

Effects of Instruction in Mechanical Accuracy on Correct Spelling and Use of Comma in Composition Writing by Students in College of Education, Billiri, Gombe State

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Abstract - This research centered on effects of instruction in mechanical accuracy on correct spelling and the use of comma in composition writing by students in College of Education Billiri. It was geared towards improving students' performance in essay writing. A quasi experimental research design was adopted. The population was NCE I students of College of Education Billiri, Gombe State. A sample of 112 NCE I students selected purposively was used. Two intact classes of NCE I students, one as the control and the other as experimental group were used. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The 2018 WASSCE questions were adapted and used to collect data, and the data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics. The results showed a significant difference between students who received treatment on mechanical accuracy as they achieved higher than those who did not. The study concluded that instruction in mechanical accuracy improves students' correct spelling and use of comma in composition writing. Based on these findings, a number of recommendations were made, major among is that teachers of English composition writing should teach mechanical accuracy separately for the learners to apply the rules while composing essays.

Keywords: Mechanical, Accuracy, Spelling, Comma, Composition Writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a language involves becoming proficient in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As the language of the Nigerian multilingual community, for there is no mutual intelligibility and understanding amongst the greater majority of people, therefore, English language becomes a means of obtaining, maintaining, and regulating contact. It is therefore very important for every Nigerian to be proficient in both the speech and written forms of the language; for the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world. Above all, success in school is largely a language matter which purely depends on the ability to write.

Writing is a medium of human communication that represents language and emotions with signs and symbols. In most languages, writing is a complement to speech or spoken language. Writing is not a language, but a tool to make languages readable. It is necessary therefore, to note that

certain rules must be borne in mind when practicing the art of writing.

Writing is believed to be the difficult skill to acquire especially in oral culture like Nigeria, where people including English Language teachers rarely read and write. Writing does not come as natural as speaking, but it is an activity that many of us cannot get away from, there are letters to write, forms to fill, messages to send etc.

The importance attached to the art of writing good essays cannot be measured. One can put their thoughts across clearly without any form of ambiguity. There is no doubt that it is a great task for anyone to produce flawless essays. However, great care must be taken so as to produce a good write-up. A very dull essay with poor Mechanical Accuracy, will surely reduce the interest and enthusiasm of the reader.

Looking at the phrase Mechanical (Technical) accuracy, this entails grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules to be complied with. (Annie Moon, 2018, <http://myschool.ng>)

Mechanical accuracy according to Uzo (2007), is 'a fancy way of saying that your writings should be free of errors.' He added that 'it has to do with typographical errors, spelling, punctuation and syntax.' Remember that no writing is comprehensible until it is free from errors. Every piece of writing that is judged to be good must have four cardinal factors, otherwise the piece will fall flat regardless of its intended purpose. The four factors are Content, Organisation, Expression, and Mechanical Accuracy.

To achieve the needed goal of written communication, emphasis should also be placed on punctuation, for it is more stubbornly problematic compared to any other aspect of the language as it can authoritatively affect meaning (Oyetunde, 2018). Full stops, commas, question marks etc. must be put at the appropriate places. Neglecting to do so, leads to alteration of meaning or missing the entire point sometimes. Full stops are put at the end of sentences. It is very nasty to forget to put full stop at the end of a sentence, yet this is what several students do! Other punctuation marks such as the colon, semi-colon, dash, quotation marks etc., correct spellings,

syllabification and capitalization should also be used accordingly.

It is of paramount importance for students to have mastery of punctuation marks and large vocabulary. However, there has been serious deficiency in the writing skill of NCE I students of College of Education Billiri. The situation is nothing to write home about. It has been observed by the Department of Modern Languages in the School of Languages, that most of the NCE I students perform poorly at General English courses especially that of Composition (Letter and Essay Writing). The gap is so wide that a prompt remediation is needed to curtail this alarming situation.

This issue may not be unconnected to the students' attitude towards practice in writing, for their wrong perception of the English language as 'difficult'. It could also be linked with large classes with students-teacher ratio of 90:1, and insufficiency of qualified English Language teachers in the school of Education to man the teeming population of the students in the General English classes.

English language is the medium of instruction in our tertiary institutions, and a means of communication in our country. In fact, one of the requirements for admission into any higher institution of learning in Nigeria is to have a credit pass in English Language and four other related subjects based on area of professionalization, yet students' performances in English Language over the years has not been encouraging, therefore the need for this work.

