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Peer-Crtiquing as an Effective Strategy for Teaching Writing

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Abstract

The problem of Secondary School students' poor performance in English Language has been of concern to English Educators. More worrisome, is the poor writing ability of learners of English Language.. Effort to solve this problem directs attention of scholars and educators to pedagogy of imparting knowledge. Collaborative emerged as one of the supplements of language teaching both in first and second language situations. This paper used peer critiquing,, an aspect of collaborative learning, as a teaching strategy and examined its effect on writing skill of some secondary school student in the second language situation. One hundred second year Senior Secondary School students drawn as samples from two schools in Ikenne Local Government of Ogun State, Nigeria were the research subjects. The results show that peer-critiquing has a positive effect on teaching quality and the performance of students, thus it is recommended for teaching writing skill.

Introduction

The persistent poor performance in English Language has been described as a major problem to the teaching and learning process in English medium countries. Both teachers and researchers (Oluikpe, 1984; Tucker, 1999; Ayodele, 2002; WAEC report, (2003) have described students' performance in English Language as low. This alarming rate of poor performance is

summed up by Oluikpe's (1984) observation that there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction in the English Language performance of students especially the undergraduates.

The teaching and learning of English Language in which writing is a major aspect is quite different from the teaching content topics like Biology, History or Culture. In most cases, English Language students are not required to memorize the content. On the contrary, they are only to study the content to learn language skills. Therefore, the rationale for varying one's method of teaching or strategy is to teach the academic thinking skills which language learners will need to succeed in an English language classroom (Plourde & Silina, 2001). The general feeling of dissatisfaction stands out for the fact that, among men in authority in Nigeria, the hallmark of a truly educated man is his ability to communicate with other people either in oral or written form the knowledge he has acquired in his academic sojourn. The language of official communication in Nigeria is English.

Many scholars have identified teaching quality and efficacy as a valid source of students' achievement in academic teaching quality and efficacy can contribute to teaching effectiveness (Schannen-Moran et al, 1998, Ayodele, 2002), students' achievement (Larmor et. al, 1976), professional commitment (Coladraic, 1992); and career longevity (Burly et. al., 1991). Teaching efficacy is a belief that teachers have in their abilities to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context (Schannen-Moran et. al., 1998). Furthermore, teachers with high teaching efficacy are motivated to persist when faced with setbacks. They are willing to exert effort to overcome difficulties.

However, career commitment appears to be a source of teacher's efficacy, which aligns with efficacy and quality expectancy of successful teaching (Bandura, 1997, schannen –Moran et. al, 1998). Ayodele (2002) affirmed that teachers with higher career commitment are more committed to their teaching career, more efficacious in carrying out tasks that lead to successful teaching and result in great success.

Proffering a lasting solution to the deteriorating situation of essay or paper writing among students right from the secondary school to higher citadel of learning, Karen (2005) identified the causes of discrepancies between what students are able to learn in English Language classroom and their writing and communication skills thereafter. This can be related to the issue of 'how to teach' writing skills to students. Therefore, if writing and communication

skills of students are to be improved, English teachers must identify ways of generating students' interest and identifying teaching strategies or techniques which can boost instruction. This background emphasized the need to focus research on teaching strategies that can enhance the teaching and learning process. The search for such strategy beams its light on peer-critiquing, which is a kind of collaborative learning. For the past three decades, educators have recognized the value of collaborative learning. Indeed, learning is most effective when students overcome both isolation and silence (Karen, 2005).

Peer Critiquing as a teaching strategy is a collaborative learning exercise which gives students the opportunity to become actively involved with their peers. It is a process in which a learner is exposed to the writing of another learner with a specified purpose- as a common reader, diagnoses a problem and proffers solution. It encourages learners to take control of their learning (as it is learned) thus making them more reflective and critical in their thinking. Karen (2005) in a meta-analysis review on peer critiquing has helped to compress the relevance of peer group in the writing process as follows:

- (i) It helps students to understand writing as a public communal act. Many students write papers that make sense to them, but that are not clear or persuasive for others. Peer reviewers help students to understand that they are not writing for themselves but for a reader;
- (ii) It helps students to understand better the conventions of academic prose;
- (iii) Peer critiquing gives students practice in analyzing writing;
- (iv) Peer critiquing forces students to talk about their writing. In the peer review section, students will have to explain and defend their writing strategies;

Writing involves the mastery of language, understanding the content, and deep knowledge of English language as well as adequate thinking and writing skills.

