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EFFECT OF PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES ON JS1 STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN LETTER WRITING IN GWER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of pre-writing activities on Junior Secondary School One (JS1) students' achievement in letter writing in Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test non-equivalent group design was adopted. The study involved 553 JS1 students selected from two junior secondary schools, comprising 330 students in the experimental group and 223 in the control group. Data were collected using a Writing Achievement Test (WAT), which assessed students' achievement in the content and organisation of formal and informal letters. The instrument was validated by three experts and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70 using KR-21. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The experimental group recorded higher post-test means in content (43.48, SD = 15.14) than the control group (26.68, SD = 12.85), and in organisation (44.74, SD = 15.50) than the control group (26.68, SD = 12.34). The reported ANCOVA results indicated significant group effects for content ($F = 31.616$, $p < .001$) and organisation ($F = 7.552$, $p = .007$). However, inconsistencies in the supplied ANCOVA output require verification from the original SPSS output before the exact degrees of freedom, sums of squares and effect sizes are reported. The findings suggest that explicit pre-writing instruction was associated with higher achievement in the two assessed dimensions of letter writing.

Keywords: *pre-writing activities, letter writing, content, organisation, JS1 students*

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Introduction

Letter writing remains an important form of written communication through which individuals convey information, express feelings, present opinions, make requests and maintain relationships. Although digital communication has become increasingly common, the ability to produce clear, coherent and appropriately structured letters remains part of English language competence. In school, letter writing provides opportunities for learners to apply vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, paragraph development and organisation in meaningful contexts. Contemporary writing research views writing as a complex process requiring coordination of ideas, language resources, audience awareness, planning and revision rather than the reproduction of memorised expressions (Graham et al., 2023; Kalmendal et al., 2024).

Formal and informal letters serve different communicative purposes. Informal letters are commonly addressed to friends, relatives and acquaintances and may use a personal style, whereas formal letters are directed to institutions, organisations or authorities and require greater precision and formality. Mastery of both forms requires more than knowledge of letter format; learners must generate relevant ideas, select appropriate information, organise points logically and communicate meaning effectively.

Writing competence is particularly important in Nigerian education because English is widely used in schooling, examinations, administration and professional communication. Effective writing requires learners to generate ideas, determine relevant information, arrange ideas in an appropriate sequence, draft, reconsider and revise their work. Research indicates that students' writing performance is associated with planning and other self-regulatory strategies (Woo & Kim, 2024). Writing instruction should therefore address the processes that occur before, during and after drafting.

Pre-writing refers to activities undertaken before a full draft is produced. Such activities include brainstorming, questioning, listing, free writing, outlining, clustering, mind mapping, graphic organising and discussion. Their purpose is to help learners generate, select and organise ideas before drafting. Kalmendal et al. (2024) emphasise planning as an important component of writing-strategy instruction, particularly for students who experience difficulty with writing. Evidence from Nigerian studies also suggests that pre-writing can support writing achievement. Gomwalk et al. (2023) reported improved idea organisation and paragraphing following instruction in a pre-writing strategy, while Pam et al. (2024) found that pre-writing activities improved students' achievement in expository composition. Enighe (2024) similarly reported positive effects of graphic organisers on junior secondary students' composition writing.

The writing process is commonly described in terms of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and producing a final version. These stages are not necessarily rigid or strictly linear because writers may move repeatedly between planning, production and revision (Keen, 2025). For junior secondary students, however, explicit instruction in planning can provide a useful framework for generating and arranging ideas before drafting. In letter writing, content concerns the relevance, adequacy and development of ideas, whereas organisation concerns the logical arrangement and coherence of those ideas. Pre-writing activities may support both dimensions by helping students identify

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relevant points and determine the order in which they should be presented.

