

Instruction in Textual Cohesive Conjunctions and Senior Secondary School Students' Achievement in Essay Writing in the Osogbo Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study determined the effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing in Osogbo metropolis, Nigeria. It also examined the moderating effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing. The study adopted the pretest-posttest control group quasi experimental design with a 2 × 3 factorial matrix. The participants were 201 students in intact classes from four purposively selected senior secondary schools in Osogbo metropolis. The instruments used for data collection were Essay Writing Achievement Test ($r = .79$), Vocabulary Knowledge Test ($r = .87$), Instructional Guides on Textual Cohesive Conjunctions and Modified Conventional Strategy. Three null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected were analyzed using ANCOVA and Estimated Marginal Means. Findings revealed that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in essay writing ($F_{(4,196)} = 41.33$; $\eta^2 = .39$) as the students instructed in textual cohesive conjunctions had a higher mean score in essay writing (10.46) than those taught using modified conventional strategy (4.32). There was a significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing ($F_{(3,197)} = 5.15$, $\eta^2 = .05$). Students with high vocabulary knowledge had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 10.08$) followed by those with medium vocabulary knowledge ($\bar{x} = 7.01$) and low vocabulary knowledge ($\bar{x} = 6.40$). The two-way interaction effect of treatment and vocabulary knowledge was also significant ($F_{(11,189)} = 4.21$, $\eta^2 = .006$). Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that: English Language teachers must explicitly teach textual cohesive conjunctions in order to enable students to write better essays.

Keywords: Textual cohesive conjunctions, essay writing, vocabulary knowledge, achievement in essay writing

Introduction

The importance of English Language cannot be underestimated. It is the language of international relations among different countries and people of the world. It is Mother Tongue (MT) to some people; it is some people's second language (ESL) and a foreign language to others (EFL). It is the language of integration, language of politics, language of nationalism, language of wider communication, language of the media, language of commerce and industry, language of international relations and communication and the language of social interaction. English Language is also a necessity for living. It is the language used for instructions, descriptions and prescriptions.

English is also the language of education, the language of instruction in schools and the language of educational evaluation. Ajao (2014) reaffirmed Ajufo's (2007) claim that English language is the medium of instruction for all school subjects from primary school level to the university level. The terminal objectives of the English Language cited by Atanda and Jaiyeoba (2011) include: providing pupils and students with a sound linguistic basis for further learning in secondary, tertiary and vocational institutions; equipping school learners with a satisfactory level of proficiency in the

English Language usage in their places of work; promoting the art of spoken English as medium for national and international communication; enhancing and developing further the various skills and competence already acquired at primary and junior secondary level.

Fakeye and Ogunyemi (2010) also submitted that the English Language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because it acts as a school subject from primary one through higher institution and on the other hand, the medium of instruction from primary four to tertiary institution. To that effect, all the school subjects are taught in the English Language except the Nigerian languages as revealed in the National Policy on Education (1981, revised). In addition to being a compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria, a student is not likely to succeed if he or she cannot write correctly in English Language.

In spite of the importance of English Language, students' performance in it at public examinations in Nigeria has not been encouraging. At the secondary school certificate examination level, a credit pass or failure in English Language determines, to a great extent, the academic progress of students. However, the achievement of students in the subject at this level has brought a deep concern to

parents, teachers, educators, researchers and educational stakeholders in Nigeria. With this trend of students' failure in the subject, the value of English Language is gradually and rapidly deteriorating. The report from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) showed that students' performance in English Language has been very disheartening. As reported, more than 60 percentages of candidates each year under consideration scored below credit level. The implication of this is that less than 40% of candidates that sit for WASSCE annually would have the opportunity of competing for placement in higher institutions provided by have the right subject combination. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board brochure (2013:2) in stating entry requirements into Nigerian institutions emphasized that "A credit pass in English language is required for all courses except where it is stated otherwise". For instance, a candidate with C6 parallel including the English language will be offered an admission ,while a candidate with 8As without English language will not be offered admission into any university.

Among the factors responsible for the performance in the subject is students' poor performance in English language paper 1 which is made up of writing activities such as comprehension, summary writing and essay writing. According to WAEC Chief Examiner's Report (2012), there are several reasons for students' poor academic achievement in essay writing, among which are shallow knowledge of grammar, lack of adequate vocabulary, illegible handwriting, spelling errors, poor grasp of the English language as a medium of instruction as well as medium of expression, disregard for rubrics and incorrect interpretation of questions, poor command of the English language, poor knowledge of examination technique, poor writing skill, poor use of conjunctions, punctuations and ineffective teaching strategies used by the English language teachers.

