Impact of Eclecticism on Nigerian ESL learners' communicative competence: A comparative study

Chinomso P. Dozie[✉][1], Adaeze Regis-Onuoha[1], Lovina I. Madu[1], Favour O. Egwim[1], Mary C. Okere[1], Richard C. Ihejirika[1]

[1]Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

Article Info

Abstract

This study adopted three practical teaching strategies intended to positively affect learners' writing skill while neutralising negative factors affecting their writing competence.To achieve the study objective which aimed at the assessment of the best teaching strategy to enhance learners' writing proficiency, a comparative study of three teaching methods(namely communicative, eclectic and task-based methods) was used over a-6-week period as treatment on three experimental groups A, B, C respectively and a control group (D) was taught using conventional method. A pre-test was administered on two hundred (200) freshmen/subjects purposively selected from different Departments at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). A post-test was used to ascertain the outcome of the six weeks period of treatment on their essay writing. Results varied according to groups but, most importantly, Group B showed very significant improvement and control group D showed no significant improvement at all in the post-test assessment while groups A and C's writing ability improved just marginally at best post-test. Our findings suggest the need to pay attention to eclectic teaching technique as a crucial element in enhancing writing proficiency among learners. The implications and limitations of this research in addition to guidelines for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Eclectic approach is known to be a selection of a mixture of what appears to be best of variousdoctrines, methods or styles and draws upon multiple theories and processes to gain complementary insights into result-oriented phenomena. This teaching strategy has over time through theoretical and experimental deliberations been measured a constant effective means of content delivery as well as fostering learner's ability to comprehend foundational skills in writing. These notions and experiences, as well as occasional technical and empirical updates helps researchers work through the web of errors which may be arising from teaching practice or learners' non-performance in each evaluation and assessment task which seeks to capture learner's achievement level in the area of writing. It is often difficult to describe in print or by rote the extent of failure encountered during second language teaching and learning, and this continues to create a lingering gap if the causes of failure are not ascertained .Scholars (Boscolo &Carotti, 2003; Maduekwe 2007; Applebee & Langer, 2011; Crosson et al., 2012) have argued that there is an inverse correlation between second language competence and performance because it has been observed that only a few students meet standards for proficient writing which is linked not only to learners' presumed threshold but also to teachers' preferred teaching strategy. Hence this study would highlight the facts and failings of the teaching approaches used in this study and help identify as well as emphasize the impact of eclectic approach on Nigerian ESL learners' writing competence.

Nigeria as a nation, is dotted with approximately 500 spoken languages (classified as major and minor), ethnic groups and cultures with English as the official language but spoken less in the rural areas and among people with lower education level (Kari, 2002).The implication is that the nation is at variance on matters of language, ethnic and cultural concerns with English as a second/official language bridging the gap of this diversity. Lado (1957) argues that if certain elements of a second language differ greatly from the student's native language, that student is likely to encounter difficulties. Lado further attributes these difficulties to the dissimilarities in the syntax, pronunciation and structure existing between the learner's first language(L_1) and second language(L_2). Again, according to Kuo and Lai (2006), there is need to acknowledge the inseparable tie between culture, language and which extends to the implementation of instructional strategies for teaching second language to enhance students' linguistic comprehension and proficiency. Considering that the second language learners of English in Nigeria come from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds (which presupposes that their first or native languages are not the English language), the question of how to balance the teaching and learning process to get optimal result comes to the fore. In the ever-changing world of today, communicative competence of language learners is becoming worrisome as there is no singular language teaching method known to accommodate learners' peculiarities. Teachers therefore experiment with various methodologies believed to enhance learning by adopting techniques that significantly motivate as well as influence their grasp of the language.

However, there has been a tremendous awareness of the need to help language learners communicate appropriately as communicative competence forms the core of the language learning process, particularly in the written forms. Writing, (as a productive language skill which is critical to evaluating writing fluency and quality) has a deep connection with conveying one's message to others. Therefore, individuals who are deficient in writing or cannot write well are particularly grossly disadvantaged. Again, second language learners of English in Nigeria have been known to deal with their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in a manner that portrays their lack of commitment to the rigors of language learning hence their readiness to refer to the language as non-native and their acceptance of their incompetence in the use of the language as a natural outcome. Nevertheless, ESL learners at the tertiary level are expected to have perfected or nearly perfected the skill of writing and are supposed to be able to develop, construct, deconstruct as well as write extended essays on topics across disciplines; but that aspiration is almost not attainable among most Nigerian ESL learners. Research and experience have also shown that there are two sides to the equation of second language acquisition which loosely translates to mastery of the four language skills (Krashen, 1987). On the one hand lies the learner's overall interest in the target language and his/her capacity to grasp and navigate the fine details involved in the process of second language learning. On the other hand rests the teacher's ability to gauge, assess, appraise and reappraise learners' progress vis a vis his/her teaching technique, with a view to finding the optimal balance in the teaching and learning process (Maduekwe 2007 and Taylor 2019) . Assessment of communicative competence in Nigerian ESL learners on a grand scale is a logistically challenging

activity but trying to assess this competence within the framework of Writing, which appears to be an extremely difficult trajectory for many Nigerian ESL learners, remains the thrust of this study. The study objective therefore is to assess which is the most effective of the three teaching strategies employed in this study in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency.

Language teaching approaches
Language teaching methods vary in principle and in practice largely as a result of the differences in tactics utilized and the focus of each technique as well as its attendant benefits. Therefore, this review will dwell on an overview of language teaching methods with emphasis on appropriateness, objectives, environment as well as learning needs of language learners. According to Taylor (2019), there is no single best method for everyone in all contexts and no teaching approach is inherently superior to the others as each is anchored on understanding the language/learning process using specific techniques and materials used in a set sequence. Fundamentally, too, each method has its own sufficiency and deficiencies alike which ultimately drive the shift from good to better or even best in an effective way. We hereby try to examine three teaching approaches namely, Communicative Language Teaching Approach, Task-based Learning Approach and Eclectic Approach to teaching English as a second language one after another in a chronological order.

