

Effectiveness of Direct and Indirect Manageable Feedback Strategies on Nigerian Secondary School Students' Essay Writing

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ABSTRACT

Several researches conducted in recent times have found that students' achievement in English language in general and essay writing in particular has been very poor. This situation has been linked to a deficiency in the type of essay writing instruction given in Nigerian schools which mostly lacks a feedback component. Two of the strategies that could be adopted in giving appropriate and timely feedback during writing instruction are direct and indirect manageable feedback strategies. Hence, this study was carried out to investigate the effects of the two strategies on secondary school students' learning outcomes in English essay writing. The study adopted a pretest-posttest control group quasi experimental research design. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select nine secondary schools from Ogun East Senatorial District, Nigeria. Achievement test in essay writing ($r=0.7$) and attitude to essay writing questionnaire ($r=0.72$) were the two main instruments used for data collection. Findings revealed that treatment had a significant main effect on students' posttest achievement in essay writing ($F_{(2,307)} = 204.46, P<.05$). However, treatment had no significant effect on students' attitude to essay writing ($F_{(2,307)} = 1.46, P>.05$). There was also a significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students' achievement in essay writing ($F_{(4,307)} = 4.24, P<.05$). Based on these findings, it was recommended that teachers should adopt these strategies for effective and prompt provision of feedback on students' writings. Government should also ensure that seminars and workshops are organised on regular basis to train teachers on the use of both strategies. Nigerian textbook writers should also focus more on the issue of corrective feedback in language teaching in order to address the dearth of local textbooks on feedback strategies.

Keywords: Direct Feedback, Essay Writing, Indirect Feedback, Learning Outcomes, Manageable Feedback

INTRODUCTION

The multilingual nature of Nigeria has aided the emergence of English language as a national language and a major means of expression within the country. This is because it helps to facilitate communication among Nigerians of diverse language backgrounds. The English language has enjoyed a privileged position in the Nigerian society. It is used in almost all spheres of life for all kinds of communicative interactions. It is the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. However, as important as English language is in the Nigerian academic environment, researches have shown that students are not performing well in the subject. Many factors have been identified to be responsible for the poor performance of students, among which are poor attitude to English language learning. Getie (2020) asserted that the attitude an individual has towards a language will to a large extent impact the level of proficiency achieved by such individual. This implies that a positive attitude leads to successful language learning while a negative attitude inhibits it.

Some scholars (Kolawole, 1998; Hartshorn, 2008; and Ogunyemi, 2019) reported that the failure usually recorded in the English Language examinations is due to Nigerian students' inability to use the English language in expressing their thoughts while writing. This claim is further supported by Ogunyemi (2019) who affirmed that competence in writing is a pre-requisite for students' academic success. According to him, since examinations are conducted through the medium of writing, students should be able to respond clearly to examination questions, through writing, for them to record any meaningful success.

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In spite of the importance of essay writing in the achievement of students in English language, it has been observed by Aika (2020) that essay writing is not being properly taught and learned in Nigerian secondary schools. Scholars have noted further that when teachers have large number of students to deal with; they hardly have time to correct most errors in students' essays. This creates a false sense of capability in students. It is the belief of the scholars of this article that when learners are shown the nature of their errors and are given the opportunity of knowing what is wrong with their production, they tend to perform better. Abbas and Hogar (2018) also pointed out that providing corrective feedback on students' writing is one of the strategies that can be used in improving students' writing skills.

Liu (2008) identified two major types of feedback: direct or explicit feedback, which occurs when the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form and the indirect or implicit feedback which refers to situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but does not provide a correction, thereby leaving the student to diagnose and correct it. Several studies have shown that error correction could be a potent source of improving students' accuracy in writing tasks (Chandler, 2003; Liu, 2008; Wahyuni, 2017 and Fatima & Akbar, 2020). Although the studies mentioned above tried to establish the effects of corrective feedback on students writing, they have some gaps that have made it difficult to generalise the result with a high level of confidence, particularly in the Nigerian context. The first thing to be noted is that, the classroom atmosphere in Nigeria is not conducive enough for proper use of corrective feedback (Ajayi, Audu & Ajayi, 2017). Though the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) recommended an average of forty students per class, Ogunyemi (2014) observed that there is a sharp contrast between policy provisions and the reality in Nigerian schools. When the class size is unnecessarily large, it becomes extremely difficult for the teacher to give appropriate feedback to learners' errors. Another important shortcoming of some of the earlier studies has been that many of those studies did not consider the effect of error correction on new writing tasks. Students were only required to revise their writing based on the feedback provided by the teacher after which the final assessment will be made.

