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## **Appraising the Blindspots and Creativity Effects in the Teaching of Essay Writing Among Students with Learning Disabilities**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Effective teaching/learning of essay writing is very crucial to the achievement of educational objectives. This paper, therefore, discussed the aims of teaching essay writing in schools most importantly to students with learning disabilities, notably to develop critical thinking skills in the students; stages involved in essay writing was extensively discussed: pre-writing, writing, post-writing, to mention but a few. The paper also viewed creativity as a key to professional development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Different definitions of creativity as given by some scholars were highlighted and some important components of the concept as well as the features of a creative student were discussed. The paper further discussed some creative methods of teaching essay writing to students with learning disability, among which are potency of technology and bringing of samples to the classroom for students' observation and learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** teaching, learning, essay writing, creativity learning disabilities.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Essay writing is an important aspect of English Language curriculum in schools. It could be referred to as composition of relevant ideas which are logically arranged for continuous flow of

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK thoughts. The writer's choice of words is being determined by the readers' level of intelligence, background knowledge and situation. A good essay should have an introduction, the body and the conclusion. Essay writing is a skill that cannot be acquired naturally; it has to be learnt thoroughly and consciously. This is particularly so because it is a source of academic advancement. For students to excel in their academic pursuit, they should be able to meaningfully express their thoughts in written form.

Essay writing is a multidimensional process which ranges from simplest to complex. Scholars such as Muodumogu and Unwaha (2013) and Ogunyemi (2022) observe that poor performance of students in essay writing could be traceable to their inability to pen their ideas down in a logical way. This implies that essay writing plays a significant role in determining students' overall performance. Premised on this, teaching learners to write effectively should be the priority of a worthwhile education system.

Obi-Okoye (2004), Rao (2007), Oha (2012) and West African Examination Council Syllabus (2019) stipulate the aims of teaching essay writing in schools with emphasis being placed on developing critical thinking in students in order to enable them to discover and explore as well as construct a framework with which to present ideas. It indicates that essay writing is a mental process which involves different phases well-designed to make students become competent writers.

Kpolugbo (2006) identifies three stages that could be involved in essay writing: pre-writing, writing and post-writing. Three major activities are involved at the pre-writing stage; these include brainstorming, outlining and discussion with peers. The writer sources for ideas, writes them down and draws an outline based on the order of importance before the main write-up. Post-writing stage involves a critical review and revision of the drafts because there could be several drafts before the final production.

However, Ellis (2022) goes further to classify writing stages into five: brainstorming, preparing, drafting, revising and proofreading. The writer generates ideas at the brainstorming stage. The ideas are then re-arranged in order of importance after which the essay is developed. The main stage of essay writing is the drafting; there could be as many drafts as need arises. All errors in the draft are taken care of at the revising stage in order to put the write-up in a perfect order. At the proof-reading stage, the writer meticulously reads through the essay to correct the wrongly spelt words or grammatical errors. Throughout this process, teachers provide the explicit instruction and feedback that could assist learners to master the various conventions of writing.

Blindspots are the deficiencies noticed in the teaching and learning of essay writing; and they include teacher, home and student factors; among others. Many researchers have focused on some factors that could affect effective teaching/learning of essay writing: teachers' attitude (Oha, 2012); the nature of the home of learners (Ogunyemi, 2014); reading deficiency on the part of teachers and the students (Nyang'au, 2014); lack of adequate vocabulary (Fakeye, 2018); class

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK size (Adeyemi, 2019); learners' attitude (Oluwadare, 2021); and choice of instructional strategy use by teacher (Ogunyemi, 2022); to mention but a few. However, little attention has been paid to creativity as an important factor for effective teaching/learning of essay writing in schools especially as it is applicable to students with learning disability.

### **Who are these Students with Learning Disability**

Students with learning disabilities are found in every classroom and majorly exhibit uniqueness in cognitive processing difficulty which placed lots of limitation on them when it comes to learning classroom subjects. Teachers and co-students labeled them, as 'idiots' never do well students' and dullards 'due to their poor academic performance, this no doubt reduces them to nothing but mere spectators and bench warmers in the classroom.

