JUXTAPOSITION OF PRODUCT AND PROCESS APPROACHES FOR TEACHING WRITING SKILLS IN ESL CLASSROOM

BY

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Abstract

This study intends to find out the differences in the effects of product approach and process approach for teaching writing skills in tertiary institutions. It is evidence that in the process of mastering English as a second language, learners and teachers encounter many difficulties which lead to the increasing emphasis in improving and modeling new strategies to enhance students' English Language Learning proficiency and writing competence. This study, therefore, tries to compare traditional method (product approach) with process approach with the view to find out how effective it will be when compared with the former. Therefore, 80 participants were used in the study, they were grouped into two of 40 students each and taught separately using each of the approaches to teaching essay writing. And then compare the two to see which one is the best applicable to the current situation in the educational system in teaching and learning writing in a second language classroom where students are expected to possess adequate skills that will make them cope with any learning condition and develop them for academic writing. The findings of the quasi-experimental study show that process approach group out-performed the product approach group with a mean score of 35.36 to 19.78 respectively.

Keywords: Process approach, product approach, writing skill, teaching, tertiary, juxtaposition

Introduction

There is no one best approach to teaching writing skills as there are different ways writing can be approached in the classroom. The type of students with the genre to be taught will determine the best way to approach it. What is necessary is that the writing teacher should know the various ways to approach it with certain categories of students. It should be well known to teachers of language that not all students that can read can effectively write an essay so writing should be looked at as the most difficult aspect of language skills. The situation of students' writing at all levels of education all over the world is a thing of concern to educationists as the situation is deteriorating year in year out. Therefore, the aim of teaching essay writing is to produce students that can communicate effectively in writing by being able to write Narrative,

Descriptive, Debate, Argumentative, Expository, Letter, Article, Speech, Report and Creative Writing.

According to Kellogg, Olive & Piolat, (2005) Writing is the ability to document ideas or information on paper. Writing is a skill that is very important in a second language teaching program. It is a skill that involves the ability to put down the graphic symbols that represent a language and is a way of recording information by means of visible symbols. Unfortunately, writing is not well taught formally from primary school to tertiary level because it is a valuable skill that is very difficult to teach especially in a second language situation where the influences of the mother tongue are tremendous. Students write based on their own taste. Flower and Hayes (1980) put the complexity of writing on their known cognitive model of writing processes as long term memory which stores the writer's background knowledge, the topic and the text that is produced. Therefore, the ability to express oneself in writing a language other than the first language is increasingly becoming a condition for educational success.

Problem Statement

Due to complain all over the world about the poor performance of students in the essay aspect of their examinations there is a need for stakeholders in education to look for ways to improve classroom interaction between the teachers and students as well as students to student's interaction in learning. In Nigeria like many other countries confirmed the poor performance of students in writing. According to Muraina (2012) the performance of student is so poor that education is tagged as 'falling standard'. Munro (2003), Lillis and Scott (2007), Ivanic and Lea (2008), Thomas (2015) in their studies have shown that the problem of students of English as a second language especially in tertiary institutions is the teaching and learning of writing skill. In the United Kingdom, Lea and Street 1987 and Munro 2003 assert that writing standard in all levels of education is very poor and that to effectively deal with students' essay writing is a challenge all over the world.

 According to Akinwamide (2012) learners are generally poor in writing, most especially in essay writing and this poor writing skill by students is as a result of the teaching method/ approach and students' readiness to learn. In other words, the teachers of writing adopted the traditional method which they were trained within their time (Sarala et al., 2014). In view of this the process-genre approach was employed in this study to examine its effectiveness on

students' performance in writing an essay as it helped them improve and introduce another dimension to essay writing.

Research Questions

Six questions will be extracted from the question below as can be seen in the findings of this study

1. What is the Essay writing performance of the students in experimental and control groups in terms of content, organization, expression, and mechanics before and after the intervention?

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study will enlightened writing teachers on an alternative approach to product method of teaching writing. Students will also benefit from its practical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives.