Communicative Language Teaching Approach: this is typically a learner-centred/language-in-practice technique as learners successfully communicate actual meaning by adopting their individual natural strategies for acquiring a language which facilitates their use of the target language. According to Harmer (2005), CLT approach is primarily built on enhancing skills that facilitate effective message and content delivery with emphasis on communicative competence hence its focus on contextualising learners' real and concrete experiences through the target language. Basically, communicative approach which encourages learner's use of different strategies to actualise language in context does not appear to be an all-round package as it does not address various key aspects of language teaching and learning such as phonetics/phonology, morphology, grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic function of language etc.

Task-based Learning Approach: in this approach as developed by Prabhu (1987), the teacher encourages the learners to do meaningful tasks such as engaging in a doctor-patient conversation scenario, being a part of an interview process, seeking the assistance of a customer service personnel etc using the target language. This appears more like a predictable hands-on activity classroom where learners are expected to act out an imagined role-play as directed by the teacher using the target language at the end of which the teacher evaluates learners' performances making corrections and adjustments where necessary. Since Task-based learning approach is experimental and form-focused and thrives on corrective feedback to classroom second language acquisition, it may not successfully fulfil the language needs of learners in different circumstances.

Eclectic Approach: also known as mixed methods and advocated by Rivers (1981), it refers to a diversified teaching approach which combines all the other approaches in second language teaching. In other words, it is not based on a single approach but experiments with other approaches depending on the goal of the lesson and individual learner's ability. It is the teacher's prerogative to decide what approach would be suitable for the lesson as well as the learners. The teacher tries to factor a lot into the stream of the lesson plan and does well to execute same bearing in mind the different learners' capacity while ensuring that no aspect of the language skills is ignored. According to AL-Khuli (1996), Eclectic method breaks monotony, ensures better understanding, enhances participation by learners and saves time in presenting language activities to learners. The teacher's flexibility is known to drive this process to the benefit of all learners as the approach works with a triangulation of techniques believed to yield positive results.

Within the framework of language teaching approaches as developed and ratified, every technique has its unique way of attaining the language teaching goals although not entirely without peculiar challenges. However, the flow of these methods only shows that the shortcomings of an earlier approach are nearly addressed by the latter to achieve global best practices which include – ability to integrate information, ability to recognize various aspects of text structure, ability to put to great use general knowledge, personal experiences and associations, and ability to show mastery and bringing to bear the fine details of the teaching pattern and its impact on second language learning. Although the importance of teaching English as a second language to Nigerians is a known fact, there is not a guaranteed specific approach to teaching English to Nigerian ESL learners. Therefore,

teaching approach plays a vital role in language learning and impacts on Nigerian ESL learners' communicative competence.

METHODS

Participants

In this study, the two hundred participants who were freshmen in the university were purposively selected and randomly separated into four groups A,B,C as experimental and D as control groups, respectively. The participants were 83 males and 117 females aged between 16 and 20. They were of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds bound together by a common second language (L_2)/official language and medium of instruction- the English language. By the singular virtue of being born, raised and schooled so far in Nigeria, they (study participants) are believed to have been thoroughly exposed to the English language by acculturation, association, education and or choice as it remains the nation's official/second language and medium of instruction across educational levels. For this reason, there was need to ascertain participants' English proficiency levels regardless of prior exposure to the language before tertiary education in order to rate their writing competence, and to put a benchmark on the performance of the participants and only those who scored D and E in the pre-test (which evaluated their knowledge of and proficiency in English Essay Writing) formed the entire study group. The choice of participants who scored D and E was so because in the standardised university grading system for ESL Learners in Nigeria, scores are graded thus- 70 and above = A (Excellent), 60-69 = B (Very Good), 50-59 = C (Good), 45-49 = D (Fair), 40-44 = E (Pass) and below 40 = F (Fail).

Only two hundred (200) freshmen ($\geq$ 20years) in the school of Physical Sciences who scored D and E in the pre-test and who willingly gave verbal consent were enrolled in the study. The criteria for the inclusion were: Level of Studentship (all participants must be only first year students at the university), Course of study (all participants must be enlisted from the five (5) Departments namely, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science and Geology, School of study (all participants must be in the school of Physical Sciences) and Attainment of the eligibility benchmark score all participants must have scored either D or E in the pre-test to qualify for the study).

Participants were excluded if they declined to participate. Also, subjects who did not attain the eligibility benchmark score from the pre-test or exceeded the benchmark were not recruited for the study and other willing participants who were sophomores, juniors or seniors, were naturally excluded from the study.

Study design

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Krashen and the Monitor Model (1987) elaborately taken into consideration and presented in terms of its highlights:

- Language acquisition is principally below the threshold of conscious perception as it takes its origin from natural and informal interactions
- Language learning subsists through conscious efforts and is largely dependent on constant correction and feedback in a formal setting
- Grammar is learned in a conventional sequence and progression
- Language acquisition is believed to occur when talking and/or reading become a conduit for comprehensible input
- A monitor can be a person or device that provides necessary error corrections and urges one to improve during language learning.

