

ACQUISITION OF APPROPRIATE WRITING SKILLS AS A TOOL TO EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS

Diseph Florence Ezeh- Origie Ph.D

Abstract

This study examined acquisition of appropriate writing skills as a tool to educational attainments. One of the problems identified was students' low competence in academic performance due to defective writing skills. The methodology employed was observation and analytical. Materials were sourced from books and journeys. The study surveyed writing skills encompassing: ability to generate ideas to topics, knowledge of organizational patterns and knowledge of syntactic competences and views educational attainments as the success with regards to the level of knowledge an individual possesses in order to function optimally in a given situation. It traces the role of writing in various fields of academic discipline and sees writing as an instrument through which beliefs can be explained and defended, opinions can be experimented and shared, thoughts and ideas can be explored and cross fertilized by members of the academia. One of the findings was that educational attainments are rooted in acquisition of appropriate writing skills. It was concluded that acquisition of appropriate writing skills is a panacea to academic proficiency. It was recommended among others that every person irrespective of vocation should acquire appropriate writing skills because it will make a better educationist, a better journalist, a better lawyer, a better physician, a better musician, a better scientist, a better economist, to mention but seven.

Keywords: generating ideas, brainstorming, freewriting, syntactic competences and organizing ideas

Writing is an integration of processes and activities demanding a variety of complex skills. In order to write proficiently, the writer needs to acquire writing skills encompassing: (1) ability to generate ideas to topics, (2) knowledge of organizational patterns and (3) knowledge of syntactic competences.

Ability to Generate Ideas to Topics

In order to write proficiently and be able to generate ideas and treat them effectively; Ituen, (2005) posited that one must be equipped with sources of materials such as: personal experiences, observations, reading and interviews. Personal experiences are common knowledge which deals with one's experiential learning that is coming in contact with the main object, having first hand knowledge of facts pertaining to places, people, events, ideas and its ideals and feelings associated with them. With such experiences one can bring to bear in any write-up thus creating uniqueness, originality and interest. To have such experiences one must have observed well what one sees, hears, feels, tastes and smells, by noting details or taking stock and attaching importance to them so that one turns what he observes into useful materials when writing.

Good writers have equally been identified as good readers. Reading exposes one to varieties of information or knowledge. One should be able to read intensively and extensively by reading magazines, newspapers and books, noting words and their usages. One should read with an eye for writing, one good way to improve one's writing is by paying close attention to what one reads, taking tips from writers one especially admires. To see how they do it, what they do with the strategies and structures; in this way one's stocks of vocabulary (registers) and language usage are increased and invariably are reflected on one's writing. One also needs the views of other, so information can be

sourced through interviews, written or unwritten and such information should be brought to bear in any write-up.

All the information got through personal experiences, observations, reading and interviews are stored in the brain. These Ideas can be generated when writing through brainstorming, use of probing questions and free writing.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming requires the ability to group students and ask them to rattle their brains to elicit ideas that are relevant to a topic. Martins (2009) observed that brainstorming is tossing out ideas with several people in order to find new or fresh ways of approaching a topic through quickly writing down everything that occurs to one about the topic, put down key words and phrases not sentences, classifying concepts and then evaluating arising from issues raised 'if one is short of ideas at this point try 'thinking the opposite' for instance, if one is thinking of reasons for reducing tuition fees at a college and is going up blank, try concerning on reasons to increase tuition fees. Once one start generating ideas in one direction, one can move back to exploring the other side of the topic. Accept all possibilities and let one suggestion trigger another. When the ideas have stopped flowing, you can sort them out by grouping them into major and minor ideas.

Use of Probing Questions

The writer can also use probing questions which is a situation that demands the writer to ask questions partaken to a given topic in order to get an in-depth knowledge and appraise the topic. The ability to question the topic or subject can assist one in generating ideas to the topics under review.

Free Writing

Free writing is a method of exploring a topic by writing about it or what ever else it brings to mind for a period of time without stopping by following the free flow of one's thought, in this way it may remind one of things one has heard or ideas one has always associated with the subject, this will stimulate thinking. Ideas generated must be developed through paragraphs, the central ideas or main ideas must have a sharp focus with its supporting ideas fully developed with apt illustrations, experiences and copious examples by highlighting as many points as possible, arranging, rearranging, rephrasing, drafting and redrafting until a better material has been got.

Organizational Patterns in Writings

The organizational patterns in writing are the arrangement of ideas, thoughts, feelings etc in any piece of writing. Organizational patterns should include such elements as paragraphing, style, use of connectives or binding words and phrases.

