VOL. 02 NO. 2,
DECEMBER, 2023
E-ISSN 3026-8893
P-ISSN 3027-1061

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of Education Research and Library Practice (JERLP)

Analysis of the Written Essays of National Diploma Students in Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State

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Abstract

This study analyzed the essays of written in the English Language of National Diploma 1 students in Kaduna Polytechnic, Nigeria. The study was guided by six research questions. The descriptive research design was used. The population of the study comprised National Diploma (ND 1) students of Kaduna Polytechnic. The sample of students for the study comprised 100 students from five departments. The sample of students for the cut across the five colleges. The selection was by random sampling technique. Two instruments, expository and narrative essay topics were validated and had reliability coefficient of 0.82. The research questions were answered using percentage, standard derivation and frequencies the results obtained showed a significant improvement in the components-content and organization. The study concludes that the analysis was able to show areas of strengths and weaknesses. The study recommended that teachers should go for retraining programmes to improve on their skills of teaching essay writing. The study also recommended that workshops and seminars for English lecturers should be organized by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) regularly.

Key Words: Content, Organization, Expression, Mechanical accuracy

Introduction

It is impossible to overstate the role that language plays in interpersonal communication. Since there has never been a society without a means of communication, language is the thread that unites all societies. Nigeria is a multilingual country where 250 tribes speak roughly 509 indigenous languages

(Ethnologue, 2019). As a result, English became the language of choice for both domestic and international communication and interaction. As a result, English was adopted as both the official language of Nigeria and the medium of instruction for all educational levels, facilitating communication between the nation's many ethnic groups (Jolayemi, 2006; Akinjobi, 2013).

In addition to being the official language of communication, education, and political administration in Nigeria, English language is important because it provides access to education. It is the teaching medium that students use to gain knowledge and skills. Therefore, English language proficiency—especially in writing—is seen by the average Nigerian as the key to the world's proof of knowledge and universal culture, particularly in today's diverse society. It serves as a doorway to prosperity in the world economy. It is crucial to guarantee that students are proficient in writing in an increasingly literacy-demanding environment. Writing well was once considered a luxury, but these days it is absolutely essential. Writing is essential to students' literacy development. Given this, instructing teaching students to write well should be top priority of a worthwhile education system. Aschool that "teaches its students the curriculum without concurrently teaching them how to write well is a school that has failed".

It is in the light of this that this study 2.1aims to investigate the written essays of students in ND1 Kaduna Polytechnic in order to find out the nature of their writing in terms of the organization, expression, mechanical accuracy and content of the written essays.

Statement of the Problem

Students who are learning a second or foreign language will inevitably struggle with structuring and expressing their ideas in writing. Because they are still learning the language, students may make mistakes. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) releases results each year in Nigeria that show how poorly students perform in English language. As a result, researchers have been looking for the cause of this widespread failure. In general, many Nigerian students do poorly on written English examinations. For example, the Chief Examiner's Report of the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) on the 2018 May/June Examination in English language noted the following inadequacies in the student scripts:

Mass failure in English language among students in schools and colleges has been well documented and researches are being carried out in order to find answers to the lingering problems (Joseph, 2010). Writing is an important aspect of the curriculum in the communication in English course in the polytechnic and various studies have been carried out to identify deficiencies in writing made by students. The present study

focused on the area of structural, content and mechanical accuracy in written compositions.

Therefore, this study analyze the written essays of National Diploma 1 students in Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna and determine what strategies can be used to improve or reduce the errors in the content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy of the essays. The current study therefore focused on the analysis of the mechanics of writing an essay.

Following the above stated problem, the following specific objectives shall be pursued:

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze the written essays of National Diploma Students in Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna. The specific objectives of the study include:

1. Analyze the students' ability in content development of the written essay of National diploma students.
2. Discuss the students' strengths and weaknesses in the organization of the written essay of National diploma students.
3. Find out the students' performance in expression and mechanical accuracy used in the essays written by national diploma students.
4. Suggest approaches to be used to improve the overall performance of students in essay writing.

Research Questions

1. What is the performance of the national diploma students' in the content of their written essay?
2. How did the students perform in the organization of their written essays?
3. What is the student's performance in the expression and mechanical accuracy aspect of their written essays?
4. What strategies can be used to improve the performance of students in essay writing?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on the analysis of the written essays of students in National Diploma 1 of Kaduna Polytechnic in Kaduna, Nigeria. The study will specifically focus on ND1 students from specific departments in the institution. The essays to be written are Expository and Descriptive Essays. Other types of essays like argumentative and narrative essays were not used in this work. The content, expression, organization and mechanical accuracy aspects were areas of interest. Other

aspects such as errors, errors in grammar like omission of articles, tenses and overgeneralization were also looked into.

