

Effect of Project-Based and Skills-Based Strategies in Teaching Expository Essay Writing On Students' Achievement in English Language

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Abstract: This study investigated the comparative effective of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' achievement in expository essay writing in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study examined the difference in the effects of project-based and skills-based strategies on male and female students' achievement in expository essay writing. The study was guided by three research questions three null hypotheses. The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design of pre-test, post-test of non equivalent experimental groups. A sample of 84 Senior Secondary School (SS 2) students was sampled from two secondary schools in the area of study using simple random sampling technique. The students were taught expository essay writing using either project-based or skills-based strategies in two intact classes, one in each of the schools. Data were collected using Expository Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) and analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. The findings also showed that there was no significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. The researchers therefore recommended among others, that project-based and skills-based teaching/learning strategies should be incorporated into the senior secondary schools programme, especially in writing instruction. Workshops and seminars should also be organized for English Language teachers on the different effects of project-based and skills-based strategies in teaching expository essay writing on male and female students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ability of learners to acquire proficiency in English Language especially in the skill of writing is a gateway to academic success and development in education. This is because the skill of writing is a veritable tool learners need to develop their critical and analytical thinking ability to solve learning tasks and problems (Bulya, 2010). This implies that students who aspire to attain success and progress in educational career must possess good writing ability and skills like organizing ideas, generating and developing ideas using mechanics of writing (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013; Agbum & Anule, 2015).

Writing is a literacy skill that offers a lot of advantages to mankind/society in all facets of life. According to Awaupila (2012), writing has numerous cultural importance as it gives permanence to language and allows the society to record its literature, history and technology. This therefore shows that, writings as literature in a school curriculum remains a critical and important aspect of students' lives in and after school. This is because at school and life after school, written tests and reports are the primary means for assessing students' progress and cognitive level (Graham, 2008). No wonder, many employers of labour insist that employees must possess well developed communicative and working skills before a sensitive position can be acquired. This therefore means that the skill of writing should be meaningfully taught and learnt by students in the course of schooling in order to avoid being put at a considerable disadvantage at school and later in life (Graham, 2008; Muodumogu & Yisa, 20013; Agbum & Anule, 2015).

Owing to the crucial place of writing in the life of every child, it is indeed important that students are taught the essentials of writing skills and conventions in a meaningful way in order to equip them to take up the vigorous tasks in the writing process. However, it has been observed that most second language learners in Nigerian classrooms who have completed their secondary education still lack the basic skills and conventions in

the writing process (Bello, 2006). This is because the skill of writing over the years is taught and acquired as a product not as a process, forgetting that writing is a complex and abstract activity of composing and translating abstract ideas meaningfully and constructively on paper following the conventions of writing (Adegbile, & Folaranmi, 2011; Bae, 2011).

The trend is not different in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State where students either fail or cheat to pass their Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) due to the faulty nature of essay writing instruction. This premise is evident in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiner's Report (2004) that reveals that many students failed English Language because of their deficiencies in the skills of writing ranging from loose sentences, abuse of basic rules of grammar, wrong spellings and wrong or no use of punctuation marks, among others. This affirms the worry of Oyetunde (2013) who laments that the big problem facing Nigerian education today is that of helping students to acquire proficiency in English Language especially the skill of writing. This trend therefore has posed lots of concern to language experts and researchers, especially the researchers in this research. Considering the need to improve on the effective teaching and learning of writing, there is a need to employ process and research proven approaches that are learners' friendly. This drive gave rise to this study as it sought to investigate the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based learning strategies in the teaching and improvement of writing skills in expository essays based on gender.

Expository essay writing is one of the four kinds of compositions. Others are argumentative, narrative, and descriptive, taught and assessed at school, especially at the Senior Secondary School level. According to Ezebuoro (2015), expository essay writing exposes students to details, steps and procedures of how something is done, achieved or practised. Woodney (2013) maintains that expository writing enhances students' cognitive skills to solve language problems. Therefore, improving the teaching of writing and students' achievement in expositions using project-based and skills-based strategies may help to improve the level of students' performance in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) across gender.

Project-based learning strategy is a concrete and independent building activity that is directed towards the learning of significant skill or process. Ada (2010) asserts that project method of learning is a unit of activity carried out by learners in a natural life-like manner with the purpose of accomplishing a goal under the guidance of a teacher. It is a learning approach that involves an individual or group writing a report on findings. Project-based strategy includes other activities like drama, pageant making models, drawing maps and charts, collecting pictures, preparing scraps, books, going on historical tours and exhibitions (Kumar, Lamudi & Rao, 2016). This strategy therefore is in line with the National Policy on Education (2013, P.3) that clearly stipulates that "teaching should be practical, activity-based, experiential and information technology supported".

