CAN CONFERENCES AND MODELLING STRATEGIES IMPROVE STUDENTS' INTEREST AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ESSAY WRITING?

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Abstract:

The study reported here was on the effects of writing conference and teacher modelling strategies on Senior School Two (SS2) students' interest and achievement in essay writing. The study used quasi experimental design of the non equivalent pre-test/post-test experimental-control group subtype. From a population of 9,244 senior secondary students in 5 Local Government (LGAs) of Central Education Zone of Plateau State, a sample of 95 students was selected from two intact classes using a multi-stage sampling technique. One of the sampled classes formed Experimental Group One while the other formed Experimental Group Two for an experiment that lasted for a duration of six weeks. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. Two instruments namely Writing Achievement Test (WAT) and Questionnaire on Students' Interest in Essay writing (QSIEW) were used for data collection. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that both strategies enhanced students' achievement in essay writing. However, students taught essay writing using writing conference strategy outperformed their counterparts taught using teachers' modelling in assigned writing tasks and tested in the writing achievement test. The finding further indicated that students taught via conference strategy gained significantly higher mean interest rating than those taught using teacher modelling strategy. Based on the findings, the study recommended that combining writing conferencing and modelling strategies in the teaching of essay writing could bring about increased interest in writing and better writing outcomes among secondary school students.

Keywords: writing, conferencing, modelling, interest, achievement, English

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the four basic skills secondary school students need before, during and after school. Writing is a skill in itself and a means of learning other school subjects. It is the basic means of communication between the teacher and students on the one hand and the students and the larger public on the other. Maynes and Scott (2011) describe writing as an aspect of social networking which is increasingly in use as a communication tool for educational and social applications. Teachers ask test and examination questions, which require the students to give answers in writing.

So much can be revealed about a students' academic standing by merely looking at his written work. Written answers give an overall picture of the writer's choice of words, use of punctuation signs, unity or logicality of ideas, and general grammatical expression. Written answers are indicators of how successful or otherwise a student is in his/her learning. Students who do well in the area of writing also stand the chance of doing well in the world of work where they are expected to engage in both personal and official communication such as sending emails, preparing memos, taking minutes of meetings, and writing reports of various kinds. It is for the purpose of giving students a strong foundation in the different aspects of writing that the teaching of writing at the secondary school level incorporates a wide array of the genres of writing such as letter writing, narrative, descriptive, argumentative and expository compositions.

In teaching these different genres of writing, teachers have a duty to ensure that in general an essay has an acceptable structure made up of the *introduction*, *body* and *conclusion* (NTI, 2007). A good essay is also known for such marked attributes as *coherence*, *unity* of the paragraphs and its adherence to the *conventions* of writing. An essay has coherence it if has a good order and the relationships between the details are so clear that the resulting paragraph is easy to understand. An essay has unity when "*every sentence in the paragraph develops the idea stated in the topic sentence*" (Chapman, 2012, p. 20). The mechanics of writing include capitalization, inserting punctuation signs and indentation (Aliyu, 1996). The mechanics of writing make writing clearer and help reading comprehension. Essay witting takes 50 marks in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) English. The topics demand candidates to write a letter, a narrative, descriptive, a debate or an expository essay. The assessment of these essays is based on four criteria namely content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy (WAEC, 2014). Under content, the examiner watches out for ideas relevant to the question asked while organization refers to the way and manner sentences are ordered to form paragraphs and the unity of the entire paragraph to form a composition. Expression embraces such matters as appropriateness of writing style, tone, choice of words and diction, and variation in sentence structure. Under mechanical accuracy, issues of spelling, grammar usage and punctuation are considered. These key areas form part of the rubrics in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), which is both a qualifying examination for higher education and a qualification for completing secondary education in Nigeria. Students who go outside the writing rubrics are often

penalized. The background presented above raises many pertinent questions such as: How are the teachers teaching writing at the senior school level and how are students faring in the area of essay writing?