The monitor model therefore shows that there are identifiably similar elements in the language acquisition/learning processes which if maximally harnessed will promote writing fluency among ESL learners

The research was conceptualised as an experimental study design. To achieve the study objective which aimed at the assessment of the best teaching strategy to enhance learners' writing proficiency, a randomized pre-test, post-test and control group design was adopted. In a comparative study, three teaching methods, namely communicative, eclectic and task-based methods, were used over a-6-week period as treatment on three experimental groups A, B, C respectively and a control

group, D, which was taught using conventional method. The study focused on the experimental group while the control group was observed based on routine application. Students' scores in the weekly assessment during treatment/post-tests were recorded, analysed and interpreted for the experimental and control groups.

Instrument

To collect quantitative data for the study, three instruments were used namely: (a)Oxford Placement Test (OPT) - a homogeneity test which was used to certify that all participants have been very reasonably exposed to the use of English as a second language, (b) a pre-test which served as a measure for determining that the participants had a certain degree of proficiency in the language and provided a benchmark for selection based on participants' current performance, (c) a post-test result which was used to compare with that of the pre-test as well as the weekly assessment during intervention in order to make deductions on the effectiveness and impact of treatment on the experimental groups A, B and C. Also, the weekly performance assessment was used to record each group's progress based on treatment for the entire period spanning six weeks.

Oxford Placement Test

To standardise the study sample, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used before the research intervention to ascertain that these second language (L_2) learners have attained a certain level of proficiency having been exposed to the English language at the primary and post primary education levels. The sample test was designed by modifying the methods used in previous studies on English as a foreign language (EFL) by Nazri and Mansouri (2014) and from this OPT, their achievement levels in writing were established.

Pre-test and post-test

In accordance with the procedural rules governing the pre-test process and to identify the study samples' writing proficiency, a detailed writing composition about self was administered as one of the primary sources of data prior to treatment. The choice of the composition on self was for its simplified form and a good start for further albeit complex forms of essay writing. The pre-test was primarily carried out to rate their writing competence as well as to put a benchmark on the performance of the study sample. As a result, only two hundred (200) freshmen from the larger pool with low level writing skill having scored 45-49 D grade and 40-44 E grade were eligible and formed the entire study group. The choice of participants on D and E grades was so because the standardised university grading system for ESL Learners in Nigeria considers D and E as (Fair) and (Pass) respectively hence their suitability for the study. Time allocation for the pre-test was 50 minutes.

Results of the post treatment test were compared with results recorded weekly within the six-week period of treatment in order to make inferences on the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised on the experimental (A B C) and control (D) groups respectively. By adopting and further modification of Nazri and Mansouri's (2014) methodological design which compared pre-test and post-test results because the intervention period was not evaluated, the present study however compared the post-test result with the weekly assessment results recorded over the six-week period of treatment.

Data collection procedures

The study took place at the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria in October and November 2018 during the first or harmattan semester of the 2018/2019 academic year enlisting participants from the five (5) Departments namely, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science and Geology which make up the school of Physical Sciences where the researchers taught. Since the study objective aimed at identifying the most effective of the teaching methods to enhance Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency, a comparative study of three teaching methods, namely communicative, eclectic and task-based methods, which served as treatment on the three experimental groups (A B and C respectively) was carried out over a-6-week period. The control group D was taught using conventional method.

Prior to commencement of the study, the research aim was properly highlighted to all the students in the school of physical sciences, and they were all excited about the study and got

enrolled for the preliminary stages of the research. The researchers were aware of the intricacies of such study and knew that close monitoring was only possible if they worked with a number that can be easily managed and assessed without bias. As a result, a pre-test was used to obtain an eligibility benchmark hence the selection of study participants who scored D and E in the pre-test for the study. Two hundred (200) willing participants (freshmen) were therefore enlisted for the study. They were further randomly separated and grouped into four (4)- three (3) experimental groups A, B, C and one (1) control group, D. The study groups were taught the same topics using the specific approaches designed for each, in the same setting, for the same length of time and same environment simultaneously for six (6) weeks. The weekly performance assessment checklist designed for the study was used to monitor, collate and record all observed progress made in terms of writing ability. All six (6) researchers worked with the checklist and recorded religiously the groups' performances, paying particular attention to Content (C), Organisation (O), Expression (E) and Mechanical Accuracy (MA) which are an integral part of essay writing. Considering the peculiar nature of the subjects' proficiency level as evaluated in the Pre-test, which could be described as near abysmal for individuals who have been exposed to the English language for twelve years (6 years of primary and 6 years of secondary schooling), the key indices of essay writing were given equal importance. Thus, each index was allotted an even 25-mark score which totalled a 100%.Ultimately, the procedure took a three-step process: Pre-test-Treatment-Post-test.

Data analysis

As with the study objective which aims to assess the most effective of the three teaching strategies employed in this study in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency, data gathered over the six weeks of treatment for the experimental group and for the control group who did not receive any treatment and post-test scores were aggregated and further analysed to estimate the significance of the gaps if any existed and ascertain the most effective of the teaching strategies applied in the study. Simple percentage and frequency tables as well as bar charts, line graphs and pie charts were used to diagrammatically illustrate and represent the findings. The scores were initially compared to test for the hypothesis of significant differences in means using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique. However, the assumptions of the test were not fulfilled in Levene's test for homogeneity of variance; hence an alternative Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test was conducted. Post hoc test was computed to establish the group that differs significantly.

Study hypothesis

The following were the hypotheses of the study.

Null Hypothesis (Ho): The mean ranks are equal (do not differ significantly) across the groups.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): The mean ranks are not equal (at least one group differ significantly) across the groups.

