Letter Writing: An Endangered Genre Of English Language

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ABSTRACT: *Our contemporary society clamours over the expertise of our workers from various sectors and the quality of personnel involved in communication. Many of our candidates do not take need to study special rules. The quality of letters written by our graduates remains appalling. As such they pay heavy price for their carelessness by loosing precious jobs on merit until they bribe the employers. In an attempt to curve out this ugly situation the research enquire to see the relationship between pedagogies used and the learners achievement. The enquiry discovered that there has been great relationship between the two. After thorough discussion, suggestions and recommendations were made to all the stakeholders of education. The recommendations, if well followed would help much to remedy the graduates canker disease of lack of competency in their official letters. Thirty six (36) students of summer semester were used as sample. The piagination cognitive theory of learning was used through Demonstration and traditional lecture methods in teaching the students the concept letter writing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing letters has been and will continue to be the integral part of human interaction. Due to ineffective nature of verbal communication, man sought to use signs as symbolic form of communication especially letter writing to enhance his interaction. Before the advent of writing, one sends message verbally to his counterpart in a distant place. There was a tendency of forgetfulness and therefore a mishap and distortion of the intended message.

The introduction of letter writing safeguards the communication integrity and genuiness. Unfortunately, many graduates of our contemporary period find it difficult to write personal or official letters. This is realized through the chunks of complain over the candidates inability to write applications for job. It is also discovered that they could not write letters to some parastatals neither could they write complain letters. These stimulate the writer to enquire as to where comes the problem. It is against this background the paper explores and compares two strategies used in teaching letter writing in a second language learners classroom.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical perspective

During the flourish of Greece, the theoretical treatises were restricted to three specific types of speaking which are linked to the respective institutions. These institutions were public assembly, public ceremony and law courts. Writing letters was never a subject of discussion until 4th century when Julius Victor included it in his rhetoric as an appendage. Payne (2011) buttressed that.

Fourth century saw the infetous of the art of letter writing. It was highly prestigious art which had enjoyed privilege by the domain of political and ecclestical discourse. This had continued up to the middle ages.

The art of letter writing was given a gigantic attention in the eleventh century. Buba (2011) reporting Coustable (1967), "It resulted in the development of Ars Dictaminis". It was popularized and formalized by the institution of papal chancery". Ars Dictaminis was the basis for the development of standardized style of letter writing. It was during that period letter writing started to gain position in the curriculum of cathedral and monastic schools, and later spread to the universities all over Europe and ciphoned to us through western education which was brought by the trio of British traders, missionaries, and colonialists.

Importance of Letter Writing

1.   **Communication:** correspondence constitutes the larger part of external communication. Many literate persons world over get involved in one form of correspondence or the other with the friends, relatives business partners or institutions. In this, we noticed that something is to be said, a message to be delivered, questions to be asked, or answers to be given to an early enquiry. This range of writing is known as letters. Letters therefore can be recognized as written messages sent to persons or organizations with whom it is difficult to communicate

verbally. The letter had been in use for long time. It tends to enjoy the pride of place in terms of utility among other forms of essay.

2.   ***Core Course in Curriculum:-*** Curriculum designers describe letter writing and free essay as continuous writing. Usually questions on letter writing are asked in senior school certificate examination on compulsory basis of which the candidates must answer. Furthermore, companies and organizations employ highly trained and specialized secretaries and legal practitioners to help among other posts in writing good letters. The letter now is one of many genres of writing and therefore is a complex process. Yule (2002) mentions writings as "The art of putting down on paper one's ideas, feelings, and emotions, by using graphic symbols." So writing is a form of communication. It is like conversation and therefore, should be clear, because once sent out no deletion would be entertained. Kamal (2000) argues that "writing Pedagogy is a specialized area demanding greater knowledge and control, but most English language teachers lack requisite training."

