



INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR WRITING EFFICIENCY: FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI FRESH STUDENTS AS A CASE IN POINT

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ABSTRACT: *The advanced language requirement at the tertiary education level has continually challenged and affected the performance of many fresh students in their core courses, and have impeded their achievements generally. This has been attributed in part to the conventional instructional methods employed by language instructors at the lower rung of the educational ladder. Therefore, this study investigates the probabilities that the integration of reading and writing instruction would make any difference on the writing achievement of freshly admitted undergraduates of Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria. The study adopts the pretest, post test, control group quasi experimental design in which three hundred and two students from three different faculties and departments participated. Two experimental groups and one control group were used for the study. The first experimental group was taught with the activation of the background knowledge method; while for the second experimental group, the response to the text-strategy was added to the activation of the background knowledge method. The control group was taught with the usual conventional method and the treatments lasted for six weeks. All groups of participants were given a pretest before treatment commenced for the experimental groups. A post test was also administered on all participants at the end of the six weeks treatment. Students' writing were graded and the scores used as data which are analysed using means, standard deviation and t-test. The results show that the experimental groups which are treated with the integrated reading and writing instructional methods perform significantly better than the control group whose own instruction had gone on with the conventional method. It therefore concludes that integrating reading and writing instruction would enhance the writing competence of newly admitted undergraduates in the university.*

KEYWORDS: Integrated reading and writing instruction, Activation, Background knowledge, Tertiary.



INTRODUCTION

The capacity to read and write with competence remains a major key to success in academics, the workplace and life in general. For example, Koster, Tribushinina de Jong and Van den Bergh (2015) see proficiency in writing as mandatory and a necessity for students because it is a basic requirement for achieving educational goals as well as social and economic positioning in life. This is because reading and writing are the vital tools with which students connect with, get hold of and demonstrate the knowledge they have come to acquire in the academic setting. Graham and Hebert (2011) explain that for students to be successful in their education, occupation as well as their social engagements, they have to consciously develop their reading and writing skills. Students need to always engage in reading so as to elicit information from books and other materials which relate to their studies. And then, they also have to reproduce the knowledge they gain from reading through writing; as such, those who are handicapped in reading and writing will be at a disadvantage even before they have begun their studies.

Therefore, the significance of these two skills (writing and reading) as catalysts to the academic success of students cannot be overemphasized. Reading is the means through which students obtain information, an activity in which meaning is generated from the written texts which they encounter in their studies, especially in the university. If the undergraduates lack expertise in the language in which they are being tutored, (in our case, English), they will be unable to make meaning or obtain the required knowledge which should contribute to their success in achieving set academic goals. Reading at the tertiary level of education is not to be approached as ordinarily as it is done at the earlier stages. It rather requires students to decipher and appraise whatever information they come across during their studies. Therefore, competence in reading and writing the English language becomes a fundamental requirement if they are to make a success of their academic pursuits and aspirations (Olanipekun & Zaku, 2013; Aina & Olanipekun, 2013).

Writing is of fundamental importance in understanding any material that we read (LeBron, 2008; Wallace, Pearman, Hail & Hurst, 2007). Therefore any instruction in reading must incorporate writing in order to enhance understanding and learning in the reader. Glenn (2007) believes that integrating writing in reading activities does not only enhance learning but also ensures that learners become better readers and writers. Writing prompts the reader to actively think about what s/he has read and to connect it with his/her experiences or those of others, to ask questions and make things readily understandable. Ramirez (2013) also affirms that writing boosts reading and comprehension in learners and that this can be exploited through encouraging learners to always engage in writing as personal responses to texts and summaries of important ideas in a text and to survey other texts in order to write their own text. Ramirez further observes that reading also provides the learner with good examples of writing patterns to emulate. In this regard, the reading instructor can gauge the reader's insight into a particular reading task when the reader has written down his/her reaction to the material read. Thus the instructor can easily identify areas where there is confusion or inaccuracy in the reader (Giesen, 2001).



