



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### PROCESS APPROACH FOR TEACHING WRITING IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

<sup>1</sup>Alabere Rabiab Ajoke and <sup>2</sup>Aspalilabt Shapii

<sup>1</sup>School of Education and Modern Languages, University Utara Malaysia/Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>School of Education and Modern Languages, University Utara Malaysia

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#### ABSTRACT

The only way to teach language is by creating environment which will make the development of the target language easy to master by the learners since it has been said that language cannot be taught (Dana *et al.*, 2013). Writing is the most difficult of the four language skills and it is not easy to acquire especially in second language situation. Teaching writing skills in Nigeria and around Asia is faced with many problems and in the process of learning it students are prone to difficulties using the traditional method in the classroom teaching becomes passive and the classroom activities become monotonous. Therefore, new global method should be introduced to make the learners active in the classroom & this paper looks at how process approach can help reduce the difficulties students faced in the teaching and learning writing skills, and the benefit of introducing the process approach for teaching writing skills at tertiary institutions.

#### INTRODUCTION

In the process of mastering second language skills, learners and teachers encounter many difficulties. As a result of these difficulties, increasing emphasis has been on improving and modelling new strategies to enhance students' English language learning (ELL) proficiency and writing skills. According to Peregoy& Boyle (2013), apart from learners being academically sound, they are expected to possess adequate skills that will help them to cope with any learning condition, such as the four language skills. In the daily activities, writing in language use is not separated and isolated from other skills. During development, the four language skills are not kept separate and are basically of mutual support, the practice of one contribute to the development of the other (Peregoy& Boyle, 2013). According to Obemeata (1995) Akinwamide (2012) the major problem in the Nation is students' deficiency in English language is writing because the teaching and learning of L2 writing is not an easy task due to the following reasons:

- English language is a foreign language with culture different from ours and as L2, the culture of L1 has already embedded in the speakers of L2.
- ESL teachers also have limitation due to the influence of mother tongue.
- Reading and writing need conscious effort to be taught and learnt, and it is not everyone who can read that can write effectively.

\*Corresponding author: Alabere Rabiab Ajoke,

School of Education and Modern Languages, University Utara Malaysia/Nigeria.

The problem of writing at tertiary levels of education in developing nations eg Nigeria and Malaysia is exposed when it comes to writing essay (project or thesis) in colleges and universities. The purpose of essay writing is to test students' ability to communicate effectively in writing and contribute to education reform through research findings. To some, it is believed that, the product approach does not allow students to write on their own independently as stated by Vanessa (2004). Therefore, this study intends to find out the role of process-genre approach in making students develop independent frame of mind in writing based on imagination and experience: this new approach makes students ready for academic writing at the tertiary institutions to contribute to the global demand for writing and it makes writing class an exciting forum for both the teacher and learners for better performance in academic writing.

#### Writing in the Classroom

To attain academic success, attending lectures is the most important thing and to ensure that the time spent in the class is productive and useful. Students must always write when lecture is going on to make them active and productive. Writing in classroom has two primary functions:

- Writing keeps learners at alert, attentive and accountable for what is listened to.
- The written document becomes a record of the lecture heard for the purpose of future use.

Fecas& Thompson (2007), Kiewra (1985), and Hartley & Marshall (1974) agrees that students who write during lectures

increase in attention and concentration in classroom, and that writing during lecture and reviewing it before examinations or tests produces better recall that leads to better performance in exams and academic writings. An effective way of writing in the classroom is considered in two ways; the first is the surface-level writing which involves writing down the words that are heard from speech and not really paying attention to the meaning, the writer aim for meaning-based note that is characterized with thinking and processing what is heard or listened to. This is the best for learners that write in the classroom when lecture is going on by identifying the main points, making inferences, and identifying question areas. Bligh (2000) in his research shows that writing make students recall larger quantity of knowledge taught if well recorded and reviewed. While Kiewra (1991) agrees that students who write while listening do better in academic writing than those who do not write. There are two ways of storing materials for future purposes: writing can be carried out for variety of reasons. In an answer to the question why writing? Cottrell (2003) observes that information recorded should function as the following:

- It creates a useful record for important points for use in future and the source of the information.
- It helps to make ideas flow in writing, help students plan, organize, arrange, and remember notes in a different order.
- It helps students to understand the information in their notes.
- It helps in summing things up in long-term memory.
- It helps for examination revision if materials are well organized.
- The encoding function of writing suggests that the process of recording information facilitates learning, increases attention to material, and creates a more personal understandable version of presenting information with different information.
- External storage function of writing indicates that learners' performance is facilitated by reviewing the information stored in a written form.

