

Effects of Pre-Writing Activities on Junior Secondary School Student's Achievement in Composition Writing in Jos East Local Government Area, Plateau State

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ABSTRACT

The study set out to investigate the effect of pre-writing activities on junior secondary school students' achievement in composition writing in Jos East L.G.A, Plateau State. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The sample of the study comprised 159 junior secondary students selected from two government secondary schools in Jos East L.G.A, Plateau State using a simple random sampling technique. The study adopted a quasi experimental non-equivalent pre-test post-test research design. Two intact classes were assigned the experimental group and the other two, control group. Data were gathered using composition writing achievement test (CWAT) which was an instrument designed by the researchers. Means and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were used to test the hypotheses. Hypotheses tested revealed that students exposed to pre-writing activities to composition writing exhibited higher achievement in writing than those who were taught writing using the traditional methods. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers of English language should use pre-writing activities in teaching writing and that more emphasis should be laid on teaching strategies that will focus on building and developing students writing skills.

Keywords: Composition writing, Pre-Writing Activities, Brainstorming, Clustering, Graphic Organisers

INTRODUCTION

With the shift of the instructional paradigm from writing as a product to writing as a process, attention has been focused on the processes students go through to discover what to write and how to organise their writing; the process approach to writing which is the principal that writing is a process that uses some steps and skills that are applied in a recursive manner leads students to a better understanding of the topic under construction [1,2,3]. The shift of the instructional paradigm from writing as a product to writing as a process led to the discovery of what students do before the actual writing [4,5]. This leads to engaging in some activities that can enable the students to discover ideas, usually referred to as invention writing which ignites the students' thinking and creative abilities. Such activities are referred to as pre-writing activities [6]. Pre-writing activities are the activities students engage in before the actual

writing begins. Pre-writing is the first stage the writer goes through in the act of writing and it involves activities such as brainstorming, clustering and use of graphic organisers [7,8]. These activities enable the writer to invent necessary ideas to illustrate details and examples related to the topic. Through this, the writer explores available materials that could enhance creativity [9,10]. The writer therefore thinks and presents his or her ideas logically and coherently. These activities help students to discover their style, interest, needs, strengths and weaknesses [11,12]. Brainstorming, clustering, free writing, concept mapping, mind mapping are all examples of effective pre-writing activities. These activities give room for interaction and co-operative discussion [13,14,15]. Co-operative discussion creates an avenue where ideas are generated, criticized, accepted and evaluated. Pre-writing activities allow students to participate in

the real task of the writing process thereby making writing successful, meaningful and functional. A free atmosphere of writing offers students freedom and opportunities to immerse themselves in constructive thinking [16,17,18,19,20]. The effectiveness of pre-writing activities can be seen in the work of [12] where pre-writing activities enabled the students to discuss a topic, generate ideas and organise what to write. Through these activities, students were able to spend quality time which offered adequate attention to the content and organisation of their writing [21,22,23,24,25]. They also discovered ideas through asking their peers, the whole class or the teacher target questions. Such interactions helped to

generate new ideas, remember prior knowledge and develop those ideas. Moreover, writing anxiety was reduced and the students wrote freely because they interacted with their peers [26,27,28,29,30]. Also, [30] noted that visual organisers provided the students with concrete framework of information, drew the learners' attention on major ideas, and established relationship between these ideas and the topic they discussed. It is based on this assertion that the present research work investigated the effects of pre-writing activities on junior secondary school students' achievement in composition writing in Jos East Local Government Area of Plateau State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a general outcry about the poor performance of both junior and senior secondary students in English language particularly in composition writing. The ability to compose meaningful and coherent compositions is a problem to many junior secondary school students, including students of Jos East Local Government Area of Plateau State. The reports of the Chief Examiner of Plateau State BECE (2016-2018) revealed that students in Jos East hardly pass English language at a credit pass. The Chief Examiner's reports of Plateau State BECE for Jos East (2016, 2017, & 2018) revealed that students that passed English language at credit level were 35% out of 892 students, 37% out of 839 students and 52% out of 817 students respectively. The observation in these reports indicated that many students presented compositions that lack ideas and are not up to two hundred and fifty (250) words, being the minimum requirement for Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). They do not know how to express their ideas effectively. Their compositions lacked proper sequence and organised flow of ideas and were not properly punctuated. The students' compositions

