

# Students' and Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Writing in Lagos State Schools

**Prof. F.O. Okebukola, Prof. S.O. Makinde and Kolade, Abiodun Ahmed**

*Department of Language, Arts and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, Lagos State University*

## Abstract

*This paper examined both teachers and students perceptions and practices of English Writing at the senior secondary school in Lagos state. The research employed the usage of Questionnaire for English Language Teachers (QELT) and Questionnaire for English Language Students (QELS) towards elucidation of appropriate data with which to ascertain the perceptions of teachers and students as regards the subject matter of discourse (writing). It went further to administer a well constructed interview questions for the students for avoidance of bias in the research. Students and teachers responses were analysed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that students and teachers had positive perceptions of writing.*

**Keywords:** Students, Teachers, Perception Practices, Writing

## Introduction

The essence of engaging in any act or art is commensurate to the outcome in the long run. Over the years, student's level of failure in writing art calls for concern and one of the possible and probable reasons could be concluded to be the inability of both teachers and students to come to terms with the importance accrued to the art. The chief examiners report in WAEC among others gives credence to the focus of this research which attempts to bring to fore the perception of teachers and students as regards writing, being one of the four basic skills to be attained by students in an ESL classroom. The chief examiner suggested as part of effort to abate the status quo that students must be exposed to vocabulary development, take time to understand the exact demands of their questions, read through their work to correct spelling and grammatical mistakes, practice letters and essays constantly and that schools should ensure that only qualified teachers are employed (WAEC 2023). Additionally as suggested by this research, students view of writing and teachers perceptions and practices must be given credence if any meaningful result will be attained in a typical writing class.

Writing, no doubt, is perceived to be herculean by language students yet it cannot be wished away considering advancement in science and technology that have developed gadgets such as phones and computers with

which communication is made possible within the shortest time regardless of distance. For adequacy of understanding of global interaction, everyone will be expected to study English language skills for ease of communication and accompanying psycho-development (Zawahreh 2012). Within the confine of this discourse, writing will be defined as communication both of thoughts and emotions, with the use of signs and symbols. The attempts by the instructors to put learners through deciphering the thoughts of listeners and readers of their transmitted information means learners have grown both in knowledge and understanding of language use (Kern 2000). The fear by learners to use the second language has hampered their development of efficiency with the use of the second language and this has resulted in the production of error-filled compositions which are inimical to success in internal and external examinations. The ability to reason out ideas in composition complements the other language skills positively. Students' thinking is improved as they grow to becoming better writers with eventual effect on the writing tasks given to them in their different academic endeavours. According to Kern (2000) knowing how to write in one's mother tongue does not guarantee proficiency in a target language. Because of this, teachers must teach the target language with an understanding of the peculiar differences that are noticeable between the first language and the

second language without which the job of the teacher will be tagged wishy-washy; they must also make frantic effort to imbibe the essence of writing section of the English Language lesson since they must bequeath to the students the writing art as a compulsory skill in life. This accounted for the reason the research delves into the perception of instructors (teachers) and students as regards writing within the confine of the school system.

The world at large have seen a development in writing skill due to different programmes and government interventions such as World Literacy Foundation and International Literacy Foundation among others, with an accompanying yearning for an increase in global communication, acceptability and understanding but despite all of these giant stride efforts aimed at improving ability to write, the practice of writing in English language in Nigeria has been a herculean task in the face of interference issues caused by the contact of target language with the indigenous languages of the people from the nooks and crannies of a country blessed with well over one hundred and eighty million people and with well over five hundred indigenous languages actively in use till date (Makinde, Jegede and Kolade 2017). It is no longer news that English is very important to the growth of the Nigerian society at large especially as it has been identified as the subsequent language of instruction after the first three years of a child's formal education in schools. As entrenched in the NPE, English Language is compulsory after the first three years of a child's primary education when the learner is expected to have been immersed in using indigenous language. In any write-up by humans, either in school or for any other purpose, errors which can range from spelling, grammar, semantics, and style to typography do exist. Even an attempt to correct such errors may still lead to committing

other errors. Perhaps this accounted for the reason publishers employ professionals to edit or proofread their works to minimize drastically all perceived errors in their written texts. According to Owolabi and Okebukola (2009), the errors are classified according to: spelling, morphology, syntax (grammar), punctuation, lexical and semantic choice, style and typography and this is corroborated by the chief examiners reports in 2023. A stimulation of students and teachers' interest is paramount in this survey.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The research attempted to survey students and teachers' perceptions and teachers' practices in English writing. Specifically, the study set out to:

1. Examine students' perception of English writing in Lagos State Schools
2. Investigate teachers' perception and practices of English writing in Lagos State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were answered in the study.

