

Instructions on Metacognitive Learning Strategy and the Effects on Narrative Essay Writing Ability of Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of instructions on metacognitive learning strategy on narrative essay writing ability of Senior Secondary School students in Sokoto State. The main objective was to find out whether training on metacognitive learning strategy has impact on narrative essay writing of the students. Five research questions and five null hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. One hundred and twenty-eight students from SS II in the State served as sample. A Quasi-experimental design was used where a pre-test, treatment and post-test was conducted. A researcher design test instrument called Narrative Essay Writing Test (NEWT) was used to gather data. The instrument was validated and pilot tested using test-retest method. The reliability index of the instruments was 0.75. An intact class was used as experimental group while another intact class served as control group. The control group received instruction on narrative essay writing while the experimental group received instruction on narrative essay writing along with training on metacognitive learning strategy. The statistical tools used in the analysis of the data were mean, standard deviation and t-test. It was found that experimental groups performed better than their control groups' in the four aspects of narrative essay writing. The conclusion drawn from this was that metacognitive learning strategy can help improve students' narrative essay writing ability. It was therefore recommended that students at Senior Secondary School level in Sokoto State should be given training on metacognitive learning strategy to enhance their narrative essay writing ability. Furthermore, adequate training should be given to teachers of English as a second language (L2) on metacognitive learning strategies and they should be encouraged to integrate same into their narrative essay writing lessons.

Key Words: Metacognitive Strategies, Essay Writing, Narrative Essay, Senior Secondary School, Content of Essay, Organisation of Essay

1. Introduction

The vital role played by acquisition of English language skills in the socio-economic, political and academic life of Nigerian students cannot be underscored. English language has remained the official and common language in Nigeria where tribes and tongues differ. It is the medium of instruction of which knowledge and skills at levels above the lower basic of formal education are acquired by learners. Therefore, proficiency in English language is a passport to good education and social mobility in Nigeria society. Consequently, mastering and use of the various skills of the language become corner stone of English curriculum at secondary education level in Nigeria.

Writing is one of the most vital activities of a literate society. It is foundational to success in academics, in the work place and in the global economy. The rising demand for a literate society globally has made proficiency in writing paramount in education. Rog (2007) emphasizes that students need to read so they can learn about the world but they need to know how to write so they can change the world. This statement captures the centrality of writing to life generally. One of the great challenges facing English Language teachers in Sokoto State is that of teaching written composition. For instance, Saleh (2007) conducted an error analysis of the written work of students in Sokoto State and found that 29.5% of the sampled students did not attempt the writing section at all because they are simply ill-equipped to write. This is indeed a matter of great concern. Perhaps both the teaching methods adopted by language teachers and learning strategies used by students to write essays keep them at a disadvantage. It is against this backdrop that the researchers decided to look for alternative ways of teaching writing skills for students to write better narrative essays with ease.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Determine the difference between the Narrative Essay writing ability of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group.
2. Determine the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the content aspect of Narrative Essay writing.
3. Determine the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the organization aspect of Narrative Essay writing.
4. Identify the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the expression aspect of Narrative essay writing.
5. Find out the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the mechanical accuracy aspect of Narrative Essay writing.

2.2 Research Questions

To aid the conduct of the research, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the difference between the narrative essay writing ability of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group?
2. What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the content aspect of Narrative Essay writing?
3. What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the organization aspect of Narrative Essay writing?
4. What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the expression aspect of Narrative Essay writing?
5. What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the mechanical accuracy aspect of Narrative Essay writing?

2.3 Research Hypotheses

To guide the conduct of the research, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant difference between the narrative essay writing ability of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group.
2. There is no significant difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the content aspect of Narrative Essay writing.
3. There is no significant difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the organization aspect of Narrative Essay writing.
4. There is no significant difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the expression aspect of Narrative Essay writing.
5. There is no significant difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the mechanical accuracy aspect of Narrative Essay writing.