2. The Problem

The SSCE syllabus is clear about the learning outcomes expected of students at the senior school level. Classroom experience and research have indicated that essay writing is a major challenge to senior school students. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Chief Examiners' reports for English (2018, 2019) bear evidence that candidates display the problem of direct translations from vernaculars to English. Many of the candidates use their tenses wrongly while many have scrawled handwriting and show a poor understanding and usage of English language. All evidence tends to support the fact that writing is a challenge to secondary school students in Nigeria. In a study on difficult topics and achievement in English language, Udu (2017) found that students perceived *punctuation* and *paragraphing* as difficult topics under the component of writing while teachers perceived *spelling* and *paragraphing as* difficult topics. The conclusion can therefore, be reached that writing is a challenge to both teachers and students.

According to Nwogu and Nwoke (2010), due to the lack of knowledge of appropriate methodology, some teachers introduce students to free writing right from the first year of secondary education. This is a clear indication that they lack awareness of writing as a process. As a process, writing has to be understood from the point of view of a *skill* then as involving systematic *steps* to be followed (Lagan, 2013; Chapman, 2012). If writing is a skill, it means it can be taught, learnt, and practised following an acceptable procedure like other motor skills. From the starting point to the finished paper, the teacher is to ensure that the students engage in prewriting activities such as reading about the topic, asking pertinent questions and generating ideas useful to the topic. This is a preparing ground for the actual writing. During the actual writing stage, the writer is expected to produce the first draft without stopping to effect corrections. It is then followed by revision, editing, and proofreading (Lagan, 2013; Chapman, 2013).

In addition to underachievement, it has been noticed that secondary school students' interest in writing is fast declining. The reasons for low interest are many and varied. For some, writing is a laborious task because of its sub-components which need to be knit together. Describing its complex nature, Defazio, Jones, Ternnant, and Hook (2016) maintain that writing is a skill that is grounded in the cognitive domain. Many students feel that writing is a laborious and dreaded exercise that involves putting thoughts down on paper. The process requires one to not only master but to also apply the rules of grammar and spelling. Others have a hard time getting started with writing and maneuvering through its many other requirements such as sticking to one central idea in a paragraph, ensuring that the right words are used to express one's feelings and sticking to the requirements of punctuation. Moreover, they have to creatively organize ideas and use the mechanics of writing, a process which involves retrieving the right

word(s) to express an idea. This process is seen by many students as slow and tedious. Many questions come to mind: Could teaching strategy be the main reason why secondary school students' achievement in writing continues to decline? Does teaching writing using strategies like writing conference and modelling improve the situation?

3. Literature Review

Research on approaches of teaching writing has identified teacher's modelling or modelling (for short) and writing conferences as two of the commonest approaches in use in the classroom. The verb 'to model' refers to a situation when a teacher demonstrates a concept for a student (Haston, 2007). Salisu and Ransom (2014) define modelling as the act of demonstrating a new concept in order for the students to learn by observing. In the teaching /learning process, observation plays a fundamental role, especially its ability to give students the opportunity to observe the teacher's thought process. This makes modelling a very popular and common teaching strategy across disciplines and in all grades and ability classrooms (Salisu & Ransom, 2014). Research evidence has emerged that modelling provides less proficient L2 writers with the support they need to generate such aspects of a text as thesis statement, topic sentences, and support sentences (Macbeth, 2010). In their study on the role of modelling towards impacting quality education, Salisu and Ransom (2014) came to the conclusion that "*if we teach all children to read and write, then models, explanations, and demonstrations of how we go about reading and writing will be essential elements of instructional programs.*" (58). Abbuhl (2011) has also contended that the use of models has provided students the practical opportunities to imitate the 'correct' forms of writing from the teacher.

Charney and Carlson (1995) examined the effect of modelling on the ability of undergraduate students to write the methods section of a short experiment. After comparing the control group with the experimental group, the researchers found that the experimental group, which was taught writing using modelling had better organization of their write-ups as they were able to include details. In another study, Abbuhl (2011) used a controlled/posttest design with stimulated data to examine the effects of two types of model on the ability of two groups of writers. In one group comprising native speakers of English with a high proficiency the researcher taught using models only and in the other group comprising non-native speakers with lower proficiency the researcher taught using a combination of models and explicit instruction. The study found that the group taught writing using models in combination with explicit instruction outperformed their counterparts that received instruction using models only. The same study reported that the instructed group also significantly outperformed the non-instructed group on the quiz one month after treatment.

