



## **Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy in Igbo and English Language Essay Writing**

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### **Abstract**

Assessment, as an integral part of curriculum evaluation, is a very important aspect of the teaching and learning process. It is usually used by teachers to make informed decisions about students' learning and achievement and to identify effective instructional procedures that enhance learning. When assessment is done or used by students themselves or by other students of equal status, it is referred to as peer assessment. Peer assessment usually thrives when learners are given opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning as implied in learner autonomy. Both peer assessment and learner autonomy have been proved to be effective in instructional practice as shown by different studies. Therefore, peer assessment and learner autonomy can enhance Igbo and English language teaching and learning especially in essay writing if properly harnessed. This paper examines the concepts of peer assessment and learner autonomy with a view to highlighting the various ways they can be harnessed to improve the teaching and learning of essay writing in both English and Igbo language and the pros and cons associated with their implementation.

**Keywords:** Peer Assessment, Learner Autonomy, Language, Teaching and Learning

### **Introduction**

Language is a very important means of communication among human beings. It is basically a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings use to communicate with each other (Azizu, 2018). With language, multicultural relationships and uniqueness are established among people from diverse linguistic background. This means that language is an instrument of interaction, socialization and verbal and non-verbal expression of thoughts, ideas, information and feelings. The importance of language as a means of promoting national unity, preserving cultures and facilitating social development has been harped by the federal government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). The policy stipulates that in the interest of national unity, the English language should be taught as a subject and be also used as a medium of instruction from the fourth year in primary to any other level of education in Nigeria. The policy further states that every Nigerian, in addition to learning one of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), shall learn the language of the immediate environment. This means that Igbo as a major Nigerian language and English as a language that bridges the communication divide existing among the multifarious ethnic languages in Nigeria are very important in Nigeria education system hence, they are taught as subjects in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The inevitability of English language in Nigeria education system compels every Nigerian student to learn it as a subject and use it as a medium of communication in a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation like Nigeria. While learning the English language, students especially those of Igbo background, are encouraged to also learn Igbo both as a subject and as one of the major Nigerian languages. Considering the communicative and educational importance of these two languages and the worrisome failure rate of students in the two subjects, one begins to wonder whether the teaching of these subjects is not a far cry from being effective. For instance, apart from such problems as curriculum overload, poor language policy implementation, clamour for certification, students' seeming lack of interest in language learning and dearth of instructional materials, Nwanyanwu (2017) states that English language is extremely badly taught in Nigerian schools as evidenced by poor students' results. Nwanyanwu's statement is buttressed by Muhammed, Ya'u, Aliyu & Hassan (2018) who lamented that English language teaching in this country is a far cry from being satisfactory and such unsatisfactory teaching is not conducive for learning because it is based on 'formal and bookish' trend.

The instructional process of this traditional 'formal and bookish' teaching trend is not yielding satisfactory results as evidenced by Nwanyanwu (2017) and Muhammed et al (2018) because this process probably lacks activities that guarantee students' active engagement in the teaching and learning process of all the skills of English language especially the writing skill. On the other hand, the predominant use of the lecture or conventional method to teach virtually all aspects, especially the writing aspect of the Igbo language according to Omeje (2009), does not help matters because the method is teacher-centered as it does not allow active participation of the students. The situation becomes more worrisome as most Igbo language teachers seem not to be interested in teaching the subject. Osuala (2009) notes that such teachers are ashamed to be addressed as Igbo language teachers and as a result, they lack the new strategies needed in the teaching of the language.

The strategy used in teaching any language contributes to the success or failure of that language outcome. A good instructional strategy is a great weapon which language teachers need to employ in their professional duty of enhancing the language ability of the learners. This is because students not actively involved in class activities learn less than those who participate actively because it is easier and more interesting to learn when involved than when passive (Offorma, 2006). A good instructional strategy that encourages students' participation could also turn out to be an avenue of promoting learner autonomy. What the foregoing suggests is that there is need for an instructional strategy that will enhance active participation of students; help learners to appraise their own performance and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning as implied in learner autonomy. Such instructional strategy is expected to make learners not to depend completely on their teachers in the teaching and learning process of Igbo and English languages and especially in the essay writing aspect of the two subjects. This is where peer assessment strategy comes into play. This paper examines the concepts of peer assessment and learner autonomy with a view to highlighting the various ways they can be harnessed to improve the teaching and learning of essay writing in both English and Igbo language and the pros and cons associated with their implementation.