The Framework of the Study

Murray & Johannson (1990) are of the opinion that writing process includes thinking, planning, drafting, revising, editing and writing the final version. Represented below in a diagram is the adopted framework for this study:
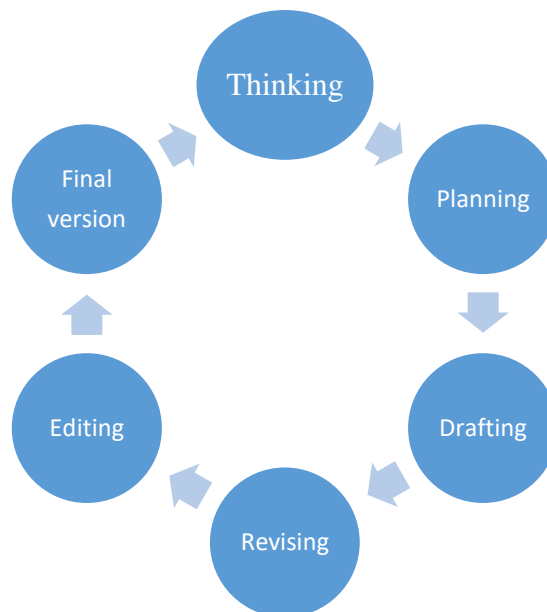

Figure 1: Writing Process by Murray and Johannson (1990)

Writing in Higher institutions

The success in development of communication and writing skills by students through discipline-based modules is at the Centre of teaching and learning in tertiary institutions while students encounter difficulties in its mastering at higher levels. Therefore, transition from secondary school to tertiary according to Young (2010) poses serious problem for many students and teachers in academic writing as teachers complain and feel frustrated about students' writing deficiencies as academic writing remains a challenge in tertiary education. Academic writing as one of the most critical skills at tertiary level because it is used for most assessment tasks at schools and it shows the demonstration of learning through its effective teaching and feedback in pedagogical academic writing (Lea & Street 2006; Ferris 2008; Weaver 2006; Chokwe 2011 etc). They all agreed that students should be given feedback to enable them see their strengths and weaknesses to improve in the future work. Weaver (2006) further added that students are motivated to improve when they are given feedback and that teachers should make their feedback explicit to have positive effects and that teachers should be trained to know how to effectively respond to students writing by exchanging information and should be able to write and teach writing as a process. Feedback at this level should not focus on correction of grammar but that which gives clues such as talkback is more effective in helping students to revise what they have written. According to Lillis (2001) talkback approach to feedback is suggested to be the most effective way of communicating with students regarding their writing and is student centered approach which involves linear transfer of information from the teacher to the student through media which is the written feedback.

Product Approach

Product approach is a traditional approach that encourages students to mimic a model text that has been explained and analyzed by the teacher. Fauziah and AbdulRahim (2015) affirm from their exploration of teachers' belief and experiences about English writing teaching/learning in second language context. They emphasize on the use of model approach to teaching writing skills and they also confirm from past studies that students are poor in writing skills due to the fact that the teaching of writing is mainly based on product approach method which has negative effect on undergraduates. They also assert that in the recent time the teaching of writing has shifted from product to process approach method of teaching /learning writing skills but confirm research that teachers in Malaysia schools still continue with the product approach.

Teaching writing skills become more problematic for some English teacher than teaching other skills Akinwamide, (2012)

Research has shown that to develop students' writing skills teachers have to give clear instruction on the techniques to apply when carrying out writing activities and to effectively carry out these duty teachers in primary and secondary schools should be given proper training to improve their methods of teaching writing skills to enable them to to vary their methods David, 1991; Hu, 2003. & Kong, 2005. One of the oldest methods of teaching writing is the product approach method and is widely used classroom teachers as an instructional method of teaching writing and has been adopted by students all over the places. Researchers have argued that the product approach helps teachers to introduce different types of essays that help them to cover the syllabus on time. According to Chow 2007, this situation motivated the teachers slowly towards the product approach in the ESL writing instruction in the 1990s. It is believed that the product method of teaching writing encourages students to practice the production of an end product that is similar to a model essay or the one provided by the teacher McCrimmon, 1994, Deng, 2003. The basic aim is about providing linguistic knowledge to the students rather than improving their writing skills Pincas, 1982. In turn, students imitate the sentences to get familiarity with the content, copy and finally transform the models into a new essay to be as perfect as the one that they have imitated by focusing on the correct language Mourtaga, 2004. There are four different stages in the product approach in teaching writing as posits by Steele (2004), in the first stage, students are required to study the model texts followed by highlighting the features of the genre. For instance, in teaching how to write a formal letter, students' attention is focused on the language used to make formal requests. At the second stage when a learner reads a story, the focus will be on the techniques used to make the story interesting, and students do controlled practice of the highlighted features of the text separately, for example, practicing the key parts of a formal letter such as the positions of the addresses, salutation and the concluding part as features of a formal letter. The third stage shows the learners the organization of the ideas, which they believe is more important than the ideas it contains. The last stage is for students to compare written tasks to show language use and structures of the writer's discourse by using the skills, structures and vocabulary to produce their own write up.