Paragraphing

Paragraphing is the art of putting all ideas coherently and cohesively into Paragraphs. Therefore, every paragraph should follow the principle of paragraph making which include the length, unity, coherence, emphasis, varieties of sentence. Paragraphs are divided into three main parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. Every paragraph should be coherently written; there are three ways of achieving coherence in paragraph: by organizing ideas, by repeating key terms or phrases and by using parallel structures, pronouns and transistors.

Organizing ideas

Organizing ideas in paragraphs always ensures coherence, Bowles, (2008) posited that paragraphs can be organized in three means: (1) by spatial order, (2) chronological order and (3) logical order. Paragraphs organized in spatial order take a 'tour' of an object, person or place; beginning at one point and moving from near to far, left to right, north to south; this order is especially useful in descriptive essay. The writer can as well organize his paragraph by using

Acquisition of Appropriate Writing Skills as a Tool to Educational Attainments

chronological order; which demands a step by step process of arriving at a finishing point; paragraphs organized in this order arranges a series of events according to time, putting earliest events first followed by sequence of later events. This order is appropriate in narrative essay which basically tells a story as well as explaining a process that is how things are done or something happened. The writer can also Use logical order which involves: illustration, defining and classification, comparing and contrasting, exploring causes and effects, considering problems and solutions, or questions and answers, from general to specifics, from part to whole or whole to part and order of importance.

Style in Writing

Styles imply diction which is formal or informal, informal style is used for persons of equal status. Formal styles are required in academic writings and discussions. Style also includes the manner of usage of figurative language which paints pictures in our minds: metaphor, personification, allusion, hyperbole, euphemism etc which allow us to 'see' a point and hence understand more readily and clearly. The writer can use euphemism to appeal to an audience by showing that the writer is considering their feelings. Allusion implies indirect reference to cultural works, people or events; allusion can bring an entire world of associations to the mind of readers who recognize them.

Connectives or Binding Words or Phrases

Connectives are binding words which link sentences and paragraphs in a piece of writing in order to achieve unity and coherence; the sentences and paragraphs must be effectively linked by linking phrases or one-word linkers. Olatilo (2007) observed that 'if a sentence or a paragraph gives additional information to the previous idea, such a paragraph or sentence can be linked with the following: moreover, furthermore, again, also, in addition etc. Where a sentence or paragraph contradicts the previous one, the followings apply: but, however, nevertheless, etc. Where a sentence or paragraph states the consequences of an action in the previous sentence or paragraph, these apply: therefore, hence, thus, according to, consequently, etc. Where a paragraph gives an example of an action immediately before it, start with: for example, let us suppose that, let us imagine that, for instance etc.

Syntactic Competences in Writing

Syntactic competence in writing is the knowledge an individual has about the grammatical structures or rules of grammar, such knowledge helps him to produce well-formed sentences when he writes in that language. It also implies knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, sentence structure, spellings, semantics and phonology. It is the competence that one associate with mastering the linguistic code of a language which gives one the ability to construct correct sentences, (Maduekwe 2007). Thus, a writer does not only need to think what to write, or does he also needs to arrange his thoughts, ideas and feelings coherently and cohesively but above all manipulate the resources of language (vocabulary, grammar and meaning) in a clear and readable form for his audience of readers.

A very important aspect of good writing is sentence construction and sentence variations. A good piece of writing should entail a large variety of sentences ranging from simple to compound to complex and compound complex sentences. Active and passive statements should also be artistically woven together. A person's knowledge of the different types of sentence that exist can assist him to incorporate them in his writings.

Vocabulary refers to the extent and knowledge of words, so every writer must poses a large stock of vocabulary to enable him articulate meanings related to his ideas. Alo (1995) observed that Vocabulary is classified along: productive and receptive, register bound, specialized and culture bound. Thus, appropriate knowledge of root words, morphologies-prefixes and suffixes can modify and create more words and meanings. The selection of vocabulary depends on choice, need and purpose.

Writing usually is a test of a writer's ability to write correct grammar. So every writer must pay attention to the rules of grammar. For a sentence to be grammatical in English, knowledge of appropriate use of concord, tenses, articles, punctuation marks are necessary and essential because their proper uses guarantee perfection in writing. Furthermore, a good knowledge of collocations and idiomatic expressions spice up one's writings.