In an attempt to find lasting solution to students' poor performance in essay writing aspect of the English language, several researches have been carried out among which are that of Adegbile and Alabi (2011), Diab (2005), and Olaboopo (2000) who tested effectiveness of teaching strategies. None of these studies focused on instruction in textual cohesive conjunction.

When students write essays, they need to establish clear relations between one sentence and the next by connecting those statements together. Good essays establish a sense of direction by making

explicit connections among their different parts, so that what is said in one sentence or paragraph not only sets up what is to come but is clearly informed by what has already been said. Connections can be done by using transition terms, adding pointing words, using key terms and phrases, repeating words but with a difference (Graft, 2006). For readers to follow a writer's flow of thought, and to mark the kind of text the writer is making, he/she needs to connect his/her sentences to each other. This is achieved by the use of transitions, conjunctions and textual cohesive conjunctions.

Second language acquisition researchers on writing skill as Halliday and Hassan's work in 1976 (*Cohesion in English*) emphasized the act of producing coherent as well as cohesive discourse in order to ensure texture or cohesion in writing. The effect of discourse devices on writing is very strong since they provide us with various kinds of grammatical devices which are used to stretch any piece of discourse to be cohesive. It is noteworthy that without having a good command of the linguistic ties, one can never construct a cohesive discourse. Thus, since traditional grammar focused on form not syntax, there was a need to have sentences in combination which are created with discourse analysis attempts.

A text has "linguistic features which can be identified as contributing to its total unity and giving it texture" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:1-2). Texture is provided by cohesive relation that exists between cohesive items. Cohesion distinguishes texts from non-texts and enables readers to establish relevance between what was said, what is being said, and what will be said, through the appropriate use of the necessary lexical and grammatical cohesive devices. Cohesion occurs when the semantic interpretation of some linguistic elements in a discourse depend on another. It is the foundation upon which the edifice of coherence is built (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) and it is an essential feature of a text if it is judged to be coherent (Castro, 2004: 215). Likewise, Palmer (1999) stated that cohesion is important to both the reader in constructing the meaning from a text, and to the writer in creating a text that can be easily comprehended.

Furthermore, cohesion refers to the linguistic features which help make a sequence of sentences a text. It occurs in a text through the use of devices that link across sentences. According to Connor and Johns (1990), it is defined as the use of explicit cohesive devices that signals relations among sentences and parts of text. Cohesion is

concerned with the ways which the components of text are connected. In short, it is a relationship between lexical items and structures which are put together to construct a unified text. Cohesion is also one among the seven standards of textuality. Alarcon and Morales (2011)

Cohesion is created through grammatical and lexical forms. Textual cohesive devices are divided by Halliday and Hassan into grammatical devices and lexical ties. The grammatical cohesive devices include reference, ellipsis and substitution. The lexical ties include repetition and collocation. Conjunctions are the link between both the grammatical and the lexical categories. These conjunctive items are also discussed in detail by Chapan (1983), Quirk and Sidney (1973); Hoey (1991); Martin (1992) and Fraser (1999). Researchers such as Hassan and Halliday see that using linguistic ties make the text more cohesive and understandable. But, it seems that students do not use grammatical cohesive devices efficiently because the problem noticed by teachers is that students have many problems in writing effective discourse in general and in using cohesive devices in particular. Studies have shown that teaching textual cohesive conjunctions improves students' outcome in comprehension and writing. The impact of textual cohesive conjunctions has been researched in countries outside Nigeria and it succeeded in improving English language performance of students especially in areas such as reading comprehension, speech making or live talks but not on the effect of textual cohesive conjunction on essay writing.

Apart from the strategies used in teaching essay writing, there are other various factors which influence students' achievement. They include: school resources, vocabulary knowledge, class size, gender, race, home background and so on. In the context of this research, vocabulary knowledge is considered a moderator variable which affects students' achievement in essay writing in view of the pivotal role it plays in oral and written expressions.

Vocabulary is defined as knowledge of words which is considered vital for language development and acquisition and is recognized as an essential factor in essay writing. It can also be described as the ability to use words in the generation and understanding of sentences (Beck, Perfetti and McKeown (1982)) cited in (Yonek, 2008). Vocabulary knowledge has been considered as basic principles of learning English and it also has a determinant impact on EFL writing skills.

Statement of the problem

The role of English Language is very important in Nigeria and this makes it indispensable for progress in education. Studies have, however, revealed that students do not do well in English Language as a result of their inability to communicate their ideas in good essays. Efforts to address the problems have led researchers to adopt various strategies to improve essay writing skill of students but none of them focused on instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions as a way of improving students essay writing. Therefore, this study examined the effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' performance in essay writing in Osogbo metropolis. The moderating effect of vocabulary knowledge was also determined.

