

A Comparison of the Effect of Team Teaching Approach and Single Teacher Teaching Approach on Senior Students' Essay/Letter Writing Performance

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Abstract

The study investigated effects of Team Teaching Approach (TTA) and Single Teacher Teaching Approach (STTA) on senior students' performance in essay/letter writing. The purpose of this research was to find out and establish whether team teaching would bring about higher academic achievement in English language essay/letter writing than the single teacher approach. Data were collected from 156 senior secondary two (SSII) selected from four public secondary schools in Onitsha Education Zone, Anambra State. Two of the schools selected were used as the experimental group while the other two were used as the control group. Thus nonrandomized quasi-experimental design was adopted for the study. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The findings revealed that the students who were taught easy/letter writing using TTA performed significantly better than those taught with the conventional method of STTA. The theoretical assumption that team teaching enhances students' academic achievement has been tested and findings have been given practical support to earlier propositions. Since the result of this study agrees with the earlier findings in other countries and subjects, it implies that team teaching does not discriminate along subject, culture and location. It was therefore recommended that team teaching approach be adopted as part of improving classroom activities for teaching essay/letter writing in public secondary schools to make for enhanced performance in English language.

Keywords: team teaching, essay/letter writing, single teacher teaching, cooperative effort.

INTRODUCTION

English language is the bane and foundation of all learning in schools. The language serves as a foundation for excellent performance not only for effective usage in oral and for written communication but as a means of learning other subjects in schools. Thus its functional role is simply multi-faceted that no subject area or even business escapes its application. In Nigeria educational system, English language has always been treated as a compulsory subject. It is used as the medium of instruction after the first three years in primary schools (FRN, 2004) while at the secondary level it is studied as a core subject. In view of its importance Nwachukwu – Agbada (2012) posited that it is the central role the subject plays that makes it a compulsory subject at all levels of education and a requisite for employment in most modern organization operating in the country. Ogbodo (2002) had earlier described the subject as a nation's window on the global village. Thus it serves as a mark of education, social advancement and a requirement for social mobility.

The English language curriculum stipulates the teaching and learning of the various aspects of the language which are comprehension, summary writing, essay/letter writing, grammar and oral English. Competence in the writing aspects which

have to do with printed words is based on competence in oral English which comprises listening and speaking. Thus writing like reading is very important skill at the senior secondary (SS) level because it showcases the students' competence in all aspects of language usage. Students are expected to write for various purposes, situations and for specific audience. They should therefore be aware and trained of the need for logical connection in their writing as they generate ideas and organize them systematically into coherent piece on given topics. The concern of this study is essay/letter writing which is a sub-set of writing. Students are expected to learn and master them.

Writing in the form of essays and letters are part of English language programme. Obi-Okoye (2006) described writing as meaning made permanent unlike the spoken language and communication. The written account of events, opinions, facts and observations provide permanent records, which can be referred to when one can no longer rely on one's memory for an accurate version of the incident. Otagburuagu (1997) explained that the writing skill has an incalculable influence on humanity because it is a common instrument for the dissemination of knowledge. Writing contributes to enabling students to clarify and structure their own thinking and enables them to

communicate with a wider audience than the one with which they are in daily contact.

Essay/letter writing are act of actively putting down one's feelings and opinions using the correct choice of words. They are important activities of a literate community and students are expected to be conversant with the writing of various forms of essays and letter writing. Essay is a written composition on a given topic. According to Ogbuehi (2001) essay is a piece of writing on a given topic composed in a continuous prose format through a process which achieves effectiveness and correctness. It is one of the constant writing tasks demanded of secondary schools students which is designed to help improve their language skills, especially writing. Writing essays requires students to think about what they have observed, thought of or witnessed/experience about places, persons, events, processes etc. Tinuoye (2001) opined that good essay writing ability is not confined to the English class but extends to fiction, play and poetry, that is any type of writing that requires composition of ideas, facts and opinions. Uzoegwu, (2005) advocated that students should be trained through the use of innovative method such as cooperative learning to write good essays. There are four basic types of essay: descriptive, narrative, argumentative and expository. Essays have tripartite structure which means that any piece of writing must have a beginning, middle and an end.

