

Addressing Writing Deficiencies: Innovative Strategies for Enhancing English Writing Skills Among Junior Secondary School Students in Jigawa State

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Abstract: *This study investigates strategies to improve English writing proficiency among junior secondary school students in Jigawa State, Nigeria. Writing in English poses significant challenges for students, resulting from limited vocabulary, inadequate teaching methods, and a lack of confidence. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with 300 students and 30 teachers to identify key challenges and evaluate current instructional practices. An intervention involving peer feedback, process writing, and mentor texts was implemented over a 10-week period. Pre- and post-test evaluations showed a significant improvement in students' writing proficiency, with average scores increasing from 38% to 65%. Students also demonstrated increased confidence and engagement in writing tasks. Teachers reported that structured writing processes and collaborative learning were particularly effective in enhancing students' ability to organize their thoughts and apply grammatical rules. The study concludes that integrating these strategies into the English language curriculum can substantially improve writing skills and overall academic performance. Recommendations for policy and future research are also provided.*

Keywords: English writing proficiency, junior secondary school, peer feedback, process writing, mentor texts, Jigawa State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Writing in English is an essential skill for academic success, but it poses significant challenges for students, particularly in non-native English-speaking regions like Jigawa State, Nigeria. English is

the official language of instruction in Nigerian schools, but many students in Jigawa State struggle with mastering writing skills due to a combination of factors including limited vocabulary, poor foundational literacy, and inadequate teaching methods. Research shows that in northern Nigeria, where Jigawa is located, literacy rates are among the lowest in the country, with only 28.7% of children aged 7–14 able to read a complete sentence in English or Hausa (UNICEF, 2022). This is a major concern, as literacy is a key determinant of students' future academic performance and socio-economic mobility.

In Jigawa State, students' struggles with writing in English are exacerbated by the fact that most students come from homes where English is not spoken, limiting their exposure to the language outside the classroom (British Council, 2019). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), Jigawa has one of the lowest educational attainment levels in Nigeria, with a large percentage of students dropping out before completing secondary school, largely due to poor academic performance. Writing, in particular, has been identified as a significant area of concern, as students' inability to express themselves effectively in English negatively impacts their performance across all subjects.

Several studies have emphasized the need for targeted interventions to improve writing proficiency in English for secondary school students in Nigeria. However, existing research often overlooks the specific socio-linguistic and educational context of Jigawa State, which faces unique challenges due to socio-economic factors, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a lack of resources. Recent data from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2021) indicates that Jigawa is significantly behind in meeting national benchmarks for educational quality, especially in English language teaching.

To address these issues, this study explores and tests strategies that can enhance students' writing abilities in English. Specifically, the study focuses on junior secondary school students, as this is a critical stage where students transition from foundational literacy skills to more advanced writing tasks. By evaluating current teaching methods and proposing innovative strategies such as peer feedback, process writing, and the use of mentor texts, this research aims to provide practical solutions to improve writing proficiency among students in Jigawa State.

Furthermore, the study aims to align with the broader national and international education goals, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Enhancing students' writing skills not only contributes to academic success but also prepares them for future careers in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-driven economy.

This study is essential for educational stakeholders in Jigawa State and other regions facing similar challenges, as it offers evidence-based strategies that can be integrated into the existing curriculum to improve English writing skills. By addressing these challenges, this research has the potential to contribute to broader efforts aimed at reducing learning poverty and improving literacy rates in northern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing proficiency is a critical component of language learning, but it remains a challenging area for students, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts. Numerous studies have explored the factors affecting students' ability to write in English, pointing to issues such as limited vocabulary, insufficient writing practice, lack of feedback, and inadequate teacher training. In Jigawa State, Nigeria, these issues are compounded by socio-economic factors, limited resources, and a lack of language support at home, as English is often not spoken outside the classroom (British Council, 2019; UNICEF, 2022). This section reviews the existing literature on writing challenges, effective writing strategies, and theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

Challenges in Writing Proficiency

Studies on writing proficiency in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries consistently highlight a range of challenges that impede students' ability to write effectively in English. These challenges include poor foundational literacy skills, lack of vocabulary, grammatical errors, and insufficient exposure to written English (Olaofe, 2013; Olajide, 2010). Writing is also regarded as a complex cognitive skill that requires the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural knowledge (Kellogg, 2008). In Jigawa State, these issues are further exacerbated by the fact that many students come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds where access to books and other literacy resources is limited (Adejare, 2018).