3.   ***Persuation:-*** Any serious educated person must show his intelligence, if he wants to persuade his audience, examiners, companies, or organizations consider and gauge his capability by reading his letter. In the same vein, job seekers and students of serious mind must show perseverance in so far as they want to excel in writing and convince their teachers that they possess intelligence of which diligence is one of the elements. The way we write letters depends on the person we are writing to and why we do so. The tone and language of letter should therefore be given attention to avoid causing offence. The purpose of the letter of application for instance, is to introduce oneself briefly and make the employer interested in you. Undoubtedly a business letter determines the readers impression of the writer. Due to this, thoughtfulness, correctness and neatness are all essential. Whatever the occasion and purpose may be, the writer of a letter would be read by a busy human being who has feelings just as every other human does. So, it is better for the writer to be cautions and get to the point be clear, objective, and always be polite. The writer must posses the ability to manipulate syntax by the use of embedding and deletion for transformation to say more in fewer words. Good letter writer achieves greater succinctness. He should know who is meant to be addressing and why. These are after all, normal condition for writing and without them, there can be no basis for interaction.

Classification of Letters

Since Aristotelian period, letters recognized three aspects: speaker, subject and audience. By implication the earliest form of letter writing took into consideration, the identity of the sender and the person to whom the letter was sent. The writer should consider whether he is noble or common in rank, a friend or enemy, then what kind of he person is, and what background. Rhetorical theory of Ars Dictaminis seemed to recognize hierarchical social relationship as the principal element of communication. So, the writer does not ask first, what is going to say, instead, he asks what is the rank of the person to whom he is writing the letter. Adalbertus promoted the cause of letter writing at the climax of the elevenths century and maintained the three fold scheme: exalted medium, and the meager. Exalted refers to letters form inferior to a superior person. The meager refers to such letter from superior to the inferior; and the medium neither ascends nor descends, it was between the other two types mentioned above. This taxonomy of the three order to persons humble middling, and exalted gave birth to the three principal types of letters. The determinant for the classification of letters was no longer the relative social position of the writer and reader, but the social position of the writer. This transitional period descended to our contemporary period.

In spite of the taxonomy mentioned above, letters are principally formed according to their structural appearance. They are classified into two forms. Many English language teacher sand expertise like Ebest, et al., (2000) and Language (2003) are today on the view that there are only informal and formal

Letters. The informal letter is usually written to acquaintances of intimate relationship like friends, playmates, school mates, family relations, colleagues, contemporaries and associates. The structure of the informal letter includes address of the writer, date, salutation, body, conclusion, and complimentary close. The language and style is usually easy flowing and natural. The formal letter is normally written for business and administrative transactions. Format common to the formal letter involves writers address, date, addresses address, formal salutation, title of the letter, body complimentary close, signature, and the name of the writer in full (Payne, 2011).

It is impossible to mention the exact number of the kinds of letters due to the increasing number of needs of human interactions. However, application, reference, circulars, enquiries, acknowledgement letter, letter of complaints, sales letter, orders, tender, and personal letter are among others.

Some Problems Realized In Students' Letter Writing

Literature on English language shows, mistakes committed by writers of letter are numerous. These are grammatical, structural, lexical and typographical. These are due to certain problems manifested by the students themselves. The problems are as mentioned below:

1. ***Family background:-*** A great number of the students come from a remote area. Their parents are poor illiterates that cannot offer any remedial exercises to the children.
2. ***Poor Background from Primary School:-*** Where they were not introduced to the concept of 3Rs intensively.
3. ***Lack of concentration:*** The students do not concentrate when the concept letter writing is being taught to them. It is usual, that learners hate concepts with many rules, and letter writing has its specific patterns.
4. ***Advent of cell phone:-*** The introduction of handset made the students lazy relegated letter writing useless. They usually talk over the phone, or write text message, abbreviated and unconventional.
5. ***Lack of proper teaching Pedagogy:-*** Many teachers are dogmatic to one method of teaching instead of having various ways for facilitating the learning of the concept of letter writing.
6. ***'Resume' Substitute Application***: Many parastatals require 'resume' from the candidates in lieu of written application. This made the learners to neglect the aspect of application letters and any other form of official letter writing.