Ethical consideration and informed consent

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria. In addition, as research which focus on human subjects thrive better on voluntary participation, informed verbal consent was obtained from all the study participants after the objective of the study was explained to them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

All the participants (200, 100%) in the study were aged 16-20 years. A greater number (117, 58.5%) of the subjects were females while the remaining (83, 41.5%) were males and all (200, 100%) were freshmen in the various five (5) Departments that constitute the School of Physical Sciences. Forty-six (46, 23.0%) of the total participants studied Mathematics, forty-two (42, 21.0%) studied Computer Science, thirty-nine (39, 19.5%) studied Geology, thirty-eight (38, 19.0%) studied Physics while the remaining Thirty-five (35, 17.5%) studied Chemistry.

Also, judging by our respondents' mother tongue or native language (L_1), the majority (113, 56.5%) were Igbo, twenty-four (24, 12.0%) were Yoruba, nineteen (19, 9.5%) were Hausa and Forty-four (44, 22.0%) were from other language groups in Nigeria.

Lastly, all (200, 100%) respondents agreed to English as their second language (L_2) which is a strong confirmation that English is the Nation's official language and medium of instruction at various educational levels.

Table 1.Socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants

Students Characteristics (n=200)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
16 -20	200	100
21 -25	0	0
26 -30	0	0
Gender		
Male	85	41.5
Female	119	58.5
Level of Study		
Freshmen (100 level)	200	100
Course of Study		
Mathematics	46	23
Physics	38	19
Chemistry	35	17.5
Geology	39	19.5
Computer Science	42	21
Native Language/ Mother Tongue		
Igbo	118	59
Yoruba	24	12
Hausa	19	9.5
Others	44	22
Second Language		
English	200	100
French	0	0
Other	0	0

Six weeks of treatment based on the key indices of essay writing in the observation checklist

Table 2 contained the output for six weeks of treatment based on the key indices of essay writing for three experimental groups and the control group. Marks allotted on each index are 25 points, leading to a total score of 100 points, at a mean score of 25 points for each week. For week 1 to week 6, the average (mean) score performance among the students was not quite high as it ranged between 11.3 to 13 points (Total score: 45 - 53%), for the experimental group A and 10 points (Total score: 40 - 44%), for the control group. Similar mean score results were obtained by the other groups. The largest mean score of 17.6 points (Total score = 71, standard deviation = 4.6) was obtained at week 6 for experimental group B while the lowest mean score of 10 points (Total score = 40, standard deviation = 3.3) was at week 1 for the control group.

A remarkable observation from the table is that experimental group B maintained a higher mean score in all the weeks of study. The mean performance for group A and group C were slightly reduced at weeks 2 and 3 but started going up at weeks 4, 5 and 6. The mean score for the control group was rising steadily at a slower pace from 10 point at week 1(standard deviation = 3.1) to 11 points at week 6 (standard deviation = 2.9). The percentage score at each week for the groups are clearly represented on a compound bar chart (Figure 1) and a progressive line graph (Figure2).

The Kruskal-Wallis H test shows that there was a statistically significant difference in performance due to the learning outcomes (H(3)=17.621, p=0.001), with a mean rank of 11.92 for group A, 20.75 for group B, 13.58 for group C and 3.75 for group D. The post hoc test (Bonferroni-Correction) comparing pairs of groups shows significant difference between group B and the control (p < 0.0001).

Table 2. Treatment based on the key indices of essay writing in the observation checklist

Indices	Marks Allotted	Experimental Group			Control Group
		A	B	C	D
WEEK 1					
Content	25	12	13	12	10
Organization	25	12	13	12	10
Expression	25	14	17	14	14
Mechanical Accuracy	25	07	09	07	06
Total	100	45	52	45	40
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	11.3 (3.0)	13 (3.3)	11.3 (3.0)	10 (3.3)
WEEK 2					
Content	25	10	13.5	12	10
Organization	25	11.5	14	12	10.5
Expression	25	14	17	13	14
Mechanical Accuracy	25	7.5	9.5	7.5	6.5
Total	100	43	54	44.5	41
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	10.8 (2.70)	13.5 (3.1)	11.1 (2.5)	10.2 (3.1)
WEEK 3					
Content	25	11	16	12.5	10
Organisation	25	13	15	12	11
Expression	25	13	17	13.5	14
Mechanical Accuracy	25	07.5	9.5	6.5	06
Total	100	44.5	57.5	44.5	41
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	11.1 (2.6)	14.3 (3.4)	11.1 (3.1)	10.3 (3.3)
WEEK 4					
Content	25	11	17	13	10
Organisation	25	14	15	13.5	12
Expression	25	15	18	16	13
Mechanical Accuracy	25	7.5	10	7	6.5
Total	100	47.5	60	49.5	41.5
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	11.9 (3.4)	15 (3.6)	12.4 (3.8)	10.4 (2.9)
WEEK 5					
Content	25	13	18	14	11
Organisation	25	15	18	16	12
Expression	25	17	20	16	13
Mechanical Accuracy	25	07	11	08	07
Total	100	52	67	54	43
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	13 (4.3)	16.8 (3.9)	13.5 (3.8)	10.8 (2.6)
WEEK 6					
Content	25	13.5	20	14	11
Organisation	25	14	19	16	12
Expression	25	17	21	16	14
Mechanical Accuracy	25	8.5	11	08	07
Total	100	53	71	54	44
Mean (s.d)	25 (0)	13.3 (3.5)	17.8 (4.6)	13.5 (3.8)	11 (2.9)
Kruskal-Wallis Test;					
Mean Rank		11.92	20.75	13.58	3.75
		$H=17.621$, df= 3, Asymp sig (p)= 0.001			

Kruskal-Wallis Post-Hoc test	Control – Group B	Control – Group B	Control – Group C	Group A – Group B	Group A – Group C	Group C – Group B
Test statistic	8.167	17.000	9.833	-8.833	-1.667	7.167
Std error	4.073	4.073	4.073	4.073	4.073	4.073
Std test statisrtic	2.005	4.174	2.414	-2.169	-0.409	1.760
P (Asymp sig.)	0.045	0.000	0.016	0.030	0.682	0.076
P (Adj. Sig)	0.270	0.000*	0.095	0.181	1.000	0.471

s.d: standard deviations; df: degrees of freedom; Asymp sig: asymptotic significance; P: probability value; H: Kruskal-Wallis test statistic value which approximately follows Chi-square distribution with g-1 (g = number of groups) degrees of freedom. Adj. Sig: Adjusted significance based on Bonferroni Correction.

