

EFFECT OF SELF-REGULATED STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH ON ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE OF UPPER BASIC STUDENTS IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) approach on essay writing performance of upper basic students in Otukpo and Ohimini Local Government Areas in Benue State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions. Two hypotheses were tested. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design consisting of one treatment group and one control group. A sample of 128 Upper Basic III students from four UBE schools was used for this study. Essay Writing Performance Test (EWPT) was used for data collection. The EWPT was administered to experimental and control groups as pre-test and post-test. The treatment lasted 12 weeks. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA. The finding indicated that there is a significant difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method ($F(1, 125) = 73.22$; $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of male and female students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development ($F(1,63) = 0.32$; $p = 0.57 < 0.05$). It is concluded that SRSD improves students' performance in essay writing more than the product method and that SRSD is gender friendly as there is no difference in male and female students' performance in essay writing. The researcher recommended among others that teachers should expose students to the Self-Regulated Strategy Development so as to improve their writing skills.

Keywords: Self-regulated strategy development, writing, writing performance, upper basic students, Benue State.

Introduction

Writing is one of the basic literacy skills that are required for effective functioning in the modern society. It is the representation of ideas on paper using symbols, marks and letters. Writing is creating meaningful texts such as stories, descriptions, invitations or informative pieces. It remains the most important mode of knowing the students' academic ability in learning institutions globally, yet a very challenging task for students to master. The written word is the medium mostly used to determine the performance of students in all school subjects' especially English competence and performance. Students nowadays manifest difficulty in expressing themselves through writing because of the limited knowledge they possess in producing good written output (Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010). Specifically, the difficulties students experience in writing start with difficulty in developing

a coherent and effective sentence and paragraph which then builds to writing a full-fledged essay. Such difficulties may include their inability to generate proper ideas, lack of skills to write sentences logically and coherently and inability to generate topic sentences and develop such topic sentences into paragraphs (Olorunfemi, 2021). Hasan (2010) adds that most students do not know how to do free writing and they do not possess the strategies for composing texts independently.

Similarly, majority of the students who graduated from the Nine year Universal Basic Education (UBE) do not have the needed skills which hinder their capacity in communicating constructively through writing which is a critical aspect for their success upon graduation (Hassan and Umaru, 2014). The main goal of universal basic education in Nigeria is to equip individuals with adequate knowledge and skills that will enable them to discharge their civil obligations competently to the development of the society. Competency in the use of English language is key to achieving this goal. However, it has been noticed that many students still struggle with their use of English language after spending nine years in lower basic and upper basic classes. The weaknesses observed in the script of the candidates are lack of skills of writing, among others (Benue State Examination Board, 2019). In this regard, Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) observe that the school system is failing in its responsibility to make learners proficient writers in English language and that the teaching and learning of writing in Nigerian secondary schools has lost its taste and has deprived students of the proper acquisition of the many benefits it brings. Among the four basic skills of English language namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing, Sonya (2013) states that writing seems to be the most neglected in teaching and learning of English language. In fact, when public outcry is raised in the performance of students in English, what is often voiced is the poor writing ability of students. The outcry is such that students are often accused of inability to string a couple of sentences together to form a paragraph apart from the glaring weaknesses observed in handling the grammar and mechanics of writing in English (Olorunfemi, 2021).

Writing is a higher-order skill in language development, which unlike listening and speaking cannot be acquired naturally, but must be formally taught using guided instructional strategies that will motivate and engage learners in writing skill practice. Writing a good composition demands the ability to use language appropriately and effectively too. Moreover, the writer needs to know certain skills by which essay development is assessed as effective. Effective writing requires mastery of not just the knowledge of grammar but also the ability to develop and present thoughts in a well organised manner because writing is not just the graphic presentation of speech (Ibrahin, 2021). Knowledge of these writing skills is central to learners achieving competence in writing.

In the light of the importance of the writing skills to learners, there is need for teachers of writing to use effective approaches that give attention to the development of the writing skills as they are necessary for minimum success in completing a writing task. However, in Nigerian classroom the development of writing skills is neglected by teachers of English language due to their method of teaching. Nwaiwu and Nnanna (2011) observe that many teachers of English language teach essay writing by listing the types after which essay exercises are given with little or no guidance from the teachers on the process of essay writing. The authors conclude that this product approach based method will not help the students to arrive at a

well-organised essay as skills of writing are not emphasized in the method. To enable students acquire writing skills, Oyedele and Chikwature (2016) advocate the use of teaching methods that develop learners' necessary writing readiness skills. In line with this view, this study investigates the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) approach on essay writing performance of Upper Basic (JSS3) in Benue State, Nigeria.