In Nigeria, a few studies investigated the effect of modelling strategy on students' composition writing with varying results. One of such studies is by Akighir (2013) in which the experimental group, which was taught using modelling performed better on writing achievement test than the control group which was taught using the conventional

method. In a similar study, Chia (2016) found that teacher's modelling strategy led to a better performance in assigned writing tasks than students who were taught with a different strategy. In Chia's study, no significant difference was observed in the achievement of urban and rural students who were taught with the modelling strategy.

Despite its numerous advantages, Haston (2007) warns that when used inappropriately, modelling can be a 'crutch that actually prevents students from learning' (p26). Both modelling and writing conferences have been described as effective strategies for writing instruction. Both strategies are process approaches and

> *"…characterized by the timely and responsive use of instruction that teaches students how to write specific purposes, targets support as writing tasks are undertaken, provides timely and specific feedback to focus improvement efforts, gives instruction in specific sub-skills of the tasks (punctuation, paragraphing, sentence combining), and provides models or exemplars, including teaching students to use rubrics that clarify targeted standards as growth schemes to work toward in their own writing tasks."* (Maynes& Scott, 2011, p.3)

Similar to modelling, a number of studies have made the claim that writing conferences help students become very proficient writers. But what does the term writing conference mean? Researchers use different names to refer to conference writing. Some call it 'one-to-one teaching' (Calkins, 1986; Consalvo, 2011) while others call it 'conversation' (Newkirk, 1995; Anderson, 2018). Whether looked upon as *"private conversations between teacher and student about the student's writing or writing process"* (Sperling, 1991, p.2) or as *"an interactive approach to the teaching of writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting/revising, and editing their own work"* (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p.131), the writing conference is a reaction to students' writing needs and provides the teacher with the opportunity to gain a good *"understanding of where students are coming from and where they are currently at in their writing development"* (Sinchak, 2015, p.16). Proponents of this strategy believe that writing conferences build very strong relationships between the teacher and his students. The nature of the relationships that grow out of writing conferences are not the by-product of conferring—they are one of the important goals, since these relations are central to students' growth as writers (Anderson, 2018). Writing conference can be done individually or with small groups and can be done before, during or after reading. Different from whole-class instruction, writing conference involves four basic steps (Anderson, 2018). The first step involves probing or researching (Sinchak, 2015) to know or discover what the student is doing as writing. During this step, the teacher has to *"observe and interview to understand what the child is trying to do as a writer"* (Calkins, Hartman & White, 2005, p.7). The second step involves assessing to know how well the student is doing. The teacher can point out students' strong and weak points as they engage in writing. Step three involves deciding what to teach the student, which can be in the form of a mini lesson. During the last stage, the teacher focuses on linking what the student learned to the other areas of writing in

which s/he could practice the skill (Sinchak, 2015). In using this strategy, the teacher should make efforts to teach the student how to do better what he is doing.

With writing conferences, responsibilities are shared between the teacher and the student and these make both the teacher and student to find joy in the writing process (Calkins, 1986). It is recommended by Graves (1992) that an effective writing conference should have the following six characteristics, (a) a predictable structure, (b) focus on a few points (c) demonstrate solutions to students' problems, (d) permit role reversals, (e) encourage the use of a vocabulary appropriate for writing, (f) stimulate pleasure in writing. The teacher using this strategy focuses on one language skill at a time and assigns tasks to students. He ensures that he moves round the groups to monitor to see if everyone is doing what they are supposed to be doing. Writing conference as an instructional strategy has many advantages to both the teacher and students. Network Support (nd) states that writing conferences provide immediate feedback. It creates a positive attitude among students towards writing and motivates them to improve their work. Also, it structures the teaching process around the students' skill level and understanding. And it addresses and improves writing skills including the process of writing. It helps teachers to know more about their students' writing needs and this helps them in remedial lesson preparation. During conferences, students can showcase their writing styles while teachers can recognize the students' strengths and weaknesses (Bayraktar, 2012).