The quality of students' writing may also vary across school contexts because urban and rural schools can differ in access to instructional materials, facilities, teachers and exposure to English-language resources. Such contextual differences make school location relevant when interpreting writing achievement, although location itself does not determine performance (Ukwumaka & Bamidele, 2024). The present study therefore includes students from an urban and a rural school in Gwer Local Government Area.

Despite the reported benefits of planning and pre-writing activities, there remains a need to examine their contribution to specific dimensions of letter writing among JS1 students in Gwer Local Government Area. In particular, it is important to determine whether systematic pre-writing instruction is associated with improvement in the content and organisation of students' letters. The present study addresses this gap by examining the effect of pre-writing activities on these two dimensions of letter-writing achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Effective written communication is an important component of English language learning at the junior secondary school level. Students are expected to communicate information, ideas and experiences through formal and informal letters. Successful letter writing, however, requires more than memorising the format of a letter. Students need to generate relevant ideas, select appropriate information, organise points logically, develop paragraphs and communicate their messages using suitable language.

A difficulty may arise when students move directly from a topic to a complete composition without adequate preparation. Limited opportunity to generate and organise ideas can result in irrelevant points, repetition, weak paragraph development and poor connections between ideas. Research has identified planning and self-regulatory writing strategies as important aspects of secondary students' writing performance (Woo & Kim, 2024), while Kalmendal et al. (2024) observed that students experiencing writing difficulties may require explicit support to plan and organise their texts.

Nigerian studies have reported positive effects of pre-writing-related interventions. Gomwalk et al. (2023) found improved idea organisation and paragraphing following instruction in a pre-writing strategy, while Pam et al. (2024) reported improved achievement in expository composition after the use of pre-writing activities. Enighe (2024) also found that graphic organisers improved junior secondary students' composition-writing achievement. Nevertheless, the extent to which explicit pre-writing instruction improves the content and organisation of letter writing among JS1 students in Gwer Local Government Area remains insufficiently established. This study therefore investigates whether students exposed to pre-writing activities achieve higher post-test scores in content and organisation than students receiving conventional instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of pre-writing activities on JS1 students' achievement in letter writing in Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the effect of pre-writing strategies on the content of letters written by JS1 students; and
2. determine the effect of pre-writing

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strategies on the organisation of letters written by JS1 students.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of pre-writing strategies on the content of letters written by JS1 students?
2. What is the effect of pre-writing strategies on the organisation of letters written by JS1 students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference in the adjusted mean achievement scores in the content of letters written by JS1 students exposed to pre-writing activities and those taught using conventional instruction.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in the adjusted mean achievement scores in the organisation of letters written by JS1 students exposed to pre-writing activities and those taught using conventional instruction.

Method

Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test non-equivalent group design because intact classes were used and students were not individually randomised to the treatment conditions. The design permitted comparison of post-test performance while taking the pre-test scores into account.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. The area contains schools in both urban and rural settings. These settings provide a useful context for examining writing achievement under different school conditions.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised 2,136 JS1 students in 16 junior secondary schools offering English Language in the Local Government Area. Two schools were purposively selected, one urban and one rural, producing a sample of 553 students. The reported school enrolments were 204 students from Universal Basic Education School, Aliade, and 349 students from U.B.E. Ayar. Because the manuscript does not provide sufficient information on the criteria used to select the two schools or the allocation of students to the two groups, these details should be supplied from the original sampling records before publication.

Instrument

Data were collected using the Writing Achievement Test (WAT), which comprised three questions based on the formal and informal letter-writing topics taught during the study. The test assessed students' ability to generate relevant content and organise ideas. The manuscript does not provide the complete scoring rubric, maximum score, mark allocation for each question, or separate scoring procedures for content and organisation. These details should be included in the final version because the study's principal findings depend on these scores.

Validity and Reliability

The WAT was subjected to face and content validation by three experts who examined the relevance, clarity, grammatical correctness, ambiguity, language appropriateness and content coverage of the items. The instrument was trial-tested with 40 JS1 students from a school outside the study area, and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained using KR-21. Because letter-writing responses involve subjective scoring, the final manuscript should also report the number of

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scorers, scorer training and any inter-rater or moderation procedure used.

