

Effect of Sentence Combining Instruction on Students' Achievement Rate in Essay Writing in North Central Geo- Political Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract— Fundamentally, writing is an integral part of language skills; it is foundational to success in academics, in the work place and in the global economy. In an increasingly demanding world of literacy, the importance of ensuring students proficiency in writing can never be over stressed. Many methods have been tried in teaching and learning essay writing, yet students' achievement is low. The methods include the guided method, which gives students guidelines to help them write or produce correct compositions. The non-guided method which is also called free composition where the students are given topics and allowed to produce correct essays on their own and the literacy method which provides students with the necessary experience in the theme, structure, tone and other aspect of style Comachowi (2003). These methods of writing are used in the conventional classroom and they emphasize the product of the students writing without bothering whether the students have learnt the skills of writing.

Index Terms— writing, language skills, literacy method .

I. INTRODUCTION

The conventional method of teaching has not given students much assistance and part of the reason for this according to Obi-Okoye (2004) is that writing is one of the skills that are not amenable to mere memorization of a set of rules, because it calls for development and application of composite skills in the writing process. Not until teachers start teaching students to see writing as a process of discovering, exploring ideas and constructing frame works with 'which to present ideas, there will be little or no improvement in students' essays.

Nelson and Hayes (1988) agree that learner expand significantly more effort and tackle more difficult tasks when teachers monitor and support them throughout the writing process, giving them guidance on references and asking them questions. Acquisition of the English language skills in the economic, political, academic and social life of Nigerians is

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of paramount importance. Besides being the recognized medium of communication in the administration of government and business in a country with over four hundred indigenous languages, English language is the medium of instruction through which learners acquire knowledge and skills at all levels of education. To the average Nigerian, proficiency in English language skills especially in writing in today's diverse society is the key to world proof of knowledge and universal culture (Mgbodile, 1999) and a gate way to success in the global economy (Carl, 2003).

However, inspite of the vital roles of the English language, most Nigerians students are unable to acquire proficiency in the skills of the language especially writing. Komolafe and Yara, (2010) observed that the poor performance of students English could be connected to their inability to write effectively.

This translates to abysmally low performance of students in other subjects in both external examinations. The ability to write well, hither to a luxury is now a dire necessity (Gallagher, 2006). Writing is vital to students developing literacy skills. Sadly, Gallagher's observation typifies the public school system in Nigeria where writing is hardly taught in any meaningful way (Oyetunde and Modumosu, 1999).

It is expected that the English language learner should be able to develop ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and write good essays as writing is the medium through which the academic performance of the learners are assessed. Against this backdrop the study examines the Effect of Sentence Combining Instruction on Students' Achievement Rate in Essay Writing in North Central Geo- Political Zone of Nigeria

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

From recorded findings of WAEC Chief examiners reports of various past senior students questions in English language, it has been a difficult task for students to employ the right skills and knowledge expected in English language particularly in essay writing. This is due to lack of concentration or seriousness on the part of the students to carry out essay writing in the right way.

However, the inability of most students to write effectively gives parent and teachers and even students a lot of concern.

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Students' poor performance in English language and in academics has been named on their abysmally low proficiency in writing (Ibe, 2004). The difficulty which students encounter could be traced to poor teaching method. Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) observed that the school system, is failing in its responsibility to make learning proficient in English language skills. In North central Geo-political zoned of Nigeria, the case is not different. Considering the need to improve students' proficiency in the composing skills, it becomes necessary to explain alternative strategy of teaching essay writing. The researchers believe that if a more effective strategy is employed, students composition skill would improve. In recent times, no attempt has been made.

This area of study is to establish the effect, if any, of instruction on sentence combining on composition writing of senior secondary school students. At the moment it will be costly assumption to say that effective instruction in sentence combining on composition writing of students will improve the composition of students in North central Geo-political Zone of Nigeria as such the problem of this study posed as a question is the effect of sentence combining instruction on senior secondary school students achievement rate in essay writing in North central zone of Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of sentence combining instruction on secondary students performance in essay writing, This research aims at helping the teachers of English language in improving or solving students' problems in essay writing, to enable these students become good writers.

Specifically, the study hopes to:

1. Investigate the extent of students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction and those taught using the conventional method differ.
2. To find out how sentence combining instruction strategy have effect on rural and urban students' mean score in essay writing.
3. To examine the extent of effect of sentence combining strategy has on male and female students' mean score in essay writing.
4. To find out the extent of difference in the mean gain of high, average and low ability students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it focuses on the effect of sentence combining instruction on students' achievement rate in essay writing. Therefore the study will help in the following ways.