The Problem

Despite the obvious importance of these skills, students still fall short of the expected levels of competence in reading and writing the English Language. Carlson (2011), Haynes (2011) and Heller (2021) report that large numbers of students in the United States of America dropout of school because of this handicap while those who leave secondary school are hardly equipped to meet the demands of university reading or writing requirements. It is therefore not to be taken for granted that higher numbers of students in Nigeria are bound to be affected by these reading and writing challenges. Commenting on this, Olajide (2010) and Imoh (2013) point out that a great percentage of students who pass out of the secondary schools into the universities in Nigeria are found wanting in effective communication in the English Language and as such perform below expected levels in their subject areas. Ojaide (2015) bemoans the poor quality of writing by Nigerian graduate and undergraduate students which the writer says lags far behind their counterparts from India, Malaysia, and South Africa. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that a way is found to address the reading and writing difficulties of Nigerian students.

Review of Concepts

Existing literature indicates that combining reading oriented and writing oriented tasks as a method of instruction can improve literacy proficiency in learners (Shanahan, 2020), especially during the tertiary phase. The Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) method incorporates reading-oriented as well as writing-oriented tasks during particular lessons. Since each one affects the learning of the other, they cannot be divorced from one another (Ojaide, 2015). Therefore, integrating reading and writing activities during instruction is believed to enhance learning and make learners to become better readers and writers (Institute for Writing and Rhetoric, 2021).

Researchers highlight the need to amalgamate reading-based and writing-based activities during lessons when they point out that the inability of students to make meaning of texts they read may be a contributory factor to their inability to write texts that are meaningful. Holschuh and Paulson (2013) affirm that incorporating reading as well as writing tasks during teaching is an activity which should always be applied in the courses, assignments and texts throughout the duration of students' stay in school, so as to enable them develop proficiency in both skills. Thus, the Integrated Reading and Writing instructional methods were used as treatment for the experimental groups in this study.

To this end, strategy instruction in reading and writing has been verified as being most helpful in the process of enhancing the accomplishment of learners in their acquisition of literacy skills. Experts (Graham & Perin, 2007; Koster, Tribushina, De Yong & Van den Bergh, 2015) affirm that this contributes to a large percentage of what constitutes the instructional practices that improve students' achievement in reading and writing. Several scholars (Negari, 2011; Parr & Wolloshyn, 2013; Tawalbeh & Al-zuoud, 2013) have also reported the enhancing effect of different teaching techniques on the literacy development of tertiary undergraduates as well as other students. Different types of texts (narrative, expository, argumentative and descriptive) are simultaneously employed in the integration of instructional methods that are meant to enhance students' reading and writing skills. Therefore, using these instructional methods and strategies in this study (which made use of narrative and expository texts) was a means to



changing the prevailing non-competence of fresh Nigerian university students in writing and reading.

Use of instructional methods that are different from the usual conventional method where students sit to receive all information from the teacher without contributing anything to their own learning has been advocated. The IRW instructional methods of using activation of background knowledge, and/or response to text plus activation of background knowledge may facilitate fresh university undergraduates' development of their dexterity and competence in reading and writing. Each method aims to help the students activate what they are conversant with in the topics to be read or to be written about. It requires these fresh students to exploit everything in their experience so as to enhance comprehension and writing efficiency. Background knowledge, also called prior knowledge, schema or experience, is used by learners to link what they are reading to what they are familiar with in order to enhance comprehension (Agwu, 2011) and aid writing (Strangman & Hall, 2009); while the response to text method is one in which readers use their unique personality and experience to interact with the text so as to construct their meaning from the text, interpret and appropriately respond to the text in their own way through writing (Shanahan, 2016).

Activation of Background Knowledge

The calling up or remembrance of past knowledge and experiences before a learner starts the task of writing on or reading a particular topic is a method grounded in the schema view of the constructivist theory. It is used by teachers to help recollect the knowledge which learners had had about a topic, subject or idea (Strangman & Hall, 2009). Activation of background knowledge is frequently used in teaching comprehension, recall of expository text, and writing (Strangman & Hall, 2009). When students do not have background or prior knowledge on a particular topic or text, reading a trade or historical book or watching a film on the topic may help build up background knowledge on the subject. The teacher can also activate the background knowledge of his/her students by asking them questions connected to the topic, through brainstorming or class discussion on the topic to be read. The writer also uses his/her background knowledge to construct his text, thus this strategy is useful for both reading and writing. Students of the present study were obligated to apply the background information and experience they had about the topics in given texts and to carry out the response to the text tasks.