1. What is students' perception of English writing in Lagos State schools?
2. What are teachers' perception and practices of English writing in Lagos State schools?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted survey research design. The respondents for this study were students and English teachers in Lagos State public schools. The instruments used were Questionnaire for English Language Teachers' Perception and Practices of English Writing (r =) and Questionnaire for English Language Students' Perception of English Writing (r =): Data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

## Results

**Table 1:** Students' Perception of Writing

S/N	Items	Yes	%	No	%
1	I do not enjoy the writing class	109	66.8	54	33.1
2	The writing class is always interesting	64	39.3	99	60.7
3	The teacher teaches writing very well	21	12.8	142	87.1
4	Writing lessons are full of boredom	50	30.7	113	69.3
5	Writing is not a difficult task	89	54.6	74	45.4
6	There are different purposes for writing	12	7.4	151	92.6
7	I choose words carefully when I write	159	97.5	4	2.5
8	I consider myself a good writer	160	98.2	3	1.8
9	I read over my work after writing to avoid errors	14	8.6	149	91.4
10	I write my compositions according to the steps taught in class by the teacher	61	37.4	102	62.6

**Source:** Field survey 2024

**Table 1** reveals the perception of students as the teacher towards acquisition of writing skill regards writing and the instructional strategy of within the classroom setting.

**Table 2 Teachers Practices and Perceptions of Writing**

S/N	ITEMS	SA/A	%	D/SD	%
1	I teach students the parts of speech	20	100	0	0
2	I teach syntax and grammar	20	100	0	0
3	I teach content and vocabulary	20	100	0	0
4	I teach writing processes – drafting, revising, editing etc	16	80	4	20
5	I teach punctuation marks	19	95	1	5
6	I teach spelling skills	9	45	11	55
7	I use teacher-made test for assessment	20	100	0	0
8	I use standardize test for assessment	13	65	7	35
9	Writing carries meaning	20	100	0	0
10	Writing has an audience	20	100	0	0
<b>PART II</b>	<b>TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING</b>	SA	A	D	SD
11	How well a teacher delivers the writing lesson will determine the achievement of students in writing	10	50	10	50
12	Provision of instructional aid is not enough to help students attain better grades in essay writing	19	95	1	5
13	Students should be introduced to reflective methods of writing early in life	20	100	0	0
14	Students develop naturally by following simple instructions on the steps to be taken to achieve an error free essay	20	100	0	0
15	I always give my students feedback with words like 'seen' 'great effort' 'you can do better,' 'keep trying' 'try harder' etc in their written essays	20	100	0	0

16	Teaching of content, organisation, expression and mechanical accuracy are important in teaching and achievement in essay writing	20	100	0	0
17	The students composition writing improve subsequently owing to my comments on their written task	14	70	6	30
18	I always give my students feedback with words like 'seen' 'great effort' 'you can do better' 'keep trying' 'try harder' etc in their written essays	20	100	0	0
19	I give my students assignment on essay writing	9	45	11	55
20	I pair students in groups to teach aspects of writing they researched	7	35	13	65