Treatment Procedure

After a pre-test was administered to both groups, students in the experimental group received explicit instruction in pre-writing activities before completing formal and informal letter-writing tasks. The activities involved generating ideas, selecting relevant points and organising them before drafting. The control group received conventional writing instruction without explicit teaching of pre-writing strategies. Each lesson lasted approximately 40 minutes and the treatment lasted one week. The short treatment period should be interpreted cautiously. For reproducibility, the final manuscript should state the exact number of lessons, activities covered in each lesson, teaching materials, number of writing tasks, teacher arrangements and any treatment-fidelity procedure used.

Data Collection and Analysis

Permission was obtained from the relevant school authorities before data collection. The pre-test was administered before the treatment and the post-test followed the intervention. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was to reject a null hypothesis when $p < .05$ and not reject it when $p \geq .05$. Before ANCOVA is interpreted, the assumptions of independence, linearity, homogeneity of regression slopes, normality of residuals, homogeneity of variance and absence of influential outliers should be examined and reported. In particular, the homogeneity of regression slopes should be demonstrated.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the effect of pre-writing strategies on the content of letters written by JS1 students?

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD
Experimental (Pre-writing)	330	20.35	11.75	43.48	15.14
Control (Conventional)	223	14.72	8.49	26.68	12.85
Mean diff.		5.63		16.80	
Mean gain			11.17		
Total	553				

The experimental group increased from a pre-test mean of 20.35 (SD = 11.75) to a post-test mean of 43.48 (SD = 15.14), whereas the control group increased from 14.72 (SD = 8.49) to 26.68 (SD = 12.85). The post-test mean difference was 16.80, compared with a pre-test difference of 5.63. The difference in mean gain between the groups was 11.17 (23.13 for the experimental group compared with 11.96 for the control group). Thus, the experimental group recorded greater improvement in content.

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Hypothesis 1

H0 ; There is no significant difference in the adjusted mean achievement scores in the content of letters written by JS1 students exposed to pre-writing strategies and those taught using conventional instruction.

Source	Reported SS	Df	Reported MS	Reported F	p
Corrected model	15727.780	2	7863.890	52.141	< .001
Pre-test	7048.641	1	7047.641	46.735	< .001
Group	4768.304	1	4768.304	31.616	< .001
Error	19154.189	232	82.561		

The supplied ANCOVA output reports a significant group effect for content ($F = 31.616$, $p < .001$); therefore, $H0_1$ would be rejected if these group-effect statistics are confirmed from the original SPSS output. However, the supplied table contains internal inconsistencies: the reported sum of squares and mean square for the pre-test differ despite df = 1, and the error and total degrees of freedom do not correspond to the reported sample size of 553. Consequently, the exact ANCOVA table, degrees of freedom and effect size must be reproduced from the original SPSS output before publication.

Research Question 2

What is the effect of pre-writing strategies on the organisation of letters written by JS1 students?

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD
Experimental (Pre-writing)	330	27.06	11.28	44.74	15.50
Control (Conventional)	223	26.28	10.01	26.68	12.34
Mean diff.		0.78		18.06	
Mean gain			17.28		
Total	553				

The experimental group increased from a pre-test mean of 27.06 (SD = 11.28) to a post-test mean of 44.74 (SD = 15.50), while the control group changed from 26.28 (SD = 10.01) to 26.68 (SD = 12.34). The pre-test mean difference was 0.78 and the post-test difference was 18.06. The experimental group's mean gain was 17.68, whereas the control group's mean gain was 0.40, giving a difference in mean gain of 17.28. The post-test SD for the experimental group is reported as 15.50 in the table; the 15.20 value appearing in the original narrative has therefore been corrected to 15.50.

