

Perspectives
on
Applied
Linguistics
in
Language & Literature

Edited by

Adebayo Lawal
Keomaisiugo-Abanibe
Isaac Nnam Ohia

**Perspectives on Applied
Linguistics in Language
and Literature**

in

**Honour of
Professor Ephraim Ebohinye Ubahakwe**

Edited by:

**Adebayo Lawal
Ifeoma Isiugo-Abanihe
Isaac Nnam Ohia**

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Effects of an Activity-Oriented Scoring Seminar on Reliability in Scoring of Written Composition in English

Monica N. Odinko
and
Promise N. Okpala

Introduction

The testing of essays, e.g. written composition, had been plagued with the fear of unreliability (Obanya and Okpala, 1984a; Onocha and Okpala, 1995). Studies (Finlayson, 1991; Grieve, 1965) have shown that it is not easy for two persons to assess the same piece of writing the same way. Thus, to reduce subjectivity and increase reliability in the marking of composition, researchers in language education and educational evaluation (Gronlund, 1976; Obanya, 1977) have advocated:

- (i) the use of multiple raters and multiple tasks. These have in fact been put into use in research studies in Nigeria (e.g. Obanya, 1981; Obanya and Okpala, 1984a). In such cases, the average of scores of a number of raters, and the scores on a variety of writing tasks, have been regarded as being nearer to the 'true scores' of the testees;
- (ii) the use of analytical as well as impressionistic scoring. It has since been the practice to combine the two procedures (IEA, 1983; Obanya and Okpala, 1984b); and
- (iii) the introduction of pre-scoring training/coordination sessions for scorers has been put into extensive practice by the West African Examination Council and other organised examination bodies (Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji, 1993).

Along these lines, the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan recently organised a three day activity-oriented scoring seminar for practising teachers who participated in the scoring of essays in English written by some primary six pupils in Ibadan,

Nigeria. The Institute's efforts took cognizance of the view that teachers could be trained to improve on the reliability values associated with their scoring of essays. This was the background against which the investigators conducted the present study which examined the impact of an activity-oriented scoring seminar on reliability values associated with scoring of written composition in English Language.

More specifically, it was hypothesized that English language teachers exposed to activity-oriented scoring seminar are likely to exhibit more reliability than their unexposed counterparts ($p < 0.05$):

- (i) when they score the same essay (inter-rater reliability); and
- (ii) when each teacher scores the same essay twice (intra-rater reliability).

Methodology

(a) Subjects

These were 42 practising teachers (16 males and 26 females) from 28 primary schools in South-West Nigeria who participated in a three-day activity oriented scoring seminar organised by the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan. Most of the teachers (67%) were holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education, while the remaining 33% were holders of Teachers Grade II certificate and Associateship Certificate in Education. The teachers also had varied years of teaching experience (mean teaching experience = 8.5 years; S.D. = 3.3). Their ages ranged from 27 to 48 years with a mean age of 38.1 years and a standard deviation of 4.3.

(b) Treatment

The seminar was directed towards exposing the participants to the theory and practice of impressionistic and analytical scoring of essays using the scoring guide developed for the International Study of Achievement in Written Composition by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement). The guide stipulates that each essay be scored on five different criteria (each on a five-point scale) as follow:

- (i) **Over-all** Impression 5 4 3 2 1
- (ii) **Content** (Amount of relevant details and absence of superfluity) 5 4 3 2 1

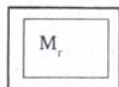
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|---|-----------|
| (iii) Organisation (Global details before specific details) | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| (iv) Style and Appropriateness (Easy flow of sentences and use of appropriate words) | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| (v) Mechanics (Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation) | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| (vi) Total (Summation of ratings on (i) to (v)). | |

It also provides the following explanations, on each point on the scale to further guide the scorer: 5 = Excellent; 4 = Very good; 3 = Good; 2 = Poor; 1 = Very poor. In all, the seminar lasted for 21 contact hours (spread over a period of 3 days) of lectures/discussion (5 hours) and practicals on scoring activities (16 hours).

The validity and reliability of the scoring guide has been established during earlier studies that involved primary school teachers in 18 states of Nigeria (Obanya and Okpala, 1984 a,b,c). However, for the purpose of this study, the guide was trial-tested using 3 primary school teachers who scored two composition tests written by primary six pupils in Ibadan. The results showed no ambiguities in the guide and produced inter-rater and intra-rater reliability values that ranged from 0.81 to 0.85, and 0.83 to 0.88 respectively.