The Study

The study was designed to assess the effect of peer critiquing as an effective strategy for teaching writing. It also examined the effect of peer critiquing on the academic achievement of students in essay writing.

The following research hypotheses were formulated for testing at 0.05 alpha.

1. Peer critiquing, as a teaching strategy, will not significantly influence students' performance in writing.
2. Teaching quality will not significantly influence students' performance in writing.

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non randomized control group design. The experimental group and the control constituted the row and the teaching strategy and teaching quality formed the column. The subjects consisted of 100 second year Senior Secondary School students (50 boys and 50 girls) selected from two secondary schools in Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State. A breakdown of the selection comprised of 25 boys and 25 girls from each school.

The evaluative instrument in this study was the teacher – made achievement test. The students were asked to write a story to illustrate the saying “All that glitters is not gold”.

The treatment package was essentially patterned to determine the effect of teaching strategy and teaching quality on students' performance in writing. The English teachers of the participating schools especially those from the treatment group (School A) were subjected to a day orientation programme on the teaching strategy to enable them use the treatment packages. A pre-test was conducted requesting the participants in the treatment group to write on a specified topic. Thereafter, they were exposed to a systematic diversified teaching strategy that stimulates students' interest. The scripts were collected to enable the 'teacher' have copies of the scripts and to be able to do the pairing. The experimental group was carried out using a specially designed instructional guide for writing. The participants were enabled to see and accept their ability to succeed. They were made to correct the essay written by their colleagues. The scripts were divided to reviewers who read the essay allotted them for critiquing which involved identifying the errors and asking questions from the writers of the assessed essays. The 'teacher' moderated the sessions where the writer, assessor, and other members of the class contributed meaningfully. A post-test was conducted using the same topic. The students were not aware that there would be a post-test writing on the

same topic. Ample opportunities for self-growth through encouraged home practices featured prominently for the two weeks treatment.

However, the 50 participants in the control group from School B were provided with normal instructions which were followed with the teacher-made test. The group had a pre and a post-tests on the same topic without a treatment. They did not have assignments or any other treatment exposure other than the test.

The statistical method utilized for the quantification of data in testing the predicted null hypotheses was a multiple regression analysis to determine the relative effectiveness and improvement of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the examples of most common errors detected from the pre-test.

Examples of the errors identified are shown and discussed in Table 2. Specific examples are presented.

Table 2 shows the analysis of errors detected from the pre -test of treatment group. Some of the errors ranging from tenses, punctuation marks, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, over generalization of rules and the use of abbreviation were identified and discussed generally.

For example:

- (i) He didn't stopped

instead of

He didn't stop,

- (ii) He didn't went

instead of

He didn't go, e.t.c.

The assessors pointed out many of the errors. The writers were given opportunities to defend themselves. Assessors and other members of the class commented and provided corrections to the errors. The teacher moderated and provided motivation. The discussion based on the peer critiquing after the pre-test challenged the students in the treatment group into action.

Punctuation marks, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, over generalization of rules and the use of abbreviation were identified and discussed generally. Table 3 shows the details of the improvement. A reduction in mistakes was observed in the post- test. This implied that peer critiquing really had great impact on the students. For example: He didn't went.

They were able to realize the fact that “didn't” has taken care of the past, “went” now becomes ‘He didn't go’.

There is a drastic change in the number of errors and a great improvement on the students' performance in the post test.

The assessed pre-and post-test scores were subjected to multiple regression to test the hypothesis.

Testing Hypothesis 1

The hypothesis states that peer-critiquing, as a teaching strategy, does not significantly influence students' performance in writing.

From Table 4, it can be seen that hypothesis one which predicted teaching strategy (peer critiquing) will not significantly influence students' performance was rejected based on the analysis made on the data collected. The level of students' performance in writing after treatment has an interactive effect. Thus, students exposed to peer critiquing performed better in their writing with about 58.6% of total variability. This finding is well supported by the works of Plourde and Salina (2001). These researchers have suggested that varying one's method of teaching academic thinking skills, which language learners need to succeed in essay writing, enhances performance.

The mean scores of pre and post- tests of the students exposed to peer critiquing were analysed and are presented in Table 5 and figure 1

Table 5: Profile of the Variations in Pre and Post Scores of Treatment Group

Figure1 shows that students who were exposed to peer critiquing became competent in the use of the specific strategy in learning and an obvious change is noticed in the figure. A wide variation was shown between pre and post mean achievement scores.

Testing Hypothesis 2

The hypothesis states that teaching quality (strategy) does not significantly influence students' performance in writing.

