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PROCESS-CONFERENCE METHOD OF TEACHING WRITING: A STUDY OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OBINGWA

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Abstract

Writing is a language skill that involves the act of manual scribbling or electronic imprints on the surface of an object. Obingwa, is one of the seven Local Government Areas occupied by the Ngwa people in Abia State. A major objective of this paper is to illustrate the usefulness of the process-conference method of writing. The theoretical framework examined in this paper is the conference *Process- conference* method of writing. Some of the findings of this paper are: that the process-conference method allays fear in writing, that it helps to improve the linguistic power of a writer, that it is a labourious and stressful method of writing, that the process-conference method results in a well planned writing, that the method leads to the expansion of one's thought, that the process-conference allows for brainstorming prior to any writing exercise. The paper recommends for the engagement of adequate language teachers, equipment of school libraries and the training and retraining of language teachers for the realization of the goals of the process-conference method of writing.

Keywords: Obingwa, method, process-conference, students, writing.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Introduction

The need for effective teaching and learning has been the major goal of education from time immemorial. Any instructional method a teacher adopts has its merits and demerits, and requires some, preliminary preparation on the part of the teacher before the presentation of such method in a class. Often times, a particular teaching method will naturally flow into another, all within the same lesson. The determination of the instructional method that best satisfies the need of a particular lesson depends on many things, among which are; the age, the developmental level of the students, what the students already know, what they need to know in a particular lesson, the subject-matter content, the objective of the lesson, the audience, the time space, material resources, and the physical setting. In our Nigerian context, writing is done from pre-primary to tertiary level. Writing in the pre-primary and lower primary involves mainly the acquisition of the manual dexterity required for writing. This type of writing involves the making of strokes, straight lines, curves, circles and scribblings, which enhance muscular flexibility of the motor nerves. From upper primary, writing is a strong motor skill, involving both the manual and mental skills, required for the expression of ideas on objects like the slates, blackboards or on papers. Writing well is necessary for one's success in examinations. That being the case, adequate attention should be paid to the teaching of writing. This is because a well written text requires that the ideas are coherent and synchronized. To achieve this depends on how much time the writer has devoted to thinking on the topic while writing, proof reading and writing his text in order to achieve a coherent thought pattern. Writing skills are not instinctive. They are consciously learned skills that are laborious and require patience and perseverance on the part of both the teacher and the learner who must achieve their set educational goals and standards. Writing whether in English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba or any language requires a careful and systematic approach for an information to be fully developed and coherently presented to an audience.

The ability to write well is therefore an indispensable task and skill that goes a long way to make one really a good writer. The problem this work seeks to look into is the feasibility and setbacks of the Process-conference method of teaching writing. This is the background on which this paper is formed. (cf. Ituen, (2004, p. 35-57), Oluikpe (2011, p. 278-304), Oluikpe, B.O.A., R.I Ndimele, and E. N. Oluikpe (2017, p. 1-35).

Conceptual Review

Writing is a language skill that is learned so that one can express himself through the medium of paper. cf. Williams (1981, p. 121). According Lalsam (1975, p. 42), writing is: "the need for a child to be able to record statement as simple sensible sentences having capital letters and full-stops". This means that writing is a language skill that is used for the documentation of information. Westwood (1991, p. 137) notes that: "… writing is certainly the most demanding of the language arts". In other words writing is not an easy language skill to acquire. Going further, he commented that: "the ability to communicate well in writing is a prerequisite for success in school". This implies that for one to attain an appreciable grade at all levels education, the acquisition of writing skill, is necessary. Ituen (1998, p. 86) asserts that: "writing is a very important language skill since it helps people to function effectively in different aspects of adult life". This means that writing is a language skill that has become an indispensable aspect of the human life, whether manually or

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

electronically. In this paper, one can add that writing requires manual manipulation of writing objects like chalk, pencil, biro or through the use type writers or electronic computers by which conceptions can be expressed on the surface of objects like the board, paper, or computer screens. Ituen (1998, p. 37) gives three types of writing namely; *transactional writing, expressive writing,* and *poetic writing. Transactional writing* is the kind of writing that permits us to get things done in the aspect of reporting, informing and persuading.

