

Effects of Communicative Language Teaching Approach on Students' Performance in Narrative Essay and Informal Letter Writing among Senior Secondary Schools in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract: - This study investigated the effects of Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) on students' performance in narrative essay and informal letter writing among 33 secondary schools in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The major objective of the study was to find out if teaching students essay writing skills using the CLT approach as against a Traditional Teaching Method, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), would make them perform better in their narrative essay and informal letter writing. The SS1 student population of the eight selected senior secondary schools was 3,104 and the population sample of the study comprised of 644 Senior Secondary One (SS1) students drawn into four comparison groups from eight secondary schools in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The design for the study was quasi-experimental and intact classes were used. The study instrument was Language Performance Tests (LPT), with four separate designs. The groups were subjected to a pretest before they were exposed to treatments. The experimental groups were exposed to treatment using the CLT approach while the control groups were exposed to treatment using the ALM. The groups were also subjected to a posttest. The study tested four null hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance using statistical procedures of mean, standard deviation, and the t-test. The four hypotheses were rejected. The findings of the study showed that students taught aspects of narrative essay and letter writing using the CLT approach performed better in their essay writing than students taught the same using the ALM. The researchers recommended that teachers should adopt CLT that makes the learner perform better in essay writing and that teachers should be trained and re-trained on the application of the method to teaching essay and letter writing skills in particular and English Language in general.

Key Words: Essay Writing, English Language, Language Teaching, Audio Lingual Method (ALM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

I. INTRODUCTION

English language is a global language of business. Its teaching and learning has become a major international enterprise. A stock-taking of language use in the world today will show that a clearly remarkable percentage of the world's population now use English language either part-time or full-

time. English language is used to access materials for the improvement of knowledge and to participate in events at the global stage. Therefore, learners of English language seek to master it to a high level of accuracy and fluency. In Nigeria, parents and guardians want to see their wards learn and speak the language. Employers of labour, too, insist on employees having good command of English language skills; and fluency in the language continues to be a pre-requisite for success and advancement in many social fields. These expectations which are consistent with Richard's (2011) view of the demand on English language to provide students with the basic ability to use language for varieties of purpose, especially in the developing countries, have created a big demand for the teaching of English language around the world. The pressure put on English language teaching in developing countries in general, and Nigeria in particular, by poverty of students' performance in the language has continued to necessitate a fresh introspection at a number of encumbering factors and importantly an appropriate teaching methodology and approach to the teaching and learning of English language.

The effort to get language teaching right has made language teachers' approach to their job go through many changes. The traditional approaches to language teaching included the Audio-lingual or Aural-oral method and Situational Language Teaching (SLT). These were the major approaches to language teaching up to the late 1960s, (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Audio-lingualism observed certain procedures in teaching language; the teacher reads a model dialogue or the same is presented in tapes for the students to listen during the lesson. The teacher listens to repetitions from students, and makes corrections. Students practice key structures individually and in chorus in patterned drills.

The Situational Language Teaching classroom adopted a procedure known as presentation, practice and production. At the level of presentation the teacher presents the structure, this is followed by the students' practice in a controlled context and eventually they practice structures in

different contexts. Based on this, the teaching of items of grammar was the basis of the methodologies. But soon, these approaches were seen as not helping the learner use language in context, or in the words of Widdowson (1984), "...be able to use the language we teach him and to extend his ability to new cases, to create new utterances that are appropriate to his needs as a language user." (P. 131).

The traditional approaches were discredited for their many failures and had to give way to a new theory and approach to language teaching which emphasized functional and skill-based teaching. This approach to language pedagogy became the Communicative Language Teaching approach. It emphasized communicative competence and proposed that the use of language involved more than grammatical competence and includes the ability to use language for communicative purposes like requesting, commanding, giving advice and so on.