It will help teachers in training institutions to train up teachers in the proper way that will enable them handle the teaching of essay writing effectively.

It will help to assess the attitudes of students performance towards the learning of essay writing and help to improve their strategies for better performance.

It will be of good benefit for the students and teachers of English language.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to direct the study.

1. To what extent would the mean score of students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction and those taught using the conventional method differ?
2. To what extent would sentence combining instruction strategy have effect on rural and urban students' mean score in essay writing?
3. To what extent would the effect of sentence combining strategy have on male and female students' mean score in essay writing?
4. To what extent would there be a difference in the mean gain of high, average and low ability students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of students taught essay using sentence combining instruction and those taught using the conventional method

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of rural and urban students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction strategy.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of male and female student taught essay writing using sentence combining strategy.

Ho₄: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of high, average and low ability students taught essay writing using sentence combining strategy.

Key words

Factors: A circumstance fact or influence that contributes to a result.

Low Achievement: insignificance output of performance of any given tasks.

Essay Writing: A social act which reflects the writers communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn.

Sentence Combining: - The act of stringing together enough sentences to qualify as a paragraph and then a short story.

Secondary School: - A school which provides education to pupils between the ages of 11 - 19 years after their primary education and before their higher education.

Sentence Construction: - The organizational system of any sentence in terms of coherence and cohesion.

North central Geo-political Zone of Nigeria: one of the geopolitical zone in Nigeria that comprises: Niger, Plateau, Kogi, Kaduna, Kwara, and Benue State.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Writing, especially essay writing is an important component of the English language curriculum at the secondary school level. Apart from inculcating the skills of writing, it also aids learners in achieving communicative competence. What then are the fundamentals of achieving effective communication at the discourse level? This research work sets out to look at (discuss) these tools necessary for effective writing especially in sentence combination patterns at the discourse level to achieve effective communication.

Subsequent areas this study intends to examine are the word/lexical level, clauses, phrases, sentence types, paragraph and paragraph development especially as it relates to coherence, thematic unity, uses of transitional words and phrases, concession and completeness. These aspects need to be examined because they provide the link and relationship in the idea(s) expressed in essay writing.

Word/Lexis

Lexis: This refers to vocabulary or the entire stock of words in a language. The building up of vocabulary is an important element in the study of English Language. A knowledge of wide range of vocabulary enhances considerably one's ability to communicate one's ideas and to express oneself vividly in both spoken and written communication. Therefore, from the point of view of structure, language is made up of five units. The units are: the morpheme, the word, the phrase, the clause and the sentence. All these form the basis of a good essay writing.

A word consists of one or more morpheme which is the smallest meaningful element of expression either in the spoken or written form, e.g. an essay. We combine series of words to form a phrase, a clause and to large extent a sentence.

Phrase

A phrase is a group of words that lacks a finite or main verb and which cannot stand on its own to make a complete meaning. Phrases do not have subjects. They are normally found within the structure of a sentence. E.g:

- ❖ From Kontagora
- ❖ On the street
- ❖ Having done the work

- ❖ Across the bridge
- ❖ At home
- ❖ Looking through the curtain, etc.

Kinds of phrases

- i. Infinitive phrase - Musa left early to catch the bus.
- ii. Adverbial phrase - He is on top of the chair
- iii. Adjectival phrase - Books in red covers fascinate him
- iv. Participial phrase - Walking along the street, I saw an old school mate
- v. Noun phrase - We asked for a pinch of salt
- vi. Gerund phrase - We saw him sucking an orange.

Clauses

A clause can be defined as a group of words which contains a subject and a verb. It forms part of a sentence when it is a subordinate clause. It can function as an adverb, an adjective and a noun.

Kinds of Clauses

- i. Main/Principal! independent clause
- ii. Subordinate/ dependent clause

The independent clause can grammatically stand alone because it makes sense. It is not introduced by a conjunction. The subordinate clause cannot stand alone. It is usually introduced by a conjunction. E.g,

While I was writing, he was reading.
Dependent clause independent clause

Types of Clauses

Nnamani (2010) identifies the following types of clauses:

- i. **Noun Clause:** Noun clauses do the work of nouns. The example below distinguishes nouns from noun clauses.
 - a. The story is true (Noun)
 - b. What the people are saying is true (noun clause)
- ii. **Adjectival Clause:** Any clause that tells us more about a noun is an adjectival clause. Most adjectival clauses are placed very close to the nouns they modify.
 - a. Terminal patients need friends who are committed.
 - b. The baby who looked like a monster was left in the bush to die.
- iii. **Adverbial Clause:** Adverbial clauses like adverbs modify adverbs, adjectives or entire sentences.
 - a. When the rain began, the light went off.
 - b. Books are sold where he works.