lacked properly defined structure as many of them do not know what to write about. In most cases, the students write down the title only while others write long and meaningless sentences. Many sentences are written without being punctuated. The major factor responsible for the poor performance of students in composition writing is teaching methodology. Most teachers use the traditional methods whereby the teachers provide students with a model copy of written composition and the students are expected to imitate the model copy to produce their own copies. The method does not allow the students to initiate their own ideas and styles. The traditional methods do not allow the use pre-writing activities like brainstorming that could ignite students' creativity. For an effective lesson delivery, students need to be exposed to teaching methods that can enable them to explore their ideas. Writing can thus be made meaningful when students are exposed to pre-writing activities. This research set out therefore, to explore how pre-writing activities can help junior secondary school students improve their composition writing abilities.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The key concept in this study is pre-writing activities. Pre-writing is the first

stage of the writing process which is usually followed by drafting, revision and

editing. This is the first stage the writer encounters as the written work is being done. Pre-writing activities are the various activities which the writer engages in before the actual writing begins. These activities serve as avenues for stimulating thinking and igniting creative writing. Pre-writing involves planning, idea generation and evaluation, rehearsing, reading, discussing with peers and jotting down points which would be used to develop writing. Pre-writing activities activate planning where the writer considers and rejects ideas as the process involves generating and recording ideas. Pre-writing skills give students the confidence and enthusiasm needed to face the actual writing. According to [29], pre-writing activities are important as they enable the writer to consider the purpose of writing, reflect the text type and language used and the information chosen to include in the writing. The writer thinks of the audience or the target of the writing. Pre-

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the beginning of the pre-writing task where a topic is given to the students for them to generate a list of words or phrases in a group. Brainstorming means engaging the brain to be active in solving problems; it aims to develop creative solutions to a given problem [31]. Brainstorming involves a stream of consciousness activities in which the writer rapidly records all the ideas related to the main topic. Questioning comes into play as students delve into generating ideas related to the topic. All ideas are equally accepted; for the purpose of brainstorming is to identify as many ideas as are related to the topic. This in essence helps to activate students' background knowledge. According to [32], composition writing is an exercise that needs building on; the learner must retain what has been learnt and use it as a bait for new knowledge. A variety of sentences is usually employed; from simple sentences to more personal sentences that express the topic as expected [33]. Brainstorming was introduced by Alex Osborn, an American advertisement company manager in 1938,

writing activities engage students in active class participation, thinking, group discussion and skeletal writing needed for the development of the main writing. The writer has to think about the topic, determine the purpose, analyse the audience before he begins to write [16]. There are different types of pre-writing activities that are effective for classroom usage. These activities could be employed depending on the pre-writing skills to be achieved. [20] provides a comprehensive list of these pre-writing activities. They are: movie review, group chat, brainstorming, graphic organisers, clustering, interview technique, journalistic technique, picture analysis, pamphlet making, literary genre writing, book writing fair, topic montage, scrap book making, sticky note technique, action feeling-setting technique, telling-showing technique, like-dislike chart, common regular t-chart, what-why-how chart and illustrative label technique.

when he used a group of his employees to determine ways of solving a problem in his company [2]. Brainstorming is a term commonly used to refer to any type of pre-writing that writers use to generate ideas and work out the connections between larger and smaller concepts. However, ideas raised during brainstorming are subject to modification and classification. Brainstorming could be seen in the form of: listing, free writing and questioning. Listing is an important brainstorming activity that is common and simple to operate. It simply means writing down the points as one remembers in the form of a list. This is done as quickly as possible so as not to forget the points so, ideas are listed as they come to the mind without considering order and sequence. The most important thing here is to take note of all the possible points associated with the topic of discussion [26], When this is done, main topics are listed with sub-topics under them. The writer may later group the ideas and write short notes on them. In order not to forget some ideas, the writer may employ the use of short

forms of words, abbreviations, formulas, diagrams or pictures as the case may be. Listing therefore takes note of all the ideas the writer remembers before development. To [24], the writer may also use items from lists and summary statements as prompts to explore new ideas.

