

**PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS ON THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE
TEACHING OF ESSAY WRITING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONUEKE
EDUCATION ZONE OF EBONYI STATE**

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study was to explore perception of teachers on their attitude toward the teaching of essay writing in Onueke Education zone of Ebonyi State. Three research questions and a null hypothesis guided the work. Questionnaire was used as the instrument. A trial test was carried out and tested for reliability and a value of 0.75 was obtained from the test. The instrument was further subjected to face validation. Language teachers – English, Igbo and French totaling 374 drawn from 59 secondary schools served as the population and out of this number, 120 language teachers – 60 males and 60 females were selected using simple random sampling technique. All the responses on the three research questions indicated that although essay writing is very important in the intellectual development of students, yet most teachers' exhibit non-challant attitude in teaching essay writing. These poor attitudes were discovered to be as a result of the complex nature of essay writing, high students/teacher population and non-motivation of teachers. The hypothesis showed that significance difference does not exist in the perception of both male and female language teachers. It was suggested that teachers should offer selfless services and take the teaching of essay writing very seriously using better instructional strategy. Also the government should motivate the teachers and employ more teachers to lessen the burden of language teachers.*

KEYWORDS: Essay, Writing, Organization, Attitude, Perception

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex process with a number of operations going on simultaneously. Writing has been a neglected area of teaching English language for some years. The National curriculum for senior secondary English (2004) states that the syllabus of English language comprises: lexis and structure; summary and comprehension; essay and letter writing; and oral English-Mastery in the first three categories ensures good performance in the art of speech and writing. It is a skill that demands that students are made to organize their thoughts clearly and effectively.

Honby (2004) sees writing as the activity of writing in contrast to reading. Writing a long essay is probably the most complex constructive act that most human beings are ever expected to study. Gaith (2006) sees writing as a complex process that allows writers to explore their thoughts and ideas and make them visible and concrete. Ogbu (2009: 86) states the requirement of a good essay writing

as a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information; a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; The use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis, and a careful choice of vocabulary grammatical patterns and sentence structures are to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and eventual readers.

Otagburuagu, (2002) notes that essay writing has an incalculable influence on humanity because it is a common instrument for dissemination of information. Essay writing is very important in the academic life of students. This is because essay writing carries about 50 % out of the total

100% allotted to all aspects of the English language. This therefore indicates that, for students to perform well in English Language, they must perform well in essay writing. Unfortunately, students' perform poorly in English Language and this indicates their poor performance in essay. Writing enhances students' performance in other aspects of the English language. Essay is an art that is used to assess students and find out what they know in other aspects of the language skills. Students cannot learn essay writing in a vacuum. They need to be taught to master the skills that are involved in the writing process Ogbu (2009:87) states emphatically, that "writing is taught and learnt formally in schools because it is not innate or inborn in man" poor attitude to teaching may be responsible for students poor performance in essay writing. Salami (2007) and Akinbobola (2009) state that poor method of teaching are responsible for poor students' performance. This poor attitude teaching in essay writing affects students' performance in English language. This poor performance of students in essay writing has also become worrisome to stakeholders in education and scholars. The West African Senior School Certificate Chief Examiner's Report (2006) laments by stating that despite the fact that similar type of questions are given to students every year, yet students continue to perform poorly. The Report stated that the worst hit was essay writing where students scored zero under mechanical accuracy, construction of loose sentences and poor usage of grammar.

Omojuwa (2005) observes that most students perform poorly in essay writing in the English language not because they are incapable of learning, but because of poor teaching strategies. Azikwe (1998) notes that most teachers do not teach essay writing in schools and even when they are taught, they are badly taught as most teachers do not give or mark exercises in the essay writing. This poor performance continues and it affects other subjects. The state of teaching and learning essay writing in secondary schools calls for immediate attention as students' poor performance in the skill continue to raise dust. Poor attitude in teaching essay writing has been observed in most secondary schools in Ebonyi State, Onueke Education zone is not an exception. It is a known fact that students perform poorly in essay writing. This study therefore is to assess teachers' perception on teachers' poor attitude in teaching essay writing.

