

## ACTIVITY-BASED METHOD AND SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN COMPOSITION WRITING IN MANGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This study investigated effect of activity-based method on senior secondary school students' achievement in composition writing in Mangu Local Government Area, Plateau State. The study adopted pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design. Two research questions guided the study while two hypotheses were formulated and tested. All the SS2 students in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State during the 2022/2023 academic session constituted the population for the study. Using purposive sampling technique, a total of ninety-eight (98) SS2 students were sampled from two intact classes in the two out of the twenty-five public secondary schools. One school was assigned to the experimental group which was taught using activity-based method, while another school was assigned to the control group which was taught using discussion method. Data were collected using the researcher-made Students Writing Achievement Test (SWAT). The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed positive significant impact of activity-based method on students in the experimental group over their counterparts in the control group. Based on the findings, it was recommended; among others that English language teachers should endeavour to adopt activity-based method in teaching composition writing and that curriculum planners and textbook writers should incorporate activity-based method into the curriculum and secondary school course books for easy implementation.*

**Keywords:** Activity-Based Method, Writing, Composition, Writing Skills and Achievement

### Introduction

Ability to write effectively is a crucial skill for academic success and professional development. However, many secondary school students in Nigeria struggle with composition writing, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas like Mangu Local Government Area. Traditional teaching methods, which often emphasize rote learning and passive reception of knowledge, have been criticized for their ineffectiveness in developing students' writing skills. Composition writing is a

piece of writing usually in prose form. It prepares one for future life. For instance, one's ability to write an application for job depends on his knowledge of the skills involved in composition writing. At the professional level, people are expected to do a lot of writing and this becomes difficult if they lack the essential skills in writing some of which include good knowledge of grammar, punctuation marks, possession of basic vocabulary or words and expressions that enable one commit his thinking to writing (Ebibi, Bako & Dung, 2022).

Composition writing is a fundamental skill that plays a pivotal role in academic achievement, professional success and personal development in today's knowledge-driven society (Thompson, Williams & Johnson, 2022). The ability to articulate thoughts coherently and effectively through written communication has become increasingly crucial in the digital age, where written expression dominates both academic and professional spheres (Anderson & Roberts, 2023). Despite this importance, research indicates that many secondary school students, particularly in developing nations, struggle with composition writing skills (Okonkwo & Eze, 2021). The importance of composition writing goes beyond academic success. Studies have shown that strong writing skills correlate with enhanced critical thinking abilities (Chen & Wong, 2022); improved problem-solving capabilities (Martinez & Johnson, 2023); better communication skills in both personal and professional contexts (Kumar, Singh, & Patel, 2021); increased employability in the modern workforce (Phillips & Thompson, 2023).

In Nigeria, the challenge of developing proficient writing skills is particularly pronounced in rural and semi-urban areas like Mangu Local Government Area. Recent statistics from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) indicate that only 38% of students achieve credit-level passes in English Language, with composition writing being identified as a major area of weakness (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2023). This underperformance has significant implications for students' future academic and career prospects, as proficiency in written English is often a prerequisite for higher education and

employment opportunities (Adebayo, 2021).

Studies (Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2021) have consistently shown that traditional approaches to teaching composition writing often fail to develop students' writing skills effectively. In writing, the method employed by most teachers is the product approach which focuses on the end product writing not minding the rigorous activities that are envisaged in the writing process. This implies that a lot of activities in the writing process are not done by students in the product approach as they are passive participants in the teaching learning exercise. The use of the product approach and other teacher-centred methods results in poor performance of students in the writing aspect of English language in examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO), among others. For instance, the WAEC Chief Examiner's reports for May/June 2019 and 2023 indicate it that despite all effort made to simplify the candidates' tasks a good percentage of the candidates scored below average in writing.

It is therefore important for the teacher to use appropriate and student-centred methods such as activity-based method in order to improve students learning and understanding of composition writing to foster their achievement not only in composition writing but also in other subjects. Activity-based learning has gained significant attention in educational research. Studies by Johnson and Smith (2019) demonstrated that active learning strategies improve student engagement and achievement across various subjects. In the context of language learning, activity-based approaches have shown

potential/capability in developing practical communication skills (Williams, 2020). Activity based method refers to learning where students physically and mentally explore subject by simulation of the work environment, manipulation of tools and materials associated with the world of work, or performance of a real work task. This learning method includes the desired activities in terms of knowledge, attitude and skills.

