



## **Effect of Process Approach on Ideas Generations and Sentences Construction among Secondary Schools ' Students in Plateau State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examined the effects of using process approach for ideas generation and sentence construction among secondary school students in plateau state of Nigeria. However, the study was designed to examine the extent to which the process approach to writing instruction would help students generate ideas and express their ideas in appropriate sentence. A quasi experimental design using non-equivalent pre-test post-test control group was employed. The sample comprised of intact class from of one hundred secondary schools students selected from two schools in the study area. The students were non-randomly assigned to experimental and control groups before treatment. The experimental group received the treatment while the students in the control group were taught oral English. They were taught twice a week for six weeks, each lesson lasted for one hour twenty minutes. After the treatment, a post-test designed by the researcher tagged "Composition Writing Skills Achievement Test (CWSAT) was administered. The CWAST comprised of 25 test items which was validated by the experts in English and Test and Measurements. Test re test method was used to test reliability index of the instrument. The result was subjected to spearman Ranking order statistics. The reliability index of 0.74 showed that the instrument is reliable for use. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-test. The results of the pre-test showed that subjects were similar in their overall performance in composition writing before treatment. The findings also indicated a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, with the experimental group showing better performance in the two variables-idea generation and sentence construction. Most of the students in the experimental group were able to generate up to five ideas on the topic written on and they constructed more compound, complex, complete and coherent sentences than their counterparts in the control group. Based on the findings, it was concluded that students' composition writing skills could be enhanced through the use of the process approach instruction. In addition, it was recommended that teachers of English language should teach students composition writing using the process approach to enable them to achieve higher scores in composition tasks and regular workshops be organised for in-service teachers to increase their effectiveness in teaching composition writing.*

**Key Words:** Students' ability, generate ideas, construct effective sentences, process approach and Writing instruction



## **Introduction**

The art of writing evolved out of man's desire to express himself and communicate with others who are not present with him. This means that writing grows from expression and it is intended to communicate. The ideas, thoughts and feelings and even emotion to be communicated could be to inform, educate, entertain and instruct among others. Writing is also a powerful and indispensable tool for gathering, preserving and disseminating information across cultures and nations. It is useful for refining and extending knowledge, a means of expressing oneself and combating loneliness (Gomwalk 2005, & Muodumogu, 2010).

Composition writing is an integral component of the English curriculum of all secondary schools across the globe. In composition writing, a whole range of language activities interact and the writer manipulates vocabulary to create communicative effect. It involves mental preparation such as idea generation through brainstorming on one hand, scripting of the ideas on a particular topic into meaningful graphic codes (Bitrus, 2015). Language activities engaged in the process of composition writing includes cognitive and linguistic skills achieved in recursive form which engages the writer in generation of ideas and organisation of the ideas. At the prewriting stage as proposed by the proponents of the process approach, the writer is expected to go through some prewriting activities such as mind mapping, looping, free writing and a host of others in order to generate enough ideas on the proposed topic. Each of these strategies helps the writer to gather sufficient ideas before embarking on the first draft (Langan, 2003).

To be able to write a comprehensive, logical and coherent composition, the writer needs the knowledge of sentences and then types. Sentences as composition writing skills are like the blocks with which a composition piece is built. This is because when people speak or write, they always do so using words or groups that give meaning or make sense. That implies that people communicate in sentence for their expression to be meaningful. By simple definition, a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a punctuation mark. The sentence is the highest level of expression made up of a combination of lower units such as morpheme, word, phrase and clause. The constituents that form a sentence put together must express a complete thought.

The above criteria for writing good compositions notwithstanding, research evidence and experience have shown that many secondary school students in most cases do not know or cannot express themselves proficiently in writing. This is evident in their compositions in both internal and external examinations (West African Examination Council 2013, 2014). Research findings have shown that most of these secondary school students, especially the ones in the public schools lack basic composition writing skills such as idea generation and organisation, organisation and sentence construction among others.



