

Assessment of Problems Encountered by Senior Secondary Arabic Students in Writing Skill in Kwara State

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Abstract

Writing is an essential skill in the process of learning, in writing one single misspelt letter can change the word's meaning and create problems with communication process. This study assessed the problems encountered by senior secondary school Arabic students in writing skill in Kwara State. Descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. The population of the study comprised of all secondary school Arabic Students in the state while target population was all senior secondary 3 (SS III) students that registered for Arabic Language in the SSC Examinations (SSCE). Cluster sampling technique was used to select 210 students that registered for Arabic Language in the State, WASSCE 2022 Arabic essay question was adapted and used for data collection. WASSCE questions are assumed to be products of standardised examinations. Mean was used to answer research Questions and hypotheses were tested with the use of t-test statistic at 0.05 alpha level. The findings revealed that students' general performance in Arabic essay

was above average, there was no statistically significant difference between problems encountered by male and female, and there was a significant difference in the problems encountered by public and private Arabic students in essay writing. The study recommended that attention should be given by the teachers to spelling errors encountered by students in Arabic essay writing.

Keywords: Assessment, Arabic students, essay writing, problem encountered, Kwara State

Introduction

Arabic language is the language of the Holy Qur'an. It is the most important language of the Semitic group spoken by millions of people and understood by many more throughout the world. Arabic has an alphabet of twenty-eight consonants, three long, and three short vowels. Its writing pattern is from right to left and was introduced in Makkah not long before the Holy Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad *sallahallahu 'alahiwasallam*.

The contribution of Arabic to the world civilisations and cultures can hardly be downplayed. Previous writers have already catalogued its influence on the national languages, literature and orthographies of many countries including Persia, India, Turkey, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Burma (Chejne, 1969 in Abdullahi (2021). Languages such as English, French, Spanish, German, Latin, Greek, Russian, Aryan, Sankrit, Hindu and Chinese are said to have borrowed many of their lexical items from Arabic (Mazhar, 1972 in Abdullahi (2021). With particular reference to Nigeria and other African countries, their various languages are reported to owe several of their loaned words to Arabic (Aje, 2005).

Arabic is regarded as the oldest foreign language in Nigeria, because its entry into the country dated back to the seventh century (17th century) of the Christian Era equivalent to the first century of the *Hijrah* calendar. Centuries before the advent of Europeans in Nigeria, Arabic Language had been used for religious, commercial, social and cultural purposes in the Northern Nigeria. The Muslims in

the region composed poems, prose and even delivered *khutbah* (sermons) on Fridays with Arabic Language and also used the language at different ceremonies among themselves. It was in recognition of its significance that Arabic Language was introduced into the Nigerian educational system as an academic programme. In Nigeria as at 2023, three Nigerian major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have been recognized as official languages in addition to English the nation's official language. Mahmud (2012) and Abdullahi (2021) noted that Arabic and French language are taught at secondary school level as a foreign language and an elective subject. The status of Arabic as a foreign language contributed to the difficulties learners faced in the aspect of speaking and writing the language correctly, this is reflected in the speaking and writing skills of the learners.

Arabic as a language has the four (4) language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, all the skills must be properly taught to bring about meaningful learning. Writing is the key of the language skills, because, it is a productive skill, therefore, must be properly handled.

Writing as one of the four major language skills is beyond use of symbols or marks to express feelings, opinions, or emotions on actual concept. The symbols and marks must be properly placed in the words, sentences and paragraphs. Writing is the most difficult language skill to teach for the teachers and learnt by the learners across levels including the native speakers. So, Arabic as a language is not exempted from these difficulties especially in Nigeria where both the teachers and learners are not native speakers of Arabic.

Writing generally has two key characteristics. These are: interactive which involve the writer and the intended reader(s). The essence of writing by the writer (s) is to communicate his/her ideas to the readers. It is therefore an onus on the writer to define the audience (readers), are they familiar (informal), recipients (friends or peers), or semi-formal recipients (the writer boss), or formal recipients. Identifying the nature of the audience will go a long way in

assisting the writer to select relevant and appropriate language and style to be used. Secondly, process which involves moves from a stage to another. This implies that process begins from the pre-writing stage (selection of topic, brain storming and jotting down relevant ideas) which will be later arranged in logical and sequential order. The writing stage involve drafting and organising ideas into sentences and paragraphs and use of linking words such as: however, but, then and etc to show continuity or contrast in the topic being discussed. Sections and paragraphs should also be noted.

