EFFECT OF FUNCTIONAL-NOTIONAL TECHNIQUES ON THE VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AND ESSAY WRITING OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANYIGBA TOWN, KOGI STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Effect of Functional-Notional Technique on the Vocabulary Development and Essay writing of Junior Secondary School Students in Anyigba town, Kogi state. The aim was to understand and measure the effectiveness of using Functional-Notional Techniques in the development of vocabulary and essay writing. A quasi-experimental design of pre-test and post-test was adopted. English language ability and performance test was the instrument employed for data collection. Sixty Junior Secondary School III students from Demonstration Secondary school, Kogi state unit were randomly sampled for the study.

The result revealed that students taught using Functional-Notional Techniques performed better than those taught using Traditional method. The result also revealed that there was significant difference in academic performance and retention between the students taught using Functional-Notional Techniques. It was recommended that teachers of English Language should use FNT in teaching.

Introduction

Over the years, teachers of English in secondary schools have observed the poor performance of Junior Secondary students in essay writing (David, 2008). Thus, poor performance has persisted despite the importance of writing to the students and the overall educational development of the country. Given the value placed on English and essay writing in particular in the secondary school curriculum, the need to teach it effectively through effective techniques like the functional-notional is indisputable.

Available records have indicated that many English language teachers find it difficult to teach essay writing at Junior level of education because they believe that it is an aspect that needs new methods, (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019) strategies, approach and techniques. Whether poor academic performance or ineffective teaching of essay writing due to lack of proper application of the integrated techniques by teachers of English is yet to be ascertained (Kennedy, 2017). Research work by Okan (2012) and Fadeiye (2005) shows that out of many challenges in the techniques and learning of essays writing, poor instructional techniques plays a major role. Despite concerted efforts made by Opega (2003), Aesan (2008), andGehlbach (2007), to remedy the situation, there seems to be no evidence that performance has improved. After all, students at the Junior level of secondary school with developed vocabulary should be able to write comprehensibly because techniques for writing such as organization of content and expression were already taught.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. Investigate whether using Functional-Notional Techniques in Junior Secondary School class affects the academic performance of students or not.

ii. Determine the differences in the performance of male and female between students taught with Functional-Notional Techniques and those that are taught with traditional method.

Research Questions

Based on the objective of this study, the following research questions are set for the study:

i. What is the effects of FNT on the academic performance of junior secondary school students?

ii. Is there any difference in performance of male and female students taught using FNT and other methods?

Concept of Functional-Notional Techniques

The numbers of current development in language teaching have put the spotlight on the learner as a social person and this technique is one of such (Williams, 1990). The functional technique to language as identified with the linguistic tradition is variously referred to as British linguistics, the London school, or Firthian linguistics. However, none of these is a precise label. The techniques has flourished not only within Britain but also in various countries outside the Britain, For example, it has influenced linguistic studies in Canada (Gregory and Camel,1978), and in Germany where it is known as 'British contextualize' (Geiger, 1981). However, it is little known in the United States where Chomskyan transformational linguistic dominated (Uche, 2014). This concept views language as primarily intended for use in society. William (1991), cited in Paula (2016), states that it was the outcome of a project to prepare teaching materials for adults, workers who would need to communicate in the language of their host communities. This view is not related to this research work because the subjects understudy are secondary school students who are not expected to pick teaching job but who must use the English language as a medium of communication.

The Functional-Notional techniques emphasize syllabus content more than teaching method. Syllabus content is developed with reference to functions and notions in language. In essence, functional techniques to language are based on an interest in performance or actual language use (Opega, 2014). It is thus in contrast with the Chomskyan concern with the linguistic competence of the ideal speaker-hearer. According to J.R Firth, the founder of British school of applied linguistics, language is 'a way of behaving and making others behave' (1951) language in the Firthian view is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. It is in line with this that the present study look at the use (function) of language in context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social or situational context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak, etc.). The following unit of instruction using the functional-notional techniques is presented as a guide for this research work.

