



ABSTRACT

English is an international language and in demand today. English is by far the most widely used language around the world. However, English language writing has always been a challenge for second language students' to master. Developing students' ability in writing is one of the major challenges faced by the ESL teachers in most schools nowadays. Nevertheless, writing has always been a major difficulty faced by students' in English language learning, especially in secondary schools.

A

ACQUIRING WRITING SKILLS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CHALLENGES.

NOEL DONATUS SHIOLBIAL

Department of Basic Studies, Plateau State College Of Agriculture, Garkawa, Plateau State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important means of communication in today's technology driven society, those who command both spoken and written skills enjoy a superior social position in comparison to those who handle only the form of speech. For students in academic institutions the ability to write it one of the prerequisites for functional and permanent literacy (Oyetunde, 2015). It is not only for academic success but also for better preparation into the modern workforce, one which places a heavy emphasis on proficient literacy skills (Chase, 2011). Indeed good writing skill is necessary for any student to perform well academically and even beyond school context, writing therefore being a literacy skill is indispensable to students' academic pursuits. Primarily the performance of students in schools is assessed by teachers, through writing of assignments, continuous assessment, tests, national examination and engaging in note taking. Writing is a complex task which requires the coordination of fine motor skills and cognitive skills. It also reflects the social and cultural patterns of the writer's time (Fisher, 2012, Myhill and Fisher, 2010). A close look at the situation or experiences with writing in Nigerian secondary schools today shows that writing seems to be the most difficult skill for language learners to acquire in academic context (Negari, 2012). This is because the nature of writing itself is complex which involves a process with interrelated system. The same difficulty arises in teaching writing Huot (2002) notes that writing is difficult for teachers to teach and assess.

In the Nigerian secondary school curriculum the teaching of writing as a language skill is done by the teachers of the English



Not only that, teachers' are also facing some challenges in teaching writing skills for students' in secondary schools. Thus, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by both the students' and teachers' in learning as well as teaching writing skills in secondary schools.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Teaching and Learning Writing, Challenges, Secondary School, English as a Second Language.

language. English language is a compulsory subject at all levels of education it also serves as the medium of instruction for other content areas. In addition, in order to gain admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria, students must obtain at least a credit pass in English language at the senior secondary school certificate examination (SSCE). The SSCE is conducted by examining bodies such as the West African examination council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO). Students' who lack good writing skills would not be able to obtain the minimum pass required as the section (paper 1) testing the writing skills carries the most marks (60%) of the examination. The following types of essay genres are tested; narrative, expository, descriptive debate/argumentative, speech, article and formal and informal letters. Students' ability to write on any of the types will be able to obtain the minimum pass required. Undoubtedly the ability to write is important in academic context. Despite its importance reports about students' writing in Nigeria have consistently revealed that students are predominantly deficient in this area for example the West African Examination Council's Chief Examiners Report (2016) lamented poor performance of students' in writing and suggested the need to inculcate writing culture among secondary school students. Also the Chief examiners report of (2017) showed that students' knowledge of basic grammar, tense and sentence construction in their essay writing was poor.

Several reasons could account for students poor performance in English essay writing. The most significant of these reasons, perhaps could be because teaching writing has become difficult as a result of the challenges faced by the students in learning writing skills, some of the challenges faced by the students are lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor spelling, students' readiness and lack of exposure to books and reading materials. The challenges faced by the students have made it challenging for teachers to teach writing skills. The challenges that are faced by the teachers to teach writing skills are; difficulty to motivate their students, students of diverse levels, difficult materials and time constraint to teach the students. Therefore this paper seeks to provide a literature review on the challenges faced by both teachers as well as students in teaching and learning writing skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is one of the skills among speaking, reading and listening skills in English. Writing is a multiplex activity Ling (2016). Writing activities need to be conducted among students' since elementary school so that the students' can generate good pieces of writing in the future.



Even though there are many subjects in elementary schools, writing is known as one of the most vital academic subjects for students’.

DEMAND ON WRITING SKILLS

Writing is a crucial skill that will benefit the rest of the students’ lives. Introducing and practicing writing with attractive activities in schools, could increase students’ confidence and they will fall in love with writing in a long run. Writing skills are vital for lower primary students to continue learning in all academic areas, communication and self-expression. Writing exercises in schools promote the improvement of penmanship as well as overall academic development through troubleshooting and critical thinking. The writing process also is applicable to other areas such as mathematics and sciences, where the learned traits of planning, research and review is applied as well. General knowledge and vocabulary are also improved as a subsequent effect. Through journals and personal story writing students’ can discover themselves and work through their real-life problems. A report by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services states that writing can provide a therapeutic outlet to help students’ cope when they are facing hard time in their life such as having problems with their parents or feeling sad.

