TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PEER ASSESSMENT OF ESSAY WRITING AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN LAGELU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:
The study investigated teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo state. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Twenty senior secondary schools were randomly selected from twenty-three private senior secondary schools in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo state. Two English Language teachers were selected from each school. In all, a total number of forty (40) teachers participated in the study. The instrument used for data collection was Teachers' Perception of Peer Assessment in Essay Writing Scale (r= 0.78). Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage scores, mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics of t-test. It was found out that teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government was very positive. There was no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government. In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that teachers should create a friendly and supportive environment that will make students to peer assess their essay writings properly. Also, teachers should give guidelines to students before they peer assess their mates' essay writings.

Keywords: teachers' perception, peer assessment, essay writing

1. Introduction

English language has four basic language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four language skills are interconnected and important for English language proficiency. The fundamental objective of the English language curriculum

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like other language curriculum in Nigeria is the mastery of the four skills. Among the four skills, writing has been seen as the most difficult because it involves act of generating ideas and organising them into readable texts. According to Babajide (1996), writing is the act of expressing one's thoughts or feelings through the use of words and punctuation marks on the surface of the paper. Omaggio (2013) views writing as a continuum of activities that range from more mechanical or formal aspect of writing down on one hand to a more complex act of composing on the other hand. Ahmed (2010) defined writing as a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about specific topic, analyse and classify any background knowledge.

Adegbile and Alabi (2007) believe that writing involves composing. This implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narrative, description or to transform information into new tests as in expository or argumentative essay.

According to Elizabeth (2014), writing is an important skill for learning to take place. Without writing, language learning remains incomplete. Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) considered writing skills to be foundation to success in academics, work place and global economy. Writing skill is an indispensable skill in all-round advancement. Kolawole (2003) said writing skill occupies a more prominent position among other skills. It is one of the most important activities of a literate community.

In English language, the skill of writing is taught and tested in many ways. It is tested as continuous writing which is made up of Essay and letter writing. Writing skill is not limited to essay writing only; it is also useful in comprehension and summary writing. Students that cannot write effectively would not be able to answer questions correctly in comprehension, they would not be able to write to answer questions correctly in comprehension, they would not be able to write error free sentences in summary writing and they would find it difficult to put down lecture notes in class. Students' ability to acquire basic skills needed for understanding and expressing their ideas in their own words is facilitated by essay writing. Studies have shown that writing skill is related to students' ability to succeed in various academic subjects (Ohia and Ogunbiyi, 199; Fakeye, 2002; Ogunyemi, 2012; Igubor, 2015).

Another reason why a good skill of writing is important is because learners' general academic performance is assessed through the medium of writing. Thus, students' performance in writing could affect their achievement, not only in English language as a subject but also in other subjects (Daly, 1979, Onwuegbuzie, 1997; Igubor, 2015). As one of the major aspects of English language, writing is tested at examinations such as West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) SSCE in form of continuous writing which involves essay and letter writing.

According to Amechi (2005), essay is a piece of writing which is composed on related ideas and made up of paragraphs. It requires a creative mind to be able to present thoughts and emotions and put them into writing. Essay writing involves such practices as compiling content materials for the essay; organising the materials into logical order (paragraphing); using appropriate expression in terms of appropriate

vocabulary, sentence construction and mechanics: punctuation, capitalisation, spelling and grammar (Fakeye, 2002; Igubor, 2015). Oruche (2014) said to write an essay or composition is to compose a piece of writing by carefully putting together some ideas or points which are part of a given topic. Anieke (2003) views an essay as piece of writing which discusses any topic usually; the essay is short in length and can be written within a short time or less than an hour. This is the type set for students of secondary school and equivalent levels of education.

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) syllabuses 2016-2020 show that marks are allotted to different aspects of English language test as follows: Essay/letter writing, 50 marks; Comprehension, 20 marks; Summary, 30 marks making a total of 100 marks. Essay writing carries 50 marks which is 45% of the total marks obtainable in English language paper one, the skill of writing is also required in other two aspects (comprehension and summary). It means a student that lacks good writing skill will not perform well in all the three aspects of paper one which means that such a student's probability of passing the examination will be very low.

In spite of the efforts put in the teaching of English language and emphasis placed on the learning of the language, students still do not perform very well in it. The Chief Examiner of the West African Examination Council has always reported students' poor performance in English language. The poor performance of students in English language at public examinations has been explained to be a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria (Fakeye, 2011). English language scholars have attributed the persistent poor performance of students in the language and nearly all compulsory subjects at school certificate level to students' poor writing skills (Kolawole, 1998, 2003; Oden, 1999; Olaboopo, 1999 and Fakeye, 2001).

