

THE EFFECT OF CONFERENCING STRATEGY ON SS II STUDENTS IN ABILITY GROUPS PERFORMANCE IN EXPOSITORY WRITING IN BENUE STATE.

Iveren Maureen Viashima Ph.D¹, Mbatomun Agule² & Blessing Kungwa³

^{1,2}Department of English and Literary Studies,

³Department of Hausa Language,

^{1,2,3}College Of Education, Katsina-Ala.

Abstract

The advent of innovative strategies in teaching has helped educators to realize their goals more than before. This paper examined the employment of conferencing strategy and its effect on secondary school two students' performance in expository writing when arranged according to ability groups. One research question and one hypothesis were answered and tested. Purposive sampling technique was used to focus on the seven public schools in the area. Random sampling technique was used to select the schools for the study through 'hat' and 'draw' method. The sample was made up of 37 students, in one intact class in Zone 'B' area of Benue State. Expository Writing Performance Test (EWPT) was the instrument used to collect data. Data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis. Results showed that though students in all the groups (High, Medium and Low) had high mean gains, the students with the medium abilities had higher mean gains after the posttest thus proving the effectiveness of the strategy. It was then suggested that students should be taught expository writing using conferencing strategy.

Introduction

Writing is one of the four major language skills, aside from listening, speaking and reading. Writing is a means through which people put forward their carefully thought out ideas. Scholars have defined writing in different ways. For instance, Birt (2022) informs that an essay is a type of writing that persuades or informs the reader. Indeed, Editorial Team (2022) explains that to write expository essay well, the writer needs to give a lot of unbiased information about the topic. This is because the writer is expected to assume the reader has little or no knowledge of the topic. Ayaka and Muodumogu (2019) observe that effective writing requires knowledge of the subject matter.

Writing is the putting down of one's ideas, feelings, opinions, beliefs or knowledge to a reader. Ukume Obiora and Agbum (2018) inform that the writing task requires the use of the three domains, the cognitive abilities of the writer; the affective domain that has to do with the writer's flexibility, expertise and organisation of the writing process as well as the psycho-motor domain.

Writing is a process, and so to write effectively, students have to be aware of the process involved and how to use it. Calkins (2021) informs that the writing process involves collecting, planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. To write effectively writers must therefore put in conscious and persistent efforts as it is a requirement in the writing skill (Muodumogu & Yisa, 2013).

The study is on expository writing. Expository essay explains a topic neutrally. The Master Class (2021) informs that this type of writing focuses on factual information and is devoid of emotions or opinions. Expository writing is the type of essay that gives basic answers to basic questions about the world around us (Kramer, 2021).

Writing is central to education as everything we do in academics has to do with it. For instance, letter writing, instructional manuals, recipes are all done through essay. This is why much importance has to be placed on writing. This means instructors have to continuously look for ways of instruction that would enhance students' efforts. Using innovative strategies would help the students to accomplish much.

Conferencing is an innovative strategy that could be used to enhance students' performance. A writing conference is an approach of teaching where the teacher carefully guides the students to arrive at a readable draft through introspective questioning and making of suggestions. Lerner (2005) refers to conferences as meaningful contact while Calkins (2021) names them interactive dialogues. Anderson (2019) informs that writing conferences are one-to-one teaching.

Conferences being interactive in nature are very effective in teaching expository writing. Anderson (2019) explains that the goal of a writing conference is to teach the students something about writing they can use in future. Krulder (2018) adds that by continually adding a piece of advice on a piece of writing in a conference makes the student a better writer. Teng (2016) informs that conferencing with students during writing session is very necessary as it helps interaction between the teacher and the students that seldom happens outside the classroom. The author informs further that through conferencing the students interact with the teacher, their peers and with their writing. A writing conference provides opportunities for the teacher to get access to the needs of the students (Wills, 2022). The teacher can then tailor instruction using the problem areas identified (Johnson, 2017).

Conferences are usually referred to as writing workshops. Calkins (2021) informs that a writing workshop is made up of four parts known as mini-lessons, status of the class, writing/conferencing time and sharing. Wills (2022) explains that mini-lessons are teacher directed parts of the lesson and could last between 5-15 minutes. What is expected here is brief, and explicit instruction which is focused on a single topic that all writers can implement regardless of skill level (Anderson, 2018).