With these contextual factors in mind, there is therefore the need to seek an alternative means of providing feedback that will not only help students to produce good writings on a short term basis but also on long term basis. Such an approach should also seek to reduce the amount of errors teachers and students have to deal with to the barest minimum in order not to overwhelm them. The attempt to reduce the amount of errors teachers and students have to deal with is what is referred to as manageable feedback (Hartshorn, 2008). Rather than requesting students to write a long essay at a go, manageable feedback focuses on paragraph by paragraph development of the essay. Students are required to write a two-paragraph essay during each class period initially, after which the teacher gradually increases the size of the essay. The initial small size of the essay makes it possible for the teacher to provide the necessary feedback appropriately and promptly. The small size of the essay also enables the learners to process and apply the feedback effectively. When this is done over time, and students are exposed to various forms of writing, they are more likely to become familiar with their frequent errors and guide against such in subsequent writing. Since it has been pointed out earlier in the study that the prevalent large class situation in Nigerian schools has hindered teachers from giving feedback on students' essays promptly and appropriately, this study also seeks to determine the moderating effect of class size on students' learning outcomes in essay writing when manageable feedback strategies are used.

Statement of the Problem

Research has shown that most Nigerian secondary school students do not perform well in the English language examinations. Researchers over the years have attributed the steady decline in students' achievement in English language in both internal and external examinations to poor writing skills. This is because essay writing attracts the highest marks obtainable in the English language subject. Research efforts aimed at improving students' achievement in essay writing had been carried out suggesting different strategies for teaching essay writing. As effective as the strategies were, they could not stem the tide of poor performance in essay writing. This is because most of the strategies focused on grammar teaching ignoring the feedback and other components of essay writing. Hence, learners are still not given the opportunity of knowing what is wrong with their essays and how to correct such errors. Thus, in order to fill this obvious gap in research, there is need to adopt a strategy that will make it possible for teachers to give feedback to learners' errors promptly and appropriately without putting unnecessary strain on the teachers. Two of such strategies are direct and indirect manageable feedback strategies. This study therefore investigates the effects of these two strategies on students' achievement in and attitude to essay writing. Also, class size has been confirmed to be a factor that interacts with instruction to produce students' learning outcomes. However, research findings on this variable are inconclusive. This then necessitates further research on the moderating effects of class size on essay writing instruction.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

- HO₁:** There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in English essay writing.
HO₂: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' attitude towards English essay writing.
HO₃: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students' achievement in English essay writing.
HO₄: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students' attitude towards English essay writing.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the pretest, posttest, control-group, quasi-experimental research design. The two experimental groups were exposed to treatment in direct and indirect manageable feedback strategies; while the control group was exposed to the conventional strategy of teaching and marking essay writing. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select nine secondary schools in Ogun East Senatorial District of Ogun State, Nigeria. The schools were stratified in terms of students' population into schools with small, medium, and large class sizes. Three schools were then randomly selected from each stratum making a total of nine schools. The three schools selected in each stratum were randomly assigned to Experimental Group 1, Experimental Group 2 and the Control Group. This means that each of Experimental Group 1, Experimental Group 2 and the Control Group have schools with a small class size, medium class size and large class size.

The instruments used for data collection are: Achievement Test in Essay Writing ($r=0.7$), Attitude to Essay Writing Questionnaire ($r=0.72$), Teacher's Manual on Explicit Error Identification, Teacher's Manual on Implicit Error Identification, Teachers' Instructional Guide for Explicit Manageable Reactive Focus-on-form, Teachers' Instructional Guide for Implicit Manageable Reactive Focus-on-form, Teachers' Instructional Guide for Conventional Strategy. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Also, the inferential statistics of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) using the pretest scores as covariates was used. In addition, Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) was computed to show how the groups performed while, Scheffé Post Hoc analysis was used to detect the source of significant difference among the three groups where they exist. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in writing essay

TABLE 1
Summary of ANCOVA Displaying the Significant Main and Interaction Effects of Treatment and Class Size on Students' Achievement in Essay Writing

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	12759.44	27	472.57	90.39	.000
Pre-Achievement	6823.87	1	6823.87	1305.25	.000
Treatment	2137.87	2	1068.94	204.46	.000
Class size	165.40	2	82.69	15.82	.000
Treatment* Class size	88.65	4	22.16	4.24	.002
Error	1604.99	307	5.23		
Total	14364.44	334			