What is Writing?

Writing is one of the most important skills of a language. It is the fourth skill of language that is acquired in a language acquisition process. Davids (2017) describe writing as a pattern of symbols which represent a speech of the writer and it must be clear to the reader without the writer's intervention. However, writing is not that much simple. According to Nunan (2003), writing is a physical as well as a mental activity. It is physical in that the writer uses some medium to express his or her ideas or thoughts, and it is mental in that it requires generation of ideas and thinking about their expression and their organization into sentences and paragraphs in a way that the reader can easily understand the text. Hence, writing needs to be effective by having accuracy of grammar and vocabulary, appropriateness of sentence-structure and subject-matter, and development and organization of ideas (Alfaki, 2015). Another researcher states that writing skill demands that the thoughts be presented in well-structured and well-organized way (Javed et al., 2013).

Skills of Writing

Even when writing in one's native tongue, writing can be challenging. Writing in a foreign language is even more difficult. According to numerous studies, beginning English as a foreign language (EFL) students frequently experience interference from their native tongue when writing in English (Collins, 2012; Jarvis, 2010). Students often find that writing in a foreign language is the most difficult at all levels, especially when it comes to essays, where the writing is typically longer and therefore more difficult than when writing a brief paragraph.

Writing is a skill that is tested in every valid language examination and that students should possess and demonstrate in academic contexts. Writing involves numerous factors and choices to be made regarding "higher level skills", such as content, organization and structure, and "lower level skills", such as punctuation and choice of appropriate vocabulary items and grammatical structures", to use the terms used by Richards & Renandya. Richard (2015) declared that there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 language learners to learn. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in converting these notions into legible text. Nevertheless, it is imperative to look into the dynamics of writing and its teaching.

Essay Writing

Writing proficiency is necessary for daily activities. Writing proficiency is still crucial as people grow older and enter the workforce (Fakeye and Ogunyemi, 2010). Students'

writing proficiency can be evaluated through essay writing. Writing proficiency is nevertheless required for other parts of the English language exam, including comprehension and summary writing, in addition to essay writing. In addition to being unable to take proper notes during class, students who struggle with writing will also find it difficult to comprehend questions and provide coherent answers in summary writing. Writing is assessed in exams like the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) SSCE through the writing of essays, compositions, and letters. A cursory look at the West African Examination Council (WAEC) syllabus 2012-2015 reveals that marks are distributed along different aspects of English language as follows: Essay/letter writing (50marks) Comprehension (20marks) Summary (30 marks) Total (100marks)

Types of Writing (Essays)

Writing can be grouped as either continuous or non-continuous (Olaofe,2013). An essay written in order to account for a writer's experiences, thoughts or reflections is referred to as continuous writing (e.g., reports, letters etc.). Non-continuous writing includes notes taken during lectures, accounts of events etc. This study was carried out using one of the two basic types of essays. These are Expository, and descriptive essays.

Components of Essay Writing (Content, Organization, Expressions, Mechanical Accuracy)

Content

Content is defined as the use of grammatical sentence to generate point in each essay (WASSCE,2002) and it is also referred to the relevance of ideas to the central theme and their development (WASSCE, 2008). Babalola (2012) opines that the adequate treatment of the subject matter isimportant in content and there must be some originality in approach.

Organisation

Organization is defined as process of arranging writing materials properly (Ibe, 2008). The qualities of organization are suitable opening, adequate development good paragraphing, coherence, unity and conclusion.

Expression

Expression is defined as a way of stating your thought and ideas as clearly as possible. WASSCE (2008) concludes that expression includes clarity, appropriateness, sentence structure and type, use of figurative language and punctuations.

Mechanical Accuracy

Ogwuche (2005) described mechanical accuracy as correctness. Correctness refers to conventions for writing like, punctuations and form.

Theoretical Framework

This study is going to adopt the cognitive constructivist theory by Vygotsky as its framework. According to the constructivist paradigm, knowledge is created by individuals rather than existing independently and being able to be mapped onto learners. According to cognitive constructivism, learning is the process by which individuals create meaning from their experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive design because it is non experimental based research. It aims at identifying and assessing the variables such as content, organization, expression and the mechanical accuracy of students' written essays.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was Seven thousand two hundred and fifty-two (7252) ND1 students across five colleges and 35 departments in Kaduna Polytechnic. Five departments were randomly selected across the five colleges with one department from each college. The reason for selecting the five departments is that the researcher has contact hours with students from those departments. 20 students from each of the five selected departments were randomly picked through balloting to participate in the study.