The major teaching strategies associated with activity methods are discussion, simulation, collaborative, field trips, project, debate, demonstration, dramatization, questioning and role-playing. These methods entail active and lively involvement and participation of learners. Activity learning method is getting greater acceptance as a method of teaching because of the numerous advantages it offers. Some of which include providing the learners with an in-depth knowledge of subject matter content; it develops learners' interest and leads to discovery of new facts. Some of the activity-based strategies include; collaborative, cooperative, and problem-solving strategies. The strategy has the potential develop the skills of idea generation and sentence construction which would consequently enhance their writing capabilities.

**Idea Generation** is the cognitive process of conceiving, developing, and organising the thoughts, concepts, and arguments that will form the substance of a written piece. It is the foundational skill upon which all effective writing is built. Without a wellspring of relevant and engaging ideas, a piece of writing will lack depth, purpose, and interest for the reader. One can think of it as the initial stage of creation like a sculptor envisioning the form within a block of

marble. A proficient writer can tap into various sources to spark ideas including: Brainstorming: Freely jotting down any thoughts related to a topic without immediate judgment; Mind Mapping: Visually structuring ideas and their connections around a central theme; research, that is, exploring existing information to uncover new perspectives and supporting details; Personal Experience: drawing upon one's own knowledge, observations, and reflections and Critical Thinking: analysing a topic from different angles, questioning assumptions, and forming original insights. The strength of a composition often hinges on the quality and originality of the ideas generated. A skilled writer can move beyond superficial observations to develop nuanced and compelling arguments, supported by relevant examples and evidence. Effective idea generation ensures that the writing has a clear focus, a logical progression of thought, and something meaningful to convey to the intended audience. It is the engine that drives the narrative, the argument, or the exposition forward.

**Sentence Construction** encompasses the ability to form grammatically correct, clear, and varied sentences that effectively communicate the writer's ideas. It is the art and science of arranging words and phrases in a logical and aesthetically pleasing manner to convey meaning with precision and impact. It is the building blocks of written communication. Just as a skilled mason carefully lays bricks to construct a sturdy and well-formed wall, a proficient writer crafts sentences that are structurally sound and contribute to the overall coherence and flow of the composition. Key aspects of sentence construction include: Grammatical Accuracy: ensuring that sentences

adhere to the rules of grammar, including subject-verb agreement, correct tense usage, proper punctuation, and accurate use of parts of speech. Clarity and Conciseness: constructing sentences that are easy to understand and avoid unnecessary jargon or wordiness. A well-constructed sentence conveys its meaning directly and efficiently. Sentence Variety: employing a range of sentence structures (for example, simple, compound, complex) and lengths to maintain reader interest and create rhythm and emphasis. Monotonous sentence patterns can lead to a dull and unengaging reading experience. Effective Word Choice and Placement: selecting precise and impactful vocabulary and arranging words within the sentence to highlight key information and create the desired tone and effect. Fluency and Flow: crafting sentences that connect smoothly and logically, contributing to the overall coherence and readability of the composition. Mastery of sentence construction allows a writer to express complex ideas with clarity, create vivid imagery, and engage the reader effectively. It is the mechanism through which generated ideas are translated into comprehensible and impactful prose. Weak sentence construction can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and a diminished impact of the writer's intended message, regardless of the quality of the underlying ideas. In summary, idea generation provides the *what* to write, while sentence construction dictates *how* to write it effectively. Both skills are indispensable for producing well-crafted and impactful compositions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most students in secondary school have serious difficulties in the area of composition writing skill.

Students have problems of organising their writing in coherent paragraphs, poor construction of grammatical and meaningful sentences and wrong use of or absence of punctuation marks (Oruche, 2014). The under-achievement in composition writing is not limited to secondary school as it is a noticeable phenomenon in Nigeria education system. The poor level of competences in composition writing among senior secondary school students is of great concern to all stakeholders in education. Government and educationists have made several efforts to reduce the failure rate, however, the problem still persists. The persistence is as a result of the inappropriate teaching methods employed. Most teachers of composition writing use product-approach in which the students are only tested and not taught the process of composition writing as against student-centred methods like activity-based method (Ebibi, Gordons, Yiljep & Oluyomi, (2024).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the major contributing factors to problems over the years is the methods employed by teachers apart from other challenges. Consequently, the study investigated whether the use of activity-based method would enhance students' academic achievement in composition writing in the senior secondary schools in the study area.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. What is the difference between pre-test and posttest mean achievement score of students taught idea generation with and without activity-based method of teaching composition writing?

2. What are the pre-test and posttest achievement mean scores of students in sentence construction in composition writing in the experimental and control groups

### Hypotheses

The following null-hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in idea generation pre-test scores of the students in the control group and experimental groups.
2. There is no significant difference in sentence construction post-test scores of the students in the control and experimental groups.