The SRSD is a research based approach first implemented by Steve Graham and Karen Harris at the University of Maryland (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2011). The approach has been used for improving spelling, mathematics, reading and writing. The SRSD approach has embedded within the process, four self-regulatory procedures which are: goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction and self-reinforcement (Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010). SRSD is an instructional approach designed to improve a writer's strategic behaviour, knowledge and motivation (Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010). The SRSD approach is based on the idea that students' writing can be enhanced if they can have pre-skill instruction, develop background knowledge of a topic, discuss it, model it, memorize it, support it and practice it independently. According to Fahim (2014) and Chen, Zhang, Wang and Zhang (2021) SRSD instructional approach is based on the following six stages of instruction:

- i. Development of background knowledge.
- ii. Discussion of the strategy.
- iii. Modeling of the strategy.
- iv. Memorization of the strategy.
- v. Supportive collaborative practice of the strategy
- vi. Independent demonstration of utilizing the strategy to obtain effective results.

Instruction in SRSD classroom begins with development of background knowledge (stage one) which involves a discussion of what the students already know, for example, if the topic is on a narrative essay, students discuss the purpose of narrative essay and the elements that are commonly found in such essays. In order to write a good story, the students may need to learn the components of a typical story. Procedures of goal-setting and self-monitoring are presented could be presented right from this stage. Mnemonic is also introduced at this stage. For instance, POW+SPACE Mnemonic.

The second stage of the SRSD is the discussion of the strategy (Mnemonic) that has been introduced. For example, POW: P stands for pick my idea, O stands for organize my idea and W stands for write and say more. SPACE: S stands for setting which refers to the characters, place and time. P stands for purpose which deals with what starts the action or issue that leads to the action. A stands for action which refers to how the actions in the narrative unfold. C stands for conclusion which refers to how the story ends and how the actions are resolved and E stands for emotion which deals with the feelings of the main character and the other characters about the events of the story.

The third Stage is modeling of the strategy. During this stage the teacher models how to use POW+SPACE to write good narrative essay as he decides on each element and then writes the essay adding more ideas as he writes. He sets goal to include all the parts of good narrative essay thinking out loud as he/she plans and writes an essay. The teacher models the use of

self-statements such as “How can I start?”, “How do I include the entire story elements?” The students help the teacher in making plans and writing the first draft. The teacher and students continue to modify their plan while writing the paper. Each student is given a sheet titled ‘My self-statements’ and is encouraged to record one or more self-statements to help him think of good ideas and how to organize the ideas. Finally, the students evaluate this collaborative essay and graph the number of parts it contained (the teacher makes sure that all parts; setting, purpose, actions, conclusion and emotion are present) on their graphs. If the teacher decides that students could profit from additional teacher-led or collaborative modeling, this will be done.

The fourth Stage is memorization of the strategy. Memorization involves reciting the POW plus SPACE mnemonic (that is, memorizing the steps of the strategy and the actions involved in each). Students engage in practice of the mnemonics and their meaning until they are memorized. If they cannot do this, more practice is needed. The fifth stage is support it and is typically the longest. The students work together with the teacher’s assistance to write a narrative essay, sharing ideas, crafting notes and then writing a draft. The teacher re-models if necessary. For each essay written during support it stage, the students first set a goal to include all essay parts. Each essay is evaluated by the students. Students are able to help each other throughout this stage as well as receive teacher’s help. They share their essays with each other, providing feedback on both strengths and areas where improvements could be made in each other’s writing.

The sixth Stage is the Independent performance. At this stage, each student writes a narrative essay without the teacher’s support. They direct themselves throughout the writing process. Students are encouraged to write the mnemonic and notes for each part on blank paper before writing on the main paper. They make sure all the parts of the mnemonic are included in the writing. The teacher provides positive and constructive feedback as needed. Strategy procedures and self-regulation scripts are reinforced. These six SRSD stages of instruction can be implemented in a week, term, session or even in two years or more depending on the writing developmental level of the learners. Usually, beginner learners require more time passing through the SRSD instructional stages. Mastering one stage before proceeding to the next stage is key to attaining success (Chen, Zhang, Wang & Zhang, 2021).

The instructional values of SRSD approach on improving writing skills of learners with writing difficulties have been established in Europe by Graham (2006) and America by Asaro-Saddler and Saddler (2010), and Hoover, Kubin and Mason (2012). The effectiveness of SRSD on improving writing skills of students with learning disabilities was demonstrated by Chen, Zhang, Wang and Zhang (2021), and Turkben (2021). However, in Nigeria, there is very little research on the use of SRSD in teaching writing. Apart from the instructional strategy used by the teacher, one of the socio-cultural factors that shapes learners in the process of learning a language, including writing is gender. The term "gender" clearly reveals the social and contextual expectations which society puts on part of each gender (male or female) culturally and socially (Kamiar, Gorjian, & Pazhakh, 2012). According to Soori and Zamani (2012), male and female students use language features (for example; style of writing) differently. Due to the fact that male and female speak differently in using different language features, they can write differently as well. In a study on self-regulation writing strategies and gender

