

IMPROVING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SUMMARY WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study aimed at determining the effects of literature circle and semantic mapping strategies on Senior Secondary Students' learning outcomes in summary writing in English Language. The pre-test, post-test control group quasi experimental design was used and a total of four hundred and two senior secondary school students from twelve co-educational institutions in Oyo South Senatorial District were involved. The study lasted twelve weeks during which the students in the experimental groups were exposed to summary passages drawn from the various approved textbooks using literature circle and semantic mapping while the control groups were exposed to the passage by using the conventional strategy. Two null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The data collected were analysed using Analysis of Covariance, Multiple Classification Analysis and Scheffe post-hoc test. It was found, among others, that students exposed to literature circle strategy performed significantly better than those in the semantic mapping strategy and the control group. Based on the findings, it has been recommended that teachers of English Language should adopt these two instructional strategies to teach summary writing.

Introduction

The use of the English Language in Nigeria dates back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the British merchants and Christian missionaries settled in the coastal towns of Badagry, in the present day south western Nigeria and Calabar in the present day south southern Nigeria. Taiwo (2009) states that with the attainment of independence, English gradually grew to become the major medium for inter-ethnic communication. The language has therefore stayed for such a long time that it has become domesticated and acculturated.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (2000), English language is a unifying language in multi lingual and multi-ethnic Nigeria. It is a compulsory school subject (NPE, 2004); it is an official language; it is a medium of instruction in schools and above all, it is a pre-requisite for admission to institutions of higher learning. Despite the importance of English language, records available from the West African Examinations Council and the Chief Examiner's Report reveal that students do not perform well in the subject. The mass failure being recorded in the subject every year begins from Paper I where the proficient use of the language is mostly put to test. According to the West African School Certificate syllabus 2004-2008, Paper I consisted of essay/letter writing, which carried 50 marks of the total obtainable; comprehension 40 marks and summary writing which carries 30 marks. When one considers the percentage scores of the three papers that make up students' overall score in the subject, one would be convinced that it is paper I that determines the overall grade that students make in the all-important subject (Kolawole, Adepoju & Adelere, 2000).

Kolawole, Adepoju & Adelere (2000) observed that secondary school students performed poorly in essay/letter writing, comprehension and summary as a result of which they failed English language Paper I. The 2004 Chief Examiner's report reveals that many candidates performed below average and some candidates even failed to score a single mark out of 120 marks obtained in Paper I. Whereas efforts have been made through researches to

improve students' performance in the aspect of letter writing and comprehension, little attention has been given to empirical research in the area of summary writing and even the little intervention measures have not yielded positive results. In 2007, the Chief Examiner's report reveals that summary writing is still a big problem to the students. Instead of students summarizing, many of them lift points from the passage and thus lose lots of marks.

Summary writing involves skills required for general competence in the use of language and it is also an accurate measure of one's communicative ability. A review of literature shows that the nature of summary writing requires in its teaching the adoption of instructional strategies that afford learners the opportunity of linking the summary passage with their prior knowledge through text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world connections. Similarly, strategies to be adopted should be such that could help learners to analyse and understand the meaning of key words that will invariably help them in understanding the general meaning of the passage. Such strategies are literature circle and semantic wrapping.

According to Daniels (2002), literature circle is a strategy by which students are free to select what they want to read based on the curriculum, form groups, read together and share what they have read. He explains that literature circles are small peer-led discussion groups where members have chosen to read stories, books as well as passages and they make note and contribute to the up-coming discussion where members have chosen to read stories, books as well as passages that they make notes and contribute to the upcoming discussion where every member comes to the groups with ideas to share. Similarly, Gunning (2002) notes that literature circles involve using literature discussion groups to elicit responses from students who get involved in grand conversation and have freedom to offer their interpretation of a text after reading. According to Daniels (2002), literature circle promotes literacy among students. It promotes reading instruction in schools because its use would lead to students being able to draw inferences, form hypotheses, make judgements and support conclusion about what they read. It turns weak and poor readers into those that are able to read. Moreover, it builds fluent writers and skillful collaborators even in schools where close to 85% of the students are poor.

In semantic mapping instructional strategy, the teacher leads the learners to analyse and understand the meaning of key words that will invariably help in the understanding of the general meaning of key words that will invariably help in the understanding of the general meaning of the passage. The strategy involves construction of meaning map(s) to explain the relationship of the words. According to Jiboku (1998), semantic mapping is designed to help students use their prior knowledge and expand that knowledge through vocabulary acquisition and discussion using the fields of cognitive, language acquisition and information processing. These strategies are certainly directly opposite the strategy where the teacher dominates every stage and leaves the learners to merely listen and repeat after the teacher.

