
RAPID READING AND THE WRITING PROCESS OF REMEDIAL ENGLISH STUDENTS: THE LOGICAL CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the impact of extensive reading on the cognitive processes associated with continuous writing of remedial English students at Ordinary Level (O' Level, henceforth). A control – experimental research design was conducted with randomly selected samples. Remedial students of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi-Nigeria of 2014/2015 academic session constituted the subjects for the study. Research instruments involved rapid reading materials and Restricted Essay Writing Test (REWT). There was a pre-test prior to treatment and then a post test. Tools for the analysis were t- test and One-Way ANOVA. Consequently, the three hypotheses raised were rejected at 0.5 alpha- level. Both quantitative and qualitative data showed a progressive influence of rigorous treatment on students' written performance. In the light of the findings, recommendations were proffered.

Keywords: extensive reading, continuous writing, remedial English, written performance

INTRODUCTION

Written performance, as Duncan (1996) posits, is acquired best when the principles of cognitive learning are applied to instruction. A number of studies also attests to this position (Flower & Hayes, 1984; Hayes & Nash, 1996). To develop writing skills, cognitive activities need to be implemented. Thus, there is an interaction between the writer, the text and the reader. Linking these three contextual factors makes writing a recursive process and the content contextualised (Hayes, 1987; Shanahan & Lomex, 1988). Cognitive theory, which is actually the origin of Constructivism, is a performance model. Since the theory is concerned with performance rather than with competence, it is related, to a certain extent, with the Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Cognitive approach is predominantly concerned with the psychological processes learners engage in when performing a task such as reading that

seeks to enhance writing abilities (Farahzad & Emam, 2010). It is for this reason that, Heller (1999) sees writing as a sensory activity that enhances mastery in other language components including grammar. The mental activities of writing, according to Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987), consist of higher mental processes of human intelligence. Such basic psychological processes associated with the act of composing include goal setting, planning, memory, problem solving/judgement, and evaluation/processing. Others are attention, motivation and mental control (Ruben & Hansen, 1984). In fact, composing problems as in writing process appear more of thought provoking than many other cognitive processes including reading.

However, in the opinions of Heller (1999) and Cho & Brutt-Griffler (2015), reading is more easily acquired and retained and that writing is more intricate as opposed to reading. Nevertheless, the two skills

should always be viewed as two facets of the same skill. For instance, Cocoron & Evans (1987) list six of such merits as: (1) imaginative re-construction, (2) adding another episode, (3) writing a continuation, (4) writing an epilogue, (5) adding dream to a conclusion and (6) re-writing an ending. Cocoron & Evans (1987) further emphasise that, "every story contains within it, the seeds of other potential stories" (P. 120). This point also gains the support of Guth (1975) in the following ways: first reading acquaints one with the methods and strategies employed by successful writers; next, it provides information useful in one's writing, and lastly, reading enables one to compare one's experience with that of others. Equally, Nadell & Langan (1987) stressed that, "as you become adept at reading the selections, you will find that the writing abilities will (also) be sharpened" (p.1). Unfortunately, in the traditional techniques of teaching reading, students are hardly being exposed to any rigorous activity.

As Ketch (2005) noted, through reading extensively, students acquire several skills and sub-skills which they later apply in their writing. Some of such requirements include grammatical accuracy, acceptability of expressions, appropriateness of diction, and above all, a careful structuring of ideas. The retention of these skills was exhibited by the experimental subjects' written performance in the present study. Nadell & Langan (1987) have also linked extensive reading and writing when they said, "a writer is a reader moved to emulation" (p. 1). Still, to justify the reading- writing relationship, Barnwell (1987) states that "students who read a lot pick up writing skill with relative ease" (p.28).

Since reading is assumed to influence writing significantly, an exposure to extensive reading occupies a place of importance in the teaching of writing (Hull, 1982; Eisterhold, 1990; Johns, 1990). No doubt, extensive reading provides a rich source of background material for the written performance of students. It also develops

an understanding of the techniques of experienced authors which students apply as strategies in writing. In this study, therefore, the subjects were expected to have acquired the written techniques of the authors in writing after having read as many as ten novels. The above explanation suggests that a beginning writer improves in styles through reading many texts for which different authors have employed a variety of discourse schemata (McAndrew, 1982). In fact, even in a single text, an experienced writer exhibits several techniques, which the student can internalise and then apply later in written English. Some of the writing devices a reader may acquire are the use of flashback, means of achieving coherence through the application of numerous words, as well as several mechanical devices. Other writing skills to acquire through an extensive reading activity, according to Imhoof & Hudson (1979), include describing scenes; explaining process; arguing with supporting reasons; ability to vividly narrate experiences - real or imaginary - in the students' own words, ability to develop a topic sentence by way of either facts, generalisations, examples, incidents, definitions, comparisons, or contrasts and also the skills of ordering details either through the order of importance or space and time analysis. These writing skills were assumed to have been acquired by the students in the course of the extensive reading activity. There is, however, the need to test the assumptions, empirically through the present experimental study.