Researchers who have investigated writing conferences have reached different conclusions about the strategy. Writing conferences make teachers and students build an excellent relationship that leads to academic collaboration culminating to writing as an enjoyable experience. Consalvo (2011) maintains that both verbal and non-verbal elements of behaviour that are shown during the interactions between the teacher and students inside a writing conference classroom lead to an enhanced understanding of how these encounters can promote students' learning. Based on reviewed studies, Bayraktar (2012) argued that writing conferences increased students' learning more than traditional methods in three ways: (1) conferencing allows students to observe a real listener, who is asking questions and reflecting on writers' texts, (2) it enables hands-on activity in which students' own texts are in hand, and (3) it provides an informal and friendly atmosphere. Fitzgerald and Stamm (1990) after examining the influence of conferences of 16 first graders' revision concluded that conferences did influence revision for children. Two years later, they maintained that writing conferences represent one promising means of stimulating revision activity even for beginning writers (Fitzgerald & Stamm, 1992). As already noted, writing conferences can take diverse forms. Mochizuki's (2019) study focused on how oral interactions during group writing conferences can shed light on second language writer's learning thesis writing. Using two doctoral students in group writing conferences by the learning centre of an Australian university, Mochizuki was able to generate data through audio-recording of group discussions, interviews and observation and after analysis came to the conclusion that L2 doctoral students 'model' in their minds as drivers of their learning of thesis writing. In

one other study, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) determined the effects of writing workshop on abilities of 21 First Grade students to become confident and independent writers. Utilizing mixed method approach involving the use of mini-lessons, Jasmine and Weiner (2007) made the 21 participants to conference with one another and occasionally with the lesson teacher. Finding showed that collaborative writing activities are influential in improving the students' attitudes towards writing. Recommendations were given which include encouraging students to share their writing with classmates and teacher. In a related research, al-Hroub, Shami and Evans (2016) investigated the differential effects of the writers' workshop approach on the second language English writing skills of upper primary pupils with varying writing abilities. The sample was 21 fifth grade pupils from a private primary school in Beirut, Lebanon. The writers' workshops were conducted twice a week over a period of eight consecutive weeks. An opinion essay served as a pre-test and posttest in order to gauge writing related outcomes across all writing ability groups. The writers' workshops intervention was found to result in a differential group effect where above average writers benefitted more than less proficient writers. The study recommended among others that teachers should encourage writing workshops in their class for effective and proficiency in writing skills.

From the forgoing evidence, both writing conference and teacher modelling are considered suitable strategies for teaching writing both as a skill and as a process. Experts (Anderson, 2018) suggest that when teaching writing using conference strategy, only one aspect of the language should be focused upon at a time. Additionally, Lerner (2005) contends that conferencing is suitable for large classes and when students come from diverse backgrounds with varied preparations. What remains to be seen is which of these strategies (conferencing and modelling) leads to better learning outcomes in essay writing among senior school students. The researchers are not aware of any research that has compared the effects of these two strategies on secondary school students' interest and achievement in essay writing. In the light of the above gap, the present study compared the effects of writing conference and teacher modelling strategies on senior school students' interest and achievement in essay writing in Central Education Zone of Plateau, Nigeria.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored on Lev Vygotsky's (1920) and Jean Piaget's (1934) contributions to the theories of cognitive development and developmental psychology found in early work linking these sciences with composition theory. Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory believes that the intellect develops as individuals are confronted with new knowledge and confusing ideas and as they struggle to solve the problems and the differences. It is Vygotsky's assumption that the learner's quest for comprehending the new knowledge leads him to link it to his prior knowledge and construct new meaning. Social development theory is the foundation of constructivism. The theorist describes language as the most important tool for gaining social knowledge from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) who may be parents, teachers, coaches,