### Methodology

The study employed quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools for uniformity of standards. All the SS2 students in the 25 public secondary schools in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State during the 2022/2023 academic session constituted the population for the study. Using purposive sampling technique, a total of 98 SS2 students were selected

from two intact classes in the two 2 secondary schools. Composition Writing Achievement Test (CWAT) was used to collect data. A reliability test was carried out on the CWAT and it yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.87. School A was experimental while School B was assigned the control group. Pretest was administered to the respondents before the commencement of treatment. The treatment consisted of classroom teaching of writing skills to the experimental group using the activity-based learning strategy while the control was taught the same thing using discussion method. The duration for the treatment was six weeks. After the treatment, a posttest was administered to both groups. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

### Research Question One

What is the difference between pre-test and posttest mean achievement score of students taught idea generation with and without activity-based method of teaching composition writing?

**Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Mean Achievement Scores of Students' in Generating Ideas on a given Composition Writing in the Experimental and Control Groups**

Group	Before			After		Mean	
	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	Gain	$\bar{x}$ - Difference
Experimental	47	43.51	11.51	91.17	5.73	47.66	28.38
Control	45	38.56	5.07	57.84	6.42	19.28	

Table 3 reveals the mean achievement score of students taught idea generating with and without activity-based method of teaching composition writing. From the result, those taught using activity-based method of teaching had a mean score of 43.51 while their counterparts in the

control group had a mean achievement score of 38.56 before exposure to treatment. However, the mean achievement score of students in the experimental group after exposure to activity-based method of teaching was 91.17, while those in the control group had a mean score of 57.84 and standard



deviation of 6.42. It indicates that the mean gain score of experimental group is 47.66 and that of control group is 19.28 with a mean difference of 28.38. The findings show that students in the experimental group had a higher achievement mean score in idea generating after exposure to activity-based method of teaching. This implies that the achievement mean scores of the

students can be improved by using activity-based method of teaching to generate ideas in composition writing.

### Research Question Two

What are the pre-test and posttest achievement mean scores of students in sentence construction in composition writing in the experimental and control groups.

**Table 2: Pretest and Posttest Mean Achievement Scores of Students in Sentence Construction on a given Composition Writing in the Experimental and Control Groups**

Group	Before			After		Mean Gain	$\bar{x}$ - Difference
	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD		
Experimental	47	50.77	11.85	90.74	5.89	39.97	36.86
Control	45	46.22	7.32	49.33	8.50	3.11	

Table 4 reveal the mean and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test mean achievement scores of students in sentence construction in the experimental and control groups. The result for experimental group yielded a mean score ( $\bar{X}$ = 50.77, SD =11.85) and control group had a mean score of ( $\bar{X}$ =46.22, SD = 7.32) before treatment. After treatment the results for experimental group yielded a higher mean score ( $\bar{X}$  =90.74, SD =5.89) than control group ( $\bar{X}$ =49.33, SD = 8.50). It indicates that the mean gain score of

experimental group is 39.97 and that of control group is 3.11 with a mean difference of 36.86. This means that there was improvement in the post-test after exposure to treatment. The result further shows that those taught with activity-based method of teaching composition writing performed better than those taught without.

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in idea generation pre-test scores of the students in the control group and experimental groups.

**Table 3: ANCOVA Result on Posttest Achievement Mean Scores of Students in Generating Ideas in the Experimental and Control Groups**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	26001.279 <sup>a</sup>	2	13000.640	405.252	.000	.901
Intercept	16823.027	1	16823.027	524.402	.000	.855
Pretest	469.394	1	469.394	14.632	.000	.141

Group	21921.406	1	21921.406	683.327	.000	.885
Error	2855.156	89	32.080			
Total	54458.000	92				
Corrected Total	28856.435	91				

a. R Squared = .901 (Adjusted R Squared = .899)

**Table 4: Result of Sidak Post hoc Comparison of Difference in the Experimental and Control Groups in Generating of Ideas on a given Composition Writing.**

I	J	X-diff. (I - J)	Std. Error	P value
Experimental	Control			
90.55	58.49	32.06	1.23	0.000

P<0.05

The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine if a significant difference exist between the posttest achievement mean scores of students taught generating of ideas with and without activity-based method of teaching composition writing. The main effect of experimental group yielded ( $\bar{x}$  = 91.17; SD = 5.73) and control group ( $\bar{x}$  = 57.84; SD = 6.42);  $F(1, 89) = 683.33$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .885$ . Since the P-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance with effect size of 89%, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that the experimental group performed better than the control group in idea generating. The result further reveals an adjusted R squared value of .899, which means that 89.9 percent of the variation in the dependent variable which is students' achievement in

generating of ideas in composition writing is explained by variation in the treatment of activity-based method, while the remaining 10.1% is due to other factors not included in this study. The Sidak post hoc test in Table 8 confirms that the corrected difference between experimental group and control group was statistically significant,  $(I - J) = 32.06$ . Hence, we can say that activity-based method of teaching composition writing does increase students' achievement scores in generating of ideas.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in sentence construction post-test scores of the students in the control and experimental groups.