Questioning is another brainstorming activity that could be used to discuss a topic as it provides answers to all the questions raised under the topic. Questions are used to determine a topic's flexibility. Such questions include: What exactly do I know about the topic? What are my sources of information? (First-hand experience, books, television, newspapers and discussions)? Will my knowledge yield sufficient examples, details and illustrations to give an in-depth knowledge about the topic? [26]. Questioning is a flexible and powerful way of getting specific details of a topic. Such questions could be called journalistic questions of how, who, when, where, what, and why [28]. Answers to

these questions pave the way to addressing the topic properly. Free writing is also another brainstorming activity. Free writing as the name goes suggests its meaning. It enables a writer to focus on a specific topic but forces him to write so quickly that he cannot edit the work [24]. It simply means jotting down all the ideas on a particular topic before serious research is done on the topic [20]. Free writing presents the first impression the writer has on a topic. The writer does not bother about correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and incomplete sentences could be accepted as the focus is the ability to put down all the information and questions that come up on paper even if such ideas are out of point. In free writing, the teacher gives the students a set period of time and encourages them to write without stopping. The purpose of this strategy is to enable students experience a free and smooth flow of ideas which could help to enhance fluency.

Clustering

Clustering is another pre-writing activity. Clustering is an activity developed and named by Rico in 1983 for assessing the state of consciousness often called the right side of the brain in which we pattern, design, connect, and deal with complex images [24]. Clustering is a visual representation of subjects and organisation in composition writing which gives the writer a clear picture of his or her topic by showing the relationship between the main topic and its sub-topics and the organisation of the ideas. Clustering acquaints the writer to different ways to think about a topic. When an idea spans other ideas, clustering enables the writer to link them together using lines and circles to form a cluster of ideas. The purpose of clustering is to use lines and circles to show visually how ideas relate to one another and to the main topic. It is a diagrammatic representation of the topic and its sub-topics. Clustering enables one to understand the possible directions one's writing may take. This allows students to

consider their audience and their needs, a crucial step made by pre-writing activities. In clustering, students write a key word (or phrase) related to the topic in the middle of a piece of paper, and enclose the topic with a shape such as a circle or square. Clustering is a visual representation of ideas and their organisation [14]. It entails drawing a circle for every idea, clustering every relevant topic like branches extending outward from a tree. It can also be referred to as making a thought web. The necessity of clustering is seen in its ability to map out ideas and show the connection of those ideas; showing the relationship between ideas. This could be in the form of main ideas and the subdivision. The picture associated with this technique enables the reader to visualize the ideas and their connections. Clustering is important as it enables students to organise their ideas accordingly. Specifically, clustering is used for outlining and organisation in composition writing. Organisation entails

coherent arrangement of material in a piece of writing. On these grounds, [4] sees composition writing as an orderly constructive thinking. Composition writing discusses a topic which is broken into related sections or parts and developed in paragraphs. [13] assert that an essay should have an introduction, which is the opening of the write-up; a

