# Institute JOURNAL of Studies in EDUCATION

Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2
NOVEMBER 2015 / NOVEMBER 2016

*Published by*
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

# INSTITUTE JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN EDUCATION

*Published by:*
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
*University of Ilorin,*
*Ilorin, Nigeria.*

ISSN: 0795 - 2199

VOLUME 5, NO. 2, (2016)

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In keeping with international status of the Journal, IJSE is peer-reviewed and is under consideration to be hosted by African Journals online at http://www.ajol.info. Our editorial team cuts across scholars from different parts of the world with article contributions from the international community as well.

With the publication of this issue, the broad goals of Institute Journal of Studies in Education (IJSE) to advance a wide range of theory, empirical research, sound methodology and research-to-practice, are further reinforced.

We present for your reading and research pleasure, Volume 5, No. 2, 2016. This is a bumper edition containing 10 (9 empirical; 1 theoretical) incisive and variegated articles from erudite scholars across the globe.

Happy reading

**Prof. Mudasiru O. Yusuf**

(Director, Institute of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.)

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# ANALYSIS OF SENIOR SECONDARY ARABIC STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN WRITING SKILL IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

*This paper examined the performances of Senior Secondary Arabic Students of Oyo State in writing skill. It examined specifically, the students' performance in (a) expression, (b) mechanical accuracy, (c) content and (d) organizational skills of writing. The study adopted the descriptive research method involving all the Senior Secondary 3 students of Arabic is the three senatorial districts of Oyo State. The Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study sample of 199 students while the instrument used for data collection was a researcher designed writing performance test. The instrument was validated using the test – retest method which yield a correlation value of 0.72. There was a research question was answered using frequency counts and percentage indices. The finding of the study show that students were (a) generally deficient in written Arabic skills but relatively good at (b) expression skills (c) fair in organizational skill, but weak in (d) mechanical accuracy and (e) content skill. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Arabic teachers should be enlightened on the right approach to the teaching of writing and other skills where the students are weak or poor. Periodic workshop and seminar should be organized by Ministry of Education to expose the secondary school Arabic teachers to the skills required for effective teaching of writing.*

**Key words**: writing skill, Arabic students, performance, Oyo State

## Introduction

Writing ranks number four in language communication skills. Other skills are speaking, listening, and reading. Writing is also a literacy skill that is fundamental to all-round education. Efficiency in the skills such as expression, organization, mechanical accuracy and content influence performance in language and communication. Specifically, students' ability to read and write in a language like Arabic which is foreign but quite desirable in Nigeria tends to show the degree of learners' academic progress (Lawal, 2015). Unfortunately, in Nigeria Secondary School students' performance in writing component of WASSCE and NECO certificate examination in Arabic over the years have been alarmingly poor [WAEC, 2001/2002, 2005 and 2010].

Writing (Al-Kitabah) is one of the four components of Arabic that is expected to be studied in details throughout the three years course. Other components parts are; Reading comprehension (Al-Qirah Wa'lfahm), Grammar [An-Nahw] and Literature (Al-Adab) (Nigerian Education Research Council, 2007).

Writing is next to reading skills among the four communication skills. Ibrahim (2006) define writing as "the use of orthographic symbols to express human awareness, abstraction and control" This is an indication that writing is a higher order of human consciousness. Writings, to a layman is the manner of expression on paper in any given language. It is a communication done on paper to represent the sound we utter orally or verbally. A pieces of writing is organized in paragraphs in which the meaning to be communicated is structured. And this feature make writing to be a more deliberate act than speech. Hence, writing is one of the basic skills that should be acquired in learning of language. It is on the basis of this that the researcher deemed it fit to conduct his research on writing skill.

Writing involves the ability to pen down experiences, feelings and idea on a given issue. Mao (2003) sees writing as the a social act which reflects the writer's communication skill by clearly conveying what the writer encodes which the reader rightly decodes and which is difficult to develop and learn especially in an English as foreign language/English as a second language context. Since writing is one the skills required in learning of languages, it is a continuous process, writing has to be adapted and adjusted to meet modern requirements (Lawal, 2015). In a society like Nigeria where the level of illiteracy is still high as 70% and where people are hardly print-oriented, the young child comes to school with a bit disadvantaged ability in learning to write (Oloyede, 2011). Therefore the teacher has to ensure that he provides a tension-free, pleasurable and attractive introduction to teaching through pre-writing activities.