On the other hand, there are basically two types of letter writing:- formal and informal. Both involve sending handwritten or printed message/information from one person to another and from a person to corporate bodies such as institutions, companies and banks. The letter can also be from one corporate body to another. The formal letter is distinguished from the informal letter by format, style and choice of words. Both essay and letter writing are organized activities which require a lot of mental energy, ideas and must be well sequenced. In fact essay/letter wiring enhance the ability of students to maintain broken discourse in writing. But Rosalie (2000) reported that students find this aspect of English language difficult. From the ongoing, it is clear that essay/letter writing requires high discipline of sitting down and organizing one's thought and ideas.

However, Ntia (2001) observed that in spite of their importance, in human communication, it is lamentable to observe that the quality of letters written especially by students in secondary schools and even in institutions of higher learning still remains appalling. The point being maintained is that messages and/or information conveyed by letters should be easily understood as if such message/information comes from free-flowing, easy going conversation on a known topic among friends.

Ikonta and Maduekwe (2006) observed that for most Nigerian students, the ability to write generally intelligible and acceptable expressions in the target language (English) is a task yet to be accomplished. This development is undesirable because according to Hannon (2004) it means that students are becoming increasingly non-literate and schools are producing students who cannot meet the challenges of a highly skilled work force of the 21st century. The problem of poor essay/letter writing has been attributed to many factors including teachers classroom practice. However, over the years teachers, parents, West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiners, the mass media among others have variously complained that students, especially, secondary school students cannot write effectively. As a result of their inability to generate ideas, thoughts and organized them well they do not do well in various examination such as Senior School Certificate examinations organized by WAEC and National Examination Council (NECO).

The current practice in most public secondary schools in Nigerian is to assign a teacher to teach a class otherwise known as Single Teacher Teaching Approach (STTA). In this approach teachers work in isolation with the result that students are placed at disadvantaged positions in the areas the teacher is weak and or has no interest. Exchange of ideas between and among teachers is rare. Therefore, the suspicion is that the inadequacies inherent in STTA have been responsible in the students' poor performance in this important aspect of English language. One way to address this ugly trend may be to give a trial to Team Teaching Approach (TTA) as an alternative approach to teaching and learning that go beyond the conventional practice of STTA.

Team Teaching (TT) is an instructional approach in which teachers come together to plan, implement and evaluate a teaching activity for the same group of learners. Bess (2000) defined team teaching as a process in which all members are equally involved and responsible for students' instruction, assessment and the setting and meeting of learning objectives. Main and Brye (2006) gave a working definition of TT as two or more teachers who combine their talents, expertise, interests and resources to take joint responsibility for any or all aspects of teaching the same students. TTA allows for more interaction and cooperation between or among teachers and students as well. The global trend in TT leaves no more in doubt that it promises to bring relief to the conventional approach of Single Teacher (ST) per subject especially in English language with its various aspects.

THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students' performance in English language particularly in essay/letter writing especially in

various external examinations organized in the country is poor in spite of its importance in the school curriculum. This trend which has been noticeable over the years has continued to get worse which is of great concern to educators and the general public. So something must be done to redress to present anomaly in the teaching and learning of English language especially as it concerns essay/letter writing. Perhaps another approach such as team teaching can be of greater assistance.