The second part of writing workshops of a conference, status of the class is where the teacher finds out where the students are in the writing process (pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing e.t.c) (Graham, 2019). This might however not be an everyday occurrence. It could be done by keeping a note book or a clip chart to evaluate progress and at the same time enable the students to be accountable.

The next thing in the writing workshop is the writing itself. At this stage, Anderson (2018) advises instructors to slow down the process of writing so as to enable the students to get meaningful feedback to improve on their work. Wills (2022) advises teachers to ask questions that would make students to understand that, they

should be working on something. Questions such as, 'Is there anything I can help you with? Are you sure you have said everything you need to say about this topic sentence?' helps the students to explore more and become more innovative (Mulvahills, 2018). Ramsey (2018) opines that revising and editing a peer's work help students to learn to work as a team. When these steps are diligently followed, it is hoped students will become more confident and would become better writers and subsequently attain higher performance.

Conferencing strategy is very beneficial in the educational sector because teachers can use it as a tool to help individual students as no two students have the same combination of strength and weakness. Conferencing is considered to be a conversational dialogue in which meaning is constantly negotiated (Anderson, 2019). The strategy is of immense benefits to students as it encourages development of autonomy and allows construction of revision plan independently (Hyland, 2016). According to Winschugh (2022) writing conferences involve a non-threatening audience of peers. As a result, students feel more confident to share with peers or teachers who then provide immediate feedback (Syh-jong, 2007). This could make the students explore a topic from different angles to arrive at solutions.

Other benefits of writing conferences include collaboration and creativity. Hartati (2016) informs that benefits of studying in groups include development of collaborative skills, learning from experience of others, having a sense of belonging to social groups, idea sharing and development of creativity. Intrinsic benefits of conferencing in groups include, development of imagination, critical thinking, creative thinking, knowledge awareness, interest and happiness that comes with life time learning (Hartati, 2016).

Many studies have found conferencing a tool to improve students' performance in writing. For instance, Ricks (2014) found that students took their writing exercise more serious when conferences were used because they were writing for an audience of peers and that gave them more confidence and they recorded higher performance. Alfalogg (2020) found that use of oral feedback during conferences made the students to use conjunctions appropriately and accurately instead of over use of first and third person pronouns, thus helping their texts to become densely cohesive.

Yeh (2019) conducted a study on teaching writing to students in groups using conferencing strategy. The study found that students who participated in these conferences had their writing problems identified and were given directive in their revisions. The students also learnt to give feedback and they developed capacities for writing better essays.

Individuals learn differently, while some learn fast, some take longer. When students are grouped based on similar skill level, they are likely to feel less intimidated and are more comfortable to participate in discussion and sharing of their work with others in the group (Gamoran, 2011). Ability groups for instruction is an educational practice whereby students are grouped according to their level of performance. Ability groups enable instructors to target instructional needs and use strategies for a specific group. It is easier than teaching. For instance, Carrol & Olsen (2023) inform that repetition

is a very good technique for teaching lower achieving students but not with high performing students.

Studies have found that teaching in ability groups enhances students' performance. For instance, Nguyen (2023) investigated on writing strategies used by of different proficiency levels at a university in Netham. Overall findings revealed that high proficiency students used strategies more often than the other two groups which accounted for their better performance. Wang, King and Mcnerney (2021) examined teachers' role and how ability grouping is related to students' achievement in English and Mathematics. The study revealed that when students in the medium and low ability groups received high levels of teacher support, they were able to achieve as much as students in the high ability groups in English.

Despite all these, some educators still cling to methods that are teacher-centered making students to learn at a slower pace. Teachers hardly segment students by their ability groups during lessons to give them the needed attention, as a result, students record mass failure in writing. They are also not able to think nor to explore issues at different perspectives so as to arrive at better resolution.

The purpose of this study was to find out the comparative effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high mean performance in expository writing.

Research Question

1. What is the comparative effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository essay?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high mean performance in expository writing.

Research Method

Research design was a one-group pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental research design. The targeted population was 709 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in seven public secondary schools in Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 2022/23 academic session. Purposive sampling was used to focus on the seven public schools. The sample comprised 37 students from one secondary school of the area. Random sampling technique was used to select one school for the study using the 'hat' and 'draw' method.