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Hypothesis 2

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in the adjusted mean achievement scores in the organisation of letters written by JS1 students exposed to pre-writing strategies and those taught using conventional instruction.

Source	Reported SS	Df	Reported MS	Reported F	p
Corrected model	9662.000	2	4831.100	33.963	< .001
Pre-test	8363.200	1	8363.200	58.793	< .001
Group	1074.234	1	1074.234	7.552	.007
Error	28065.408	233	120.452	—	—

The supplied ANCOVA output reports a significant group effect for organisation (F = 7.552, p = .007). If confirmed from the original SPSS output, $H0_2$would be rejected. The earlier expression "F (1, 7.552) = 0.007" has been corrected because 7.552 is the reported F statistic and .007 is the reported probability value. Nevertheless, the table's degrees of freedom and total degrees of freedom are inconsistent with the reported sample size, so the complete ANCOVA output must be re-run and verified before the table is treated as final.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding indicates that students exposed to explicit pre-writing activities achieved higher post-test scores in the content of letter writing than students who received conventional instruction. The experimental group recorded a post-test mean of 43.48 (SD = 15.14), compared with 26.68 (SD = 12.85) for the control group. The reported ANCOVA group effect was significant (F = 31.616, p < .001), subject to verification of the original SPSS output. The result is consistent with Gomwalk et al. (2023), who reported improved idea organisation and paragraphing following instruction in a pre-writing strategy, and with Pam et al. (2024), who found positive effects of pre-writing activities on expository composition. A plausible explanation is that structured planning gave students an opportunity to generate, select and develop relevant ideas before drafting.

The second finding indicates that students exposed to pre-writing activities achieved higher scores in organisation than those in the conventional group. The experimental group recorded a post-test mean of 44.74 (SD = 15.50), compared with 26.68 (SD = 12.34) for the control group. The reported group effect was significant (F = 7.552, p = .007), subject to verification. This finding agrees with Enighe (2024), who reported improved composition achievement following the use of graphic organisers, and with Gomwalk et al. (2023), whose findings showed improvement in paragraph organisation after pre-writing instruction. The result suggests that outlining, listing and graphic organising can help students determine the sequence in which ideas should be presented. Kalmendal et al. (2024) similarly emphasise explicit strategy instruction for learners who need support with planning and organisation.

The findings have a practical implication for English Language teaching. Teachers should not expect students to move immediately from a topic to a completed letter. Instead, learners can be guided through brief planning activities that help them identify the purpose of the task, generate

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relevant points and arrange those points before drafting. However, because the present study used purposively selected schools and a non-equivalent group design, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of an association between the intervention and higher post-test achievement rather than as definitive proof of causation. Differences between schools or classes may also have contributed to the observed outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that students exposed to explicit pre-writing activities achieved higher post-test scores in the content and organisation of letter writing than students who received conventional instruction. The reported ANCOVA results suggest significant group differences in both dimensions, although the original statistical output should be re-run to verify the exact degrees of freedom, sums of squares and effect sizes. Within the limits of the quasi-experimental design, the study provides evidence supporting the use of structured pre-writing activities to help JS1 students generate relevant ideas and organise them before drafting letters.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. English Language teachers should incorporate brainstorming, outlining, listing, questioning, clustering and graphic organising into letter-writing lessons to help students generate and arrange ideas before drafting.
2. Curriculum planners and teacher educators should include pre-writing strategies in English Language methodology courses and professional-development programmes so that teachers can develop practical skills for teaching the planning stage of writing.
3. School administrators should provide appropriate instructional materials, including graphic organisers, writing guides and other resources that support pre-writing activities in junior secondary schools.
4. Teachers should allocate adequate time for planning before drafting and should use a consistent procedure for generating, selecting and organising ideas.
5. Future studies should employ longer treatment periods, clearer school/class matching and, where possible, stronger randomisation or control procedures to provide more robust evidence of the effects of pre-writing instruction.

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