Scheme for the functional-notional syllabus

The lesson could progress along these lines:

Title and function asking for information	**Situation** at the staff room	**Formulas** excuse me, can I have?	**Structures** interrogatives	**Nouns verbs etc.** money, register mark, sign	**Activities** dialogue, role-playing

1. Explaining the situation in which the language activities are performed
2. Presentation of dialogue, involving the formulas structures and lexical items for expressing the function, for example:

Form teacher - excuse me, please.
Head teacher — yes, can I help you?
Form teacher - certainly, I want to find out the number of students newly admitted into my class
Head teacher - how many students do you have presently?
Form teacher - 1 have forgotten sir,
Head teacher - Consult your register and report back to me
3. Repetition of dialogue by pairs of students (Williams, 1990)

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development is an essential task that should be accomplished by language learners because it is a sure way to effective communication. Odumu, (1981) cited in Matin (2011) argues that many individuals with learning difficulties, problems and weak language skills have poor vocabulary. To him, a limited vocabulary often equals a limited education and career. This statement further reveals that once a learners' vocabulary is below what would be expected for his age and level of studies, not only that his reading comprehension will reduce but his performance in examinations would be very poor. Most learners who take vocabulary for granted usually encounter difficulties in both oral and written communications. But individuals who can read and have at least a high school education would consider their vocabulary adequate. Adequate meaning that they can understand oral communication, express one's thoughts in speech and they are able to comprehend common reading materials, Emenajo, (2017).

Saleh, (2012) has the following reasons why students have poor vocabulary

a. The students may have lives in an environment where higher level vocabulary are not used
b. It could be as a result of poor background
c. Such students may have attended schools at foundation level (early period of education) in which lower-level vocabulary was used in class and in text books.
d. Lack of extensive reading and may even have reading problem because it is established that the more students read, the greater number of new vocabularies they acquire. Olaofe (2009).
e. It is also possible that these students do not have a good understanding of the

structure of language including parts of speech, prefixes, suffixes and word roots.

f. One important problem identified by this researcher is that students might learn the names of new things they encounter but not learn many new adjectives, adverbs or verbs.

When reading, students may understand the meaning of new words in context. But they do not use those words in conversation or in writing. In short, it takes more than understanding the meaning of a word in context to fully add it to your vocabulary. Thus, it is easy to add a word to your receptive vocabulary (listening and reading), but it takes more work to add a word to your expressive vocabulary (speaking and writing) (Attah,2012).

Essay writing in English Class

Students in ESL classes with Poor English Language Performance have some problems passing the subject as well as accessing other academic subjects. The performance worsens when the students are expected to write long essays in the language (Wiegle, 2002). The unskilled native speaker writes like a learner, because the academic English or the standard edited English is new to him.

Thus, the unskilled native speakers and the ESL learners have to acquire or consciously learn the linguistics of the English Language, which consists of grammar, syntax, phonology, morphology, vocabulary and even the idiomatic expressions. In this regard, mechanics of good writing must be mastered and that is why essay writing forms a topic in all English Language syllabuses in Nigerian Institutions of learning (Asabu, 2008:10-11). Despite this, the present study observed that most students learning English as a second language cannot write "texture" or well knitted English. They write essays that are mostly disjointed or lacking unity and cohesion. It is ideal that while students are expected to be able to speak their native language (by acquisition), writing on the other hand must be taught to them formally at school,(Wiegle, 2002).

Learning to write in ESL class is bedevilled by compounded problems. Not only is the learner faced with the difficulty of learning to write one's own language, but added to it is also another complexity of mastering a different medium and learning to express oneself appropriately in a foreign language (Freedman et al,1983). Since writing has become an area of interest for both teachers and students of a second language, learning to write is seen as a major educational undertaking throughout the world (Lyons 2010). Thus, it is important to encourage ESL learners of English to become more proficient writers to ensure their academic success in the classroom. This is also the reason teachers should, right from the onset, know the skills to develop in writing by deciding on how to facilitate students' learning in that area. It is on this note that the present study focuses attention on functional/notional techniques in teaching essay writing to Junior Secondary School students.