Statement of the Problem

Summary writing is an important aspect of English language. As important as summary writing is, students' performance has been persistently poor as evident in the various chief examiners' reports and the researcher's observations. Different factors have been identified by scholars to be responsible for this poor performance. One of such factors is the inappropriate teaching strategy employed by English language teachers to teach summary. Scholars have, however advocated the adoption of literature circle and semantic mapping as a way of helping students overcome their difficulties and enhance their performance. This study therefore investigated the effects of literature circle and semantic mapping instructional strategies on the achievement of senior secondary school students to

summary writing. The interactions effects of verbal ability as well as school location were equally determined.

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant main effect of:

- a. Treatment
- b. School location
- c. Verbal ability on students' achievement in summary writing

Ho2: There is no significant main effect of:

- a. Treatment and school location
- b. Treatment and verbal ability
- c. School location and verbal ability
- d. Treatment, school location and verbal ability on students' achievement in summary writing.

Methodology

The study used a pre-test, post-test control quasi-experimental design in which treatment (at three levels) was crossed with verbal ability (at two levels) and school location (at two levels).

Subjects

The subjects for the study were four hundred and two (402) senior secondary school II students randomly selected from twelve distantly located secondary schools in intact classes in Oyo South senatorial district. Six schools from the urban area and six schools from the rural area were drawn by using simple random sampling.

Instruments

Three sets of instruments were used for the study – namely the achievement tests in summary writing, the instructional guides and verbal ability test. The question used in the achievement test was adopted from the West African Examinations Council (2006) English Language Paper I based on the fact that it is a standardized test which could be scored on an objective basis based on WAEC marking scheme. However, it was revalidated using test-retest method and a coefficient of $r=0.82$ was obtained. The instructional guides termed instructional guide on literature circle and instructional guide on semantic mapping were designed for the research assistants to teach the summary passages. The verbal ability test was a 40-item test adapted from the Australian Council for Educational Research Higher Test. This test has been proved to be effective in determining learners' cognitive outcomes. It consisted of both verbal ability and mental ability tests and reliability coefficient obtained was $r = 0.76$.

Procedure

Simple random sampling was used to select twelve schools that would participate in the study from the schools in Oyo South Senatorial District. Simple random sampling was equally used to choose schools that would participate in the experimental and the control groups. The researcher visited the principals of the selected schools to seek the consent of the principals as well as the English language teachers (The Researcher Assistants) to use their schools. Upon their approval, the English Language teachers were briefed on what the study was about and how to effectively carry out the study along with their normal classroom teaching. The students were encouraged to cooperate with their teacher since what he would do would be different from their typical summary writing lessons. The summary Writing

Achievement Test (SWAT) and Verbal Ability Test (VAT) were administered to both the experimental and control groups. The verbal ability was used to classify the students into high and low verbal ability levels.

Experimental Groups

After the pre-test, students in the experimental groups were exposed to literature circle instructional strategy and semantic mapping instructional strategy which lasted eight weeks. The researcher personally supervised the learning activities of the experimental groups. Students' participation in the study was monitored by the use of attendance register. All the fourteen passages assigned for the groups were treated by each of the groups of the experimental groups.

Control Groups

Students in the control groups were taught the same fourteen passages by the research assistants in the school using the conversional strategy of teaching summary writing in English language. There was no discussion involving teachers and students on the type of assignment, topics and procedure of test.

Data Analysis

The post-test achievement scores of students were analysed by using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) using pre-test scores as covariates. Scheffe post-test was used for associated treatment level where a significant main effect was observed. All hypotheses were tested at $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Summary of 3 x 2 x 2 Analysis of Covariance ANCOVA on the post test achievement scores of subject according to treatment, school location and verbal ability.

Table 1: Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Post-Test Scores of Participants according to Treatment, School Location and Verbal Ability

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Covariates (Pre-Test)	3979.330	1	3979.330	4406.720	0.000
Main effects					
Treatment group	258.360	2	129.180	143.060	0.000*
Location	117.280	1	117.280	129.870	0.000*
Verbal Ability 2-way interactions (combined)	1.180	1	1.180	1.310	0.254
Treatment X Location	318.490	2	159.240	176.350	0.000*
Treatment X Verbal Ability	1.700	2	0.850	0.940	0.392
Location X verbal ability	0.400	1	0.340	0.380	0.540
3-way interactions treatment X location	0.390	1	0.390	0.430	0.512
Model	4682.820	11	425.710	471.430	0.000*
Residual	325.180	390	0.900		
Total	5034.990	401	12.560		

* Significant at $p < .05$

Table 2: Multiple Classification Analysis of the Mean Scores of the Treatment Groups
Grand Mean – 64.00

