
Sentence Combining Strategy as a Panacea for Effective Essay Teaching in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The poor state of students' writing is a source of concern for students, parents and teachers. Students' inability to write effectively is believed to contribute immensely to their poor performance in English language and other subjects. Consequent upon poor performances in English language is that students longing to further their education are denied admission into institutions of higher learning. This paper therefore in the light of the foregoing examines sentence combining teaching strategy as a panacea for effective essay teaching in the 21st century. The paper adopted literature reviews design relevant in students' essay writing skills by highlighting the needs for sentence combining teaching strategy, the concept of essay writing, the importance of students' essay writing and the role of the sentence combining teaching strategy in essay writing achievement. Some Recommendations were: the teacher should not take writing for granted or as a minor time-consuming problem but should have perspective for writing and make time to write; students should be allowed to write independently and be encouraged to brainstorm among others.

Keywords: sentence combining instructional strategy, essay teaching, writing skills, 21st century.

Introduction

Writing is an important means of communicating information that involves translating thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences into a readable text using various writing skills. It is an essential skill, especially in today's world as one's ability to write is critical for success in most aspects of human endeavor. For instance, in academics, writing is required in the learning of all subjects and is the primary medium by which students' academic achievement is assessed. Furthermore, writing is used for job application as well as for effective performance of one's task and even progress at most workplaces. It is also used in maintaining social links and recording experiences. By implication, inability to write can limit a person's chances of reaching one's potentials, namely: academically, professionally, economically and socially.

However, writing is a complex skill that is not naturally acquired but is usually learnt in a formal education setting (Graham & Hall, 2016). This is why every serious education system ensures that learners are taught to be proficient in the different forms of writing.

Essay writing is part of the English language skills that is taught in secondary schools in Nigeria. An essay is a piece of writing on a given topic presented in continuous prose format, well structured, and that communicates its message clearly to its readers (Gomwalk, 2014). The expectation of the society is that students should be able to write the different types of essays before the completion of secondary school education. But, over the years, studies and experiences have shown that many of students find it difficult to write essays efficiently at the level required due to poor knowledge of writing skills (Ezekulie & Chinyere, 2017).

Sentence combining teaching strategy is an activity-based learner centered strategies which promote active participation of students in the learning process. It encourages social and cognitive interactions among English learners. The strategy allows for students to operate in communicative groups where they engage in discussions and evaluation of one another's view in a bid to enhance their understanding of the content being learnt (Ezekulie & Chinyere, 2017). Sentence combining strategy, is obviously in line with current trends in language learning that support active learning processes.

The role of the teacher here is that of a facilitator of learning. The teacher guides the students to participate in productive writing and dialogues by eliciting deep thought provoking questions and contribution among students. The strategy also allows the English teacher teach as well as guide, monitor and receives students' feedback as they carry out task targeted at helping them develop specific writing skills.

It has been observed that teachers employ ineffective methods in teaching essay writing. These methods which are more product-based do not allow students to practice and develop essential writing skills in writing classes (Mark, 2016). Consequently, students are deprived of learning what the writing process involves and to master skills such as idea generation, outlining, sentence construction, paragraph development, editing and others. In addition, most teachers have difficulties in designing writing task and activities that enable students practice writing skills. The foregoing is further compounded by the fact that some teachers avoid teaching writing due to ignorance of how to teach it. Writing therefore becomes the most neglected among all the language skills. This paper therefore examines sentence combining strategy as a panacea for effective essay teaching in the 21st century.

Conceptual Classification

An essay has been defined in a variety of ways. It is difficult to define the genre into which essays fall. Anyebe (2019) define it as “prose composition with a focused subject of discussion” or a “long, systematic discourse. Huxley (2021), a leading essayist noted that “the essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything”, and added that “by tradition, almost by definition, the essay is a short piece. Furthermore, Huxley (2021) argued that “it belongs to literary species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-frame of reference, namely:

- i. The personal and the autobiography: The essayists that feel most comfortable in this pole “write fragments of reflective autobiography and look at the world through the keyhole of anecdote and description”.
- ii. The objective, factual, and the concrete particular: The essayist that write from this pole do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme. Their art consists of setting forth, passing judgment on, and drawing general conclusion from the relevant data (Akinwamide, 2012).
- iii. The abstract-universal: In this pole are those essayists who do their work in the world of high abstractions”, who are never personal and who seldom mention the particular facts of experience (Anyebe, 2019). Huxley (2021) added that the most satisfying essays “...make the best not of one, not of two, but of all the three worlds in which it is possible for the essay to exist”.

