

Qualitative Study on Problems and Solutions associated with Effective Writing Skills among Learners: An Overview

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Abstract

Sufficient attention is not given to writing, which is one of the major literacy skills. In fact, the invention of social media has done more harm in this part of the world. Writing as a productive skill deserves adequate attention at every stage of learning. This paper, therefore, delves into some problems associated with writing and solutions that can be used to assist learners. Some areas that could be taught in writing in order to arouse the interest of the learners are discussed in this work. Areas of concerns where the learners may be encountering difficulties are identified such as common errors. In view of the damages that problems associated with writing could pose to the learners, this paper offers some solutions as a kind of leeway. Some of the solutions are applying pedagogical solutions, guided composition and development of content in composition writing. The paper suggests exploit and further research work in specific areas of writing such as fieldwork, laboratory report, long essays, features, journal articles, newspaper articles, editorials and many discourses.

Keywords: Writing, common errors, terms in writing, common problems, and suggested solutions.

Introduction

The importance of writing at every stage of learning in formal system of Education has been emphasized by scholars. At the pre-primary and lower basic levels of Education children learn how to write from the formation of letters, to organizing their ideas, to using correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Edwards (2003), cited in Spear-swerling (2006), opines that technological advances do not eliminate the need for explicit teaching of handwriting. Handwriting is important at the elementary school level in so many ways. First it is a basic tool used in many subjects (doing classroom work and home work). Secondly, handwriting at the elementary stage is linked to basic reading and spelling achievement. However there are some problems militating against effective teaching of handwriting at the kindergarten and lower primary school level. Yule (2010) refers to writing as the symbolic representation of language through the use of graphic signs. Unlike speech, it is a system that is not simply acquired, but has to be learned through sustained conscious effort. Not all languages have written form and even among people whose language has a well-established writing system, there are large numbers of individuals who cannot use the system.

In terms of human development, writing is a relatively recent phenomenon. We may be able to trace human attempts to represent information visually back to cave drawings made at least 20,000 years ago, or to clay tokens from about 10,000 years ago, which appear to have been an early attempt at bookkeeping; but these artifacts are best described as ancient precursors of writing. The earliest writing for which we have clear evidence is known as "cuneiform," marked on clay tablets about 5,000 years ago. An ancient script that has a more obvious connection to writing systems in use today can be identified in inscriptions dated around 3,000 years ago. In all these, Yule identifies representation of particular images consistently through a product of picture writing, or pictograms, use of symbol considered to be part of a system of idea writing, or ideograms, there is also ideograms (an arm of cuneiform, evident in Iraq) use of existing symbols to represent the sounds of language through a process known as rebus writing, syllabic writing, alphabetic writing, written English and English orthography. Adebajo (2011) refers to writing as one of the communication skills. It requires the acquisition of necessary skills to attain excellence because it is a literacy skill. The writer conveys his message through the use of words, pen and paper. Writing works through a set of symbols. These symbols represent the thoughts in the mind of the writer. Writing is not only attempting to use symbols to express feelings, opinions or suggestions on a particular issue, but putting

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together appropriately these symbols as they appear in words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs. Such symbols must be used in a logical and meaningful way. Kolawole and Ojedokun (2002) opine that writing involves the production and arrangement of sentences in a manner appropriate to the purpose of the writer, the person(s) addressed and the function of what is written. Muraina & Awolere (2013) observed that many teachers and parents perceived teaching handwriting as time-consuming and strenuous task, this in-turn has led to poor motivation and lack of practice. Teachers in the elementary schools need a modest instruction time in the earliest school (kindergarten) to help learners learn how to develop good handwriting. As earlier pointed out, to elicit positive responses from learners, teachers can motivate and encourage young learners by giving enough and adequate instruction time in the early class.

Development of Content and Context in Composition Writing

Content here means the subject matter of the topic being discussed in a piece of composition. It is the most visible feature of the composition. In other words, the main idea contained in a composition is its content. Context revolves around the language with which the content of a composition is presented i.e. the proper form or usage of words and sentences to convey the intended message in a composition. The content informs the context of a composition and the context drives home the content of the composition. By implication the two inter-dependent, for a piece of composition requires the topic to discuss and the language to discuss it meaningfully. In order to avoid poverty of ideas, teachers should do everything possible to create situations that will help pupils to develop content and context ability. This can be done through guided composition. We are aware that teachers have been making efforts in guiding pupils to write compositions, the common approach is the use of questions which are always arranged such that their answers lead to guided composition. It is not difficult to detect that the pupils have practiced writing the type of compositions in the school before. It is also easy to guess the guiding questions that must have been asked from the pupils by teachers which remain in their brains.