### **Concept of Peer Assessment in Igbo and English Language Essay Writing**

In order to determine the extent of mastery of what is taught Igbo and English Languages, teachers usually assess learners by developing a tool referred to as test such as essay writing test. The test enables the teachers to examine and describe quantitatively the extent of students' acquisition of knowledge in the two subjects. This is called assessment. In education the term assessment, according to the Glossary of Education Reform (GER, 2015), refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure and document the academic readiness, learning progress or educational needs of students. Educational assessment therefore, is systematic and involves a process of gathering information, describing and measurable terms to interpret the information for the objective of ascertaining the degree of students' success or failure and enhancing their performance in school subjects such as Igbo and English languages. There are different types of assessment but this paper focuses on peer assessment.

Peer assessment is a type of assessment in which students, by their teacher's permission, grade or assess works, assignments, tests or essays of their peers based on teacher-prepared assessment criteria. Tes (2019) notes that peer assessment is a key assessment-for-learning strategy that can help teachers to quickly determine the level of knowledge and understanding of students because it involves students in assessment process that allows them to take the role of the teacher by reviewing work of other students against a set criteria. Involving students in the assessment process encourages them to take responsibility for their learning. According to Falchikov (2007), what makes peer assessment an important component of learning is its potential of increasing students' motivation and engagement; encouraging them to learn more deeply and building up their understanding rather than just knowledge of the facts as well as gaining an insight into their own approach to assessment task in comparison to their peers. The unique feature of peer assessment is that students may get to know and understand themselves better and may also learn the art of objective and critical judgement as they engage in assessing the work of their peers thereby making them become more actively engaged in their learning processes.

Peer assessment can be used in the assessment of essays. It has a lot of advantages for teachers and students in the teaching and learning process of Igbo and English language essay writing. For instance, it helps teachers to manage their time more effectively while having students grade each other's essays in an efficient classroom (Sadler & Good, 2006). In other words, it saves teacher's time and workload. This is because when students assess their essays, an entire class' essay can be assessed in the classroom within the time limit it would take a teacher to grade one essay. Moreover, rather than having a teacher rush through each essay, students are able to take their time to correct them. Students can also spend more time in assessing a particular essay writing because they may only have to assess one or two essays and can therefore do a more thorough job.

Peer assessment is also advantageous to students. It improves students' understanding of course materials as well as improve their meta-cognitive skills which include self-monitoring (checking one's performance by oneself), self-evaluation (appraising one's performance in relation to one's own standards) and self-reinforcement (rewarding oneself for success). This is true because through peer assessment, students are able to see mistakes in their writing and be able to correct them in readiness for any future assignments or tests in Igbo and English language essays. This means that if students are assessed by their peers in essay writing, they are likely to focus more on what they

did wrong and how to correct their weaknesses. This will improve their subsequent work (essays) and allow students time to digest information and may also lead to better understanding (Ngar-fun & Carless, 2006) of the skills of essay writing with less emphasis on grades. Peer assessment also plays meta-cognitive role. By assessing essays, students are better able to understand assessment process of different essay writing questions they encounter in Igbo and English language examinations. At this point, they can properly internalize their strengths and weaknesses in essay writing with a view of building on their strengths; correcting their mistakes and learning how to write better. With peer assessment, students also learn better strategies for writing Igbo and English language essay writing tests. Sadler & Good (2006) adds that by assessing essays, students may learn how to complete essays more accurately thereby improving their tests results.