In academic writing, it has been noted that there is, in fact, a standard that can be referred to as acceptable writing behavior. Experts like Reid (2008), Raimes (2013) and Peet (2006) opined that there is a standard acceptable writing behavior. They add that the fact that there is a standard is also evident in the various marking rubrics used to assess academic writing at different levels of development. With the acceptable writing behavior comes the need to teach learners the skills that would enable them become competent and skilled writers. First language learners' (L1 students) according to Peet (2006), are regarded as having acquired the necessary language, in that they possess a productive knowledge of the minimum level of vocabulary required at the university level and are grammatically fluent but lack necessary academic writing skills. The case of second language learners' (L2 students) is more complex because it cannot be assumed that they have either the necessary language or the necessary academic writing skills.

Sogbesan (1998) conducted a study on mechanical accuracy in essay writings

of part 1 science students of the Lagos State College of Education, Ijanikin. He found that, of all the areas of written English (content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy), the respondents excelled only in content; they were grossly deficient in organization, expression and mechanical accuracy. Another study conducted by Awodele (2000) investigating the standard of English of pre-degree science students of the Lagos State University showed that of the four areas of assessment in essay writing (content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy), the sample studied displayed high competence in content but were deficient in organization, expression and mechanical accuracy. He argued that manner and not matter is the problem students' face in written English. In a similar vein, Awodele (2003) evaluated the written English of Senior Secondary School (SSS III) students in Ibadan using a sample of 306 (204 males and 102 females). His finding showed that the students were deficient in written English, they were relatively good at content, but very weak in expression, mechanical accuracy and organization.

According to WAEC May/June Chief Examiner's Report of 2005, candidate areas of weakness in Arabic generally include inability of students to express themselves in eloquent Arabic, making grammatical mistakes, and shallow knowledge of modern Arabic at a time. Specifically in composition there was the use of second person singular pronoun in a composition of a "give an account of your first day in your school" as if they were giving the "account" of their partners' instead of referring to themselves. Also, students' responses to questions on description of Walimat ceremony which they have witnessed fell short of expectation. They wrote irrelevant things instead of explaining the Walimat ceremony. They mentioned people for whom it was organized and failed to state the rationale behind the ceremony.

Organization of text is one of the academic writing skills which enable students to be competent and skilled writers. Academic writing skill, for example, essay, is describe by Peet (2006) as a text possessing a clearly definable 'out shape' with equally identifiable 'inner part'. Therefore, texts have three distinct parts: beginning, middle and end, which in academic circles, are referred to as introduction, body and conclusion. Each part mentioned here performs specific functions which students need to be made aware of if they are to conform to acceptable writing behavior (Peet, 2006).

The introduction, for instance, is expected to gain the reader's interest and state the purpose of the essay which otherwise is also known as the thesis. The body develops the thesis in a logical and coherent manner, while the conclusion completes the text in such a way that the reader gets a clear impression that the purpose of the writing has been achieved. The inner part of the essay entails focusing on the paragraphs which are considered to be the fundamental building block of the essay. This idea was also supported by Malik, Suwaid and Oseni (2003). Peet (2006) opined that the development of organized and logical paragraphs cannot be assumed even for the advanced writers. This is because this aspect of writing is often ignored or treated

in a simple way at lower levels. Peet (2006), therefore, advocates that teachers should spend more time on teaching paragraphing, how to pay attention to various components parts of the topic, such as the topic sentences, supporting and concluding sentences, details, examples and transition words. What this means in practical terms is that teachers need to ensure that students gain a proficient understanding of how these basic academic writing components work in orchestration within a given text to achieve the meaning intended by the writer, in order to be able to produce these components in various combinations effectively according to their particular need.

Expression of ideas is the writer's style, which is distinctive. It is the ability to put thoughts down on paper in such a way that the reader understands clearly the writer's intentions. It is the careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentences to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and unique to the writer to an extent that it makes meaning to the eventual reader (Hyland, 2003).. Fluent expression is regarded as a determinant of effective writing since it is the aspect of writing that allows the message to flow effortlessly such that, the reader is able to get the gist of the text. However, expression appears to be the skill in which student writers in Nigeria have the most problem, as indicated in the results of various researches (Hyland, 2003 and Awodele, 2003). Also, in the distribution of marks for the grading of essays or written texts, expression carries the bulk of the marks. Therefore, to score high marks in the overall essay, student writers have to master the skill of expression themselves effectively in their writing.