Treatment	N	Unadjusted mean scores	Eta	Adjusted Mean Scores	Beta
Literature circle	116	6.24		5.99	
Semantic mapping	141	2.65		2.40	
Control	145	-0.93		-1.18	
			0.26		0.24

Urban location	223	0.64	0.49	
Rural location	179	-0.45	-0.60	
			0.19	0.15
Low verbal ability	389	0.26	0.01	
High verbal ability	13	0.24	-0.30	
			0.05	0.02
Multiple R. Sq.				0.87
Multiple R				0.93

Table 1 shows data from the Analysis of Covariance of summary writing achievement score for treatment, school location and verbal ability. The results show that there is significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in summary writing. ($F_{(2,390)} = 143.06, P<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1a was rejected. This implies that there was statistically significant main effect of treatment (instruction) on summary writing achievement scores of senior secondary students. The result is corroborated by the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) (Table 2). The table shows that the students in the literature circle group obtained the highest summary achievement scores ($X = 69.99$). This group is followed by those exposed to semantic mapping ($X = 66.40$) while the conventional group obtained the lowest ($X = 62.82$). This implies that literature circle strategy was more effective than both the semantic mapping strategy and the conventional strategy. Table 1 equally shows that there was significant difference between the performance of participants in rural and urban schools. Urban students performed better than the rural students ($F_{(1,390)} = 129.87, P<0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 1b was rejected.

Multi classification analysis from Table 2 shows that there is significant difference between the mean scores of participations in the urban and rural locations and that the mean scores of the participants from the urban location is higher than the mean scores of those from the rural location. Table 1 shows that there was no significant difference between the performance of the participants with low and high verbal ability ($F_{(1,390)} = 1.31, P>.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected. The non-significant effect of verbal ability is not unconnected with result of the strategies tested in this study which helped to bridge all gaps existing among the students.

Table 1 shows that there was significant interaction effect of treatment and students' school location on achievement in summary writing ($F_{2,390} = 176.35, P<0.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. To explain the significant interaction effect, Table 3 is presented.

Table 3: Mean scores of the Groups

Groups	School Location	
	Urban	Rural
Literature circle	X = 8.21	X = 1.78
Semantic mapping	X = 3.80	X = 5.30
Control group	X = 2.86	X = 2.75