Methodology

The research design for this study was quasi-experimental research design of pre-test and post-test groups. This design involves a pre-test of the subjects before the introduction of the treatment followed by a post-test of the subjects after treatment. This design is widely used in behavioural research, specifically for the purpose of comparing two groups.

Experimental Group (EG)	01	X1
02		
Control Group (CG)	01	X1
02		

Therefore:

01 and 01 = pre-test of the dependent variable before treatment.

02 and 02 = post-test of the dependent variable after treatment.

X = the treatment representing the independent variable.

The two treatment groups were administered, the treatment X representing the Independent variable (EG) and (CG) respectively. The dependent variable was measured again after the treatment period, post-test (02 and 02).

Groups	**Frequency**	**Percentage %**
Experimental	30	50
Control	30	50
Total	**60**	**100**

The population of this study compromises of three (3) selected secondary schools in

Anyigba town in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi. Random sampling techniques was used to select 20 English students from each secondary schools in Anyigba town. A total of Sixty (60) JSS III students were sampled. Vernoy and Kyle (2016) are of the view that minimum of 30 participants is good for any experimental study and further explained that good results are better achieved by using small number of participants experimental research. The respondents were assigned into two groups.

Results

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Groups

Sources: Field Survey, 2021

From the demographic Information on table 1, the frequency of the respondents are 30 and the percentage is 50 totaling 60 frequency and 100% percentage.

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	40	60
Female	20	40
Total	**60**	**100**

Sources: Field Survey, 2021

Table 2 shows that the Male respondents have higher percentage than the female respondents. This is due to the higher number of frequency the male respondents have on the female respondents.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on Academic Performance

Groups	Number	Mean	SD	MD
Experimental	30	15.0667	2.01576	5.6667
Control	30	9.4000	3.20064	

Sources: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 shows the result of the analysis of the scores of the experimental and control groups. The experimental group had higher mean than control group, hence there is difference in using functional-notional techniques in teaching. From the table, the experimental group has a higher mean of 15.0667 and standard deviation of 2.01576 while the control group has a mean of 9.4000 and the standard deviation of 3.20064 and their mean difference is 5.6667, which is in favor of the experimental group. This means that the experimental group is more exposed to students than the conventional method of teaching.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on difference by Gender

Groups	Number	Mean	SD	MD
Experimental	40	12.67	2.3	-4.5
Control	20	17.17	3.46	

Sources: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 shows the result of the analysis of the scores of Junior Secondary Students in Gender. The higher the mean and the standard deviation, the lower the respondents performed better with 12.67 mean and 2.33 standard deviation while the female respondents have 17.17 mean and 3.46 standard deviation, though it may be because the male respondents are more than the female respondents. This research is in favor of male respondents

Discussion of Findings

The result of the finding shows that teaching with Functional-Notional Techniques provides the necessary spark of enthusiasm in the students' performance, hence a better performance by the students taught using Functional-Notional Techniques than those taught without it. The analysis of the scores indicates that the experiment and the control group are not equal because in the experimental group, the frequency is higher than that of the control group, and it was later found that one of the most important factors which led to the better performance of the experimental group was the exposure to the Functional-Notional Techniques.

Therefore, based on the findings of the study, English language teachers in secondary school must be made aware of the effectiveness of Functional-Notional Techniques so as to improve students' vocabulary development for essay writing.

Conclusion

Based on the data collected and analysed, the study concludes that Functional-Notional Techniques enhanced vocabulary development and essay writing. The following are typical of the findings:

1. English language teachers should be acquainted with the use of Functional-Notional Techniques in classroom as the techniques enhance academic performance of students.
2. English language teachers should incorporate justification in assessments of students to make students cooperate and engage in meaningful learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were offered based on the findings of the study:

1. That organising conferences, seminars, trainings and workshops should be in place by both the government and the school management to give orientation to both staff and students on the usefulness of FNT.
2. The Ministry of Education and curriculum planners should emphasise the use of FNT in teaching students essay writing.
3. There is also a need for the development of a positive attitude by the teachers towards students on the use of FNT. This will no doubt improve their morals in teaching and learning.

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