

CHAPTER TEN

Appraisal of Writing Skills and Academic Performance of Students in English Language WAEC Examination in 2011/2012 Academic Session in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

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1.0 Introduction

Millions of language learners all over the world are striving to improve their English Language proficiency. An important component of this proficiency is improving one's ability to communicate via writing, since it is crucial to effective communication, and important to students' examination purpose. Despite the importance of the English language, the performance of students in written English is not encouraging.

Writing is one important component of literacy development. It involves composing, conducting research, developing and analyzing ideas in writing (Oladosun 2000). Incidentally, students often find difficulties in what is considered the highest form of language expressions, which is writing. Just like looking ill, poor written English can have drastic effects on writing outcomes of students. However, over the last few decades, schools have been increasing the value it places on accurate writing, and proficiency in writing is now becoming a mark of a good education in senior secondary schools and elsewhere.

Although there had been many reports on students' performance in the English language public examinations in the country, a recent report written by the Chief Examiners of the West African Examination Council observed that candidates that attained distinction or credit in 2010/2012 academic session fluctuate between 29% and 34%. They further affirm that this trend of failure is not a recent development.

There are evidences that learners, particularly in both private and public schools, have not been effective in their writing skills during examinations. Many factors may account for the differences in the performance of students in private and public senior secondary schools in English language writing, during examinations. Such may include poor parental background, inadequate qualified teachers and subject types, apathy on the part of students, poor attitude to learning. It has been noted that students' poor performance in writing of the English language in

examinations has gone a long way to affect their performances across disciplines.

This chapter seeks to provide answers to some questions, and possibly map out ways to improve students' competence in writing.

1.1 Purpose of the Paper

The primary purpose of this paper is to appraise writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination in 2011/2012 academic session, in Ilorin Kwara State, Nigeria.

In specific terms, the study intends to find out if:

1. There is any difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination on account of students' gender.
2. There is any difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination on account of students' home background.
3. There is any difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination on account of students' school type.

1.2 Research Questions

This chapter has attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Do writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination differ on the basis of students' gender?
2. Do writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination differ on the basis of students' home background?
3. Do writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination differ on the basis of students' school type?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses have been raised and tested:

HO₁: There is no significant difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on their gender.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on their home background.

HO₃: There is no significant difference between writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on their school type.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study is an appraisal of the writing skills and students' academic performance in WAEC English language examination in 2011/2012 academic session in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study covered all senior secondary schools, in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Specifically, ten SSS 111 classes were purposively used for the study.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The students who are the recipients of every effort put in place to improve teaching the writing skills would benefit greatly from the outcome of this study. This would give them insight into why they have been finding writing skills difficult to master.

It is hoped that the findings of this study would help the English language teachers to review their understanding of the writing process, with a view to improving competence and performance of their students. It would also assist them to easily understand the students writing needs, with a view to improving their writing skills.

To the government, this study would help in sensitizing the need to promote writing instruction, in senior secondary schools through constant training and retraining of teachers. It is also hoped that the outcome of this study would provide curriculum planners with necessary information on the strategies for developing and improving on the English Language curriculum currently in use.

2.0 Nature and Scope of Writing

Writing is a powerful instrument of thought. In the act of composing, writers learn about themselves and their world, and communicate their insights to others. Man is obliged to devise a tool capable of overcoming the limitations of speech. George (2009) in his translation of Jensen, *Sign, Symbol and Script* conceptualized this tool as writing. Writing is a system of intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks. The importance of writing can easily be realized if one tries to imagine our

world without writing; therefore, where would we be without books, newspapers, and letters (Gelbagain 2009).

In *A History of Writing*, Fischer (2009) argued that no one definition of writing can cover all the writing systems that exist and have ever existed. Instead, he states that a 'complete writing' system should fulfill the following criteria:

- It must have as its purpose communication.
- It must consist of artificial graphic marks on a durable or electronic surface.
- It must use marks that relate conventionally to articulate speech (the systematic arrangement of significant vocal sounds) or electronic programming in such a way that communication is achieved (p.178).

