

Assessing Secondary School Students' Difficulties in Effective Writing Using Process Writing Strategy

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Abstract- *The study probed students' difficulties in writing using the process writing instructional strategy. The study is descriptive using a pretest, posttest control experimental design involving 60 participants, randomly selected, from Community Secondary school Rumuekini, in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The Instrument used for the study is the Process Based Students Writing Skills (PBSWS) comprising of three writing problems (Appendix I). Process method used is based mainly on students' metacognitive skill of use of language, communicative ability, editing, spelling and sentence formation. (Anigbogu et al. 2025; Gonzalez, 2010). Data obtained from students pretest and requisite scores on writing, evaluated by the researcher, revealed that students had difficulties in the use of vocabulary (57%, $\bar{x} = 0.43$) organizing ideas into meaningful sentences (72%, $\bar{x} = 0.28$). Spelling (24%, $\bar{x} = 0.756$) and inability to state ideas clearly ($\bar{x} = 0.56$, 44%). However, the experimental group outperformed the control group in ability to state ideas clearly ($\bar{x} = 0.877$), effective communication ability ($\bar{x} = 0.883$) and editing with minimal difficulties. (34%, 0.66). There is a significant difficulty among students taught using Process Writing Method on organization of ideas, use of vocabulary, students spelling ability, sentence formation and communicative ability, at 0.05 significance level, and df (3289). Based on these results, it is recommended that teachers of L2 should adopt process writing skill to reduce writing difficulties among secondary school students, thereby improving their writing skills.*

Index Terms- *Process writing Skills, Communication, Metacognitive skills, Writing method.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The writing process strategy (often called the process writing approach) is a structured, step-by-step method of teaching and practicing writing that emphasizes how writing is developed, rather than just the final product. It helps students gradually improve their ideas, organization, and language through multiple stages. The writing process is recursive in nature, meaning that writers can return to any

previous stage to make improvements. For example, a writer may revise a draft after editing or return to prewriting to generate additional ideas. This structured approach helps learners develop effective writing skills by emphasizing both the process and the final product. The writing process refers to a systematic and recursive approach through which writers generate, develop, and refine ideas to produce clear, coherent, and effective texts. It emphasizes not only the final written product but also the series of cognitive and linguistic activities involved in composing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hyland, 2003).

Pre-writing (Planning)

The pre-writing stage constitutes the foundational phase of the writing process, where ideas are generated, explored, and organized prior to text production. This stage can be divided into two major activities: generation of ideas through brain storming and outlining of relevant ideas in the order that will allow for coherency which is panning the layout of the final product. Writers engage in activities such as brainstorming, outlining, and mind mapping to develop content. Attention is also given to the purpose of the writing task and the intended audience, both of which significantly influence the tone, structure, and direction of the text (Harmer, 2004; Murray, 1972).

Drafting

Drafting involves the initial development of ideas into a written form. At this stage, the writer focuses on content generation and logical flow rather than grammatical accuracy or stylistic perfection. The primary objective is to transform planned ideas into a coherent first draft that can be further refined (Graves, 1983).

Revising stage

This is a critical stage that involves re-evaluating and improving the content, organization, and overall

effectiveness of the draft. Writers may add, delete, or reorganize ideas, clarify arguments, and enhance coherence and unity. This stage focuses on meaning and structure rather than surface-level correctness (Zamel, 1982).

Editing

Editing focuses on the correction of linguistic and mechanical errors in the text. Writers attend to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure to ensure accuracy and clarity. Proper formatting and adherence to writing conventions are also emphasized at this stage (Harmer, 2004).

Publishing (Final Draft)

Publishing represents the final stage of the writing process, where the completed and polished text is presented to an audience. This may involve submitting academic assignments, sharing written work in a classroom setting, or disseminating content through print or digital platforms (Graves, 1983).

Therefore, the defining characteristic of the writing process is its recursive nature. Writers may move back and forth between stages as necessary; for instance, revising may lead to further drafting, or editing may reveal the need for additional revisions. This flexibility allows for continuous improvement and refinement of the text (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Overall, the writing process strategy enhances learners' writing proficiency by fostering critical thinking, organization, and self-reflection, while emphasizing both the development process and the quality of the final product (Hyland, 2003). In any language, the use of writing as a medium of communication involved justifiable styles with students developing different approaches to writing skills acquisition. According to Dick (2005) writing effectively for academic purposes involve an engagement of students in a variety of writing activities as prerequisites. These tasks involve:

- i. Organizing ideas, selection and ordering information, using reporting words, using attitude words, linking words and phrases which would entail coherency and logic, which is termed composition.

- ii. Okoh (2009) and Dick (2025) emphasized the need for students to develop paragraphs and writing the different parts of sentences.
- iii. Ensuring that the qualities of good writing are observed, make use of economy of words, which is devoid of unnecessary words and expressions, simplicity-using words in sentence construct that are void of verbosity and high-flown language and concise.