Expressive writing is mainly information written down for personal consumption. Under this, we have the diary entries which are fragmentary in nature. *Poetic writing* as the name implies, is the conscious expression of one's thought in literary works. Ellis and Tomlinson (1980) as quoted by Ituen (1998, p. 86) have also distinguished two categories of writing namely; *functional writing,* and *personal writing. Functional writing* is the type of writing people normally use to pass information in real life to another or other people. *Personal writing,* like the expressive writing is concerned with writings like diaries, short stories about a thing or the criticism of an event. Ituen (1998, p. 81) notes that from the point of view of texts produced, the following writing types are usually identified: *argumentative, narrative, descriptive, dialogue, instruction/ rules/ explanations, reports/minutes/notices/questionnaire, talks and commentaries, letters, advertisements, forms for completion, biography and autobiography.* In other words Ituen, mentions that the art of writing covers every writing exercise that is undertaken by man. Westwood (1991, p. 130), notes that: "Writing at a higher level requires the skills of planning, sequencing of ideas, editing and revising. It also requires the mechanical aspects of handwriting". This means that writing is graded, and that at the upper grade of writing certain skills are required in order to attain the desired expectations of that level. In the past years, importance has been on spelling accuracy, and neatness of work in the art of writing. This has however posed a lot of problem to children who are deficient in the grammar of the language to be used in writing. Emphasis has also been placed on the use of punctuation like the comma, full stop, colon, semi-colon, inverted commas and the use of the question mark and apostrophe where necessary. Writing also requires that the children should know the parts of speech like the noun, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, interjections and conjunctions. Writing, equally requires a good choice in the use of words and construction of meaningful sentences. This is because the level of a child's vocabulary determines the ability of that child to write well.

Also writing requires that a person should be able to draw from his everyday experiences. This will enhance the person's ability to develop topics of interest for himself. From above we can see that writing requires a preplanned and conscientious effort on the part of the writer, if ideas must be effectively communicated to an audience. Isaacson (1987, p. 15) has identified the following as the problems of unskilled writers.

1a. Unskilled writers spend very little time in planning before they start to write.

b. No rough draft notes were prepared before writing.

c. Illogical composition of ideas.

d. Use of too simple or too long and rambling sentence structures.

i. Use of simple words over more interesting and expressive words.

ii. Use of repetitions e.g., then, and, but etc.

iii. Insufficient writing in specified time limits.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

iv. Numerous spelling errors
v. Reluctance of writers to review or revise their work.
vi. Irregularity in the use of punctuation marks.

From the above, it is obvious that there are many factors that are militating against effective writing. In improving writing, language exercises will serve to reinforce writing through;
2a. Joining of sentences.
b. Use of paragraphs.
c. Filling in the blanks.
d. Completing the sentence in some way or the other like: passivisation, focalization of subjects or other nouns in a sentence.
e. Supply of answers to question tags.
f. Controlled compositions.
g. Completion of a story through the use of a picture.
h. Answering series of questions through the use of pictures.
i. Use of substitution table.
j. Letter writing.
k. Copying of short passages on the board into a note book and so on. cf.

From the foregoing, one can see that writing requires a conscious will to follow the required rules to in order to achieve success in this area of language use/skill.
Day (1991, p. 43) in his preface has this to say; "Scientists, starting as graduate students, are measured primarily not by their dexterity in laboratory manipulations, not by their innate knowledge of their broad or narrow scientific subjects, and certainly not by their wit or charm; they are measured and become known (or remain unknown), by their publications. Thus, the scientist must not only "do" science, but must write science". This illustrates the fact, that art of writing well is not limited those who study language, or non-scientific courses. This is a demonstration of the relevance of writing in academic works. To some extent, have been concerned with how the teaching of writing could be improved at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions and they were dissatisfied with the manner in which the teaching of writing in schools was approached. Some of the methods adopted in the teaching of writing are:

Free Method of Writing
Nduma (1983, pp. 5-10) devises two types of writing approach. The first he called, *free composition* also called *free writing*, and the second he called *controlled composition*. Concerning the free writing, Nduma (1983, pp. 5-8) citing Erasmus (1960) and Ubahakwe (1979), maintains that students are encouraged to write spontaneously with the teacher for five to ten minutes on any topic decided on by the class. In the same vein, Ituen (2004, p. 40), argues that the free writing technique is a style "whereby the writer puts pen to paper in order to write all ideas related to the topic as they come to his mind. He does not mind the order in which these ideas are written nor does he pay attention to such things as-the spelling, punctuation or grammar. All he needs to do is to keep writing for about five to ten minutes, allowing his ideas to flow freely during this period.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

He argued further that a writer who thought that he had nothing substantial to say will be surprised to find that as he free writes, ideas begin to emerge". This implies, that in free writing, the sequence of the presentation of ideas is not of much relevance to the writer. Still on the free method of teaching writing, Nduma (1983, p. 5) argues that this method of teaching writing is superficial, in that it assumes a lot of grammatical perfection on the part of the students by the teacher, and it is therefore best for first language users.