(c) Procedure/Design

The seminar was organised for the 42 teachers in two independent groups of 21 teachers per group. The organisation was also such that the seminar for the first group (A) was completed before that of the second group (B) started. In addition, part of the initial preparation (before the arrival of the participants) involved assigning pairs of teachers, matched for qualification and training experience at random to the two groups. Whether a group (i.e A or B) should be experimental or control was decided at random. The choice, however, made group A the experimental group; thus, data were collected from teachers in the experimental group (A) at the end of the seminar and from those in the control group (B) at the beginning of the seminar. The research therefore followed experimental group - control group, matched subjects design that can be illustrated diagrammatically as follows:



X	Y (experimental)
X	Y (control)

(d) Instrumentation

A descriptive essay developed for the International Study of Achievement in Written Composition by the IEA was used for the study. The instructions were as follows:

You are going to visit an uncle who has never seen you in person and you have no photograph to send him. Provide a short description of yourself (what you look like, what you will be wearing on the day of your visit and any other special thing about yourself, so that your uncle can recognize you very easily).

Prior to this investigation, primary six pupils in 18 states of Nigeria did not experience any ambiguities in responding to the essay during the IEA study of Achievement in Written composition (Obanya and Okpala, 1984c). However, in the course of this investigation, the essay was trial - tested on primary 6 pupils in 5 schools in Ibadan who also did not experience any ambiguities in responding to it.

The essay used to generate data on the dependent variable of this investigation was written by primary six pupils of two schools located within University of Ibadan environment (a private, fee paying school and a public school).

(e) Data Collection and Analysis

The investigators and two other research assistants collected all the relevant data directly from participants in the seminar (teachers) and primary six pupils.

Data analysis involved using the standard normal distribution (z) to test for significant differences between reliability values (inter-rater and intra-rater respectively) associated with teachers (raters) in the experimental and control groups.

Results

(i) Impact of Treatment on Inter-rater Reliability of Teachers

Table I shows a comparison data on inter-rater reliability values of teachers in the experimental and control groups. The table

shows, for each criterion measure, the range of reliability values of teachers in the experimental group (r_e) and the control group (r_c), the z_{obs} associated with lower and upper limits of range of the reliability values, and the range of coefficient of determination (r^2) associated with the respective reliability values. As can be seen from the Table, all the z_{obs} values were significant at the 0.05 level (directional test). This pattern of result tends to be consistent across the six criteria of the scoring guide. The Table also shows that the coefficient of determination (r^2) values varied from 0.217 to 0.925 for teachers in the experimental group as against a set of values that varied from 0.045 to 0.261 in the control group. The r^2 values, as can be seen from the Table, was least during impressionistic scoring among teachers in the experimental group whereas this was not the case for teachers in the control group.

Table I
Differences in Inter-rater Reliability of Scorers in Experimental and Control Groups.

Criterion	Range of r_e	Range of r_c	Z_{tl}	Z_{ru}	Range of r_e^2	Range of r_c^2
Over-all Impression	0.521-0.743	0.274-0.428	2.01*	1.98*	0.217-0.552	0.075-0.183
Content	0.810-0.904	0.213-0.401	3.07*	2.87*	0.656-0.817	0.045-0.161
Organisation	0.847-0.962	0.310-0.511	2.39*	2.24*	0.717-0.925	0.096-0.261
Style	0.881-0.961	0.293-0.411	3.16*	2.95*	0.776-0.923	0.086-0.169
Mechanics	0.806-0.924	0.216-0.502	2.95*	2.16*	0.650-0.848	0.047-0.252
Total	0.833-0.939	0.265-0.443	3.32*	3.03*	0.689-0.882	0.070-0.196

*Significant at the 0.05 level (directional test).

(ii) Impact of Treatment on Intra-rater Reliability Values of Teachers

Table II shows a comparison of data associated with intra-rater reliability values of teachers in the experimental and control groups. As can be seen from the Table, the intra-rater reliability values varied from 0.628 to 0.949 for teachers in the experimental group, and from 0.381 to 0.412 for teachers in the control group. All the z_{obs} values, except the one associated with impressionistic scoring, were found to be significant at the 0.05 level (directional test). The Table also shows that the coefficient of determination (r^2) values associated with the intra-rater reliability values varied

from 0.394 to 0.855 (for teachers in the experimental group) as against a set of values that varied from 0.144 to 0.170 (for teachers in the control group). The least of the r^2 values, as can be seen from the Table, was obtained during impressionistic scoring among teachers in the experimental group whereas its values was highest during impressionistic scoring among teachers in the control group.

