

## STUDENTS' VERBAL ABILITY AND CONTENTS OF ESSAY WRITING IN FRENCH LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the effects of student's verbal ability on the contents of essay writing in French at the Junior Secondary School level in Ekiti State. The purpose was to find the extent to which verbal ability would determine the content of students essay writing in French language. The study was a three group pretest-posttest quasi experimental research design. Population for the study consisted of 2,319 students of French Language in all the 184 Public Secondary Schools in Ekiti State. The sample consisted of 240 Junior Secondary School Two students, selected from six schools using Multistage Sampling Technique. Two research instruments were used for data collection. They are, French Verbal Ability Test (FVAT) and French Essay Writing Achievement Test (FEWAT). The data collected were analyzed using ANOVA and ANCOVA. It was discovered through statistical analysis of this study that there was a significant difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French Essay writing in experimental and control groups before treatment, but there was no significant difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French Essay writing in experimental and control groups after treatment. Based on these findings, it is recommended that other variables should be researched into since verbal ability has no significant effect on the content of students essay writing in French after treatment. The study concludes that verbal ability has no effect on French essay writing.*

Key-words: Verbal ability, Content, Essay writing, French.

## Introduction

French language is an international language and the mother tongue in France. It is spoken in many other countries of the world; as mother tongue or official language, Adejo (2012) asserts that it is one of the principal languages of diplomacy in many international organizations. It is among the three most important languages of the internet. The language is one of the major languages of debate at the United Nations. A good command of French language could be a passport to social and economic advancement. French language

could be very important to Nigeria, being a country surrounded by francophone countries (in the northern, north-eastern, eastern and western parts are: Niger Republic, Chad, Cameroon and Benin Republic respectively).

French language, like several other languages is a vehicle for communication that can be used to convey wishes and commands, to tell the truths and to tell lies, to influence the hearers and to vent someone's emotion. It can be used to formulate ideas and to communicate

thoughts. It is obviously a vital tool for communication that forges friendship, cultural ties and economic relationship. It is one of the key factors in competitiveness in any advanced industrial society and in an increasingly interdependent world. The knowledge of French language is very much indispensable, as the advent of the internet has changed the world and millions of people across the globe are now sharing common interest and are able to communicate with each other to exchange ideas. Language gives one confidence in dealing with other people. In fact, the learning of another person's language such as French improves one's understanding of his own language. When we cannot speak a language, we feel like an outsider, cut off and unwelcomed, but on beginning to learn to speak a language, such feelings disappear.

French language could be very important to Nigerians, because it is not only a viable linguistic visa that would enable more qualified Nigerians to have better and easier access to job and business opportunities in French-speaking countries, but it could also equip many more qualified Nigerian professionals to satisfy the French proficiency requirement for jobs in French companies located in Nigeria. It could also make for suitability for employment in international organizations. These business opportunities and job placement within and outside Nigeria could make great impact on the economic development and international rating of the country. As at today, the available data of the results of Junior Secondary School students from Ekiti State Ministry of Education revealed that many of the students are performing poorly in their French essay writing. Aside this, examiners complain that many Junior Secondary School students write little and

incoherent content in their essays and in most cases, they may not even attempt the essay writing questions at all. Scholars and researchers have been advancing various reasons for such ugly situations. Perhaps it is as a result of lack of vocabularies to express themselves in the language or the level of their verbal ability which ought to serve as ingredients for essay writing.

## Literature Review

### Verbal Ability

Verbal ability is the ability to analyze information and solve problems using language-based reasoning. It is also known as verbal intelligence. It involves ability to examine something carefully so as to know what it is made up of or to understand it better. It is the ability to listen to a story and state its main ideas. It is also about externalizing what has been internalized. Verbal ability should be very important in all aspects of school work, more importantly, as writing in language is a task that requires language-based reasoning. Even the more abstract courses such as mathematics and physics require verbal ability because most concepts are either introduced orally by the teacher or introduced in written form in a textbook.