experts/professionals, peers and computers. Vygotsky notes that through interaction with members of the society, the child can be constructive in developing interpersonal communication that leads to constructive and effective communication. The idea of learning as a form of apprenticeship (Consalvo, 2011) springs forth from the social process nature of the teacher-student relationship where language plays the key role as a basic tool for communication. The teacher is the expert who mainly models or demonstrates learning while the learner learns by observing the teacher. Flower and Hayes (1981) provide the groundwork for further research into how thought processes influence the writing process debate. Writing conference was developed from the early work of Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and other researchers in the 1980's.

2.3 Research Questions
In the present study, the following questions were addressed.
1) What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing strategy and those taught using teacher's modelling?
2) What is the difference in the mean pre-interest and post-interest ratings of students taught essay writing using conferencing strategy and those taught teacher's modelling?

2.4 Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.
1) There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing and teacher's modelling.
2) There is no significant difference between the mean pre-interest and post-interest ratings of students taught essay writing using conferencing and teacher's modelling.

3. Methods

3.1 Design
Using a pre-test/post-test quasi experimental design, which is ideal when true experiment is not feasible (Campbell & Stanley, 1996) the researchers put two intact classes into Experimental Group 1 (40 students) and Experimental Group 2 (45 students) teaching them with writing conference and teacher's modelling respectively. It is recommended that when random assignment of subjects to groups is not possible, this method be used (Ali, 2006).

3.2 Participants
After explaining the purpose of the study to the participants and securing relevant approval from the authorities concerned, the study used a sample of 95 Senior School Two (SS 2) students who were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. The study took place during the 2018/2019 academic session. The area of study was Central

Education Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria. The zone has five LGAs sharing boundaries with Nasarawa, Taraba, Kaduna and Bauchi States. During the first stage of sampling, two LGAs were selected out of the 5 LGAs in the study area by random sampling technique. At the second stage, one school was selected from each of the LGAs selected through a simple random sampling technique. At the third stage, one intact class was selected from each school selected at the second stage by simple random sampling. Simple random sampling technique was again used at the fourth stage to assign one of the selected classes to Experimental Group 1 (treated with conferencing strategy) and Experimental Group 2 (teacher's modelling).

3.3 Data Collection

Two instruments namely, 'Writing Achievement Test' (WAT) and 'Questionnaire on Students' Interest in Essay Writing' (QSIEW) were developed by the researchers and used for data collection. The WAT was a form of narrative essay on the topic, "How I spent my last holiday." The students were asked to write an essay of not more than 450 words on the above topic. The same question was rephrased and used as posttest. The second instrument, QSIEW was a questionnaire designed to investigate students' interest in essay writing. The instrument comprised 10 items with options of SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree) and SD (Strongly Disagree) which were weighted 5,4,3,2, and 1 respectively. Students picked the option that best represented their opinion on each item. To determine the reliability of the instruments, the instruments were trial tested on 20 students within the study area who were not part of the main study. The results were used to compute the instrument's reliability using Kuder-Richardson 21 for WAT and Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for QSIEW. A reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained for WAT while that of QSIEW was found as 0.78. Both instruments were considered reliable since they met Emaikwu's (2013) recommendation of 0.70 as minimum coefficient. The instruments were supported with mini-lesson plans designed by the researchers following the four recommended steps by Anderson (2018). For Experimental Group 1, the lesson plans were guided by the framework presented in Fitzgerald and Stamm (1992) allowing students to write on the topic of their choice. Two days later, the students met to discuss at least four of the essays and one or two days later, they made their revisions before presenting the final draft for assessment. For the second group taught using modelling, they were presented with two model essays created by the researchers. They were also given explanations on its grammatical and organizational features. They were then asked to complete controlled writing activities that altered the model essays, after which they were asked to create their essays independently. For administration of tests, these were done in the first week before treatment (pre-test) and last week after treatment (post-test). The entire duration of the lessons were four weeks after which a post-test was administered in the sixth week. Students' scripts were marked then coded for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

Data collected were analyzed and the results presented in Tables 1-4 below according to the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing strategy and those taught using modelling strategy?