Writers need to employ figurative imageries in their writings in order to create a mental representation of a thing, place, person, who is not actually present in the senses so that the reader sees, hears, tastes, smells and touches. Writers need to use figurative expressions which conjure pictures in the readers' mind because of its vivid effect. Spelling is a bane in written communication. The English spelling does not have a straight pattern of spelling, but it does follow a general rule that can assist one enormously in writing. Words are spelt according to how they are pronounced by observing the syllable (morpheme) or unit of sound. Writers to need recognize the differences in spelling between America and British and should stick to it in writing.

Educational Attainments and Writing Skills

Educational attainments are the successes associated with the level of knowledge acquired in order to function optimally in a given situation. Statisticians see educational attainments as the highest degree (certificates, bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate degree) of education an individual possesses. Effective writing skills are very demanding at every stage of a student in a bid to be educationally proficient. The ability to express oneself adequately in writing remains an important task. Educational attainments and writing are twin elements in any pursuit of academic qualifications because writing is an important feature in various fields of human activities.

Ituen (2005) posited that in the school system, students need to take down notes, write essays, articles, speeches, reports, letters, laboratory reports, write comprehension, summary and examinations. In the job context, one engages in writing memos, proposals, circulars, progress reports, and minutes of a meeting among others. So, every person should avail himself with writing skills because Writing is an individual activity. One's writing can make or mar an individual or it can also reveal a person's educational background, experiences, co-ordination and composure.

In any educational level one finds himself/herself, there are hundreds of writing task one has to perform. However, whatever writing one does, if it is to be well done, one has to gather information and make sense out of it. One has to arrange ideas to reflect certain logical relationships by providing details, evidence and examples which must hold the reader's interest. Most good writings present generalized ideas and explanations and backs up these generalizations with specifics, thus every paragraph must be improved by making sure the general ideas rest on enough specific details.

Adequate knowledge of writing skills is ideal because writing is a test of a person's power of thinking capabilities, consistency of thought, organizational ability and expression. The writer is judged by the ability to think out ideas, organize and present them in a systematic manner and the manner in which sentences are combined to create meaning for content. The writer is to show his organizational capabilities by organizing content in each paragraph, developing and expressing main and supporting ideas precisely and concisely, so as to create content partaking to topics and also the ability to co-ordinate and interpret information and also structure them so as to give unity and coherence to his work.

The writer is to show mastery of the mechanics of letter formation and desire to apply these fundamental symbols to transmit intended meaning in intelligence and appropriate manner as well as his ability to adhere to appropriate grammatical systems such as subject-verb agreement, adjectives, adverbs, tenses, morphemes etc. Thus, appropriate choice of free and bound morphemes determine tone and register which are very crucial elements of how to say and write what one has to

Acquisition of Appropriate Writing Skills as a Tool to Educational Attainments

communicate. Knowledge of correct spelling is good manners in writing and a sign of proficiency. Tense usually cause a lot of troubles. If one is writing about past events, use the past tense, if one is writing in the present use the present tense. Knowledge of regular and irregular verbs is essential. Punctuation marks are test of individual educational attainment because its proper use guarantees perfection in writing. Punctuation marks are symbols used to denote pauses in utterances and writing, if punctuations marks are wrongly placed, it renders the sentence ungrammatical and the meaning distorted.

In many disciplines, informative writing frequently calls for illustrations, charts, tables, graphs, drawings and photos. In describing things one can see, writing will be much more effective if one includes an appropriate graphics, food writers, travel writers, technical writers and other professionals all know the value of illustrations and use them freely. So, choosing the right word helps the writer to say what he wants to say and to make meaning clearly because words build in phrases then clauses and sentences; paragraphs start with individual word meaning which convert into larger meanings. Semantics and non-semantics compounds, prepositional verbs, adjectives, adverbs and phrasal verbs are all the constituent of effective expressions and communications.

Writing is a power tool for thinking; it is a multitasking process that allows one to think, reflect, rethink and reverse repeatedly by engaging in different types of questioning, making assumptions and evaluating. When one writes more frequently, he has the capacity to reformulate ideas, play with words, achieve greater density of expression and organize his thoughts more effectively, so one has to write to learn how to write and the more one practices to learn the better because writing constitute an important means of communication that leads to higher academic attainments.

The Role of Writing in Various Fields of Academic Discipline

Writing is a part of all disciplines from English language -----Mathematics, if one takes a course in a discipline, one is absorbing the language and thinking of that discipline along with knowledge, the real and essential 'knowledge' is the language and thinking; if one writes paper for the course one is expected to demonstrate not only what one knows but also how skilled one is in the ways of writing in that discipline thus, writing assist in perceiving, thinking and constructing knowledge.