To achieve a sound communicative ability, Farahzad & Emam (2010) opine that any writing originates from a familiar situation or context; and that, different situations require different strategies. This proposition is true of the novels read extensively in this study. The observation also reveals that authors differ in their writing techniques. This implies that the subjects in the present study were expected to acquire numerous writing styles - resulting from the varied strategies they internalised having read ten novels extensively along

with the activities such as note making. Hence, Olness (2005), following Tierney & Leys (1984) and Spack (1985), says extensive reading is led to find out whether the High School leavers deficient in English could be made good writers by being reader -based as opposed to the widely accepted opinion of a good writer being purely writer based.

As Leki (1990); Scardamalia, Bereiter & Stein-Bach (2004) and Yuan & Ellis (2003) observed, rather than focusing on writing performance, most previous studies associated with language production are dominated by speech/oral development. Nevertheless, Kellog (1996) stresses that a wide range of insights from such studies have been drawn and linked to writing performance. In fact, recent research evidences have also shown the influence of speech on writing as in the case of thinking aloud protocols during planning writing (Whalen & Menard, 1995; Branch, 2001 Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Thus, a large body of literature on speech development shares a certain relationship with textual discourse production like the present study.

Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the effects of extensive reading on the written English performance of [O'Leve] English failures. Prior to the present study, the degree of the dependence of written English on extensive reading has not been investigated empirically.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the effectiveness of extensive reading on the written English performance of the students, the following research questions have been raised:

1. What is the difference between the overall written English performance for experimental and control groups prior to treatment?

2. How does the overall written English performance differ for experimental and control groups after treatment?
3. In what ways do the written English components of content, organisation, expression and mechanics for experimental and control groups differ from one another after treatment?

Hypotheses

The following null-hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the overall Written English performance of the experimental and the control groups before treatment.
2. There is no significant difference in the overall written English performance of the experimental and the control groups after treatment.
3. There is no significant difference between the written English components of content, organisation, expression and mechanics of the experimental and the control groups after treatment.

METHODOLOGY

The design undertaken in this study was quasi-experiment in a pre-test - post-test fashion using both control and experimental groups. The investigation was carried out by giving some test of written English for both the two groups after which the experimental group was exposed to a treatment. Subsequently, another test was administered for the control and the experimental groups in order to compare the performance of the two categories of students and also to determine the extent of relationship in the performance of the experimental group between before and after the treatment.

The population comprised the remedial English students of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi - Nigeria. This research was designed principally to enable the O'Level English failures to make up their deficiencies in the subject. The population was one hundred and sixty-seven, comprising the November/December SSCE O'Level English candidates for the year 2015. The study, which was quasi-experimental, was undertaken with simple randomly selected samples from the target population rather than picking an intact group. This idea was in the effort to avoid a sampling error or a sampling bias. Of the one hundred and sixty-seven members constituting the population who were all failures in the O'level English, fifty (i.e. 50%) were selected for the control group and another fifty for the experimental group as the sample for the study. The assignment of the subjects was based on coin toss (Fitz-Gibbon & Lynn, 1987).

The first task was the conduct of the pre-test to the two groups of subjects. Next was exposing the Experimental Group to the extensive reading of ten selected novels. Later, another written test (post-test) of a comparable level of difficulty for both groups was conducted. Finally, the results of the two tests were used to determine the impact of the treatment. However, after reading of every novel, some simple open-ended questions were given to the students to answer. That was to ensure that every member actively reads the novel. The tests of the written English performance carried out before and after the reading activity were marked by experienced W.A.E.C examiners.

The maximum score to have been obtained by every subject on each occasion was eighty marks, that

is, fifty marks for essay and thirty for summary writing, as is the case in W.A.E.C. The marks for the essay writing were further spread for the four written English components this way: content, 10 marks; organisation, 10; expression, 20; and mechanical accuracy, 10 marks. In this study, the tests focused on the students' written English performance in essay and summary writing. The written English components: content, organisation, expression and mechanics were equally assessed. Significant differences between the control and the experimental groups were computed in each case. Similarly, for each group, the statistical difference between the pre-test and the post-test performances were determined. The major statistical techniques employed in computing the differences were t-test, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and percentages. The t-test was used to determine the difference between the performances of the two categories of subjects and also between the performance at pre-test and post-test stages. ANOVA tested the differences in the written English components of the two groups.