**Research Question**

1. What is the general level of performance on writing skills of Senior Secondary School Students of Arabic Oyo State?

**Research Design**

This study employed descriptive research design using Arabic writing performance Test (AWPT) to elicit student responses, Abdulsalam (2010) described descriptive research as a research design that value judgment of the population by using adequate representative sample for the comparison of variable used in the study.

This research design was considered suitable for this study because its value judgment would be on population and adequate representative sample was used for comparison of writing skills.

**Instrumentation**

An Arabic Writing Performance Test (AWPT) was used for data collection. Section A of AWPT requested for general and personal information about the respondent while section B comprised two essay questions to access student's competence in mechanical accuracy, expression, organization and content writing skills each of which attracted 30 marks: The breakdown is as follow: Mechanical accuracy

ten marks, expression five marks, organization five marks and contents ten marks. The total for the two essay questions was sixty marks.

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) essay question formats were used for the essay tests. The two essay questions are (1) A congratulatory letter to, the principal of students' former school for being made a judge (2) Between money and children which is superior? The face and content validity of the instrument was done by giving them to two teachers of Arabic language at the Senior Secondary School level, two professors of Arabic language and a professor of linguistics at the University of Ilorin.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed within time interval of three weeks using the Pearson Correlation Co-efficient to correlate the scores of the first and second administration of instrument. The coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, meaning that, the instrument was highly reliable.

## Results

**Research Question:** What is the general level of performance in Arabic writing skills of Senior Secondary III Students in Oyo State?

**Table 1:** General Level of Performance on the Arabic Writing Skills of SS III Students in Oyo State.

| Variable of Writing Skill | Number of Students | Frequency | Percentage | Ranking order |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expression Skill | 119 | 789 | 32.8 | 1st |
| Organizational Skill | 119 | 777 | 32.3 | 2nd |
| Mechanical Accuracy Skill | 119 | 448 | 18.6 | 3rd |
| Content Skill | 119 | 392 | 16.3 | 4th |
| **Total** | **119** | **2406** | **100.0** | |

The data on table I indicates that the frequency count of expression skill were 789 (32.8%), 448 (18.6%) for mechanical accuracy skill, 392 (16.3%) for content skill, and 777 (32.3%) were of writing organizational skill.

Students were deficient in written Arabic skills, but they were relatively good in expression skill, fair in writing organizational skill, but weak in mechanical accuracy and content writing skill.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study as stated in the introductory chapter was to find out the performances in writing skills of Arabic students and analyze the data. Specifically, the study sought to find out the students' performance in expression, mechanical accuracy, content and organizational skills.

The research question stated have guided the discussion that follows. The table shows that out of all the four stages of writing skills examined, expression with of 789 (32.8%), organization skill 777 (32.3%), student had highest frequency in mechanical accuracy skill 448 (18.6%) and content 392 (16.3%).

This means that students were relatively good in expression and writing organizational skills but weak in mechanical accuracy and content skills. This finding support what earlier researchers found. For example, Peet (2006) noted that students weak in the area identified could be due to their inability to write clearly and effectively. The finding also tallies with Hyland (2003), who noted that It could be as a result of lack of access to recent development and research findings in methodology of second language teaching and learning, or lack of genre knowledge (Hyland, 2003). In order to overcome these problems of writing, awareness raising is very important as suggested by Ibrahim (2006), in which learners are guided to discover and identify specific element of good writing and feature of different text types. These include the following.

1. Analysis of a poorly formulated text in order to identify problems and propose remedies.
2. Analysis of learner's texts for merits and shortcomings; ordering jumble sentences to create a paragraph text and so on.

Awodele (2003) recommends a review of the classroom methodology which encourages reading culture via exposing learners to literature and teaching of grammar.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that students were deficient in Arabic writing skills but they were relatively good in expression skill, fair in writing organizational skill, but weak in mechanical accuracy and content writing skills.

## Recommendations

1. There is the need to enlighten teachers of Arabic on better approaches to teaching of writing skills.
2. Periodic workshops and seminars should be organized by the State Ministry of Education to expose the practicing teachers to the skills require for effective teaching of the skills of writing, for instance, mechanical accuracy and content writing skills.
3. Text book writer should pay better attention to the identified weak areas of students in writing skills when writing Arabic language textbooks in future etc.

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