Writing assists students’ with their social development. Writing connects the students’ to be in tune with what happens in the world around them. Students’ need to consider the audience and purpose in writing. This will help the students’ with their verbal communication at the same time. Writing with friends’ feedback, makes students’ to learn among themselves. As students’ progress through their school years, they will need to be both literate and computer literate to succeed. While the two skills complement each other, some computer tools such as spelling and grammar checks, can prevent them from developing their writing skills. As an example, students’ who are not practicing their handwriting when they are writing with a keyboard. It is also important for the students’ to know that they need to use their own knowledge, not by replacing their knowledge with computers, because computers can make mistakes too.

Today, due to the evolution of information technology, writers are in demand to create digital media content. A content writer is needed for digital marketing corporations. News websites, social media marketing corporations and other related and non-related. I.T corporations need writers to help them through writing for digital marketing channels such as brand quotes, advertisement, and social media posts, blogs among others.

PURPOSE OF STUDENTS’ WRITING BY USING DIFFERENT WRITING STRATEGIES

There are many ways to improve students’ penmanship through writing exercises at elementary level, students’ may use different writing methods at a time. There are various teaching writing strategies for examples; pre-writing, writing warm-up, collaborative writing, using sentence starters, and guided writing. All the teaching of writing strategies cannot be used at the same time as they may have different teaching objectives. Employing various



teaching techniques to teach writing will help the students' improve their writing skills in English. As the students' have interest and become active participants in learning, the learning process will fall on the right track. Besides, using various writing strategies will make the students' think creatively. Students may use what they know by combining opinions and facts, thus, making a new piece of writing.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE STUDENTS' IN LEARNING WRITING SKILLS

Each student may face different challenges in learning writing. All the students are special and unique in their own ways. These challenges will somehow pull back the students from moving forward to produce a good piece of writing. Lack of vocabulary has caused the students to face challenges in acquiring writing skills. (Misbah, Mohamad, Yunus and Ya'acob, 2017). Vocabulary is the fundamental element in constructing sentences which is the core of effective writing skills (Asep, 2014). Students almost use spoken and written words every single day to communicate their ideas, beliefs and feelings with people around them. Good vocabulary repertoire can help students to speak or write to deliver their thoughts. Usage of electronic dictionary and more reading activities can help students with limited vocabulary. Some elementary school students' are also having trouble with grammar. Grammar plays an important role in writing. Grammar provides information that helps the readers to understand its meaning. It is a structure that conveys the detailed meaning of the writer to the reader. Grammar also explains the forms and structure of words, called morphology and how they are arranged in sentences, called syntax. By having very limited knowledge in grammar, students will face anxiety to write sentences with correct grammar. According to Muhammad Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) students make mistakes in subject-verb agreement, pronouns, tenses, articles, prepositions and basic sentence structures, grammar ability can be improved through reading activity and grammar related activities.

Poor spelling is another cause of anxiety for students in learning writing skill and this is supported by Nyang'an Benard (2014). Having good ability in spelling will lead to positive learning of writing skill. If the students are struggling with spellings, it will hold them back to move forward. The students have the habit to spell according to their pronunciation and this will lead to wrong spelling as explained by Afrin (2016). The students will either add or leave letters of the words. For an example. "Ballon" instead of "Ballon." According to Nyang'an Benard (2014) memorization of the spelling will help the students to have good spelling.

Students' readiness is another challenge in learning writing and this was supported by foster (2015). According to Winarso (2016) in order to complete a task successfully, readiness is very important. The readiness can either be physical readiness and mental preparedness. If this is not occurring, students will be having challenges in writing. Students will not be mentally prepared to learn in the classroom if they are not ready. It is very important for the students to be ready before they enter the classroom. According to Foster (2015) motivating and attracting the students' attention can help students' readiness in learning writing.

Lack of exposure to books and reading materials are other challenges for elementary school students in learning writing and this is supported by Foster (2015). According to Fareed et al. (2016) many students find it very challenging to get enough and significant source of information. Lack of extensive reading will not help the students to writing good sentences



or paragraphs. This is because reading and writing are interrelated. If the students are not reading books or other reading materials, they are going to have lack of ideas and vocabulary to write. Their brain neurons will be connected to each other to come out with a good writing if they read more and connecting the ideas with their prior knowledge. Foster (2015) explained that exposure to different reading materials can help the students to be aware with language awareness explained.

Last but not the least, lack of motivation is another challenge faced by the students. If the students are not motivated, they might not be interested to proceed with their learning process. Motivation is important in improving students' learning results. (Gbollie and Keamu, 2017). Teachers could motivate the students by rewarding them with simple motivational phrases by saying "Good job!", "Good try!", "Keep it up" among others. Positive reward will make the students go further in their learning process.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TEACHERS' IN TEACHING WRITING SKILLS

Teaching has always been the challenging part for teachers. Teaching English at primary level is naturally much more different from teaching in other levels of students such as secondary and tertiary levels. The challenge will somehow make the teachers' teaching ineffective. The following are the challenges faced by teachers.