Examining the implication of creativity in the teaching of essay writing on students with learning disabilities, it would expose the researchers to the nature of children in the categories of exceptional children that require special educational needs. It is rather unfortunate that at present little is being done about the prevalence of learning disabilities in Nigeria, this is because no official document has been published on it by the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria (Adediran, Adebajo and Adeoye (2018)).

A learning disability results from a lack of basic cognitive skills, or thinking processes, which causes students to struggle academically. As a result, there may be a significant gap between a student's academic performance and intellectual capacity in the following areas: written expression, basic reading comprehension, math computations, and math reasoning. According to Lazerus and Kehinde (2015), this suggests that kids will struggle to learn, retain, organize, recall, or articulate information.

However, Corinne and Lisa (2019) recommend the improvement of students with learning disabilities in teaching and learning programme to include provision of wide range of instructional materials and techniques by the teachers who are imaginative and flexible enough to adapt them to particular needs of the students in essay writing. To improve essay writing learning for students with learning disabilities, teachers should have the following skills: kindness, empathy, ability to structure the class, enthusiasm, creativity, flexibility, ability to individualize instruction, consistency in mastery knowledge of the subject, and ability to modify the existing curriculum.

Teachers that interact directly with pupils with learning problems in Nigeria frequently exhibit a lazy attitude toward their education, which seems to be the cause of their miserable and utter failure in academic programs. However, Labo-popoola (2002) asserts that the availability of sufficient numbers of highly qualified, capable, and committed teachers is a major factor in whether an educational program succeeds or fails. According to Okebukola (2005), if academic excellence is to be attained in educational institutions, then a teacher's attitude toward their work and the students who have learning disabilities tend to have significant implications that cannot be dismissed. Teachers are very significant figures in the school environment in which they work.

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Nigerian teachers have severe issues with inadequate instruction, ineffective classroom administration and control, a lack of professionalism, a lack of subject-matter expertise, and poor communication skills.

### **The Effect of Creativity on Essay Writing**

Teaching is a demanding profession and any teacher who wishes to be relevant in his/her area of specialisation should develop a creative spirit. The key to teacher and students' effectiveness in the classroom setting is the level of creativity they are able to bring to bear during teaching/learning process. Creativity could be viewed as a key skill for academic attainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because it enhances language and literacy development. This is the reason for encouraging educational systems to find ways of developing learners' creativity and employ creativity in their professional development.

Creativity is a psychological skill that fosters learning and it is a necessity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce (Nakano and Wechsler, 2018; Stevenson, Baas and Maas, 2021; Fraser, 2022). Sternberg (2012) submits that creativity could predict college success above and beyond just what we get from standardised test scores. This is particularly so because the knowledge gained in the four walls of the classroom could be applied to solve day-to-day problems in the society.

According to Nwankwo (2018), a widely recognized definition of creativity is the creation of a new product that is both original and suitable for a given situation. It suggests that students would become creative instructors if they could demonstrate original thought processes and use play to interact with the material in order to convey their ideas, and vice versa. According to the British Council (2014), creativity is a mental quality that enables one to think creatively, leading to original ideas or novel approaches to a given task. Additionally, according to The Dictionary Thesaurus Translate (2015), creativity is the capacity to go beyond conventional notions, guidelines, relationships, or the like in order to produce original, significant ideas, forms, procedures, and interpretations, among other things. It follows that concepts produced in this way must be unique and significantly superior than those that came before. According to Robert (2015), creativity is the process of coming up with or identifying alternatives that have the potential to be helpful in problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and entertainment. This is in line with the proposal from Creativity at Work (2014), which defines creativity as the capacity to discover new angles, investigate patterns beneath the surface, link seemingly unrelated ideas, and generate solutions. One could conclude that innovation, or technological advancement, results from creativity. It entails demonstrating the ability to create new concepts out of preexisting ones in order to produce beneficial results. Hereditary factors have no bearing on creativity; it is a learned behaviour rather than a skill. For both instructors and students, it is therefore a must, not an option (Sternberg, 2012). According to Torrance (2015), creativity consists of four elements: originality, elaboration, fluency, and flexibility. Eloquence is the measure of fluency; situational adaptation is the measure

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of flexibility; sincerity is the measure of the ideas' sincerity; and rate of public recognition is the measure of elaboration. To foster creativity, all four of these elements must be present at once.