Process Approach

According to Kroll (2001), process approach is like an umbrella to other writing courses, in the sense that learners through this approach engage in cyclical method of writing rather than a single short approach. Process approach focuses more on varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use, brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting. Caudery (1997) also regards process approach as writing that normally takes place through the making of series of multiple drafts of text such as pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing. To him, it is a motivating to both the teaching and students. According to Street (2004), the process approach model comprises of eight stages: The first stage is brainstorming by trying to bring out ideas through thinking (brainstorming) and discussion for instance, in brainstorming for the topic 'should rich people help the poor?' the left will present argument against while the right side provides argument for the topic. As the right provides points or reasons to support the topic on why the rich should be of help to the poor, the left proves reasons why the rich should not help the poor.

The second stage is planning whereby the students in the writing class share idea among themselves, critiquing and synthesizing the ideas before writing them down in their notes after seeing the importance of the ideas and the third stage which is the mind mapping has to do with learners organizing ideas into a mind map or linear form in an hierarchical order for easy construction of the text or essay.

The fourth stage is when the learners write the first draft which is carried out frequently in the classroom in groups or pairs and presented to colleagues in the class or group to criticize and contribute to the ideas and at the fifth stage is regarded as pair feedback in which case the learners exchanged their draft among themselves in the classroom for feedback by responding as readers of the drafts, this is a way of developing in learners the awareness of an audience that will read whatever they write, by so doing students will be conscious that someone is going to read their write-ups.

The sixth stage is editing: at this stage, the exchanged drafts are returned to the owners or writers for improvements based on the feedback or comments of their pairs in the classroom where applicable. So at the seventh stage is the stage the students write the final draft based on suggestions and their rethinking of the ideas for a better piece of text or essay. While the Stage

is the final stage whereby the teacher evaluates and gives feedback on what the students have written.

Comparison of the Two Approaches

Process the approach serves as a resource for comparing ideas at the starting point and it has to involve several drafts before writing out the final product. In this situation, the writer has to follow some steps by considering the audience, the purpose and the type of essay that he/she is about to write. For instance, the writer should know whether he is writing on narrative, descriptive or argumentative essay and then consider who is going to read the essay ie is it for the general public or for the examiner, this will guide the writer for the choice of words. Therefore, whatever approach decided to use depend on the writer. The formal letter would perhaps more suited to a product-driven approach in which case focus is on the layout, style, organization, and grammar would greatly help students in dealing with this type of writing task. Such as discursive and narrative essays may take process-driven approaches which focus on writer's ideas, brainstorming and discussion in groups, collaborative writing and exchange of texts help the writer to direct their writing to their audience.

The table below gives the differences in the two approaches:

Process Writing	Product Writing
1. text as a resource for comparison	1. Imitation of text model
2. ideas are starting point	2. Organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves
3. Students write more than one draft	3. Here students write only one draft.
.4. More global, focused on purpose, theme, text type and readers are focused on.	4. Features are highlighted to include controlled practice of those features
5. Collaborative writing is done here	5. Writing here is individual
6. Emphasis is more on creative process	6. Emphasis is more on the product of others.

There is contradictory opinion on the application of product approach in teaching essay to students, where some researchers agreed that it is helping others believed that it has a negative effect on students' proficiency in writing skills Ackerman, 1993, Ferris, 2007. Studies have shown that the product approach is helpful for learners to write essays but sometimes it hinders them from achieving better writing abilities Nazim & Ahmad, 2012.

Studies have also shown that many teachers find this method easier and comfortable to use by adopting already written essay or letter of others because that is the only way they can help learners to identify their mistakes and correct them. It helps the teachers to manage their time and serve as the only way to reach all students in the classroom that is over populated and students find an opportunity to correct their mistakes and learn to use correct grammar and sentence structure by going through the teacher's corrections. 'This method works effectively when the teachers mark the essays as soon as possible before the students forget what they have written' Musa, Lie & Azman, (2012).