**Table 5: ANCOVA Result on the Difference between the Post-test Sentence Construction Ability of Students in the Experimental and Control Groups**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	40428.089 <sup>a</sup>	2	20214.045	476.582	.000	.915
Intercept	10374.070	1	10374.070	244.587	.000	.733
Pretest	1004.036	1	1004.036	23.672	.000	.210
Group	34690.235	1	34690.235	817.884	.000	.902
Error	3774.900	89	42.415			
Total	501325.000	92				
Corrected Total	44202.989	91				

a. R Squared = .915 (Adjusted R Squared = .913)

**Table 6: Result of Sidak Post hoc Comparison of Difference in the Experimental and Control Groups in Sentence construction on a given Essay Writing.**

I Experimental	J Control	X-diff. (I - J)	Std. Error	P value
89.99	50.12	39.88	1.39	0.000

P<0.05

The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to determine if a significant difference exist between the posttest achievement mean scores of students taught sentence construction with and without activity-based method of teaching composition writing. The main effect of experimental group yielded ( $\bar{x}$  = 90.74; SD = 5.89) and control group ( $\bar{x}$  = 49.33; SD = 8.50);  $F(1,89) = 817.88$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .902$ . Since the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance with effect size of 90%, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that the achievement mean score of students in the experimental group significantly differ from that of the control group. The result reveals that the experimental group performed better than the control group in sentence construction. The result further reveals an adjusted R squared value of .913 which means that 91.3 percent of the variation in the dependent variable which is students' achievement in sentence construction is explained by variation in the treatment of activity-based method of teaching, while the remaining is due to other factors not included in this study. The Sidak post hoc test in Table 10 confirms that the corrected difference between experimental group and control group was statistically significant,  $(I - J) = 39.88$ . Hence, we can say that activity-based method of teaching do increase students' achievement scores in sentence construction on a given composition writing.

## Discussion

The study investigated the effects of activity-based method on senior secondary school students' achievement in composition writing in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. The findings are discussed based on the research questions and hypothesis.

The findings of the study showed that activity-based method had significant effect on students' achievement in idea generating in composition writing. This implies that students taught with activity-based method had higher mean score than their counterparts in the control group in idea generating in composition writing. This is because the teaching method and tasks were based on individual and series of learning activities which learners were actively engaged. It encouraged students' personal involvement in the learning process and thus contributed to greater achievement recorded by the experimental group. The superior achievement by the experimental group may be attributed to the teachers, for creating a friendly learning environment for the learners and for actively engaging the learners in the learning process through the series of activities envisage in the activity-based method of composition writing. This finding agrees with Anyebe, Neple, & Onoja (2019) who investigated the effects of the collaborative approach on senior secondary school students' achievement in English composition



writing in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State and discovered that collaborative approach enhances students' idea generation abilities as students as those in the experimental group who were exposed to the strategy outperformed their counterparts who were not.

The findings further indicate that the achievement mean score of students in the experimental group significantly differ from that of the control group in sentence construction. In other words, the experimental group performed better than the control group in sentence construction. The higher achievement by the experimental group can be attributed to the effect of the treatment on the students in the experimental group which afforded students the opportunity to organize the ideas generated into meaningful and well-organized sentences by actively and interactively engaging them in the teaching and learning process. The reason for the higher achievement of the experiment group could be attributed to the fact that the painstaking strategy of brainstorming on the topic and free writing sharpen the students' intellectual abilities enabling them the opportunity to generate and write good sentences. This is in line with the findings of Enwere (2020); Williams & Chen (2023) whose studies on the efficiency of activity-based method in teaching composition writing showed that activity-based method makes significant progress in their writing skill in sentence construction.

### Conclusion

This study addressed the persistent poor performance of students in composition writing. Based on the data collected and analysed, it was concluded that Activity-Based Method

greatly enhanced students' achievement in composition writing. This implies that the method is a potent means of improving students' achievement in composition writing. This is because the method made teaching more effective, efficient and meaningful and result-oriented as revealed in the students' high achievement.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study: that teachers of English language should employ the method in teaching their students. Workshops and seminars should be organized for language educators by federal and state ministries of Education and other relevant bodies/organizations to sensitize and train teachers on the use of activity-based method in all teaching learning activities. The positive effect of activity-based method on achievement of learners should be brought to the knowledge of education policy makers, school proprietors, publishers of English language books with a view to including it in their teachers' guide and the school curriculum.

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