The instruments for the study was Expository Writing Performance Test (EWPT). The instrument comprised five expository writing tasks in line with the West African Senior School Certificate Examination and the curriculum content of SS2 students. The five tasks cut across different types of expository writing (compare/contrast, definition, problem and solution). Students were required to pick from any of the tasks of their choice to write on. The EWPT was marked over 50% (content = 10%, organisation = 10%, expression = 20% and mechanical accuracy = 10% based on the West African Examination Council's English language marking

guide for continuous writing. The same items used in the pre-test were rewarded and reshuffled and used in the post-test.

To ensure appropriateness and relevance, the instrument was subjected to both face and content validity. Two experts in Language Education from the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, Benue State University Makurdi validated it. Using Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the EWPT yielded reliability of 0.82. The instrument was then administered on the respondents with the help of research assistant located in the sampled school. After the exercise, the instrument was collected and marked. The scores obtained were subjected to analyses. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while Analysis of Covariance ANCOVA was used to test the hypothesis.

Data Analysis

Data collected were presented in tables according to research questions and hypothesis.

Research Question One

What is the comparative effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository writing?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Comparative Effect of Conferencing Strategy on Students with Low, Medium and High Performance in Expository Writing

Self-esteem	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
High	4	22.75	5.19	32.50	15.54	9.75
Medium	22	13.55	7.69	28.50	6.58	14.95
Low	10	15.00	7.45	21.10	8.95	6.10

Table 1 shows that the mean effect of conferencing strategy on students with high performance is 22.75 with a standard deviation of 5.19 in the pre-test and 32.50 with a standard deviation of 15.54 in the post-test. The mean effect of conferencing strategy on students with medium performance is 13.55 with a standard deviation of 7.69 in the pre-test and 28.50 with a standard deviation of 6.58 in the post-test. The mean effect of conferencing strategy on students with low performance is 15.00 with a standard deviation of 7.95 in the pre-test and 21.10 with a standard deviation of 8.95 in the post-test. The comparative effect of conferencing strategy reveals that the mean gain of students with high performance is 9.75, medium performance is 14.95 and low performance is 6.10. The mean gain is in favour of students with medium performance.

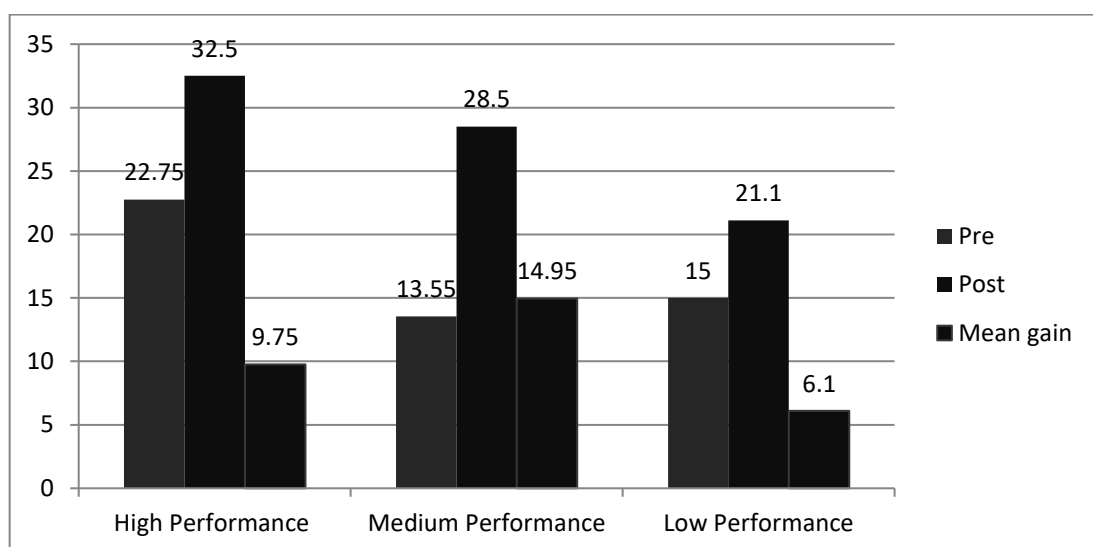


Figure 1: Pretest, Posttest and Mean of Conferencing Strategy on Students with Low, Medium and High Performance in Expository Writing.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository writing.