For the purpose of this research, College of Education Billiri NCE I students' achievement in composition writing is going to be looked at, and if rapt attention is paid to the recommendations of this research, beautiful essays and write-ups will be the outcome.

A. Statement of the Problem

Writing is intimidating to a lot of people, particularly those who do not write for a living or on regular basis. There has been a general outcry and a growing concern among stakeholders about the performance of NCE I students' achievement in composition writing especially from the School of Languages of the College, Department of Modern Languages, and the English Unit in particular. This persistent poor performance of the students has been a source of concern to the management, academic staff in the English Unit, COE Billiri, and Gombe State at large. In one of its regular meetings, the management of the college threw the challenge to the English Unit to proffer solutions to this.

Efforts were made by the concerned unit to organise a two week extra lessons for remediation in that regard. Also, formation of co-curricular activities like press club, young writers club, quiz and debate clubs were put in place to help the students overcome some of these challenges faced in writing. It is in line with this concern that the researchers decided to undertake this study.

B. Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of instruction in Mechanical Accuracy on correct spelling and use of comma in Composition Writing among NCE I Students in College of Education Billiri of Gombe State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the level of use of correct spelling in composition writing by NCE I students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy.
2. Find out the level of use of comma in composition writing by NCE I students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy.
3. Examine the effect of mechanical accuracy instruction on NCE I students' use of correct spelling in composition writing.
4. Examine the effect of mechanical accuracy instruction on NCE I students' use of comma in composition writing.

C. Research Questions

The research questions below were raised for the study:

1. What is the level of use of correct spelling in composition writing by NCE I students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy?
2. What is the level of use of comma in composition writing by NCE I students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy?

D. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the use of correct spelling in composition writing between the treatment and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference in the use of comma in composition writing between the treatment and control groups.

II. METHODOLOGY

The researchers made use of the Quasi-Experimental design. Specifically, the pre-test-post-test control and experimental group design. The experimental design is chosen because it gears at seeing the effects of an independent variable on a dependent variable (s). In this study, the independent variable is instruction on mechanical accuracy, while the dependent variable is students' achievement in composition writing. The groups are manipulated on training in effective use of correct spelling and comma. The experimental group received the training, while the control group did not.

The experimental design has three key elements: Comparison, Manipulation, and Control. Comparison is an activity that involves identifying the effects of a variable (usually the independent variable) on another variable (dependent variable). Manipulation has to do with introducing an

experience to one group (the experimental group), and withholding it from another similar group (the control group). Control is the process of doing away with other factors that may equally be responsible for the observed relationship between the variables under investigation (Awotunde & Ugodulunwa, 2004).

The population of the study consisted of all the 112 NCE 1 students comprising 46 males and 66 females from the four (4) schools: Arts and Social Sciences, Languages, Primary Education and Early Child Care Education, and Sciences, in the College of Education Billiri of Gombe State. The students that constituted the sample of this study are 112 NCE 1 students of College of Education Billiri of Gombe State selected through the purposive sampling technique.

The researchers measured the students' composition writing skills achievement in the two groups before and after the study using the 'Composition Writing Skills Achievement Test' (CWSAT) adapted from the 2019 WASSCE English Language examination questions, modified to suit NCE I level, especially with regards to length of the essay and time allotted. It was an essay question designed to attract 40 marks (20 marks each for Comma and Correct Spelling).

Both the content and construct validity of the English Language Achievement Test were obtained through inputs from experienced English Language lecturers as well as experts in the area of Research Measurement and Evaluation, Faculty of Education, University of Jos. The reliability of internal consistency was obtained by administering it to five students that possess similar characteristics with the sampled students, but were not part of the study.

Procedure

The researchers have requested and obtained an introductory letter from the Head of Department of the Department of Arts Education, University of Jos. Together with a co-lecturer of a General Course (GEN112) who served as the research assistant, a pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups by the researchers and the research assistant in the first week of the research exercise. This provided a baseline before the treatment. Thereafter, the treatment (instruction in mechanical accuracy) was provided to the experimental group only for six weeks. However, while the researchers exposed the experimental group to the treatment, the research assistant engaged the control group in the regular content of GEN 112. At the end of the six weeks of exposing the experimental and control groups to different conditions, the post test, same as the pretest, was administered.

The data collected was processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to answer the research questions and inferential statistics (t-test) to test the hypotheses.