The percentage of students that passed public examination in recent years is very low, most especially in English language. In 2014, the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) recorded 52.97 percent (878,040) of the total 1,552,758 of the candidates who sat for the examination obtained credits in five or more subjects including English language and mathematics. In 2015, 38.68 percent (529,425) of the total 1,593,442 candidates had similar results. Also WASSCE conducted in 2016, 31.28 percent (529,425) of the total 1,692,435 candidates had similar results. In 2017, 59.22 percent (923,486) of the total 1,559,162 candidates who sat for the examination obtained credits and above in five or more subjects including English language and mathematics and April/May WASSCE conducted in 2018, 49.98 percent (923,486) of the total 1,572,396 candidates who sat for the examination made credits and above in five or more subjects including English language and mathematics. The Chief Examiner observes that tests on Oral English, Lexis and Structures and Essay writing are the three aspects of English language that have continually posed problem to students in English language examinations which have resulted in the perennial poor performance in the subject. The performance of the candidates in composition was generally poor. Majority of the examiners observed that in the scripts of the candidates, in composition they have little or no exposure to writing skills.

Scholars have carried out different researches on how students' performance in English language can improve especially in the area of essay writing. Studies have been carried out on effective strategies for teaching essay writing and addressing other teacher and student-related factors. Most of these researches carried out came up with good contribution to the teaching and learning of essay writing but they have not been significant to improve students' performance in public examinations. Therefore, it means that there are more to be done to solve the problems of teaching and learning essay writing than just improving teaching strategies. According to Obemeata (1995), remarked that improving teaching methods and strategies alone cannot solve the problem of poor performance in school.

Ngonebu and Oluikpe (2000) stated that a common feature in our institutions of learning is the large number of students taught by a single teacher. The problem of large number of students made it difficult for English language teachers to teach essay writing meaningfully. The problem of large classes has been studied by scholars. Scholars like Hayes (1997), Coleman (1989) and Ur (1996) have said a lot on the definition of a large class. From these, we conclude that a large class is one where the students are more than the teacher wishes to manage and where pedagogical resources are inadequate in relation to the number of students. On the problems associated with large classes, Locastro (2001) summarily classifies them into three of pedagogical, management-related and affective. Valerian (1991) large classes not only affect the quality of teaching but they can also affect learners' concentration. Habeshaw, Gribbs and Habeshaw (1992) provide a lengthy outline of disadvantages of large classes, some which are: students do not have the information they need, it is difficult to keep track of everything and isn't time to meet all the class objectives. To easy the difficult task that teacher of essay writing face in the course of teaching and marking of essay writing, the teacher will have no option than to adopt self-help measure. However, with this challenge, just few studies looked into the area of peer assessment of essay writing in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Topping (1998), defines peer assessment as "*an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status*". It is used to enhance learning as an effective way to increase motivation for students by engaging them in the evaluation process (Rimer, 2007) and to encourage peers to help each other to master the topic of learning.

Peer assessment also aims to describe the assessment processes that foster future learning and mitigate difficulties that are expected to occur. It also aims to transform students from mere receivers of knowledge from teachers to memorise and recall on tests to active learners and participants in learning process, interact, search and explore and research to find relationship between objects in order to generate new knowledge characterised by critical thinking and creativity. It also helps to ensure a quality education for all students (Rogers and Thratt, 2000).

Peer assessment is the tool with which students evaluate the quality of their peers' performance and that stimulates students to reflect, discuss and collaborate (Strijbos and Slujsmans, 2010). It requires students to make notes or scores or both about

their peers' product or performance based on standards of excellence for them. Students also participate in determining those standards (Boud and Falchikov, 2007).

Spiller (2009), views peer assessment as a mutual process between students. The participation of students in commenting on the work of others increases their capacity for making intellectual choices and judgements, as well as the students receiving feedback from their peers helps them acquire a wide range of ideas about their work to promote and achieve development and improvement in their learning. Students' learning opportunities are less when they become passive recipients of assessments results. The future of learning requires the involvement of students in the learning and evaluation process, which reflects to improving results, both short and long-term, as well as learning in the future (Thomas, Martin and Pleasants, 2011).

Teacher's gender is clearly part of the educational construction, as gender has always been associated with language teaching and learning (Appleby, 2014). Gender is connected directly with different opportunities and barriers which shape the composition of the language teachers. According to Dee (2006), the teacher's gender not only shapes communication between teachers and students but also an important factor in portraying the teacher as a "gender-specific role model". Students are more likely to actively engage in class, be on their best behaviour and perform at high standard when the gender of the teacher matches theirs.