According to Campbell, (1998), Badger & White (2000) in the process approach the students have to follow some steps and practices in the process of learning how to write by generating ideas and the completion of writing through series of activities ranging from planning, gathering information, drafting, revising and editing occurs in four stages: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. The pre-writing stage is when the learners gather or brainstorm for ideas and then write draft during the drafting stage in an outline or rough sketch of the topic/issue which they will read and share with peers in the classroom to read and pass comments. After peers' comments, the writers go through them to make corrections to their writings in line with the comments of the peers' feedback then rewrite it before the teacher edits correcting the errors and the give back to the students for the final stage of writing.

Moving away from teacher centered approach to teaching writing to students' centered approach is argued by Walsh (2004) that process approach to writing assist learners to attain effective writing skills by comprehending the contents of the write-up and conveying the right meaning of what they write. The advocates of process approach strongly believe that it is through process approach that students can actually know what to write excellently than genre approach since it is student centered.

However, organization and grammar are not taken into consideration by process approach, though the final stage of process approach has to do with editing the mechanical accuracy of

the language of the text. Process approach is concerned with the skills of planning, drafting and writing with the believe that proficiency is attained through repeated writing and rewriting the same topic in writing procedures not minding whether the writing is letter or academic research paper. The practice of writing is the same regardless of what the topic is Badger & White, (2000).

Findings

Research Question 1: *What was the writing performance of the degree students of CAILS in experimental and control groups before intervention?*

Table 1

Students' Performance before intervention in Process genre and product Approach Groups

Group		No.	Mean	S.D	Minimum	Maximum
Process Genre	Pretest	40	13.63	2.47	10.00	21.00
Product	Pretest	40	12.80	1.83	9.00	17.00

As shown in table 1 above, the participants in process genre approach group and the product approach groups have the pre-test mean scores of 13.63 and 12.80 respectively before the intervention. Showing that there is no significant difference in the performance of the students in the pre-test, sand since there is now significant difference between the scores of the two groups, it means that the participants in the two groups were homogeneous in characteristics and their performance is poor.

Research Question 2: *was there any difference in the performance of students taught with process-genre approach and those taught with product approach based on content?*

Table 2

Difference in the Performance of Students Taught with Process-Genre Approach and Those Taught with Product Approach Based on Content

Groups	No.	Mean Score	Mean Difference	Std.	Min	Max

Content (Process-Genre)	40	8.05	4.02	0.71	6.00	9.00
Content (Product)	40	4.03	-4.02	0.95	2.00	6.00

Table 2 indicated that after intervention the two groups were subjected to another test using the same questions for pre-test. The participants in the experimental group that were taught with process-genre approach had the mean score of 8.05 with a minimum score of 6.00 and a maximum score of 9.00 in the content of their written essay while the respondents in the control group that were taught with product approach had the mean score of 4.03 with a minimum score of 2.00 and a maximum score of 6.00 in the content of their written essay..

Research Question 3: *was there any difference in the performance of students taught with process-genre approach and those taught with product approach based on organisation?*

Table 3

Difference in the Performance of Students Taught with Process-Genre Approach and Those Taught with Product Approach Based on Organisation.

Groups	**No**	**Mean Score**	**Mean Difference**	**Std.**	**Min**	**Max**
Organisation (Process-Genre)	40	8.28	3.08	0.60	7.00	9.00
Organisation (Product)	40	5.20	-3.08	0.91	4.00	7.00

Table 3 revealed that the participants in the experimental group that were taught with process genre approach had the mean score of 8.28 with a minimum score of 7.00 and a maximum score of 9.00 in the organisation of ideas while participants in the control group that were taught with product approach had the mean score of 5.20 with a minimum score of 4.00 and a maximum score of 7.00 in the organisation of ideas in writing.

Research Question 4: *was there any difference in the performance of students taught with process-genre approach and those taught with product approach based on expression?*

Table 4

Difference in the Performance of Students Taught with Process-Genre Approach and Those Taught with Product Approach Based on Expression

Groups	No	Mean Score	Mean Difference	Std.	Min	Max
Expression (Process-Genre)	40	16.67	5.82	1.18	13.00	18.00
Expression (Product)	40	10.85	-5.82	1.73	7.00	13.00

Table 4 showed that participants in the experimental group that were taught with process genre approach had the mean score of 16.67 with a minimum score of 13.00 and a maximum score of18.00 in the expression of their write-up while the participants in the control group that were taught with product approach had the mean score of 10.85 with a minimum score of 7.00 and a maximum score of 13.00 in the expression of ideas in their essay writing.

