

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING COMPOSITION WRITING SKILLS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Writing is one of the essential means of communication. Composition allows writers to express their thoughts using pen, paper, prints and computer. Writing cuts across curriculum, therefore, everybody needs it. It is sad to note that teaching and learning composition writing skill is made difficult because of the traditional method of teaching, still prevalent in most schools in Nigeria. Learners usually encounter difficulties in developing the skills of writing, especially idea generation, organization, sentence construction and paragraph creation, hence, performance in composition and other subject areas are generally poor. In order to cover the existing gaps, digital technology is incorporated in education, most especially in teaching composition writing because it makes learning easier, for example, using mobile phone is affordable, learners can access writing materials using internet. They can connect using devices like google chromes and u-tube. Also, to ensure fluency in their tasks, word and sentence checkers are used to guide learners to create meaningful task. Digital technology gives learners the opportunity to interact with other learners globally through blogs, WhatsApp and emails. In this 21st century, the teacher only guides and gives feedback for learners to improve difficult areas. The study recommended that schools should be equipped with digital technology, especially computers. In conclusion, teachers and educators are urged to incorporate digital technology in teaching because it makes learning easier and faster. Also, it makes learning fun and exciting activity, so, it enhances interest and the passion to remain focused.

Keywords: *Composition, writing, digital, technology, skills.*

Introduction

Composition writing is a means through which one expresses their thoughts in complete sentences. Hall (2019) says composition is an act of expressing meaning or to compose an interesting story. Writing is closely linked to thinking, hence Kellogg (2008) refers to that assertion saying the two are practically twins. Writing cuts across curriculum. Everybody needs it in their subject areas for effective communication. Subsequently, its relevance cannot be under estimated. Among many, it gives learners the opportunity to develop their writing skills, for instance, idea generation and organization, sentence construction and paragraph creation. Writing is an essential job skill upon which one's learning and conduct is judged. Critical and less critical information is stored in writing for possible reference.

In spite of the importance of writing, it is faced with problems. Learners find it difficult to develop their writing skills. For example, learners make mistakes in sentence construction. It is frequently marred with mixed tenses, incorrect and ambiguous statements. The teacher is often left to make meaning from faulty sentences. Punctuation is used inappropriately in sentences, chiefly, incomplete sentences, phrases and clauses carry full stop while complete sentences take commas. Apart from that, in paragraph creation, lengthy text is notice with lumping of points in a paragraph which makes the whole work senseless sometimes. Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) attribute such problems to lack of adequate dialogue between teachers and students about the constructive steps that need to be taken to address such issues. Gowon

and Yashim (2022) assert that the major cause of writing problem is poor methodology. The traditional teaching of writing is skill practiced in most schools. This maybe the reason the performance of students in composition writing is poor and this seems to be effective communication in all facets of life. Hence, the need to explore other ways of addressing the problems like the use of digital technology in teaching composition writing skills.

Digital technology incorporates all subject areas and is one of the breakthroughs in the 21st century. This method came into being to complement the traditional approach. Digital technology in education is globalized as many countries have adopted it for easy learning. The change in the learning environment adopted mobile telecommunication which is easy to afford and it provides easy access to getting information, especially wireless and portable devices such as I pods, MP3 players and smart phones. The positive effect of digital technology in education cannot be underestimated. Deniz (2022) reiterates that digital technology gives a complete layout for interactive engagement among learners. The use of digital technology is quite learner centred.

Composition Writing Skills: Writing is the assembling of words, phrases, clauses and sentences structurally and lexically concise for the purpose of making meaning. Gowon and Yashim (2021) submit that writing is an intellectual activity of using graphic symbols orally conceived and truthfully putting them into meaningful context. As a result, it is described as a cyclical activity that goes through a process of re-writing and editing to ensure fluency and meaning in text. Without these efforts, the writer creates ambiguity and makes understanding a difficult task to the reader. In other words, conscious efforts must be put in place to follow the writing process.

Writing is a cognitive complex activity involving different elements that are interrelated and need systematic approach. Anyebe (2019) pose it that learners should use the process approach because it is laid in stages. It comprises variety of activities, purposefully incorporating writing skills. Prewriting stage gives learners the opportunity to generate ideas using different techniques like brain storming and concept mapping. The second stage is drafting and it focuses on starting to write without much regard to textual features like neatness, spelling and grammar. Editing and revising give final approval for a publishable text.