Graphic organisers

A graphic is a visual display that demonstrates relationships between ideas, facts and incidents. Graphic organisers are tools seen in the forms of graphs and charts used to represent ideas and information showing the sequence and relationship between the ideas and information. The focus here is often on process rather than product; and with the necessity of organising ideas coherently in composition writing, visual tools such as graphic organisers are recommended. Graphic organisers provide the learner with a different way of visualising and thinking about a topic; they enable students to raise and explore ideas, understand content, and improve their thinking skills and creativity. A graphic organiser is usually a one-page form with blank spaces left to be completed with ideas and information which are connected. According to [6], graphic organisers can be applied as pre-teaching and post-teaching strategies for the purpose of introducing or reinforcing the key concept in a text. [9] sees these organisers as visual representations of ideas which help students to organise their thoughts and apply thinking skills to the content in a more organised and orderly way. They may often occur in the format of keywords and allow the students to focus on the meaning rather than the format of complete sentences. They can be open-ended, multi-layered, and differentiated. In addition, [4], opines that graphic organisers are important due to their visual representation of ideas and how they help build schema and key concept and connection. These organisers are useful tools in planning composition writing as they are employed during pre-writing activities. Graphic organisers are

body, which deals with the content to be expatiated on; and a conclusion which closes or summarises the whole write-up. It is expected that students should know what to write in the introduction, body and conclusion of a particular composition writing. Clustering is therefore functional in teaching effective ways of organising their ideas coherently.

useful tools in pre-writing activity. They are tools or models used to help students organise their ideas in the writing process. They are used to provoke the thinking ability of students while engaging in pre-writing activities. According to [8], graphic organisers are used to display pictorial or graphic methods to organise information and thoughts that help the writer expand and explain a concept, and create clear and concise relationships. They can also be referred to as communication devices. As usual, the most popular and conventional learners' sensory performance is visual. [5] posits that people derive countless meanings and knowledge from what they see and from the ways they interact with the visual environment surrounding them. Examples of graphic organisers include mind map, concept map, spider map, series of event change, fish bone map, charts, story maps, cause and effect diagrams, time lines, webbing, flowcharts and vein diagrams [9]. Mind mapping is also an example of a graphic organiser. Mind mapping is the graphical representation of the content of writing where ideas and concepts are represented in a graphic form. [8] defines a mind map as a powerful graphic technique which provides a universal key to unlock the potential of the brain. Here, word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour and spatial awareness are exploited to create unique images through infinite expanses of the brain. To [11], mind map is usually applicable to every sphere of life where improved learning and clearer thinking could be productive. Mind mapping can therefore be applied in different subjects, courses or situations as expected. It is an evidence of human performance. [16]

consider mind mapping as a good pre-writing technique; and it is an effective method to write down notes and brainstorm composition themes because it includes writing down a central idea then supporting it with related ones. By concentrating on key ideas which are written by learner's own words, the learner can make a map in a way that leads to better understanding. This strategy, as [7] posits, was founded by Tony Buzan, a psychologist and brain scientist. Its ideology is built on the fact that the two hemispheres of the human brain are responsible for different tasks. According to [8], mind mapping was designed to use both sides of the brain to increase memory retention and productivity. At the onset, it was developed basically for note-taking and visual representation of information in an interesting format while considering other necessities required of writing. A notable benefit of this technique is that the open flowing format supports the natural thinking process. [9] define mind map as "a visual form of note taking that offers an overview of a topic and its complete information, allowing students to comprehend, create new ideas and build connections". This is possible when students identify words and their order of importance. According to [14], in mind map, keywords are identified and arranged in their order of importance. These words can also be seen in the form of images. Main points are given preference as they are given superior places while supporting points occupy less important places. Mind map also enhances economy of words as only essential words, phrases and clauses are highlighted [31]. Concept mapping is another example of a graphic organiser. Concept mapping according to [24] is "a graphic organiser of activities that shows the relationships among concepts. Usually the concepts are circled and the relationships are shown by connecting lines with short explanations". It identifies the various concepts associated with a topic and exposes how those concepts are related to one another. This