Communicative Language Teaching has as its goal communicative competence as proposed by Hymes (2002). The argument is that learners learn a language through the process of interaction and communication in it. Richards (2011) outlined the major principles underlying the CLT approach as that it makes use of real communication in teaching language, provides opportunity for learners to experiment and try out what they know, and makes them learn language in a more meaningful way.

II. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Different methods and approaches to English language teaching as mentioned earlier have been proffered at different times including the Natural approach, Audio-Lingual Method, Situational to Situational-Functional approaches and these methods and approaches according to Richards (2011) have been found to be lacking in making Second Language Acquisition (SLA) process a smooth one.

A secondary school student in Sokoto State, just like other Nigerian secondary school student needs to communicate in the English language, access learning materials, take examinations and make progress in his or her academic activities. Beyond these, he or she is expected to exhibit the qualities of good scholarship and partake in global events which require mastery of English language skills. However, parents and teachers, as well as examiners, complain that majority of students in the Senior Secondary School in Sokoto State find it difficult to communicate lucidly in the English Language. The WAEC Chief Examiner's Report (2012) indicated that only 32.17% of students who sat for the May/June 2012 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) scored credit or more in English Language. It stressed that schools should use methodologies that will help students learn to write better. This study therefore sought to provide possible answer to the problem through the use of Communicative Language

Teaching Approach in teaching students to help them perform better in their narrative essay and informal letter writing.

III. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to find out if there is any difference in the performance in:

1. Content of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto State, Nigeria.
2. Organization of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria.
3. Content of informal letter writing of students taught with ALM and Students taught with CLT in Sokoto State, Nigeria.
4. Organization of informal letter writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered in this study: Is there any difference in the mean performance in :

1. Content of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto State, Nigeria?
2. Organization of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria?
3. Content of informal letter writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria?
4. Organization of informal letter writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria?

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The study tested the following hypotheses at 0.05 level significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the performance in content of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the performance in organization of narrative essay writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in the performance in content of informal letter writing of students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria.
4. There is no significant difference in the performance in the organization of informal letter writing of

students taught with ALM and students taught with CLT in Sokoto state, Nigeria.

VI. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The theory that underscores this study is the theory of language as communication of meaning; this focuses at achieving communicative competence. Linguistic competence as proposed by Chomsky (1998) focused on characterizing the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language; this has also been referred to as grammatical competence. Hymes (2002) held that a good theory of language should incorporate not only linguistic competence but communicative competence because, as he said, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use. He theorized that language is not exemplified merely in its grammatical and structural features, but also in the categories of functions and communicative meaning as applicable in discourse. He noted that language as communication is for the expression of meaning and the primary function is for interaction and communication. This view of language theory has received support and been expanded by various linguists. Robinson (2008), Richards and Rodgers (2001) supported this theory to language learning when they said that language is a vehicle for the transportation of meaning.

Williams (1990) agreed with the functions of language stated by Hymes, and viewed language from the perspective that language is used to realize relationship between individuals and for the performance of social transactions. This theory draws from areas such as interaction analysis and conversation analysis in its development. Meaning is inferred from the language used not necessarily that the rules of grammar have been followed. The underlying principles become the prioritization of communicative competence in language teaching emphasizing content without prejudicing grammatical form.

Many researches are available that have been carried out on the use of CLT as an approach in the teaching of various aspects and skills of English Language to foreign and second language learners. For instance, Okwach, Indoshi and Koross (2013) conducted a research on teachers' and students' perception on methods used in teaching writing skills in secondary schools in West Pokot County of Kenya with 31 English Language teachers and 334 Form Four students selected from a population of 2580 students through a random sampling procedure. The main objective of the study was to find out students' performance in both Traditional Teaching Method and the Communicative Approach. The findings revealed that teachers' perception was negative meaning that teachers were not aware of the potential of ICT method in teaching writing skills. The student's perception was also negative meaning that the students were also not aware of the method that could improve their learning of writing skills.