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

- I. What is the difference between the overall written English performance for experimental and control groups prior to treatment?

The mean percentages of the two groups at the pre-test stage have been computed. These are shown in Table I

Table I: Mean percentages of the overall written English performance of under-achievers for experimental and control groups at pre-test level

Variable	Maximum Marks	Mean	Mean Percentage
Control Group	80	24.24	30.3
Experimental Group	80	24.88	31.3

Table 1 showed that the mean percentages of the two groups are almost the same. This meant that, the overall written performance was at zero level prior to treatment. T-test was employed to test the hypothesis. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: T -test table for hypothesis 1

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-cri
Control Group	50	24.4	5.34	98	-0.67	1.671
Experimental Group	50	24.88	6.52			

$\alpha \leq 0.05$

Table 2 showed that the null-hypothesis was 'accepted'. That was because the t-calculated (-0.67) was less than the t-critical (1.671). Thus, the performance in written English for the Control and Experimental Groups did not differ significantly. In order to compare the finding before the treatment with the obtainable after treatment, the second hypothesis was formulated.

Table 3: Mean percentages of the overall written English performance for experimental and control groups at post-test level

Group	Maximum Score	Mean	Mean Percentage
Control Group	80	5.42	31.77
Experimental Group	80	51.94	64.93

Hypothesis 2

'There is no significant difference between the overall written English performance of the Control and the Experimental Groups after treatment.'

Hypothesis 1

'There is no significant difference between the overall written English performance of the Control and the Experimental Groups before treatment.'

Research Question 2:

1. What is the difference in overall written English performance of the experimental and control groups after treatment?

In order to establish the level of performance of each group, the mean percentage scores were computed. These are illustrated in Table .3.

To test the relevant hypothesis, t-test was used. This is on Table 4

Table 4: T - test table for hypothesis 2

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-critical	Level
Control Group	50	25.42	5.11	98	26.82	1.671	0.000
Experimental Group	50	51.96	8.05				

$\alpha \leq 0.05$

Table 4 showed that hypothesis number 2 was rejected. That was because t-calculated was greater than t-critical at 0.05 confidence level (t-cal, 26.82 > t-critical 1.671). The result justified the claim that treatment for the Experiment Group is effective. To test the significant difference of the two groups, after treatment for the written English components: content, organisation, expression and mechanics, hypothesis 3 was generated.

Research Question 3:

1. In what ways do the written English components of content, organisation, expression and mechanics for experimental and control groups differ from one another after treatment?

The mean percentage scores of the four sub-components of written English for the two groups have been obtained. These are illustrated in Table 5

Table 5: Mean percentages of the written English components for experimental and control groups after treatment

Components	Control group Mean	Mean Percentage	Experimental Group Mean	Mean Percentage
Content	3.88	38.8	7.06	70.6
Organization	2.9	29.0	6.92	69.2
Expression	8.02	40.1	14.32	71.6
Expression	8.02	40.1	14.32	71.6
Mechanics	0.78	7.8	7.8	54.4

Table 5 showed that the mean percentages of the experimental group were greater than those of the control group. The differences were attributable to the impact of the treatment.

Hypothesis 3

'There is no significant difference in the written English components: content, organization, expression and

mechanics, of the Control and the Experimental Groups after treatment'.

However, to confirm the significant difference of the components for the two groups, ANOVA was employed. This is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: ANOVA to test null hypothesis 3

SOURCE OF VARIANCE	SS	df	MS	F	DECISION
Between groups	1585.25	3	528.417	195..9	DE
Within Groups	258.957	6	2.697		
TOTAL	1844.207	9			

$\alpha \leq 0.05$

SDE = Significant Difference Exists

From Table 6, it is shown that F-calculated (195.9) was greater than F- critical (8.56). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This meant there existed a significant difference in the written English components of the Control and the Experimental Groups after treatment.

Below are samples of the subjects' content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy at both pre-test and post-test stages. These are illustrations to show the impact of exposing the students to extensive reading. The performance of both groups at pre-test level in all the four sub-components was as bad as the following samples. The poor writing at the Pre-test stage was perhaps attributable to lack of exposure to extensive reading programme.