Table 6 presents the analysis of variance of the scores of both the treatment and the control groups. The table is generated by comparing the post-test scores of the students in the treatment and the control groups. The result on Table 6 indicates that teaching quality is a good predictor of students' performance in writing.

The total variance accounted for by teaching quality in predicting students' performance is 49.5% (R – square = 0.49464). Therefore, about 49.5% of the total variability in student's performance in writing is accounted for by teaching quality. The outcome of this hypothesis in effect confirmed the submission of Durojaiye (1980) and Sodiya (1999) that a good teacher must have peculiarities which will make students accept him and his teaching method, and that students' interest or liking for a teacher has a huge impact on their academic performances. Also, the findings of Ayodele (2002) lend a good credence to this finding as he reported that teachers' quality goes beyond academic attainment rather it is embedded in his commitment to his teaching profession, and more efficacious in carrying out tasks that lead to successful teaching which resulted in greater student success. The teachers' effort in using an effective teaching method in facilitating learning is a sign of commitment to their profession.

The difference in the performance of the two groups is further presented in a graph in Figure 2. The profile for the graph is shown in Table 7

Figure 2 indicates that students' achievement in essay writing is a reflection of the teaching quality adopted by the teacher. The treatment group that was exposed to peer critiquing performed better than the control group. This shows the effect of the teaching quality on learning achievement.

Figure 2 shows the post – test scores of the two experimental and control groups. The higher performance as shown in the graph is a confirmation of the teaching quality used on the experimental group.

Recommendations

In the light of the results and discussion, the following recommendations are made.

- Peer-critiquing as a teaching strategy should be adapted as a viable strategy in essay teaching and writing as they involve the students in

monitoring their learning process, and it's a viable method for raising achievement levels of students.

- Teachers of English Language need to match teaching strategies with the manner in which students receive and process information.
- Teachers must also be trained adequately with a wide range of meta-cognitive skills and teaching strategies required for students to learn English as a second language meaningfully.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of teaching strategy and teaching quality on students' performance in essay writing. The results of the analysis show that students' achievement was better when they were taught using the teaching strategies of peer-critiquing as compared with the traditional teaching method. Also, teaching quality in terms of commitment and self-efficacy was a significant factor of the study. Thus, peer-critiquing as a teaching strategy when considered it as a teaching quality was able to bring out clearly that teaching language aspects, especially writing, with this method enhanced the students' academic thinking skills and improved their basic interpersonal communication skills.

The teaching strategy of peer-groups, (peer-critiquing) also helped students in the treatment group to understand writing as a process, and increase their sense of mastery of what is often a complex and difficult process. When instructing their peers, students discovered that they learn how to improve their own writing. Moreover, as they address a variety of problems in their classmates' papers – weak thesis sentences, confusing paragraphs, absent transitions, convoluted sentences, they come fully to learn through discovery method.

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Table 1: Some Examples of the Experimental Group's Pre-test Errors:

Types of Errors	Number of Errors
Tenses	37
Punctuation	10
Paragraphing	12
Grammatical Error	30
Spelling Mistakes	25
Abbreviation	6

Table 2: Some Examples of the Identified Errors under each Classification

	PUNCTUATION ERRORS	PARAGRAPHING ERRORS	GRAMMATICAL ERRORS	SPELLING MISTAKES	THE USE OF ABBREVIATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He didn't went instead of <i>he didn't go</i>. • The man say instead of <i>the man said</i>. • She went there everyday instead of she goes there everyday. • The different between them instead of <i>The difference between them</i>. • They goes there yesterday instead of <i>they went there yesterday</i>. 	<p>Some of the students omitted or wrongly used full stop (.), comma (,), question mark (?), quotation mark (" "), exclamation mark (!), or hyphen (-).</p> <p>The insertion of a comma list of words, phrases or cl</p> <p>The use of a small letter for the personal pronoun 'I', the use of a small letter at the beginning of a proper noun or a sentence.</p>	<p>Two students wrote their essay in just one paragraph while 10 students did not create any paragraph at all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The omission of an essential sentence element (e.g. subject, predicator, complement); • Wrong tense; • Mis-use of modal operators (May/might, can/could etc). • Misuse or omission of the article; • Confusion or ambiguity in the use of pronouns, • Misuse of countable and uncountable nouns; • Wrong preposition; • Misuse of relative, sub-ordinators, and conjunct- tions; • Errors in concord; • Misrelated participles; • Intransitive verb for the transitive and vice versa; • Active or passive, and vice versa; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brilliant</i> instead of <i>brilliance</i> • <i>He stopped</i> inste- ad of <i>He stopped him</i> • <i>All that gliters is not gold</i> instead of <i>all that glitters is not gold</i>. • <i>Traying</i> instead of <i>trying</i>. • What is happen? instead of <i>what happened?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '&' instead of 'and' <u>educatn</u> instead of education. • Give me <u>dt</u> book instead of <i>give me that book</i>. • There instead of <i>therefore</i>. • <i>He came late b'cos of the rain</i> instead of <i>he came late because of the rain</i>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Errors in comparative constructions• Joining of two different words together for example once upon <u>atime</u> instead of once upon a time.• In fact instead of in fact.• Her father's wealth.• The was a girl called Tola instead of there was a girl called Tola.• Off head instead of off hand.• Nook and corner of the village instead of nook and craning of the village.		
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Table 3: Post Test Error Analysis-observations