Controlled Method of Writing

The controlled method of teaching writing on the other hand, presumes that the students are grammatically deficient in the target language. This is supported by Owen, in English Language (1970, Vol. Xxxv:4) as cited by Nduma where he states that; "..a foreign language learner lacks a functional command of English grammar, verbalises his new experiences in his mother tongue and is ill-equipped to perceive the differences between styles and registers. His efforts at a composition are nothing but concealed translation and the more he is required to write, the more he produces mistakes." This shows, that second language learners are need to be supported in order to acquire the grammar of their target language. To Owen, the controlled writing method, is based on the theory that there is a fixed pattern in the manipulation of language use which is learnt by imitation through the use of model essays in tables or frames. In other words, controlled writing is a method whereby the students are directed and limited in the extent to which they can go in their writing exercise. Nduma (1983, p. 6) provides us with four steps which controlled writing should follow, as presented below:

3a. Recognition of vocabulary items

b. Production of texts which involve contrasts of usages in speech and in writing.

c. Recognition of different styles of writing for different purposes

d. Writing through the use of multiple situation tables.

Ubahakwe (1979. P. 10), went further to present four approaches to the teaching of controlled writing. These are;

4a. The teacher model approach which depends on appropriate styles according to situations.

b. The topic approach which consists of a three-level hierarchy; the core sentences which are known to all native speakers of the target language; syntax level, which is the level of in inter-prepositional connections, sentence combination, forming the rules of the language, and the third level which is the level of paragraph development.

c. The text variation approach which is designed for use in a class made up of students from various disciplines. The teacher while teaching the course, uses written materials, exemplifying the various styles which serve as a point of reference.

d. The individualized approach which is based on the theory that the, progress a student makes in writing after a rudimentary guideline in writing skills, depends largely on his motivation and innate creative ability. This aims at making each student work at his own pace. In this case, the teacher therefore prepares a series of lessons on rudimentary composition skills.

Nduma (1983, p. 6) concludes this part of the controlled writing method, by saying that there is no hard and fast rule about the above listed approaches, that they all depend on the situation in which the teacher finds himself and the individual students concerned. Paulston and Bruder (1976, p. 20)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

on controlled writing, say that there are three types of controlled composition writing. They are *substitution tables or frames,* which are models with directions for re-writing the models, and exercises with semi-controlled tables where contents and ideas are suggested, but with a minimum suggestion for structural pattern. The substitution tables, Paulston et al maintain is primarily referred to as tables or frames. These differ from substitution conversions, written from the model passages in that all necessary substitutions are indicated to students either by slot or by number. In these substitution tables, the students have to find all the necessary correlative substitutes himself. Paulston et al (1976, p. 20), went further to say that conversion can be of three types namely; *substitutions, transformations,* and *modifications.* Since, this is not the major focus in this paper, one cannot not go further into discussing substitution tables. However, the controlled method of writing encouraged correction of written exercises given to students as feed backs so that students can know their level of effective performance and make amends on their errors. In relation to the use of models in the teaching of writing, Odejide (1980, p. 4) sees models as "... pieces of writing from works, which attempt to teach the art of prose writing from the teacher himself, the pupils' work or pieces of publications from scientific writings, and journals". This means that model writing the requires the taking of texts from a published work for illustrative purposes to students. Odu and Umeh (1983, p. 23) share this view when they said that: "... a student learns to make use of good English from newspapers, magazines, selected comprehension passages, and good novels". In other words, the model approach of writing encourages the imitation of renounced authors.

Process-conference Method of Writing

The process-conference method of writing, sees writing as a gradual and developmental act of putting down information.Viewing writing as a process, Marcus (1977, p. 34) encourages one to ask the following questions before the actual writing process commences.

5a. What is the purpose for the presentation of information?

b. What sense of order could one bring these data in relation to the main idea of a paragraph to support for the realization of a unified central theme, accuracy of observation, honesty, sincere expressions, logical progression, sequencing of ideas and appropriate styles?

