Effect of Integrated Approach on Polytechnic Students’ Achievement in Essay Writing

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Abstract
The pivot of polytechnic education is its focus on technical know-how. A polytechnic graduate ought to show dexterity in the practical application of theoretical concepts – essay writing skills inclusive. In an effort for polytechnic institutions to produce skilled writers that could compose publishable essays, this study was conducted to investigate the main effect of integrated approach and the moderating effects of gender and professional training on polytechnic students’ achievements in essay writing. The study used 150 randomly selected first year Higher National Diploma students from two polytechnics in two South Western states in Nigeria. The study revealed that treatment significantly affected students’ achievement (F(3,275) = 113.720, P < .001 eta .554); while gender, professional training, and interaction of treatment with gender and professional training did not. The implication is that polytechnic students’ gender and professional training should not be seen as hindrances to their achievement in essay writing if they are sufficiently assisted through the writing process and trained in the relevant language style. For them to pick and practice essay writing for self-realization, it was recommended that polytechnic students should be diligently taken through the integrated processes of essay writing for them to obtain better results regardless of their gender and professional training.

Keywords: integrated approach, gender, professional training, achievement, essay writing

INTRODUCTION
In the effort to produce skilled writers that could produce publishable essays, the practice of product approach to essay writing in the polytechnic leaves much to be desired. The traditional product approach has been attacked as unsuitable for effective language learning. McNamara (1973) had earlier declared that the traditional approach, from its abstract principles to the after-the-effect criticism, undermines confidence, produces antagonism, and often bewilders the average student. If he has learned anything constructive, it consists in a set of principles and rules by which writing may be judged, but he has not learned how to write. The pivot of polytechnic education is its focus on technical know-how. A polytechnic graduate ought to show dexterity in the practical application of theoretical concepts – essay writing skills inclusive. Gatbonton & Seglowitz (1988) and Myers (1997) insist that the traditional writing approach has failed to make correct grammar automatic because it has been aimed, not at particular utterances, but at structures. The resultant effect is that while so much is being done in the name of teaching of writing, so little is being achieved in terms of producing skillful, self-sustaining writers which is a core objective of the nation’s polytechnic education.

Myers (1997) posits that composition teaching today strongly de-emphasizes a focus on grammar and correctness as obstructive to students’ efforts to write. This, perhaps, is why Smith (2005) advises that writing courses should not be narrowly limited to grammatical and stylistic concerns. He points out that studies in writing pedagogy show that even the most basic and technical writing skills are best learned in the context of students discussing and revising their own papers not just through sample sentences and paragraph exercises. The heart of learning to write, like learning to be a surgeon or a dancer, is peer-and/or instructor-guided apprenticeship. This is the strength of the integrated writing approach being used in this study if it is painstakingly adopted in the polytechnics by teachers of Use of English in the teaching of essay writing skills.

Components of Integrated Approach
The Integrated Writing Approach, as the name implies, is a combination of the product, process and genre writing approaches. It is the most recent writing approach being proposed in an effort to circumvent the weaknesses of the existing approaches and benefit maximally from their inherent strengths. James (1993) explains that the combination rewards both the teachers and students with the best of each approach. Xu (2005) also opines that by introducing and comparing product, process and genre approaches, we can find the weaknesses and strengths of each approach and we also find that the three approaches are largely complimentary.

In the Product Approach, students’ attention is focused on adhering to, and duplicating, a model; and in particular on correct language. Students are made to study a model essay and attempt to produce a parallel text. The major pre-occupation of the
approach is with the finished product. The process approach shifts focus from product to process; from an approach devoted to correct form and accuracy to one which is concerned with individual levels of fluency and expression. Jordan (1997) explains that as a replacement of Product Approach which considers written language secondary and merely as a mechanism for reinforcing spoken language, Process Approach empowers the students, thereby enabling them to make clearer decisions about the direction of their writing by means of discussing, drafting, feedback, and making informed choices; thereby encouraging students to be responsible for making Improvement themselves. Tribble (1996) defines it as an approach to teaching of writing, which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than imitation of models. Onosode (2004) favors the process approach because it emphasizes the usefulness of dialogue as a teaching technique by getting the students to talk about their writing at every step of the writing process. To Smith (1982), an advantage in adopting the process approach is in developing the significance of the cyclical and recursive nature of writing where pre-writing, writing and rewriting frequently seem to be going on simultaneously.