TENSES	PUNCTUATION	PARAGRAPHING	GRAMMAR	SPELLING MISTAKES	THE USE OF ABBREVIATION
<p>Students were able to realize the fact that Tense occurs only in verbs. Although it is usually to talk about the past, present, future and other tenses, tense is not exactly the same thing as time. Rather, tense refers to the change that takes place in the firm of the verb to indicate time. On this basis of the changes that take place in the form of the verb to indicate time, only two tenses, namely the present and the past can be identified. For example: He didn't went "Didn't" had taken care of the past "went" so it now becomes: He didn't go</p>	<p>Based on the teachers' interventions, some of the punctuation errors discovered were discussed with the students. Before the post-test, the students were able to correct some of the following: *punctuation marks omitted or wrongly used. For example: They were able to 'know that they should put full stop (.) at the end of a sentence. *question marks at the end of a question. For example: Where is he? The use of a capital letter for the personal pronoun "I", the</p>	<p>It was discovered that students fully developed their paragraphs and there was effective linking of ideas.</p>	<p>Some students' stories were devoid of grammatical blemish. They were able to differentiate between and indefinite article. For example: The definite article is used to refer to already known objects. a. Give me the book on the table. (The 'book' and the 'table' are already known to the speaker and the person addressed). b. I talked to the man about the house. Examples of indefinite articles are 'a' and 'an'. Indefinite article is used to refer to unknown objects. • A man came to our house yesterday. • Active and passive. In the <u>active form</u> the subject of the verb is the person or thing doing the action. Example: "I <u>give</u> money to <u>beggars</u>. In the <u>passive form</u></p>	<p>Students were able to correct most of their spelling mistakes. For examples: All that <u>gliters</u> is not gold" instead of "All that <u>glitters</u> is not gold." • He <u>stoped</u> him instead of He <u>stopped</u> him.</p>	<p>Most of the abbreviated words were written in full in the post test. Some examples of the abbreviated words and their correct forms". <u>B'cos</u> for Because, <u>dt</u> for that, There4 for therefore, '&' for 'and' etc. They were also aware of the fact that in conformity with modern practice, initials with or without the full stop is accepted, e.g. O.A.U or OAU., W.A.E.C or WAEC.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He does not go. <p>They also discovered that the form of the verb required in a sentence depends on the nature of its subject. Great care should be taken not to break any grammatical rule that governs this requirement.</p> <p>For example: They goes there yesterday, instead of:</p> <p>They went there yesterday.</p> <p>They also observed that the verb agrees with its subject in number and person. Thus a singular subject requires a singular verb, while a plural subject demands a plural verb.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>He go there everyday. This is a third person</p>	<p>use of a capital letter at the beginning of a proper noun or a sentence. Where a proper noun consists of more than one element, each of them begin with a capital letter e.g. Central Bank of Nigeria.</p>		<p>the subject of the verb <u>accepts the action</u> passively.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>‘I am given money by my father’.</p> <p>In the passive the action is always done by somebody else.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining of two different words together. for example: <p>‘Once upon <u>atime</u> ‘instead of once upon a time, <u>infect</u>’ instead of ‘in fact’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Errors in concord. In grammar, concord means the agreement between the subject and the verb. Concorde in English grammar is treated as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When the subject is singular, the verb is in singular form e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) She reads. (b) The boy runs. 2. When the subject is plural, the verb is a plural form e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) We read. (b) The boys run. 3. When a verb refers to two singular subjects joined together by ‘and’, the verb is in plural form e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The carpenter and his friend are 		
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<p>singular. A person being spoken about represented in the subject form by pronoun "he" (singular)</p>			<p>dancing. (b) The teacher <u>and</u> student <u>are</u> discussing on the topic.</p> <p>4. When a verb refers to a singular subject joined together by 'and', the verb is in plural form e.g. (a) The man <u>and</u> his children <u>are</u> busy in the room. (b) The policeman <u>and</u> the suspects were summoned by the judge.</p> <p>5. Words like every, each, have, everybody, take singular verbs after them e.g. (a) <u>Everybody</u> is doing the assignment. (b) Each room <u>was</u> kept tidy.</p> <p>6. Group of words like either of, neither of, one of, each of, every one of, take singular verbs after them e.g. (a) <u>Neither of</u> the robbers <u>was</u> arrested. (b) <u>One of</u> the students is coming.</p> <p>7. When two singular subjects are separated by 'either'-or', 'neither'-nor', they attract singular verbs e.g. (a) <u>Either</u> the husband or the wife <u>is</u> at home. (b) <u>Neither</u> Sola <u>nor</u> Olu <u>is</u> guilty of the offence etc.</p>		
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Table 4: Post-treatment comparison of subjects exposed to Peer critiquing only using ANOVA