Research Question 5: *was there any difference in the performance of students taught with process-genre approach and those taught with product approach based on mechanics?*

Table 5

Difference in the Performance of Students Taught with Process-Genre Approach and Those Taught with Product Approach Based on Mechanics

Groups	No	Mean Score	Mean Difference	Std.	Min	Max
Mechanics (Process-Genre)	40	8.57	3.74	0.68	7.00	9.00
Mechanics (Product)	40	4.83	-3.74	0.87	4.00	8.00

Table 5 showed that respondents in process genre group had the mean score of 3.57 with a minimum score of 7.00 and a maximum score of 9.00 in the mechanics of their write-up while

respondents in product approach group had the mean score of 4.83 with a minimum score of 4.00 and a maximum score of 8.00 in the mechanics of essay writing.

Research Question 6: *What was the writing performance of the degree students of CAILS in experimental and control groups after the interventions?*

Table 6

Students' Performance after Intervention in Process- genre and Product Approach Groups

Group		No.	Mean	S.D	Minimum	Maximum
Process Genre	Post-test	40	35.36	7.73	18.00	45.00
Product	Post-test	40	19.78	2.20	16.00	24.00

Table 6 above showed that the participants in process genre approach group and the product approach group have the post-test mean scores of 35.3.6 and 19.78 respectively after the intervention. So there is significant difference between the scores of the two groups, it means that the participants in the experimental group did better than the participants in the control group. It also indicated that there is positive achievement in the use of process-genre approach to teaching writing skill. Therefore, introducing this approach in teaching writing at all levels of education is a welcome development in classroom teaching more so that learners' centered approach to teaching is the issue of the day in education.

Research Question 7: *What is the effect of process-genre approach on students on CAILS' performance in essay writing?*

Table 7

Effect of Process-Genre Approach on CAILS Students' Performance in Essay Writing

Groups	No	Mean Score	Mean Difference	Std.	Min	Max
Process-Genre (Post-Test)	40	35.36	15.58	7.73	18.00	45.00
Product (Post-Test)	40	19.78	-15.58	2.20	16.00	24.00

Table 7 showed that the participants in the experimental group that is taught with process genre approach had the post-test mean score of 35.36 with a minimum score of 18.00 and a maximum score of 45.00 in Essay writing while the participants in the control group that were taught with product approach had the post-test mean score of 19.78 with a minimum score (16.00) and a maximum score of 24.00 in essay writing. The post-test mean difference of 15.58 of process-genre group revealed that the process-genre approach had positive effect on CAILS students' performance in essay writing. This shows the effect of process-genre approach to writing is a welcome development.

Discussion

The general purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of process-genre approach for teaching the students of tertiary institutions how to improve their essay writing. The idea was to find out whether the use of process-genre approach would improve students' ability to generate ideas to develop the content of any given topic, to the organization the ideas in a systematic order, explain with good expressions following the rules of grammar with subject and verb agreement, and mechanics free of punctuation and spelling errors to perform better in the academic task of writing essay.

The result of the pre-test showed that the performance of students is very poor in both groups showing the homogeneous position of the participants which is in line with Akinwamide (2012) Sarala et al (2014), and Thomas (2015) who assert that the performance of students in essay writing is very disturbing. Based on content, organization, expression, and mechanics, this study revealed that if students are properly thought with a process approach, learners will perform well in their essay writings and will positively influence academic writing at universities.

Conclusion

The two approaches can be said to be compatible in the sense that re-drafting and collaboration can be integrated with the practice of studying product model writing in the classroom. The process approach emphasizes collaborative work, discussion among students which are very important in generating and organizing ideas. Teachers of writing should involve the two approaches by focusing first on the organization of the writing before emphasizing on grammatical problems of the students' writing. In other words, the organization of ideas before grammatical mistakes because better organization leads to a reduction of other errors and clear

expression is the key point of writing. Therefore, the combination of the two approaches can go a long way to help students to achieve success in writing skills.

It is also important to note that the nature of learners and cultural background could also determine the approach to use by the writing teacher. To some, the product approach is favorable for them especially where students are not used to brainstorming for ideas by themselves while in another context the process approach can be used to achieve better results. So an effective teacher of writing should be able to modify the approaches and methods that suit the demands of the students.

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