3. Review of Related Literature

Essay writing refers to writing of one's opinions, experiences, prejudices and inner passions to be read. Essays are best written when "the writer has a wide range of knowledge, possesses impeccable linguistic proficiency and has the ability to organize the ideas in coherent, organically related paragraphs" (Olusegun, 2001: 11). Narrative essay is writing about a succession of events or storytelling. The events may be factual or imaginary. These skills can be acquired when the right strategy of learning to write is applied by the students. One of the best learning strategies according to scholars (Fenghua and Chen 2010; Conner 2007) is metacognitive learning strategy which sprang from the broad term metacognition. Metacognition is thinking about thinking and is most commonly broken down into two distinct but interrelated areas: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. Metacognitive knowledge is awareness of one's thinking or thinking about what one knows. It is viewed by Zhang (2010) as highly interactive knowledge variable of person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge.

Person's knowledge refers to general knowledge that learners have acquired about themselves as learners, which facilitate or inhibit learning. We know that children are not very accurate or efficient at describing what they know, but as they get older their skills improve, especially if they have been taught and have had practice in how to think about and discuss their own thinking. Task knowledge generally involves three aspects: Learners' knowledge about the task purpose and how it will meet their learning needs and goals (Breen 1987), knowledge about the nature of a particular task identified through a classification process; information about a task's demands such as the approach to the task and the knowledge and skills needed to complete the task. Strategic knowledge on the other hand, refers to general knowledge about the types and usefulness of strategies, and specific knowledge about their utility for learning. Of particular importance are metacognitive strategies, which are "general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate and guide their learning, i.e. planning, monitoring and evaluating" (Wenden, 1998: 519). One common approach to developing metacognitive skills involves teaching study strategies that require students to think about the way they learn best.

Metacognitive regulation otherwise known as self-direction or directing learning refers to the processes by which learners plan how to approach a task, their analysis of the task, and the monitoring of its implementation. The cognitive literature refers to the same processes as self-regulation (Wenden, 2001). When a student has information about his/her thinking (metacognitive knowledge), he/she is able to use this information to direct or regulate his/her learning. Metacognitive learning strategy is a procedure management adopted by learners to learn a second or foreign language successfully, an act regulated by learners themselves (China 2010). It includes determining and adjusting learning aims, choosing learning methods and skills and evaluating learning results. It is a strategy consisting of self- planning on a given task, self- monitoring in the course of executing the plan and self- evaluation after completing the task. Once learners have a good command of metacognitive learning strategy, they will become more independent and autonomous and will be more capable of planning, monitoring and evaluating their writing processes and thus become efficient writers (Chen & Fenghua 2010). This is because numerous studies revealed that mastery of writing skill can be made easy through direct instruction on metacognitive learning strategies (Olson & Robert, 2004; Kasper 1997; Uwazurike, 2010).

Conner (2007) conducted a study on final year high school students. It was aimed at investigating the relationship between strategy use and sophistication of their essays. The results showed that students who produced good quality essays used metacognitive strategy to plan and monitor their work more than students whose essays were of poor quality. The current research is unique to the ones outlined above as it touched on specific form of writing, that is narrative essay writing which is fundamental to WAEC, GCE and NECO paper one test of English in Nigeria.

4. Methodology

Quasi-experimental design was used for the conduct of the study. Thus, a pre-test-treatment-post-test approach was used to ascertain the impact of instruction on metacognitive learning strategy on student' narrative essay writing ability. One intact class served as experimental group and was paired with another intact class as control group. The control group received instruction on narrative essay writing while the experimental group received the same instruction on narrative essay writing with an additional integrated training on metacognitive learning strategy of planning, monitoring and evaluation from the researchers. The subjects used in the study were senior secondary school II (SS II) students in Sokoto State. Their age ranged from 16-19 years. The total number of this category of students for the 2011/2012 academic session when the study was conducted was 11,839 from 57 senior secondary schools in the State. The samples selected for the research were 128 (59 experimental and 69 control) SSII students from two intact classes of two senior secondary schools. Simple random sampling technique was used in the selection of one intact class that participated in the study.