Hypotheses

- The following hypotheses were tested
- H₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing.
- H₂: There is no significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing
- H₃: There is no interacting effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing.

Scope of the study

The study examined the effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing. Grammatical cohesive devices such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion were considered for the study. Four secondary schools in Osogbo metropolis were selected for the study while SS 2 students in four intact classes participated in the study.

Significance of the study

The study has shown that instruction in textual cohesive conjunction led to improved performance of students in essay writing, thereby improving their overall performance in English Language. The study would open the eyes of English language teachers to vital areas that need to be addressed in order to improve students' essay writing skill. Teachers of English essay writing will also find this study useful as it exposed them to the need to emphasize the teaching of textual cohesive

conjunction to improve achievement of students in essay writing.

Methodology

The study adopted a pretest, posttest control group and quasi experimental design with a 2×3 factorial matrix. The design could be given as:

Experimental Group: $O_1 \quad X_1 \quad O_3$
Control Group: $O_2 \quad X_2 \quad O_4$

Where O_1 and O_2 represent the pretest measures of students' achievement in essay writing, O_3 and O_4 represent posttest measures of students' achievement in essay writing.

X_1 - Instruction in Textual Cohesive Conjunctions

X_2 - Modified Conventional Lecture Method

From Osogbo metropolis, four secondary schools were purposively selected for the study. The four schools that emerged were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups such that two schools were in the experimental group (i.e. instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions) while the other two schools were in the control group

(modified conventional strategy). From each school, an interclass of SS2 was randomly selected making a total of four intact classes and 201 students. The instruments used for data collection were Essay Writing Achievement Test ($r = .79$), Vocabulary Knowledge Test ($r = .87$), Instructional Guides on Textual Cohesive Conjunctions and Modified Conventional Strategy. Pre-test was administered on both the control and experimental group followed by the exposure of treatment to the experimental group in the teaching of essay writing, while the control group was taught using the conventional strategy. The same essay topics were taught to both experimental and control groups. Thereafter, the post-test was administered to both the experimental and the control groups. The summary of activities and time spent are stated below: The treatment lasted six weeks. Data collected were analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Multiple Classified Analysis (MCA). Scheffe post hoc analysis was also done to indicate sources of significant difference between the groups. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Testing the hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant main effect of treatment in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing

Table 1a: ANCOVA showing the significant main effects of treatment in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing

Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta ² /Effect Size
Corrected Model	5435.47	4	1358.87	233.61	.000	.83
Pre Achievement	1696.89	1	1696.89	291.72	.000	.60
Treatment	721.28	3	240.42	41.33	.000*	.39
Error	1140.09	196	5.82			
Total	6575.56	200				

*Significant at $P < .05$

The above result shows that there is a significant main effect of the treatment in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing ($F(4,196) = 41.33, P < .05, = .39$). Hence, the

null hypothesis was rejected. In order to see how experimental and control groups performed, the estimated marginal means was computed as shown in table 1a.

Table 1b: Estimated marginal means of the treatment group on students' achievement in essay writing

Treatment groups	Mean	Std. Error
Experimental group	10.46	.53
Control group	4.32	.29

Table 1b shows that the experimental group did better ($x = 10.46$) than the control group ($x = 4.32$)

Ho₂: There is no significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

Table 2a: ANCOVA showing the significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on Students' achievement in essay writing

Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta ² /Effect Size
Corrected Model	4806.638	3	1602.213	178.43	.000	.731
Pre Achievement	2821.257	1	2821.257	314.20	.000	.615
Treatment	92.447	2	46.224	5.15	.007*	.050
Vocabulary knowledge	1768.924	197	8.979			
Error	6575.562	200				
Total						

*Significant at $P < .05$

The above results shows that there is a significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing ($F(3,197) = 5.15$, $P < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

In order to establish the difference in the performance of the three vocabulary knowledge groups in essay writing, estimated marginal means was computed as shown in table 2b.

Table 2b: Estimated marginal means of the vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

Treatment groups	Mean	Std. Error
Low	6.40	.28
Medium	7.01	.39
High	10.08	1.08

From table 2b, students with high vocabulary knowledge had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 10.08$) followed by those with medium vocabulary knowledge ($\bar{x} = 7.01$) and low vocabulary knowledge ($\bar{x} = 6.40$).