Kishindo (2011) conducted an evaluation of the communicative approach to language teaching in Malawi. She involved forty-one teaching practice students, four (4) experienced teachers and an observation of fifteen language classes as well as data from the analysis of Malawi National Examinations Board. She analyzed her data using Creswell's procedures. She found in her study that CLT was the best approach to help solve the problem of English Language mastery. She also found however that the test pattern of national examination bodies in Malawi did not conform to the communicative pattern of the approach in question.

Molen and Green (2011) studied a group of 182 first grade foreign students of a British university to enlist their performance in their study areas. The experimental group was taught English for Specific Purposes (ESP) communicatively while the control group was taught the same course with a teacher centred approach. Their findings showed that the students taught language in context showed early linguistic performance and that eventually, they out-performed the group taught with the teacher centred approach.

Nwali (2014) investigated into the motivation to higher and better performance from the use of interactive learning materials in the teaching of fresh Junior Secondary School students. He used an experimental design, and hypothesized that there will be no significant difference using audio-visual and other interactive materials and the textbooks/blackboard and teacher explanation. The findings of his study suggested that the group taught interactively (communicatively) performed better than the group taught with just texts and the formal classroom teaching materials.

Okonkwo (2014) investigated the effects of Collaborative Instructional Strategy (Communicative approach) on students' achievement in English essay writing using a quasi-experimental design and a total sample of 191 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in two experimental groups and two control groups. She taught the experimental groups essay writing using the Communicative Approach while the two control groups were taught essay writing using conventional teaching methods (Traditional Teaching Method). She collected data using English Essay Achievement Test (EEAT) and analysed the data using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) the result of her study showed that the experimental groups taught essay writing using the Communicative approach performed much better than the control groups taught essay writing using Traditional Teaching Method (TTM).

Fahim and Hashtroudi (2012) investigated the effects of teaching techniques on the development and writing of argumentative essay writing by Iranian students. They used 63 EFL university students for the study divided into experimental and control groups. They treated the experimental groups with the Communicative approach while the control group was exposed to conventional methodology. They found that the improvement was positive as the

experimental groups exposed to Communicative approach performed excellently well.

VII. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was a quasi-experimental. Two groups, one experimental and the other control, were used for the study. The experimental group was exposed to the CLT approach for a period of six weeks. The control group was taught conventionally for the same period. A pretest was administered to both groups before treatment to assess their homogeneity to protect against experimental bias. The researchers used simple random sampling technique to select four schools for the study and further used simple balloting to assign the intact classes to group of either experimental or control

Senior Secondary Students One (SS1) in Sokoto State totaling 3,104 formed the population of this study. The SS1 students in the selected secondary schools Four schools were selected for the study with one intact SS1 class from each school. The number of subjects in the four selected intact classes was 644. Two of the classes were used as experimental groups while the other two were assigned to control group.

The instruments used to collect data from the subjects were the Language Performance Tests (LPTs) which had four designs namely Narrative Essay Performance Tests (NEPT) content and organization designs and Letter Writing Performance Tests (LWPT) content and organization designs. The students were expected to score a maximum of 20 marks in the tests. The questions were taken from WASSCE 2012 question paper to ensure standardization.

The instruments were validated by experts in the Faculty of Education and Extension Services and Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. The reliability of the instruments was carried out using the test-retest method and the data collected were analyzed using Spearman Brown's Rank-Order correlation (rs) co-efficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained for the NEPT (content) instrument and 0.80 obtained for NEPT (organization) instrument. For the LWPT (content) instrument, a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained and 0.78 obtained for LWPT (organization) instrument.

The two groups were first given a pretest before the administration of treatment. The experimental groups were taught both contents and organization of narrative essay and informal letter using CLT while the control groups were taught the same topics but through the use of ALM. At the end of the six weeks of continuous treatment, all groups were subjected to posttests. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and the t-test statistics to find difference in performance between the groups.

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this segment, the research questions will be answered followed by the testing of the research hypotheses.