An instrument tagged 'Narrative Essay Writing Test (NEWT)' was developed by the researchers using the contents of the Senior Secondary Education Curriculum (English language) for SS 1-3 of the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2007). The test item was constructed drawing from the provisions of the syllabus for SS II on "writing for effective communication" aspect of the curriculum. The study lasted for six weeks with pre-tests conducted in the first week. Metacognitive learning strategy in this study was of three aspects. The first being self-planning was therefore exhaustively discussed with the experimental group. This was done with ease as students' past experiences were used in activating their critical thinking thereby coming-up with ideas which were brained-stormed and put in bubbles. Some of the main areas and ideas generated are presented in Figure 1.

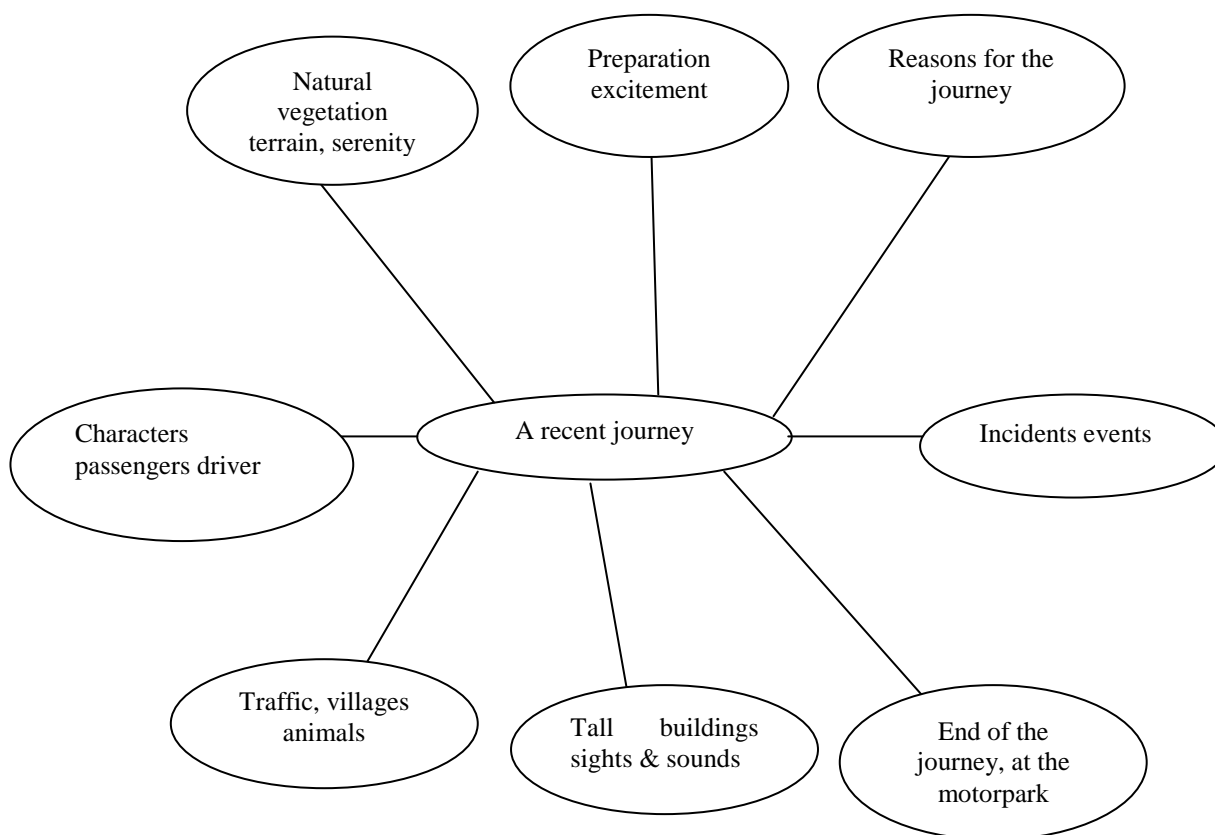


Figure: 1 Parts of a Recent Journey.