The role of the teacher is to teach the principles of the essay writing and then guide the students through the writing processes as they attempt to produce their own texts. In doing this, Myers (1997) suggests that we apply “process” not only to composing, but also to the acquisition of the syntax and vocabulary of a new language as well. To him, simply pointing out what is wrong in surface level grammar, whether through grammar lessons, proof-reading symbols, or underlining, does not correspond to the process of producing writing. Rather than being expected to turn in a finished product right away, students are asked for multiple drafts of the write-up and taught that rewriting and revision are integral to writing, and that editing is an ongoing, multi-level process, not merely a hasty check for grammar.

The third component in the Integrated Approach is the Genre Approach. Proponents of the Genre Approach are of the view that every chosen field of study has its particular written language and permissive forms of expression. Davies (1998) proposes that students aiming to attain academic success need to “somehow discover … the criteria by which different genres they produce are assessed”. Swale (1990) explains that a genre comprises a class of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. The rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences choice of content and style.

Factors of Students’ Achievement in Essay Writing

In the teaching of essay writing in the polytechnic, some factors can positively or negatively affect student’s performance. Two of such factors adopted as moderator variables in this study are students’ gender and professional training. Several studies have established a significant positive correlation between students’ gender and performance in academic domain. In mathematics, for example, gender difference tends to favor male students (Eisenberg, Martini and Fabes 1996; Hacket and Betz, 1989) while in the language arts, many researches have reported that girl are more favoured (Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Reuman and Yee, (1989), Pajares, Miller and Johnson 1999; Pajares and Valiante, 1997; Wigfield, Eccles, Maclever, Reuman and Medley (1991).

Studies in western education have shown that female students tend to have lower ability than their male counterparts in some fields of study. Numerous studies like those of Terman & Tyler (1954), and Adepoju (1996) have shown that girls are superior to boys on intelligence tests that were highly verbal. While boys are superior in numerical aptitude, science, reasoning and spatial relationship, girls are superior in verbal fluency, perceptual speed, memory and manual dexterity.

On students’ professional training and how it affects their interest in writing, the researcher reasons with practitioners of Transformative Language Arts (TLA) that everyone, irrespective of his professional training, has a story to tell, an experience to relate, or an idea to put across to the general public. It is, therefore, reasoned that since language is a kind of culture, and currency in our culture, and currency equates power, then writing and telling our stories are ways of giving value and voice to what’s often silenced, ignored or not heard in our individual lives, our communities, and our culture-at-large (TLA 2005).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of integrated writing approach on polytechnic students’ achievement in essay writing. The study also examined the moderating effects of students’ gender and professional training.

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested.
1. There was no significant main effect of treatment on students’ achievement in essay writing.
2. There was no significant main effect of gender on students’ achievement in essay writing.
3. There was no significant main effect of professional training on students’ achievement in...
essay writing.

4. There was no significant interaction effect of treatment, gender and professional training on students’ achievement in essay writing.

METHODOLOGY

This research study was the pre-test post test control group type. It adopted 2x2x3 factorial design for the factorial analysis. Students of polytechnics in Nigeria constituted the population for this study. Two institutions were randomly selected and assigned as experimental group and control group respectively. A total of 75 first-year HND students were randomly selected from each institution – 45 males and 30 females. 15 males and 10 females were selected from each of faculties of Engineering, Environmental, and Management studies. The sample size was 150.

The writing approach was the independent variable and it was manipulated at two levels: Integrated Writing Approach and Traditional Product Writing Approach. The dependent variable was students’ achievement in essay writing while the moderator variables were students’ gender and professional training.