In Figure 1, the total scores were highest at group B for each week. The scores were same for groups A and C at weeks 1 and 3 while group C scores were slightly higher than group A scores at the rest of weeks 2, 4, 5 and 6.
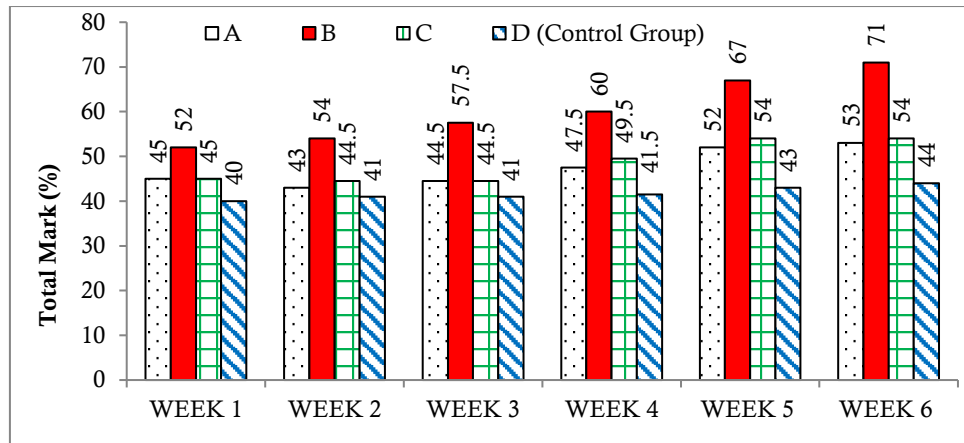

Figure 1. Scores obtained and recorded at different groups of tests over the weeks

The line gragh (Figure 2) shows that the overall weekly scores recorded greater progress across the weeks in Group B with rising trend than in any other group. The trend lowered slightly in group A curve at week 2, and starts to rise gradually as from week 3. Group C performances were close to static at weeks 1 to 3. Group D (control) shows relatively no trend.
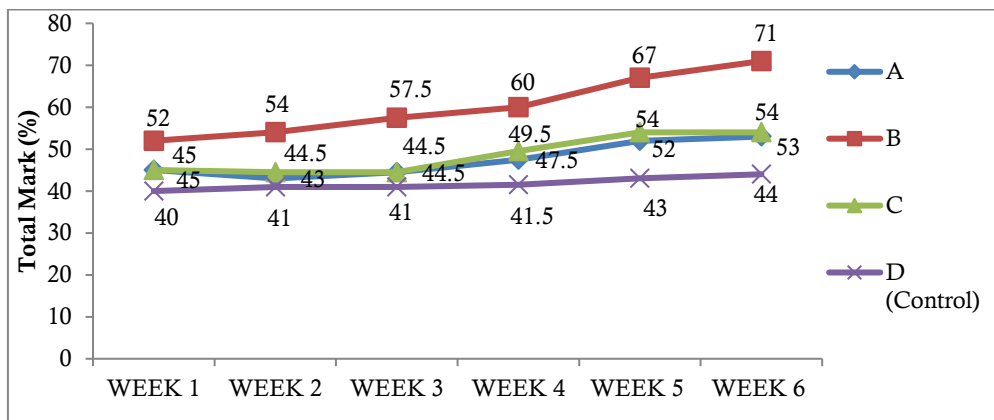
Figure 2. Line graph of progress recorded at different groups of tests over the weeks

The overall performance of the students across the weeks is represented in a line graph on Figure 3, which clearly shows that on average, 60.3% highest overall was obtained by experimental group B, while the lowest overall; score of 41.8% was obtained in the control group.

Post-test for experimental and control groups

At post-test performance, the results obtained were in line with the weekly treatment results with group B maintaining the highest point (72.5%) while the lowest score was at the control group (45%). This performance is depicted in a bar chart (Fig. 4) and a line graph (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 Shows that, while the performance score was 72.5% in group B, it was 53.5% in Group A, 54% in group C and 45% in group D. It therefore suggests that eclectic teaching approach comprising extensive and mixed components is more likely to lead to greater performance towards achieving Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency rather than the conventional method currently in use.
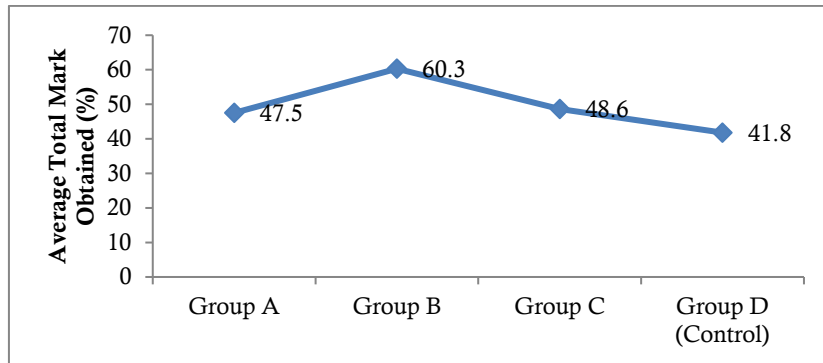
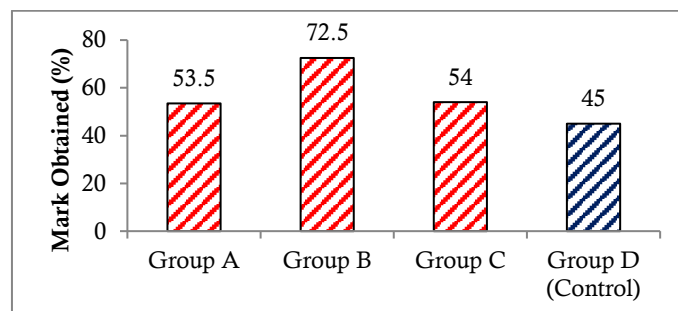Figure 3. Line graph of average total mark obtained at each group