### External Storage

This serves as a place where knowledge and information are kept for future purposes and review by students. The importance of writing helps to enhance retention (Kiewra *et al.*, 1989). The group that writes and reviewed their notes performed extremely well in the subsequent tests while the other group did below expectation. In the result of his empirical study on review of notes by learners, Kiewra reports that students who were allowed to review their notes after lecture out performed those who did not review their notes after lecture in their test. Learners should re-read their notes as many times as possible for them to master the contents of the notes, the more the information learning process involves understanding and reviewing process, the greater the intensity and effectiveness of the learning outcome. Thus it is better to highlight notes than to simply read them, and it is better to summarize the notes than mere highlighting them Kiewra, *et al* (1995). Therefore, the storage function of writing has been demonstrated to improve retention. Writing primarily serve as external storage due to the fact that its main value is not the activity of recording notes but what is externally stored and

reviewed, meaning that it is a source of written document that can be reviewed at any time for tests (Kiewra and Frank, 1988).

### Encoding information

According to Colman (2009) the process of writing helps students to commit information into memory and sees encoding as a way of converting information from the original form to another form representing it. Generating one's own record aids retention than when it is been generated by someone else. Piolat, Olive and Kellog (2005); and Williams and Eggert (2002) believe that students actually start to learn and memorize the ideas when writing with full concentration. It is also believed that writing is an important means of effective information processing weapon that is frequently used in everyday activities such as passing judgment, resolving issues and taking decisions by different bodies. It is used for problem solving and for ongoing project Cary and Carlson, (1999); Badger, White, Sutherland, and Haggis (2001); and Van Meter, Yokoi, and Presley (1994) and that after many years of the practice of writing students become familiar with the concept of writing with different purposes.

In an ethnographic interview carried out by Van Meter *et al* (1994) on why students need to write during lectures? The answer was that it enhances their retention level, increases their understanding and retains the content in their memory and provides connection between ideas. Harley (2002) confirmed that writing is everyday activity in life and in many professions with the believe of Armbruster (2009); Kiewra *et al.* (1991 and Piolat and Boch (2004) that writing is used when information is transmitted in academic contexts. It writing is used to carry out a range of intellectual processes, such as writing judgment, resolving issues, taking down discussions and agreements. Badger, White, Sutherland, & Haggis (2001); and Van Meter, Yoki, and Pressley (1884) discover that writing in academic contexts when practiced for several years by students, they will get to know the ideas and strategies of writing which has to do with the purpose of writing information, content and structure of the information, the style of the teacher and the nature of the course all have effects on writing in the classroom. Researches have helped to verify that writing helps learners to encode the information involved and that notes are valuable materials for review. Studies also show that writing promotes encoding with mixed opinions. For instance Hult *et al.* (1984) contended that writing involves semantic encoding, but Henk and Stahl (1985) found that the process of writing does little to enhance recall.

### Benefits of Writing by Students

Writing is indeed an important task that students engage in for the purpose of developing writing skills, though many studies have shown that students who are taught how to write information perform better yet some found no advantage for students who write. This mixed result show the kind of writing that participants engaged in. Bohay, Blakely, Camplin, and Radvansky (2011) assert that what we write are self-generating memory cues that is good at reminding students of verbal information, drafting, reviewing and editing what has been written is a way of re-reading or studying the material the second time and this in turn improving the memory performance and improve writing ability of students involve