Mark, (2016) categorized essays into: descriptive, dialectic, exemplification, familiar, history, narrative, argumentative, economic.

Descriptive writing is characterized by sensory details, which appeal to the physical senses, and details that appeal to a reader’s emotional, physical or intellectual sensibilities. Determining the purpose, considering the audience, creating a dominant impression, using descriptive language, and organizing the description are the rhetorical choices to consider when using a description. A description is usually arranged spatially but can also be chronological or emphatic. The focus of a description is the scene. Description uses tools such as connotative language. Connotative languages, figurative languages, metaphor, and simile to arrive at a dominant impression. In essay guide, Anyebe (2017) stated that descriptive writing says what happened or what other author has discussed; it provides an account of the topic to be written (Michael, 2019).

In the dialectic form of the essay, which is commonly used in philosophy, the writer makes a thesis and argument, then objects to their own argument (with a counter argument), but then counters the counter argument with a final and novel

argument. This form benefits from presenting a broader perspective, while countering a possible flaw that some may present.

An exemplification essay is characterized by a generalization and relevant representative, and believable examples including anecdotes. Writers need to consider their subject, determine their purpose, consider their audience, decide on specific examples, and arrange all the parts together when writing an exemplification essay.

An essayist writes a familiar essay if speaking to a single reader through writing about both themselves or about particular subjects. Mark, (2016), suggests that while critical essays have more brain than the heart, personal essays have more heart than brain, familiar essays have equal measures of both (Jacqueline, et al., 2019).

A history essay sometimes referred to as a thesis essay describes an argument or claim about one or more historical events and supports that claim with evidence, arguments, and references. The text makes it clear to the reader why the argument or claim is as such (Wydra, 2006).

A narrative uses tools such as flashbacks, flash-forwards and transitions that often build to a climax. The focus of a narrative is the plot. When creating a narrative, authors must determine their purposes, consider their audience, establish their points of view, use dialogue and organize the narrative. A narrative is usually arranged chronologically (Adger, 2013)

An argumentative essay is a critical piece of writing, aimed at presenting an objective analysis of the subject matter, narrowed down to a single topic (Ahmed, 2015). The main idea of all the criticism is to provide an opinion either of positive or negative implication. As such, a critical essay requires research and analysis, strong internal logic and sharp structure. Its structure normally builds around introduction with a topic's relevance and thesis statement, body paragraphs with arguments linking back to the main thesis and conclusion. Also, an argumentative essay may include a refutation section where conflicting ideas are acknowledged, described, and criticized. Each argument of argumentative essay according to Troia, (2016) should be supported with sufficient evidence and relevant to the point.

An economic essay can start with a thesis, or it can start with a theme. It can take either a narrative course or a descriptive course. It can even become an argumentative essay if the author feels the need. After the introduction, the author has to do his or her best to expose the economic matter at hand, analyze it, evaluate it and draw a conclusion (Edet, 2021). If the essay takes more of a

narrative form, then the author has to expose each aspect of the economic puzzle in a way that makes it clear and understandable for the reader (Troia, 2016).

Importance of Essay Writing

Essay writing is indispensable especially in academic and other spheres of human endeavors. Essay writing enables students to practice and enhance their writing skills. They learn the nuances of writing, how to engage the readers and how to express their views using the written word in the correct manner (Troia, 2016). It also helps them improve their written communication skills. It is an important part of studying for a degree for four reasons:

- (a) Career advancement for better job opportunities
- (b) Personal growth for higher education
- (c) Specialize knowledge for diving deep into gaining expertise in one's field and
- (d) It increases understanding and helps the process of learning because it pushes one amongst other things, to clarify, sort out and organize ideas.

The ability to write essays has other advantages. The knowledge can be applied to any form of writing (Enighe, 2017). This means that one who can competently write essays has the tendency to succeed in activities where there is need to engage in one form of writing or another from time to time. Students who can write essays effectively are likely to excel in their academics and future lives. This is because students are required to present their work in writing both in their classwork, in internal and external examinations. In a high-stake examination such as the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), the essay section of the English language paper carries the large share of the marks and a candidate needs to competently write this aspect to pass the subject. Besides, candidates are required to make at least a credit pass in English language to secure admission into any institution of higher learning. Also, proficiency in English language could be judged by one's performance in English language examination as one of the yardsticks for job placement in many countries of the world.