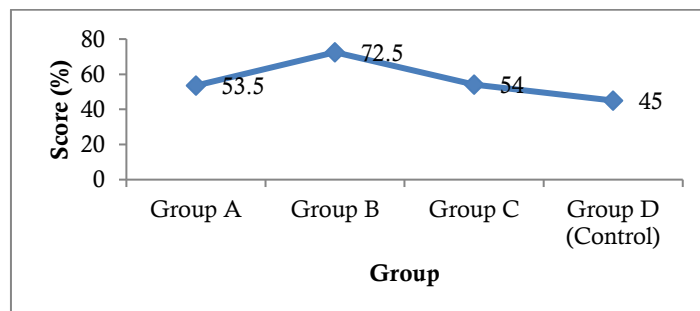Figure 4. Post-test bar chart for experimental and control groups

Figure 5. Post-test line graph for experimental and control groups

Average performance on key indices of essay writing

The underlying total performance on key indices of essay writing at each study group was such that the highest overall average performance was obtained in Expression at each group (Fig.6). Organisation was second to Expression at groups A, C and D while Content with average score of 16.3, was second in group B. Mechanical accuracy recorded the lowest average score in all the groups. The performances improved weekly on each indicator for all the groups. There exists observable difference on the indices between the control group and the three other experimental groups, especially group B where the weekly differences appared wider. At individual indices, the widest difference across the groups was in content index, where the difference in average total performance was 11.8 for communicative method (group A) but changed to 16.3 for eclectic teaching method (group B).
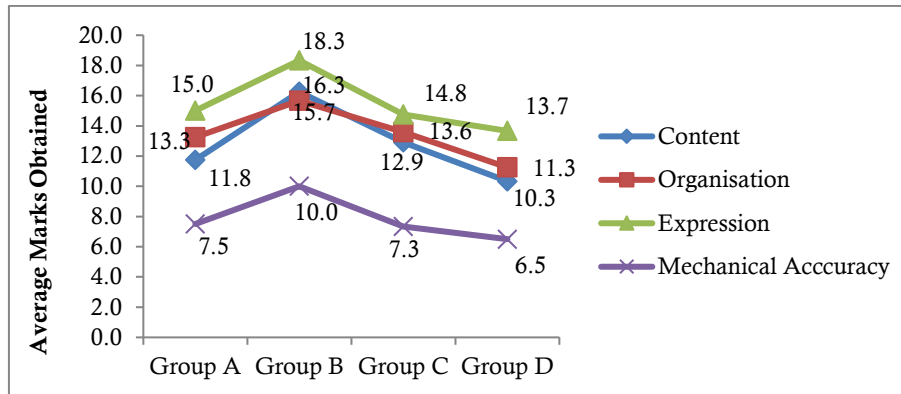
Figure 6. Underlying average total performance on key indices of essay writing on Experimental group (A, B, C) and Control group (D).

Overall assessment of performance on key indices of essay writing

In terms of overall proportion on the performance on key indices of essay writing among the students studied, figure 7 showed that the overall average score of 15.4 was obtained in Expression, representing 31%, which is the highest obtained. Following Expression is Organization at overall average score of 13.4 (27%), while Mechanical accuracy has the lowest overall average score at 7.8 point (16% of the scores).
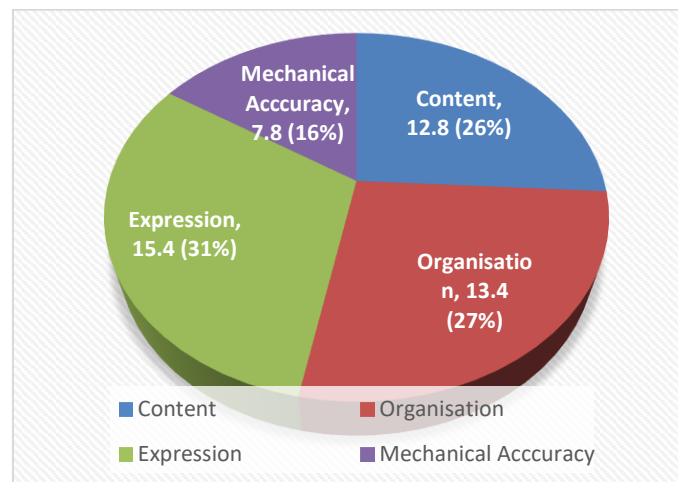

Figure 7. Overall assessment of Performance on key indices of essay writing by the study groups.

Discussion

The primary aim of the present study was to assess which is the most effective of the three teaching strategies employed in this study in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency. Our results demonstrated appreciable difference between the experimental and the control groups in terms of writing fluency. The null hypothesis of equality of mean ranks among the groups was clearly rejected in the index study, indicating evidence of significant differences between the groups. At post hoc analysis, the study shows that participants in the experimental group B (who got intervention by means of Eclectic approach) improved very significantly in their writing performance ($p = 0.001$). Also, experimental groups A and C (who received treatment by means of Communicative and Task-based methods respectively) showed marginal improvement while the control group D (who were taught using the Conventional method) did not show any significant improvement.