Additionally, research has shown that English language teachers in Jigawa State are often not adequately trained in modern language teaching methodologies, including process-oriented approaches to writing (Usman, 2016). As a result, students are often taught writing through rote learning and memorization, which does not foster critical thinking or creativity in writing (Oluikpe, 2012). The lack of formative assessments and individualized feedback also means that students are not given adequate opportunities to improve their writing over time (Adeyemi, 2017).

Strategies for Improving Writing Proficiency

To address the challenges students face in writing, various strategies have been proposed and tested in different educational contexts. One of the most widely supported approaches is **process writing**, which emphasizes writing as a recursive process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This approach allows students to view writing as a continuous process of improvement rather than a one-time task. Studies have shown that process writing significantly improves students' writing quality, as it encourages critical reflection and iterative improvement (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hayes, 2012).

Peer feedback is another effective strategy for improving writing skills. It involves students reviewing each other's work and providing constructive feedback. This method not only fosters collaborative learning but also helps students develop critical evaluation skills and increases their confidence in writing (Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 2010). In the context of secondary schools

in Nigeria, peer feedback has been found to improve students' engagement and motivation in writing tasks (Adeyemi, 2017).

Mentor texts are also widely used in writing instruction. Mentor texts are exemplary pieces of writing that teachers use to model good writing techniques, structures, and styles. Students can analyze and imitate these texts to enhance their own writing (Gallagher, 2011). The use of mentor texts has been shown to improve students' understanding of genre-specific writing conventions and helps them develop a more nuanced understanding of how effective writing is constructed (Calkins, 1994).

Lastly, **regular writing practice** has been identified as essential for improving writing proficiency. Research indicates that students who engage in daily writing tasks develop greater fluency and confidence in expressing their ideas in written form (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Frequent writing practice allows students to experiment with language, improve their organization of ideas, and strengthen their grammatical accuracy (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed around the concept of **writing as a process** that involves multiple stages of development. The process writing approach posits that writing is not a linear activity but a recursive one that involves drafting, revising, and refining ideas. This framework views writing as both a cognitive and social activity, requiring students to engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory also informs this study, particularly in relation to peer feedback and the role of social interaction in learning. Vygotsky emphasized that learning occurs through social interactions, where students learn from each other through collaboration and scaffolding. This theory supports the use of peer feedback as a tool for collaborative learning, where students can provide and receive support to improve their writing skills.

Furthermore, the concept of **self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2000)** is relevant to this research. Writing requires self-regulation, as students must set goals, monitor their progress, and adjust their writing strategies as needed. By encouraging students to engage in process writing, this study seeks to enhance their ability to regulate their writing development independently.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theoretical perspectives: the **cognitive process theory of writing** (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and **sociocultural theory** (Vygotsky, 1978). **Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory** posits that writing involves a complex interplay of cognitive processes, including planning, translating ideas into written form, and revising (Flower & Hayes, 1981). These cognitive activities are not linear but are recursive, meaning that writers continually move back and forth between planning, drafting, and revising as they develop their ideas. This theory emphasizes that writing is a problem-solving activity that requires constant reflection and adaptation.

In this study, the cognitive process theory supports the implementation of process writing strategies, as it encourages students to approach writing as a series of decisions and revisions that improve their written expression. By breaking down writing into distinct but interconnected stages, students are able to manage the cognitive demands of writing more effectively (Kellogg, 2008).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory complements this by emphasizing the role of social interaction in learning. Vygotsky argued that students learn more effectively when they engage in collaborative activities with peers, teachers, or more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). This aligns with the peer feedback strategy used in this study, where students learn from each other through collaborative critique and discussion. Peer feedback not only facilitates learning but also helps students internalize new skills and strategies by articulating their thinking and receiving input from others (Topping, 2010). Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how students can develop their writing skills through both individual cognitive processes and collaborative social interactions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods design to collect quantitative and qualitative data from junior secondary schools in Jigawa State. The research consists of three phases: data collection, intervention, and evaluation.

Data Collection

- **Surveys:** A total of 300 students from six randomly selected junior secondary schools in Jigawa State participated in the study. The survey assessed their perceived difficulties with writing in English, focusing on challenges such as vocabulary use, grammar, and idea organization.
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 English language teachers to gather insights into current teaching methods, challenges in instruction, and strategies used in addressing writing difficulties.