The Sentence

A sentence can be defined as a group of words that expresses a statement, a question, a command or an exclamation. In writing, a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop or any other equivalent mark such as an exclamation mark (!) or a question mark (?) (Eyisi, 2006).

A sentence could also be defined as a configuration of the various parts of speech to express a definite idea or a

complete thought (Otagburuagu, 1999). This definition recognizes the inflectional forms of some parts of speech to show case, number and gender.

In another divide, Chalker and Weiner (2000), view a sentence as the largest unit of language structure treated in traditional grammar, usually having a subject, and a predicate, especially when written and beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop. This definition stresses the graphological or the mechanical as well as the structural attributes of a sentence.

A sentence can therefore be seen as a unit of thought which can be expressed in a single word or by several words. in a sentence, 'Words are mobilized and syntactically arranged to convey your intended meaning. Each new sentence you construct in a writing process, poses a challenge to you; the challenge of being grammatically, syntactically and logically correct.

Types of sentences

A sentence can be identified in terms of function, that is the function performed by the sentence. It can also be identified in terms of its structure, that is the composition of the sentence.

Sentences identified according to function are as follows:

A. The Declarative Sentence: It is a statement or declaration. E.g.

- i. My wife is a kind woman
- ii. Ado did not go to the market yesterday.

B. The Interrogative Sentence: It asks a question. E.g.

- i. When did you go home?
- ii. Can you speak Arabic?

C. The Imperative Sentence: This is a command. E.g.

- i. Stop making noise
- ii. Get out of my class

D. The Exclamatory Sentence: This is an exclamation expressing emotions such as surprise, joy etc. normally introduced by "What" or "How". It is followed by an exclamation mark (!) at the end. E.g.,

- i. What a handsome boy!
- ii. Wao! Am glad.

The common classification of sentences according to structure is as follows:

A. The Simple Sentence: This consists of only one clause.

- i. Maimunat did not attend the party last night.
- ii. The man ate his food.

B. The Compound Sentence: It contains two main clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction.

- i. Saleh is a doctor and his daughter is a nurse.
- ii. Musa promised to attend the lecture but he failed to do so.

C. The Complex Sentence: It contains main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

- i. They bought the book which he recommended.
- ii. If they come at 10:00am they will be late because the exercise will start at 9:00am.

D. The Compound Complex Sentence: It contains more than one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

1. When I called Audu in the morning he was still sleeping but when I came back in the afternoon I was able to see him.
2. Since Musa married his second wife, his children have not enjoyed good health and he has lost his peace of mind.

Style

An important analysis of a sentence is the style of construction. A sentence should not only be grammatically correct but also stylistically effective in its composition and aesthetics.

In examining the style of a sentence, we look at how ideas and words are arranged. That is through the loose sentence structure and periodic sentence structure.

A loose sentence is one in which the important point is made at the beginning of the sentence. A periodic sentence structure is one in which the key idea comes at the end. This type of structure creates suspense. E.g., Mr. Gutenberg, a German, invented mechanized printing. (Loose sentence).

Mechanized printing was invented by Mr. Gutenberg a German. (Period sentence).

Parallelism

In order to make a composition a work of art that it is, sentences should maintain balance. The skillful construction of parts of a sentence in order to produce a pleasant effect is called parallelism. This is achieved through deliberate balancing of words, phrases and clauses in a sentence. For Example:.

"I came, I saw, I conquered. This is a balancing of three independent clauses:

I came - subject and verb
I saw - subject and verb
I conquered- subject and verb.

Felix likes to study and to read

Infinitive Infinitive.

Qualities of a Good Sentence

A good sentence should have the following qualities:

- i. Clarity: - A good sentence should be devoid of

ambiguities.

- ii. Unity: - For a sentence to have unity, the sentence must contain one main idea.
- iii. Coherence: - When the parts of a sentence are arranged in a logical order, the sentence is coherent.

Elements of a sentence

The elements of a sentence are subject, predicator. Object complement and Adjunct (SPCOA).