mental organization. During writing students are actively involved in problem solving and self-explanation, by so doing they improve in writing skills like essay writing, conceptual writing, summarizing and self-questioning are involved. (Anderson, Conrad and Corbert, 1993; Trafton, 1994; Trafton and Reiser, 1993). In this regard, Peverly *et al.* (2007) revile that writing itself produces a multiple task situation, such as, memory, comprehension, and writing performance, which may affect the cognition that should be devoted for composition. In addition, Kobayashi (2005) and Rowntree (1976) in their researches observe that writing help students to extend their retention span, and their minds are focused on the subject area for better understanding. Writing also helps students to remember what they have listened to in the classroom. While writing in the class, students use their listening and writing abilities as well as their brain and muscles. In that wise, the materials are written in their own words and into the format that they will understand when reviewing it. What they write remind them of the effort they put in the course. Therefore, the respondents of this student should be active listeners rather than being passive listeners. Writing should be arranged into easy-to-review chunks of information that would be clear and well-structured when such information is expected to be used for revision during examination or test. Apart from containing the facts, it should also contain the teachers' emphasis. All these encouraged concentration, retention and understanding.

### Process Approach to Teaching Writing

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. The process approach focuses more on varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use, brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting. The stages of process approach to writing to Street (2004) are:

- Brainstorming by trying to bring out ideas through thinking and discussing.
- The second stage is planning by share ideas with others, critiquing and synthesizing the ideas before writing them down.
- The third stage is mind mapping which has to do with learners organizing ideas into a mind map or linear form in a hierarchical order for easy construction of the essay.
- The fourth stage is writing the first draft.
- The fifth stage is when students share knowledge with colleagues to get feedback and criticism to be conscious that someone is going to read their write-ups.
- The sixth stage is editing what has been written and after the exchanged drafts are returned for improvements based on the feedback or comments of their pairs in the classroom.
- This seventh stage is for the students to write the final draft based on suggestions and rethinking of the ideas for better output.
- Stage eight is the final stage whereby the supervisor evaluates and gives feedback on what the students have written.

**Below is a model for process approach to teaching writing**



**Figure 1. The Writing Process by Murray and Johannson (1990)**

Academic writing process according to Lloyd (2007) involves planning, referencing organization, composition, engineering, spelling and structure framework that learners could adopt when doing academic writing and presenting argument in a well- balanced manner through critical evaluation is essential part of academic writing. It should be observed that students have their own style of writing and academic aims to modify their styles and present a standard that will address academic requirements. Boughey (1997) support the view that students need frequent constructive feedback from their supervisors to the successive pieces of writing to develop academic writing. It is an act that is desirable and necessary. For the fact that academic writing is introduced to student at the first time when they entered tertiary institution is one of the reasons why most students do not have the idea of what academic writing is.

### How to Implement Process Approach

According to Trupe (2001) for teachers to incorporate process approach instruction in the classroom, they should follow the following ideas:

- Writing teachers should ask learners to constantly write something that may not need to be recorded as assignment or assessment for grades. Teachers should try to read what students write and pass comments on the content.
- Teachers should assign time for brainstorming whenever a topic to write on is given to learners to write on before starting to write. At least students should be given 5 minutes to brainstorm on any given topic.
- Teachers of ESL writing should encourage planning, pre-writing and variety of drafting before writing the essay. Teachers should understand that some students do well with outline or diagram while some benefit from questions generated by others by visualizing the scenes, for instance, when a story is acted as play in the classroom, the learners who are the audience will learn from viewing the scene.

- Writing teachers can as well assign students to groups to assist each other to get feedback on their drafts, prepare written feedback for the students; written essay and ask them in each group to look for specific features in the written text among themselves in the classroom or watch a debate presented on a topic for the techniques and features of the presentation.
- The teacher should encourage students to ask questions about what they have written on the paper for clarification to become better writers.
- In writing class the teacher can create scheme a brief face to face conferences where students present papers or the essays for others to give their comments on them. The comments should be inform of questions eg What do you refer to with this or can you explain further or more about this? Instead of evaluating the writer.
- In the process of presenting many draft on essay topic the students are bound to produce a standard essay for the final product.