Peer assessment is necessitated by the fact that tutor or one-shot assessment techniques have some debilitating impacts on students' all-round developments. Emphasis on the outcome of final Igbo and English language external examinations often encourages teachers to rush their teaching in order to complete the syllabus without regards to students' proper mastery and understanding of what was taught. Such rush makes it difficult for students to have proper understanding, accurate and timely feedback. Another debilitating impact is that Igbo and English language teachers tend to concentrate on the assessment of learning outcomes in the cognitive domain which include ability to recognize, recite, read, identify, recall ideas, describe, among others. Assessment in the affective domain (interest, feelings, attitudes, emotions and values) and psychomotor domain (handling of equipment and tools, designing and fabrication of equipment and neuro-muscular coordination) is more often ignored. As a result, the overall assessment of learning outcomes becomes defective, hence the need for a desirable, innovative technique such as peer assessment.

Teachers of Igbo and English languages can embark on all-round assessment of students' learning outcomes if peer assessment is properly conducted. Peer assessment can be carried out in the cognitive domain, affective domain and in the psychomotor domain. With peer assessment, the major discouraging concerns of teachers in Igbo and English language essay writing, which are the rigour of marking and students' poor performance in essay writing, may be drastically reduced. In addition, peer assessment may improve the communication of feedback as peers use similar and more accessible language and may also reduce negative feelings of being evaluated by an authority figure (Liu, Lu, Wu & Tsai, 2016).

### **Stages for Conduct of Peer Assessment Igbo and English language Essay Writing**

Conducting peer assessment in the Igbo and English language classrooms using essay writing could be a complex venture. It therefore requires conducting it in stages so that both the teachers and students may not find it cumbersome. The following procedural stages recommended by Sivan (2010), Wride (2017) and the Centre for Teaching Innovation (CTI, 2020) were adapted for peer assessment in Igbo and English language essay writing:

- **Preparation for Peer Assessment:** Things to do at this stage include:  
*Preparing ahead of time:* Before the actual assessment, the Igbo or English language teacher needs to decide ahead of time the type of essay to be assessed; whether it will be individual, group or anonymous peer assessment; how much time to allocate for the assessment; writing skills to be emphasized and assessed such as punctuation, paragraphing, correct use of tenses,



concord and use of diverse sentence structures; grading criteria such as minimum and maximum marks to be awarded to content, organization, expression, mechanical accuracy and formatting (in case of letter writing) and how to tackle any question(s) students are likely to ask.

**Notifying students of the conduct of peer assessment early:** Students are to be notified of the conduct of the peer assessment. Teachers should explain the rationale for doing peer assessment, teacher's expectation of students in the course of the assessment and the benefits of engaging in the peer assessment. This is to demystify the assessment process.

**Setting of criteria and selection evidence of achievement by students:** They should be given rules, instruments and format by the teacher such as giving directions and time limits.

**Involving students in the development of rubrics:** Teachers may involve students in the development of the rubrics (marking guide) and in the choice and number of peer assessors. Introduction of the rubrics and involvement of students at this stage is to be done through learning exercises to ensure that they have the ability to apply the rubrics effectively. Their familiarity with the marking guide enhances the validity of the assessment.

- **Pilot Testing:** At this stage, the following should be done:

**Allow students to practise:** Practising what is intended for the assessment is necessary here since it is the first time of the exercise. The Igbo or English language teacher should give the students clearly defined task(s) and ensure that they meticulously follow the guidelines.

- **Students are to practise with their friends:** Students may be allowed to be assessed first by a friend. They may be allowed to choose their friends. They can compare the assessor's (friend) note after the assessment. Such practice can enhance skills in the task and ensure a desirable outcome of the essay writing assessment exercise.

**Feedback:** Students should be given feedback and correction on the essay writing assessment carried out. This is to guard against repetition of mistakes when carrying out the main assessment.

- **The Main Assessment Exercise:** This involves the following:

- Trying out the peer assessment on the subjects intended
- An extension of an improvement on the pilot testing stage
- Assessor adhering strictly to rules earlier highlighted
- Teacher being in the midst of students to guide, check exercises and unruly behaviour
- Teacher listening to individual or group feedback and discussions and providing guidance
- And making input when necessary

## Conducting Peer Assessment

In conducting peer assessment in essay writing, students are made to take responsibility for their individual or group assessments while observing strict adherence to the guidelines and rubrics. To this end, Sivan (2010) advises that teachers are to ensure that allocation of assessors could be randomly done. Also, equal number of assessors need to be assigned to per student while anonymity, multiple assessors, avoidance of assessor-assessee pair and moderation must be appropriately maintained.