INTRUMENTS FOR THE STUDY

Five instruments were used for the study:

(i) Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT): EWAT was a question on narrative essay constructed by the research. The question was drawn based on the curriculum designed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). The question fell within the purview of students’ practical experience. EWAT was administered twice on 30 students from a department other than the study sample within an interval of two weeks. The Pearson correlation of the two sets of scores yielded an alpha coefficient of .84.

(ii) Lecturers’ Operation Guide 1: LOG 1 contained a breakdown of the topics to be covered by the lecturer in the teaching of narrative essay. The topics were spread to cover three contact sessions of two hours per session.

(iii) Essay Marking Guide: The marking guide provided the details of marks distribution under the four assessment aspects – Content, Organization, Expression, and Mechanical Accuracy. It also provides a catalogue of expectations from the students under each aspect giving detailed example of errors to be penalized under grammar and punctuation.

(iv) Lecturers’ Operation Guide 2: LOG 2 was a full discourse on narrative essay writing with relevant examples from the model story and other stories. It was made available to both the lecturers and the students as instructional facility.

(v) Lecturers’ Operation Guide 3: LOG 3 was the narrative essay model adopted for the study. It was a 10-page short story titled “The Madman” written by Chinua Achebe and published in his anthology of short stories titled Girls at War and Others Stories.

PROCEDURE

The researcher first conducted the pre-test on the study sample. He thereafter went on to teach the course. To facilitate the teaching/learning process the students were each provided with a copy of the model essay and lecture note. After the teaching exercise, the students were given a period of three weeks to write the essay and submit as post-test script. The pre-treatment and post-treatment EWAT scripts were scored manually based on the modified marking guide adapted from West African Examination Council (WAEC).

Students’ scores were converted to percentage and the test score values were interpreted for the purpose of discussion as follows: 80 & above (Excellent); 70 - 79 (Very Good); 60 - 69 (Good); 50 - 59 (Average); 40 - 49 (Below average); 30 - 39 (Weak); 00 - 29 (Very Weak). Data generated from the study were classified as pre-test and post-test scores for Experimental and Control Groups. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to analyze the post-test scores using the pre-test scores as covariates.

LIMITATION TO THE STUDY

An obvious limitation to the study is the time factor. The time it took the researcher to teach the skills and for the students to undertake the writing exercise far surpassed the time allocated for the Use of English course in the polytechnic curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: ANCOVA of Students’ Achievement in Post-test Essay Writing by Treatment Groups, Professional Training, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>_df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>22213.93*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>925.381</td>
<td>31.939</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>11669.552</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11669.55</td>
<td>402.938</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate</td>
<td>10306.250</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>555.865</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment (Gd)</td>
<td>10306.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10306.25</td>
<td>113.720</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Training</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.969</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Gd)</td>
<td>15.266</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.266</td>
<td>527.468</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP'T' *Gd</td>
<td>51.603</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>138.372</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>15.266</td>
<td>297.938</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>852355.000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>8.600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>217182.250</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>28.961</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R Squared = .736 (Adjusted R Squared = .713)

Table 2: Estimated Marginal Means and Standard Error of Students’ Post-test. Achievement by Treatment Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exp. Group (IA)</td>
<td>55.471*</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>54.212 - 56.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group (PA)</td>
<td>45.872*</td>
<td>.635</td>
<td>44.622 - 47.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Evaluated at covariates appeared in the model: Essay score pre-test = 42.3833
The overall total shows that the three professions performed almost equally (Engineering 52.4, Management 52.3, Environmental 52.2). The differences are insignificant. Standardized score shows equal standard error of .549 which implies that only 0.2% of the observed variance in the post-test essay score. Table 4 shows that the male gender had a mean score of 52.166 while the female gender had 52.627. The observed difference is .461. Hypothesis 2 was therefore not rejected as the observed variance was adjudged to be quite insignificant. What this means is that students’ gender did not significantly affect their performance in essay writing. This is contrary to earlier studies like those of Iyagba (1994), Ogunkola (1997), Olaboopo (1999), Granewell (2000), Pajares & Valiantes (2001), and Abijo (2008) which reported better achievement in essay writing in favour of the female gender. This finding corroborated the report of Onosode (2004), and Olajide (2008) which reported that gender plays an insignificant role in students’ achievement in essay writing.