could be achieved when the teacher brings out a topic and allows the students to identify the concepts connected to the topic then, the teacher must give an overview of the topic so as to enable the student suggest possible concepts in relation with the topic. The implication here is that concepts can be used for the sake of comparison and association. Concept map is a general organiser that uses numerous concepts to illustrate a central idea. [9] sees concept mapping as a reflective process and emphasises the reasons and rationale of associations with related concepts. Maps generally are used to show hierarchical relationships with the main concepts placed on the top followed by others in the order of their importance. Maps can also be used to brainstorm, activate background knowledge and generate synonyms and antonyms. According to [7], concept maps are forms of graphic organisers which help students to perceive the relationships between concepts through diagrammatic representation of concepts using key words associated with them. These maps help to facilitate logical thinking by provoking the students to remember concepts that can be used to illustrate a general idea. Learning is more productive when it is connected to prior knowledge with new information [4]. Spider map is an another example of graphic organiser which focuses on the description of a central idea. Questions to be asked include: What is the central idea? What are its features? What are its functions? Another example of graphic organiser is series of event chain. Series of event chain gives a vivid description of the stages of something (the life cycle of a butterfly), or the sequence of events or formation of a state or nation. Key questions to be asked here include: What is the object procedure or initiating event? What are the steps or stages involved? How do they lead to one another? What is the result? Fish bone map is also an example of a graphic organiser. Fish bone map is used to identify the casual interaction of a complex phenomenon. Some of the key

questions to be asked here include: What are the factors that caused? How do they interrelate? Are there relationships between the factors that affect "A" and the factors that affect "B"? Chart is another example of graphic organiser. A chart is a diagram used to show directions of how to do something. It can also be used to categorise numerous ideas. Another example is story map. A story map is used to retell stories in books, plays and novels. Cause and effect diagrams are also examples of a graphic organiser. They are used to examine how things happened. In examining this, the cause and result are explained. Timelines are another example. Timelines are used to indicate how things occur in time frame. Webbing is also in the list. It is a visual picture that shows how words or phrases are connected to a topic or a concept. The teacher lists the target topic and builds a web-like structure of words and phrases that students generate as being connected to the topic.

Flowcharts are further examples of graphic organisers. They are used to enable students see the representation, role and other relationships among group elements. Here, the students draw a representation of a sequential flow of events, action, character roles and decisions. Specifically, flowcharts foster logical and sequential cognitive development and direct students' attention to connections, relationships and interdependence of things and events. Vein diagrams are further examples of graphic organiser that can also be engaged in writing. These diagrams are used to visualise the analysis of information that show the differences and similarities among concepts, people and things. This organiser is constructed by using two or more overlapping geometrical figures such as circles, squares, rectangles that share an area in common.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a quasi-experimental design specifically, the non-equivalent group pre-test post-test design in which four intact classes within the study area were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. A pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups. The pre-test was to ensure that the two groups had the same writing ability; thereby ascertaining the homogeneity of the groups. Both the control and experimental groups were post-tested after the treatment group (experimental group) have been exposed to pre-writing activities in different types of composition writing. The control group were also exposed to the same content using traditional method. This design is considered appropriate as intact classes were used in order to avoid disruption of the normal academic programme of the schools concerned. Also, the design was adopted because it is the most appropriate in determining the effects of the independent variable (pre-writing activities) on the dependent variable

(achievement). The design was used to ascertain the effects of pre-writing activities on JS2 students' achievement in composition writing. The researcher used a double lesson period of 80 minutes on Mondays and Thursdays only for a period of eight weeks. The population of the study consisted of all the JS2 students in the 10 junior secondary schools in Jos East Local Government Area of Plateau State in the 2019/2020 academic session numbering 732 with 411 males and 321 females. The two schools GSS Fobour and GSS FebasKudedu were selected using simple random technique. The schools were labelled School A and School B. School A had 91 students, consisting of 48 males and 43 females; while school B had 68 students consisting of 40 males and 28 female numbering 159 students. All the students in the two schools selected for the study formed the sample of the study. They were taught in their intact classes. These two classes were used for experimental and control groups respectively. The instrument for data

