

Two Modes of Corrective Feedback and Students' Achievement in Essay Writing in Oyo, Oyo State

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Abstract

The study investigated the extent to which two modes of corrective feedback (direct and indirect) determined students' achievement in essay writing in Oyo, Oyo State. The study adopted the pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. The participants were 91 SSII students from three schools in Oyo, Oyo State. The instruments used were Students' Essay Writing Achievement Test ($r = .92$ and $r = .90$) for direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback, respectively, as well as Teachers' Instructional Guides on Direct Corrective Feedback and Indirect Corrective Feedback, Teachers' Instructional Guide on Conventional Strategy and Teachers' Manual for Error Identification. Three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Findings revealed that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in English essay writing ($F_{(2,84)} = 228.406$; partial $\eta^2 = .845$). There was no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement ($F_{(1,84)} = .753$; partial $\eta^2 = .009$). Also, there was no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' achievement ($F_{(2,84)} = .981$; partial $\eta^2 = .023$). Based on the findings, it is recommended that English Language teachers should adopt written corrective feedback strategies in teaching essay writing.

Keywords: Direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, achievement in essay writing

Introduction

The four basic interrelated skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing are important for proficiency in English language as they allow communication to be effectively carried out. However, among these four skills, writing is considered more difficult than others to learn. Writing is really a difficult task because of its complexity in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, meaning, sentence structure, etc. Moreover, there is no proper correspondence between spelling and pronunciation of English words. In general terms, writing is the graphic representation through symbols, that is, letters. Unlike speaking and listening skills that develop naturally, reading and writing skills are acquired and taught. A writer becomes better when he/she reads extensively which implies that the in-depth reading the writer does, the more in-depth writing he/she does.

According to Kolawole (2003), writing skill occupies a more prominent position among other language skills. It is one of the most important activities of a literate community. Although, pupils need to read so that they can learn about things around them, they also need to learn to write in order to impact meaningfully in their world. A citizen who writes has the capacity to actively participate in the continuity of learning and put across ideas, feelings and important information to others. Writing enables people to externalise their ideas through reading,

listening and observation, thereby contributing to information dissemination and perhaps academic success. It is therefore, not out of place that Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) view writing as a foundation to success in academics, in the work place and global economy. Writing skill is an indispensable skill in all-round advancement.

Writing is of great importance in our personal and academic life because it makes information available and long lasting in that written work can be read and re-read over time. Writing is important in learning, without writing, language learning remains incomplete (Elizabeth, 2004). Writing is a tool for creation of ideas and consolidation of linguistic system by using it for communicative objectives in an interactive way (Elashri, 2013). Writing is also a successful tool for transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee through a text. This exchange of information becomes a powerful means to motivate and encourage development of language skills. Writing is one of the language skills that enable a learner to think critically and creatively as they respond to academic discipline. It is a lifelong process and part of personal development whose usefulness stretches beyond the classroom. As individuals mature and become adults, competence in writing continues to be essential (Fakeye and Ogunyemi, 2010). A good writer should think in a clear and organised manner in order to present ideas logically.

Writing consists of several processes: Planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Written communication skills are central to learning whether in academic life, work place, or personal life since they offer a powerful advantage in a world in which people must constantly learn new information (Duignan, 2012).

Another reason why writing is essential is because learners' general academic performance is assessed through the medium of writing. Thus, learners' performance in writing could affect their achievement, not only in English language as a subject but also in other school subjects (Daly, 1979; Onwuegbuzie 1997; Igubor, 2015). As one of the major aspects of English language, writing is tested in examinations such as West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) SSCE in form of continuous writing which involves essay and letter writing.

In order to achieve necessary competence and success in English language, essay and letter writing aspect of English language become greatly important to students. This is because English language examination in WASSCE and NECO SSCE is divided broadly into three papers. Paper 1 which has the highest contribution to the success of a student in English language examination is further divided into three parts namely: Essay/letter writing, comprehension passage and summary passage. These three parts are assigned 50, 20 and 30 marks respectively. That is, essay writing aspect of English language accounts for fifty (50) of the total marks for English language in WAEC and NECO public examinations. The simple deduction from the above is that essay/letter writing part of paper 1 has the greatest contribution to the success of a student (Fasasi and Amadi, 2015; Fakeye and Ohia, 2016).

According to Oruche (2014), to write an essay or composition means to compose a piece of writing by carefully putting together some ideas or points which are part of a given topic. A good essay has three necessary parts: An introductory paragraph which introduces the essay and states the main points, the body which supports (shows, explains or proves) the main point and support paragraphs and the concluding paragraph that summarises the whole idea of the essay. Fakeye and Ohia (2016) opine that essay writing also requires conscious efforts and practice in composing, developing and analysing ideas. It also provides a natural outlet for the writer's reflections on a given topic. It is a form of composition whose content and organisation are guided by the topic and

purpose of writing. Ezema (2010) asserts that essay is a short piece of writing on a particular or given subject. An essay reveals not only the writer's ability to communicate ideas, but also provides the basis for assessing whether the writer possesses a lively mind.