- A. Words that can function as subject in a sentence are:
 - i. Pronoun: almost all classes of pronouns can function as subject.
 - ii. Noun: A single or compound word can function alone as subject.
 - iii. Gerunds: These are verbs that function as nouns e.g. singing, dancing swimming etc.
 - iv. Nominal group: A group of words headed by a noun. E.g. The men in black.
 - v. Clauses: clauses that function as subject are often referred to as noun clauses. E.g. What I said.

B. Verb Phrase: This is the only obligatory part of the sentence. It reveals the state/condition or action of the subject. E.g. Mary sells fish.

C. Object: - This is the receiver of (or the one affected by) the action of the subject. Like the subject, the object could be subdivided into two parts: object (direct) and object (indirect) E.g.,

Bayo gave Bola a diamond
Indirect object direct object

D. Complement: This is derived from the verb 'complete', hence, complement is that part of the sentence that is mandatory to make the sentence complete. E.g. Mary appears quite nice Complement

The most prominent words or group of words that function in this position include the following:

- i. Adjectival phrase: - E.g. quite nice, very beautiful
- ii. Nominal group: - Gen. Buhari is the best president Nigeria ever had.
- iii. Pronoun: - It is me.
- iv. Prepositional phrase: - I am at home

E. Adjunct. It gives circumstantial details about the action of the verb. It provides the time, place and manner of the action. E.g. Garba hides the cat in the hostel.

Sentence Combining

Sentence combining is the process of joining two or more short, simple sentences to make one longer sentence. Sentence combining instructions are generally regarded as an

effective alternative to more traditional methods of teaching grammar.

Sentence combining instruction introduces the English learners to organize sets of short choppy sentences into longer and coherent ones, helps them apply the techniques of cohesion strategy in essay construction, enable the English students to practice condensing and combining sentences using transitional words and helps them to use the knowledge of sentence combining to create more sentences or to make sentence limitation.

Combining sentences encourages a writer to take two or more short, choppy sentences, and combine them into one effective sentence. By learning this skill, students enhance their writing styles (O'Hare, 1985).

Paragraphing and Paragraph Development.

Paragraphs are the largest unit of expression in any form of writing while the words, phrases, clauses and sentences would be regarded as the foundation in any writing. Paragraphs are the bulwark that gives an essay its completeness.

Kehinde (2006) opines that paragraph refers to combination of sentences dealing with a single theme and forming a distinct section of a piece of writing. Therefore, every good paragraph develops in different ways one idea or related ideas and it usually has a beginning, middle and end. Furthermore, the organization of a continuous discourse into appropriate segments to make it meaningful and readable is called a paragraph.

A good paragraph has three units namely, beginning, middle and the end. The beginning of any meaningful paragraph is the opening sentence that introduces the main idea in that paragraph or what would be referred to as the topic sentence of that paragraph. The middle consists of chain of sentences that elaborate on the main idea of that paragraph. The end of a paragraph summarizes all that have been said in the paragraph. It is sometimes appropriate to end a paragraph with a sentence or two that does one of the following:

- i. Summarizes the preceding sentences
- ii. "Pulls together" the preceding sentences (e.g. by making a general comment that applies to them all).
- iii. Draws a logical conclusion from the points mentioned III the paragraph.
- iv. Leads into the next paragraph.

Paragraph Development

Paragraphs are built of sentences that give information of these kinds: general statement, more details, examples, comparison, contrasts, conclusions, consequences, Other kinds of information may be given as well as this structure: general statement, detailed expansion, further detailed expansion. It is worthy to note that many paragraph begin with a general statement, they may then be developed by giving details on one or more of the things mentioned in the

first sentence.

controlling idea or views.

Features of a Good Paragraph

There is no rule that stipulates the length of a paragraph. It is usually determined by the topic at hand. A paragraph may consist of only a sentence as are usually found in business letters or some literary writings. A good paragraph should have the following features:

- i. **Thematic unity:** This refers to the harmonious relationship of ideas or the singling out of a main idea for treatment in the paragraph thereby presenting a complete and pleasing whole. Every sentence in the paragraph must connect appropriately and have a direct relationship with the main idea.
- ii. **Coherence:** Here, the term covers the logical presentation of related ideas and the appropriateness of language and style used in the paragraph, there should be a careful choice of words, appropriate grammatical patterns and sentence structure to achieve coherence. The use of transitional words and phrases is important in paragraph development. They are used to achieve the following effects:
 - a. To amplify or expand: - furthermore, in other words, etc
 - b. To show similarity. Likewise, in the same way etc.
 - c. To enumerate/express sequence - first, second next etc.
 - d. To indicate conclusion - To sum up, in summary etc.
- iii. **Cohesion:** - It refers to relations of meaning that exists within the text. Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded without recourse to it. Once more, cohesion in a paragraph refers to an awareness of the part played by linking devices such as pronouns, conjunctions, and articles, to make sentences dovetail into one another in the production of a good paragraph, a readable essay, a readable chapter, or a readable book.
- iv. **Completeness:-** In a nutshell, this is another important feature of a good paragraph. Completeness refers to structural wholeness. It is the quality of doing justice to the subject at hand by providing necessary illustrations, facts and figures available to the writer. A paragraph is complete if it is well developed, well rounded and it is as long as it needs to be. Therefore a paragraph is said to lack completeness if it is not fully developed. If it poses a question and gives no answer, or if it fails to give adequate basic information and sufficient explanation to support a

Essay Writing

The student of language is often faced with the situation of putting his ideas or thoughts in writing. Anyone in that condition identifies his/her subject matter. He/she selects the words, phrases, sentences and idiomatic expressions considered most suitable. Some dialogues, suitable and refreshing quotations may be brought in now and again. Aliyu (2006) observes that writing involves putting down impressions or statement or declarations. And when the writing is done in a sustained form or manner, it grows into a composition. Depending on the situation, purpose and target audience, the composition may take any of these forms. Letters, personal notes, memoranda, arguments, narratives descriptions, instruction, biography, meditation/prayer, or personality profile.

Ngonebu (2006) defines an essay as "any written composition or extended discourse on a particular issue. It is an attempt to put in logical order an organized body of ideas about a given subject. Writing is among the four language skills.

Tomori (1971) cited in Masuga (2016) believes that mental ability of the writer forms the basis of his composition. In other words, if a writer is mentally and intellectually sound, the product will be sound and accurate. He considers imaginative and linguistic abilities to be the main components of mental process in writing.

Essay writing is a vehicle for expressing a person's inner thoughts and deeply felt emotions and all educated people are expected to be able to do this (Kehinde 2006) in a similar development Shantali (2014) sees writing as the art of forming letters or combination of letters to represent the sounds we make in speech. Such letters are combined according to laid down rules or conventions to form words, phrases, clauses and sentences to form written text.

A good writer must have an audience in mind and must write for a purpose. There are many purposes for which people write and Obanya (1981) in Azikiwe (2007) outlines them as follows:

- i. They may want to agree in favour of something
- ii. They may want to express doubt, sorrow, joy, arrogance, or other emotions.
- iii. They may want to persuade the reader to do something.
- iv. They may simply want to describe a person, a place, an object, an experience or a situation. Each of these purposes will require a different approach to writing. The writer has to be able to adapt his writing to his purpose.

Varieties of Writings

Writing is the use of language in its written form, it can

serve as a form of social behaviour, a means of expressing thoughts and emotions. The purpose of writing determines the types or variety of writing. The purpose of writing could be to give information, to make request/enquiry, to describe a thing, to make or .social courtesy, etc (Obuasi, 2012).

This review will therefore focus on the traditional essays/compositions, they are:

- i. Narrative essay
- ii. Descriptive essay
- iii. Expository essay
- iv. Argumentative essay.

1. Narrative Essay

A narrative essay entails some narration. It is the type of essay where what happened and how it happened, what existed and how it existed is narrated. The aim of this type of essay is to tell a story about anything: a fact or a fiction, a process or a product, an event or a situation, a man or an animal, an experiment or an assertion: other examples of these narrations include: stories, histories, minutes of meetings, events of everyday life, biographies/bibliographies etc. The narrative essay follows a definite time pattern and is written in the past tense. Furthermore, events are naturally arranged as they occurred and the narrative follows a chronological order.

2. Descriptive Essay

This is the type of essay that creates a vivid, visual and mental picture of an object in order to give information. Description is done by giving adequate detail about the subject until you have created clear picture of it. To create an accurate and vivid picture, a writer must make good use of his powers of observation and creation. The writer should also try to make his reader see, smell, feel, hear, and even taste through his words. Other essential aspects that need to be considered when we want to describe objects and places include size, shape, weight, colour, composition, location, form etc. the writer should not forget to use appropriate verbs and adjectives to air his views correctly.