There is an obvious explanation for this finding and it is in the fact that students, whether male or female, admitted to the polytechnics are usually required to have attained a minimum standard of credit pass in English Language in their School Certificate examinations. This requirement has put their performances in English on almost the same pedestal. Those who came in with a pass grade are usually made to pass through the pre-lim programme and will have attained a set standard in English before they are promoted to the National Diploma level. Studies like that of Olajide (2000) have shown that students who pass prelim English go ahead to attain credit pass in SSCE English Language when they re-write the examination. Whatever difference that would have existed in the performances of male and female students in essay writing has thus been eliminated by the entry requirement to the polytechnic; hence the finding of this study was valid.

**Hypothesis 3:** Table 1 shows that after adjustment by the covariate of pre-test essay score, post-test essay score did not vary significantly with professional training $F(2,275) = .032, P = .969$, eta squared = .000. From Table 3, it could be seen that the mean scores of the three groups are almost the same and the difference largely negligible with uniform standard error of .549. The implication is that professional training did not contribute significantly to the observed variance in the post-test essay score. Hypothesis 3 was therefore not rejected. That the students did well or not in the essay writing exercise could not be traced to the kind of professional courses they are studying in the polytechnic.

Table 3 clearly shows that none of the three faculties under study had a monopoly of the highest score. The overall total shows that the three professions performed almost equally (Engineering 52.4, Management 52.3, Environmental 52.2). The differences are insignificant. Standardized score shows equal standard error of .549 which implies that
students in the three professions have performed equally in the writing exercise.

This finding has proved that students’ professional training cannot be a serious problem if they are to engage in essay writing and it is confirming Olajide’s (2008) finding that student’ professional training does not singularly predict students’ achievement in essay writing unless it combines with other variables like students’ writing self-efficacy, apprehension, and feedback effectiveness. The students have equal endowment across professional training. They have almost equal mental and intellectual capacity to engage in abstract and logical thinking. They also have come under almost similar experiences of life which can serve as a repertoire of themes or subject matters for narrative essays. They live in the same community and under the same social, political and economic influences. They also interrelate in similar socio-cultural clubs and associations irrespective of their professional leanings. They make friends without consideration to their individual professions. The students build their linguistic vocabulary in their respective professions. Since there is no profession that is inferior to the other, the difference is not in the vocabularies acquired but how they are used in a beautiful, readable style. Students do not do well in an essay writing class simply because they are male or female or because they are studying once course or the other. Writing on the requisite of a good fiction writer, Ike (1991) puts it this way:

Have you been to any gathering of fiction writers? If you have, you may have observed that they are a mixed bag: men and women, old and young, single and married, employed and unemployed, holders of doctorate degrees and persons without university education, professors and students, graduates in English as well as graduates in civil engineering, soldiers, school teachers, administrators, medical doctors, journalists… Some are dandy in appearance, some bohemian. You may also have observed that they cut across racial, ethnic, religious, social, and political boundaries. (p.39)

If there are other factors apart from treatment (teaching method), it certainly is not gender or professional training. In Ike’s (1991) view, what a student needs to write good fiction include the following among others: Creative ability: A student must have a fertile imagination, and the ability to create something out of it. Language ability: The student must be able to write well in the language he has chosen to communicate. Ability to stick through it: The student must be sufficiently self-motivated and disciplined to complete a piece of writing. A man who does not depend on writing for his livelihood or for advancement in his career is unlikely to go beyond the first three chapters of a novel unless he is richly endowed with motivation and self-discipline. Ability to observe: A good student writer must have more eyes, more ears, and more noses than other people. Ability to be objective: A writer must ensure that at all times he presents an objective picture of life in his writing - Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned?

Doing well in those five-fold abilities or gaining what the proponents of Transformative Language Arts (TLA, 2005) describe as ‘an understanding of the power of language’ has nothing to do with students’ gender or professional orientation but on personal interest which Ezekwokah (1998) says prompts in the students the desire to know more about the subject of study and the ability to engage in an activity for an appreciable length of time.