In order to maintain a unique writing style, writers should concentrate on specificity of context, purpose or reflect on those who would consume the presented materials hence adjudging every piece of writing in terms of precision (void of repetition), progression of writer's ideas and paragraphs development, ensuring, logical arrangement of ideas, essential use of logic and ensuring sentence fluency.

Teaching writing in schools involved teachers adopting model skills. Astrini, Ratmoningsih and Utami (2020) adopted a mind mapping, and Creative writing strategy. These teacher-based strategy identified students lack of vocabulary, grammar and lack of motivation as difficulties faced by the learners. Astrini et al suggested that teachers focus on the process of writing rather than the product. The author furthermore, advised that cultural and linguistic background could becloud learners affective use of languages and existing recourses hence encouraging exploratory language writing. Scaffolding students writing means exposing them to several examples and algorithm which would be rigorous the method of mind mapping pledge and creative writing is rather metacognitive and student centred. Much is done to have a mental picture of the composition of the writing borne mostly out of creativity. Rotimi & Wahyuni (2024) adopted discovery learning strategy for English teachers use in teaching writing. Strategy involved learners' active participation, creative thinking, high students' motivation. The thrust of the method is that students had free cognition of the processes.

Anigbogu, Okere and Oparam, Egurum, Onuoha (2025) adopted the process writing approach at a technological university to enhance students' writing competence. This process, according to Gon Zalez (2010) involved teaching students metacognitive

skills that improve the texts. Language use process Encouraging meaningful communication through writing texts and self-evaluation.

The activities involved in a process writing based learning of writing involved planning/pre-writing, composing/drafting, revising/editing.

The planning/pre-writing activity is enriched in harnessing of ideas coherently. Some of the ideas can be generated through brainstorming, some of those ideas can be haphazardly mentioned as a draft than there is a proper discovery of further ideas that builds up a writing composition. The context can be revised and edited. Some of the identified problems of the process writing skill is that much time is not given to mastering foundational skills such as spelling, handwriting and sentence construction (Graham, 2011; Anigbogu et al. 2025)

Process writing technique is a learner-centred approach that facilitates the learners potentials and recursive procedures of pre-writing, drafting, evaluating and reusing (Anigbogu et al., 2025). Teachers in secondary school, modify the methods of teaching English language writing, such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, peer review and editing. Prosper & Barnabas (2024) investigated the teaching methods adopted in students' English writing skills in secondary schools. The study showed teachers use of documentary review, classroom observation, interviews. Writing differed significantly based on teachers understanding of the scheme of work. some methods such as demonstration, writing practice and sentence combining, gene-based instruction, collaborative writing skills were observed, among constructions.

According to Prosper & Barnabas (2024), teachers in secondary school agree that teaching writing involves language demand for vocabulary, structure and coherence. In order to probe students writing ability, they have commonly used story writing, opinion essays, descriptions and applications. Students generally have anxiety in writing external examinations on English Language due to lack of in-depth practice of activities involved in developing the needed skills in writing.

Chief examiner of English Language for West African Examination Council(WAEC) 2023, 2024 and 2025 stated that secondary school students who sit for examinations in English Language have difficulties in paragraph development, poor expression as a result of wrong concord, poor punctuation marks, inability to construct simple and correct sentences, illegible hand writing, spelling errors and poor knowledge of basic rules of English language, among others. The study intends to assess secondary school students' difficulties in effective process writing instruction.

Benefits of the Writing Process to Academic Performance

The writing process approach has significant implications for improving students' academic performance, particularly in second language learning contexts. By engaging learners in structured and reflective writing activities, it promotes deeper learning and skill development across multiple domains.

Improvement in Writing Quality

The writing process enables students to produce more coherent, organized, and logically structured texts. Through drafting and revising, learners refine their ideas and improve clarity, leading to higher-quality academic writing (Hyland, 2003; Zamel, 1982).

Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Engagement in multiple stages of writing encourages learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. Revising and editing, in particular, require critical reflection on content and structure, thereby enhancing higher-order thinking skills (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Enhancement of Language Proficiency

The editing stage helps learners improve their grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and sentence construction. Over time, repeated exposure to these processes strengthens overall language competence (Harmer, 2004).

Promotion of Learner Autonomy

The writing process fosters independence by encouraging students to take responsibility for planning, reviewing, and improving their work. This

autonomy contributes to better academic performance as students become self-directed learners (Graves, 1983).

Increased Motivation and Confidence

As students see improvements in their writing through revision and feedback, their confidence increases. This positive reinforcement enhances motivation and willingness to engage in academic tasks (Murray, 1972).

Better Performance Across Subjects

Writing is central to learning in many academic disciplines. Improved writing skills facilitate better expression of ideas in subjects such as English, social studies, and the sciences, thereby positively influencing overall academic achievement (Hyland, 2003).