3. Expository Essay

Expository essay answer the question How? This type of essay gives a detailed exposition of its subject for specific information. Its main area of concern is exposing information, making reports, describing how things happen, how things are done (E.g. how to prepare Egusi soup) etc.

The dominant feature in this type of essay remains expository although some kind of narration and description are common. It is a very important type of essay for students because it is relevant when they are writing term papers, answering essay-type examination questions, writing reports, defining terms and stating the process of doing things.

4. Argumentative Essay

This kind of essay aims at persuading readers to accept the writer's point of view. It is also referred to as persuasive

essay. It requires the writer to state a particular opinion or idea and support that opinion using relevant evidence. Argumentative essay is possible on subjects that can be analyzed and interpreted. Such subjects therefore, must consist of two arguments: 'for' and 'against'.

When writing an argumentative essay, the writer should be knowledgeable in the two sides and then decide which side to support and proceed to provide evidences in support of his point of view. This can be achieved through the writer's ability to present his argument in a clear, logical and orderly manner. The writer should not forget to bring forth evidence that will counter the arguments of the opponents. In concluding this type of essay, the writer should summarize the major points raised in the body of the essay for the purpose of emphasis.

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, it is obvious that for effective writing of essays and compositions to take place, the students require the basic knowledge of words, phrases, clauses and sentences and how these elements are combined systematically to produce meaningful and interesting essays.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design of the study

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive research is associated with events that currently exist and also about factual available information (Peterson and Nisenholz, 1991). This method is preferred because it helps to collect data from large number of participants on a particular situation/topic, and it may involve self – report questionnaire or highly structured interviews. Ali (2006) posited that, descriptive design studies are mainly concerned with describing events as they are, without any manipulation of what caused the event or what is being observed. The present study only collected data on students' perception without any form of manipulation as to any casual factors.

Population of the study

The target population for this study was all the 3800 senior secondary school two (SSS II) students in the North – Central Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of one thousand five hundred students (1,500) were used. A random (billoting method) was adopted on the six states (FCT excluded) to pick three (3) states for this study. In each of the states, five hundred SSS II students were randomly sampled on cluster basis. However, Private and Public Schools were purposively included in the sampled schools. Also, there was deliberate effort to sample from both rural and urban centres.

Furthermore, a maximum of fifty (50) students were sampled in each of the schools used without necessarily selecting equal number of male and female respondents. At the end of the administration, out of the 1,500 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of one thousand three

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hundred and fifty seven (1,357) were found usable for analysis.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data collection was made through the use of a self structured questionnaire. Items were generated from extensive literature, personal observation and experience of researchers. The instrument comprised of four segments: Preamble, Section A had eight items on personal data of the respondents such as; sex, location and type of school. Section B had fifteen (15) items of positive and negative statements relating essay writing issues and sentence combining strategy.

The items were of four – point likert scale with responses of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Scoring were rated 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively for positive statements and in a reversal order for negative statements. To guide against halo effect, positive and negative statements were not arranged in any order.

Validation of Instrument

To validate the instrument, it was given to three experts in Research, Measurement and Evaluation, and English Language to scrutinize the items to ascertain the appropriateness, coverage, meaningfulness and wording. Following their inputs and comments, the final instrument resulted to fifteen (15) items in Section B.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established using Test-retest method for establishing Coefficient of internal consistency. Copies of the instrument were administrated to 60 students spread across three Local Government Areas of Niger State that were not part of the final administration. The reliability index of 0.8 was obtained. This high value thus justifies the reliability of the instrument for use in this study.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection (Administration of questionnaire) was carried out personally in the three states by six (6) research members with three (3) coordinators (one for each state). In each study schools, teachers and form masters were used as facilitators in organizing classes, supervising and ensuring positive response from the students.

Method of Data Analysis

The generated data were analysed with descriptive, t – test and ANOVA statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 were tested at 0.05 levels of significance using independent t-test. ANOVA was used to test H_{04} because it compared more than two means-low, average and high ability.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The data used to answer the questions and test the hypothesis were obtained from the score of research instrument.

Research Question 1: To what extent would the mean score of students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction and those taught using the conventional method differ?