Ho₃: There is no significant interaction effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunction and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

Table 4.3: ANCOVA table showing the significant main and interaction effects of treatment groups and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5553.44	11	504.86	93.351157.89	.000	.85
Pre Achievement	853.85	1	350.87		.000	.46
2-way Interactions:				4.21		
Treatment group x vocabulary	5.72	5	1.15		.957*	.01
Error	1022.12	189	5.41			
Total	6575.56	200				

*Significant at $P < .05$

From table 3, there was a significant interaction effect of treatment and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing ($F(11,189) = 4.21$, $P < .05$, $\eta^2 = .006$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion of findings

Instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions and students' achievement in essay writing

There is a significant main effect of the

instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions on students' achievement in essay writing. The experimental group performed better than the control group in essay writing. The findings showed that

students exposed to instruction in textual cohesive conjunction performed better in learning and writing essay. This might not be unconnected with the fact that cohesion is important to writer in constructing meaning and creating a text that can be easily comprehended. Students, who had good command of linguistic ties, wrote explicit connections and well linked sentences in constructing their essays.

Halliday and Ruqaiya (1976) was corroborated by the result of this finding. In their proposition, cohesion is a semantic concept that occurs when the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another, meaning, cohesion refers to the ways in which texts are 'stuck together' – the ways in which sentences are linked or connected by various linguistic and semantic ties. In agreement with the finding of this study, Wayne and Marshall (1987) confirms that writing must have not only coherence, an effective design, but cohesion, an explicit set of 'hooks' and 'ties' that ensure a reader's interest and comprehension. Coherence is the kind of 'holding together' that a good design will give any discourse, whether written or spoken. Cohesion is the result of giving readers the right kind of explicit help in figuring out the design.

Main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

There is a significant main effect of vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing. This might not be unconnected to the fact that vocabulary knowledge is the knowledge of words which is considered vital for language development and acquisition and is recognized as an essential factor in writing. Students' ability to use words in the generation and understanding of sentences make their writing more influential. This is in agreement with Yonek (2008) who says that a good writer has to know a set of vital items to enrich his writing such as grammar, punctuation, capitalization rules, figurative language, rhyme, rhythm and vocabulary. One item that can power up writing is a strong vocabulary.

This finding is in agreement with Yonek (2008) who reaffirms that effective writing has been shown to be reliant on verbal working memory. Student who have considerable difficulty in producing well written essays suffer from underdeveloped oral proficiency levels. Further research shows that verbal working memory limitations impact both quantity and quality of writing (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Cox,

Shanahan and Tinzman, 1991; Yonek, 2008). The result of this finding is not in disagreement with any research. This might be because vocabulary is a strong ingredient that powers up effective writing, comprehension and oral proficiency.

In contrast, the result of this finding is in disagreement with the view of the 20th century grammarians like Franz Boas and recent argument of Larry Lynch (lynchlarrym@gmail.com), who agree with the implicit approach of teaching grammar.

Interaction effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing

There was a significant interaction effect of instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions and vocabulary knowledge on students' achievement in essay writing. Writing is dependent on the ability to draw upon words to describe an event. The breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy and quality of his or her writing. Yonek (2008) restated that improved vocabulary can enhance students' writing skills; there is no guarantee that it will do so automatically. Improvement in vocabulary will result in improved writing skills only if the teacher is able to create a classroom that takes writing seriously. In such a classroom, process and environment are closely intertwined and interdependent. This is in agreement with Yonek (2008) who notes that variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in writing, the outgoes of the language arts and at any level, written communication is more effective when a depth of vocabulary and command of language is. Also, this study agrees with Yonek (2008) when he stated that since words are the writer's most important tools, vocabulary development must be an important and ongoing part of classroom learning..

Conclusion

The findings revealed that instruction in textual cohesive conjunctions is more effective in enhancing students' achievement in essay writing than conventional lecture method in essay writing. Appropriate use of conjunctions facilitated their essays. They were able to construct meaningful sentences using linguistic ties which made their essays more cohesive and understandable. A well-grounded knowledge of the use of textual cohesive conjunctions and vocabulary knowledge are vital ingredients for effective essay writing and therefore, essay writing instruction could be enriched with these two variables for improved performance of students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- (1) Teachers should adopt the teaching of textual cohesive conjunctions to enable the learners write better essays.
- (2) The relevant government agencies should organize periodic seminars and workshops for serving English Language teachers in order to acquaint them with various innovative strategies that can improve essay writing performance of students.
- (3) Textbook writers and publishers could link grammar and essay together such that they would include the use of conjunctions in essay writing instructions.

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