Project-based strategy spans across the different levels of education in Nigeria because of its level of importance. It enables learners to practically explore the real life experience as they think for themselves. At this point, learning is therefore made real and permanent as they work together with one interest for a common goal. This enables learners to retain learning experiences and improve their achievement in writing (Wekesa & Ochiombo, 2016; Kumar, Lamudi, & Rao, 2016; Darren, Jace, Ky, 2016).

Teaching and improving students' achievement using project-based strategy requires the teacher to organize the students in groups of four students each. Each group is assigned to a sub-topic. The project or task could last of a period of two weeks. During the period of the project, the time-table is modified to allow students time for the project and the teacher closely monitors the activities of the various groups to ensure that they carry out what is expected of them accordingly. At the end of the process, the teacher collects, inspects, comments and grades the students' performance (Kumar & Rao, 2016; Darren, Jace & Ky, 2016). Wekesa and Ochiombo (2016) report that project-based learning technique enables students to improve on their academic achievement as well as develop their positive attitude towards learning. Darren, Jace and Ky (2016) affirm that project-based learning has a significant effect on students' learning outcome.

Skill-based learning strategy is a 21st century teaching and learning intervention aimed at improved students' intellectual activities by encouraging active participation in the learning experiences rather than sit as passive listeners. Harfield, Davies, Hade, Panko and Kenley (2007) assert that skills-based activity learning strategy is a teaching and learning model that helps learners to transform knowledge or information into their personal knowledge which they can apply in different situations. The strategy helps learners to construct mental models that allow for higher-order performance such as applied problem solving and transfer of information and skills (Churchill, 2003).

In skilled-based activity environment, the teacher is usually a facilitator, motivator, guide and a coach (Stolen, 2009). The strategy allows learners to examine learning requirements and think on how to solve a problem at hand. The students do not learn about the content. Rather, they learn about the process and skills to solve the problem. As they go towards the solution of the problem, they also learn about the content (Churchill, 2003; Stolen, 2009). Uzezi and Kyado (2017) reveal that this learning strategy has a significant effect on students' achievement, attitude and motivation.

Skills-based and project-based learning may be gender friendly. Gender as an important variable in learning is a moderator variable. Hornby (2010) defines gender as the state of being a male or female by sex traits. Nnachi (2017) believes and reports that female students have an edge over male students in learning aptitude. However, Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) assert that male students are as intelligent as female students and they have homogenous cognitive skills and as such, there is no significant difference in their learning outcome in writing if exposed to mini-lesson strategy. This study therefore determined the comparative effective of project-based and skills-based learning strategies on male and female students' achievement in expository writing.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?
2. What would be the difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?
3. What would be the difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the comparative effective of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?
2. There is no significant difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?
3. There is no significant difference on the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The design of the study was a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test of non-equivalent experimental groups. The sample population of this study consisted of 84 SS 2 students in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. The students were assigned and taught writing in two experimental groups in intact classes. One experimental group was taught using project-based strategy while the other was exposed to skills-based strategy, for four weeks each. With the Expository Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT), data were collected. The instrument consisted of five expository essay-writing questions. The marking guide adapted from West African Examination Council (WAEC). Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

III. RESULTS

The analyses and interpretation of data were based on the research questions and the null hypotheses. The decision rule was that if the p-value was less than the specified alpha level of 0.05 it was therefore rejected but if proven otherwise, it was accepted.

Research question 1

What is the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?

Table 1: Mean difference in the effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Std.	Post-test	Std. deviation
Project-based strategy	43	11.33	2.925	23.70	
Skills-based strategy	41	12.05	3.821	23.88	
Mean difference		0.72		0.18	

Table 1 shows the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. Students exposed to project-based strategy had a post test mean of 23.70 while those exposed to skills-based strategy had a mean of 23.88. This gave a post-test mean difference of 0.18 in favour of those exposed to skills-based strategy.

Research question 2

What would be the difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?

Table 2: Mean difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students mean achievement scores in expository essay writing

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Std.	Post-test	Std. deviation
Male	25	10.36	2.827	22.83	3.199
Female	20	12.50	2.503	24.79	3.360
Mean difference		2.14		1.96	

Table 2 shows the difference in the effect of project based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. Male students had a post test mean score of 22.83 while the females had a mean score of 24.79. This gave a mean difference of 1.96 in favour of the female students.

Research question 3

What would be the difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing?

Table 3: Mean difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in essay writing

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Std.	Post-test	Std. deviation
Male	28	12.21	4.992	23.90	3.177
Female	12	11.27	3.243	23.83	4.174
Mean difference		0.94		0.07	

Table 3 shows the difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. Male students had a post test mean score of 23.90 while the female had a mean score of 23.83. This gave a mean difference of 0.07 in favour of the male students.