According to Mihaly (2015), a lot of energy but also quiet and at ease; intelligent but also naive; a mix of playfulness and discipline; inclinations toward both extroversion and introversion; a tendency toward both humility and pride at the same time; freedom from rigid gender role stereotyping; rebellious and independent; passionate about work; suffering pain, but also experiencing a great deal of enjoyment. The attributes of a creative teacher are as follows, according to Egah (2015): knowledge capacity, commitment to assisting students in succeeding, nonconformity, familiarity with a variety of methodologies and techniques, risk-taking, desire to create learner-centered lessons, and effectiveness. The statement suggests that creativity plays a significant role in the development of culture and society at large, as well as in the personal evolution of individuals.

### **Creative methods of teaching essay writing to Students with learning Disabilities**

Teachers play an important role in the teaching/learning process. A teacher performs excellently in the classroom when he/she has a good mastery of the subject matter and the appropriate strategies to deliver the content in the curriculum. He/she should be exposed to high level of thinking which cultivates aesthetic sensibilities. To avoid monotony and boredom in the classroom setting, teachers should look out for new and interesting ways to stimulate learners with learning disabilities in essay writing and this could only be done through creative skills.

We are in the era of technological advancement where students are good at playing games that involve critical thinking on their handsets and computer systems; therefore, teachers of students with learning disabilities should be made to apply the same skills to teaching/learning of essay writing. Brainstorming assignments should be given to these students in order to develop their thinking skills. They should be encouraged to google search new ideas. This implies that their teachers too should be computer literate. In Lamb-Sinclair (2018) submission, there are a lot of sites that provide quality interactive content for English language learning. For example, essay writing service custom Writing is a site that assists learners on high quality papers. Both the students and the teachers should be conversant with all these sites and make use of them judiciously.

There is need for the students with learning disabilities and the teachers to develop good reading culture in order to boost their vocabulary. With a little acquisition of vocabulary, there would be a limitation to the level at which a writer would be able to express himself/herself. This corroborates the views of Nyang'au, (2014) and Fakeye, (2018) who reiterate that lack of enough vocabulary could lead to poor performance in essay writing. The teacher can assist the students with learning disabilities by encouraging them to get small exercise books where they would be writing new words, their meanings, and the way(s) they could be used in sentences. Through constant practice, the students with learning disabilities would get to perfection thereby improving their competence in essay writing.

Likewise, the conventional method of just given students the topics to write on should be improved on. Alternatively, the teacher could get samples of different types of essays written by different writers and take them to the classroom for students' observation and learning. The errors in each of the essays would thus be highlighted and corrected by the teachers, through that, students with learning disabilities would be able to master the rules that govern writing of each of the essays. Moreover, by bringing in different types of essays written by various writers, the teacher would have deemed to exhibit his/her creative skills. In addition, the teacher could bring into the classroom an object and ask the students to write essay on that particular object. Here, the exhibition of their potency in creative skills comes in. However, due to individual differences, students would come up with different ideas, and at the end of the exercise, the ideas would be discussed and harmonized, with this the classroom would not only be interesting, but effective teaching and learning would have taken place.

Teaching/learning of essay in the classroom setting should be made student-centered, and not teacher-centered. Students with learning disabilities should be given the right to express themselves in the classroom for confirmation that effective learning has taken place. It needs to be stressed that teacher should not see himself/herself as the alpha and omega where whatever he/she says is final. Very importantly, the class size should not be so large so as to give the teacher the opportunity to mark the writing essay writing meticulously and give students the feedback promptly. It has been observed that teachers hardly give students essay exercise when the class population is large, and when given at times, it would not be marked because of the stress involved. Teaching of essay writing should be made practical: the teacher should attend to the learners individually so as to know the areas in which the students with learning disabilities are deficient.

## **CONCLUSION**

The rate at which students are failing aspect of essay writing in English language examination is very alarming. This could be due to the fact that they are unable to put down their ideas logically in a written form. Therefore, teachers should intensify efforts to make the teaching/learning of essay writing interesting by applying creative skills as against aged long conventional method. With conducive learning environment, students with learning disabilities would be motivated to acquire the correct communication habits with joy and less inhibition.

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