According to Richard and Rogers (1986), Verbal ability test is a test of intelligence that can be used to predict learners' achievement in language skills. Verbal task may involve concepts such as: Concrete or abstract ideas and internalized language based reasoning. It involves skills such as:

- Ability to listen to and recall spoken information

- Understanding the meaning of written or spoken information
- Solving language based problems of literary, logical or social type
- Understanding the relationships between language concepts and performing language comparison.
- Ability to perform complex language based analysis.

Elements of verbal ability test includes: word power, sentence arrangement, word arrangement and substitution of elements, logical selections of appropriate words. Verbal ability could be tested through reading comprehension, logical reasoning, verbal questioning, sentence re-arrangement, sentence correction, paragraph completion, verbal-based reasoning and critical reasoning. A lot of grammar, vocabulary and fill-in-the-gaps are involved in verbal ability questions. All of which seems to be a very good precursor to essay writing. But presently at the elementary level, students seems not to be so much exposed to these variables before they are requested to write essays (composition). This study seeks to find the effects of verbal ability on the content of students essay writing in French Language.

#### Essay Writing in French Language

An *essay* could simply be described as a piece of *writing* that is written to convince someone of something. It includes several components to drive in the point. It is all about presenting an argument and using evidences to back it up.

There are about four types of essay writing in French language generally. They are: expository, descriptive, narrative and argumentative essays. Candidates who write good essays in language according to Fakeye (2001), perform better in other aspects of the subject while, Adegbile and

Alabi (2007) suggest that L2 writer's verbal ability should predict their performance in writing task. Richard and Rogers (1986) also find a correlation between general intelligence and academic endeavour, particularly that verbal ability as a test of intelligence can be used to predict learners' performance in language skills. In a similar study, Bell and Perfitti (1994) observes some correlation between verbal ability and language performance. Olabopo (1999) also notes significant interaction effects of treatment and verbal ability on the variation in students' scores in English composition.

On the contrary, Iyagba (1993) finds no significant difference in the performance of student with various verbal ability groups in English composition achievement, but discovers a significant difference in the attitude of students belonging to various ability groups. Based on the variations of findings, in English Language, there is the need for further investigations on the effect of this verbal ability on the content of students essay writing in French language. This is because a correlation has been found between students' ability to write good essay and their performance in other aspect of language as Ellis (1992), Adegbile and Alabi (2007) formed consensus of opinion on the need for effective essay writing in Nigerian secondary schools.

To improve on verbal ability in language according to Munoz-Sandoval, Cummins, Alvarodo and Ruef (2005), the learner needs to do a lot of reading because of the para-jumbles, para-completion and sentence completion involved. Learners need to devote time to learn different words, their meanings and usage in sentences which could be done through the use of internet and bilingual dictionaries. Practicing and implementing what has been learnt will

boost the learners' confidence. Paragraph forming and para-jumbled questions are parts of verbal ability questions. They consist of a group of sentences that have been jumbled up. The goal in these types of sentences is to re-arrange the sentences in the original sequence. In para-jumbled questions, one will be given a paragraph made of four to five sentences whose original sequence has been changed. Students have a few minutes to figure out what that original sequence was. Anyone who applies his mind to the given sentences and spends sufficient time arranging the sentences can get the sequence. Constant practice may enhance one's confidence in dealing with such questions. Verbal ability is worth mastering because a person with passion and communication skills is a delight for everyone else. A person with great passion but poor communication skills is confusing to everyone else.

A good understanding of basic French grammar coupled with adequate exercises on the different types of common errors will help a learner to answer verbal ability questions. During essay writing practice, it is important not to worry too much about one's accuracy initially; it is better to answer questions, make mistakes and learn. Students need to read a lot in order to gain expertise and be well versed in using the right words. It is not possible to memorize all the new words learnt, as it will be very difficult and time consuming. The best way is to practice these words in everyday conversation. This could be a smart way to learn the words as well as know their meaning.