The students were then trained on how to make plans for writing the narrative essay taking into account some of the ideas generated which would be expanded for a good narration. The use of flash back technique was concretized with clear examples.

Self-monitoring was then introduced in the third week of the study. Students were trained on how to monitor their narration for precision and meeting the required length of the essay. Self-monitoring technique embodies the ability to stay clear of mistakes of grammar, sentence structure and inconsistent tense use. It also includes avoidance technique with regards to spelling and punctuation marks so that the student is constantly reminded and aware of such mistakes which could thwarts his or her effort of obtaining a good grade. Students were therefore offered training in this direction in practical terms as they partake in building up a draft of their respective journeys taking into consideration the plan made the previous week.

The fourth week featured discussion on self-evaluation of the draft made i.e. the narration on the journey recently made. Here, students were trained on self-assessment of the piece of writing. This was done in order to pick or edit the write-up for spelling mistakes, faulty grammar, vocabulary, concord, punctuation, tenses etc. Self-evaluation ensures a more and improved write-up since check and balances are made with reference to fluency, accuracy and even content of the narration. The overall assessment of the efforts at narrating a journey from the start to the end of the journey was made making sure that a rich piece of writing is arrived at. Week five of the study was extensive training on the use of the metacognitive learning strategy of self-planning, monitoring and evaluation integrated in writing a narrative essay on 'a recent journey'. This was done in three stages. The first stage was practical demonstration of writing a modeled narrative essay with the aid of the bubbles generated taking into account the technique of self-monitoring. The students were engaged on constructing coherent sentences to make-up a paragraph with clear linkages relevant to subsequent paragraphs.

Next, students were guided by the researcher to compose their respective essays and tasked to edit it against the criteria of spelling, punctuation, style, language used, length etc. Students were then asked to make an independent effort at narrating a journey they made recently. It was expected that they would utilize the

knowledge gained through the training on metacognitive learning strategy to accomplish the task successfully. The data collected through the making of their efforts were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while inferential statistics of t-test was used to test the five hypotheses formulated for the study. The data generated through these processes were used to frame the Tables presented in the findings.

5.1 Findings

The hypotheses of the study were tested at 0.05 alpha levels. The criteria for decision making was, if the alpha value of 0.05 exceeds the p-value in the t-test, then the null hypothesis would be rejected, otherwise the null hypothesis would be upheld. The analysis of each research question was done then followed by the corresponding hypothesis since the data required for the two were contained in the same Table.

Research Question 1: What is the difference between the narrative essay writing ability of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group?

Table 1: t-test Comparing Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Narrative Essay

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Experimental	59	46.59	15.36	126	7.79	0.00	Ho: Reject
Control Group	69	29.51	9.05				

To answer Research Question 1, the information in Table 1 serve as guide. The Table shows that the experimental students exposed to metacognitive training scored a mean score of 46.59 in their performance in narrative essay writing with a standard deviation of 15.36. The control group students on the other hand who were taught narrative essay only recorded a mean score of 29.51 and a standard deviation of 9.05. The difference in the mean score between the two groups was 17.08 in favour of the students in the experimental group. This difference was subjected to further analysis in Hypothesis One.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the narrative essay writing ability of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group.

Table 1 showed that there was a difference between the post-test mean scores of control and experimental groups in narrative essay writing. The value of t-calculated was 7.79, the degree of freedom was 126 while the p-value was 0.00. The decision reached was that Hypothesis One that assumes no significant difference in this direction was rejected because the alpha value of 0.05 was greater the p-value of 0.00. This mean that the students in experimental group performed much better than those in control group. Thus metacognitive learning strategy proved to be quite effective in improving the narrative essay writing ability of students of senior secondary school (SSII) students in Sokoto State.

Research Question 2: What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the content aspect of Narrative Essay writing?