People write to demonstrate membership in a club of scholars; the primary badge of membership is the ability to use the jargon of the course. Every course, every discipline has its argot. Literary criticism talks about symbols, subjects, archetypes, genres and deconstruction. Mathematics has: tantita, bodmas, calculus, trigonometry, indices, cosine etc. Biology talks about: mutation, cardiovascular diseases, chitin, osmoregulation, meiosis, viviparous, and others, while Physics is all about luminous, spectrum, Polaroid, electrostatic, rays, and magnetic fields. Chemistry makes use of: saturation, bonds, cracking, hydrozination, polymerization among others. Knowledge of the jargon of the disciplines in writing facilitates the message making as well as help to say things easily.

In the literary field, people engage in one form of writing or the other, some may find themselves giving an account of events (reporting) others may make request or complain or pass information (letter writing) few may bore their minds on issues bothering them (essay) there are those that may love to entertain (literary works). All these forms of literary writings come to limelight because Bowles, (2008) believed that somewhere in the mind's recess there is always something waiting to be tapped and writing is that which can bring the something out.

Academic writing seeks to teach to do critical thinking and data gathering research. The writings of scientists, artistry, genius and knowledge of the field of research which deals with summary, observation, problem-solving, hypothesis experimentation and theorizing are the most

common procedural steps in scientific investigation and once theories or conclusions have been arrived at, the scientific investigation and the result of it are clearly written and presentation could be in the form of published books, or articles in a reputable journals or even presentation in a seminar or workshop. Research is a way of integrating our personal conversation with ourselves and our conversation with others across disciplines, the researcher moves onto reporting their particular personal research on the subject and in their conclusion often integrate what they've uncovered and what previous researchers have uncovered, these articles in turn will be used by future researchers who desire to join the conversation.

Writing is an enhancer in the development of modern technologies based on application of micro-electronics, and telecommunications such as satellites: which watches the happenings in the world. Computer network: with Microsoft excel chart which opens directly from a word document, with a clink of a mouse; one can view already written materials gathered in different forms –as a line graph, bar graph, tables, pie charts and so forth. Internet: where information of various types are stored for retrieval at any given period. E-mail: messages are sent and received, and information communication technology (ICT). In many disciplines, one is expected to follow the conventions; writings in these fields are specialized. Informative writings: service manuals, cookery books, technical and science reports, encyclopedia, textbooks, travel guides and 90% of every newspapers and magazines are most of the writings that are earning money in the real world today. Thus, writing is an instrument in preserving history, dissemination of knowledge through mass media and the formation of legal laws. However, due to the inventions of modern technologies like computer network for data storage, the pace of correspondence and collaborations across the globe has increased.

A lot of discovery had been carried out in science and technology, some of these discoveries are beneficial and dangerous to man; the results of these discoveries are written down, stored and retrieved at the appointed time. The writings of scientist had showcased some of the risk inherit in some chemicals; Efiuvwevwere, (1994) asserted that-carcinogens is a cancer-causing chemical which has been reported at least in some quantity in food, drinks, food additives, medicines, the air, the soil, the water and other consumer products. When the blood is exposed to these chemicals it negatively affects the blood, lever, and kidney. Obianime, (1994) stated that other radioactive radiations risk include harmful biological effects (interaction with cells) this could cause immediate or early death and can also induce cancer and other cells disorder, it can also cause hereditary defects such as giving birth to abnormal babies. What writing is doing here is to inform the masses of the associated dangers with science and technology. Nonetheless, the writings of scientists and others after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan clearly demonstrate the relationship between science and politics.

In library science, writing plays a very significant role. Library is the store house of knowledge where books and materials are carefully marked and arranged and access to them is by the catalogue. The catalogue is a record of all books and materials which comprises a number of small drawers each of which holds authors title or subject. Alabo (2011) posited that the library is a reservoir of information for term papers, research projects and dissertation. Every library has cards which are carefully arranged in alphabetical order starting with surnames, the call numbers or class marks on the cards describe books of their choice thus with all information carefully written the user is quick to access any material from the basic library sections: department, faulty, college division, acquisition division, research library division, processing division, circulation division and reference division.