#### Content of French Essay Writing

There are four important components in French essay writing, they are; content, mechanical accuracy, organization and

expression. The focus of this study is content. It refers to what is written inside the essay, the writers own ideas which will definitely include ideas that is not his own, it is the way it is used, added to, adapted and modified that makes the ideas or arguments the author's own and original.. It is this ideas of the writer, fashioned into a coherent set of argument and presented in the order that will make the most sense to the reader we call content. Content is the writer's own voice that should be heard. It forms the basis of the essay. It is the writer's ideas that needed to be heard but he must be careful not to cultivate an overly idiosyncratic (individual) style, because complex issues must be expressed with clarity. The content of an essay is all about presenting an argument and using evidences to back it up. Even though the writer will use materials that does not belong to him, it is the way such materials are added to, adapted or modified that makes the materials or arguments his own. Normally, organization of the content of an essay should be; introduction, body and conclusion.

The content of an essay must reflect and develop the topic. Key words in the topic must be singled out and elaborated upon. Introduction is the commencement aspect of the content which must be interesting, because if a writer fails to write an interesting introduction, the reader loses interest in what he is writing about. Each paragraph is expected to commence with a topic sentence which will be explained further in subsequent sentences of the paragraph. Any idea raised in any paragraph will need clarification and proof. If this is not done, an impression of a superficial collection without any depth of thought will be created. Conclusion is both a summary and a generalization which restates the topic, thus,

laying additional emphasis on what has been written.

After each draft of the essay, it should be read carefully and critically. One could ask himself the following questions, is there a significant idea not included? Is there any need to expand some of the points chosen? Are some of the points, after due consideration, not really relevant? Are the points too long-winded or repetitive? If so, it could be cut out or reduced. Does the link between some of the main points need more emphasis? An essay writer must ask himself these questions, in order to ensure that each point is presented in a logical and coherent order. A writer must understand early enough the things that could make his essay to be classified as good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, so that he will be sure of the type of essay he is trying to write.

The content of a good French essay according to Motunrayo, Nnenna, Yakubu (2005) is clearly structured to include an introduction which clearly yet subtly defines the topic of the essay and prepares the reader for the course of the argument. Having logically linked paragraphs with topic sentences, a clear and concise conclusion that is soundly based on the argument, it should be written in a fluent and appropriate style, grammatically correct and one that uses good vocabulary. It should also respect formal conventions. And to make it a satisfactory essay, it should be adequately structured, written in acceptable academic French language, contains few errors of grammar and uses appropriate vocabulary.

An unsatisfactory content in an essay could easily be identified through incomplete or incoherent introduction which will contain few interesting idea, shows a poor grasp of topic, has no logical structure i.e. the paragraphs do not clearly develop the

points; conclusion is not soundly based on the argument. It contains many errors of grammar and structure and it is written in an inappropriate style or unsuitable vocabulary and does not respect the formal conventions.

#### Statement of the Problem

Presently, it appears many junior secondary school students seem to show little or no interest in written work of French Language. This may be as a result of their deficiency in verbal ability, which could be noticed in their unintelligible communications, wrong spellings and lack of appropriate vocabularies to express their ideas. All these may have some effects on the content of students' French essay writing. Also, it seems that students prefer the oral aspect of the language at the Junior Secondary School level and detest the essay writing aspect. And where they write, it seems they prefer the 'fill-in-the-gap' type. The question is, what will be students' performance in verbal ability and content of Essay Writing before and after the experiment? Two hypotheses were formulated.

1. There is no significant difference between high and low verbal ability level students' in experimental and control groups on the content of French Essay writing before treatment.
2. There is no significant difference between high and low verbal ability level students' in experimental and control groups on the content of French Essay writing after treatment.

#### Methodology

The study was a pretest-posttest quasi experimental research design. Population for the study consisted of 2,319 students of French Language in all the 184 public Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria as at 2013. The sample consisted of 240

Secondary School class two students, selected from six schools in Ekiti State using Multistage Sampling Technique. The first stage was the division of the population into rural and urban schools using Stratified Sampling Technique. The second stage was the selection of three schools that are offering French Language from each of the stratum, using Purposive Sampling Technique. The third stage was the selection of twenty boys and twenty girls from each of the selected schools using Proportional Random Sampling Technique, making a total of two hundred and forty students from all the schools. Two research instruments were used for data collection. They are, French Verbal Ability Test (FVAT) and French Essay Writing Achievement Test (FEWAT). Instruments were personally administered to the respondents with the help of research assistants. The researcher was assisted by research assistants in retrieving the test scripts on the spot after completion, in order to ensure high percentage return of the scripts. The answer scripts were personally scored by the researcher based on the prepared marking scheme.