In terms of idea generation, these set of students write short essays with few undeveloped and haphazardly arranged ideas. The students also write incomprehensive, incomplete and sometimes incorrect sentences. Some of the students do not usually make any attempt to explain, expand or give examples of ideas presented. As could be observed at most times the students only list their ideas and do nothing more, write or rewriting of topic and these they do in incoherent manner resulting in poorly constructed sentences with illogical paragraphs and this makes them score low marks.

The writing curriculum in most countries is examination inspired and geared toward preparing students for certificate examination, neglecting the fact that writing skills are life-long skills that the students would need throughout their lives, even long after graduating from the school. It is not out of place to notice that the students' ability to write well has over the year eluded students in many secondary schools and this has been attributed to poor methodology and students' attitude to writing as a language skill. Consequently, there is the need for more research to savage the situation, hence the need for research of this nature.

The process approach to writing instruction is activity based and child ventured approach and research evidence has shown that this approach has the potential to enhance students' composition writing skills if properly handled. It is in the light of this background that this study seeks to improve secondary school students' idea generation and sentence construction through the process approach.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The project was designed to improve secondary school students' achievement in idea generation and sentence construction through the process approach to writing instruction. The specific objectives of this study focused on the students' outcomes as follows:

1. Determine any difference in achievement in secondary school students' ability to generate ideas before and after exposure to composition writing using the process approach.
2. Determine the effectiveness of the process approach on secondary school students' sentence construction ability before and after exposure to treatment.

### **Research Question**

1. What is the level of secondary school students in idea generation before and after instruction in the process approach to composition writing?
2. What is the level of secondary school students in sentence construction before and after exposure to instruction in process approach to composition writing?

### **Null Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in posttest mean scores in idea generation of secondary school students in experimental and control groups in composition writingtest.



2. There is no significant difference in posttest mean scores in sentence construction ability of secondary school students in experimental and control groups in composition writing test.

### **Methodology**

The design for this study was pretest, posttest quasi experimental and non-randomize design for the study. The choice of this design was necessitated by the fact that it is impossible and inconvenient to randomly assign subjects to groups, especially in a school setting where already established groups of subjects (intact classes) are used. This is consistent with the view of Denga (1999) who suggested that the use of intact classes is one of the factors for quasi experimental design. Because the study used non-equivalent groups, pretest was administered to the treatment and control group.

### **Participants**

One hundred senior secondary II school students were purposively drawn as sample from the population of one hundred and ten. These students were considered because of the number of years spent in the school. By the time of the study, this category of students had spent five years already in the school and they were more experienced than their counterparts in SS I. Out of the one hundred students used, 50 were in the experimental group and 50 in the control group, all drawn from two secondary schools in the study area. The study sample consisted of 55 boys and 45 girls between the age range of 16 – 18 years, who were sequentially selected from two purposively selected secondary schools that existed in the local government area used.

### **Instrument**

The researcher measured the students' composition writing skills' performance in the two groups before and after treatment using a Composition Writing Skills Achievement test (CWSAT). The instrument was one composition writing question that was adapted from an external essay writing composition exam but was modified to suit the students' level. It was an expository topic on article for publication which talked about "why one should like to become ...."

### **Procedure**

The researcher visited the two schools purposively selected and obtained permission from the school authorities. Four regular class teachers were designated as research assistants for the study. Three day training was held for these regular class teachers, as the experimental study started after the training. The experimental and control groups received a total of twelve (12) eighty (80) minutes double periods lessons which was done during normal school periods, but was carried out on Mondays and Tuesdays. On the whole, the study lasted for eight (8) weeks. Two weeks were used for the pretest and posttest and the real treatment lasted for six (6) weeks. At the beginning of the study, a pretest was conducted and immediately the study ended, a posttest was conducted, using the same instrument. Pre-



test aimed at finding out the participants’ entry ability and that of posttest was to ascertain the efficacy of the treatment. The participants were asked to write an essay of not less than 300 words on the question used as instrument for measuring writing skills acquired and the time allowed was 40 minutes.