This view of preplanned writing pattern, is supported by Ellis and Tomlinson (1980, p. 190) where they clearly stated that: "The writer should first select relevant materials, and then systematically put these materials into Sequence. The students must be trained to recognize what is logically connected to a given topic and then show how to order these information". This means that the process-conference method of writing requires adequate planning. Ituen (2004, pp. 35-38) who conceives writing as a process, gives the following points that a writer must consider in the writing process. These are: gaining understanding of the topic, setting limits to the subject in terms of: length, purpose, audience, writer's knowledge, finding something to say, making an informal outline, emulating a thesis, making a formal outline. These points go on to demonstrate that writing is like a raw material that needs to be processed in order to yield a refined product for the consumption of a target audience for a certain goal to be effectively attained. Demonstrating that writing is a process which is acquired by man through time and practice, Turk and Kirkman (1992,

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

pp. 1-2) note, that writing is a daring task which "is not inborn. It requires courage to get on and try. It requires practice, and it requires thinking about it before the actual writing process starts in order to improve on it". This means that writing is a difficult language skill that is learnt over a period of time. They went on to add that "Writing skill is a basic professional equipment in every field of human study which requires a careful and systematic approach for a successful output." This shows that writing is required in all fields of modern education. O' Connor (1993, p. 55) in her process method of writing, gives the injunction that: "when you start writing the draft or your share of it, you should ideally cut yourself off from the outside world. Try to find a time when you can remain undisturbed for several hours and a place where no one will interrupt you. Write at a time of day, when you feel freshest and most alert. Try not to choose a time when you are physically or mentally tired, even if that time is convenient for other reasons. Be selfish. These few hours are the culmination of long and expensive research and you are entitled to suitable working conditions, lock the door, unplug the telephone and ban other distractions." Thus, writing reqires silence and concentration. The above quotation has been cited in order to illustrate the seriousness with which some scholars view the writing process as an exercise that must be jealously and carefully guarded. As a prewriting requirement, O' Connor (1993, p. 56) urges any writer to get the following writing materials ready: pen, paper, typewriter or computer, a tape or a cassette recorder. O' Connor, however, emphasizes the use of handwriting for the first drafting of any writing as an initial step before the use of other electronic gadgets. The first phase of the writing stage is the first draft. This first draft is called the *first rough work*. This first draft according to Ituen (2004, p. 49), "is meant to give the writer the opportunity to see his ideas as an integral whole so that he might react to them in the re-writing phase in the form of changing a word, a phrase, or an expression that is unsuitable to the issue at hand". This means that at the *first rough work,* the writer is free to edit his own work. Ituen went further to add that after the first draft has been completed, that: "it is useful for the writer to give himself some "cooling off' period before going on to revise the work. The length of the period will vary depending on how soon he has to submit the final copy. Thus, the gap will vary from a matter of minutes to over one day. The "cooling off" period helps the writer to distance himself from the work and so consider it with a good measure of objectivity." In other words, the cooling off period allows the writer to expand or reduce his writing. In the writing stage, the paragraph has been of concern to some scholars, since it is within the paragraph, unity and consistency in thought pattern is achieved. In this line, Francis (1984, p.16) notes that one should not fail to point to students that: "A paragraph deals with only one major point of the discussion. Such a point is made clear through the use of many simple sentences and general illustrations". In other words, the paragraph deals with a single idea. Acholonu (1978, p. 4) adds that every sentence should be such that it explains further the main idea in the paragraph in which it occurs, and that every paragraph should be exhaustive on a particular point before progression is made to another point. Ituen (2004, p. 49) sees the paragraph as: "a unit in which a dominant idea is developed; often it has its own topic sentence though sometimes it is implied". This again shows that the paragraph usually expands a single concept. He goes on to proffer the following characteristics which a paragraph must possess in order to fulfill its function. These are; unity or internal consistency, completeness, and coherence. Acholonu (1984, p. 5) adds that "without proper paragraphing, the essay is likely to be incomprehensible". In other words, the