The present study indicates that the study participants who were judged based on the four cardinal points of Content(C), Organisation(O), Expression(E) and Mechanical Accuracy (MA) in essay writing were found to have performed accordingly as the teaching approach utilised for each group provided likely outcome. It is important to note that however significant, marginal or

insignificant the improvements were, the experimental groups moved from a weak point (pre-test) to a considerably strong point (post-test) by virtue of teaching techniques adopted as well as constant writing practice over intervention time. This validates the theory that "one learns to write by writing" (Lee and Schallert, 2016).

According to the results of the study on the summary of overall assessment of our respondents' performance on the key indices of essay writing, Content (C) which represents the information the writer intends to communicate as well as the style adopted for its transfer scored an overall average of 12.8 (26%) out of the 25-mark score allotted each index (Fig. 7). It is also noteworthy that the experimental and control groups were duly assessed and graded weekly for six weeks and that accounted for the record of progress achieved within the time of intervention (Table 2).The weekly assessment culminated in the underlying average performance on the key indices of essay writing with experimental group B (who got intervention by Eclectic approach) scoring the highest average total of 16.3, followed by group C (who received treatment by Task-based method)scoring an average total of 12.9 and group A (who got treatment by Communicative approach) recorded a total of 11.8 while control group D (who was taught by the Conventional method) recorded the lowest average score of 10.3 (Fig. 6).As earlier stated by Onukwugha (2007), Content is the substance, the embodiment and the heartbeat of any composition which means that content is the research base and core of any writing and from content, other prime factors in essay writing take their ascent. The result summative on Content (12.8/26%) is clear evidence that Nigerian ESL learners have not quite hit that point of mastery required of second language learners to be adjudged as native-like competence.

Also, findings of the study show that Organisation (O)which captures sentence formation/structure, thesis statement, topic sentence, presentation/logical sequence of ideas, unity and coherence, effective paragraphing etc recorded an overall average of13.4 (27%) of the 25- mark score allotted the Organisation index arising from the weekly assessment of the experimental and control groups (Fig. 7). A breakdown of individual group performance indicates that group A recorded an average of 13.3, group B recorded an average of 15.7 and group C scored an average of 13.6 while group D scored an average of 11.3 (Fig. 6). As Reid (2012) typically points out organisation is the arrangement of the larger units of meaning in a paper, taking into consideration patterns of organisation acceptable in specific disciplines. In other words, Organisation is the coordinating arm of essay writing as ideas are sufficiently ordered, controlled, unified and presented in a manner that portrays communicating ideas visually albeit in writing to readers. The result aggregate on Organisation (13.4/27%) is an indication that there is still so much to be done to enhance learners' writing competence in the target language.

In addition, results of the study show that Expression (E) which embodies the writer's ease/manner of articulation, choice of words, clarity of tone, in fact, the artistic thisness of writing recorded the highest percentage (15.4/31%) of the 25-mark score allotted the expression index based on overall assessment of the study groups (Fig. 7). Further analysis of data which produced the 15.4 average explains that group A recorded an average of 15.0, group B recorded an average of 18.3whereas group C scored 14.8 and group D scored 13.7 average (Fig. 6). Quite like other studies, Xin (2017) believes that how we construct our sentences and express these ideas may be what distinguishes a good essay from a great essay. For this reason, Expression works well with rich, active and compelling vocabulary strength, mastery of word spelling rules and conventions, extensive reading and understanding the oddities of the language, constant grammar practice and fine-tuning to perfection. Ultimately, Expression is that singular factor that connects the writer/s to the reader/s and writer's failure to achieve profound expression of thoughts on paper amounts to gross incompetence hence the need to draw the attention of Nigerian ESL learners to an all-round correctness which is customary in writing.

Furthermore, the outcome of the study indicates that Mechanical accuracy (MA)(which is the framework that checks grammar, punctuation and spelling rules, is in conformity with standard practice in the writing process) recorded the lowest average 7.8 (16%) of the 25-mark score allotted the index as a cumulative effect of the six weeks intervention period on the study groups. Interestingly, group B maintained the lead with an average score of 10.0, followed by group A with an average score of 7.5 and group C recorded 7.3 while group D scored 6.5 averages (Fig. 7). As Onukwugha (2007) succinctly puts it - Mechanical accuracy has to do with typographical errors, spelling, punctuation and syntax. The extremely poor performance of the study group in mechanical accuracy is an indication that learners have not totally imbibed the culture of correctness in essay

writing which prohibits slang, clipping, abbreviations, heterography, concord error, lexical discordances, punctuation failure etc. The decline in MA despite intervention is not unconnected with the above-mentioned errors which were rife and bristled in their writing and which earlier studies (Harris and Dilts 2015; Abati 2016; Dozie and Ojilere 2019) have attributed to learners' tendency to yield to social media inventions which are unhealthy, counter-productive and systematically displacing the original and correct versions of the target language. In other words, writing requires a lot of work, nay detail, and it is expected that essays be error-free and accurate. One may argue that although perfect accuracy is seemingly unattainable, near-perfect accuracy is achievable by ESL learners.