differences in writing performance, Galbraith (2014) reported a superiority of girls' writing over boys' writing and girls' writing was considered as more detailed descriptive and having greater conformity to writing conventions. Kamiar, Gorjian and Pazhakh (2012) found the superiority of writing skill of male students on opinion paragraph essay and superiority of female students on descriptive one. Kamari, Gorjian and Pazhakh (2012) found that male students are good writers on opinion related-subjects because of their ability in expressing their opinions and ideas. Soori and Zamani (2012) on the other hand found no significant difference in the writing performance of male and female students. The mixed results on effect of gender on essay writing performance call for further empirical researches. Based on these, the present study examines the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development on essay writing performance of Upper Basic students in Benue State with gender as a modulation variable.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that many students, after spending nine years in Lower Basic (Primary School) and Upper Basic (Junior Secondary School) still have problem with their use of English Language, especially the written form which resulted to poor performance. For instance, according to the Benue State Examination Board (2019), only 38.4% of the candidates who sat for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) obtained credit or distinction in English language. The Board further revealed that the weaknesses observed in the scripts of the candidates are mainly as a result of inadequate exposure to the skill of writing, wrong use of tenses, poor knowledge of basic rules of English grammar, wrong spelling of words, inappropriate expressions and construction of loose sentences.

The failure of Upper Basic students in acquiring writing skills has translated into poor communication through writing. This is a pointer that the objectives of teaching English Language at the Basic Education level to enable students acquire necessary skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in English language seem defeated and the goal of UBE to ensure that completers of Basic Education possess literacy and basic life skills is not being achieved.

This poor writing skill among the students has been blamed largely on the instructional approaches used by English Language teachers. Nwaiwu and Nnanna (2011) observe that many teachers of English language have taught essay writing in theoretical stereotypes whereby they list types of essay and give essay exercises with little or no guidance on the process of essay writing. Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) state that writing is hardly taught in Nigerian schools and when it is taught, it is taught as a product and not as a process which could be the cause of mass failure in English language and other subjects because students' inability to write well affects their academic performance in all subjects.

This implies that, serious measures should be taken to improve the situation by employing strategies of teaching writing that could yield desired results especially at the basic education level. Therefore, this study investigates the effect of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) on essay writing performance of Upper Basic students in Benue State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method?
2. What is the difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic male and female students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of male and female Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development.

Research Method

This study adopted the pre-test – post-test quasi experimental design. This design implies that all groups took pre-test before the treatment and post-test at the end of the treatment. The population for this study was 3, 875 Upper Basic III students in 24 public Upper Basic School (UBE Junior Secondary Schools) in Otukpo and Ohimini Local Government Areas of Benue State. The sample of this study comprised 128 Upper Basic III Students located in four intact classes in four UBE Junior Secondary Schools in the two Local Government Areas in Benue State. The sampling procedure was multi-stage approach. One instrument was used for data collection. The instrument was Essay Writing Performance Test (EWPT). Treatment packages (Lesson plans) were also developed and used for treatment. The packages were SRSD and Product Method lesson plans. The instrument was validated by three experts. Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument and it was found that the EWPT had a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

Before the commencement of the treatment, a pre-test was administered to both the experimental group and control group. The experimental group was taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) while the control group was taught essay writing using Product method. After teaching for twelve weeks, post-test was administered to both groups. Data collected were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results are presented based on the research questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1

What is the difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method?

Data analysis providing answer to research question one is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Performance Scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using SRSD and those taught using product method

Group	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
SRSD	66	38.30	8.93	76.64	13.98	38.34
Product method	62	36.68	8.58	54.91	11.41	18.23
Mean difference		1.62		21.73		20.11

Table 1 shows that 66 Upper Basic III students were taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and 62 students were taught using the product method. The table reveals that the mean performance scores of students taught using SRSD is 38.30 with a standard deviation of 8.93 during pre-test and 76.64 with a standard deviation of 13.98 in post-test. Table 1 also reveals that the mean performance scores of students taught using product method is 36.68 with a standard deviation of 8.58 during pre-test and 54.91 with a standard deviation of 11.41 in post-test. Table 1 further shows that the mean gain of students that were taught essay writing using SRSD is 38.34 and those of students taught using product method is 18.23. The mean difference between the SRSD group and the product group is 21.73 in favour of the SRSD group.

Research Question 2

What is the difference between the mean performance scores of male and female Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development?