Composition writing is a means of expressing one's thoughts. Hall (2019) explains that, composition writing is an act of expressing meaning or compose a story. It is a fact that, students who have good writing skills are always successful at expressing their ideas and reaching their goals. Also, composition writing is a process of thoughtfully taking decision on what is necessary and organising such thoughts into meaning context. It involves a collection of expatriate skills including letter formation, spelling, punctuation, grammar and organization, Aldin, Omer, Hamid and Elteb (2019).

Structurally, any kind of composition has three sections, introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction is conceived to draw the attention of the reader and making it clear and readable. The body comprises the development of points by vividly describing, explaining and relating experiences and events. The conclusion sums up, recommends or forward suggestions as solution to problems identified by the writer. More so, composition writing provides learners the opportunity to develop skills in writing, for example, the sentence is the highest grammatical unit that gives a complete thoughts. On the other side, the paragraph is the assembling of a thought expressed in sentences, thereby giving concise thoughts to the writer and reader.

In addition, a good composition should have rich content. The writer is expected to tackle the subject matter giving details and meeting the requirements of the examiner. Anyebe, Neple and Onoja (2022) ascribe rich content to having fluent ideas. The authors further reiterate that, having rich content in composition, means the ability to convince the reader to the extent

of citing examples and illustrations. Organizing of points is another relevant skill in writing. It means that, every point in a paragraph should be chronologically arranged. It should follow proper sequence of growth. Language expression entails fluency which is achieved through proper clarity, syntactically and grammatically well ordered. Mechanical accuracy takes care of the use of punctuation marks. Punctuation marks give meaning to the writer's expression.

Writing is beneficial to all learners because it cuts across curriculum. Students do not only listen in their subject areas but they take notes during lecture delivery. Also, writing is not a skill for the few but one essential skill for all students planning to enter the workforce. Good writers always impress their supervisors and naturally, students who have good writing skills are always successful at expressing their ideas and reaching their goals. Writing, enhances the ability to acquire and develop cognitive skills such as generating and organizing ideas, content and language norms (spelling and grammar). Larios, 2007 (as cited in Al - Sawalba (2014), writing has the ability to solve linguistic issues and assist learners in developing their second language proficiency. Also, writing helps to transmit information, thoughts feelings and reaction.

Writing Problems: Despite the relevance of writing, it has been observed generally that students' performance in writing is poor. Specifically, Nabhan (2016) identifies some major difficulties face by learners to include poor idea generation and organization, faulty paragraph creation, misuse of the punctuation marks and wrong sentence construction. Composition writing enhances the development of writing skills but it is not given the optimal attention because the wrong methodology is practiced. Kemboi, Adiena and M'mbone (2014) state that the conventional or product approach is still practiced by teachers in most schools. Consequently, students' achievement is not satisfactory and poor writing skill is the main cause. Also, in spite of the fact that, writing is a vital means of communication, students' writing skill is poor.

Experience has shown that, learners hardly express themselves coherently in writing. In generating ideas, sketchy and unorganized points are seen frequently. Sentence construction is marred with mixed tenses, incorrect and ambiguous statements. The teacher is often left to make meaning from faulty sentences. Punctuation is used inappropriately in sentences, for example, incomplete sentences, phrases and clauses carry full stop while complete sentences take commas. Apart from that, in paragraph creation, lengthy text is noticed with lumping of points in a paragraph which makes the whole work senseless to some extent. Fareed, Bilal and Ashraf (2016) attribute such problems to lack of adequate dialogue between teachers and students about the constructive steps that need to be taken to address such issues. You all agree that, the major cause of writing problem is poor methodology. Others are poor linguistic background because of insufficient exposure to speaking and reading which are likely to affect the use of English in writing.

It could be seen that the major cause of the writing problem is the methodology. It is obvious that in a typical conventional writing situation, a model text is used for learners to follow. They merely use the same type of words, phrases and sentences. As for the proponents of the product approach, this style makes their work an error free exercise. There are four stages of the conventional method; familiarization, controlled, guided and free writing. In familiarization, the teacher instructs learners to make exploits on the model text bearing in mind they will produce similar features. In controlled writing, the teacher selects grammatical features and drills learners on pronunciation and memorization over a short period of time, subsequently, exercises are given on the features. In guided writing, learners are assigned responsibility of producing similar text while free writing allows learners to write freely but following the model.