Post-writing or editing is an attempt to go through the write-ups to determine whether to add more facts/points or to delete, re-work or re-organise points raised. Technical correctness of grammar, punctuation and flow of expression must also be checked (Sanni-Suleiman, Adeniyi-Egbeola& Bello, 2020).

Writing is considered as a social engagement whereby writers interact with their readers not only to convey messages, but toalso help them understand the message passed across. This is part of the reasons why Salem (2013) opined that writing is a valuable tool for communicating one's ideas or thoughts to the readers. Therefore, students of Arabic and writers in Arabic should take note of this whenever they are writing so as to have effective communication.

To Jahin (2012) in academic context, writing has gained attention and learners consume too much time and energy for mastering its process. It is worthy to note that any writer who is grammatically deficient in a second language (Arabic) will not be able to express his thoughts, ideas and feeling in an accurate way, since writing is a matter of choice to say and say it clearly and interestingly. Therefore, the following should be properly handled by the Arabic students when writing an essay: choosing the subject, collecting and sorting out ideas, drafting and editing the essay.

For Arabic students to be adequate in essay writing, the following skills must be properly taken care of while writing according to Daniel (2013): the appropriate use of orthography; the correct usage of

vocabulary; the correct word order; the correct placement of accent; the appropriate sentence constituent order (subject, verb and object); ability to make the main idea distinct from the supporting ideas or information; the ability to make the text coherent so that readers can follow the development of the ideas; the ability to judge how much background knowledge the audience has on the subject and make clear what is assumed they don't know; and ability to vary sentence and paragraph length, ensure sentence agreement and avoid over-use of words, redundancy and verbosity.

Writing generally seems to be a burden for the learners at all levels of education. Students thought that writing is the hardest part, particularly in learning Arabic. Moreover, it requires not only having a lot of vocabularies, but also considering the mechanisms of it. Regarding these mechanisms, the students are urged to apply some of these in writing, for instance, grammar, punctuation, coherence, and unity. Moreover, it is not only used by college and university communities as written communication or as one of its programmes, but also as an intellectual activity, as a method of learning and as an instruction (Weigle, 2012).

According to Abdullahi (2017), essay is a fundamental and the most complex aspects of Arabic curriculum at secondary school level where students are required to perform well because it attracts significant marks in both internal and external examinations. Essay writing is a piece of writing that methodically analyses and evaluates a topic or issue (Guo & Ouyang, 2010). Basically, an essay is designed to develop scholarly view on a particular matter. The teaching of essay writing is designed to develop the creativity of individuals or train them on how to relate their experiences and contribute to issues around their immediate environment and the world at large (Cai & Dai, 2001).

Writing, according to Ahmed (2018) is the ability to produce written language. This includes being able to spell words correctly, use grammar correctly, and express thoughts and ideas clearly. He further

explained that it is an active skill, because you are producing information rather than receiving it. It is a more challenging skill than reading, as you need to be able to think on your feet and come up with words and phrases quickly.

Assessment could be defined as a related series of measures used to determine a complex attribute of an individual or group of people. This involves gathering and interpreting information about student level of attainment of learning goals. It is used to discover individual student weaknesses and strengths to assist educators in proffer academic support to educational programme and social services. Assessment provides feedback on the effectiveness of the instruction and provides learners a measure on their performance and progress. Assessment of Arabic students' essay writing involves the procedures or yardsticks for judging students' write-ups.

Gender is referred to as stereotype to a collection of commonly held beliefs or opinions about what are "appropriate" behaviours and activities for males and females. In another perspective, gender is a socially-constructed and not biological-defined characteristics of human beings. Ezeh (2013) observed that gender describes the personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power, influence roles and expectation (femininity & masculinity) that society ascribes to the two sexes on differential basis. To Eugene (2016) gender is a psychological term and a cultural construct developed by society to differentiate between the roles, behaviour, mental and emotional attributes of males and females. Studies have been conducted on the influence of gender on students' performance and arrived at different findings. Some found out that gender has significant influence on students' academic performance. For instance, Abdullahi (2011), and Musa and Abdullahi (2017) found that gender has significance influence on students' performance. However, to Abdullahi (2014), Olorundare and Aderogba(2009) concluded that gender has no significant difference in the performance of male and female students. On the basis of inconsistencies in research findings,

the researchers examined the influence of gender on Arabic students writing skills among senior secondary school students in Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is an essential skill for success in schools and in the workplaces. Various problems have been combating writing among students and some of these problems include: lack of ability to express ones thought and ideas, understand appropriate grammar and sentence structures, punctuations marks, appropriate use of vocabulary of one's choice. Understanding the problems students encountered in learning how to write, a more effective methods of teaching writing could be employed. Studies have been conducted of problems encountered in learning writing skill in school subjects such as Sanni-Suleiman et al (2020), Abdullahi, (2014), French, Hausa and Igbo. To the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has been conducted on writing skill in Arabic as a foreign language, this study was interested in finding out if students of Arabic as a foreign language also encountered these problems. Therefore, the study assessed problems encountered by senior secondary school Arabic students in written essay in Kwara State.