Furthermore, essay writing requires the writer to draw from a range of knowledge and skills such as generating, organizing and expressing ideas logically and coherently to achieve effective communication. The writer needs to use well-constructed sentences, effective paragraphs, appropriate vocabularies, correct spellings, punctuation and capitalization (Akinwamide, 2012). It has obvious that a student who is deficient in these skills will definitely struggle with his or her writing tasks.

Most secondary school students find it difficult to write good essays because they lack writing skills such as idea generation, sentence construction, paragraphing, punctuation and spelling (Michael, 2019). This is further evidenced by several WAEC Chief Examiners' reports of 2007-2012 as cited by Ezeokoli and Igbubor (2016) which revealed that most of the candidates' essays were dominated by errors of grammar/poor expressions, spelling and punctuation. The WAEC Chief Examiners' report of 2011 for example, pointed out that students organized their essay badly, despite different methods teachers used in the teaching of writing.

Sentence Combining Teaching Strategy

English is an international language because it is the most widely used in the world. No other language has spread around the world so extensively like English (Kilmova, 2014). English is used as a second language in many countries. In Indonesia, English is one of the main subjects in schools. English Language has four skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Particularly for writing, it is used in daily lives for various reasons which could be to take notes, or even to make important documents for business purposes.

Essay writing is one important form of writing especially for students in secondary schools as it improves students' sentence combining and writing skills. Ghaith as cited in Edet (2021) asserted that essay writing is exploring thoughts and ideas, and making them visible and concrete in a complex process. Essay writing is a piece of writing which is written by an effective writer. In the process, the writer is required to write according to what is on his mind. Essay writing cannot be mastered easily; it must be studied and practiced consciously and continuously. Many students find essay writing difficult because they can hardly find and generate ideas (Akimade, 2012). The lack of writing skills for expressing ideas and demonstrating knowledge negatively impacts struggling students' ability to maximize content learning opportunities (Enighe, 2017). Idea is the important stage to begin writing essay. In this skill, students are required to manage their thoughts clearly and effectively (Michael, 2019). This is also influenced by differences in understanding of various human endeavors and circumstances (Akinmade, 2012).

In writing English, the teacher usually gives materials from books or manuals as a reference in teaching. As students have low motivation in studying English, so they have in writing skills and in expressing their ideas. This makes students creativity low considering their experiences in writing essays. Writing is one of the language skills which has made important contributions to human work. Through writing, records of past activities are kept for future purposes. Mark (2016) stated that writing is a language skill used to communicate indirectly, not face to face with other people. Writing is also a process of

discovering and organizing ideas, putting them on paper and re-forming and reviewing them. According to Meyers (2005), writing is a way of producing language, which can be done naturally when one speaks. Based on this, writing is a skill to communicate directly or indirectly.

Graham and Hall (2016) stated that in language learning situation, writing is perceived as an important skill to master because through writing, the students can expand and strengthen their knowledge. Ahmed, Hassan and Alwad (2015) stated that writing is a personal act in which writers take ideas or prompts and transform them into self-initiated topics. Edet (2021) added that it is the production of the written word that results in a text but the text must be read and comprehended in order for communication to take place.

Awotunde, Ugodulunwa and Ozoji (1997) argued that academic writing is culture and tradition bound in every country, which presents difficulties from the point of view of education integration. This indicates that writing is difficult because it requires preparation/design and thinking hard in the process to make good text and make the reader understand the meaning of the text. Shawn and Richard (2020) stated that writing is the graphic representation of a language that follows some systematic order that can be grasped by the reader.

A good text must go through certain processes according to Edet (2021), namely:

First, writing helps students to learn because it reinforces the grammatical structure, idioms and vocabulary that are being taught by the teacher.

Secondly, students also have chances to be adventurous with a language to go beyond what they have just learnt to say, to take risks.

Third, in the process of writing, they necessarily become very involved with the new language.

From the foregoing, the purpose of writing such as strengthening sentences, provides the opportunity to know the language and become familiar with the new language and it all helps the students to learn.

Essay writing is a collection of sentences that have facts, opinions, and ideas that are linked to a topic. Komolafe and Yara (2010) saw essay writing as a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas and make them visible and concrete through effective sentences. The essay writer must be able to invite the reader to feel what the writer feels so that the content in the essay becomes more real.