Table 2: ANCOVA on Effect of Conferencing Strategy on Students with Low, Medium and High Performance in Expository Writing

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1081.241 ^a	3	360.414	6.435	.002	.376
Intercept	1563.279	1	1563.279	27.911	.000	.466
PreEWPTc	563.085	1	563.085	10.053	.003	.239
Performance	470.032	2	235.016	4.196	.024	.208
Error	1792.315	32	56.010			
Total	28902.000	36				
Corrected Total	2873.556	35				

a. R Squared = .376 (Adjusted R Squared = .318)

Table 2 shows that $F(2,32) = 4.196$; $p = 0.024 < 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository writing. This suggests that there is significant difference in the effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository writing. The partial eta square of 0.208 obtained for performance means that 20.8 percent of variation in students' performance in expository writing can be attributed to the effect of

conferencing strategy. The students with average performance had a higher mean gain than the other two groups. This implies that with the right strategy any student can perform excellently well.

Table 3: Pairwise Comparisons on Effect of Conferencing Strategy on Students with Low, Medium and High Performance in Expository Writing

(I) Performance in conferencing strategy class	(J) Performance in conferencing strategy class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b
High Performance	Medium performance	-1.114	4.376	.992
	Low performance	7.094	4.631	.354
Medium performance	Low performance	8.208*	2.866	.022

Table 3 shows the pairwise comparisons of effect of conferencing strategy on students' performance in expository writing at $P = 0.992 > 0.05$ for high and medium. Similarly, pairwise comparisons of effect of conferencing strategy on students' performance in expository writing at $P = 0.354 > 0.05$ for high and low. However, pairwise comparisons of effect of conferencing strategy on students' performance in expository writing at $P = 0.022 < 0.05$ for medium and low. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Therefore, the rejected null hypothesis is confirmed and upheld. This implies that there is statistical significant difference in the effect of conferencing strategy on students with low, medium and high performance in expository writing.

Discussion of findings

The study investigated the effects of conferencing strategy on SSII students' performance in expository writing using ability groups, in Zone 'B' Benue State. The findings are discussed based on the hypothesis. The findings of the study showed that the conferencing strategy had significant effect on students' performance in expository writing. The findings also revealed that students in the various ability group recorded improvement when pretest was compared to posttest. The result showed further that students with medium performance outperformed those in the high and lower ability groups. The result could be that with the use of the strategy, students were compelled to revise and rewrite using the feedback from teacher and peers, they were able to come out with better essays which accorded them high scores. It could also be that because they were studying among their ability groups, they felt an environment free from intimidation they normally felt among those of higher abilities.

The result agrees with earlier studies which focused on teaching writing in ability groups using the conferencing strategy. Wang, King & McInerney (2021) examined teachers' role and how ability grouping related to students' achievement in English and Mathematics. The study revealed that when students in the medium and low ability groups received high levels of teacher support, they were able to achieve as much as students in the high ability groups in English. Nguyen (2023) found that students with high proficiency levels at a university in Vietnam used strategies of learning more often than the other two groups which accounted for their higher performance in English.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The paper concludes that conferencing as an instructional strategy is very effective in teaching senior secondary two students. This is because the strategy is interactive in nature thus helping students to learn from the teacher and their peers and to get immediate feedback. Also through conferencing, student can continually add a bit of information or remove irrelevant portions to arrive at a better piece. This would in turn make them to have higher performance in expository essay. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Teachers of English language should employ the conferencing strategy in teaching expository essay.
2. Workshop and seminars should be organized by educators and relevant bodies to train teachers on the use of this strategy.