Samples of Content at Pre-test Level

1. I think you may see what is happening exactly with regard to this saying.

2. I hope everything is fine in the name of the almighty Allah.

3. My contribution to a debate on tradition holds back progress.

Sentence number one did not convey the intended meaning. The sentence should have been:

'That is why it is commonly said: "Pride comes before a fall".'

The second sentence failed to reflect the idea of greeting. It is vague. It could be a wish for the writer or the audience. The third sentence was neither a title nor an introduction.

Samples of Content at Post-Test Stage

4. He was good-looking, dark-complexioned and without any mark on his face.

5. I am happy to inform you that I am in my final year in secondary school.

Examples 4-5 showed that the students were now grappling with more concrete ideas than before treatment.

Samples of Organisation at Pre-Test Stage

6. Yours Sincerely Lami

7. How are you and how about activities I hope everything is moving

8. however (b) infact

Example 6 should have been:

'Yours sincerely,
Lami.'

The expression in (7) was poorly organised due to inability of the student to indicate question using the appropriate structure. The interrogative sentence has been mixed up with another sentence (declarative). Prior to the treatment, the students could not amalgamate however and split in fact.

Samples of Organisation at Post-Test Stage

9. Then, I pressed the knob. There was no light.

10. He gently held my typewriter to his side and continued to search.

Examples 9-10 revealed better organisation than 7-8.

Samples of Expression at Pre-Test Level

11. I want to advise you about the man you wants to many.

12. The main writing this letter to inform you.

13. The purpose of this my letter is nothing rather than to know your condition of health which is significant to me.

At the pre-test stage, the students did not understand subject-verb agreement and correct pronoun reference such as You (second person pronoun as a subject) and want (singular verb). In the second sentence, the primary auxiliary verb 'is' has been omitted. More so, the adjective 'main' was used as the head of the noun phrase. The last sentence was merely a direct translation from Hausa (L1) to English (L2).

Samples of Expression at Post-Test Level

14. My regards to aunty Maryam and little Amin

15. When I came back from school, I packed all my clothes in a big bag and waited.

Examples 14-15 indicated a greater improvement in expression than before treatment.

Samples of Mechanics at Pre-Test Stage

16. My DEAR SISTER Asma'u

17. but before saying anything I would like to start with greeting.

In writing salutation for a letter, only the initial letter of the first word on the line and the proper nouns were to have been written in capital. Also a comma should have been put at the end of the salutation. The second sentence did not begin in a capital letter. That was wrong. Moreso, there should have been a comma immediately after the adjunct: 'before saying anything'

Samples of Mechanical Accuracy at Post Test Stage

18. As a result, I am requesting for some capital to start a business

19. Yours sincerely,

At this stage, a remarkable improvement in mechanical accuracy has been exhibited in the students' activity. Below are extracts of the students' written English to show the performances at pre-test and post-test stages.

A Paragraph at Pre-Test Level

20. Furthermore, I had everything about your marriage as I have already say. my advice is please you have understood one thing you don't have to insist you are wrong especially when you are in the middle of elders so for you to understand, for you to know, we must obey our parent in order to have god blessing.

(A student writing a letter to his younger sister advising her about marriage)

A Paragraph at Post Test Level

21. He was about twenty-five years old and tall. He was good looking, dark complexioned, and without marks on his face. His hair was so dirty; and was wearing blue trousers and a white long sleeved shirt. I did not know his name but I saw him several times. He used to stay at the entrance of the market.

(The same student in 20 above, writing a report to the police giving a description of a robbery suspect) The remarkable difference in examples 20 and 21 is observable in the subject's ability to organize ideas, clarity, and brevity of expression, tenses and mechanical accuracy.

DISCUSSION

The first finding emanated from the result of the investigation of significant difference in the overall written English performance of the control and experimental groups before treatment. The t-test revealed that the hypothesis was 'retained' ($t_{cal} -0.67 < t_{crit} 1.671$). That was due to the fact that, the low performance level of both experimental and control groups before treatment was obvious. None of the two groups performed higher than the other. The two groups were at zero level then. The finding confirmed the claim of Barnwell (1987) that extensive reading ability is all that is needed by students of English as a second or foreign language. In fact, from the finding, it can be concluded that under-achievers are in dire need of the

rigorous reading programme to enhance written English performance.

The second finding showed that the overall written English performance of the control and experimental groups after treatment differed significantly ($t\text{-cal } 26.82 > t_{\text{cri}} 1.671$). Such statistical difference was so pronounced to have exceeded chance event. The difference revealed that the treatment was effective. However, the finding rejects McAndrew's (1982) earlier finding that the performance in written task for high and low ability groups did not differ considerably. The findings support other claims laid earlier that, a rigorous reading activity enhances written English performance (Hull, 1982; Eisterhold, 1990; Johns, 1990, for example).