Statement Of the Problem

Assessing secondary school students' difficulties in writing using the process writing instruction model is necessitated by students poor writing outcomes. Most students lack skills in developing essays whether expository, narrative, persuasive, descriptive or critical/analytical hence showing low knowledge and lack of contextual understanding. Classroom instruction exposes students' loss of interest and excitement in the use of modern language in reading and writing exercises. Students writing in classroom instruction depicts poor sentence development inconsistency in use of grammar and lack of knowledge of the procedures of a writing process. It is incumbent on language teachers to rethink the pedagogical alternatives that would unravel students' writing difficulties such as the use of process writing strategy and proffer solution to it. Teachers have numerous teaching approaches, but rarely use the process writing instructional method in assessing and remedying students' difficulties in writing.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess secondary school students' difficulties in writing effectively, using the process writing instructional strategy. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- i. To determine students' development and organization of ideas in writing.

- ii. To evaluate students' knowledge and use of vocabulary on writing
- iii. To evaluate students' spelling proficiency and sentence formation in writing.
- iv. To evaluate students' communication ability shown in editing of writing in English.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study.

1. Do students have difficulty in organization of their ideas and the ability to use vocabulary in writing?
2. Do students have difficulty in spelling and sentence formation requisite in writing?
3. Does communicative/editing ability of students constitute any difficulty in writing?

Research Hypotheses

The following are null research hypotheses stated at 0.05 significant level.

1. Organization of ideas and use of vocabulary are not significant difficulties of students in writing.
2. Ability to spell words sentence formation and communicative ability are not students' difficulties in writing.

Method

The research design adopted is the descriptive experimental research design of the pretest, posttest and control type, in order to determine the difficulties faced by students in writing, mainly in descriptive and narrative perspective, using the process writing instructional method.

A sample of 60 Senior secondary 111 students were randomly selected from a public secondary school in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample was subdivided into two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group were taught writing using the process writing modes of planning, drafting, editing where students equally expressed use of metacognitive skills to improve their text, use of language, vocabulary context, spelling and meaningful communication and self-evaluation. The control group were taught writing mainly on conventional approach involving, explanation, draft, revising and formulation of sentence. The instrument Process Based Students' Writing Skill (PBSWS)

consisting of three writing exercises (Appendix I) was administered as a pretest and posttest after instrument that lasted two days. In order to elicit data for analysis. two questions were on descriptive essay while one question was a narrative question. The research questions were answered using mean and percentages while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level using the analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

Result and Discussion

Research Question I

How do students organize their ideas and use of vocabulary in writing (descriptively or narratively)?

Table 1: Students Organization of Ideas and use of Vocabulary

S/N Group	No of Students	Use of Vocabulary (30)	Ability to state ideas (30)	Ability to organize ideas into meaningful sentences (30)	Mean Score (\bar{x})
I(C)	30	150	200	100	15.0
II(E)	30	240	200	150	19.66
2.	60	390	400	250	

The Table 1 revealed that the experimental (II) group II had better use of vocabulary, ability to state ideas and coherency of ideas into meaningful sentences that the group I (\bar{x} : 19.66 > 15.00). Students had difficulty in organizing the ideas into meaningful sentences in writing (\bar{x} : 0.28, 72%), use of vocabularies (\bar{x} : 0.433, 5%) and ability to state ideas (\bar{x} : 0.44, 56%). Fig I shows profile performance plot. The experimental group had greater performance in the use of vocabulary than the control group, similarly students organization of ideas was greater in the experimental group than the control group.

Research Question II

Do students have difficulty in spelling and sentence formation requisite in writing?

Table II: Spelling and sentence formation difficulty of students.

S/N	No of Students	Spelling (30)	Sentence Formation Requisites (30)	Means (\bar{x})
II(C)	30	280	450	24.33
I(E)	30	400	340	24.66
2.	60	680	790	

Table II explained that students had spelling difficulty (\bar{x} : 0.756, 24%) in both groups, sentence formation requisite (\bar{x} : 0.877, 13%). The ability of students in spelling and sentence formation requisite in writing of mean values (\bar{x} mean:24.33).

Research Question III

Does the communicative, editing ability of students constitute my difficulty in writing?