Most importantly, based on the overall performance of each group on all indices, our study draws attention to the fact that group B (representing the Eclectic approach set) made steady and remarkable progress while groups A and C (representing the Communicative and Task-based methods respectively) showed minor improvement and control group D made no significant improvement all through the intervention period. This significant finding corroborates earlier reports by Rivers (1981) and AL-Khuli (1996) that Eclectic approach experiments with several other teaching techniques aimed at imparting the desired goal and empowering learners to deal with problems associated with second language learning while engendering greater participation and enhanced result bearing in mind individual learner's ability. Therefore, this goes to show that the benefits of adopting the eclectic approach in teaching Nigerian ESL learners are valid as the method is proven to make a world of difference in learners' ability to navigate the usual complex problem of target language proficiency as well as give exceedingly appreciable positive feedbacks in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Writing as an integral part of the language acquisition/learning process is a skill with many ramifications and potency which can duly be assessed based on learners' performance on various written tasks hence Applebee's (1984) definition of writing as the externalization and remaking of thinking. Quite like other language skills, writing which vehiculates thoughts on paper tends to highlight context, personal experience, sociocultural leanings, learning, individual expressive ability etc which individuals naturally bring to focus on the course of writing. In other words, writing not only mirrors learners' motivational factors and the need to show mastery or competence in the skill but also tries to measure by way of assessment the learners' aim of just completing the task as learners are driven differently on approach to achieving results. Realistically, academic writing is tough, complicated and delicately nuanced, requiring much more than the inclination for and ease with which informal e-mails, short stories, poems etc are put together. Nevertheless, there is always a sense of adventure that comes with habituating the writing exercise which transcends a strengthened vocabulary and language skills. The totalities of language teaching/learning with writing at its core helps learners gain understanding and mastery of its basic structure. Consequently, our study has found evidence to prove that teaching technique is crucial to language learning. Secondly, learners have been found to make progress by dint of constant and consistent writing practice aimed at achieving fluency in the target language. Finally, the study establishes that Eclectic approach is the best teaching method to ensure that Nigerian ESL learners attain native-like competence in the English language. The implication is that the findings from this study suggest that teachers of English as a second language should endeavour to include Eclectic Approach as evidence-based component in teaching ESL learners in Nigeria.

The present study described the impact of eclecticism as instructional approach to teaching and learning English as a second language in Nigeria. However, a few factors may limit the generalisation of its outcome. One, the sample size as well as restricted geography of participants forbids extensive generalisation. Two, the choice of freshmen as participants limits our findings as it is possible that inclusion of sophomores, juniors and seniors alike may have produced a different result. Three, using the study samples' writing skills to judge their overall communicative competence may have been a sweeping statement as listening, speaking and reading skills are equally integral to second language learning. Four, the six weeks period of treatment leading up to post-test limits our current findings as observation over a longer time is likely to generate diverse results. All these limitations suggest the need for more research in the field of second language learning in Nigeria.

Specifically, as the present research is significantly replicable, future holistic studies addressing all limitations are needed to further finetune the impact of eclectic approach on ESL learners' communicative competence.

REFERENCES
Abati, R. 2016. "Social media and the English Language". *The Guardian,* p. 23.Retrieved from https//guardian.ng/opinion/social-media-and-the English-language>

AL-Khuli, M.A. (1996).*Teaching English to Arab Students.* Jordan: Al-Falah House.

Applebee, A.N. (1984). *Contexts for learning to write: Studies of secondary school instruction*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Applebee, A.N. & Langer, J.A. (2011). "EJ" Extra: A Snapshotof writing instruction in Middle schools and High schools.*The English Journal.* 100 (6) 14-27

Boscolo, P &Carotti, L. (2003). Does writing contribute to improving high school student's approach to literature? *L1-Educational Studies in language and literature.* 3 (3) 197-224

Crosson, A., Matsumura, L., Correnti, R &Arlotta-Guerrero, A. (2012). The quality of writing tasks and students' use of academic language in Spanish. The Elementary School Journal. 112 (3) 469-496

Dozie, C.P. & Ojilere, I.C. (2019). Emerging Trends in English among Youths in Nigeria – An Exploratory study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature.* 8 (4) 70-80

Harmer, J. (2005). *The practice of English language teaching*. England: Pearson Education Limited.

Harris, M and Dilts, N.M 2015. "Social Media and its changes on Student's formal writing" *Crius: Angelo State Undergraduate Research Journal*. 3, 191-198. Retrieved from docplayer.net/46353898

Kari, E. E. (2002). Multilingualism in Nigeria: The Example of Rivers State. A paper presented at the seminar on multilingual situation and related cultures in Asia and Africa. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Tokyo 25 March 2002.

Krashen, S.D. (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. United States: Prentice-Hall International.

Kuo, M & Lai, C. (2006). Linguistics across Cultures: The Impact of culture on second language learning.*Journal of Foreign Language Instruction.* 1 (1) 1-10. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id= ED496079 language teaching. International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Lee, J and Schallert, D.L (2016). Exploring the Reading-Writing Connection: A Yearlong Classroom-Based Experimental Study of Middle School Students Developing Literacy in a New Language. *Reading Research Quarterly.*52 (2) 143-164

Maduekwe, A.N. (2007). *Principles and Practice of Teaching English as a second language*. Lagos: Vitaman Educational Books.

Nazari, B. & Mansouri, S. (2014). Dynamic assessment versus static assessment: A study of reading comprehension ability in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 10 (2) 134-156

Onukwugha, U. (2007). The four cardinal points of any good writing: Expression, Content, Organization &Technical Accuracy. Available at https://www.ezinearticles.com

Prabhu, (1987). *Second language pedagogy: A perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reid, S and Kowalski, D. (2012). Organizing Documents. Writing@CSU.Colorado State University. Available at https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm

Rivers, W.M. (1981). *Teaching foreignlanguage skills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, B. (1987). Teaching ESL: Incorporating a communicative, student-centred component. In M.H. Long & J.C. Richards (Eds.), *Methodology in TESOL: A book of Readings*. Boston: Heinle&Heinle Publishers.

Xin, M. (2017). Improving Expression and flow in essays. Available at https://www.vcestudyguides.com