Table II
Differences in Intra-rater Reliability of Scorers in
Experimental and Control Groups

Criterion	r_e	r_c	Z_{obs}	r_e^2	r_c^2
Over-all					
Impression	0.628	0.412	1.46	0.394	0.170
Content	0.896	0.381	2.84*	0.803	0.145
Organisation	0.912	0.407	2.66*	0.832	0.166
Style	0.941	0.379	3.24*	0.885	0.144
Mechanics	0.844	0.411	2.28*	0.712	0.169
Total	0.895	0.376	3.01*	0.801	0.141

*Significant at the 0.05 level (directional test).

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study show that significant differences existed between the reliability values (inter-rater and intra-rater) of teachers in the experimental and control groups. The results also show that the differences existed across the five criteria of the scoring guide/total (for inter-rater) and only across the components of analytical scoring/total (for intra-rater). More specifically, the differences were such that the teachers in the experimental group, who were exposed to activity-oriented scoring seminar, exhibited more reliability in scoring the essay than their counterparts in the control group. This pattern of result is also reflected in the differences in the values of coefficient of determination (r^2) between the experimental and the control groups. As shown in Table I, what the pairs of raters (teachers) in the experimental group shared in common while scoring the same essay varied from 21.7% to 92.5% as against 4.5% to 26.1% in the control group. In the same light, Table II shows that what the pairs of rating from the same teacher in the experimental

group shared in common while scoring the same essays twice, varied from 39.4% to 88.5% as against 14.4% to 17.0% in the control group. These variations also indicate that the effect of the treatment on reliability in scoring seem to be sensitive to whether the scorer (teacher) is employing impressionistic or analytical approach to the scoring. In other words, the extent to which activity-oriented scoring seminar would improve reliability in scoring is not the same under impressionistic and analytical scoring (The results show that the improvement is much more under the analytical scoring). This, however, needs to be investigated further. These results therefore tend to support the hypothesis that English language teachers exposed to activity-oriented scoring seminar are likely to exhibit more inter-rater reliability than their unexposed counterparts ($P < 0.05$). The results also supported the hypothesis that the exposed teachers are likely to exhibit more intra-rater reliability than their unexposed counterparts ($P < 0.05$) at least for components of analytical scoring and the total score.

The need for training/coordinating scorers on how to use valid marking schemes in scoring of essays had been advocated by many educational evaluators (Gronlund, 1976; Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji, 1993; Obemeata, 1999). The West African Examination Council, a major public examination body in West Africa, had also suggested that familiarizing the scorers with the contents and methods of using valid marking schemes should be the focus of examiners co-ordination meetings. Written composition, being an essay, should therefore require scoring procedures that demand training of scorers in the contents and use of valid marking schemes. This singular view is further underscored by the results of the present study which indicated that English Language teachers, who were exposed to activity-oriented scoring seminar, exhibited more reliability in scoring than their unexposed counterparts. Such an improved reliability in scoring could boost the efforts of educational evaluators in overcoming what seems to be the greatest limitation of essay test—the subjectivity/unreliability involved in scoring the test (Onocha and Okpala, 1994).

The result that no significant difference existed between intra-rater reliability levels of scorers in the experimental and control groups (under impressionistic scoring) as against the significant differences observed between their inter-rater reliability perhaps

indicate that impressions are more consistent within raters than between raters. In previous investigations that focused on reliability in scoring written compositions (IEA, 1983; Obanya and Okpala, 1984a) it has been suggested that increasing the number of raters could increase the reliability values. However, the present study shows that such an increase, if it occurred, appear not to be sensitive to raters' exposure to activity-oriented scoring seminar. That is, the increase seem to have equally occurred in the experimental and control groups hence the inability of the treatment (exposure to activity-oriented scoring seminar) to significantly influence intra-rater reliability values. It is suspected that the short duration of the seminar must have limited the impact of the treatment. Perhaps, a more intensive training of longer duration would provide significant changes in intra-rater reliability values of raters during impressionistic scoring. A follow-up activity in this direction is recommended.

In the light of the entire results and the associated discussion, we share the view that:

- (i) the process of scoring written composition in English should be such that would involve a pre-scoring activity-oriented training of all the scorers since this would help to improve reliability in scoring;
- (ii) perhaps, more time should be spent by the trainees under impressionistic approach since the associated intra-rater reliability values are not as responsive to training as those of the analytical approach; and
- (iii) the use of multiple scorers who had been exposed to pre-scoring, activity-oriented training should be encouraged in the scoring of written composition in English since it is a useful device for reducing subjectivity in scoring.

It is hoped that the implementation of these recommendations would lead to our ultimate goal of overcoming the problems of subjectivity/unreliability in the scoring of written composition in English.

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