### **The Challenges of teaching Writing in Tertiary 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 upon. 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. There are numerous factors affecting the teaching and learning of academic writing especially in Nigerian context. Some of them are highlighted below.

### **Under-preparedness on the Part of the Teachers and Students**

The poor political and economic situation of a country can contribute to backwardness in the writing ability of students as well as teachers under-preparedness due to strikes as a result of non-payment of salaries. When teachers are not motivated it affects their performance. Students are under-prepared due to

inadequate schooling experiences, work demand, lack of English language competency on how institutions work. Most students are not exposed to writing right from the beginning as such find it difficult when it is introduced at later stage. The inadequate mastering of English also contributes to poor writing by learners, practically in ESL contexts where English is the medium of instruction and majority of students are from educationally underprepared backgrounds without access to e-libraries and books basically on writing. Chokwe also had it that students are not well equipped with academic writing in their previous education and experiences with tertiary literacy will have problem with academic writing and they are often portrayed as unable to manage rigorous academic tasks. Under preparedness of teachers could be as a result of too much work load and some may be highly qualified in a specific subject but may not be trained to teach the subject they are teaching due to lack of enough teachers. Therefore teachers should reflect on their practices and be conscious of what is right or wrong about their pedagogic practices and approaches that they employ in their classroom. So teachers with the same background with the students are required in the educational sectors for better development of ESL students' academic writing.

### **The Role of School in Teaching Writing**

Students' writing skills is greatly influenced by the school attended by students and play critical role in developing students' writing. If learners' writing is not given adequately addressed at elementary and secondary levels, tertiary institutions will be filled with students who are underprepared academically. Researches have shown that ESL students from such schools hardly use English in their daily activities; most African schools are over-crowded with over hundred students in a class attending lecture with poor facilities. What students learn in higher institution prepare them or underprepare them for university studies. Researches have indicated that students in secondary schools are no longer made to write essay which could be the reason for students' problems with academic writing. In Nigeria research has revealed that students are not doing well in English language most specially, in essay writing (Opara, 2012; Muraina, 2014). In South Africa, Chokwe (2011) in his study affirms that the performance of students in essay writing is very poor that it calls for the attention of the stakeholders in education sector. He further explains that Engstrom (2008) contend the unpreparedness of students to inadequate schooling experiences, competing family and work demands, lack of English language competency etc. Therefore, the training students get at secondary school seems to prepare them to cope with the academic task especially in the area of writing essay that they are going to face at the higher institutions. It is also added that under preparedness in writing does not only come from the students alone, and that on the part of the teachers some are under qualified, under prepared and insufficient experience to handle the course. To solve this problem, teachers should see that they are active participants in the process making sure that they are fully equipped and trained to help students acquire the required knowledge on writing skills. It is also observed that students no longer actively participate in essay writing at secondary level which could lead to the problems of academic writing. Socio-economic Factor on Teaching Writing. The socio-economic factor of students and parents can contribute negatively to students learning particularly academic writing. For instance,

Sanchez and Paulson (2008) assert that in United States, learners that are in transitional English courses often come from backward schooling conditions and that it is widely accepted that students who attended under-resourced rural and township schools are under-prepared and usually face difficulty with writing at university. Despite this problem the university should have role to play in developing students' academic writing and address the problem by correcting what the schools failed to do by designing writing activities that will help students into contextual academic discourse in their respective disciplines. Generally, students need to be supported to improve their academic writing competency so that they can function effectively not only in academic writing but in all areas of learning.

## Conclusion

The process approach has positively enhanced students' ability to write essay considering generating ideas, organizing them, presenting the ideas with accurate expression and mechanics. The process approach was found reliable for the development of writing skills. Students benefited from the contribution of the stages of teaching writing with emphasis on a specific topic. Brainstorming for ideas and planning helped students to be confident in their writing as they were able to generate ideas themselves and write with confidence without looking at any model either inside or outside the school. As students' centred approach, the process of writing, rewriting and editing help students to be logical and write in sequential order with less grammatical errors. Expression will be perfected as teacher only serve as moderator in treating writing as creative act that requires positive feedback from the teacher.

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