Objectives of the Study

This study assessed problems encountered by senior secondary school Arabic students in written essay in Kwara State. Specifically, the study assessed:

- a. general performance of senior secondary Arabic students in written essay.
- b. types of problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay.
- c. problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay based on gender.
- d. problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay based on school type.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered:

1. What is the general performance of senior secondary Arabic students in written essay?
2. What are the types of problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay?
3. Is there any significant difference in the types of problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay based on gender?
4. Is there any significant difference in the types of problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay based on school type?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated and tested:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the problems encountered in written essay by male and female Arabic students.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the problems encountered in written essay public and private school Arabic students.

Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised of all senior secondary school Arabic students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The target population was all senior secondary 3 (SS III) students that have registered for Arabic Language in the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE). Cluster sampling technique was used to sample 210 students that registered for Arabic Language in the State as the respondents, because not all schools and students in the State offer Arabic Language at the senior secondary school level. Therefore, all students that registered for Arabic Language in the 2022 WASSCE in the State were used as the respondents. WAEC 2021 essay writing was adapted and

used as the Arabic Performance Test (APT) for data collection. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) Arabic essay questions are assumed to be products of standardized examinations. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used to answer Research Question One, while Research Questions Two and Three with corresponding Hypotheses One and Two were tested with the use of inferential statistics of the t-test at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

The data collected were analysed using the percentage to describe the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	114	54.3
Female	96	45.7
Total	210	100.0

School Type	Frequency	Percentage
Public Schools	126	60.0
Private Schools	84	40.0
Total	210	100.0

Table 1 reveals that out of 210 (100.0%) students that were sampled for this study, 114 (54.3%) of them were males and 96 (45.7%) were female. Also, 126 (60.0%) of the students were from the public schools and 84 (40%) were from the private schools.

Answering of Research Questions

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question One: What is the general performance of senior secondary Arabic students in written essay?

Variable	Mean Score	S.D.	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Remark
General Performance	12.90	1.88	8.0	17.0	Above Average

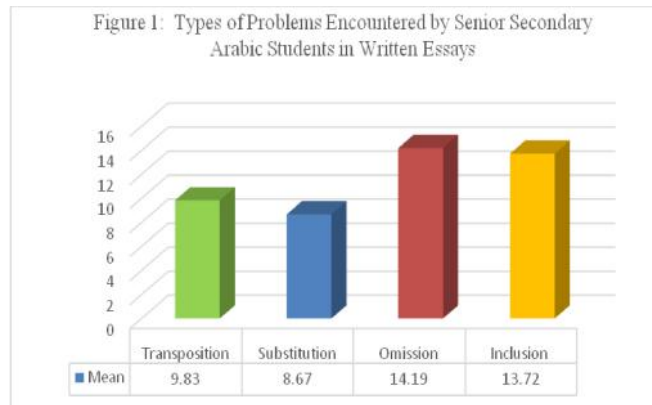
As shown in Table 3, the mean score of 12.90 with minimum score of 8.00 and maximum score of 17.0 was obtained. This shows that the general performance of secondary school students in Arabic written essay was above average in Kwara State.

Research Question Two: What are the types of problems encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in written essay?

Table 2: Types of Problems Encountered by Senior Secondary School Arabic Students in written Essay.

SN	Type of Essay Errors	Mean	S.D.
1	Transposition	9.83	2.14
3	Substitution	8.67	2.37
4	Omission	14.19	2.49
2	Inclusion	13.72	2.61

As shown in Table 2, transposition of letter(s) has the mean score of 9.83, substitution of letter(s) has the mean score of 8.67 and omission of letter(s) has the mean score of 14.19 while inclusion of letter(s) has the mean score of 13.72. The answer to Research Question Two could also be explained using a histogram as shown in Figure 1.



As revealed in Figure 1, omission problem was mostly committed followed by inclusion problem and transposition problem, while substitution problem was less encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in Kwara State.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were tested with the use of independent t-test at 0.05 alpha level.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the problems encountered in written essay by male and female Arabic students.