Research Question 1: Is there any difference in the mean performance in content of narrative essay writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method(ALM) and those taught with Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT)

Table 1: Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental Group and Control Group (Narrative Content)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
EG.1	80	17.89	2.07
CG.1	76	12.42	2.77

The analyses in Table 1 showed that the total number of subjects that took part in the posttests from both the experimental group and control group in the content of narrative essay was 156. Eighty (80) subjects took part in the experimental group whereas 76 subjects were involved in the control group. The mean score of the experimental group was 17.89 and the standard deviation was 2.07. Subjects in the control group scored a mean of 12.42 and their standard deviation was 2.77. The result showed a mean difference of 5.47 in favour of the experimental group that was taught using CLT

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the performance in content of narrative essay writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and students taught with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT).

Table 2: T-test of Posttest scores of Experimental and Control Group of Narrative Content

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value
EG.1	80	17.89	2.07	154	14.00	0.001
CG.1	76	12.42	2.77			

The difference observed in observed in Table 1 is subjected to further statistical analysis in Hypothesis 1 using t-test. The total number as observed in Table was 156, therefore, the degree of freedom was 154. The t-calculated was 14.00 and the p-value was 0.001. The p-value of 0.001 is less than α -value of 0.05 set for the study, therefore, the null hypothesis one (Ho1) is rejected. The observed difference in the mean scores of the two groups is significant to draw a conclusion that teaching students content of narrative essay writing with the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) made the students perform better.

Research Question 2: Is there any difference in the mean performance in organization in narrative essay writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and

students taught with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT)

Table 3: Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental Group and Control Group (Narrative Organisation)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
EG. 2	80	17.63	2.09
CG. 2	74	12.15	2.28

Table 3 showed that 80 students took part in the posttest of experimental group 2 (EG.2) representing subjects taught using CLT and 74 students took part in the posttest of control group 2 (CG.2) representing students taught using ALM bringing the number of subjects to 154 subjects. The mean score of the experimental group was 17.63 with standard deviation 2.09. The mean score of the control group is 12.15 and standard deviation 2.28. The difference in mean scores observed was 5.13 in favour of the students that were taught using CLT.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in performance in organization of narrative essay writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and those taught with Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT)

Table 4: T-test of Posttest Scores of Experimental Group and Control (Narrative Organisation)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value
EG. 2	80	17.63	2.09	152	15.51	0.001
CG. 2	74	12.15	2.28			

To test the significance of the observed difference in Table 3, a t-test analysis was carried out to test the corresponding Ho2. The result of the analysis as presented in Table 4 showed that the degree of freedom was 152, the t-calculated 15.51. The p-value of 0.001 is less than 0.05 α level of significance, therefore, hypothesis three (Ho2) is rejected. That is to say that the observed difference in the mean scores of experimental group and control group is significant to conclude that teaching students the organization of narrative essay writing with the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) made students perform better.

Research Question 3: Is there is any difference in the mean performance in content of informal letter writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and students taught with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT)

Table 5: Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Informal Letter Content

Variable	N	Mean	SD
EG. 3	86	17.83	2.02
CG. 3	82	12.05	2.22

Table 5 showed that a total of 168 subjects were involved in the posttests of the two groups. Eighty-six (86) subjects participated in the experimental group and 82 in the control. The posttest mean score of experimental group (EG.3), the group taught informal letter content with CLT, was 17.83 with a standard deviation 2.02. The posttest mean score of control group 3 (CG.3) taught with ALM was 12.05 and a standard deviation of 2.22. The mean difference observed was 5.78.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the performance in content in informal letter writing of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and students taught with Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT)

Table 6: T-test of Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Informal Letter Content

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value
EG. 3	86	17.83	2.02	166	17.63	0.001
CG. 3	82	12.05	2.22			

The t-test analysis to answer Ho3 showed the degree of freedom was 166. The t-cal was 17.63; the p-value was 0.001 and was less than 0.05 α level significance. Ho3 is therefore rejected and it is concluded that the observed difference between the mean of experimental group three (EG.3) and control group three (CG.3) is significant and that teaching students the content of informal letter writing with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) made them perform better.