**Results**

To answer the research questions, the raw scores were analysed using the following range as yardstick to group the students’ level of CWSAT. Those who scored between 0 – 45 belonged to low level, 46 – 69 fell within medium level while those who scored 70 and above belonged to high level of CWSAT. The results of the data analysed was presented under the following headings:

1. Ability to generate ideas
2. Ability to construct sentences

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of secondary school students’ in idea generation before and after instruction in the process approach to writing composition?

**Table 1:** The levels of Idea Generation (in Percentage) of Experimental and Control Groups in Pretest and Posttest

Level of IGA	Experimental Group.		Control Group	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Low	40	0	50	38
Medium	60	84	59	62
High	0	16	0	0
Number of Students	50		50	

From Table 1, before the treatment the experiment group had 20 students, 40% at the low level and 80 students, 60% at the medium level of achievement in idea generation. After the treatment, there was an improvement in the level of students’ achievement in idea generation as 42 students, 84% were at the medium level and 8 students, 16% were at high level. Similarly, the control group had 25 students, 50% as the low level and 25 students, 50% at the medium level before treatment. There was no significant improvement as the control group was denied the treatment package. Consequently, the control group remained at low and medium levels of achievement in idea generation with frequencies of 19 students, 38% and 31 students, 62% low and medium levels of achievement respectively.

**Research Question 2:** What is the level of secondary school students in sentence construction before and after exposure to instruction in the process approach to composition writing?



**Table 2:** The Levels of Sentence Construction (in Percentage) of Experimental and Control Groups in Pretest and Posttest

Level of IGA	Experimental Group.		Control Group	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Low	100	2	100	94
Medium	0	98	0	6
High	0	0	0	0
Number of Students	50		50	

From Table 2, 50 of the students 100% in the experimental group were at 100 level of achievement in sentence construction before the treatment. After the treatment, their posttest scores showed that one (1) student, 2% remained at the low level and 49 students, 98% moved to medium level of in sentence construction. In the same vein, 50 students 100% in the control group were at the low level of achievement in their pretest and their posttest scores showed that 46 students 94% remained at the low level and 3 students, 6% moved to the medium level of achievement. This is because they were not exposed to the treatment, therefore, so there was no remarkable improvement in their performance.

**Null Hypotheses Testing**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in posttest mean scores in idea generation of secondary school students in experimental and control groups in composition writingtest.

**Table 3:** t-test of Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Idea Generation

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-cal	df	Significant
Experimental	50	20.20	2.65	11.64	98	0.000
Control	50	13.20	3.31			

From Table 3, it will be observed that experimental and control groups have 20.20 and 13.20 as their mean values respectively. It will also be observed that standard deviation is given as 2.65 and 3.31 respectively. The calculated t-value is 11.64 with a degree of freedom 98. The p-value is given by 0.000. Since p is less than 0.05, it was concluded that the difference between experimental and control groups is significant. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected while the alternative hypothesis was retained. This implies that, there is significant differences between posttest mean scores in idea generation in composition writing test of students who were exposed to process writing instruction and those who were not.



**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in posttest mean scores in sentence construction ability of secondary school students in experimental and control groups in composition writing test.

**Table 4:** t-test of Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups Achievement in the Test on Sentence Construction

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-cal	df	Significant	Decision
Experimental	50	16.90	2.65	14.73	98	0.000	Significant
Control	50	8.00	3.35				

From Table 4, it will be observed that experimental and control groups have 16.90 and 8.00 as their mean values respectively. N is given by 50 for both groups. It will also be observed that the standard deviation is given by 2.65 and 3.35 respectively. The calculated t-value is 14.75 with a degree of freedom 98. The p value is given by 0.000, since the p value is less than 0.05, it was concluded that the difference between the experimental and control groups is significant. From the study it is indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis retained. This implies that, there is a significant difference in the mean achievement scores in sentence construction between secondary school students who were exposed to the process approach writing instruction and those who were not.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Before the treatment in this study, the pretest scores showed general poor performance of both the experimental and control groups as shown in Table 1 and 2. The students had no relevant composition writing skills, such as idea generation, sentence construction and a host of others. This goes to buttress the findings of Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) which stated that many teachers were afraid to teach composition writing and those who dare to teach it do it haphazardly which results in students’ low and poor performance.