Candidates who are able to write good essays in English language perform better in other aspects of the subject such as comprehension and summary while those who are unable to write good essays in English perform poorly in the subject (Fakeye 2002; Igubor 2015). The skill of writing is not limited to essay writing only because it is also required in the other two aspects of English Language (comprehension and summary). It means a student that lacks good writing skill will not perform as expected in all the sections of Paper One which means by implication probability of such student performing well in the examination will be very low.

Despite the emphasis placed on teaching and learning English language and the efforts put into the teaching of the language, students still do not attain the mastery required for academic pursuit. The Chief Examiner of the West African Examinations Council always reports poor performance of students in English language every year. The poor performance is of great concern to everybody as it negates the aspirations of students themselves as well as purpose of secondary education (Fakeye, 2001). When looked into reasons for students' poor performance, English language scholars have attributed the persistent poor performance in English language and nearly all compulsory subjects at school certificate level to students' poor writing skills (Kolawole, 2003 Oden, 1999; Olaboopo, 1999; Fakeye, 2001, Adeleye 2017, Araromi and Olatunji, 2019).

Poor writing skills have been identified as a major cause of mass failure of Nigerian candidates in English language examinations. The WAEC Chief Examiner's Report (2018) states that tests on oral English, lexis and structure and essay writing are the three main aspects of language learning that have continually posed problem to students in English language examinations and which have resulted in the perennial poor performance in the subject. The report states that performance of candidates in composition was generally poor.

Majority of the examiners observed in the scripts of candidates that in composition they have little or no exposure to writing skills. According to the report, students' problem with writing include

inadequate preparation manifesting itself in many forms like poor spelling, poor punctuation, inadequate exposure to idiomatic forms of English language, ignorance of the rudiments of the language, construction of loose sentences, transliteration from mother tongue, lack of familiarity with the required formats, indiscriminate copying of passages in summary section, poor grammatical expressions, misinterpretation of questions, abuse of rules of grammar and use of unacceptable contractions that have become common on social media.

As a way of addressing this problem, scholars have carried out varieties of research ranging from effective strategies of teaching essay writing to other teacher and students related factors. Although, these studies came up with useful insights to the teaching and learning of essay writing but with little emphasis on corrective feedback and students' achievement in essay writing. Corrective feedback on students' writing is linguistically beneficial because it addresses linguistic problems that individual learners are actually experiencing. It also allows learners to notice problematic linguistic items in their written tasks (Ellis, 2009). It further provides opportunities for learners to improve their level of competence and to express themselves in a language that is accurate and appropriate (Swain, 1995).

Corrective feedback is an important variable in language teaching, especially in writing, as it plays important roles in developing students' writing skill. Writing is one of the most difficult skills in English and so most second language learners tend to make errors. (Ferris, 1996). It is a crucial aspect in writing process which plays a central role in learning the writing skill. Karim and Nassaji (2013) observe that through corrective feedback, learners come to distinguish for themselves whether they are performing well or not. Getchell (2011) also contends that when students are not performing well, feedback helps them to take corrective action about their writing in order to improve on it and reach an acceptable level of performance.

Written corrective feedback is defined as responses to students' wrong sentences (Ellis, 2005). These responses include informing learners that their sentences are wrong and offer the corrected form of the sentences. Written corrective feedback provides the grammatical explanation of the mistakes and informs learners that their target language output is wrong (Lightbown and Spada 2006). Mimi (2009) also defines written corrective feedback as any indication to the learners that their language is

incorrect. This is supported by Suzuki (2003) who claims that written corrective feedback is the provision of negative evidence which encourages learners' repair involving accuracy and precision. Hopefully, the written corrective feedback from teachers can help the learners to acquire the second language (L2) by helping them to overcome their negative evidences.

According to Ellis (2009), there are six types of written corrective feedback which includes direct, indirect, focused /unfocused, metalinguistic, electronic and reformulation. However, research has shown conflicting views on effects of each types of feedback on students' writing achievement. Hence, this study was carried out to examine two types of feedback and students' achievement in essay writing, that is, direct and indirect written corrective feedback. Indirect feedback is a strategy of providing feedback commonly used by teachers to help students correct their errors by indicating an error without providing the correct form (Ferris and Roberts, 2001).