Oyeyemi (2003) has stated that writing involves words through a set of symbols or marks. These symbols or marks, according to him, represent the thought of the writer. He further explained that writing is not only an attempt to use symbols or marks to express feelings, opinions or suggestions on a particular issue but putting together appropriately these symbols and marks as they appear in words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs. He also said such symbols and marks must be used in a logical and meaningful way.

Babatunde (2009) saw writing as both an interaction and a process. An interaction between the writer and the reader(s) and a process, considered writing as a major task involving a number of steps which must be taken one after the other so as to have a good product or text. In other words, regardless the form of a work, writing reveals thoughts and values of its creator. Even with lies, exaggerations, and omissions, a writer cannot hide his or her thought process.

Writing is usually permanent, and written texts cannot usually be changed once they have been printed or written out. A written text can communicate across time and space, for as long as the particular language and writing system is still understood. Again, here are a number of other ways to define writing: it is a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the uttered.

Writing can also be described as a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system (The World's Writing Systems 2009).

3.0 Writing skills and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Nigeria

Despite the importance of the English language and the fact that it is the language of instruction in Nigeria educational system, the performance of students in the subject, in Ilorin, Kwara State over the years, has been poor and not encouraging.

Abdulkareem (2002) has observed that the problem has been in existence as far back as 1963, when a pass in the English Language for senior secondary school students in Nigeria ceased to be a limit for award of the school certificate. He added that the increase in enrollment figure without increase in personnel and facilities, over the years, also encouraged the decline in the performance of students.

A onetime Minister for Education, Professor Rukayyatu Ahmed Rufai at a National Conference on Examinations in Abuja (2012) described the poor quality of outcome in the country's education system as pathetic. She took a close look at students' results over the years which showed that there had been steady decline in the number of candidates who obtained two credits and above, especially in the English Language. She hinted that this was worrisome considering that the subject is a basic entry requirement for transition to higher education in the country.

Rufai (2012) explained that there was a marginal improvement in performance of students in public examination in 2012, with WAEC recording 39 per cent of those that made five credits and above, including the English Language and Mathematics over the previous year (WAEC Chief Examiner's report on students' performance in English Language 2012). In the Chief Examiners' report in 2011, it is stated that, "the paper was generally within the scope of the curriculum, although the performance of the students belied the quality and simplicity of the question. They generally organized their essays, badly, and they made no conscious efforts at grammatical corrections.

From the above comment by WAEC Chief Examiner, even though the questions were very cheap, the students failed to organize their essays well, and they made grammatical errors which also contributed to their poor performances. In the subsequent years (2012) the Chief Examiner noted that:

The students failed to adhere to the rule of comprehension, which led to their poor performance. Hence, they engaged themselves in lifting works and expression to answers their

questions without checking if they are wrong or right. They did not understand the questions very well which reflected in the answers they gave in the comprehension passage. Their construction were wrong, filled with vague expressions. the students could not understand the question, which resulted in the wrong expression and answering they made. Thus, they failed.

4.0 Instrumentation, Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument for this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire, titled "Student Variables Questionnaire" (SVQ) which was used to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire was structured into Sections A and B. Section A seeks demographic information of the student's gender, home background, subject area and school type; while Section B focused on identifying the writing skills in relation to the academic performance of the respondents. Four hundred (400) SSS 111 students made up of forty (40) students from each of the ten secondary schools were selected for this study. The test instrument consisted twenty (20) 2011/2012 sampled WAEC English language questions administered to the students.

4.1 Data Analysis

Data collected through Section B are analysed using t-test statistical technique using SPSS 200 to ascertain if gender, home background, subject area and school type affect the writing of the students.

4.2 Results and Discussion

The analyses are shown below:

H01: There is no significant difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on gender.