paragraph gives the link in thought. Under the body of a written material, the length of sentences to be used has been commented on by authors like; Fitzpatrick and Hand (1961, p. 127) that "if the sentences are all very short, writing becomes uninteresting, and if they are all too long on the other hand, the writer's meaning can be lost". The implication of this is that the length of sentences should be varied in every writing to suit the interest of the audience. Talking about the introductory part of a written material, O' Connor (1993, p. 160-137) in his approach to writing as a process argues that: "The introduction should persuade readers to go on reading once their attention has been attracted by the title, abstract, tables and figures. The introduction answers; why did you do the work? What is its purpose? " This means that the introduction must be striking to sustain the interest of the reader. In drafting the body of the text, he encourages one to ask questions like why, what, how, when around the topic in question. This is to enable one to think and develop points and paragraphs that are logically consistent and coherent. He further suggested revision of the first and second draft of a written text in order to identify various linguistic errors, and errors of logic and order. These various revisions and editing processes in the writing process will culminate in preparing the text for the final revision before the submission of the text. One must not fail to add here that the revision of a written text can be done alone by one's self, in association of a colleague, or under the auspices of an instructor or a teacher. Also Ituen (2004, p. 76) notes that at the re-writing or revision stage, the writer re-examines and rethinks all that had been written down. This involves ascertaining that there is logic among the sentences and paragraphs and that the message of the writer is expressed with clarity and effectiveness. He suggests the following questions at this editing stage. Is the thesis clearly and accurately stated? Does it indicate the direction the essay will take? To what extent is the introduction appropriate from the point of view of the subject treated, the audience, and the purpose? In the body of the essay, has there been sufficient development of the topic? Do the points have focus? Do they support thesis and topic sentences in the various paragraphs? Are the paragraphs well developed, unified and coherent? Is the essay concluded in an interesting manner? Are the central points reflected in the conclusion? These would lead to proper scrutiny of the work, and may result in the deletion, substitution, addition of words, sentences or even paragraphs as the case may be. Finally, the thesis would be edited for spelling, punctuations and grammatical accuracy. Reviewing the work of Day (1991, p. 44), on *How to write and publish a scientific paper,* he enumerated the following writing guideline to the scientist: discuss, do not recapitulate the results, point out any exceptions or any lack of correlations and define unsettled points, show how your results and interpretations agree with previously published work, don't be shy; discuss the theoretical implications of your work as well as any possible practical applications, state your conclusion as clearly as possible, summaries your evidence for each conclusion. These guidelines, one must not fail to add, could be applied to not just scientific writing alone, but to other academic writings where appropriate. Mike (1994, p. 30) in his own work gave the following points as strategy to effective writing: use simple words, avoid unnecessary words, use terms your readers can picture, write like you talk. Kress (1994, p. 1) sees writing as a process (a step by step skill) in children which starts with the control of the writing implement, concentration and attention-span, spelling, letter formation, word-formation and sentence formation as forming the focus of attention in the teaching of writing to children. Kress went further to add that creative and aesthetic (mechanical) writing, agree with

the process method of working in that it involves questions around a topic, editing, revising, and publishing. Max and Martin (1998, p. 49) talking about the writer and the producer said that one must know the sort of approach the producer has in mind, the nature and degree of development of the script will depend on that factor. The chance to gain this information will be in one or more story conferences with the producers depending on the length and complexity of the project. He went further to add that the script writer must ask questions, must be satisfied, and that before the completion with these preliminary story conferences, one must know everything the producer will do. The conferences of the writer and the producer as mentioned by Max et al, are for editing and revising of the written material between the writer and the producer. These conferences equally exemplify the fact that writing is a process which involves specific guide if texts must be successfully produced. In conclusion, from the review of literatures, one has seen that some scholars argue for the use of *controlled models* for the teaching of writing in secondary schools to enhance grammatical proficiency in the target language. Others, argue for the use of the *process-conference* strategy which encourages continuous consultation of the teacher or supervisor by the student for editing and revising, from the inception of the writing exercise to the end when the text is published for general consumption.

Methodology

For the Purpose of this paper, two secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government" Area of Abia State have been selected. One co-educational school in the town and another from the rural area. The intent of this selection is to reflect both the urban and rural situations. The schools used were: Ahiaba High School, Ahiaba and Comprehensive Secondary School, Mgboko-Itungwa. The population of the sample selection was the English Language teachers, heads of the English language department, and the students in the above mentioned schools. There were two sets of questions. One for the teachers of English language and the other for the students. Items in the questionnaire for the English teachers were ten in number. Those questions were to find out, the staff strength in the area of English language teaching, the methods adopted in the teaching of writing, the regularity of writing exercise in each class per week, the mode of feedback to students, the mode of reinforcing writing, availability of library in the school, various language activities that students are involved in that could help improve creative writing, the problem of the process-conference approach, and the type of needed support to encourage the adoption of this strategy in the teaching of writing. Questions in the students' questionnaire would seek to find out students' likeness to write, freedom to choose a topic in an essay class, consultation of the teacher in the writing process, willingness of students to edit and rewrite their text as many times as necessary to produce good text, publication of students' work for general consumption, availability of school library, usefulness of writing skills to students' success in exams, and the type of support the government gives to schools to help improve students' writing skills.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In this section of the paper, one is going to present the data, and analyze it through the discussion of the findings. The schools used for the collection of the data are: Ahiaba High School, Ahiaba and Comprehensive andComprehensive Secondary School, Mgboko-Itungwa. One must not fail to mention that these schools are all from Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Table 1: Table showing the number of teachers, number of students and student teachers'ratio.