Writing plays the role of a written communication in major fields of activities. In mathematics, writing activities can be employed to diagnose learning difficulties, assess students' mastery of concepts and the ability to express their emotions and thoughts about math in reflective and creative ways. Writing in math takes different forms: creative writing, assignments, long term

Acquisition of Appropriate Writing Skills as a Tool to Educational Attainments

assignments involving research, expository, cooperative projects, and journal writing. In journals writing students are assisted to keep a running account of their works, to learn to write without censoring their thoughts; to feel confidence that nobody will criticize what they have written, thus with writing of journals students can record successive stages of their thought:

‘in a student’s first journal entry after an exposure to calculus in mathematics believes that calculus is a way of finding solutions to problems that can’t be solved with conventional math, by using abstractions. I was partially correct in that many parts of calculus do acquire abstract thinking, but that’s not what calculus is. Calculus is a way of dealing with motion. it’s a way of finding out exactly how something is moving. Without calculus it was impossible for us to know what the instantaneous velocity of .constant rate; then its derivatives or the slope of its tangent line is equal to the slope of the original line. when we had something that had a variable rate of exchange we tried to find the average velocity, but this was inaccurate...’ (Neil swenson, 1995)

Listening to this student’s journal example, one can say that writing and learning also apply to mathematics: that we write to discover what we know and don’t know; that we write more comfortably if we go exploring, free of the fear of not being on the ‘right’ road to the right destination.

The Concept of Writing

Calkinsm1986 stated that:

Writing is considered as a dynamic reorganizational process one finds that effective shifts between rehearsal, drafting, revision and editing occur minutes by minutes, second by second through out the writing process. The writer thinks of a topic, jots down a few lines and rereads them, dissatisfied; the writer may cross out a line and recopy the remaining text making small changes. The piece still looks feeble. Trying again, the writer asks, what do I want to say? and this time jots sown some notes, they are messy, so the writer copies them again; already the writer has shifted from rehearsal to drafting, to revision to editing to rehearsal to editing.

Writing is cycling through stages of preparing, planning, drafting and revising such that some writers may decide to complete the first draft before a major revision is carried out, others may in the process of drafting revise sentence by sentence and few may repeat a process several times before they produce a finished piece (Maduekwe, 2007). Thus, writing is an instrument through which beliefs can be explained and defended, opinions can be experimented and shared, thoughts and ideas can be explored and cross fertilized by members of the academia. The more the individual explores his environment the more materials he has to work with because writing is a tool for learning that leads to generating new ideas or rediscovering what one already knows.

Findings

From the foregoing, it is apparent that writing is one of the major academic activities people engage in various fields of human endeavour.

Acquisition of appropriate writing skills is a guarantee to excel in one’s field of work because writing functions as informative (passing information) imaginative (creative writing), interactive (conversation), instrumental (achieving success), personal (expressing self),reformative (shaping conduct), and heuristic (exploring the world).

Conclusion

It was concluded that acquisition of appropriate writing skills is a panacea to academic proficiency.

Recommendations

It was recommended among others that every person irrespective of vocation should acquire appropriate writing skills because, it will make a better educationist, a better journalist, a better lawyer, a better physician, a better musician, a better scientist, a better economist, to mention but seven.

For students to aspire to academic excellence in various fields of human activities; the need to acquire appropriate writing skills should be topmost in educational policies.

References

- Alabo, F. G. (2011), *Effective Language and Communication skills Acquisition in English*, Port-Harcourt: Flomedia communications
- Alo, M.A. (1995), *Applied English linguistics*, Port-Harcourt: Aeddy link University of Port-Harcourt.
- Bowles, D.A. & Borden, D.L., (2008), *Creative writing*, Boston: Thomson and Wadsworth Corporation.
- Calkins, I.M. (1986), *The art of teaching writing*, Portsmouth: Heinemann Publishers
- Ituen, S.A.U (2005), *Reading, writing and analysis of short stories*, Uyo: Abicon Associations ltd
- Efivevwere, B.J.O. (1994), *Contemporary general studies*, Port-Harcourt: Hercon-university series
- Maduekwe, G. (2007), *Principles and Practice of Teaching English language as a second Language*, Lagos: Vita Nasco and Company Publishers
- Martins, (2009), *Creative writing*, Boston: Thompson and Wadsworth Corporation
- Neil, S (1995), *In a Community of Writers*, Boston: McGrawHill, Inc
- Obianime, A.W. (1994), *Contemporary general studies*, Port-Harcourt: Hercon- university series
- Olatilo, T.A, Olooku, G. (2007), *Essential English Language*, Kaduna: Tonad Publishers' ltd
- Peter, E. & Belanoff, .P. (1995), *A Community of Writers*, Boston: McGrawHill, Inc
- Jack, R. & Stephen, .M. (2009), *The Writer's Way*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company