What is Attitude?

Attitudes are very dynamic and its formation is a very complex construct act which develops from multivariates of many variables and of influences. It is an ending system of positive or negative evaluations, feelings and Pro con lation tendencies with respect to a special object (Adekola, 2007). A person is affected by what he does. Therefore if the attitude of teachers in teaching the essay writing becomes positive, they are likely going to affect students' performance positively, but if the attitude becomes negative students suffer the grunt and they continue to perform poorly. Poor attitude may be as a result of many factors. Shehu in Okonkwo (2014) notes that motivation and incentives encourage one in what he does. He further states that most teachers are not motivated and many teachers in order to support their meager pay packets engage in petty-trading or become 'okada' riders. These affect teaching and learning.

Essay writing requires devotion to teaching, giving exercises and marking the essay. But many teachers do not seem to teach essay writing in schools and even when essays are taught, they are poorly taught. When teachers weigh the tasks involved in teaching essay writing, they decide to jump the aspect of essay teaching or they employ poor method of teaching which may involve teaching without giving tasks to students inform of involving them in continuous writing, not marking the exercises and giving corrections. These continue to lead to students' poor performance in essay and English as well as other subjects they offer in the school.

Most students develop phobia in essay writing because they find the essay writing very difficult. Most of them are very much below their level in academics as far as essay writing is concerned and this affects their performance in other subjects. In order to improve writing of essay

among students, teachers and students must develop genuine positive attitude towards teaching and learning of essay writing. The purpose of this study therefore is to assess teacher's perception on attitude of teachers in teaching essay writing.

Statement of Problem

Students 'performance in essay writing have seen very poor and their poor performance in essay continuously affect students' performance in English. The cause of this poor state of essay writing among students may have been as a result of the fact that teachers do not teach essay with much seriousness and commitment they give to other aspects of the English language. This paper therefore seeks to find out teachers' perception on their attitude towards teaching of essay writing in schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the conception of teachers on the importance of essay writing?
2. What are the attitudes of teachers toward teaching of essay writing?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers on their attitude toward teaching of essay writing?

Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female teachers' perception on teaching of essay writing

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

A descriptive survey design was adopted.

Area of the Study

The area of the study was Onueke Education Zone. Onueke is one of the three Education Zones in Ebonyi State and this was chosen because there seems to be continuous deterioration in students' essay writing and this affects their performance in English Language.

Population of the Study

The population consists of 374 Language teachers which include English teachers, Igbo teachers and French teachers in 59 secondary schools.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample was randomly selected from 24 different secondary schools in the area which comprised 60 male teachers and 60 female teachers making it a total of 120 teachers.

Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was adopted as the instrument. The questions was titled Questionnaire on perception of teachers' attitude towards teaching of Essay writing (QLTAEW).

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was divided into four sections and each section contained a subtitle of the twenty five items which was generated using a four point scale – Strongly Agree 4 point, Agree 3 point, Disagree 2 point and Strongly Disagree 1 point. The respondents were required to mark (X) on the option chosen. The instrument was validated by experts in the field and was trial tested. The result obtained was subjected to construct validation using factor analysis by experts and all the twenty one items were isolated non was extracted.

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to the test of internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha method which gave reliability co-efficient of 0.75

Presentation of Data

Data was presented based on the three research questions and hypothesis. Results were presented in accordance to the individual responses on the research questions and a null hypothesis which guided the work.