In order to test this hypothesis two, the result on English language for both male and female students that sat for WAEC were collected, and transformed to continuous data. The WAEC English language results were converted to raw scores such that A1 = 88, B2 = 72, B3 = 67, C4 = 62, C5 = 57, C6 = 52, D7 = 47, E8 = 42 and F9 = 39. The scores were then subjected to the t – test statistical analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: The t-test showing difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on gender.

Variables	No.	Mean	Std.	Df	Cal. t-test	Table t-value	Decision
Male students	1269	57.9913	1.20753	2107	7.922	1.960	accepted
Female students	840	56.5476	1.33357				

P > 0.05

Table 1 above has revealed that the calculated t-value is 7.922 while the table t-value is 1.960 at degree of freedom 2107 computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated t-value (7.922) is greater than the table t-value (1.960) sub-hypothesis 2 is thereby rejected. This implies that, there is no significant difference in the performance of both male and female students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session. This is represented in the percentage of scores with the mean score of 57. 9913, and the mean score of 56. 5476, respectively.

H02: There is no significant difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on home background.

In order to test this hypothesis 2, the results of the English language for students that sat for WAEC 2011/2012 were collected and transformed to continuous data. The WAEC English language results were converted to raw scores, such that A1 = 88, B2 = 72, B3 = 67, C4 = 62, C5 = 57, C6 = 52, D7 = 47, E8 = 42 and F9 = 39. The scores were then subjected to the t-test statistical analysis, at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: The t - test showing difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in English language WAEC examination based on home background.

Variables	No.	Mean	Std.	Df	Cal. t-test	Table t-value	Decision
Students from literate homes	558	57.6976	1.34968	1649	1.362	1.960	rejected
Students from non-literate homes	840	56.5476	1.33357				

$P > 0.05$

Table 2 above has revealed that the calculated t-value is 1.362, while the table t-value is 1.960 at degree of freedom 1649 computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated t-value (1.362) is less than the table t-value (1.960), the hypothesis is thereby rejected. This implies that, there is a significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations in the 2011/2012 academic session, based on home background.

H03: There is no significant difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on school type.

In order to test this hypothesis three, the results of the English language for private and public school students that sat for WAEC 2011/2012 were collected and transformed to continuous data. The WAEC English language result were converted to raw scores, such that A1 = 88, B2 = 72, B3 = 67, C4 = 62, C5 = 57, C6 = 52, D7 = 47, E8 = 42 and F9 = 39. The scores were then subjected to the t-test statistical analysis, at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3: The t-test showing difference in the writing skills and performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on school types.

Variables	No.	Mean	Std.	Df	Cal. t-test	Table t-value	Decision
Students from private schools	558	57.6976	1.34968	1649	1.362	1.960	rejected
Students from public schools	840	56.5476	1.33357				

$P > 0.05$

Table 3 above has revealed that the calculated t-value is 1.362, while the table t-value is 1.960 at degree of freedom 1649, computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated t-value (1.362) is less than the table t-value (1.960), the hypothesis is thereby rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session, based on school types. This is in favour of private school students with the mean score of 57.6976 greater than their public school counterparts with the mean score of 56.6133.

5.0 Discussion

Specifically, three research questions were raised with their corresponding research hypotheses.

The variability of the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on gender

The finding of the study accepted the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session based on gender. This implies that, there is no significant difference in the

performance of both male and female students in the English language WAEC examinations in 2011/2012 academic session.

The variability of the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on home background

The finding of the study rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session, based on home background. This means that, there is a significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session, on the basis of home background.

The Variability of the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination based on school types

The finding of the study rejected the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations 2011/2012 academic session, based on school types. This means that there is a significant difference in the performance of students in the English language WAEC examinations in 2011/2012 academic session from private or public.

6.0 Conclusion

This study has appraised the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination in 2011/2012 academic session in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings have revealed that male and female English language students have no significant difference in their writing skills and academic performance in WAEC examination in 2011/2012 academic session in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. However, there exists a significant difference in the writing skills and academic performance of students in the English language WAEC examination during the 2011/2012 academic session based on home background and school types respectively.

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