The responsibility of teaching this sub-set of writing is distributed between team teachers each taking up the sub-set in which he/she has greater interest and is strongest. It therefore implies that for teaching and learning of essay/letter writing to be effective the classroom practices should be geared towards purposeful task based on interactive nature which team teaching readily offers. TT may ensure detailed teaching/learning because where different teachers teach students the different types of essay/letter writing, the students tend to benefit more. More time is given to lesson preparation through research, giving of more practical work, grading and more importantly giving of feedback to students. Where two or more teachers teach the same group of students, it helps to enhance critical thinking through discussion and clarification of ideas and thoughts. Hughes and Murwaski (2001) remarked that collaboration, cooperation and interaction in particular distinguish TT from ST teaching. In TT classroom interaction should not be seen as something in the teachers' hand but a production of all participants. Many educators who have implemented TTA in language classroom especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Portocarrero & Bergin, 1997) reported that students' writing skills improved significantly. Akudolu (2002) counselled teachers to use technologies of the day, different strategies and approaches in classroom instruction to help students learn skills and knowledge that will help them become effective in the society.

So TT seems to provide a dynamic learning environment that foster's excellence in students learning especially in essay/letter writing. Carless (2006) asserted that the presence of two teachers in the classroom can allow team teachers to provide more support for students and as such group work becomes more practical. This is against the conventional practice where the teacher over dominates the teaching/learning situation by talking too much and as a result assuming the centre stage. It is against this background that this study was carried out to find out the effect of team teaching on students performance in essay/letter writing. In order words, if teachers team up to teach essay/letter writing how will students' achievement compare with those of an equivalent group taught in the conventional single

teacher teaching classroom? To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research question and hypothesis guided the study:

What are the mean achievement scores in essay/letter writing of students taught with team teaching approach and those taught with single teacher teaching approach?

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in essay/letter writing of students taught using TTA and those taught using STTA?

METHOD

The design used for the study was pretest posttest nonrandomized quasi experimental design. The sample was selected from four public secondary schools in Onitsha Education Zone. The sample size of 156 was made up of 87 in the experimental group and 69 in the control group. Pre-test and posttest were administered for data collection. Two experienced English language teachers at Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka validated the instruments. The instrument for data collection was an argumentative essay and one informal letter writing. The essay title was "Female children assist their parents better than the male children do". While the letter was, "You have been invited to spend the Christmas holiday with a friend. Write a letter to him or her explaining why you prefer to be at home that season. Besides, the topics were in the scheme of work for SS 2 for 2nd term. The educators were asked specifically to examine the instrument in terms of their clarity and appropriateness to the students' level.

They approved the instruments as it is because it is clear and appropriate to the students' level. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Pearson product Moment Correlation technique. This yielded a co-efficient of $r = 0.78$. The regular English language teachers in the four schools were used for the study. But the researcher organized training sessions with the team teachers in the experimental schools only. The students in the STTA were taught by their regular class teachers alone while those in the experimental group (TTA) were taught by team teachers; their regular class teacher in addition to another English teacher well-known to the students in their school. The pretest was administered before the treatment started. After the teaching which lasted for six weeks, the posttest was administered. The team teachers used the lesson plan prepared by the researcher as a model to write their own lesson plan. The teaching was done during normal school period using the normal school time table. At the end of the teaching which lasted for six weeks the posttest was administered to the subjects. The essay /letter writing was scored hundred percent by the teachers while the

researcher collated and tallied the marks. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation while the null hypothesis was tested using Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at an

alpha level of 0.05. The use of ANCOVA was to eliminate any further imbalance in the entry knowledge of the participants before the treatment.

RESULTS

Table 1: Students’ Mean Achievement and Standard Deviation Scores in Essay/Letter Writing of Students Taught with Team Teaching Approach (TTA) and Single Teacher Teaching Approach (STTA)

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Gain Score
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Experimental	87	8.28	4.21	13.09	4.30	4.81
Control	69	6.41	2.60	8.39	3.36	1.98

Result in table 1 revealed that both the TTA and STTA groups improved in their performance after the treatment however, the mean gain score for the TTA group was 4.81 while that of the STTA group had

mean gain of 1.98 which is considerably low if compared with the TTA group. This showed that the TTA group had a higher gain score than the STTA group.

Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Students’ Mean Achievement Scores in Essay/letter writing by Teaching Approach

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Pre-Test ^a	710.45	1	710.45	65.91	.000*
Teaching Method	462.45	1	462.45	42.90	.000*
Error	1649.25	153	10.78		
Total	3209.97	155			

There was a statistically significant difference $F(1,153) = 42.90, P < 0.05$ in mean achievement in essay/letter writing between students taught essay/letter writing using TTA and those taught with STTA. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups was therefore not supported.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study showed that the mean gain scores in English essay/letter writing of students taught with the team teaching approach was higher(4.81) than that of those students taught with the single teacher teaching approach(1.98). The findings in Table 2 showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean academic achievement score in essay/letter writing of students taught with TTA and that of those taught with STTA. The academic achievement of those taught with TTA was better than that of those taught with STTA. This result is in line with that of Uzoegwu (2005) who reported that students should be groomed through the use of innovative methods, such as cooperative learning, to write good essays. Just as team teaching enhances the development of critical thinking through discussion and clarification of ideas because in it students enjoy greater liberty to advance their own ideas as well as benefit from the ideas of others, the cooperative learning approach offers the same benefit hence the inference on the use of cooperative learning to learn writing skills. The emphasis on the use of innovative approaches and methods other than what is the conventional in the classroom especially in all aspects of English

language and writing in particular is so that learning should be relevant and make students functional in the new world of the 21st Century. Thus, the TTA has shown that it has the capacity of leading students to achieve their full potentials better than the single teacher teaching approach especially essay/letter writing that students find very difficult as reported by Rosalie (2000).

Akudolu (2002) advocated that teachers use the technologies of the day, new/different strategies and approaches in classroom instruction in order to help learners learn skills and acquire knowledge that will make them effective in the society. This result has shown that team teaching can positively influence students writing. And since writing in all its forms is seen as a complex process (Malinowski, 1991; Nunan, 1999) which must be learnt because of its importance, it becomes more urgent to aid students do so through the team teaching approach. This is in line with (Portocarrero & Bergins 1997) view that students’ writing skills improved significantly since team teaching was implemented and students were no longer afraid to write. The salient issues of cooperation, higher intellectual engagement, greater level of ease that dominate the team-taught class help students to learn tasks otherwise seen as complex or annoying. Uzoegwu (2005) successfully used the cooperative learning method to significantly influence the achievement of students in essay writing. In this study, just as in co-operative learning, teaching and learning are social activities where learners interact with others through cooperative efforts, and teachers act as facilitators rather than

custodians of knowledge or experts (Reppening, Rerrone 2000; Wentworth & Davis 2002). This may have facilitated students' learning thereby resulting in better achievement.

However, this result calls for caution especially in the design employed. The design naturally uses intact classes as groups so random assignment of samples to TTA and STTA was not applied. Therefore the equivalence of the groups was unlikely.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established that team teaching enhances the achievement of students in English language essay/letter writing thus bringing about higher academic achievements. This implies that when the job of teaching this aspect of English language is distributed between team teachers, they are more effective and adequate attention given to this subset of writing especially the area of giving students constant practice and feedback. It is therefore recommended that since many serving English language teachers are not very familiar of the vital contributions/benefits of team teaching, workshops, seminars, and conferences should be organized by relevant professional bodies to educate them on the team teaching approach.

Again more English language teachers should be employed to help ease the problem of population explosion in schools especially in urban areas. This will help the language teachers to give enough learning exercises for practice since language learning especially writing is enhanced by constant practice.

Students should be trained through the use of team teaching approach to become proficient in writing which is central to life both within and outside the school system. This will surely reduce the trend of poor performance in essay/letter writing especially in external examinations. The students who participated in this study were excited and motivated by the presence of two teachers sharing in teaching them this aspect of English language which is new to them. Thus, such opportunities should be made available to other students in order to make them learn the correct conventions and format used in essay/letter writing.

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