**Source:** Field survey 2024

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that students generally do not enjoy the writing class by 66.8% while asserting that the writing class is not and never an interesting one with a score of 60.7%. This is not in agreement with Zawahreh (2012) who remarked that for adequacy of understanding of global interaction, everyone will be expected to study English language for ease of communication and accompanying psycho-development. They are of the opinion that teachers do not teach well enough at 87.1%, more so, they remarked that writing as an art is a difficult task, this, is believed to be as a result of their opinion that the teachers don't teach well enough. Teachers are expected to do better because learners as a matter of fact must learn all the language skills to successfully lay claims to mastery of English language (Brown 2000). Writing is seen as a difficult task at 54.6% maybe because teachers are not doing well enough to build the interest of learners in the art and reveal to them the essence of the writing endeavor. Students agreed that they are aware that writing has different purposes at 92.6% and they also chose words carefully (97.5%) when writing and they consider themselves as good writers at 98.2% despite their earlier negative responses to entertaining the writing art. Students do not engage in self-reflective activities of reading over their works after writing at 91.4% and do not care whatever steps the teacher has taught them to follow in the course of writing at 62.6% despite that literature reveals that a participation

in self-reflection helps to stop unfair judgments thereby building impeccable thought process, (by implication) Students must understand the standards expected of them in writing (Ed Cyzewski 2015). These and many more accounted for, among others, the reason students fail their writing tests and examinations. Despite these many negating claims of the learners, teachers on the other hand, remarked that they teach the necessary topics for development of content in writing such as the 'parts of speech' at 100% affirmative response, 'syntax and grammar' at 100% affirmative response, 'content and vocabulary' at 100% affirmative response. This is an indication that the teachers engage the students well enough on aspects of writing that they needed to be exposed in order to actualize a maximum positive score in writing task. They are aware of the fact that they need to grasp the complexities and intricacies involved in recalling and revising so that they can guide the students towards making appropriate corrections without fear of failure (Sarah H. 2015), this is revealed in their response that they teach the writing process, drafting, revising and editing process at 80% affirmative response, only 20% negated this practice. Furthermore, teachers believe that punctuation marks are important to the writing process at 95% affirmative response as they are aware of the dangers that ambiguity may cause for the reading audience, hence they teach the students because of their belief that the practice of what an appropriate classroom should be is that the

teacher pays attention to structure of the write up which comes in the form of idea development clarity and coherence before transcending to grammatical errors correction (NhlanhlaMpfu 2019).

It is evident from teachers' response that many of them do not enjoy teaching the spelling skill maybe because the archaic approach of calling out words still permeate the entire teaching service from the language teachers without an attempt at improving the approach being used to make learners better with their words and spellings. Only 45% of respondents affirmed to teaching of spelling while 55% of respondents for this study negated teaching of spelling to the learners. This will have an aftermath effect on the learners as they may not be able to write and use words correctly hence having a wishy-washy composition filled with errors and ambiguity. A vivid look consideration from another perspective may make one agree that this type of negligence may be owing to the verbosity of the scheme of work which may not allow for ample time for teachers to cover their areas of concentration in the course of the delivery of their lectures. Teachers prefer a self-made test as shown by their responses at 100% to a standardize test at 65%, maybe because of their belief that teaching and accompanying response are the bedrock for revisions... (Cumming 1989), (White 1994), (Zamel 1987). Also, they agreed that writing carries meaning and has an audience owing to their 100% affirmative responses respectively. There is quite a synergy between teachers and students response at this point as students also agreed that writing has different purposes and by extension different types of audience.

The second part of the teachers' survey reveals further that teachers were torn between agreeing that achievement of students in writing is determined by how well a teacher delivers the writing lesson at 50% affirmative response and another 50% negative response. To some of the teachers, how well a teacher delivers a lesson might not be as effective as the other approaches to teaching writing, perhaps, to these teachers, the interest of students supersede any approach

to teaching and learning process or maybe such teachers are comfortable using a stereotype approach that may not yield positive result. More so, it is believed that if teaching is communicating and exchanging of knowledge and ideas, teachers can no longer afford to continue to jealously maintain the "all knowing and all sufficient" attitudes that often characterize some teachers in the classroom (Detlef R Prozesky 2000).