Research Questions

Two research questions were used to address the concerns of this inquiry and are given below.

RQ1: What effect did the IRW instructional methods have on the writing achievement of students?

RQ2: What level of difference exists between the writing achievement of the experimental and control students?



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the schema theory of Bruner (1966) and Anderson (1977) which assumes that all learners of reading or writing have previous information and encounters which they incorporate into the task of reading and/or writing. This previous experience/background or prior knowledge combines with the ideas written by the author to generate meaning. Thus a reader generates meaning from a text and a writer generates meaning in a passage that s/he is writing. This means that the more familiar a learner is with a topic to be read or written about, the better he/she will understand or write it. Bruner's scaffolding concept comes into play when learners are supported to build up or recall background knowledge through questioning, brainstorming and other such activities by the teacher. Thus this perspective of the constructivist theory is very relevant to the study at hand.

Review of Literature

Oyinloye and Gbenedio (2010) studied how the use of integrated instruction which incorporated reading as well as writing would affect the learning outcome and attitude of pupils in senior secondary schools. The six-week, quasi-experiment used 521 pupils from 163 colleges in Kwara as subjects. The study made use of a linguistic input package as well as a writing achievement test as instruments to collect the data. Analysis of Covariance and Scheffe tests were used to analyse the data. The results showed that experimental subjects who received the reading-writing treatment attained enhanced results over all other groups.

Working with National Certificate of Education (NCE) teacher education students, Ndukwe (2015) conducted research in which a total of 176 students were studied. Eighty-eight English/Social Studies students were used as the experimental group while 88 English/PES students were used as the control group. The treatment, IRW instruction, was given to one set of subjects (experimental) and the skill-by-skill instruction to the control. After six weeks, the IRW set was discovered to have excelled far above the skill-by-skill set in their achievement in writing. This study was on student-teachers in the arts and humanities in a middle level tertiary institution, therefore it is pertinent to investigate IRW methods in a university of technology where the students are purely science and technology inclined.

In another investigation, Esmaeli (2017) studied the effect that knowledge of subject matter from materials read would have on the writing process and product of adult ESL students' writing and reading in an English language test that made use of reading and writing components. Following a counterbalanced within-subjects design, 34 first-year engineering students with medium levels of English ability carried out two reading and writing tasks in two conditions: one, when the theme of the reading passage was related to that of the writing task; and the other when the reading passage was not. In addition, participants answered interview questions and filled out a form to recall the writing strategies which they used when the topic of the writing task was related to the subject matter of the reading task. The results showed that the students improved in their writing when the reading passage was connected to the writing topic. This is also obtained in their summary and comprehension outcomes. The study also revealed that the common theme between reading and writing enhanced both the processes and outcomes of students' writing. Thus the connection of reading to writing positively affected students' writing and reading outcomes. However, the small number of subjects in the study would make it difficult to generalize the results of the study.



Oyinloye and Ajayi (2018) also carried out an investigation whose objective was to identify if the activation of background knowledge would affect the English Language achievement of junior secondary school students in Ekiti State. The quasi-experimental study which lasted nine weeks used a sample of 160 students who were assigned to three experimental groups and one control group. A 50 question instrument was developed to stimulate prior knowledge in the students while brainstorming, semantic mapping and KWL were used as treatment on the experimental groups. Students' scores were used as data which were analysed with bar graphs and ANCOVA. The researchers reported a greater achievement in English by the experimental groups above the control group. They also advised that different strategies be used for different pupils since only one or two strategies cannot suit all students in order to improve their performance and achievement. Therefore, a different set of methods and strategies were used for tertiary students in a university of technology.

METHODOLOGY

Three hundred and two newly admitted students of the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria, were the participants in the study. The pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental method was adopted for the study. Three first year classes from three different faculties comprising the Schools of Biological Sciences (Microbiology), Science (Physics) and Engineering (Chemical Engineering) who registered for the Use of English course, participated in the study. The faculties were allocated to experimental (two groups) and Control (one group) using random assignment. The two experimental groups were each treated with only one of two methods - activation of background knowledge strategy (ABK) or activation of background knowledge combined with response to text (ABKRT). The control group was not treated with any of these two methods but was taught with the conventional method. The three groups were administered the pre-test before the experimental groups were treated with the ABK and ABKRT methods.