According to Edet (2021), in this skill, students are required to manage their thoughts clearly and effectively. This skill encourages the essay writer to link sentences correctly to make their essays coherent and interesting. Qaddumi, (2019) stated that writing needs a creative process. The author explained that

writing requires high concentration and good arrangement. The author also assumed that “The upshot of the compositional nature of writing has produced writing pedagogy that focuses students on how to generate ideas, how to organize coherently, how to use discourse makers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to combine sentences for clearer meaning, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product,” Students also can learn how to write sentences that are related to each other in one main idea, organize supporting sentences in some kind of logical order and ideas connected by using appropriate transition signals, re-checking the contents and grammar of the essays that have been written into one topic that can be read and understood in the final product.

What is Sentence Combining Strategy?

Sentence combining makes students more active in finding resources that are increasingly growing compared to the conventional method that makes students passive in finding ideas and learning resources (Enighe, 2017). The conventional method also reduces students’ experiences in writing and makes students’ writing less creative while sentence combining strategy, can improve students’ achievement in writing. The sentences in essay must be unified and coherent between one sentence and another, therefore students should be taught how to connect and combine sentences to form diction. This method which is sentence combining, also helps students to make unified and coherent sentence in essays (Stones & Serwatka, 2015).

In any essay, there are various parts namely introduction, body, and conclusion (Saddler, 2012). The introduction is in the first paragraph after the topic. In this section, there is usually a sentence that draws the attention of the reader to be curious about the contents of the text. What will be discussed in the essay is called the main idea. Saddler, Ellis-Robinson and Asaro-Saddler (2018) stated that the main idea is usually at the beginning of the paragraph, generally at the end of the first paragraph, or in the conclusion of the essay, or even in both. In addition, emphasis on the various parts of the essay to the students, is to train them to write good sentences and combine them correctly as the students dare to say their opinions. The knowledge of sentence combining also develops ways of writing, using varieties of sentences. According to Ahmed (2015), sentence combining strategy, helps students’ to develop creative thinking, writing style, vocabulary, and allowing them use their own opinions.

Sentence combining is a derivation of the concept of creative learning. Sentence combining strategy is a teaching strategy where the teacher is directly involved with students, to maximize learning. According to Bruce, Tammy and Kristie (2018), it is a student learning strategy to develop sentence creation in them. In this strategy, the students have equal level of ability to improve their mastery of the lesson.

Quaddumi (2019) stated that sentence arrangements have a positive quality where students learn how to form varieties of sentences for their writing. Schroeder (2006) added that sentence combining in writing is an instructional arrangement in which students create sentence in their writing process. In going through the writing process such as plan, create, combine, revise, and edit, students are expected to be able to combine their sentences correctly. Students form sentences from other given sentences to make their writing interesting. This is also confirmed by Adger (2013) in the pre-writing stage where sentence combining writing students are asked to write sentences and this can be done also on revisions and reviews. Similarly, Akinwamide (2012) found that sentence combining provides good contribution to enhance students' writing skill. Sentence combining skill helps students write coherent essays in the process of writing. Sentence combining strategy also gives students the courage to argue by writing their opinions on essays and make each sentence become unifying and coherent in the subject essay as asserted by Troia (2016) that this treatment increases the use of statements in sentences, unity and coherence of the subjects' essay.

The use of sentence combining strategy has the advantage of proving convenience for the teachers to manage to be qualitative in interacting with students and providing great opportunities for them to explore ideas and opportunities and to learn on their own as stated by Graham and Hegert (2015). Besides, this strategy also increases students' creative writing skill by actively forming sentences. This is because sentence combining strategy prioritizes sentence formation (Gomwalk 2014). In implementing this strategy, the teacher acts as a facilitator who gives assignment and manages the class to stimulate students to write and monitors them forming variety of sentences and combining them.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the importance of sentence combining teaching strategy in enhancing the effectiveness of students' essay construction above other methods. English language teachers as well as other content area teachers, are encouraged to develop students' essay writing skills through sentence combining teaching method to improve their essay writing skills towards their academic achievement. The sentence combining instruction method can consolidate students' essay writing abilities by enabling them create various sentences and be able to combine them.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. The teacher should not take writing for granted or as a minor time-consuming problem but should have perspective for writing and make time to write.

2. The teacher should endeavor to introduce effective teaching strategy to balance the provision of content.
3. Teachers should give all the necessary instructions and details to the students but never to think for them.
4. Students should be allowed to write independently and be encouraged to brainstorm.
5. Teachers should also know individual student's writing problems.

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