Data analysis providing answer to research question two is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Performance Scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using SRSD and those taught using product method

Gender	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Male	35	38.10	8.70	74.60	12.48	36.50
Female	31	37.82	8.84	75.91	13.11	38.09
Mean difference		0.28		1.31		1.59

Table 2 shows that 35 male and 31 female Upper Basic III students were taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development. The table reveals that the mean performance scores of male students is 38.10 with a standard deviation of 8.70 during pre-test and 74.60 with a standard deviation of 12.48 during post-test. Table 2 also reveals that the mean performance scores of female students is 37.82 with a standard deviation of 8.84 during pre-test and 75.91 with a standard deviation of 13.11 in post-test. Table 1 further shows that the

mean gain of male is 36.50 and that of female students is 38.09. The mean difference between male and female students is 1.31 in favour of female.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method.

Data analysis for testing hypothesis one is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: ANCOVA of Performance Scores of Students taught essay writing using SRSD and Product Method

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2672.42 ^a	2	1336.21	36.92	.00	.22
Intercept	8268.52	1	8268.52	228.48	.00	.46
Strategies	2649.93	1	2649.93	73.22	.00	.22
Pre-test	.67	1	.67	.02	.89	.00
Error	9409.33	125	75.27			
Total	196800.00	128				
Corrected Total	12081.75	127				

Table 3 reveals that $F(1, 125) = 73.22$; $p = 0.00 < 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method in favour of the SRSD group. The partial Eta square of 0.22 was obtained for the method meaning that 22% of the essay writing performance can be accounted for by the method employed in the teaching of essay writing.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of male and female Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development.

Data analysis for testing hypothesis two is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: ANCOVA of Performance Scores of male and female Students taught essay writing using SRSD

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	9.59 ^a	2	4.79	.21	.81	.003
Intercept	4345.73	1	4345.73	186.96	.00	.603
Gender	7.519	1	7.52	.32	.57	.003
Pre-test	.81	1	.81	.04	.85	.000
Error	2859.04	63	23.24			
Total	103114.00	66				
Corrected Total	2868.64	65				

Table 4 reveals that $F(1,63) = 0.32$; $p = 0.57 < 0.05$. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of male and female Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development. The partial Eta square of 0.003 was obtained for the gender meaning that only 0.3% of the students' essay writing scores can be accounted for by their gender in SRSD class.

Discussion of findings

Finding from hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean performance scores of Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development and those taught using product method in favour of the SRSD group. This finding is possible because the SRSD strategy involves extended opportunities for writing, engaging in cycles of planning, translating and reviewing, personal responsibility and ownership of writing projects, high levels of student interactions and creation of a supportive writing environment featuring self-reflection and evaluation and in some instances more systematic instruction. Students in the SRSD group were exposed to pre-skill instruction (Prewriting activities) where they develop background knowledge of a topic, discuss the strategy to use, model the strategy, memorize it, support it and practice writing on the topic independently which build their essay writing skills and resulted in the enhanced performance in writing. The use of mnemonics such as the Pick, Organize and Write (POW) and the Setting, Purpose, Action, Conclusion and Emotion (SPACE) enable students in the SRSD group to organize and develop the content of their essay. The product method lacks the intricacies of writing skill development which are found in the SRSD strategy.

The finding that SRSD enhances students' performance in writing essay corroborates that of Graham (2006) who found that SRSD instruction yielded a larger mean effect in writing than all other instructional approaches combined. This finding agrees with that of Asaro-Saddler and Saddler (2010); Hoover, Kubina and Mason (2012) that SRSD is an effective instructional strategy for teaching writing. The finding is also in tandem with that of Chen, Zhang, Wang and Zhang (2021) and Turkben (2021) that the use of SRSD improved students' essay writing skills. This finding also lends credence to Oyedele and Chikwwature's (2016) recommendation that teaching method that develops the learners' necessary writing skills should be used for teaching writing.

Finding from hypothesis two indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of male and female Upper Basic students taught essay writing using Self-Regulated Strategy Development. This finding implies that SRSD is gender friendly. The finding could be possible because SRSD provide equal writing opportunities to both male and female learners by engaging them in rigorous writing activities. Hence, the finding that there is no significant difference in essay writing of male and female students in the SRSD classroom. Thus, with the use of SRSD instruction, gender is no longer a determinant of writing performance. This finding agrees with Soori and Zamani (2012) who found no significant difference in the writing performance of male and female students. However, the finding disputes Galbraith (2014) who reported a superiority of girls' writing over boys' writing with the use of self-regulated strategy development.

Conclusion

It is concluded in this study that SRSD improve students' performance in essay writing more than the product method and that SRSD is gender friendly as there is no difference in students' performance in essay writing based on gender.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should expose students to the Self-Regulated Strategy Development so as to improve their writing skills.
2. Ministry of education, Teachers' training institutions and Universal Basic Education Commission should organize workshops for English Language teachers on the use of SRSD to enhance students' performance in writing.

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