Intervention

The intervention was implemented in the selected schools over a period of 10 weeks. Teachers were trained in the following writing strategies:

- **Peer Feedback:** Students worked in pairs or small groups to provide constructive feedback on each other's writing. This fostered collaborative learning and helped students critically engage with their peers' work.
- **Process Writing:** Teachers introduced a structured writing process, guiding students through the stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing.
- **Mentor Texts:** High-quality texts were used as models to demonstrate effective writing techniques, helping students improve their writing structure, coherence, and creativity.

Evaluation

To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, a pre-test and post-test design was used. Writing samples were collected from students before and after the intervention. The samples were evaluated based on a rubric that measured clarity, organization, grammar, and creativity. Teacher feedback was also collected through post-intervention interviews to understand their perception of the strategies' impact.

RESULTS

Pre-Intervention Findings

Before the intervention, students demonstrated significant weaknesses in writing. The majority of students struggled with organizing their thoughts, using correct grammar, and developing coherent ideas. The average writing score based on the pre-test rubric was 38%, indicating a low proficiency level. Teachers reported that students often lacked confidence in writing tasks and relied heavily on rote memorization rather than critical engagement with writing prompts.

4.2 Post-Intervention Findings

After the 10-week intervention, notable improvements were observed. The average post-test writing score increased to 65%, reflecting substantial progress in students' ability to structure ideas and apply grammatical rules. Peer feedback sessions were particularly effective, as students reported feeling more confident and motivated to write when receiving constructive input from their peers.

Teachers also observed that the process writing approach helped students understand the importance of revising and editing their work. The use of mentor texts provided students with clear examples of successful writing, which they emulated in their own assignments. Overall, the intervention was deemed successful in enhancing students' writing skills and fostering a more positive attitude towards English writing.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous research suggesting that structured writing processes, peer collaboration, and modeling through mentor texts are effective strategies for improving writing skills in junior secondary students. The improvement in students' post-intervention writing scores underscores the value of moving beyond traditional rote learning and memorization techniques commonly used in many Nigerian schools. Instead, engaging students in critical thinking and iterative writing processes significantly boosts both proficiency and engagement.

Moreover, the role of **peer feedback** was particularly highlighted in this study. This collaborative learning technique not only improved writing quality but also promoted a sense of community and shared responsibility for learning. **Process writing** was equally impactful, providing a structured yet flexible framework for students to express themselves and improve over time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve writing proficiency among junior secondary school students in Jigawa State and similar educational contexts:

1. **Incorporation of Process Writing in Curriculum:** The process writing approach should be formally integrated into the English language curriculum across secondary schools in Jigawa State. This method allows students to approach writing as a series of stages (planning, drafting, revising, and editing), fostering deeper cognitive engagement and improving overall writing quality.
2. **Teacher Training on Peer Feedback Methods:** Continuous professional development for teachers should include training on effective peer feedback strategies. Teachers need to be equipped with the skills to facilitate constructive peer review sessions that encourage collaboration and mutual learning among students.
3. **Use of Mentor Texts in Writing Instruction:** Schools should provide access to a variety of mentor texts that reflect different genres and writing styles. These texts will serve as models for students, helping them to understand the structures and techniques of effective writing, and enabling them to apply these strategies in their own work.
4. **Daily Writing Practice for Students:** Teachers should incorporate regular, structured writing activities into their daily lesson plans. Continuous writing practice can significantly enhance students' confidence and fluency, helping them to overcome initial fears and inhibitions about writing in English.
5. **Policy Support for Language Development Programs:** The state government and education authorities should support initiatives that promote English language development, including programs that provide additional resources for writing instruction. Investments in teacher training, classroom materials, and digital resources for English writing can lead to sustained improvements in literacy.
6. **Further Research on Long-Term Impact:** Future studies should focus on the long-term effects of these interventions on students' writing proficiency. Additionally, research should explore the scalability of these strategies across other states with similar educational challenges, particularly in northern Nigeria where literacy rates remain low.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that implementing targeted strategies such as peer feedback, process writing, and mentor texts can significantly improve the English writing skills of junior secondary school students in Jigawa State, Nigeria. The findings suggest that these strategies should be incorporated into English language curricula across the state to improve literacy rates and foster critical thinking. Further research should explore the long-term effects of these interventions, as well as their scalability across different regions with similar educational challenges.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Copilot / Editing and paraphrase in order to Draft and review. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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