Table 1: Teachers' mean rating on teachers' perception on importance of essay writing

S/N	Perception on importance of easy writing	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Help students organization thought	87	27	3	3	3.66	1.36	Accepted
2	Help students explore their taught	95	18	4	3	3.75	1.50	Accepted
3	Gives the coherent idea	84	32	2	2	3.65	1.31	Accepted
4	Concretizes student idea	97	18	2	3	3.71	1.53	Accepted
5	Help them make careful choice of vocabulary	78	30	1	1	3.38	1.22	Accepted
6	Helps them employ grammatical devices	85	32	1	2	3.64	1.31	Accepted
7	It leads them to develop accuracy	101	15	2	2	3.83	1.64	Accepted
8	Helps them make a careful choice of sentence structure for stylistic purpose	98	8	3	1	3.56	1.61	Accepted
Grand mean						3.65		

Summary of result on Table 1 above reveals that essay writing is very crucial to the overall development of students academically especially in English language.

Table 2: Attitude of teachers toward teaching of essay writing?

S/N	Attitude of teachers	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Avoid teaching essay writing	59	21	18	12	2.90	0.85	Accepted
2	Do not adopt appropriate strategy such as group interaction	62	49	5	4	3.38	0.98	Accepted
3	Do not mark given exercises	71	45	2	2	3.55	1.12	Accepted
4	Do not effect corrections in essay	60	55	2	3	3.44	0.99	Accepted
5	Do not insist on students effecting corrections	67	50	1	2	3.54	1.06	Accepted
6	Do not give time to teaching essay writing	81	37	1	1	3.66	1.27	Accepted
7	Do not most often include essay writing in their scheme of work	30	40	21	29	2.59	0.41	Accepted
Grand mean						3.29		

Summary in Table 2 above shows that teachers have poor attitude towards teaching of essay writing and most teachers do not even teach essay nor give time to the teaching of essay writing in this area.

Table 3: Causes of teachers attitude toward teaching of essay writing in schools

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	The nature of essay writing is so complicated	50	21	29	20	2.88	0.65	Accepted
2	Very high students/teacher ratio	75	29	10	6	3.48	1.13	Accepted
3	Marking essay is too time consuming	105	12	3	1	3.86	1.70	Accepted
4	Marking essay is too tiring	86	29	3	2	3.67	1.34	Accepted
5	The burden of teaching all the skills of English by one teacher is too cumbersome	91	26	1	2	3.72	1.43	Accepted
6	There is no incentive for teachers	61	42	12	5	3.32	0.91	Accepted
Grand mean						3.49		

Summary of Table 3 above reveals that teachers' poor attitude toward teaching of essay writing is as a result of the complex nature of essay coupled with many problems associated with the teaching of essay

in this area.

Table 4: T-test statistics on male and female teachers' perception on teachers' attitude toward teaching of essay writing

S/N	Variable Derision	N	Variable Derision	N	D/f	X	SD	t- critical	M&F t-cal	value level	Alpha Remark
1	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.66	1.36	1.98	0.93		
2	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.75	1.75				Accept
3	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.65	1.31		0.65		Accept
4	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.71	1.53				Accept
5	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.38	1.28		0.62		Accept
6	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.64	1.31				Accept
7	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.83	1.4		0.60		Accept
8	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.56	1.64				Accept
9	Male	60	Female	60	118	2.90	0.85		0.67		Accept
10	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.38	0.95				Accept
11	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.55	1.12		0.54		Accept
12	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.44	0.99				Accept
13	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.54	1.06		0.479		Accept
14	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.66	1.27				Accept
15	Male	60	Female	60	118	2.59	0.49		0.87		Accept
16	Male	60	Female	60	118	2.88	0.65				Accept
17	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.48	1.13		0.61		Accept
18	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.86	1.70				Accept
19	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.67	1.34		0.65		Accept
20	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.72	1.43				Accept
21	Male	60	Female	60	118	3.32	0.91				Accept

Data on Table 4 reveals that t-calculated value in all the 21 items are less than the t- critical value. This shows that there is no significant difference in the male and female mean rating of teachers on their perception on teachers' attitude toward teaching essay writing.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study were based on three research questions and a null hypothesis that guided the work.