Some common mistakes identified from the number of letter writers were in correct application of formal features, improper opening of the letter, lack of designation, inappropriate subscription in complimentary remarks, tense error, and punctuations are among others. Majority of the general public is of the view that SSCE English Examination is a stumbling block to the progress of their children. Many a times a candidate would be given admission into NCE programme without credit pass in English Language. The candidate would ask to make up the failed English within the three years of his study. He would not make it. Some would look for admission into university but loose chance due to the deficiency in English Language Examination. The candidates have the faculty and ability to perceive the lesson, all what they need is, teachers to properly guide and show them writing techniques. By implication, it was not the fault of the candidate's lack of seriousness, but teachers are accused of laxity and lack of expertise in imparting the learners the knowledge of writing.

III. METHODS USED IN CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

1. Demonstration Teaching Method

Demonstration teaching method is where the teacher teaches learners to what and how of the subject matter he tries to introduce the students. The teacher brought a concept and asked the students about it. This method answers the question what is it and how does it work? Demonstration strategy for teaching is also the teacher's greatest asset in arriving at short time.

In fact, it is the basis method for introducing new skills to the learners for developing understanding and for setting people to accept new and better way of doing things. The teacher can plan manipulation of equipment and materials in order to observe a phenomenon with the students. Thus demonstration strategy for teaching simply means displaying something accompanied by showing how it works or how it should be handled or manipulated. The strategy according to Abimbade (2001), can be employed at all levels of education.

An effective classroom was characterized as one in which students had opportunities to demonstrate or physically interact with instructional materials and engaged in various kinds of activities. Learning by doing is one of the effective strategies to develop skills. The best way to teaching letter writing skills and attitudes to students that will enable them manipulate their immediate environment for survival, is to give them opportunity to practice them and demonstration strategy provides that. The teacher should write sample letters for the students to copy. The students should in turn be asked to use teachers pattern and produce letters of their own.

2. Lecture Method

Lecture method is the traditional way of teaching where the teacher is seen as an embodiment of knowledge and imparts it by mere telling his pupils. The teacher addresses the students about the subject matter while they listen attentively. The effectiveness of this way of imparting knowledge to the learners has been very significant. It enables the teacher helps students realize their dream. The critics of this method of teaching were of the view that, the teacher, in using it, does not the real teaching, but spends all his time lecturing his subjects, which means that the teacher uses words on the heads, or rather over the heads, of the passive learners. But one should recognize that there are certain concepts which the teacher knows and the learners do not know and the only way of imparting them, requires telling and it is what is called teaching. This pedagogy is the commonest in use and inevitable since teaching includes communication of information. The teachers aim is to help students gain better understanding of a concept, subject, topic or event. The teacher may find it necessary at times to arouse the pupils' interest more especially where the concept entails outdoor interaction like the use of tosses, the lecture method becomes inevitable. The instructor should be meticulous enough to use ideas and words which are familiar to the students. This will help in systematic delivery of the teachers goods by adopting a suitable order. Chaudron (2000) asserts, that the teacher must be clear and distinct and make use of illustrations where possible. It is the duty of the teacher to divide the whole classroom interaction according to soliciting, reacting, structuring and responding. It is of great interest to classroom researcher the question of how teacher

talk is distributed, to what extent is the teachers speech directed to the students as opposed to leading them along to discuss research, or assignment of time to explanation, management, instructions, and asks questions at interval moves. The move is the entailment of soliciting from the teacher, responding from learner, structuring from the teacher and reacting from the learners.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to discover which between the two teaching strategies has greater impact on the students letter writing and then give preference to the profound way in teaching our students so that they become proficient workers/employees.

Research Question
Does the students' performance in letter writing relate to the method employed in teaching of letter writing?

Research Hypothesis
There is no relationship between students competency in writing formal letter and the method employed in the teaching exercise.

V. METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were collected by using simple percentage and average. For each exercise a table was designed in which the marks obtained were calculated in terms of average score and percentage score. A sample of thirty six students was selected from the total target of Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare. The sampled students were selected because the research is survey in nature and the use of all the students would be unrealistic. These students were also selected due to the fact that they were on summer semester being completed their term semester on the study of English as a second language. A random sampling frame was drawn from the population using mechanical means of lottery in grouping the sample population into two; each consisting of eighteen (18) students.