So, male and female teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing will determine how they tend to be supportive, provide an enabling and positive classroom atmosphere.

This study investigated the teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo state.

2. Statement of the Problem

Essay writing is an important aspect in English language as students' good performance in English language is mandatory for admission to all levels of higher education in the country. However, reports have shown that students' performance in essay writing is very low. As a way of addressing the problem, researchers have carried out studies on different methods and strategies of teaching essay writing in schools. Despite the contribution of these studies to the teaching and learning of English language, the problem of students' poor performance still persists. Scholars have therefore advocated a shift in research focus from teachers' teaching method to solving the problem of large classes which made teaching and marking of essay writing difficult for English language teachers. Literature have shown that there is a strong link between peer assessment and performance of students in various aspects of English language like comprehension, summary and grammar but peer assessment of essay writing has not been given much research attention. Therefore, this study investigated teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo state.

3. Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:
1) What is the teachers' perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction?
2) What is the difference between male and female teachers' perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction?

3.1 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it will reveal teachers' perception of peer assessment as an alternative strategy for evaluating learning outcomes in essay writing. Thereby, providing information on the most viable method of evaluating learning outcomes in essay writing. Also, this study would guide teachers who are in constant search for improved performance in essay writing on areas of professional development needs. Finally, the study would add a significant contribution to the existing research on the solution to the poor performance of students in essay writing and English language.

3.2 Methodology

The study covered twenty public senior secondary schools which were randomly selected from twenty-three in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. The participants were two (2) English language teachers selected from each school. In all, forty (40) English language teachers participated in the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The instrument used for data collection was Teachers' Perception of Peer Assessment in Essay Writing Scale (r=0.78). Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage scores, mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics of t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

Research Question 1: What is teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing Among Senior Secondary students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo State?

Table 1: Showing teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std.D
1	Peer assessment promotes collaborative learning of essay writing	8 (32)	32 (8)	-	-	3.80	.405
2	Peer assessment is time consuming	10 (25)	12 (30)	10 (25)	8 (20)	2.60	1.081
3	Peer assessment makes students to participate actively in essay writing instruction	20 (50)	14 (35)	5 (12.5)	1 (2.5)	3.33	.797
4	Peer assessment increases students' interest in essay writing	18 (45)	19 (47.5)	3 (7.5)	-	3.38	.628
5	Usage of peer assessment enables students to learn from their peers	31 (77.5)	7 (17.5)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.5)	3.70	.649
6	Peer assessment is not objective	6 (15)	17 (42.5)	10 (25)	7 (17.5)	2.55	.959

7	Peer assessment is prone to manipulation by students	3 (7.5)	11 (27.5)	22 (55)	4 (10)	2.33	.764
8	Peer assessment fosters future learning and mitigate difficulties that are expected to occur in essay writing instruction	15 (37.5)	21 (52.5)	2 (5)	2 (5)	3.23	.768
9	Peer assessment makes students learn from their peers's errors	21 (52.5)	7 (17.5)	11 (27.5)	1 (2.5)	3.20	.939
10	Peer assessment stimulates students to reflect and discuss	25 (62.5)	12 (30)	3 (7.5)	-	3.55	.639
11	Peer assessment enhances strengths through training students on how to evaluate their work	15 (37.5)	22 (55)	3 (7.5)	-	3.30	.608
12	Peer assessment makes students learn mechanics of English language	22 (55)	17 (42.5)	1 (2.5)	-	3.50	.641
13	Usage of peer assessment stimulates students' ability to think very fast	19 (47.5)	15 (37.5)	4 (10)	2 (5)	3.28	.847
14	Peer assessment decreases students' dependence on their teacher	15 (37.5)	19 (47.5)	3 (7.5)	3 (7.5)	3.15	.864
15	Peer assessment facilitates the development of students' critical reading and analysis skill	18 (45)	17 (42)	4 (10)	1 (2.5)	3.30	.758
16	Peer assessment develop students' editing skills	8 (20)	28 (70)	3 (7.5)	1 (2.5)	3.08	.616
17	Peer assessment makes students acquire a wide range of ideas about their work in Essay writing instruction	17 (42.5)	17 (42.5)	6 (15)		3.28	.716
18	Peer assessment enables students to become more aware of their strength	22 (55)	11 (27)	6 (15)	1 (2)	3.35	.834
19	Peer assessment makes students to be more aware of their problems in writing	16 (40)	19 (47)	5 (12)	-	3.28	.679
20	Peer assessment makes students to know how marks are gained and lost	17 (42.5)	9 (22.5)	8 (20)	86 (15)	2.93	1.118
Weighted Average= 3.21							

Note: Percentage in Parenthesis.