Furthermore, teachers at 95% affirmatively agreed that instructional materials are pivotal to the teaching and learning of writing as it will contribute immensely to academic achievement in writing. They revealed further that students should be introduced to self-reflective method of writing early in life at 100% affirmative response to the item. It is the opinion of teachers that practice makes perfect and that continuous rigmarole with self-reflective style of writing will result in positive result in internal and external examinations. Although, it was revealed by the students that the steps taught in class do not determine achievement, teachers at 100% affirmative response revealed that students develop naturally and incidentally by following the simple instructions on the steps to be taken to achieve an error free essay. At this juncture, Teachers must remember always that they are the trainers of other manpower. They are the coordinators, planners, managing directors of teaching-learning activities and executors of curriculum that has been planned by the curriculum experts. In all that happens in the classroom the teacher will expect from the students cooperation and positive response which goes to show the willingness to acquire skill from the teacher. Teachers agreed to giving feedback to students using the general languages such as 'good' or 'bad' at 100% affirmative response, instead of an attempt at engaging in analyses of error for students to determine the areas to concentrate their energy in subsequent writing class or task so as to avoid the reoccurrence of such error. Teachers agreed affirmatively that teaching or making students aware of the WAEC marking yardstick in writing

(i.e. COEMA) is important if the students must record a high level of success in their examinations. Teachers' response reveal their belief that the students improve owing to the feedback pattern at 70% affirmative response as against the 30% view of the rest of the respondents who perhaps do not see feedback as a means of improving learners writing ability. Teachers further reveal that marking of writing is cumbersome as they reveal that only minute 45% gives assignment to students in writings as against 55% of the respondents who negated the use of writing as assignment. Finally, teachers do not use the group pairing strategy to teach aspects of writing as revealed by just minute 35% of respondents affirming positive to using the strategy while the rest 65% negated the usage of the strategy. This, it is believed might be owing to the arrangement of the students in the classroom, the size of the class and the students perception of the practice. Many students may feel disturbed by the need to be paired into the different groups and may boycott classes because of this strategy, this is why the teacher must be available to make sure that students understand and see the importance of such strategy in building their ability to become better writers. With this the teacher has shown that students deserve to be respected in their learning space as against the belief by some teachers that children do not deserve respect because they are learners but a knowledgeable teacher must accord a level of respect for the children (Kristie Marie Landry 2022).

### Conclusion and Recommendation

#### References

- Brown, D.H. (2000), *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. (4<sup>th</sup>). Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cumming, A. (1989). Writing expertise and second language proficiency. *Language Learning*, 39, 81-141.
- Cyzewski Ed. (2015). Why we avoid self-reflection even though it's good for us. *The art of simple*. Retrieved (online) January 18, 2022.
- Detlef R.P (2000). *Communication and Effective Teaching*. National Library of Medicine. *Community Eye Health*. 13(35): 44-45. Retrieved June 16, 2018.
- Kern R. (2000), *Literacy and Language Teaching*. OUP Oxford publishers. 0194421627,9780194421621
- Kristie M.L (2022). *Good Tips for Teaching Kids to Respect their Teachers*. Moms.com Retrieved December 12, 2023.
- Makinde S.O., Jegede F.O, and Kolade A.A. (2017). *Language: a veritable tool for entrepreneurial skill development in Nigeria*.
- National Bureau of statistics (2023), *West African Examination Council (WAEC) Results Statistics*
- Nhlanhla M. (2019). *What student teachers learn when putting theory into classroom practice*. University of Free State. *Conversation.com*. Retrieved May 16, 2020.
- Okebukola, F., & Owolabi, T. (2009). *Improving the Reading Ability of Science Students through Study Groups and Multiple Intelligences*. *US-China Education Review*, 6, 38-43.
- Olivia B. (2017). *Understanding the importance of Native-language instruction*. Latest news blog. Retrieved May 8, 2019.
- Sarah H. (2015). *Teaching Teachers to Teach: It's Not so Elementary*. Michigan Public. NPR ed. Retrieved October 16, 2018.
- White, E. (1994). *Teaching and assessing writing*. (2nd Ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Zamel, V. (1987). Recent research on writing pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 697-715.
- Zawareh F.A.S. (2012) *Applied Error Analysis of Written Production of English Essays of Tenth Grade Students in Ajloun Schools, Jordan*. *International Journal of Learning and Development*. DOI:10.5296/ijld.v2i2.1680