Table 1: mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (SD) of students' achievement in essay writing (by method)

Method		Pre test	Pos t test	Me an gain	Diff. b/w groups
Mini lesson	N	170	170		
	\bar{X}	11.0	20.	9.9	
	S	4.52	6.6		5.5
	D		3		
Conventio nal	N	172	172		
	\bar{X}	10.5	14.	4.4	
	S	3.83	4.5		
	D		1		

Table 1 shows that the experimental group taught with mini lesson has a mean gain of 9.9 while the control group taught with the conventional method has a mean gain of 4.4. The mean score difference between the group is 5.5. This implies that the experimental group had a higher score in the post test.

Research Question 2: To what extent would sentence combining instruction strategy have effect on rural and urban students' mean score in essay writing?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of students' achievement by location

Locatio n		Pre test	Post test	Mea n gain	Diff b/w groups
Urban	N	96			
	X	9.88	19.1	9.28	
	S	4.06	6.10		1
	D		6		
Rural	N	74	74		
	X	12.7	23.0	10.2	
	S	4.62	6.66	8	
	D		0		

Looking at the mean gain of the data in table 2, the urban students had a gain of 9.28 while the rural students had 10.28 and then between groups difference of 1, meaning that the students in the rural area achieved more than their counterparts in the urban areas.

Research Question 3: To what extent would the effect of sentence combining strategy have on male and female students' mean score in essay writing?

Table 3: Extent of effect of essay on male and female students in essay writing

Gender		Pre test/ post test	Mean gain
Male	N	85	85
	X	10.83	20.43
	SD	4.36	6.38
Female	N	85	85
	X	11.41	21.23
	SD	4.8	6.9

Table 3 shows that the mean gain (that is the difference between the pre and post test scores) for the male is 9.6 while the females have a slightly higher mean gain of 9.82. Therefore, sentence combining instruction strategy had more effect on the females than the males.

Research Question 4: To what extent would there be a difference in the mean gain of high, average and low ability students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction?

Table 4: Extent of effect of sentence combining strategy on low, average and high ability students in essay writing

Ability		Pre test	Post test	Gain score
High	N	6	6	
	X	15.66	24.50	8.84
	SD	7.96	9.31	
Average	N	102	102	
	X	11.17	21.15	9.98
	SD	4.94	6.95	
Low	N	66	66	
	X	10.59	19.95	9.36
	SD	3.35	5.80	

Table 4 reveals that the high ability group has a mean of 8.84; average ability group has a mean gain of 9.98 while the mean gain of the low ability group is 9.36.

Through students with varying abilities were influenced by this strategy as improved achievement was recorded across all levels, the effect on the achievement on students with average ability is more. Students with low ability were less affected and students with high ability were affected. Hypothesis 4 is used to further examine the extent of the effect of sentence combining on students with varying abilities.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of students taught essay using sentence combining instruction and those taught using the conventional method

Table 5: t-test of mean gain of students taught essay writing using strategy and the conventional method.

Method	N	X	S	T	D	Sig
			D		f	g/p
Mini lesson	170	90	37			
				18.3	3	.00
				35	40	0

Table 5 reveals that the difference between high ability and average ability groups is not significant, between high ability and low ability is significant and the difference between average ability and low ability is also significant. Though, ANOVA reveals a significant difference among the three groups, the direction of significance is in group 2 and 3. Consequently, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean gain of students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction strategy with regard to their ability levels is not accepted.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of rural and urban students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction strategy.

Table 6: t- test of mean gain of urban and rural students taught essay writing using strategy

Location	N	X	S	T	Df	Sig/p
Urban	9	10	3.2			
	6	10	1			
				.89	.16	.37
				9	8	0
Rural	7	9.6	3.5			
	4	3	7			

Table 6 shows that t calculated is 0.899, df is 0.168 and p is 0.370. This means that the probability level is greater than the specified alpha level of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The calculated t value is lesser than the table value at 0.05. The calculated t value is therefore not significant. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted, implying that there is no significant difference between the mean gain of urban and rural students in essay writing.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of male and female student taught essay writing using sentence combining strategy.

Table 7: t-test of mean gain of male and female students taught essay writing using sentence combining strategy

Effect of Sentence Combining Instruction on Students' Achievement Rate in Essay Writing in North Central Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

Gender	N	X	SD	T	Df	Sig/p
Male	8	10.2	3.6			
	5	0	4	1.1	16	.24
				6	8	7
Female	8	9.60	3.0			
	5		7			

Table 7 shows that the t calculated is 1.16, df is 0.168 and p is 0.247. This means that the probability level is greater than the specified alpha level of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The calculated t value is lesser than the table value at 0.05. This implies therefore that there is no significant difference between the mean gain of the male and female students taught essay writing using sentence combining instruction strategy. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

HO₄: There is no significant difference in the mean gain of students taught essay writing using strategy with regard to their ability levels.

