



The Teaching of Essays, Articles and Letter Writing: Cooperative Teaching Approach

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors VA and SA designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors KA and OM managed the analyses of the study. Authors EA managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

English Language occupies a central place in Nigeria as the official language. Today, teachers are calling for more effective methods of communicating information and assisting the students in the learning process because the issue of poor performances in English Language examinations is alarming and cannot be glossed over. It is noted that new pedagogies are being introduced to the curriculum from time to time; and approaches from other fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology are encouraged. This indicates that innovations and constant improvements are needed in the teaching process. One of the innovative ways of improving students' learning and performance is by encouraging cooperative approach. The 'cooperative writing approach' to teaching of English Language involves role-playing and role-shifting. The best bet in teaching is the creative and practical component. Thus, cooperative model is a recently developed socio-cultural method of the teaching aspects of a topic in any subject or course in a participatory and role-shifting manner. This approach is sociological and anthropological in orientation because it allows students to relate well in learning process. Hence, the paper identifies ways by which select topics

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could be taught in schools by giving practical examples. The discoveries in the teaching of students through the cooperative model will significantly improve teaching and learning of English as a Second Language in Nigeria.

Keywords: English language; teaching; cooperation; classroom; students.

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language occupies a central place in Nigeria, as the introduction of English language cannot be traced to an exact date but it could be credited to the factors of missionary activities, colonial administration, trading and the follow-on political process. Hence, English language is regarded as a Second Language in Nigeria, considering the fact that Nigeria has several indigenous languages which students would have acquired before or at the same time with English language. There are about over 400 indigenous languages with three major languages: Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo [1]. With this in mind, a number of questions will need to be addressed such as: how do the English language teachers teach in Nigeria? Do they teach based on Native English (NE) context or Non- Native English context? What are the Nigerian students' needs of the English Language? How should Nigerian students of English Language be assisted in learning process?

Several proposals have flooded the civil service on the teaching of English in Nigerian schools. It is, however, noteworthy that most of these have been swept aside probably because those that attend to them are not language experts. It will be wise for the government to depend solely on the language experts that will not only view the teaching of English Language from linguistic approach, but also from the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts of choice used as the official language in Nigeria.

Today, teachers are calling for more effective methods of communicating information and assisting the students in the learning process because the issue of poor performances in English Language examinations is alarming and cannot be glossed over. It is noted that new pedagogies are being introduced to the curriculum from time to time; and approaches from other fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology are encouraged. Recently, a team of researchers proposed the application of humorous techniques in the teaching of English as a Second Language. This indicates that innovations and constant improvements are

needed in the teaching process. One of the innovative ways of improving students' learning and performance in the writing aspect of English Language is through the 'cooperative writing approach'.

Indeed, writing as the formal and symbolic representation of messages for readers' understanding requires special and greater attention. Also, it is reliable and gives room for record keeping. [2] posit that 'writing demands a higher degree of discipline from the source than any other skill of communication'. They further assert that the written medium is the dominating medium in the field of education. Moreover, writing makes proposals, minutes, books, projects and letters formal. In the contemporary society, written communication gains more relevance and use on daily basis. As such, students are faced with a future that will require them make different kinds of correspondence and documentation in form of article, letter or essay. Therefore, scholarly attention to writing of students is essential because mastery of the skill requires a lot of practice.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

It has been observed that some students in tertiary institutions face challenges in writing essays, articles and letters, which they ought to have significantly mastered at secondary school level. Hence, this research was done to apply a model labeled 'Cooperative Writing Approach' in three secondary schools in Ondo State; in order to assess the viability of the model on students performances and consider the possibility of recommending the approach to all teachers of English Language in Nigeria, because existing studies have paid little attention to creative models for essays, articles and letter writing that are based on Non-Native English context like Nigeria. Therefore, the research paid attention to this.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at conducting an investigation into a model of 'cooperative writing' in the improvement of students' performances in

essays, articles and letter writing. Thus, the main thrust of this research was to achieve the following objectives:

- i) Classification of topics and students into roles according to cooperative writing model;
- ii) Teaching of the students with and without the model;
- iii) Comparison of the performances of the students taught with and without the model; and
- iv) Recommendation of cooperative writing model in the teaching of essay writing in Nigeria based on the results.

1.3 Review of Relevant Literature

There is no gain-saying the fact that English has become a world language. Several researches have revealed the overwhelming rate at which English Language has spread across the globe. This cuts across countries and continents, and Nigeria as a country is not left out. In fact, [3] opines that 'English is generally regarded as the world's most important language.' In consonance with this, Thorne [4] observes this and submits thus:

In the sixteenth century, there were under 5 million English speakers in the world, in the late twentieth century, there are 300-400 million first language speakers and probably 1.5 billion English speakers worldwide. English is spoken in all five continents and is the recognised language of trade and international affairs.