The Use of English lectures took place two times a week, one hour for each period. The same course outline and the same teaching materials used for the whole university first year Use of English lectures were used for the three groups of participants. The duration of the study was six weeks. At the end of the treatments, all three groups were once again administered the post test. The students' scores in both tests were used as data for the statistical analysis. Two research questions guided the study.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

RQ 1: What effect did the IRW instructional methods have on the writing achievement of students?

The pretest showed that the students were basically at the same level of competence in their writing but at the post test, the results were different.

**Table 1: Pre-test and post test results of the effect of IRW instructional methods on the writing achievement of subjects**

Groups	N	Pre-Test Mean	Std. Deviation	Post-Test Mean	Std. Deviation
ABK	94	52.86	4.78	70.57	8.35
RTABK	83	51.99	5.59	76.52	9.47
CG	125	51.40	6.99	59.54	13.23

At the post-test, the experimental groups (ABK and ABKRT) which had received the instruction-based activation of background knowledge and the combination of activation of background knowledge plus response to text instructional methods, respectively, increased appreciably in their mean scores whereas the Control group which had received instruction in the conventional method increased only marginally. The ABKRT group which had the lower mean score of the two experimental groups in the pre-test now had the highest mean score. The standard deviations of the scores in the post test indicate that there was a greater spread of the students' scores than what is obtained in the pretest.

Table 2: Pre- and Post test results of the different groups based on four writing elements.

Treatment	Test	Content		Organization		Expression		Mechanical Accuracy	
ABK	Pre	18.83	4.02	13.30	2.19	10.41	1.78	9.67	1.75
	Post	23.13	3.46	21.17	3.80	13.44	2.43	13.10	2.41
ABKRT	Pre	18.48	2.80	13.24	1.92	10.46	1.87	9.22	1.52
	Post	24.31	2.51	22.57	3.69	15.17	3.20	14.39	3.34
CG	Pre	18.10	3.18	12.75	1.79	10.16	1.74	9.58	1.78
	Post	21.49	3.71	16.60	3.86	12.34	3.13	10.62	3.25

Table 2 indicates that in the pre-test, participants in the different groups performed at similar levels in the different elements of writing. But in the post test, it was observed that the experimental groups achieved better mean scores in the four elements than the control group. The lower performance of the different groups in Expression and Mechanical Accuracy could be explained by the fact that since they measure the versatility of subjects in producing the language, students will require a more sustained and concentrated teaching in these two areas



than in Content and Organisation. Nevertheless, the treatments affected the achievement of the experimental subjects above what obtained in the control subjects. Figures 1 and 2 below paint a clearer picture.