Table 2: t-test Comparing Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Content of Narrative Essay

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Experimental	59	17.02	3.36	126	9.11	0.00	Ho: Reject
Control Group	69	11.38	3.60				

To answer Research Question 2, reference is made to the descriptive statistics in Table 2 which showed that the mean score of students in experimental group exposed to metacognitive treatment as well as essay writing was 17.02 Content segment of Essay writing. The standard deviation recorded by the same group was 3.36. The students in control group on the other hand had a mean score of 11.38 with a standard deviation of 3.60. The difference in the two means was 5.64. This difference was subjected to t-test in Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the posttest performances of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the Content aspect of Narrative essay writing.

Table 2 indicated that the calculated t-value was 9.11 while the p-value was 0.00. Since the P-value is less than the alpha value, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that metacognitive learning strategy has proved to be effective in facilitating the learning of content aspect of narrative essay among SS II students of Sokoto State.

Research Question 3: What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the organization aspect of Narrative Essay writing?

Table 3: t-test Comparing Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Organization of Narrative Essay

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Experimental	59	12.51	4.567	126	4.11	0.00	Ho: Reject
Control Group	69	9.71	3.08				

Table 3 provides the data that answer Research Question 3. The descriptive information in the Table shows that the mean score of students in experimental group in respect of organization component of narrative essay was 12.51 with a standard deviation of 4.57. The students in the control group recorded a mean score of 9.71 while the standard deviation stood at 3.08. The difference in mean performance was 2.8 in favour of the experimental group. This variation in mean score was subjected to further analysis in Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference between the posttest performances of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the Organization aspect of Narrative essay writing.

To test H_03 , t-test analysis was carried out to compare the two means. Table 3 again showed that t-calculated was 4.11 with a p-value of 0.00. The degree of freedom was 126. Hypothesis 3 was rejected on the ground that the p-value was smaller than the alpha value 0.05. Based on this submission, the observed difference in the posttest scores of experimental and control groups on the organization aspect of narrative essay writing of SS II students in Sokoto State was significant to draw the inference that metacognitive knowledge can improve the organization essay writing ability of the subjects.

Research Question 4: What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the expression aspect of Narrative Essay writing?

Table 4: t-test Comparing Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Expression of Narrative Essay.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Experimental	59	11.66	5.28	126	8.52	0.00	Ho: Reject
Control Group	69	5.70	2.25				

Table 4 holds the data related to Research Question 4 and Hypothesis 4. The mean score of students in experimental group in respect of the expression aspects of narrative essay was 11.66 and their standard deviation was 5.28. The students in the control group recorded a mean score of 5.70 with a standard deviation of 2.25. The observed mean difference was 5.96. This was tested in Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between the posttest performances of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the Expression aspect of Narrative essay writing.

Table 4 shows that the t-calculated was 8.52, the degree of freedom was 126 while the p-value was 0.00. The alpha value of 0.05 was higher than the p-value which necessitated the rejection of Hypothesis 4. On the strength of these data, it was concluded that the difference observed between the posttest scores of SS II students who were exposed to metacognitive learning strategy and the control group was significant to infer that the treatment package of metacognitive instructions helps in developing expression aspect of narrative essay writing among the control groups.

Question 5: What is the difference between the performance of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the conventional group in the mechanical accuracy aspect of Narrative Essay writing?

Table 5: t-test Comparing Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Mechanical Accuracy of Narrative Essay

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Experimental	59	5.41	3.33	126	5.94	0.00	Ho 5: Reject
Control Group	69	2.72	1.59				

Question 5 and Hypothesis 5 focus on the mechanics of essay writing. The Table shows that the mean score of students in experimental group was 5.41 while the standard deviation was 3.33 mechanical accuracy aspect of narrative essay. The students in the control group on the other hand scored a mean score of 2.72 with a standard deviation of 1.59. The mean difference between the two groups was 2.69. This difference was the subject of comparison in Hypothesis

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference between the posttest performances of SS II students trained on metacognitive learning strategy and the control group in the Mechanical Accuracy aspect of Narrative essay writing

Table 5 indicated that the value of t-calculated was 5.94 with 126 degree of freedom. The p-value of 0.00 was observed to be smaller than the alpha value of 0.05 set for the research. Therefore, Null Hypothesis 5 was rejected. Thus, it is inferred that metacognitive learning strategy was effective in promoting the learning of the mechanical accuracy aspect of narrative essay writing among SS II students in Sokoto State.