The English language in Nigeria has become a necessary and welcome development. It is, therefore, understandable to assert that English is a language that has been deeply entrenched in the Polity of Nigeria. This is the view shared by [5] when they posit that the language (English) has become an invaluable legacy of the British. Also, [6,7] emphasise why English language is a dominant language in Nigeria. Hence, the teaching of the language, at any level in Nigerian schools, deserves scholarly attention from time to time.

It is noteworthy that the first language acquirer has access to the resources of the culture attached to the language and particularly to those learnt and encoded or even imprinted early, unlike the post puberty second language learner, who does not have this experience.

Then, one talks about acquiring native or near-native competence. The provision of National Policy on Education stipulates that children should be taught in their native language in the first three years, after which English Language should be introduced. This provision enhances firm foundation in mother tongue since a child learns better in his or her mother tongue [8-10]. Notwithstanding, applying appropriate methods in teaching could make a second language learner a better acquirer of writing skill.

The 'cooperative writing approach' to teaching of English Language involves role-playing and role-shifting. The best bet in teaching is the creative and practical component. Thus, cooperative model is a recently developed socio-cultural method of teaching aspects of a topic in any subject or course in a participatory and role-shifting manner. This approach is sociological and anthropological in orientation because it allows students to relate well in learning process. Cultural values and language functions such as friendliness, association, integration [11], communal living, sense of belongingness and interdependence are entrenched amongst students, while anxiety, nervousness and fright are highly reduced through this approach.

In consonance with the above, [12] asserts that:

Participatory approach adds new dimension to the teaching of ESL by encouraging in students the criteria of problem solving and improving their perspective towards the world. It helps students in shaping their views and motivates in finding out a solution about the approaching problems and promotes a better understanding into the process of proper decision making.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to state that collaboratively writing has been earlier practiced in the various places especially in developed countries but there are specific dimensions to this research because it combines team teaching with team learning. Also, specific contributions of each student in a group or team could be easily identified because specific roles are assigned to each student.

The roles and status of English language in Nigeria, especially in education, indicate, beyond reasonable doubt, that it is not impossible to dispense off the language but to continue to improve on its teaching. In fact, [13] posits that emphasis in Applied Linguistics should be on

effective use of the English Language in teaching, in order to achieve the various purposes which the language should serve, while [14] insists that students should be motivated in the course of teaching English as a Second Language. No wonder, [15] opines that 'it is very essential for an agreement on a particular model(or models) that will be generally acceptable in the teaching of English.' A model(s) that is (are) objective and verifiable could as well be adopted by native teachers of English Language.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research covered only three selected secondary schools in Ondo State. The three schools were selected from each of the three senatorial districts. One Hundred research subjects were drawn from Senior Secondary Three (S.S.S.3) Class in rural, urban and suburban secondary schools. Thus, Grade A school was chosen from an urban community in Ondo North, Grade B school in a suburban community in Ondo Central and Grade C school in a rural community in Ondo South. The selected schools are Imade College, Owo (Ondo North), Igoba High School, Akure (Ondo Central) and Oloruntele Grammar School, Oloruntele (Ondo South). The schools were selected based on the ranking system of Ondo State Ministry of Education. Students in each school were taught one topic without the application of cooperative model and two topics with the application of the model; essay and article writing were based on the model, while letter writing was not taught using the model. The first assessment was conducted after teaching letter writing, while the second assessment was conducted after employing the method in the teaching of essays and articles writing. The scripts were marked and based on twenty marks. For letter writing, address, organisation, expression and mechanical accuracy were based on five marks each, while content, expression, organization, mechanical accuracy in essays and articles also had fixed five marks each. The results of the students in the first assessment were recorded on individual basis and the mean scores were calculated based on each group. Percentages of

the initial mean scores and later scores were analysed. The analysed results of the students were compared using the means sores and increase percentages of the differences in the mean scores. These formed the basis of discussion. Also, recommendations were based on the results of the students.

3. RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A team of researchers comprising four research members and four assistants embarked on the project in line with the research objectives and the field work was completed 15th of June, 2017 in three secondary schools. In essence, students in the three schools were taught and assessed. The scripts were marked and the scores were recorded and presented below. It is noteworthy that since the researchers enjoyed maximum cooperation from the schools, the results were presented with the identity of schools as School 1, School 2 and School 3 for the purpose of results. Hence, results from a particular school will not be identified with the name of the school.

3.1 Results from Schools 1, 2 and 3

The students in this school have been taught letter writing before the research. In fact, on the day of the assessment, researchers met the school's teachers revising letter writing with the students. Scripts of the best fifty students were selected and the result had an average of 8.5 marks over 20. The students were taught articles and essays writing through the cooperative model and the students had an average score of 11. In the School 1, there was an improvement of 29.4%.