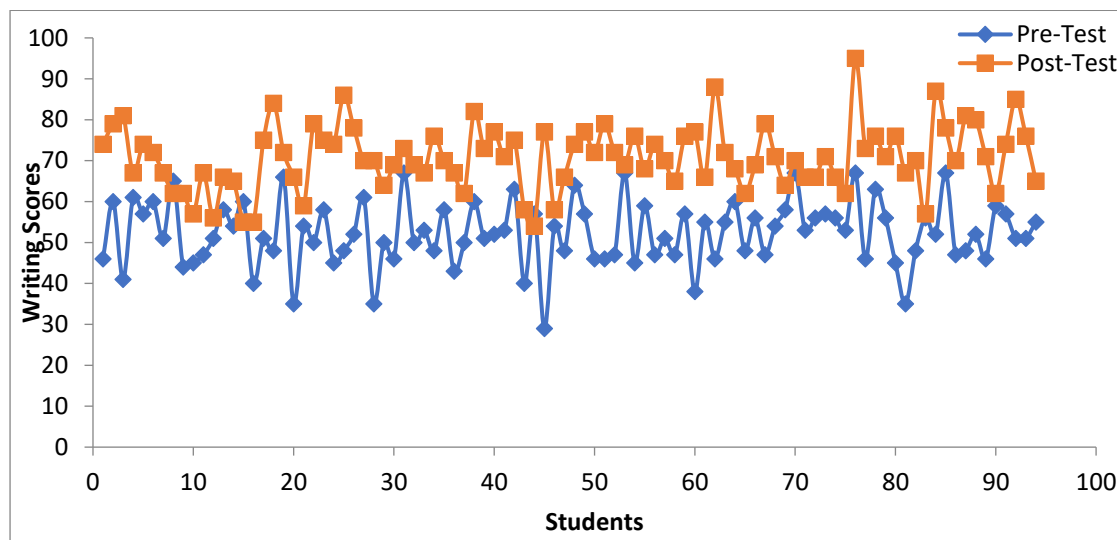


Fig 1: Pre-test and Post-test Writing Scores of Students in ABK.

Figure 1 shows the achievement of the Experimental Group 1 which was taught with the activation of background knowledge instructional method. The graph shows that the post test scores (the red graphs) were higher than the pre-test scores (the blue graphs) indicating that the subjects' achievements were better in the post test than at the pre-test. Even the subjects who had very low scores in the pre-test improved on them in the post test. The same type of achievement is observed in Figure 2. The red graph is higher than the blue, indicating that the instructional method impacted on the achievement of the subjects. The Experimental Group 2 (taught with a combination of Activation of Background Knowledge and Response to text) was also of the same higher achievement in the post test than in the pre-test.

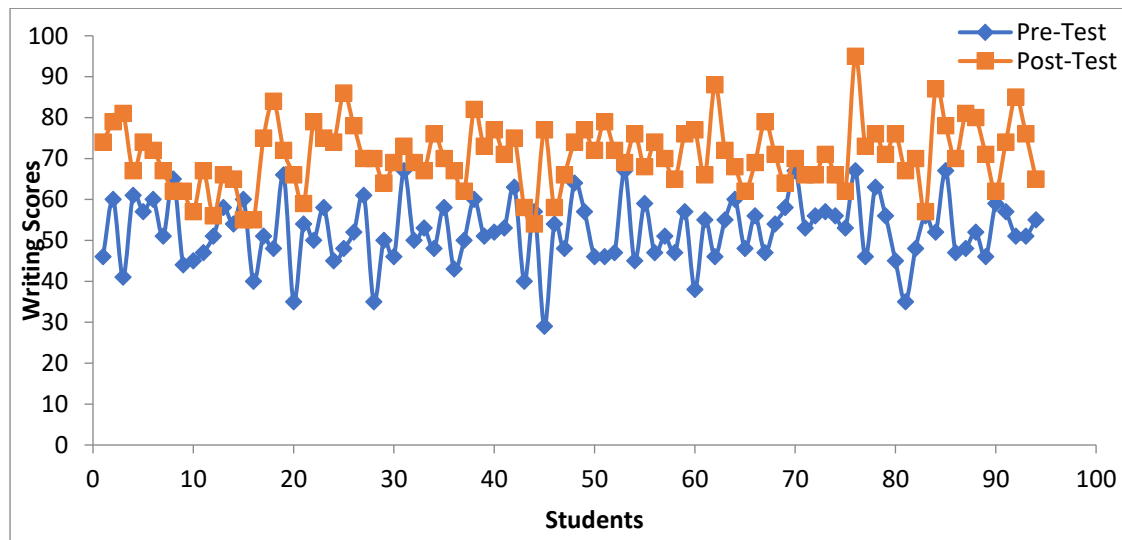


Fig 2: Pre-test and Post-test Writing Scores of Students in ABK.

However, the case of the Control Group (CG) is different from that of the experimental groups. Fig. 3 shows that this group, taught with the traditional instructional method, had only a marginal improvement in their post test over the pre-test. For this Group, the blue and red graphs bullets are clustering together. The blue is difficult to find as the red almost covers it, indicating that there was not much difference between the pre and post test scores of the Control Group.