Table III: Communication and writing ability of student

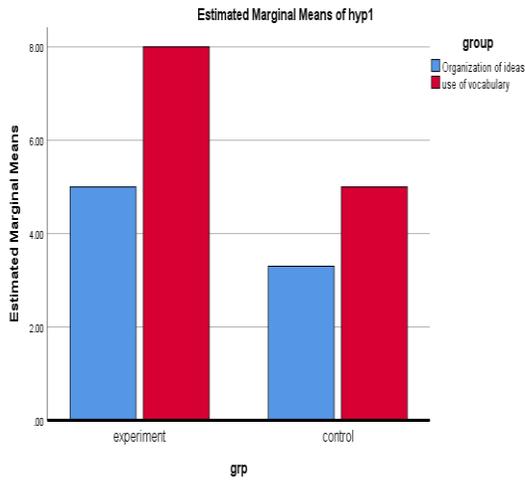
S/N	No of Students	Spelling (30)	Editing	Means (\bar{x})
I(C)	30	300	210	17.00
II(E)	30	4500	385	27.83
2.	60	750	595	37.42

Table III showed that students had difficulty in communicative ability (\bar{x} : 0.83) to a low extent of about 16% editing problem was slightly high to about 34% (4:0.66).

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: Organization of ideas and use of vocabulary are significant difficulties in writing between the experimental and control groups

Table 3: Summary of Analysis of Variance on Difficulties of students' organization of ideas and Use of vocabulary.



The table shows that the F-calculated value at $df(1,119)$ was 109.614 while the F-theoretical was 2.72 value hence the hypotheses rejected. The F-calculated value was greater than the F-critical. There is a significant difficulty encountered by students in organization of ideas and use of vocabulary (knowledge) in writing using process method. Descriptively, mean score of students' organization of ideas 4.15 ± 4.3714 while the mean score on use of vocabulary was 6.5 ± 6.808 .

Ho₂: Ability to spell words, sentence formation and communicative ability aret students' difficulties in writing

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on students spelling ability, sentence formation and communicative

Oneway

ANOVA

hyp1

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	165.675	1	165.675	109.614	.000
Within Groups	178.350	118	1.511		
Total	344.025	119			

Descriptives

hyp1

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	Between-Component Variance
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Organization of ideas	60	4.1500	.85717	.11066	3.9286	4.3714	3.30	5.00	
use of vocabulary	60	6.5000	1.51266	.19528	6.1092	6.8908	5.00	8.00	
Total	120	5.3250	1.70028	.15521	5.0177	5.6323	3.30	8.00	
Model									
Fixed Effects			1.22941	.11223	5.1028	5.5472			
Random Effects				1.17500	-	20.2548			2.73606
					9.6048				

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: EXPERIMENT

GROUPS	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Spelling	10.5333	3.97955	30
Sentence Formation	11.9000	3.87165	30
Communicative	12.3333	4.49776	30
Total	11.5889	4.15106	90

Error	49.745	8	.578		
Total	13620.80	9			
		0			
Corrected	1533.589	8			
Total		9			

a. R Squared = .968 (Adjusted R Squared = .966)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: EXPERIMENT

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1483.844 ^a	3	494.615	855.107	.000	.968
Intercept	51.097	1	51.097	88.339	.000	.507
CONTROL GROUP	1430.889	1	1430.889	2473.769	.000	.966
	113.418	2	56.709	98.040	.000	.695

Table 4 showed that the F-calculated value was 98.040 at df (3.89), while the theoretical value was 2.73 at 0.05 significance level. Since $F_{cal} > F_{critical}$, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difficulty on students spelling ability, sentence formation and communicative ability. Descriptively, mean score of students spelling ability (10.53 ± 3.979). Sentence formation (11.9 ± 3.87) and communicative ability (12.33 ± 4.49).

Discussion of Findings

Students in the experimental and control groups had some difficulties in identifying meaning of some vocabularies and ability to state their ideas in writing, taught using descriptive and narrative essays on "A

new school experiences and environment". The New Yam Festival and wrestling competition in Obio and Akpor. This agrees with the problems identified by authors Dick (2025) and Okoh and Udumukwu (2009) on expectations of a good writing mainly resulting from the influence a multilinguistic environment and mother tongue interference, some may be traced to teacher modified teaching methods. The students in the experimental group had greater mean score value and improved percentage scores (though still poor) in spelling, sentence formation, communication ability (0.83) and editing (34%) due to their change in attitude in accepting the recursive procedure and potentials of process writing technique. However, participants low scores in spelling, may have resulted from the technique adopted and agrees with Anigbogu et al. (2025) learners much time to master fundamental skill such as spelling, drafting and sentence construction. At 0.05 significance level and $df(1, 89)$. There was a significant difficulty encountered by students on organization of ideas, use of vocabulary, spelling ability, sentence formation and communicative in writing of L2.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study will enlighten teachers on the effectiveness of using the writing process strategy to reduces students' difficulty in writing resulting from poor use of vocabulary, generation t of ideas, planning, sentence development, communicative and editing abilities in writing generally and more in academic writing

Conclusion

The use of process writing strategy has identified students writing difficulties such as generating ideas, communicative ability and drafting, editing and sentence formation requisite in writing. The method has unraveled, students' difficulties in writing and has opened up more areas of research to help students overcome writing difficulties.

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