S/N	SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	STUDENT TEACHERS' RATIO
6a.	Ahiaba High School, Ahiaba.	3	850	1:283
b.	Comprehensive Secondary School, Mgboko-Itungwa.	6	950	1:158

Table 1, showed the two schools that were consulted for this paper. This table shows the number of teachers available in each school to handle writing lessons. Ahiaba High School, Ahiaba has 3 teachers with 850 students. This gave the ratio of 1:283 students to 1 teacher. Comprehensive Secondary School, Mgboko-Itungwa, has 6 teachers and a total number of 950 students, giving a ratio of 1: 158 students to 1 teacher.

If the process-conference method of teaching writing, which requires conferring with each student from the pre-writing stage to the publishing stage, the student-teacher ratio in these schools is not commendable, since the approach is time consuming and requires maximum attention to be given to individual students due to individual differences. It is therefore impossible to adopt this writing method because it is not feasible under the situation that the data has revealed. It equally makes it impossible for students' work to be properly assessed and sent back to them for correction as at when due. The educational implication of this will be that students will not be given enough writing exercises, since there may not be more than 2 essay writing lessons conducted in each class per term.

Table II: Table Showing Students Prewriting and Writing Strategy

S/N	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
7a.	Brainstorms	1,800	100%
b.	Drafts a rough outline	100	66.6%
c.	Consults with the teacher	110	73.3%
d.	Revises work	120	80%

Table II, showed students' prewriting and writing strategy. This data showed that 1, 800 of the students sampled, that is 100% of the students asserted to the fact that they think or brainstorm before any writing process takes off. 66.67% of the students also claimed to always write out their points, -that is have a rough outline of the major areas of their discourse to enhance better organization and developments of their thoughts and ideas in order equally to ease the flow of such ideas. The able also showed that 73.3% of the students consulted with their teacher during the writing process, while 80% claimed that they revised their work in the writing stage. This is hard to believe in that both teachers and students asserted they were ignorant of the process-conference method of teaching writing. But since this is an academic work, one has to be honest and present the data as it was given. The fact is that most of the students cannot read and therefore could hardly understand what the questionnaire expected of them. In the other hand, one can equally say that they were trying to present a picture that things were going well in their

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

school while it was not just so. So, their responses as to their pre-writing and writing strategy, contrasted with their responses as to their use of the *process-conference method of teaching writing*. The teachers are more familiar with the discussion method which is *traditional* in approach. The *process-conference* method of teaching is communicative and seeks to reduce mistakes in writing, from start to finish. This method was found to be strange and new to all the teachers sampled.

Table 111: Table showing students' view on teachers' approach to the teaching of writing

S/N	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
8a.	Freedom to choose topic	1,800	100%
b.	Teachers use the process-conference method	1,800	100%
c.	Teachers assesses students' works	84	56%

Table III discusses students' view of teachers' approach in the teaching of writing. In this data it was seen that 103 students which is equivalent to 68.6% of the students' population sampled, agreed that they have freedom to choose their topics in essay writing exercises. 100% of the students agreed too, that the process-conference approach, was not used in their school. This explains the fact that other methods of teaching like: lecture or discussion methods are used by their teachers. 84 students, that is 56% of the students, assert that teachers mark and return their written exercises for correction, but that this could be once or twice in a term due to the large number of students to be managed by the teachers.

Table IV: Table showing responses to the various methods teachers adopt in the teaching of writing.

S/N	METHOD	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
8a.	Lecture	1	6.25%
b.	Discussion	15	93.75
c.	Process-conference	-	-

Table IV illustrates that 1, that is, 6.25% of the teachers sampled use the lecture method, while 15, that is, 93.75% of the teachers use the discussion method in the teaching of writing. 100% of the teachers agree that the conference process method of writing was not used by them in their schools.

Table V: Table showing number of writing lessons in each class per week in the two different schools consulted.

S/N	SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF WRITING LESSONS IN EACH CLASS
9a.	Ahiaba High Scool, Ahiaba	1
b.	Comprehensive Secondary School, Mgboko-Itungwa	3

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Table V, demonstrates the number of times writing lessons are held in each class in the schools per week. Ahiaba High School, Ahiaba, has 1 lesson of writing in each of the classes per week. Comprehensive secondary Mgboko-Itungwa, has 3 writing lessons per week. The educational implication of this is that students are not adequately inspired and exposed to enough writing exercises. This therefore becomes a hindrance to the improvement of creative writing skills which could either be psychomotor, grammatical skills or skills of organization of thought into a logical sequence.