Research Instrument

The instrument used for the collection of data for this study is the Expository Essay Performance Test (EEPT) which was adopted by the researcher from past Use of English examination questions from the Kaduna Polytechnic examination office in which the students were asked to write an essay on selected topics. Each essay was judged using the marking scheme for guided expository essay adapted from Jacob, Stephen, Deanne, Faye and Hughes (1981).

Procedure for Data Collection

The procedure for collection of data is stated below:

One hundred (100) sampled students from the departments selected was used to gather data for the study. Essays were he used to assess the students. Two weeks were earmarked for both the first and second essays. The marking of the scripts was carried

out by the researcher with the help of an assistant who is a holder of a B.Ed. degree in Language Arts with a lot of teaching experience.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Research Question 1:

1. What is the overall performance of the students in essay writing?

Table 1 Data set obtained from analysis of data

Variable	No	Score	Mean	Standard deviation
Content	75	846	11.28	3.17
Organization	75	903	12.04	11.77
Expression	75	1341	17.88	3.99
Mech. Acc.	75	441	5.88	1.92

The table is a presentation of the scores obtained by the students in the essay writing exercise and what they represent. The variables for the study i.e. content, expression, organization and mechanical accuracy are clearly presented in terms of scores obtained in the tests carried out. The number of students and the scores obtained (total score), the mean score and the standard deviation were also presented. There data were used in answering the research questions. The overall scores reveal that the students have areas of strengths and weakness in their written essays. the students performed well in the organization and content of their essays. The major area of weakness was mechanical accuracy component of the essay. Most of the essays had spelling errors and poor use of punctuation marks.

The instruments used in the collection of the data for the study were analyzed and the results obtained were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question 2

What is the performance of the national diploma students' in the content of their written essay?

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the performance in the content of the Essay writing.

	N	Mean	SD
First essay	75	16.02	2.09
Second essay	75	11.28	3.17

Table 1 shows the mean score and standard deviation of the content of the written essay. The result shows a better score in the content of thesecond essay. They had a mean score of 16.02 as compared to the first essay scores that had mean score of 11.28. Both essays had a standard deviation score of 2.09 and 3.17 respectively. This is a clear indication that the students 'performance in the content component of the second

essay adhered to the topic given. The students showed an understanding of what content is all about.

Research Question 3

3. How did the students perform in the organization of their written essays?

Table 3 Statistics for the performance of the students in the first and second essays in the organization of essays written.

GROUP	N	Mean	SD
First essay	75	12.04	11.8
Second essay	75	15.62	2.67

Table 3 is a presentation of the mean score for the organization of the essays written. The second essay mean score (15.62) was the highest while the first essay mean score was 12.04. The two essays had standard deviation score of 2.67 and 11.77 respectively. This indicates that the second essay scores revealed a good organization of the students written essays. Some of the strengths observed in the student's organization of their written essays is the ability to organize their essay in well-formed paragraphs.

Summary of Major Findings

As a result of the data analyzed above, the study discovered the following:

The overall performance of the students in the essay writing exercise revealed that some of the students performed well in the essays written especially in the content and organization of their written essays.; Based on the studies objectives, the following findings were revealed.

The organization of the students' essays showed that the students' performance in the essays showed that they organized their thoughts appropriately by providing title, introduction, development, well arranged paragraphs and conclusion. These made their essays to be well organized compared to the ones written during the same exercise.

From the analysis of the data on the mechanical accuracy of the students written essays, it was observed that the performance of the students in some of the essays were better because the students use punctuations and spellings appropriately. Though most of the students still had some weaknesses in this component.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate students' performance in the content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy of written essays of students in Kaduna Polytechnic. In chapter two, the researcher reviewed literatures related to the

study. The literature reviewed include, students writing performance, mechanic of writing, skills of writing, essay writing, grading of essays and the theoretical framework of the study.

The study used 100 students for the study. They were randomly selected and given essays to write on. A first and second-essay was carried out.

The study revealed that the students performed well in some aspects of the essays especially the content and organization component while they performed above average and, in some instances, poorly in the expression and mechanical accuracy components of the essays.

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