collection in the study was Composition Writing Achievement Test (CWAT). The instrument was used as pre-test to assess students' entry behaviour. It was also used as post-test. It was composed of one narrative composition topic on "My First Day in School". This test tagged "Composition Writing Achievement Test"

was used to assess students' performance in two writing skills such as idea generation and outlining skills. These two skills have sub-sections for scoring since the total score was fifty (50) marks. The marks for each sub-section is as follows: idea generation 25% and outlining 25%.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the effects of pre-writing activities on the JS2 students' idea generation mean scores in composition writing?
2. What is the outlining mean scores of the JS2 students after exposure to pre-writing activities?

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test idea generation mean scores of the JS2 students in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test outlining ability mean scores of the JS2 students in experimental and control groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One

What are the effects of pre-writing activities on the JS2 students' idea generation mean scores in composition writing?

Table 1: The Mean Scores of Students' Achievement in Idea Generation for the Experimental and Control Groups

Group		N	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x} -diff
Experimental	Pre-test	77	7.90	2.53	4.21
	Post-test	77	12.11	2.86	
Control	pre-test	82	7.81	2.10	0.75
	Post-test	82	8.56	2.30	

Table 1 shows the JS2 students' idea generation mean scores. From the result, the experimental group had a mean score of 7.90 and a SD of 2.53 before exposure to treatment and mean score of 12.1 and a SD of 2.86 after treatment. The experimental group gained a mean

difference of 4.21 while the control group had 0.75. The results show that the experimental group who were exposed to treatment, improved in their composition writing performance while the control group that were not exposed to treatment remained as they were in the pre-test.

Research Question Two

What is the outlining mean scores of the JS2 students after exposure pre- writing activities?
 Table 2: The Mean Scores of Students' Achievement in Outlining for the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x} -diff
Experimental	Pre-test	77	5.24	1.98
	Post-test	77	8.46	2.36
Control group	Pre-test	82	5.01	1.74
	Post-test	82	5.58	1.91

The results of the analysis from table 2 reveal that the experimental group had a pre-test mean score of 6.24 and a SD of 1.98 and a post-test mean score of 8.46 and a SD of 2.36 while the control group had a pre-test mean score of 5.01 and a SD of 1.74 and post-test mean score of

5.58 and a SD of 1.91. The experimental group had mean score difference 3.22 while the control group had 0.57. This shows that students that were exposed to pre-writing activities achieved higher in outlining activities than those that were not exposed to pre-writing activities.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test idea generation

mean scores of JS2 students in the experimental and control groups.

Table 3: Results of the t - test Analysis for the Experimental and Control Groups after Exposure to Treatment

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	diff	P-value	sig
Experimental	77	12.11	286	157	0.00	0.05
Control	82	8.63	2.32			

The results of the analysis in table 3 show that the P-value of 0.00 is less than the significant level of 0.05. This therefore shows that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted hence, there

is a significant difference in the achievement mean scores between the experimental and control groups in favour of the experimental group after exposure to treatment.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test outlining ability

mean scores of the JS2 students in the experimental and control groups.

Table 4: Results of the t-test Analysis for the Experimental and Control Groups After Exposure to Treatment

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	diff	P-value	sig
Experimental	77	8.46	2.36	157	0.000	0.05
Control	82	5.67	1.89			

The results of the t-test analysis from table 15 show that the P-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05. This therefore shows that the null hypothesis failed to be retained hence

there is a significant difference in the achievement mean scores between the experimental and control groups after exposure to treatment.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences in idea generation and outlining of the experimental and control groups. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers of English

language should use pre-writing activities in teaching writing and that more emphasis should be laid on teaching strategies that will focus on building and developing students' writing skills.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed the findings of other studies, and that pre-writing activities to composition writing enabled students to score high marks. The activities also improved students' composition writing

skills and confidence to write. Conclusively, it can be said that pre-writing activities are effective in teaching composition writing.

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