Pretest was conducted in all the selected schools before the experiment. The study involved twelve experimental teaching sessions of a minimum of forty minutes per

session. The duration of the teaching was two lessons per week for six weeks. After the six weeks experiment, post test was conducted for both experimental and control groups. A teaching package was used to teach the two experimental groups for six weeks, during which, the control group continued with their normal classroom work without interruption. After the six weeks experiment, a post test was conducted for all the groups. The responses of the subjects in the two tests were scored and subjected to statistical analysis of t-test, Standard Deviation, ANOVA and ANCOVA.

## Results

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between high and low verbal ability level students' in experimental and control groups on the content of French Essay writing before treatment.

Mean scores of students in content aspect of French essay writing in experimental and control groups before treatment were compared for statistical significance on the basis of their ability level using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The result is shown in Table 1

Table 1: 2x3 ANOVA summary of students' content in French Essay writing by verbal ability and treatment.

Source	SS	Df	MS	Fcal	Ftable
Corrected Model	155.484	5	31.097	5.644	2.21
Verbal Ability	89.842	1	89.842	16.307*	3.84
Group	36.281	2	18.140	3.293*	3.00
Verbal Ability * Group	29.508	2	19.754	3.586*	3.00
Error	1289.178	234	5.509		
Corrected Total	1444.663	239			
Total	3377.000	240			

\*P<0.05

Table 1 shows that  $F_{cal}$  (19.754) is greater than  $F_{table}$  (3.586) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French Essay writing in experimental and control groups before treatment. Similarly, the main effect of verbal ability ( $F=16.307, P<0.05$ ) and treatment ( $F=18.140, P<0.05$ ) on students' content in French Essay writing is statistically significant at 0.05 level in each case.

There is no significant difference between high and low verbal ability level students' in experimental and control groups on content of French Essay writing after treatment.

Mean scores of students' content in French Essay writing in experimental and control groups after treatment were compared for statistical significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level on the basis of their verbal ability levels. The result is presented in table 2.

Hypothesis 2

Table 2: 2x3 ANCOVA of students' content in French Essay writing after treatment by verbal ability after treatment.

Source	SS	Df	MS	$F_{cal}$	$F_{table}$
Corrected Model	446.498	6	74.416	21.262	2.10
Covariate (Pretest)	84.758	1	84.758	24.217	3.84
Verbal Ability	1.736	1	1.736	0.496	3.84
Group	286.022	2	143.011	40.861	3.00
Verbal Ability * Group	16.275	2	8.137	2.325	3.00
Error	815.486	233	3.500		
Corrected Total	1261.983	239			
Total	6140.000	240			

$P>0.05$

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French essay writing in experimental and control groups after treatment ( $F=2.325, P>0.05$ ) the null hypothesis is not rejected. Similarly, the main effect of verbal ability on students' content in French Essay writing after treatment was statistically not significant ( $F=0.496, P>0.05$ ). However treatment had significant effect on students' content in French Essay writing at 0.05 level ( $F=40.861, P<0.05$ ).

difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French essay writing in experimental and control groups after treatment. This is an indication that other variables are responsible for the significant difference found in the pretest. This finding is in support of the findings of Iyagba (1993) who finds no significant difference in the performance of students with various verbal ability groups in written composition, suggesting that essay writing has to be learnt and practiced every time. He explains that essay should be an on-going process which must be learnt more each time since the content of one's essay do not necessarily depend on the level of one's verbal ability.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that there was a significant difference between students' verbal ability and the content of their French Essay writing in experimental and control groups before treatment but there was no significant

Conclusion

The study concludes that verbal ability has no significant effect on the content of students essay writing in French Language. Other variables should be responsible for the significant difference found in the pretest conducted before the experiment.

#### Recommendations

The researcher recommends that future researchers could find the effects of other variables, such as teacher's method of teaching and scope of students reading on the content of students essay writing in French.

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#### Abstract

*This paper examined the role of chemistry and teacher education as a tool in achieving sustainable development. Issues that were regarded as being responsible for teaching were*