Hypotheses 1

There is no significant difference in the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Table 4: ANCOVA for the significant difference in the comparative effective of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing

Source	Type III sum square	df	Mean square	F	P
Corrected model	.704a	2	.352	0.030	.971
Intercept	3594.184	1	3594.184	305.346	.000
Pre	.021	1	.021	.002	.966
Strategy	.650	1	.650	.055	.815
Error	953.439	81	11.771		
Total	48478.000	84			
Corretd Total	954.143	83			

Table 4 is ANCOVA for the significant difference in the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. The table gives $F_{(2,81)} = 0.055$, and $p = 0.815$. Since p is greater than 0.05 (alpha level), the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean scores in expository essay writing.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Table 5: ANCOVA for the significant difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Source	Type III sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Corrected model	56.517 ^a	2	28.258	2.675	.081
Intercept	1522.318	1	1522.318	144.107	.000
Pre	15.938	1	15.938	1.509	.227
Gender	55.317	1	55.317	5.509	.027
Error	422.553	40	10.564		
Total	24627.000	43			
Corrected Total	479.070	42			

Table 5 shows ANCOVA for the significant difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in Expository essay writing. The tables gives $F_{(2,40)} = 5.236$, and $P = 0.027$. Since P is less than 0.05 (alpha level), the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the effect of project-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Table 6: ANCOVA for the significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

Source	Type III sum of square	df	Mean square	F	P
Corrected model	.1117 ^a	2	.559	.045	.956
Intercept	1970.671	1	1970.671	158.229	.000
Pre	1.083	1	1.083	0.87	.770
Gender	.026	1	.026	.002	.964
Error	473.273	38	12.455		
Total	23851.000	41			
Corrected Total	474.390	40			

Table 6 is ANCOVA for the significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. The table gives $F_{(2,38)} = 0.002$, and $p = 0.964$. Since p is greater than 0.05 (alpha level), the null hypothesis is accepted. It means that there is no significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing.

IV. DISCUSSING OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the comparative effect of project-based and skills-based strategies on students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. This may be because both strategies are learners'-based language models that give students active opportunities to improve on one another's needs to solve language tasks. The insignificant mean difference between the two strategies was in favour of the project-based strategy. This finding is in line with the finding of Darren, Jace and Ky (2016) who reported that the experimental group exposed to the project-based learning strategy tool was responsible for the learning by the peers who also scored significantly higher than the control group exposed to the traditional method. Project-based strategy which is also activity-skills-based teaching is more effective for the development of higher order skills in the students than the traditional method. This implies that project-based and skills-based strategies are effective language teaching models for improving students' achievement in writing.

The result of the study further revealed that there was no significant difference in the effect of project-based learning strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. This may be because project-based strategy gives equal opportunities to male and female students to explore

knowledge and solve language tasks by transferring real life experience to new language tasks. This finding agrees with the report of Wekesa and Ochiambo (2016) who found out that the project-based learning technique enables students regardless of gender to improve their academic achievement as well as develop positive attitudes towards learning and solving tasks. In the same vein, Moudumog and Unwaha (2013) had reported that mini-lesson strategy like any other modern and research-proven strategy is usually gender friendly and it gives equal opportunities to both male and female students to explore knowledge and solve language tasks by transferring real life experience to new language tasks. This implies that project-based strategy is an effective model that is gender-friendly like every other modern learners'-based strategy such as mini-lesson strategy, among others.

The finding of the study further revealed that there was no significant difference in the effect of skills-based strategy on male and female students' mean achievement scores in expository essay writing. This may be because skills-based model is not gender sensitive and thus gives equal opportunities to male and female students to transfer experiential knowledge to solve language tasks. Skills-based strategy which is also brain skills-based learning approach used on the experimental group was more effective in increasing students' achievement, attitude and motivation regardless of gender than the lecture-based approach used in the control group. This implies that skills-based strategy is an effective language model that is gender friendly and treats male and female students equally as they explore knowledge to solve language task.

The educational and instructional implication of these findings is that teaching to improve students' learning outcome requires learners-based and cognitive tasking models like project-based and skills-based strategies that stimulate learners' critical and analytical cognitive skills to solve learning task without being gender bias. If adopted, they would increase learners' effectiveness and achievement.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore concluded that project-based and skills-based strategies are effective and interactive language models that develop communicative and linguistic competence in learners as they tackle expository essay tasks. Also the interactive and learners'-centred language strategies like project-based and skills-based strategies are research-proven effective writing activities for improving students' achievement in writing among male and female students.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. Curriculum planner and designers should work in collaboration with English Language textbook designers and writers to incorporate project-based and skills-based strategies into the students' writing programme for secondary schools.
2. Teacher education should be repositioned to empower teachers to acquire modern interactive language strategies like project-based and skills-based strategies for teaching writing based on gender.
3. Teachers should encourage students' participation in project and skills-based activities at school in order to enhance their cognitive and communicative competence in speaking and writing skills.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized by stakeholders like Ministries of Education across Federal and State levels on the uses and important effect of project-based and skills-based learning strategies on students' achievement in writing skills.
5. Schools should promote and encourage project and skills-based learning among students to enhance their participation and interest in expository writing so as to boost their confidence, critical and analytical cognitive skills.

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