Previous studies have criticized the traditional method as having concern on the finished product (Akinwamide 2018). The author explains that the focus of teaching writing is on different parts, words, phrases and sentences. It is teacher-centred and accords importance to checking of errors in grammar. The stages of the conventional method lacks definite writing activities for learners and it is glaring that writing skills are neglected. The learning process is individualistic and collaboration is not practiced as is currently done in the 21st century language teaching. In the twenty first century teaching, digital technology is globalized in education to complement the traditional method of teaching.

Digital Technology: It involves finding and assessing information using digital tools, for example, social media web browsers and online discussion boards. Digital technology provides opportunities that traditional teaching cannot give, for example, ideas, images, graphics, and hyperlinks (Deniz, 2022). Digital technology generally is the use of computers and technology assisted strategies to support learning in schools. Specifically, digital technology avails learners the opportunity to use programmes or applications designed for problem solving or open ended learning while teachers on their part have interactive whiteboards or teaching platforms.

Digital technology in education is globalized as many countries have adopted it for easy learning. The change in the learning environment adopted mobile telecommunication because it provides easy access to getting information, such as, wireless and portable devices like I pods, Mp3 players and smart phones. Also, laptops computers/mobile phones are revolutionizing education and transforming the traditional based teaching and learning into anytime and anywhere education (Fattab, 2015).

Digital Technology in Teaching Composition Writing: The advantages of using digital technology in teaching writing is enormous and with digital technology, teaching and learning can take place anywhere not necessarily in the classroom. There are digital tools that learners can use to enhance their learning abilities as such, digital learning is very interesting to use in developing writing skills than the traditional (Sarwat, Kabir and Sehar, 2021). Digital technology has some tools that enhances students learning, such tools include;

Computer Application: Word production programme enhances and guides learners to improve in their spellings. It predicts words suitable for learners to use in their writing. It usually list words that begin with those letters. This measure quickens the speed of typing.

Speech – to – text programme: This is helpful in typing words, most especially during video/audio conferencing. It is hardly achieved when there are distractions, especially when wrong words are typed, wrong spelling of words and a noisy environment.

Text – to – speech: It improves listening, most especially in writing. It provides the right spellings of words when students edit any task given.

Spell – Checkers: It assist writers to identify wrong spellings and correct them immediately.

Computer – mediated – technology: It refers to tools that can be connected to the computer.

Internet: The internet is the largest tool that one can access millions of information in minutes. It is a global village that connects the world. It is at the disposal of writers to access and share ideas as they collaborate with other learners elsewhere in the world.

Social Software: These are programmes such as WhatsApp, blogs, face book, twitter and instagram. These are tools where writers can chat and share ideas. Teachers can as well upload writing materials relevant in writing.

Messengers: It is also known as MSN Messenger and windows live messenger. Messenger is a Microsoft program for windows that allow users to chat online using the internet, the examples of messengers are;

Computer – mediated tools like Skype, Imo, face book, yahoo and WhatsApp are for educational programmes. The teacher can instruct his learners through messengers. With the

use of the messengers, groups can be organized to teach and guide students through voice, text or visually. Through this learners can raise issues, solve problems and share ideas.

Multimedia technology: Multimedia technologies are digital pictures, scanning audio and visual technologies. They help to assist effective communication, especially in the large usage laboratory.

Importance of Digital Technology in Education:

The positive effect of digital technology in education cannot be overemphasized. Deniz (2022) states that digital technology gives a complete layout for interactive engagement among teachers and learners. This collection is quite learner - centred. It motivates learners to develop creativity, especially in writing. It helps learners to work because of the availability of tools meant to access information, for example, internet browser, WhatsApp and emails. Consequently, it raises their interest to achieve the task given to them. Azmi 2017 (as cited in Deniz 2022) emphasizes that students tend to display positive response when they are using any digital tool or device.

Another vital role of digital technology is the way in which it is improving learners' vocabulary. The availability and uses of spell and sentence checkers linked to micro software like excel and emails, enhance fluency in meaning and in the writing task. The current method of teaching creates fun as learners show more interest in manipulating digital tools to attain success in writing. By implication, teacher development in digital technology should be enforced to assist learners and their needs. When this is done, it will reduce digital limitations and anxieties, especially in the writing process.