*Significant at $P < .05$

Table 1 indicated that there is a significant main effect of treatment (Explicit manageable Reactive focus-on-form and implicit manageable Reactive focus-on-form) on students' achievement in essay writing ($F_{(2,307)} = 204.46$, $P < .05$). This means that there was a significant difference in the achievement of students exposed to explicit and implicit manageable reactive FOF and the students exposed to the conventional strategy (control group). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected. The magnitude of the mean scores and deviations of students across the experimental groups and control group is presented below

TABLE 2

Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) of Posttest Achievement Scores of Students by Treatment and Class Size

Variation + Category	N	Adjusted Variation	Eta	Adjusted Independent covariate deviation	for + Beta
Grand Mean=22.25					
Treatment			.39		.43
1. Explicit manageable FOF	122	1.80		1.00	
2. Implicit manageable FOF	99	1.92		2.75	
3. Control group	114	-3.60		-3.81	
Class Size			.26		.14
1. Large class size	167	-1.80		-.98	
2. Average class size	107	.31		.26	
3. Small class size	61	2.26		1.21	
Multiple R-squared					.88
Multiple R					.94

Table 2 above showed the mean scores of the different treatment groups.

Explicit manageable FOF (Grand mean 22.25 +1.00) =23.25

Implicit manageable FOF (Grand mean 22.25 +2.75) =25

Control Group (Grand mean 22.25 -3.81) =18.44

From this analysis, implicit manageable reactive focus-on-form group ranked highest, followed by the explicit manageable reactive focus-on-form group and then the control group. This means that the implicit manageable reactive FOF strategy contributed most to the observed difference, followed by the explicit manageable FOF, and the least contribution is from the conventional strategy (control group). To ascertain the source of the significant effect of treatment on achievement, the Scheffe post-hoc analysis was computed and table 3 presents the summary.

TABLE 3

Scheffe Post-hoc Analysis of Treatment Showing the Mean Differences

(I) Treatment groups	(J) Treatment groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Explicit FOF	Implicit FOF	-1.75	.817	.989
Explicit FOF	Control group	4.81*	.787	.000
Implicit FOF	Explicit FOF	1.75	.817	.989
Implicit FOF	Control group	6.56*	.830	.000
Control group	Explicit FOF	-4.81*	.787	.000
Control group	Implicit FOF	-6.56*	.830	.000

Table 3 showed that there is a significant difference between implicit manageable reactive FOF and control group, and also between explicit manageable reactive FOF group and control group. Hence, these were the sources of variation in the dependent variables. However, experimental group I and experimental group II do not differ significantly from each other.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' attitude to essay writing.

TABLE 4

Summary of ANCOVA Showing the Significant Main and Interaction Effect of Treatment and Class Size on Students' Attitude to Essay Writing

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	13726.67	27	508.39	14.96	.000
Pre-Attitude	10117.41	1	10117.41	297.70	.000
Treatment	99.26	2	49.63	1.46	.234
Class size	7.01	2	3.50	.103	.902
Treatment* Class size	229.42	4	57.36	1.69	.153
Error	10433.32	307	33.99		

*Significant at P<.05

The results from table 4 indicated that there was no significant main effect of treatment on students’ attitude to essay writing ($F_{(2,307)}=1.46, P>.05$). This means there was no significant change in students’ attitude to essay writing after exposure to the different experimental groups and control groups. Hence, hypothesis 2 was not rejected. Below is the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) which presents the descriptive statistics of the post-attitudinal scores of students in the two experimental groups and control.

TABLE 5
Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) of Post-attitudinal Scores of Students by Treatment and Class Size

Variation + Category	N	Adjusted Variation	Eta	Adjusted Independent covariate deviation	for + Beta
Grand Mean=61.99					
Treatment			.26		.10
1. Explicit manageable FOF	122	1.54		.82	
2. Implicit manageable FOF	99	1.58		.29	
3. Control group	114	-3.02		-1.13	
Class Size			.13		.01
1. Large class size	167	1.27		.05	
2. Average class size	107	-1.16		-.11	
3. Small class size	61	-.48		.08	
Multiple R-squared					.35
Multiple R					.73

Table 5 showed the posttest attitude means scores of the different treatment groups.
 Explicit manageable reactive FOF (Grand mean 61.99+0.82) =62.81
 Implicit manageable reactive FOF (Grand mean 61.99+0.29) = 62.28
 Control group (Grand mean 61.99-1.13) =60.86

From this analysis, students in Explicit Manageable Reactive Focus-on-form group had the highest posttest mean attitude score (62.81), followed by students in the Implicit Manageable Reactive FOF group (62.28) while students in the control groups had the lowest posttest mean score (60.86). However, the difference between the posttest attitude scores of the control group and the two experimental groups is not significant.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students’ achievement in essay writing.