Figure 1 is presented

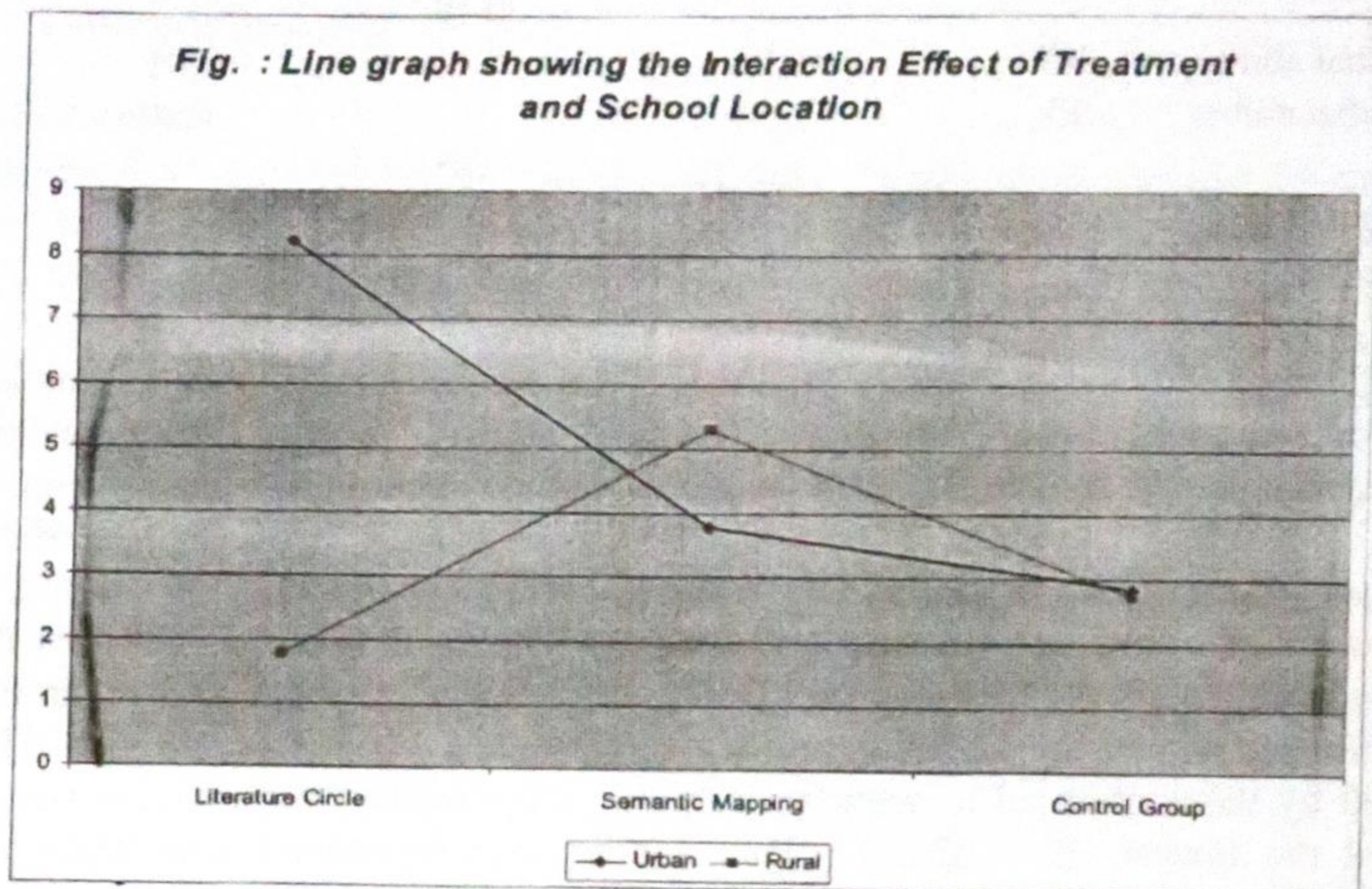


Figure 1 shows a disordinal interaction effect between treatment and school location. Urban schools in literature circle and control groups performed better than the rural schools. From table 1, the results show that there was no significant interaction effect of treatment and verbal ability. The ($F_{(2,390)} = 0.939, P > .05$). Thus, hypothesis 2(b) was rejected.

Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that there was no significant interaction effect of verbal ability and school location on students' achievement in summary writing. The ($F_{(1,390)} = 0.357, P > .05$) Hypothesis 2c was therefore not rejected. From table 1, there was no significant interaction effect of treatment, verbal ability and school location on students' achievement in summary writing. The ($F_{(1,390)} = 0.432, P > .05$). Hypothesis 2(d) was therefore not rejected. This shows that efforts of using literature circle and semantic mapping in summary writing achievement appear to be less sensitive to school location and verbal ability.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows the significant main effects to treatment and school location on students' achievement in summary. From the results, it can be inferred that the use of literature circle instructional strategy resulted in higher achievement gains for the students exposed to this strategy than their counterparts in the semantic mapping group and the control group. This lends support to previous findings by Sweighar (1991), Pitman (1997), Villamine (2000), Richards (2003), Daniels and Steineke (2004) and observed that literature circle instructional strategy was effective in improving reading and writing performance.

This study equally shows that students exposed to semantic mapping instructional strategy performed better than those in the control group. Semantic mapping is a learner-centred approach which makes the learner actively involved in the learning process. This finding corroborates the findings of Miccinanti (1992), Jiboku (1998), Margosein, Pescarella and Pfaum (2003). School location had significant effect on students' achievement in summary writing. Students from the urban schools performed better than students from the rural schools. It has been observed that academic attainment of students in terms of location varies from one school to the other and this corroborates the findings of Kemjika (1989),

Ajayi (1998) and Owoeye (2000) who found that urban students performed better than their rural counterparts in their various studies. It however contradicts the findings of Gana (1997), Ajayi and Ogunyemi (1990), Komolafe (2009) who found that there was no significant difference in the achievement scores of students in the urban and rural schools.

Table 1 shows that verbal ability was insignificant in this study. Many reasons, part of which is the effectiveness of the strategies tested in this study account for the no significant difference in the achievement of low and high verbal ability subjects. This suggests that teachers should use literature circle and semantic mapping as instructional strategies to teach summary writing irrespective of students' level of verbal ability. The interaction of treatment and school location on students' performance reveals a disordinal interaction between treatment and school location. Students from the urban schools performed better than those from the rural schools in the literature circle and the control groups while rural schools performed better than the urban schools in the semantic mapping group.

In conclusion, the instructional strategies of literature circle and semantic mapping were more effective in enhancing students' performance in summary writing than the conventional strategy. The instructional strategies could be used to improve the performance of students of low verbal ability as well as high verbal ability. The instructional strategies could be used to improve the performance of students in the urban and rural schools. The application of instructional strategies that are student-centered and promote co-operation rather than competition is more effective in improving students' performance in summary writing.

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