Table 3: t-test Statistics Showing the Difference between Problems Encountered by Male and Female Arabic Students

Gender	No	Mean	S. D.	df	t-value	Sig	Remark
Male	114	16.821	2.409	208	1.314	0.122	Not Rejected
Female	96	17.975	2.454				

*Insignificance at $p > 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the t-value 1.314 is obtained with a p-value of 0.122 computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.122 is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis one is retained. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the problems encountered by male and female Arabic students ($t_{\{208\}} = 1.314$, $p > 0.05$).

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the problems encountered in written essay by public and private school Arabic students

Table 4: t-test Statistics Showing the Difference between Problems Encountered by Public and Private Arabic Students.

School Type	No	Mean	S. D.	Df	t-value	Sig	Remark
Public	126	17.551	2.722	208	8.278	0.001	Rejected
Private	84	13.428	3.001				

*significance at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that the t-value 8.278 is obtained with a p-value of 0.001 computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.001 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis two is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the problems encountered by public and private school Arabic students ($t_{\{208\}} = 8.278$, $p < 0.05$). Given the mean scores, it could be noted that students from the public schools encountered more problem in essay writing than those from private schools.

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed that the general performance of secondary school students in Arabic written essay was above average in Kwara State. This finding corroborated Abdullahi (2011) who found that Arabic students' performance in both WASSC Examinations and National Examinations Council SSCE Examination was very high in

Arabic Language. Comparing this finding with English language, this result negated Alfaki (2015) who found that students' overall academic performance in English language was low. The performance level of students in English language especially in essay depends on their ability to compose and pronounce letters and words correctly coupled with their conversance with necessary materials such as text books, writing materials etc.

The second finding obtained from this study indicated that all Arabic students encountered problems in written essay in the state. However, omission error was mostly encountered followed by inclusion error and transposition error, while substitution error was less encountered by senior secondary Arabic students in Kwara State. This finding was in line with the assertion of Abdullahi (2011) who found that secondary school students failed Oral Arabic in both internal and external examinations. This may be true due to the intonation problems of the respondents sampled for this study. Due to interference of mother tongue, students tend to have poor oral pronunciation in the language and this consequently affected their written essays.

The third finding of this study showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the problems encountered in written essay between male and female Arabic students. This implies that male and female senior secondary Arabic students encountered the same problems with written essay. This finding aligned with Abdullahi and Salisu (2017) who found that there was no significant difference in the Arabic vowel sounds that constitute pronunciation difficulty for male and female students of Upper Basic Hausa-speaking students of Arabic in Kano state. The finding contradicted Deane (2018) who found that female students performed better than male students in English language. The likely reason was due to the fact that English written essay is sometimes influenced by pronunciation given the interference of mother tongue of the respondents, and they may not be able to pronounce words like native speakers aside from identifying the correct sound.

The fourth finding revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the problems encountered by public and private school Arabic students. Given the mean scores, it could be noted that students from the public schools committed more essay errors than those students from private schools. This implies that the type of school a student attends may determine his or her level of proficiency in English written essays. This outcome corroborated the finding of Khan and Khan (2020) that school environment can influence students' intonation, writing and essay. This may be attributed to commitment and dedication on the part of the teachers in private schools than the public schools. Students in private schools tend to do better in English essay writing as private school teachers' care and correct students in their pronunciation, unlike public schools where some teachers do not care even if students speak vernacular, not to talk of correct pronunciation. The finding is in contrary with Abdullahi and Salisu (2021) found in their studies that in respect of the types of school attended by Hausa-speaking Arabic students in Kano State, there was no significant difference in the Arabic consonant and vowel sounds, as well as the Arabic syllable patterns that constituted pronunciation difficulties for the students in the state.

Conclusion

With respect to the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the general performance of Arabic students in essay writing is good, and that students encountered all identified problems in their written essay, they mostly encountered omitting and including letters in written essay. Although, no discrepancy exists in the problem encountered in the essay by male and female Arabic students, students from public schools encountered more problems compare with private Arabic school students in essay writing.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. More attention should be given by teachers of Arabic to spelling errors committed by students.
2. Teachers should give more homework and assignments to students and engage them in Arabic essay/letter writing since it is part of what students will be tested in external examinations. This will enable the students to master all words that are prone to all forms of spelling errors and thereby in their essay writing.
3. Teachers should find out the causes of spelling errors committed by students and strategise how to help them by using appropriate teaching methods and approaches.
4. Students need to be encouraged to exhibit a positive attitude towards the learning of Arabic Language being a foreign language. What the students learn depends largely on their attitude, if they do not have the zeal to learn, they would not learn what is required.
5. Parents should also encourage and motivate their children, through provision of textbooks and dictionaries to enhance students' writing skill.

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