Based on the analysis of the study, the following are the major findings:

1. The SS II students in the experimental group who were trained on metacognitive learning strategy made more gains in their narrative essay writing scores than students in control group who were taught narrative essay only. This is because the mean score of experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group.
2. The SS II students in the experimental groups who were trained on metacognitive learning strategy made more gains in their post-test mean scores on ‘Content’ aspect of narrative essay writing than their counterpart in the control group.
3. The SS II students in the experimental group trained on metacognitive learning strategy made more gains in their post-test mean scores on ‘Organization’ aspect of narrative essay writing than the control group.
4. The SS II students in the experimental groups who were trained on metacognitive learning strategy made more gains in their post-test mean scores on ‘Expression’ aspect of narrative essay writing than the control group counterparts.
5. The SS II students in the experimental groups trained on metacognitive learning strategy made more gains in their post-test mean scores on ‘Mechanical Accuracy’ aspect of narrative essay writing than the control group.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the impact of metacognitive learning strategy on essay writing ability of senior secondary school (SSII) students in Sokoto State. Findings from numerous studies revealed that mastery of writing skill can be made easy through direct instruction on metacognitive strategies (See, Razi 2012; Kasper, 1997). The present investigation confirmed the aforementioned findings. Result of posttest mean scores of experimental group

exposed to metacognitive learning strategy was significantly greater than that of the control group who received the conventional writing instruction on narrative essay writing. Findings from studies conducted that suggest the potency of metacognitive strategy in promoting effective essay writing were in agreement with the findings of the present study. For example, Chularut in Smith (2003) after conducting a study on metacognition and students in ESL classroom concluded that students receiving explicit instruction in concept mapping would outperform students in alternative learning strategy conditions on achievement, self-monitoring, knowledge acquisition strategies and self-efficacy. The above also concurred with the findings of the research especially in narrative essay writing. It was found that EG2 performed better in narrative essay writing in their posttest mean scores when compared to results of CG2. In other words, students who received training on metacognitive strategy in narrative essay writing did better than those who were not explicitly exposed to the idea of metacognitive strategy use.

The qualitative data indicated that gains were recorded on the part of the students trained on the use of metacognitive learning strategy on narrative essay writing. The post test scores depicted that improvement were observed on the 'Content', 'Organization' and 'Expression' as well as the 'Mechanical Accuracy' aspects of narrative essay writing. Findings of the research supported the position of Magno (2008) who carried out a study on reading strategy, amount of writing, metacognition, metamemory and apprehension as predictors of English written proficiency. The researcher concludes that teaching students to make use of the three different strategies (reading strategy, metacognitive strategy and metamemory strategy) may lead them to produce improved compositions, narrations in written form, essays and written reports.

6. Recommendations

In consonance with the findings of the research the following recommendations were offered:

- 1) The learners of English especially at secondary school levels should be encouraged to study the basic process and the art of essay writing to improve their writing ability.
- 2) At the same time, English language teachers should put extra effort at teaching the students well so as to achieve better results through effective pedagogy.
- 3) Learners of English language should be trained to become aware of the existence of metacognitive learning strategy and its efficacy at improving their writing ability.
- 4) Explicit metacognitive training should be offered to students of secondary schools which will go a long way in enriching their narrative writing performances.
- 5) Teachers of English language should be given professional training on the usefulness of metacognitive strategies and the effective ways of training learners to adopt the strategies for autonomous learning. For instance, National Teachers Institute (NTI) can organize workshops for English language teachers to promote the use of metacognitive leaning strategy.
- 6) An infusion of a course of study or a course content known as strategy training in the curriculum of would-be-teachers of English at either the NCE or Degree level or (both) could equipped teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills to offer instruction on metacognitive learning strategies to students

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