Another finding revealed that there existed a significant difference in the written English components for control and experimental groups after treatment. The difference is attributable to the treatment for the experimental group. It is evident in the light of the finding that through extensive reading activity, improvement would reflect in not only the overall writing performance but. Also in all the four subcomponents. The finding, therefore, confirmed some previous claims put forward (see, Olness, 2005, for example) that, by way of extensive reading, students acquire the skills of grammatical accuracy, acceptability of expressions, diction and careful structuring of ideas. Also, the performance of the experimental group was tested on three different scales to determine the significant difference at pre-test and post-test levels.

The significant differences in the subject's essay and summary writing between before and after treatment were computed in each case using t-test statistics. The significant difference in written English sub-components of content, organization, expression and mechanics were also tested with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Each of the three results showed a significant difference at 0.05 confidence level. Those

differences were noted to have most likely emanated from the impact of the treatment since improvement manifested only at post-test stages for the experimental group.

Based on the findings, the claims of Cho & Brutt-Griffler (2015) that extensive reading influences performance in summary and creative writing abilities were firmly established. Besides, essay writing accounts for the highest marks while summary writing is the area where candidates fail most in O'Level English. In this regard, a great emphasis needs to be focussed on these two aspects to enhance performance. The findings also supported the view that through extensive reading, students are capable of applying in their writing later, the schemata they had internalised from other authors (Eisterhold, 1990; Naddell & Langan, 1987).

The result of the findings that there existed a significant difference in the written components of the experimental group after treatment proved that extensive reading activity was an effective solution for under-achievers' efficiency in written English. This finding has rejected several other notions. For instance, James & Fatuga (1980) and Emenyonu (1983) reported that juvenile readers were more recreational than purposive. The finding here showed that, with motivation such juveniles could turn out to be purposive in extensive reading. Furthermore, according to Lasisi & Adeyanju (1991), the story preference for low and high income students was very different. On the contrary, the findings in this study showed that with careful guidance, students irrespective of socio-economic background would read novels carefully selected and recommended for them. This is possible if the government could supply the books.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the claim of this study, as well as those in other previous literature, that extensive reading, has to a very large extent, impact on the written

English performance of O'Level English failures is now firmly supported by empirical evidence. The subjects of the experimental group, after having been exposed to treatment, performed relatively higher in the test of written English. The improvements have been shown in summary, essay and the four sub-components of written English.

It is interesting to note here that prior to this study, only claims on the reading writing connection existed. The empirical studies on the area were mainly based on LI (Eisterhold, 1990). But the present study has carried out investigation on how written English performance of students could be enhanced through activity-based reading.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The present study recommends the integration of extensive reading into the teaching-learning of not only literature in English, but also English as a Second Language. In this regard, the selection of the text materials is very important. Hence, the criteria used for the selection of texts in the extensive reading programme in this study should be adopted. These include: the availability of books, levels of language complexity, the standard of the students and the socio-cultural realities of the subject - matter, as well as literature not foreign to the students' cultural milieu. In fact, extensive reading should be introduced, where possible, right from the later stage of elementary education. This will make the pupils to develop the zeal of reading at the outset. Thus, the wide informative reading activity as a tool for language development should cut across all levels of language learning programmes.
3. The extensive reading activity should be considered as a means through which students of English as a second language could have contact with English even outside the classroom.
4. The programme, if painstakingly embedded in the teaching of English, would assist in guarding against levelling - off completely in the language after leaving school. This way, the written English of the O'Level English failures will be greatly enhanced.
5. Reading of novels extensively along with such activities as note making (with pencil), preparing a glossary of words and expressions, making a summary of the text read and applying the writing techniques of other writers could enhance communicative language learning. Here, reading and writing as two interwoven skills are integrated in a meaningful manner for language learning-teaching enhancement.
6. If the extensive reading programme is to succeed as a tool for language development, all the tiers of government, education boards, school managers and parents should appreciate the importance of the activity. They should also be willing to provide the recommended texts. Equally important is for the parents to encourage their wards to read extensively at leisure times.
7. Finally, since the rate of the drop out is always on the increase owing to mass failure at O'Level English, other means of improving performance should be sought. Future researchers on the subject are expected to do that in addition to the findings in this study. At all costs, improvement in essay writing which accounts for the highest marks and summary writing, an area in which O'Level candidates fail most, is needed in order to prevent or minimize an essential way of the perennial failure rate.

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