Guided Composition and Oral Preparation

Our intention here is to make further suggestions on guided composition writing. These suggestions are in the areas of laying more emphasis on oral preparation; basing the writing on simple structural exercises; using key sentence approach and story-telling technique.

All composition writing exercises are better preceded by oral preparation. During the oral exercise on a topic for composition, the following values shall be ensured:

1. Pupils interest and imagination shall be aroused and sustained.
2. Pupils will acquire more information from one another. Even weak pupils who may have had no idea at all will gather some facts on the topic.
3. Pupils will also acquire the knowledge of how to organize the facts meaningfully.
4. Pupils will have opportunities to use speech themselves instead of just listening to the teacher's speech only.
5. Pupils are likely to enrich their vocabulary store.

The personality of each pupil is positively influenced as they gain team spirit from the oral work. Another suggestion is to use structural exercises approach to help the pupils to write good compositions, for instance, the teacher can write something like this on the chalkboard.

Tola is my friend. She has a sister named Tosin. She also has a brother. They all live in Lagos. Her sister is a nurse and her brother is a teacher. Pupils are led to read the short passage several times and write similar ones. Several of such structural practices will help pupils to acquire concept formation.

Ojo (2014) opined that writing is a productive language skill which the learner must demonstrate before making effective use of any language. The learner must have a good mastery of the writing skill in English language in order to be an effective user of English language. Writing is a graphic representation of ones opinions, experiences and thoughts in papers or in any other writing materials. Writing involves putting down impressions or statement or declarations. It involves the expressions of one's ideas through the use of words and symbols in a particular language and particularly in English.

Writing is an important English language skill because it is an indication of the literacy ability of an individual. Most of the time literacy rate in a country is determined through the ability of many people who are able to read and write in English language. Emphasis is placed on writing skill in any language because it is also one of the measures of testing ones proficiency in a language especially in English language.



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Expression of knowledge in other subject areas is also most of the time through writing skill. This does not mean that speaking and reading skill are not used to express knowledge in other subjects, but the most effective is the writing skill, because the certificate to prove the mastery of any subject will be written one.

Writing in English language is a very important skill to be taught in Nigerian schools from the primary to the tertiary institutions. The fact that English is an official language in Nigeria and at the same time a language of instruction in our educational system has made the teaching of writing in English an important task and compulsory task. Pupils in primary schools must have a good mastery of writing skill in English language before they can be effective in the use of English language. Developing a good mastery in writing in English depends largely on the teachers, pupils and the materials to teach writing. The school situation also determines the effective teaching of writing in English. This is because schools with adequate materials and conducive environment to teach writing in English will help the pupils a lot to have good mastery of writing in English. Writing involves all aspects of language 'grammar', 'vocabulary', 'word order', 'spelling' and logical arrangement of ideas. Pupils start writing from the writing of alphabetical letters to the formation of words. The writing of words will lead the pupils to the writing of simple sentences. The mastery of writing and formation of words will allow the pupils to manipulate words to bring out new idea or write creatively.