Table 1 indicated that there was a significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students’ achievement in essay writing ($F_{(4,307)}= 4.24, P<.05$). Hence, null hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students’ attitude to essay writing.

Table 4 showed that there was no significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students’ attitude to essay writing ($F_{(4,307)}=1.69, P> .05$). Therefore, null hypothesis 4 was not rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main thrust of this research work was to investigate the effects of explicit and implicit manageable feedback strategies on Nigerian senior secondary school students’ learning outcomes in English essay writing. The findings from the study revealed that both explicit and implicit manageable feedback strategies were more effective than the conventional method of giving and receiving feedback on written essays. The two experimental strategies were also found to be more effective in improving students’ achievement in essay writing. This finding corroborates earlier findings by Arifin, Zaim and Ningsih (2018), Wahyuni (2017) and Hartshorn (2008). The studies cited above also agree that corrective feedback given by the teacher helps learners identify and correct their errors thereby leading to an improvement in their achievement in essay writing.

The findings of the study also showed that students exposed to the implicit manageable feedback strategy performed better than those exposed to the explicit manageable feedback and the control group. This is probably because students in the implicit group were given the opportunity to interact more with the feedback provided by the teacher. Unlike the explicit group where the students were provided with the correct forms of all erroneous utterances, students in the implicit group went through a process of self-discovery of the correct forms

of the errors identified by their teachers. This process could lead to a permanent uptake. The findings reported above is also in line with the findings of Liu (2008) who in his study reported that indirect/implicit feedback helped students reduce their error frequency substantially more than those who received direct/explicit feedback. These findings, however, negate the findings of Chandler (2003) who found in her study that direct/explicit feedback was more effective because it provides learners with explicit guidance about how to correct their errors.

The findings of this study on attitude to essay writing revealed that there was no significant effect of treatment on students' attitude to essay writing. The finding is a sharp contrast to the findings of Halim, Wahid and Halim (2021), Getie (2020), Rahimi (2010), and Zacharias (2007). Halim et al (2021) found in their study that majority of the students under investigation developed stronger attitude towards teachers' corrective feedback and essay writing in general after exposure to feedback strategies. Rahimi (2010) in his study of 50 Iranian EFL students also found that students have positive attitudes to teachers' correction of errors and essay writing in general. Zacharias (2007) while exploring teachers' and students' attitudes to feedback, found that students have a positive attitude to teacher's corrective feedback, and considered the feedback in improving their writing ability.

Though treatment had no significant effect on students' attitude to essay writing, the findings of the study showed that students in the two experimental groups had higher posttest attitude scores than students in the control group. This is an indication that both implicit and explicit manageable reactive feedback strategies are more effective in enhancing students' attitude to essay writing. The insignificant effect of treatment on students' attitude may be due to the fact that attitude is a theoretical construct developed over time. Therefore, the short duration of the treatment may not be enough to have much impact on learners' attitude. The present study also revealed that there is a significant interaction effect of treatment and class size on students' achievement in essay writing. This implies that treatment and class size contributed most to the significant difference in students' achievement in essay writing. This corroborates the submission of Uhrain (2020) who pointed out that an increase in class size leads to a decrease in students' level of achievement. However, the interaction effect of treatment and class size on students' attitude to essay writing was not significant. This means that treatment and class size had little or no effect on students' attitude to essay writing.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study have shown that both explicit and implicit manageable feedback strategies are more effective in enhancing students' level of achievement in essay writing than the conventional method. The two strategies produced better achievement and more positive attitude to essay writing than the conventional method. This means that students' poor performance in essay writing could be effectively tackled through the use of explicit and implicit manageable feedback strategies while teaching essay writing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers at the secondary level of education should adopt explicit and implicit manageable feedback strategies in giving appropriate, timely and constant feedback on learners' errors while teaching essay writing.
2. To achieve the recommendation above, seminars and workshops should be organised by the government to train teachers on the use of these strategies.
3. Proper monitoring should be done to ensure that teachers implement the strategies appropriately. The school authorities should also follow up on the implementation of these strategies, giving necessary encouragement to the teachers.
4. Textbook writers should pay more attention to the issue of corrective feedback in language teaching. This becomes imperative because of the dearth of local textbooks on feedback strategies encountered by the researcher.

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