The research exposed group A to the concept letter writing through the lecture method. At the first instance, the researcher used the teacher expressed to the student the importance and significance of letters in our daily communications. After a period of six weeks they were also given a test for assessment of their proficiency and competency in the writing of letters both formal and informal. The difference was very little from the pretest result. The assessment was marked and scored as shown on the table in tabulated form below:

Table I

X	F	FX	X-X	(X-X)2	F(X-X)2
0	1	0	-3.40	13.40	13.40
1	3	3	-2.66	7.08	21.24
2	4	8	-1.66	2.76	11.04
3	1	3	-0.66	0.44	0.44
4	3	12	0.34	0.12	0.36
5	1	5	1.34	1.80	1.80
6	2	12	2.34	5.48	10.96
7	1	7	3.34	11.16	11.16
8	2	16	4.34	18.84	37.68
9	0	0	534	28.52	0.00
10	0	0	6.34	40.20	0.00
	18	66			108.08

The second group which was Group B was introduced to the concept letter writing through demonstration teaching strategy. The teacher/researcher came to the class with a cardboard paper containing the chart of the format of the letter. He also demonstrated to them how the individual formats should be written. This was done by the use of chalkboard. Finally the researcher wrote some sample of letters for the students to copy. In all the steps, the students were asked to write their own letters by modeling the format. Many a times, the researcher grouped the students and asked them to write or draw examples of the topic taught to them. He also used to call the students individually to come forward and demonstrate the required point on the black board. This method was found to be very stimulating and helped the students in the pursuit of their interest. The students were assessed after six weeks' practical training and there was a great positive difference between their pre-test and the post-test assessment as can be seen in the table below:

Table II

X	F	FX	X-X	(X-X)2	F(X-X)2
0	2	0	-4.33	18.75	37.50
1	1	1	-3.33	11.09	11.09
2	2	4	-2.33	5.43	10.86
3	2	6	-1.33	1.77	3.54
4	1	4	0.33	0.11	0.11
5	3	15	0.67	0.45	1.35
6	3	18	1.67	2.79	8.37
7	2	14	2.67	7.13	14.26
8	2	16	3.67	13.47	26.94
9	0	0	4.67	21.81	0.00
10	0	0	5.67	31.15	0.00
	18	78			114.02

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design use in this study is a pre-test post-test control design. The design made use to two groups where both groups were pre-tested before the instruction and they were also post-tested after the exercise.

VII. ANALYSIS

The hypothesis was tested by using t-test statistical tool at $d = 0.05$ and the degree of freedom df=38. The results of lecture method of teaching were compared to that of demonstration method. The calculation showed that null hypothesis was rejected and the demonstration method of teaching yielded more proficiency than the lecture method since we have seen the difference manifested itself, then there was relationship between teaching pedagogy and the students' output. There was positive relationship between the method employed in teaching and the students performance. Demonstration method of teaching here yielded more results than that of the lecture method of teaching letter writing. The result summary is shown on the table below:

Summary of the Results Based on the Method of Teaching

Table III

Statistical Values							
Test Group	Methods	Sample NR	Mean XR	Standard Deviation	t-values		judgment
A	Lecture	18	3.08	4.31	3.17	1.66	Null hypothesis rejected alternative hypothesis
B	Demonstration	18	4.69	4.96	4.54	1.66	Accepted

VIII. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research observed that activity based teaching/learning pedagogy yields much proficiency than the others. Therefore, the research findings specifically consist of the following.

✓ It was found that the demonstration teaching strategy was more effective in learning letter writing than the lecture method of teaching.

✓ It was discovered that students exposed to active learning in teaching/learning process performed better than those not exposed as they could easily relate classroom activities to real life outside the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ The research advocates for the need to expose teachers of English ESL to various teaching method so that they would make appropriate choice depending on the situation and topic to teach.

✓ Teachers, as the mentors of their students, should employ various teaching methods in executing their primary assignment in achieving the objective of teaching a particular concept.

✓ Teachers should not dominate the classroom activity but through demonstration should allow the students considerable amount of practice which favours the students do things by themselves.

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