References

- Alfalagg, A.R. (2020). Impact of teacher students' writing conferences on frequency and accuracy of using cohesive devices in EFL students' writing. *Asian Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 5(21), 63-75.
- Anderson, C. (2018). What is a writing conference? Retrieved from <https://blog.heinemann.com/what-is-a-writing-conference> on 6th May, 2022.
- Anderson, E. (2019). *Structure of an essay: Handy staff for the English class*. Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net> on 6th May, 2022.
- Ayaka, S., & Muodumogu C.A. (2019). Effects of environmental literacy on students achievement in writing in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. *Journal of Pan-African Reading and Literacy Research*, 1 (2), 97-110.
- Birt, J (2022). *10 types of essay: Examples and Purposes of each*. Retrieved from indeed.com on 15th September, 2023.
- Calkins, L. M. (2021). *Writer's workshop: What is the classroom workshop model? 7 essential elements of a perfect essay*. Retrieved from <https://writemyessay.net> on 5th May, 2022.
- Carrol, K. & Olsen, D. (2024). *Ability grouping in school: Importance, pros and cons study*. Implementing group work in the classroom.
- Gamora, A. (2011). Designing instruction and grouping students to enhance the learning of all. New hope or false promise, In M.T.Hallinan (Ed.) *Frontiers in Sociology of Education* (pp. 111-126). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands
- Graham, S. (2019). Changing how writing is taught. *Review of Research in Education*, 43, 277-303.
- Hartati, T. (2016). Penerapan, pendekatan conferencing, dalam penibel ajaran menulis disecolah Dasar: *Journal Pendidikan Serantau*, 2, 288-300.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *Second Language writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- InDeed Editorial Team (2022). *How to write a personal essay in 8 simple steps (with tips)* retrieved from <https://fayllar.org> on 16th May, 2022.
- Johnson. M.M. (2017). *How to hold writing conferences when you have 165 students*: Retrieved at mathewjohnson.com

- Kramer, L. (2021). Expository Essay: Everything you need to know. Retrieved at www.gramatically.com
- Krulder, J. (2018). Five minutes writing conference. *The Canial Chronicle*: Retrieved from www.edutopia.org on 14th March, 2023.
- Lerner, N. (2005). *The teacher-student writing conference*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org>. on 6th May, 2022.
- Master Class (2021). Virtual conferences; 18 top training events for writers in 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.makalivingwriting.com> on 27th January, 2023.
- Mulvahill, F. (2018). *Fostering a culture of writing in the classroom*. Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Retrieved from <https://www.pdst.ie> on 6th May, 2023.
- Muodumogu, C.A., & Yisa, T.A. (2013). Writing skills: Development strategies and junior secondary students' achievement in composition. *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*, 14 (1), 107-117.
- Nguyen, T.N. (2023). A study on writing strategies used by students of different levels of proficiency at a university in Vietnam. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Human Research*, 6 (5), 2722-2729
- Ramsey, S. (2018). *Writing conferences: How to get the most out of a writing conference*. Retrieved from www.readingbokets.org on 26th June, 2023.
- Ricks, P. (2014) *Components of effective writing: Content Conferences in a Sixth Grade Classroom*. Brigham Young University BYU Scholars.
- Syh-Jong, J. (2007). A study of students' construction of science knowledge: Talking and writing in a collaborative group. *Educational Research*, 49 (1), 65-81.
- Teng, M.F. (2016). *Immediate and delayed effects of embedded metacognitive instruction on Chinese EFL students English writing and regulation of cognition, thinking skills and creativity* . Retrieved from www.research.net on 22nd July 2023..
- Teng, M.F. (2016). *Immediate and delayed effects of embedded metacognitive instruction on Chinese EFL students English writing and regulation of cognition, thinking skills and creativity* . Retrieved from www.research.net on 22nd July 2023..
- Ukume, G. D, Obiora, E. & Agbum, P. (2018). ICT and students' achievement in writing in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State. *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*, 17 (1), 72-82.
- Wang, H.; King, B.R. & MCInerney, D.M. (2021). Ability grouping and students' performance: A Longitudinal investigation of teacher support as mediator and moderator. *Research Papers in Education*, 38 (2), 1-22.
- Wills, D. (2022). *My best student writing conference: Tips and tricks*. Retrieved from www.craftyourcontent.com on 6th January, 2024.
- Winschuh, B. (2022). *Writing conferences part two. Seven common struggles: Collaborative classroom*. Retrieved from www.collaborativeclassroom on 11th May, 2022.
- Yeh, C.C. (2019). Interaction and participation in the small group written conferences: *Journal of Response to Writing*, 5 (2), 175-204.