The findings of the study were as follow:

1. Essay writing is very crucial to the intellectual development of students
2. Most teachers have poor attitude toward the teaching of essay writing.
3. High students /teacher ratio couple with the intricate nature of essay writing is among reasons of teachers poor attitude
4. Lack of adequate incentive to teachers is another reasons for teachers poor attitude to teaching essay writing
5. Both male and female teachers share the same perception on teachers' attitude towards teaching of essay writing.

DISCUSSION

Table 1: reveals that essay writing is very crucial to the intellectual development of students. Essay writing organizes students' thought has mean of 3.6, explores thought 3.7, coherent idea 3.6, concretizes idea 3.7, careful choice of vocabulary 3.3, gives good graphical device 3.6, accuracy development 3.8 and careful choice of sentence structure for stylistic purposes 3.5. The findings support Otagbumagu

(2002) who noted that essay writing has an incalculable influence on humanity because it is a common instrument for dissemination of information.

Table 2 reveals that teachers perceive that teachers exhibit poor attitude toward teaching essay writing in schools. Most teachers avoid essay writing has means of 2.9, do not adopt appropriate strategy such as group interaction 3.3, do not effect corrections 3.5, do not insist on students to make corrections 3.4, do not include essay writing in their scheme 2.5. The findings lend support to Azikwe (1998) who noted that most teachers do not teach essay writing in schools and even when they are taught, they are badly taught as most teachers do not give or mark exercises in essay writing. The findings are also in line with Omojuwa (2005) who observed that most students perform poorly in essay writing not because they are incapable of learning but because of poor teaching method adopted by the teacher.

Table 3: reveals that there are reasons for the poor attitude of teachers towards the teaching of essay writing. Complicated nature of essay writing 2.8, very high student/teachers ratio 3.4, time consuming 3.8, marking essay is too tiring 3.7 teaching all the language skills including essay writing by one teacher is too burdensome 3.7 and lack of incentive 3.3. This is in line with Ogbu (2009) who stated that teaching essay requires high degree of organization is the development of ideas and information and a high degree of accuracy so that there will be no ambiguity. Also Okonkwo (2014) who noted that lack of motivation and incentives play major role in what one does and incentive by resorting to petty-traders to support their meager pay-packets.

Again, Table 4 shows that difference does not exist in the responses of male and female language teachers in secondary schools. This shows that teachers conceive that essay writing is very important in the intellectual development of students. Teachers agreed that most teachers do not teach essay writing in schools and even when they teach, they teach it half hazardly and do not devote time to teaching of essay writing. Essay writing is conceived to be too time consuming and tiring and no incentive is given to the teachers. Again teachers are saddled with the heavy burden of a teacher teaching all the skills of language. All these however, are the causes of teachers' poor attitude toward teaching of essay writing in secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of major findings, it would be concluded that essay writing plays vital role in the intellectual development of students. Teachers recognize that teachers exhibit poor attitude to the teaching of essay writing in secondary schools and this leads to students poor performance in essay writing. This poor attitude is as a result of the fact that essay writing is tiring and time consuming. Also, it is a burden for a teacher to be assigned to teach all the language skills in streams of different classes and no remuneration or incentive for such teacher. All these lead to teachers' poor attitude towards the teaching of essay writing. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female language teachers on teachers' perception on attitude of teachers towards essay writing.

It is surprising to discover that teachers themselves noted that teachers conceive essay writing as being very important in the intellectual development of students, yet, they do not put in their best in its teaching, the complex nature of essay writing notwithstanding. This shows that motivation has great role to play and if teachers are adequately motivated and more teachers recruited, teaching of essay writing would be enhanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should take the teaching of essay writing very seriously and be fully committed to its teaching.

2. Teachers should employ more facilitating strategies that make students more involving in the class.
3. The government as a matter of urgency should employ more teachers in language teaching and make essay writing easier to handle.
4. Government should give incentive and motivate the language teachers.
5. Teachers should as well learn to give selfless services.

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