Table VI: Table showing teachers' and students' attitude to the Process-conference method of writing.

S/N	Attitudes	Frequency	Percentage
10a.	Improves Writing Skill	1,809	100%
b.	Slows down the pace of work	1,809	100%
c.	Brings closeness between teacher and student	1,809	100%
d.	Laborious	1,809	100%

Table VI, informs us of teachers' and students' attitude to the process conference method of wiring. Within this table, one can see that 100% of the teachers and students, that is the total population sampled, agree that the method helps to improve writing skill. It also illustrates that all teachers and all the students sampled, agree that the method brings the teacher and students close, thereby helping both parties involved in the conference or consultative process, to understand their individual differences. The educational implication of this is that apart from the academic writing skill it gives to the students, it also improves the human relationship between teacher and student by allaying the fear that tends to exist in students towards their teacher, yet preserving the respect of students to their teacher. Having seen the good side of this process-conference method of teaching writing, table VI reveals that 100% of the sampled population agree that the approach is laborious on both parties involved in the consultative approach and at the same time slows the pace of work on both the teacher and the Student.

Table VII: Table showing teachers' and students' suggestions of what the government can do to encourage the use of the process-conference method of teaching writing in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria.

S/N	ITEMS
11a.	Provision of adequate and qualified teachers
b.	Provision of audio-visual language aids.
c.	Encouragement of refreshers courses for the teacher
d.	Salary incentive
e.	Encouragement of essay competitions
f.	Award of prizes to students for good written essays
g.	Provision of libraries in schools

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Table VII shows the following suggestions made by students and teachers in the sample schools. These are provision of library, provision of qualified and adequate number of teachers in schools, increment of salaries of language teachers as incentives to motivate further input of labour by the teachers, provision of audio-visual aids in language classes to enhance the acquisition of communicative skills. The idea behind efficient communicative skills is that human beings tend to write as they think and talk. The students and teachers also suggested provision of in-service training for the already employed teachers to update their knowledge in their areas of study, encouragement of essay competitions among schools, and the award of prizes to good performing students in essay competitions to induce further and better exhibition of such writing skills in students in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State.

TableVIII: Table Showmg problems identified from the researcher's findings

S/NO	ITEMS
12a.	Lack of teachers
b.	Lack of Libraries
c.	Lack of audio visual aids
d.	Lack of textbooks by students
e.	Lack of incentives for language teachers
f.	Poor writing habits by students, due to lack of interest to study
g.	Ignorance by teachers of the process-conference method of teaching writing.

Table VIII, informs one of the problems identified by the researcher in the schools sampled. These are; lack of qualified and adequate number of teachers, lack of audio-visual aids, lack of library for further reinforcement of writing skills for quiet and private study by students, lack of textbooks on the part of the students to enhance efficiency in reading and writing, grammatical errors due to low vocabulary level and spelling errors, and lack of incentives to language teachers.

Conclusion

From the discussions on the findings, it was discovered that there are many factors that inhibit the general teaching and learning of effective writing skills through the process-conference method of teaching writing. Following the findings as the sample data revealed and coupled with the subsequent discussions, the following conclusions have been made as problems of the process-conference method of teaching writing. The student-teacher ratio in the sampled schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, is not commendable. This very situation makes the teachers inefficient and overworked. The students in the schools sampled have no good pre-writing and writing strategy in that they are not properly informed and groomed in the techniques required for the execution of writing exercises. In the secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, whether schools in urban or rural areas, there are no teaching aids such as language laboratories, libraries and their likes in those schools. The students poor performance in writing is predicted on the linguistic fact that they have a low vocabulary level and poor spellings which all result in very high ungrammatical constructions. Students do not have textbooks for reinforcement of writing skills and for further personal and private study. The