Research Question 4: Is there any difference in the mean performance in organization in informal letter writing of students taught with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) and the performance of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

Table 7: Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Informal Letter Organisation

Variable	N	Means	SD
EG. 4	86	17.46	2.16
CG. 4	80	12.08	2.48

Table 7 Showed that 166 subjects took part in the posttest in both experimental and control groups in informal letter organization. Eighty-six (86) subjects participated in the posttest from the experimental group and 80 subjects from the control group. The experimental group had a mean score of 17.46 with standard deviation 2.16. The control group had a mean score of 12.08 with standard deviation of 2.48. The difference in mean performance was 5.38.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in performance in organization in informal letter writing of students taught with Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT)

and the performance of students taught with Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)

Table 8: T-test of Posttest Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Informal Letter Organisation

Variable	N	Means	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value
EG. 4	86	17.46	2.16	164	14.89	0.001
CG. 4	80	12.08	2.48			

The data in Table 7 was subjected to further scrutiny in Table 8 using t-test statistic procedure to find out whether the observed difference in the mean scores of the two groups was significant. The figures in Table 8 showed that the degree of freedom was 164. The t-cal was 14.89 and P-value 0.001. The P-value is less than 0.05 α level significance. The null hypothesis 4 is therefore rejected. This is to say that the observed difference in the mean scores of the two groups is significant and that teaching students the organization of informal letter writing with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach made them perform better.

IX. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following were the findings of the study:

1. Students taught content of narrative essay writing using CLT performed significantly better than students taught using ALM.
2. Students taught organization of narrative essay writing using CLT performed significantly better than students taught using ALM.
3. Students taught content of informal letter writing using CLT performed significantly better than students taught using ALM.
4. Students taught organization of informal letter writing using CLT performed significantly better than students taught using ALM.

X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that teaching students aspects of narrative essay writing using the CLT approach enhanced the students' performance. The findings of tallies with the result of the experimental study conducted by Okonkwo (2014). she found out that the experimental groups she treated with communicative mode approach outperformed the control groups that she gave the Traditional Teaching Method treatment. The finding is equally in line with Ogbu's (2009) findings on the effects of Cooperative Teaching Methodology in narrative essay writing. He revealed that the methods made students perform better than traditional individualized method did.

The findings of the research showed that teaching students aspects of informal letter writing using communicative approaches enhanced their performance. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ajiboye (2007). He found that the groups taught with CLT excelled far and above

those taught with conventional methods. This finding also supported the findings of Roy (2010) that students' taught informal letter writing in communicatively oriented classrooms, and a functional analytic approach wrote a better informal letter than those taught the same from the teacher as the stand point in a conventional methodology.

XI. CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this study that LCT impact more positively on the learning of content of narrative essay by senior secondary school students in Sokoto State of Nigeria. The experimental group taught content of narrative with CLT out-scored the control group taught with the ALM. Using CLT approach to teach students content of essay will make them write well thereby leading to high performance. The group taught organization of narrative essay writing using the Communicative Approach performed better in their essay writing. The difference in their performance was significantly high. It is therefore better to teach narrative essay to students using the Communicative Approach.

Similarly, it is the conclusion of the study that students will perform better in both content and organization of informal letter writing if CLT is used in teaching them. This conclusion was arrived at because the control group taught the same content and organization of informal letter writing using ALM did not perform as well as the experimental group.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should explore various approaches to Communicative Language Teaching to engender interest, participation and enhance students' performance.
2. Teachers should notover relyon conventional methods in their teaching; and teacher-centeredness should be drastically reduced while the use of communicative approaches ispromoted.
3. Most Communicative approaches require training. Teachers need to be trained and retrained to launch them into the application of this approach in their teaching efforts.

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