Digital technology gives learners the opportunity to meet and interact with wider audience whether native or non – native speakers. Learners' joy of meeting wider audience creates cordial relationship to the extent of getting to know their cultural background. Audio and video conferencing allows learners to communicate with renowned authors as they get first-hand knowledge from those in authority. It enhances the development of writing skills and good memory that cannot be easily erased. In fact, meeting their audience fosters new development in learning.

Also digital technology allows learners to receive feedback from their teachers, peers even unknown people with records (Deniz 2022). It is a fact that, this motivates faster learning whether as individuals or groups. They usually use blogs, WhatsApps and other digital tools to chat and edit their corrections in no time. Moreover, sharing ideas among learners nationally and globally strengthens weaker learners to be more involved. The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning activities which is a bigger step away from the traditional teaching.

Digital technology affords learners with consistent learning, especially using mobile phones because of its accessibility. Having this digital tool, makes it faster to access information. It is a major breakthrough that, wireless and portable devices like I pods, Mp3 players and smart phones provide faster information. Others are laptops which are gradually replacing the traditional method of teaching and learning. Currently, teaching and learning are done anytime and anywhere (Fattab, 2022). Twenty first century teaching is not limited to the classroom. Also, social media clicks allow popular features like tags, networks and repost (Al - Shargi and Abbasi, 2021).

Challenges

Despite the enormous benefits of digital technology in learning composition writing, there are challenges that are overwhelming the process, most especially in Nigeria. Most schools are not equipped with the digital devices of learning like computers. Worst still, these schools are not even electrified and even if they are, the epileptic power supply in Nigeria is a

thing of concern. In fact, there is wide gap in the use of digital technology in some countries in Africa, Nigeria to be specific.

Most teachers and students are not computer literates. Therefore, they show negative attitudes toward incorporating digital technology in teaching writing. Teachers' negative attitudes can be linked to expensive training and purchase of computers. Also, government make yearly budgets but little attention is given to equipping schools with digital technology.

Mobile telecommunication, like the mobile phones are expensive to purchase, especially those that are android and others that have internet facility. Most schools in Nigeria are prohibiting the use of mobile phones, especially in the classroom. Sometimes, phones are ceased from students and are never returned. In fact teachers and students lack the knowledge of imparting learning using mobile phones. More so, purchasing the data to browse is another issue in the use of digital technology. It is always like gambling. The quicker one purchases data, the sooner it finishes.

There is large exclusion of the world in digital technology, especially Africa and in Nigeria. Many people's income is too low to gain connectivity (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2021). There is low quality access to devices that are fixed at home. Also, the author adds that there is lengthy proliferation of fake news and cyber-attacks. There is also hacking of accounts and privacy is not secured.

Implications and Recommendations

The current method of teaching writing is a move towards incorporating digital technology anywhere and anytime. Learning is not fixed to the classroom, therefore, teachers should be flexible to accommodate global teaching practices. Language curriculum planners should make adjustments to incorporate digital technology and providing learning materials in English content areas.

Government and non – governmental organization (NGOs) should organize digital technology workshops, seminars and conferences for language teachers. Let them be exposed to creating materials and access information using different devices. This measure will expose teachers to practise how language teaching is done both in native and non – native speaking English countries. Government should supply all current resources, experts and popular professional teachers of English, so that, they will give instruction using digital technology.

Teachers should be passionate about self-development. They should update their knowledge on global teaching practices, especially the use of digital technology. Computer literacy is key to the 21st century teaching and learning. By that, the students teachers are producing would be able to function in all sectors, especially to basic computer knowledge of receiving information and sending through different means like emails, blogs and websites with other students globally.

Government should equip schools with learning materials like computers. Teachers should create conducive learning environment and the teaching process should be learner – cantered while the teacher guides, directs, counsels, and facilitates learning activities.

Conclusion

Writing is one of the important means of communication, however, teaching it using the traditional method makes it difficult for learners to develop good writing skills. In the 21st century, digital technology makes writing easier for learners as it avails learners with digital tools such as words sentence and spelling checkers to ensure fluency and meaning in writing. Teachers are urged to create conducive writing environment for learners to experience writing as fun and an exciting activity. This will bring improvement in learning, even in other subject areas.

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