Indirect feedback takes place when teachers only provide indications which in some ways make students aware that an error exists but they do not provide the students with the correction. In doing so, teachers can provide general clues regarding the location and nature or type of an error by providing an underline, a circle, a code, a mark, or a highlight on the error, and ask the students to correct the error or errors themselves (Lee, 2008). According to Lanlade (1982) and Ferris (2006), indirect written corrective feedback helps students significantly in their writing as compared to direct corrective feedback from the teacher. Ferris (2006), shows that there was a strong relationship between teacher's indirect feedback and successful student revisions on the subsequent drafts of their essays.

Another feedback strategy commonly used by teachers is direct feedback. Direct feedback is a strategy of providing feedback to students to help them correct their errors by providing the correct linguistic form or linguistic structure of the target language (Ferris, 2006). Direct feedback is usually given by teachers, upon noticing a grammatical mistake, by providing the correct answer or the expected response above or near the linguistic or grammatical error (Ferris, 2003). Direct feedback may be done in various ways such as by striking out an incorrect or unnecessary word, phrase, or morpheme; inserting a missing or expected word, phrase, or morpheme; and by providing the correct linguistic form above or near the erroneous form (Ellis, 2008; Ferris, 2006), usually above it or in the margin. Direct

feedback has the advantage that it provides explicit information about the correct form (Ellis, 2008).

From the above, it is clear that teachers and educational practitioners used different types of feedback which are believed to be more effective than the other but two modes of corrective feedback (direct and indirect) have not been linked to essay writing especially in Oyo, Oyo State. Therefore, this study investigated two modes of corrective feedback (direct and indirect) and students' achievement in essay writing in Oyo, Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

Essay writing is an important aspect of the English language as students' competence in English language would go a long way in helping them pass all their academic subjects successfully. However, studies have shown that students' performance in essay writing is poor and this accounts for their poor performance in English language examinations. As a way of addressing this problem, researchers have concentrated efforts on different methods and strategies of teaching essay writing and students related factors such as attitude, interest, etc, but with little emphasis on two modes of corrective feedback and students' achievement. Literature has shown a strong link between corrective feedback and students' achievement especially in other aspects of English language such as grammar, comprehension and summary but the extent to which this factor would determine students' achievement in essay writing has not been given much research attention especially in Oyo. Therefore, this study investigated the extent to which two modes of corrective feedback (direct and indirect) would determine students' achievement in essay writing in Oyo, Oyo State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide

Results

H_0^1 : There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in English essay writing.

this study and were tested at 0.05 levels of significance.

- Ho₁. There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in essay writing.
- Ho₂. There is no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in essay writing.
- Ho₃. There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' achievement in essay writing.

Significance of the Study

This study revealed the effectiveness of teaching essay writing through direct and indirect corrective feedback thereby improving students' performance in English essay writing. It exposed English language teachers to direct and indirect corrective for teaching essay writing. In addition, this study will add to the pool of research on effective strategies for teaching essay writing in schools.

Methodology

The study adopted a pretest post-test control group quasi- experimental research design. Five instruments were used for data collection namely: Students' Essay Writing Achievement Test (r = .92 and r=.90) for direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback respectively, Teachers' Instructional Guide on Direct Corrective Feedback, Teachers' Instructional Guide on Indirect Corrective Feedback, Teachers' Instructional Guide on Conventional Strategy and Teachers' Manual for Error Identification. Three intact classes were randomly assigned to treatment groups such that two groups were for the experimental groups and the other one for the control group. A total of ninety - one (91) students participated in the study and data analysis was done using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

Table 1: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Post-Achievement in English Essay Writing by Treatment and Gender

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1283.798 ^a	6	213.966	322.444	.000	.958
Intercept	24.470	1	24.470	36.875	.000	.305
Pretest	516.885	1	516.885	778.938	.000	.903
Treatment	303.129	2	151.565	228.406	.000	.845
Gender	.500	1	.500	.753	.388	.009
Treatment * Gender	1.303	2	.651	.981	.379	.023
Error	55.740	84	.664			
Total	26462.000	91				
Corrected Total	1339.538	90				

Table 1 shows that there is significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in English essay writing ($F_{(2, 84)} = 228.406$; $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .845$). The table also shows a partial eta square of .845, which implies that the effect size of the treatment was 84.5%. That is, 84.5% difference in the post-achievement of students' in English essay writing was

accounted for by the main effect of the treatment, hence, there was a significant difference in the post-achievement of students. Thus, the null hypothesis 1 was rejected. In order to determine the magnitude of the significant main effect across treatment groups, the estimated marginal means of the treatment groups were carried out and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Estimated Marginal Means for Post-Achievement in English Essay Writing by Treatment

Treatment	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct Corrective Feedback	19.028 ^a	.156	18.718	19.338
Indirect Corrective Feedback	15.022 ^a	.182	14.659	15.384
Conventional Strategy	14.579 ^a	.165	14.250	14.908

Table 2 shows that students in the Direct Corrective Feedback group (mean = 19.028) had the highest post-achievement mean score in English essay writing, followed by the students in the Indirect Corrective Feedback group (mean = 15.022) while the students in the control group (mean = 14.579) had the least post-achievement mean score. This implies that the students who received the direct corrective

feedback performed better than their counterparts who received the indirect corrective feedback and their counterparts who received no feedback at all in the control group. Similarly, the students who received indirect corrective feedback performed a bit better than their counterparts in the control group who received no feedback at all.