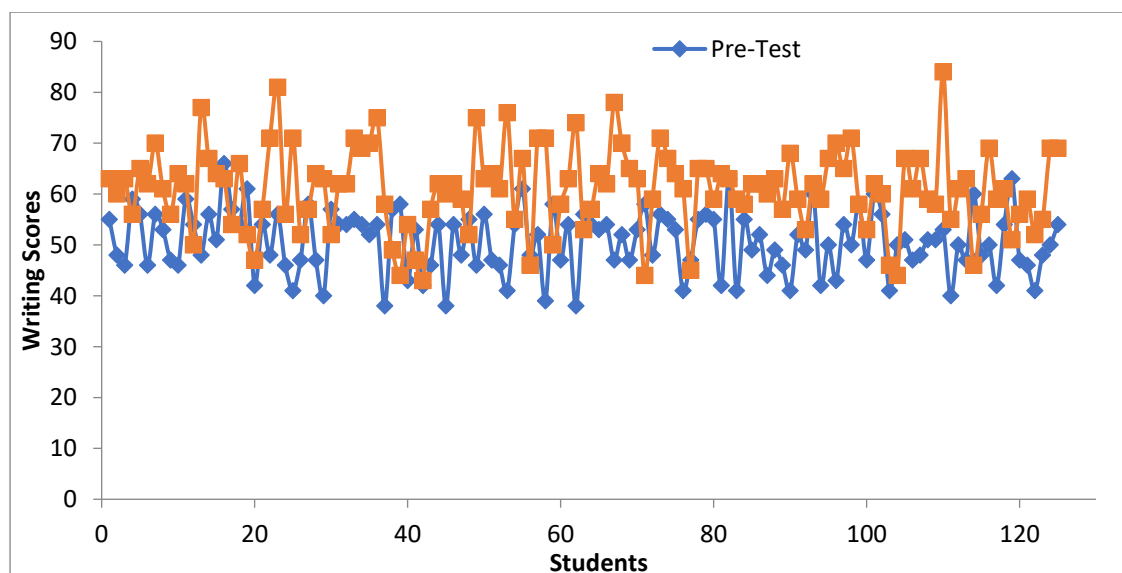


Fig 3: Pre-test and Post-test Writing Scores of Students in CG.



RQ2: What level of difference exists between the writing achievement of the experimental and control students?

A paired t-test was used to address this research question.

Table 3: Paired t-test analysis of pre- and posttest scores of the different groups.

Treatment	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	T	df	p-value	Decision
Pair 1 ABK	Pre	94	52.86	4.78	-17.710	-17.85	93	0.000*	p<0.05
	Post		70.57	8.35					
Pair 2 RTABK	Pre	83	51.99	5.59	-24.53	-20.32	82	0.000*	p<0.05
	Post		76.52	9.47					
Pair 3 CG	Pre	125	51.40	6.99	-8.14	-6.08	124	0.000*	p<0.05
	Post		59.50	13.20					

***Significant at 0.05 level of significance.**

The Experimental Group 2 (ABKRT, which received the activation of background knowledge plus RESPONSE to text treatment) had a higher mean difference than Experimental Group 1 (ABK, which received the activation of background knowledge treatment only). The Control Group (which received no treatment but was taught with the conventional method) had the least mean difference between the pre- and post test scores. The post test mean scores of the experimental group 2 differed significantly from that of the other experimental group as well as that of the control group. Also, there was a significant difference between the achievement in writing of the two experimental groups and that of the control group. This indicates that the activation of background knowledge plus the response to text treatment had the highest effect on the students. The activation of background knowledge treatment also had an effect on the students but was not as effective as the other treatment. Thus the IRW treatments had a significant effect on the writing achievement of the two experimental groups above what was achieved by the control group.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study considered the effects of Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) instructional method on the writing efficacy of newly admitted undergraduates of the Federal University of Technology Owerri. Pre- and post tests were conducted on the participants and scores from these tests were analyzed using t-tests, as well as means and standard deviations. The results showed that the experimental groups performed far above the control group. The experimental group treated with a combination of activation of background knowledge and response to text methods performed significantly better than the second experimental group treated with only the activation of background knowledge method as well as the control group. It was therefore concluded that integrating reading and writing instruction using a combination of activation of background knowledge and response to text method or using activation of background knowledge only method will go a long way to enhancing the writing proficiency of newly



admitted undergraduates in the Federal University of Technology Owerri or any similar institution of learning in Nigeria. The researchers therefore recommend the Integrated Reading and Writing instructional method to English language teachers of tertiary students and other educational levels in Nigeria to enable them to improve the writing efficiency of their students.

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