III. RESULTS

The results are presented in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question One tried to find out the level of use of correct spelling in composition writing by NCE 1 students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy. The computed result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation on the use of Correct Spelling before Treatment

Group	Variable	N	\bar{x}	SD	Level
Control	Spelling	56	0.7	2	Low
Experimental		56	0	0	Low

Result on Table 1 shows the computed mean for Control Group as 0.7 and standard deviation as 2. For the Experimental Group, the mean is computed as 0 and standard deviation as 0. This means that students' use of correct spelling before exposure to treatment was low in both groups.

The second Research Question examined the level of use of comma in composition writing by NCE 1 students before exposure to instruction in mechanical accuracy. The computed result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation on the use of Comma before Treatment

Group	Variable	N	\bar{x}	SD	Level
Control	Comma	56	1.07	1.64	Low
Experimental		56	0.7	1.48	Low

The result on Table 2 provided the computed mean for Control Group as 1.07 and standard deviation as 1.64. For the Experimental Group, the mean is computed as 0.07 and standard deviation as 1.48. This means that students' use of comma before exposure to treatment was low in both groups.

Hypothesis One stated that there is no significant difference in the use of correct spelling in composition writing between the treatment and control groups.

Table 3. Mean Score difference in Spelling

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	T	Df	p-value	Dec.
Control	56	1.05	3.81	4.83	110	0.0001	Sig.
Experimental	56	4.02	2.57				

To test hypothesis one, a t-test statistic was computed. Table 3 shows that the mean score for the experimental group in spelling is 4.02, while that of the control group is 1.05. Therefore, the experimental group achieved higher than the control group in spelling.

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the use of comma in composition writing between the treatment and control groups.

Table 4. Mean Score difference in Comma

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	T	Df	p-value	Dec.
Control	56	1.57	3.33	10.92	110	0.0001	Sig.
Experimental	56	7.83	2.72				

A t-test was also used to test the hypothesis. Table 4 shows that the mean score for experimental group in comma is 7.83, while that of the control group is 1.57. Mean score difference in comma is in favour of the experimental group.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken in order to ascertain the effects of instruction in mechanical accuracy on the use of correct spelling and comma in composition writing among NCE I students in COE Billiri, Gombe State. Evidence from this research has shown that teaching mechanical accuracy as an entity is better. This is justified by the improvement of the experimental group over the control group in writing composition as a result of treatment received in mechanical accuracy. The finding also showed an improvement in the use of comma and correct spelling by both groups but higher in the experimental group than control. This implies that teaching mechanical accuracy separately is better, because students were thoroughly carried through the technicalities of mechanical accuracy in composition writing where samples of marked dummies of WASSCE & SSCE were given out to the students, and the researchers vividly explained the penalties of mechanical accuracy errors. This aided much in making the students more careful in committing similar errors in the subsequent practice. In the course of teaching, the researchers also guided the learners to a certain level on what and how to write error-free compositions.

The finding of this study indicated that students learn composition writing rapidly by being careful and skillful in the use of mechanical accuracy, as evidence showed from the performance of the experimental group.

The findings of this study revealed that:

- a. the instruction in mechanical accuracy enhanced the mean achievement scores of students in the use of both comma and correct spelling.
- b. students in experimental group were able to perform higher than that of control in posttest in the areas of comma and correct spelling.
- c. the posttest mean score showed a significant difference between the two groups, with the experimental group achieving significantly higher because of the intervention received, while the performance of the control group in the posttest showed a little improvement.
- d. instruction in mechanical accuracy improved NCE I students' achievement in composition writing even though little errors were observed in spelling, use of linkers and vocabulary etc.
- e. the pre-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups showed no significant difference.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and evidence provided by the research, it is concluded that instruction in mechanical accuracy improves the use of comma and correct spelling by students in composition writing.

Recommendations

The researchers have offered some recommendations as below:

1. English language teachers should be encouraged to integrate mechanical accuracy meaningfully in teaching composition writing. The teaching should be practical so as to increase students' understanding of the concept, and the lecturer must be expert, skillful, and sophisticated especially in the use of punctuation marks.
2. Composition writing should be learner-centered in such a way that learning materials are applied to encourage active participation of the learners, while the role of the teacher is to guide the composition writing.
3. Curriculum planners (NCCE) are also advised to plan NCE minimum standard taking cognizance to include mechanical accuracy as an entity.
4. Composition writing clubs should be established in all public colleges of education with a clear intervention from government which will serve as motivating factor to capture the interest of the learners to involve in writing regularly.
5. College management should supply ample composition learning materials such as story books, English language textbooks, novels, plays, poems, diagrams, pictures and other related materials.

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