MULTIPLE REGRESSION	ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
	Source	DF	SS	MS	F-VALUE	P
R=0.36271	Regression	1	1653.126	143.581		
R ² = 0.58569	Residual	49	3473.823	97.067	11.327	S*
SE=3.51927	Total	50	5126.949	240.648		

S* = Significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 5: Profile of the Variations in Pre and Post Scores of Treatment Group

Variable	Real Score	Pre-Score	Appro.	Post Score	Appro.
Content	10	2.78	3	8.17	8
Organization	10	3.33	3	6.95	7
Expression	20	8.10	8	13.81	14
Mechanical Accuracy	10	4.22	4	7.46	8

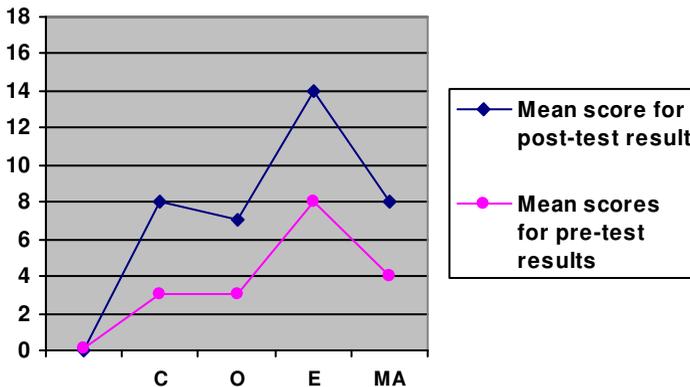


Figure 1: Variation in Mean Scores of Pre & Post-Tests of the Treatment Group

Table 6: Effect of Teaching Quality on Students' Performance in Writing.

MULTIPLE REGRESSION	ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
	Source	DF	SS	MS	F-VALUE	P
R=0.21850	Regression	2	1183.184	127.728		
R ² = 0.49464	Residual	98	1703.036	68.688	18.190	S*
SE=2.94770	Total	100	2886.220	196.416		

S* = significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 7: Profile for the graph

Variable	Real Score	Post-Score of experimental group	Approximation	Post Score of Control Group	Appro.
Content	10	8.17	8	1.46	2
Organization	10	6.95	7	1.41	1
Expression	20	13.81	14	3.90	4
Mechanical Accuracy	10	7.46	8	1.64	2

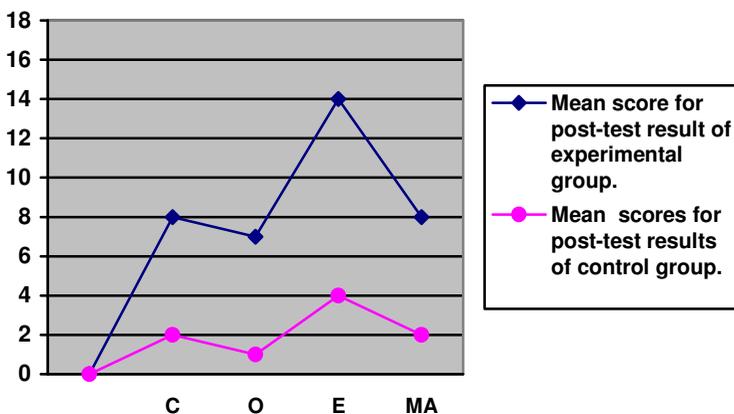


Figure 2: Variation in mean scores of post tests of the control and experiment groups.