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

teaching of writing in the sampled schools is poor due to the fact that teachers can only attend to each class once a week, due to very few number of teachers in a school. This implies that adequate attention is not given to the teaching of writing in the schools in Obingwa Local Government Area. Because the process-conference method of teaching writing is not popular, but laborious and cumbersome, it was found that teachers adopt the lecture and discussion method which does not bring the teacher and the students close, nor does it give room for the teacher to fully understand the peculiar problem of each student. This makes the low intelligent students to be at a loss or at the mercy of their class mates. The teachers and students are not aware, that is they have no knowledge of the process-conference method of teaching writing hence, the inability to properly train students in the art and techniques of writing. On the other hand too, the findings have helped one to make the following conclusions as prospects of the process-conference method of teaching writing, in secondary schools in the Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State and the whole Nigeria in general. The process strategy of writing will help to allay the fear of writing in individual learners who have developed the, *I can't write attitude,* due to initial emphasis of other previous writing methods in past years of spelling accuracy and neatness of work, because there is now a conference between the teacher and the student, with the teacher building confidence and inspiring the ability to write in the students. The adoption of the process strategy in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, will improve the skill of individuals in writing, because it is an approach that encourages regular exercises of writing so that the ability and technique to write are developed, mastered, and maintained. The process-conference strategy stimulates the interest of learners to write, since the intent of the approach is to produce an error-free product of writing. The process-conference strategy will lead to creative writing, in that since the sampled students in Obingwa Local Government Area, asserted that they enjoyed writing, the adoption of the process-conference method will inform the students through the teachers, of the procedures required for effective writing exercises. This is because students can follow the approach to produce books of few pages that are educative and entertaining. The process - conference approach will lead to a reduction in spelling and punctuation errors since the strategy gives room for the teachers to edit and revise the work of the students before the writing process is concluded. The process-conference method in the teaching of writing in secondary schools in Obingwa, will help to bring the teachers and the learners closer. This helps to create a more relaxed and friendlier atmosphere in teaching and learning, therefore helping the teacher to identify the different problems of individual learners. The process-conference method of teaching writing will encourage research work in individual learners in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area, because the teacher through the process will arrange their ideas about a particular topic so that there will be a logical consistence in every line of argument. The process strategy of teaching writing will reduce failures in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area, in that students will develop the language and the skill with which to answer their questions in an order that is consistent and coherent.

The process-conference method of teaching writing will bring about theoretical satisfaction of a job well done among students in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State. This intrinsic reward will act as a stepping stone to greater heights in art of writing. The process-conference strategy of teaching writing will encourage and enhance communication through writing among

students in the Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State. What more, students can now write articles through the press, commenting or criticizing about any abnormalities in their area like; bad roads, poor health services, exam malpractices, religious crisis and the like in their area. They can even go further to compete in international essay writing competitions on important occasions like; *The United Nations International Day of the Child.* The process-conference method of teaching writing in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area, will enhance systematic and accurate recording of events and acts among the students. This means that accurate records can be made of historic events by the students for reference purposes. From the above conclusion, on the problems and prospects of the process-conference method of writing in secondary schools in Obingwa local government Area, one can therefore make the following recommendations to alleviate and encourage the adoption of the process conference method of teaching by suggesting: that qualified and adequate number of teachers be employed in secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State to balance the student-teacher ratio required for the attainment of the prospects of the conference strategy of writing, that students in the Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State should be encouraged to buy their textbooks in order to enable them read wide and extensively outside what the teacher has taught them in class for reinforcement of writing skills, that The student should be taught writing using the process-conference method, in that it gives the students guidelines with which to follow in the writing process to reduce much errors that could result from poor organization, poor grammatical constructions, that teaching aids like language laboratories, libraries should be built for schools in the Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, through a joint effort of the government, parent-teachers' association and other well wishers of secondary education in the area, that the teachers responsible for the teaching of writing, should encourage the students to increase their word power (vocabulary) and be cautious of their spellings and punctuation marks in that without these linguistic skills, more errors are bound to occur in the writing.

that, more periods should be allotted to writing lessons on the time table and be effected in practice in class, to encourage constant practising of teaching and learning writing skills in the secondary schools in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, that the adoption of the process-conference method in the teaching of writing, should be encouraged irrespective of the fact that it is strenuous on both the teacher and the learner, because it not only improves skills in writing but it also promotes a better human and social relationship between the teacher and the student because of the cordial social relationship that gradually develops between the teacher and the student as the consultation and conferencing goes on, that language teachers should be sent on refresher courses to update their knowledge on the process-conference method of writing. This is to enable the teachers to pass information gathered from such in-training courses across to their students, and finally, the government should increase the salaries of language teachers because their work at school is much, demanding, tasking and strenuous. This measure is to induce them to do a more efficient work in their field of service. One must not forget that the foundation they lay will affect how well the students in secondary schools in the Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State will perform. The fact being that language is the bedrock for the teaching and learning.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

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