Table 8: Scheffe test on direction of significance

Grouping	Ability level	X	Mean diff (1-J)	Sig	Remark
1	High ability	13	258.450	30.7	.000
2	High ability	192	.295	N.S	11.08
3	Low ability	764	.000	Sig.	
	Average ability	113.08	3.44		
	Low ability	764	.000	Sig.	

Table 8 reveals that the difference between high ability and average ability groups is not significant, between high ability and low ability is significant and the difference between average ability and low ability is also significant. Though ANOVA reveals a significant difference among the three groups, the direction of significance is in groups 2 and 3. Consequently, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean gain of students taught essay writing using mini lesson strategy with regard to their ability levels is not accepted.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Findings

The evidence of the findings of this study reveals that

students taught essay writing using strategy have higher mean gain in their written task than those taught with the conventional method. The findings agree with findings in earlier researches of Anizoba (2004), Bos (2008), Jibowo (2010) and Komolafe and Yara (2010). These studies report a positive effect on students' writing when teachers adopt an interactive strategy in teaching essay writing. Bos (2008) research stresses that the process approaches hold a lot of promise for the development of writing skills. Jibowo, (2010); Komolafe and Yara's (2010) studies show a positive correlation between the interactive strategies used and students' achievement in essay writing like the process oriented approaches to teaching writing is built on an interactive model of composition which is undertaken in overlapping and recursive stages. The interactive and recursive stages employed in this study must have enhanced the achievement of the students in the experimental group. One can infer that the experimental group was able to acquire skills as they were through the writing process and made proper use of the many activities that comprise the act of writing. In addition, teachers' readiness to assist the students at their point of need also helped to improve the students' active participation, clear and creative thinking and this no doubt accounted for the significant effect on students' achievement.

The study reveals that there is no significant difference in writing achievement between students in urban and rural area. This agrees with the findings of Anizoba (2004) and Uzoegwu (2005) whose studies reveal that there is no significant difference in the achievement of students located either in the rural or urban area. Though students in the urban area have a slightly higher mean gain, the difference tends not to be significant despite the poor facilities in the rural area. This shows that sentence combining transcends boundaries as an effective strategy. It contradicts the findings in Mkpugbe (1998), Okoye (2009) and Aduwa-Ogiegbaem and Iyamu (2010) who found that students in urban schools perform better in language learning because of the developed environment and facilities than schools in the rural areas with limited human and material resources that could enhance learning.

The result of this study shows that there is no significant difference in achievement between the male and female students taught essay writing using strategy. The finding implies that both male and female students benefitted from the treatment. The result is in agreement with the findings of Anizoba (2010), Jibowo (2010) and Komolafe and Yara (2010). These studies report that there is no significant effect on gender on students' achievement in essay writing. It contradicts, however, the findings of Nnachi (2007) which reports that females have an edge over the males in writing task and that of Ikegbunam (1998) which revealed that male students performed better than the females.

The study revealed a significant effect of the strategy on

students with high, average and low ability level but the direction of significance was between high and low ability; average and low ability groups. The strategy thus impacted positively on all levels of students. Students with high, average and low abilities improved in their achievement after treatment. This agrees with the findings of Uzoegwu (2005) that ability level has no significant effect on the achievement of students in essay writing. Rather, there is a relationship between instructional methods/strategy and students' achievement in a particular subject.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was undertaken to find out the Effect of Sentence Combining Instruction on Students' Achievement Rate in Essay Writing in North Central Geo- Political Zone of Nigeria. The study revealed that sc strategy facilitates the development of the writing skills. It also revealed a significant difference in the mean gain of students across ability levels. However the study revealed no difference in achievement across gender and school location. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Sentence combining strategy which teaches writing as a process should be adopted to enhance the teaching and learning of essay writing in schools irrespective of gender, location and ability of the students.
2. Curriculum planners should encourage the use of sc instruction in teaching of English language in secondary schools by making it a component of the curriculum of pre-service teachers.
3. Publishers too, should include it in English language texts for secondary schools. Featuring it in language texts will make teachers use the strategy in the classrooms.
4. Since many serving English teachers are not familiar with the strategy, conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized by the government, faculties of education and relevant professional bodies to educate teachers on the use of this strategy in essay writing in schools.

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