Table 1: Mean achievement scores and standard deviation of students
taught essay writing using conferencing and those taught using modelling groups

| | | Pre WAT | | Post WAT | | Mean |
Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Gain
Conferencing	40	10.70	4.61	21.05	5.87	10.70
Modelling	45	09.96	4.52	16.62	5.75	06.66
Mean Difference		0.74		04.43		04.04

Table 1 presents mean achievement scores and standard deviation of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies. In the conference group, the table reveals that = 10.70; SD=4.61 for pre WAT, and = 21.05; SD=5.87 for post WAT while in the modelling group = 9.96; SD=4.52 for pre WAT, and = 16.62: SD=5.75 for post WAT. The mean gain for conferencing group was 10.70 while modelling group gained 6.66. The difference in the mean gains of the two groups was 4.04.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught essay writing using conference strategy and those taught using modelling strategy?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of interest for conferencing and modelling strategies

| | | Pre WIR | | Post WIR | | Mean |
Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Gain
Conferencing	40	1.71	0.28	3.30	0.47	1.59
Modelling	45	1.71	0.29	2.04	0.37	0.33
Mean Difference		0.00		1.26		1.26

Table 2 presents mean interest ratings and standard deviation of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies. In the conferencing group, the table reveals that = 1.71; SD=0.28 for pre WIR and = 3.30; SD=0.47 for post WIR while in the modelling group =1.71; SD=0.29 for pre WIR, and = 2.04; SD=0.37 for post WIR. The mean

gain for conferencing group was 1.59 while modelling group gained 0.33. The difference in the mean gains of the two groups was 1.26.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies.

Table 3: ANCOVA report on mean achievement scores of
students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2619.46	2	1309.73	180.75	0.00
Intercept	699.75	1	699.75	96.57	0.00
Pre WAT	2204.29	1	2204.29	304.19	0.00
Gp	270.64	1	270.64	37.35	0.00
Error	594.19	82	7.25		
Total	32956.00	85			
Corrected total	3213.65	84			

Table 3 presents an ANCOVA report on effect of conferencing strategy on students' achievement in essay writing. Result from the table reveals $F_{1, 82} = 37.35$ and $p = 0.00$ for group. Since the significant value (p) is less than the set significant value for the study ($p<0.05$), the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies was rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies

Table 4: ANCOVA report on mean interest ratings
of students taught essay writing using conferencing strategy and modelling strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	33.99	2	16.99	98.56	0.00
Intercept	11.53	1	11.53	66.83	0.00
Pre-WAT	0.39	1	0.39	2.28	0.14
Gp	33.68	1	33.68	195.27	0.00
Error	14.14	82	0.17		
Total	636.34	85			
Corrected Total	48.14	84			

Table 4 presents an ANCOVA report on the mean interest rating of students taught essay writing using conferencing and writing strategies. Result from Table 4 reveals $F_{1,82} = 195.27$ and $p = 0.00$ for group. Since the significant value (p) is less than the set significant value for the study ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling strategies was rejected.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This section makes a vivid discussion of findings by examining the similarities and differences in findings against the reviewed literature providing each finding according to the two research questions. After the discussion, a conclusion is drawn.