On idea generation skill, the findings of this study revealed that the students in the experimental groups improved significantly as can be seen from Table 3. After the treatment, 42 students 84% moved to medium level of achievement and 8 students, 16% had high level of achievement which proved that the treatment was effective when compared to their performance at the pretest. In terms of ideas, the students who could not generate more than two ideas were able to generate up to four and even five ideas after the treatment. This finding is in line with the discovery of Vou (2010) which revealed that brainstorming is a good frame that could help students to generate ideas on composition topics. Also, the findings showed that students in the experimental group were able to construct more complete, coherent and complex sentences compared to their performance at pretest. Some of the ideas generated after brainstorming include:



“Becoming a doctor so as to save lives”, “so as to earn respect in the society”, “so as to carry out researches on causes and prevention of diseases”, “so as to dress in lab-coat”, “so as to earn fat salary since doctors are said to earn fat salary compare to other professional”.

Also in the area of sentence construction the performance of the students in the experimental group improved significantly as can be seen from Table 4. Before the treatment, all of the students, 100% were at the low level, however, after the treatment, only one (1) 2% remained at the low level while 48 of them, 98% moved to medium level of performance in sentence construction. The students who wrote incomplete sentences such as when I went to the hospital with my mother. doctors treat sick. I want to collect much salary from been a doctor (incomprehensive and ungrammatical sentences) were able to write comprehensive and coherent sentences like “when I went to the hospital with my mother, we saw doctors treating patients”. “I want to earn much salary from being a doctor”. Those who said they would want to become accountants wrote sentences like “accountants has much cash” were able to write that accountant make much money because they take care of money wherever they work. They also wrote sentences like accountants always dress in suits which make them look smart. On the whole, the performance of the experimental group really improve significantly because the ideas generated help them to write the required length of 350 words in complete and more coherent sentences.

### **Conclusion**

Writing skills are specific abilities that help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and to mentally interact with the message. This study has proved that the knowledge of writing skills such as idea generation and sentence construction helps second language learners of English gain independence, comprehensibility, fluency and creativity in writing.

Also, it could be concluded that the writing challenge among students could be tackled by making learning of writing a process and not a product. The present study has demonstrated that for students to generate quality ideas on any topic, they need to be taken through pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, mind mapping, free writing, discussion and even journalistic wh-questions such as Who? Whom? Where? When? What? and which? This is because the result of this study showed that students were able to generate greater number of quality and quantity ideas, even organise their ideas in a more coherent way, and constructed more complete, compound, complex and cohesive sentences than what they had in their pretest.

The implication is that the process approach holds great promise to empower students to become better writers. This also implies that teachers need to understand the nature of the writing process to be able to teach writing well and effectively. The study has proved that if



writing instruction practices target specific writing skills and are developed in an integrated manner, students are likely to write more meaningful and creatively.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research effort, the following recommendations are made:

1. At the pre-writing stage of composition writing instruction, teachers should use the various methods of idea generation such as brainstorming, free writing, mind mapping and so on to help students generate enough ideas on composition topic(s) before they settle down to do the actual writing.
2. Composition writing teachers should devote part of their writing instruction time to the teaching of sentence construction and the various types of sentences to enable students construct better and complete sentences when writing.
3. Regular workshops for in-service teachers should be organised to enable them to teach writing effectively and comprehensively using the process approach.

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