Term In Effective Writing Skill

- (1) **Pre-Writing Activities:** Muraina & Awolere (2013) further add that these are the activities that the teacher must inculcate in the pupils to enhance their writing skill. These will be used to develop mastery of writing skill in the pupils. Teacher exposes the pupils to certain activities which will lead them to the real writing activities. The ability of the pupils to perform these tasks or activities will develop or improve their writing skill and thereby start the writing process. Pupils cannot start writing without first passing through these pre-writing activities. Pre-writing activities such as correct sitting position, handling of writing materials, placing of writing materials and the coordinators and movement of the body before and during the writing process are all to be learnt by the pupils before writing. The pre-writing activities that the teacher allows the pupils to practice are writing in the air, writing on the sand, twisting of the wrist and laying of blocks as well as throwing of balls or rings. Teacher later allows the pupils to make use of writing materials and also start writing by writing different shapes such as circles, curves, strokes, and lines. The mastery of these will prepare them for the writing of the various letters of alphabets.
- (2) **Control or Guided Writing:** Control or guided writing activities are easy and short. They help the pupils to write with few mistakes. Guided writing allows pupils to practice their new concepts and skills, but within a supportive, small group situation. Teachers guide the pupils in the process of writing by giving them ideas and outlines of what to write. The teacher presents or revises the language that the pupils will need in a controlled writing. Teacher gives pupils practice with the language they will need. This can include written controlled practice. Pupils must be given the freedom to practice in pairs or groups, to personalize and practice extended writing. Teacher writes simple words and sentences on the chalkboard and asks the pupils to copy them. The pupils can also be asked to give examples of word and sentences and write them while the teacher helps them to correct themselves and each other.
- (3) **Story Boards:** These are series of drawings or pictures that shows the outline of the story of a film or movie etc.
- (4) **Prompts:-** Is to encourage somebody to write by asking them questions or suggesting words that they could write. Teacher acts as prompts to the pupils by guiding them concerning what to write and how to write. Teacher can use pictures to encourage the pupils to write. He can also use actions to encourage or motivate the pupils to write.
- (5) **Hooks:** Connecting the pupils to information or things to write about through the use of objects or pictures. Pupils will write effectively when there is a link to the subject through various objects and pictures and even story.
- (6) **Web Creation:** Putting information on the internet and which can be read by anybody with access to internet services.
- (7) **Scaffolding:** This concept was first devised by Bruner (1983-1986). Scaffolding is a process whereby the teacher helps children by doing what they cannot do at first, and allowing them slowly to take over parts of task construction process as they are able to do so. The teacher controls the focus of attention, demonstrates the tasks, segments the task etc. Scaffolding is also assumed to describe the behaviour of any power(s) designed to help a student engaged in some aspects of learning beyond their actual level of development. This means that the teacher starts the writing process with the pupils and allows the pupils to copy and practice what the teacher is writing. Teacher starts with them from known to the unknown and from simple to the complex.

(8) Creative writing: This is the development of the independent writing ability of the pupils. Teacher allows the pupils to write on their own using their initiative and creative powers to bring out new ideas. Creative writing starts with the pupils from the writing of simple compositions on simple topical issues which are most of the time of interest to the pupils. e.g. myself, my school, the food I like best etc.

Creative writing also includes the writing of stories, plays, and poems. Creative writing involves the ability to think and write about the new things, and to provide solutions to societal problems through new ideas. Nigeria has produced many creative writers like Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Late Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi and many others.

The writings of these people have contributed immensely to the development of this country in the ramifications. The pupils must be taught to move from the writing of composition to writing of short stories and even composition of short poems. The teacher can motivate or stimulate the creative thinking ability of the pupils by allowing them to write short stories. The pupils must also be taught good paragraph development and proper choice and placement of punctuation marks. This will enhance their creative writing abilities.

Common Errors and Suggested Solutions

Other writing difficulties and problems that may arise at the later stage of writing (or higher level of writing) includes some common errors in grammar usage and mechanics, difficulties in developing content (elaboration of details) and organization of ideas. Writing ability can be developed gradually. Children can build upon skills learned in lower class. Some common errors in grammar, usage and mechanics that can hinder effective writing are listed below:

1. Problem of Proper Nouns not capitalized

Example: I saw dr. smith in new York

Solution: I saw Dr. Smith in New York

Problem of Wrong End Punctuation

Example: What are you doing

Solution: What are you doing?

Problem of the use of Incorrect Noun Plurals

Example: The berrys are ripe

Solution: The berries are ripe

2. Problem of Lack of Commas in a Series

Example: Our flag's colours are red white and blue

Solution: Our flag's colours are red, white, and blue.

Problem of Lack of Subject-verb Agreement

Example: He run every day

Solution: He runs every day

Suggested Solutions to the Problems of Writing Applying Pedagogical Solution

We want to suggest here that solutions to the academic problems in writing can be resolved using the following methods of composition writing. In doing this, three distinct steps can be followed. These are, development of content and context through controlled writing approach; gradual movement from controlled writing to creative writing; and developing proper graphic representation through emphasis on good handwriting and adequate use of orthographic symbols.

Conclusion

There are numerous problems facing learners today as a result of our lackadaisical attitude to writing. The learners at the elementary schools give ugly facial appearance when he/she is called upon to write. Those in secondary schools express themselves with scanty lines. As they progress into tertiary institutions, telephones dominate their actions through social media; incidentally, this dominance is supposed to be a blessing by transferring such experiences into productive academic exercises. This study, therefore, is a reminder to all stakeholders, the need to give necessary impetus to writing so as to help our children in schools.

Recommendations

It is recommended that some terms should be regularly taught in schools. It is saddening that graduates from the tertiary institutions cannot adequately write letters, memos, speeches even when they are guided.



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