Table 3: Bonferroni Post-hoc Analysis of Post-Achievement by Treatment

(I) Treatment	(J) Treatment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct Corrective Feedback	Indirect Corrective Feedback	4.006*	.238	.000	3.423	4.589
	Conventional Strategy	4.449*	.232	.000	3.883	5.015
Indirect Corrective Feedback	Direct Corrective Feedback	-4.006*	.238	.000	-4.589	-3.423
	Conventional Strategy	.443	.250	.240	-.168	1.054
Conventional Strategy	Direct Corrective Feedback	-4.449*	.232	.000	-5.015	-3.883
	Indirect Corrective Feedback	-.443	.250	.240	-1.054	.168

Table 3 shows that the post-achievement of students exposed to direct corrective feedback strategy was significantly different from that of the students exposed to indirect corrective feedback strategy (Mean Difference = 4.006; $p < 0.05$) and conventional strategy (Mean Difference = 4.449; $p < 0.05$). However, there was no significant difference in the post-achievement of students who received indirect corrective feedback and the students in control group who received no feedback at all (Mean

Difference = .443; $p > 0.05$) though the students in the indirect corrective feedback group performed a bit higher than the students in the control group.

Ho₂: There is no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in English essay writing.

Table 1 shows that there was no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in English essay writing ($F_{(1, 84)} = .753$; $p > .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .009$).

This implies that there was no significant difference in the post-achievement of male and female students in English essay writing. Therefore, the null hypothesis 2 was not rejected.

Ho₃: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' achievement in English essay writing.

Table 1 shows that there was no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' achievement in English essay writing ($F_{(2, 84)} = .981$; $p > .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .023$). This implies that there was no significant difference in the post-achievement of students based on the interaction of treatment and gender. Hence, the null hypothesis 3 was not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Findings show that students in the Direct Corrective Feedback group had the highest post-achievement mean score in English essay writing, followed by the students in the Indirect Corrective Feedback group while the students in the control group had the least post-achievement mean score. This implies that the students who received the direct corrective feedback performed better than their counterparts who received the indirect corrective feedback and their counterparts who received no feedback at all in the control group. This finding is similar to the findings of Ahmad, Saeed and Salam (2013) who found that direct corrective feedback had a significant effect on students' academic achievement as students who got direct corrective feedback scored high in the examination, did their classroom assignment in time and easily communicated their views in classroom discussions. This finding negates the findings of Hammad (2014) who found that direct corrective feedback did not improve middle and low achievers' performance and concluded that for direct corrective feedback to be effective, it has to be used with other strategies like reading of authentic materials, the use of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries.

The study also revealed that there was no significant main effect of gender on students' achievement in English essay writing. This implies that there was no significant difference in the post-achievement of male and female students in English essay writing. This corroborates the findings of Okonkwo (2014) that gender has no significant effect on students' achievement in essay writing and that it is not a barrier to attainment of a students' desire in education. However, the finding is against the finding

of Abdullahi and Bichi (2015) who revealed that there existed a significant gender difference in students' overall performance while there also existed a significant gender difference with respect to school location as females performed above average in both urban and rural areas while males performed below average.

Finding of the study revealed that there was no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' achievement in English essay writing. That is, there was no significant difference in the post-achievement of students based on the interaction of treatment and gender. The finding showed that students, either male or female tend to benefit from error correction whether direct or indirect error correction by the teacher. This is similar to the finding of Ferris (2006) who revealed that students who were provided with either direct corrective feedback or indirect corrective feedback would be able to revise and correct their mistakes successfully. This shows that with the use of written corrective feedback from teachers, all students benefit irrespective of their gender.

Conclusion

The study has shown that essay writing could be enhanced through direct and indirect written corrective feedback. Based on the finding, the study has provided a better understanding of written corrective feedback as a variable that could influence senior secondary school students' achievement in essay writing in Oyo, Oyo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that teachers of English language should adopt written corrective feedback strategies in teaching essay writing. Also, direct corrective feedback can be an alternative option to be given to students since it has already been statistically proven to be able to help the students in decreasing their errors and also increasing their scores in English essay writing. Furthermore, English language teachers should be exposed to periodic workshops, seminars and conferences where they could be familiar with procedural steps of various instructional strategies that will facilitate learning. Also, corrective feedback strategies should be incorporated into the curriculum for implementing essay writing component of English language curriculum.

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