Table 1 reveals that teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing Among Senior Secondary students is high (WA= 3.21). Analysis further shows that teachers perceive that peer assessment promotes collaborative learning of essay writing (π=3.80). Peer assessment is time consuming (π=2.60). Peer assessment makes students to participate actively in essay writing instruction (π=3.33). Peer assessment increases students' interest in essay writing (π=3.38). Usage of peer assessment enables students to learn from their peers (π=3.70). Peer assessment is not objective (π=2.55). Peer assessment fosters future learning and mitigate difficulties that are expected to occur in essay writing instruction (π=3.32). Peer assessment makes students learn from their peers' errors (π=3.20). Peer assessment stimulates students to reflect and discuss (π=3.58). Peer assessment enhances strengths through training students on how to evaluate their work (π=3.30). Peer assessment makes students learn mechanics of English language (π=3.50). Usage of peer assessment stimulates students' ability to think very fast (π=3.28). Peer assessment decreases students' dependence on their

teacher (π=3.26). Peer assessment facilitates the development of students' critical reading and analysis skill (π=3.30). Peer assessment develop students' editing skills (π=3.08). Peer assessment makes students acquire a wide range of ideas about their work in Essay writing instruction (π=3.28). Peer assessment enables students to become more aware of their strength (π=3.35). Peer assessment makes students to be more aware of their problems in writing (π=3.28). Peer assessment makes students to know how marks are gained and lost (π=2.93).

Research Question 2: What is the difference between male and female teachers in their perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction Among Senior Secondary students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo State?

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference between male and female teachers in their perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction Among Senior Secondary students

Gender	N	Mean	Std.D	T	df	Sig.	Remark
Male	17	63.06	6.00				Not Significant
Female	23	64.83	5.56	-0.962	38	0.342	

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in their perception of peer assessment in essay writing instruction among senior secondary students (t = -0.96; df = 38; P>0.05). The table also shows that female (π=64.83) teachers have higher perception than male teachers (π=63.06).

5. Discussion of Findings

The main focus of this study was to determine the teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students. Table 1 showed Teachers' Perception of Peer Assessment of Essay Writing among Senior Secondary Students in Lagelu Local Government Area, Oyo state. From table 1, it can be deduced that teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government was very positive. Larger percentage of the respondents responded that students provide feedback to other students to help them improve in essay writing. In support of this finding, Race (2001) says Peer Assessment encourages deep learning by students, which leads to improvement in students' performance than the other regular assessment practices. Also, Juwaah (2003) states that Peer Assessment is an effective and efficient assessment strategy that leads to high academic achievement of students. Sadler and Good (2006) state that Peer Assessment apart from enabling students to grade their peers based on teachers' benchmarks; the practice apart from saving the teachers time, also improves students understanding of the course materials.

Table 2 indicates difference between male and female Teachers' Perception of Peer Assessment of Essay Writing among Senior Secondary Students in Lagelu Local

Government Area, Oyo state. Table 2 revealed that there was no significance difference between male and female teachers' perception of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu local government. The difference between the perception of male and female teachers of peer assessment of essay writing is not large enough to say that teachers' perceptions of peer assessment of essay writing are related to gender. In this view, Tesnim Ounis (2017) from his study reported that there was no significant difference in senior secondary teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing. Both male and female teachers had favourable perceptions towards the role of peer assessment in essay writing instruction.

6. Conclusion

The study focused on teachers' perception of peer assessment of essay writing in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. It was concluded that essay writing could be enhanced by peer assessment and the study has provided a better understanding of peer assessment of essay writing among senior secondary students in Lagelu Local Government.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that English language teachers should create a friendly and supportive environment that will make students to peer assess their essay writings properly. Also, teachers should give guidelines to students before they peer assess their mates' essay writings. Students should be given opportunity to ask questions.

Students should be encouraged to join any English language club in their schools, so that they can learn from others. Clubs like young readers club, press club, literary and debating society and so on. This will improve their English language usage.

The Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM) and other educational bodies should organize seminars, workshops and other in-service training for English language teachers on how they can teach their students to peer assess their essay writings.

Parents should provide the necessary materials such as textbooks, dictionaries, writing materials and notebooks for their children. They should also help those students that are performing below expectation by organizing private lessons for better performance.

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