Nowadays, teachers are having a hard time in motivating the students, not because of the students' naughtiness, but the students are not interested in learning writing and this is supported by Asep (2014). The younger generation has the perception that they can do whatever they please since much freedom has been given to them by their parents. When students choose to feel reluctant in learning, it is a sign of lack of motivation (Abrar, 2016). Having different levels of students in the classroom is another challenge faced by teachers to teach writing. In many elementary classrooms, students from different levels are placed in the same classroom. Different levels of students will result to difficulty to teachers in order to cater all of their levels simultaneously (Asep, 2014). Different levels of writing ability will require the teachers to use different approaches, as a result the teachers feel difficult to plan their lessons and prepare appropriate activities for the students.

Parental indifference is another challenge. Lack of parents' support will make the teachers having a hard time to help the students. Students who feel lack of warmth and affection from their parents will draw them back from succeeding in their learning process (Gundogmus, 2018). This is due to little guidance, motivation and support from their parents. Besides, lack of professional experience is another challenge faced by the teachers (Gundogmus, 2018). Having lack of professional experience will lead to stress and tension to teach at elementary school students especially among novice teachers. The multiple roles of teacher are also a challenge. The teachers' experience is depending on the level of their previous experience and training. It will take time for the novice teachers to adapt themselves with their students very well. Teachers can only prepare appropriate activities if they know well about their students' proficiency level, and interests. Not only that, longer time is needed for teachers to prepare new teaching materials, appropriate lesson plans, suitable activities, and provide comments or reflections.

Finally, according to Anyiendah (2017) lack of students' interest is another challenge. Developing writing skills is always challenging, however, it is always an interesting task. Especially when it comes to writing, some students zone out. Students feel lack of interest in



writing because they need to know many aspects in order to produce a good piece of work. The students need to know punctuations, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and sentence structure in order to write a good piece of writing.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is to explore the literature review on the challenges faced by both the students and teachers in learning and teaching writing skills. It can be concluded that school students are facing many challenges to learn writing skill and it is not easy for English teachers to teach them writing skills. The existing literature has identified demands on writing skills in English, purpose of students' writing by using various writing strategies, challenges faced by both the students and teachers in learning and teaching writing skills and past studies on the challenges faced by students and teachers to learn and teach writing skills among ESL school students. By understanding both the students' challenges in learning and teaching writing skills, the teachers could choose the best possible approach to teach writing skills by giving feedback and guidance. Besides, the school management should take necessary actions on the challenges faced by the teachers in order to facilitate the teachers to have effective teaching process. Finally, teachers may stress the importance of learning writing skills to the students in order to motivate them to learn writing skills.

REFERENCES

- Abrar, M. (2016). Teaching English Problems: An Analysis of EFL Primary School Teachers in Kuala Tungkal. Birmingham, UK: *The 16th Idonesian Scholars International Convention*.
- Afrin, S. (2016). Writing Problems of Non-English Major Undergraduate Students in Bangladesh: An Observation. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 104-115.
- Anyiendah, M. S. (2017). *Challenges Faced by Teachers When Teaching English in Public Primary Schools in Kenya*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2017.00013>
- Asep, S. (2014). *The Challenges in Teaching writing skill at Junior High School: problems and solutions*.
- Dewi, A. (2015). *Perception of English: A Study of Staff and Students at Universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL Learners' Writing Skills: Problems, Factors and Suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4, 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.20547/jess0421604201>
- Foster, B. (2015). *Teaching Children with Reading and Writing Difficulties in Regular Schools*.
- Gbollie, C., & Keamu, H. P. (2017). Student Academic Performance: The Role of Motivation, Strategies, and Perceived Factors Hindering Liberian Junior and Senior High School Students Learning. *Education Research International*, 2017, Article ID: 1789084 <https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/1789084>
- Gundogmus, H. D. (2018). The Difficulties Experienced by Teachers in the Process of Primary Reading and Writing Instruction and Their Solution Offers for Eliminating These Difficulties. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 6, 333-339. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.060216>
- Ling, Y. L. C. (2016). Teaching Writing. In W. A Renandya, & H. P. Widodo (Eds.), *English Language Teaching Today: Building a closer link between theory and Practice* (pp. 1-20). New York: *Springer International*.
- Misbah, N. H., Mohamad, M., Yunus, M., & Ya'acob, A. (2017). *Identifying the Factors Contributing to Students' Difficulties in the English Language Learning*. *Creative Education*, 8, 1999-2008. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2017.813136>
- Nyang'an Benard, N. (2014). *Challenges Students face in learning essay writing skills in English language in secondary schools in Manga District, Nyamira County, Kenya*.
- Winarso, W. (2016). Assessing the Readiness of Student learning activity and learning outcome. *Journal Pencerahan*, 10, 81-94.