The same procedure was applied in School 2 and School 3. Students from School 2 had an average of 10 marks in letter writing, while they had a mean score of 13 marks from essay. With these results, School 2 students' performances increased with 30%. Moreover, School 3 students had an average of 9.5 marks in letter writing and a mean score of 12 marks in essay. The resultant effect of this is a performance increase of 26.3%

Table 1. Results' table

School	Mean scores (Letter writing)	Mean scores (Articles/Essays)
School 1	8.5	11
School 2	10	13
School 3	9.5	12
Cumulative Mean Score	9.3	12

The results from the three schools showed that there was an improvement in the performance of the students when the cooperative model was applied to teaching in the classroom. Furthermore, it is obvious that the three schools had above 25% increase in performance rate, which is quite significant. In fact, the students were excited to experience roles playing and roles changing in learning and assessment. Indeed, National Examination Council(NECO) Examination and West African Senior School Certificate Examination(WASSCE) are individually based examinations and this restricts this approach to teaching but it is interesting to note that when a student is able to complete all roles in different essays. Such students have mastered all aspects of the essays and he will be able to singlehandedly write a whole essay.

The researchers also discovered that the cooperative approach could be extended to teachers. In essence, teachers (researchers) took roles on the field. The parts of an essay/article, comprising introduction, body and conclusion, were taught by three teachers. The first researcher explained introduction, the second researcher taught body, while the third researcher handled conclusion.

In a group of five students, five different topics were written before the five roles of A(first paragraph), B(second paragraph), C(third paragraph), D(fourth paragraph) and E(fifth paragraph) can be completed. The aspect of roles-playing by teachers and students reduced the fear and anxiety of the students

The improvement in the performances of the students showed that the cooperative model is an appropriate pedagogical tool in teaching students in secondary schools, especially those preparing for Senior School Certificate Examination in Nigeria.

At the end of the research, these results were served as reference for subsequent researchers in beaming light on the appropriateness of cooperative model, which is a modified version of [16] technique of teaching essay development. This is meant to show that Applied Linguistics is no longer limited, in scope, to theories of language and communication but has extended its roots to multidisciplinary fields where techniques and models that could enhance and improve learning and teaching could be tapped. No wonder, [13] emphasises effective teaching of English Language as the nexus in Applied

Linguistics. This research is in line with the demonstration of [12] that participatory approach is an effective tool in teaching ESL in the classroom.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study is meant to provide more intellectual insight into innovative pedagogies of teaching essay, article and letter writing through the employment of cooperative approach. It is expected that this study will improve students' performance in West African Senior School Certificate Examination and other external examinations if applied to all schools. The approach, with the support from the Federal Government towards organising workshop for teachers in primary and secondary schools, will equip teachers of English as Second Language in Nigeria with the required methodological skills in making the classroom participatory and adventurous for both teachers and students.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are hereby recommended based on field experience, results and findings:

- i) The cooperative model should be expanded to encompass cooperation among teachers as it was experimented on the field;
- ii) As a matter of urgency, researchers should submit a proposal to organise a workshop for the teachers of English Language from all schools in Ondo State. This could later be extended to other states.
- iii) This model could also be extended to students in tertiary institutions that are weak in essay/article development.
- iv) Teachers should encourage students to take practice tests on essays/articles and letter writing by adopting this model. This will enable the students learn from one another.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, efforts have been made to report a research which was carried out to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative model in the improvement of students' performances in English Language in three secondary schools in Ondo State. Therefore, this paper indicates that the recommendations are by no means exhaustive but the adoption of the model should

be employed will enhance students performance in writing by exposing them to lessons on different parts of essays and articles writing taught by different teachers and making the students write different parts of essays and articles on different topics in a team or group. It is, therefore, concluded that the model is highly appropriate for pedagogical purposes.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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APPENDIX I



INSTRUCTION: ANSWER A QUESTION IN EACH GROUP BY WRITING FOUR HUNDRED WORDS

- 1) Write a letter of advice to one of your classmates in secondary school who has just been elected as the new Governor of your state.
- 2) Write an article suitable for publication in a national magazine on the roles of the youth in national development.
- 3) Write a story that ends with 'to be fore warned is to be fore armed'

APPENDIX II

A Chart for a Team of Five Students

A - (Introductory Paragraph) : The Introduction of the essay/article



B - (Transitional Paragraph) : A part of the body



C - (Transitional Paragraph): A part of the body



D - (Transitional Paragraph): A part of the body



E – (Concluding/Terminal Paragraph): The conclusion of the essay/article

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