Hypothesis 4: From the relevant portion of Table 1, it is shown that the interaction of treatment, gender, and professional training accounted for 0.6% of the observed variance in the post-test essay score. \( F(6,275)=.297, P=.938, \text{eta squared is .006.} \) The interaction effect of treatment, gender, and professional training is not significant; therefore hypothesis 4 was not rejected. There certainly were contributory factors to the significant effect of treatment, but this study has shown that students gender and professional training did not occupy the front burner. The significant must be traced to some other factor(s).

Studies on students personality construct like those Marsh (2000), Onosode (2004), Adeoye (2007), and Olajide (2008) have shown the crucial roles played by students’ self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional intelligence on academic achievements. These are the areas that should attract the attention of the polytechnic lecturers in their effort to improve their student’s attitude and achievement in essay writing. Another factor worthy of manipulation is the learning environment.

As earlier pointed out, the improvement recorded in students’ achievement as shown in this study is linked to the integrated writing approach adopted. Gocsik (2005) has been unequivocal in the assertion that the process pedagogy, which is a component of integrated writing, empowers the students by getting them to talk about their writing every step of the writing process. Xu (2005) also proved in her own study that as it applies in the integrated writing approach, when students are provided with a model, in addition to being taken through the writing process, their imagination is triggered and they are able to explain better, argue better, and persuade better. In this case, as can be seen from the results of
this study, the students have been able to compose better, arrange better and express themselves better.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

A fundamental conclusion from this study is that polytechnic students can indeed produce publishable writings in the narrative genre. Irrespective of their gender or professional course of study, with dedicated quality assistance and interaction as provided with the aid of the Integrated approach, they can indeed overcome perceived shortcomings and limitations of poor self-esteem and linguistic incompetence.

The findings of this study have a number of implications for polytechnic education in Nigeria and our recommendations for the students, the lecturers, the institutions and the curriculum developers are based on such implications. This study is challenging polytechnic students to develop positive self-concept; not to allow their gender and professional characteristics to hinder their interest in essay writing. Prose writing is not an exclusive preserve of a particular gender or profession. Many people in the engineering, architecture, banking, and other professions are doing exploits in writing and publishing stories and they are earning financial dividends from the exercise.

The students should on their own, out of personal interest and commitment, try their hands on prose writing and summon the courage to seek the assistance of their peers and English lecturers with a view to publishing such works. The secret of writing good essays lies in getting assistance from others in editing and reworking the paper. The joy of it is that the credit or financial reward goes to the student who is eventually recognized as the bona fide author. Also, students must bear in mind that their perceived inadequacies in the English language should not be seen as a barrier to their successful venture into writing if only they can go through the writing process diligently as enunciated in this study. At this point, it is being recommended that students should come together under the banner of a Writer’s Club with the assistance of the lecturers, to facilitate purposeful interaction with their peers to engage in constructive writing exercises. They can go a step further by organizing a literal festival where they will showcase their write-ups.

The use of Integrated Writing Approach is also a challenge to the lecturers. It is expedient for lecturers not just to teach the students the nitty-gritty of writing a particular genre of essay with example but also to painstakingly take them through the writing processes taking time to give them tokens of encouragement in form of praises for every attempt. This will boost their self-concept. When they are allowed to take active part in correcting their own essays, their self-efficacy will receive a big boost. It is hereby recommended that lecturers should be available to students who desire their corrective inputs to their essay writing projects and should not shy away from serving as their patrons or staff advisers if invited to the Students’ Writers Club. At such club meetings, lecturers should seek to sharpen students’ intellect and literary style by challenging them to create a story from every unique incident that happens to them.

Lastly, as it obtains in the teaching of project writing in the polytechnics, students offering Use of English should be requested to submit an essay writing project as a condition for passing the course and qualifying for award of National Diploma or Higher National Diploma Certificate. When, for instance, students are taught narrative essay writing, the student should be made to submit a type-written short story or novella. This is a way we can be sure that the polytechnic products will be competent to independently write and publish their own texts when they get to their respective fields after graduation.

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