4.2.1 Difference in Achievement Scores between students taught essay writing using writing conference and modelling

Research Question one examined the difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing and those taught using modelling. To arrive at a decision, the average scores of the two groups were compared as illustrated in Table 1. Result on the difference in the achievement scores of students taught essay writing using conference strategy and those taught using modelling was statistically significant. The posttest means recorded after treatment indicated that the students taught essay writing using conferencing strategy performed better in the writing achievement test than their counterparts taught using modelling. This was enough grounds to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of students taught essay writing using conferencing and modelling. The likely explanation for this result could be attributed to the fact that the conference strategy provided the students with more room to practice and seek guidance from the teacher than modelling. Conference strategy of writing instruction encourages the formation of groups, which makes it easier for students to learn from one another. The use of mini-lessons as a sub-strategy under the conference strategy took into account the many writing needs of the participants. The strategy made each student to engage in writing tasks with full eagerness. Bayraktar (2013) and Partth (2014) contend that during writing conferences students discuss and share ideas about their written essays. This finding corroborates the finding by Fitzgerald and Stamm (1992) who found that writing conference stimulates revision even among beginning writers. A similar finding has been reported by Jasmine and Weiner (2007) who found that the post-survey after intervention favoured participants who were taught using writing workshops, a form of writing conference. It can be recalled that many senior school students come to class with little writing experience. They need strategies that arrest their interest to learn. Using writing conference strategy proved that students can freely share ideas and discuss their writing challenges with the teacher under a friendly atmosphere promoted through this strategy. Calkins (2006) aligns himself to the positive effects of students' writing when teachers adopt an interactive strategy like conferencing in teaching essay writing. The finding also showed that there was a significant improvement from pre-test to posttest scores of the group taught using modelling strategy. This is an indication that using modelling to teach essay writing can also bring about improvement in students' writing abilities. This result is similar to the finding by Chia (2016) who reported that modelling has a significant effect on students' achievement in essay writing. This finding supports earlier findings by Charney and Carlson (1995) and Abbuhl (2012) that modeling improves writing achievement. Modelling could be particularly ideal for students who have little or no

previous writing background. When a teacher demonstrates the act of writing for the students to observe, it removes the mystery associated with writing. It also affords the students the opportunity to follow the steps the teacher adopted when it comes to their turn to write. Through the process, the student gets even example words to use. The findings on achievement in writing are also similar at the same time a bit different from those of Fitzgerald and Stamm (1992), Jasmine and Weiner (2007) and Chia (2016). Fitzgerald and Stamm (1992) focused on the revision component of the writing process. Revision which has been defined as the changes made at any point in writing (before, during, and/or after pen meets paper) (Fitzgerald & Stamm, 1992), is one aspect of writing that has been confused with editing. Fitzgerald and Stamm's (1992) study dwelt on how conferencing influenced the revision knowledge of first grade learners. He found that naïve writers made substantial progress in their revision. In the studies cited, the comparison was not between conferencing and modelling strategies. The other unique difference between the present study and the ones cited above is that interest is a main variable.

4.2.2 Difference in mean interest rating of students taught using writing conference and modelling

On interest, the study found that students taught with conferencing strategy gained higher mean interest ratings compared to their counterparts in the modelling group. The result was surprising to the researchers. In the modeling strategy, model essays were presented to learners to read, study and follow the steps. The various components and organizational structure of each essay were well explained before the students engaged in tasks involving completing some controlled writing tasks similar to the model essays. So, one expected the group taught with model essays to perform better. The finding on interest cannot be related to any previous study since none of such studies was located and reviewed. This creates a research gap, which further research is required.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study's finding, a conclusion has been reached that both conferencing and modelling strategies enhance students' achievement in essay writing and therefore, can be said to be effective strategies for writing instruction at the senior school level. Students taught composition writing via conference strategy gained significantly higher mean interest rating compared to those taught using teacher modelling strategy.

On the strength of this conclusion it is recommended as follows:

1) Both conferencing and modelling strategies of writing instruction should be utilized for effective writing instruction at the secondary school level of education in Nigeria.
2) The State Universal Basic Education Boards and Teaching Service Boards of the various states of the Federation should organize training workshops on effective writing methods to give teachers teaching at the two tiers of education namely

primary and secondary the capacity to improve in their teaching of the various aspects of writing.

3) Teachers should endeavor to teach the four skills of language as an integrative endeavour. While teaching one component of language, conscious efforts should be made to integrate activities that promote the learning of other components. In other words, a lesson on writing should not be a writing-only lesson. A reading comprehension lesson should not be a reading-only lesson. Elements of reading, speaking and listening should be incorporated in the same lesson.

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