For teachers of Igbo and English languages therefore, peer assessment is profitable for essay writing because it creates room for students to be critically immersed in the written materials as they discuss the differences and similarities in the performances of their peers in essay writing. By such critical engagement, they are able to identify and judge mistakes, errors and gaps in their own essays. By so doing, they learn the intricacies (the hows and the how nots) of essay writing thereby improving their knowledge of essay writing in Igbo and English languages. Importantly, by performing both the role of assessor and being assessed, students can potentially benefit more than if they are just assessed (Reinholz, 2016).

### **Concept of Learner Autonomy**

When students in Igbo and English language classrooms are allowed to assess their own learning and achievement in essay writing by themselves, they are made to take responsibility for their learning. This is learner autonomy. It refers to the ability of learners to take responsibility for their learning, how they want to learn and what they intend to learn including strategies, techniques and the learning styles they want to adopt. David and Miller (2005) explains that learner autonomy is not an automatic obligation among students and that the autonomous learner is not automatically obliged to self-direct his learning either totally or even partially. Learners are also to take maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it and also make decisions concerning setting objectives for learning, determining ways and means of learning as well as reflecting on and evaluating what they have learnt (Richards, 2020). By implication, the learner will make use of his ability to do this only if he so wishes and if he is permitted to do so by the material, social and psychological constraints to which he is subjected.

Learner autonomy may be of help to students learning Igbo and English languages if given the opportunity to practise it especially in essay writing. For instance, by encouraging them to adopt learner autonomy in their learning, these students are able to set realistic goals, plan their work, develop coping strategies for new and unexpected situations, and perform self-evaluation and self-assessment of their work (Noraini and Noraiha, 2012). This will provide for them opportunities to learn how to learn. By so doing, they learn from their mistakes, errors, achievements and failures from their own successes and failures. Rao (2006) observes that there is a misconception about learner autonomy as it is thought that students are given 100% responsibility in learning, without the presence of a teacher and that in autonomous learning teachers do not play the conventional primary role of transmitting knowledge (teacher-centered learning) but are “autonomous teachers who are organizers, advisers and sources of information” (Horvath, 2007:104). Thus, although teachers’ roles seem to have shifted to autonomous learning, their roles are still important in promoting learner autonomy as emphasized by Sert (2006) who states that if the teachers (especially that of Igbo and English languages) who are supposed to teach their students how to take the wheel (in essay writing) are not good drivers themselves, the whole system will be at risk.

Learner autonomy is not therefore, one sided affair. Both the teacher of Igbo and English languages and students learning essay writing have a role to play. Noraini and Noraiha (2012) note that since a fruitful cooperation between the students and teachers is essential in promoting and achieving learner autonomy in language teaching, teacher such as those teaching Igbo and English



languages, must determine the aspects and the extent where learner autonomy can be sought from the students in terms of learning objectives, learning materials and assessment of their learning process.

### **Learner Autonomy in Igbo and English Language Essay Writing**

The concept of learner autonomy is based on some models. One of such models is the Autonomous Learning Support Based (ALSB) model proposed by Scharle and Szabo in Dang (2012). This model consists of three stages, namely: raising awareness, changing attitudes and transferring roles. Raising awareness is the initial cognitive process that enables learners to be conscious about learning objectives; defining the contents and determining the progression. Changing attitudes refers to the stage of transition where learners attempt to replace the previous learning behaviours with some new way of learning. They rationally select appropriate methods and techniques for their learning path. Transferring roles is the highest level of learner autonomy when learners can fully control their learning process with little structured instructions and support. Learners are involved in a process of checking the ongoing learning activities and evaluating the knowledge gained.

Scharle and Szabo's model is described by Dang (2012) as a similar and simplified version of the model proposed by Nunan (1997). Based on learners' actions, Nunan proposed a model of five degrees namely: awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. This model is similar to the stages of a learning process which is how learners are guided to perform a sequential series of behavioural and cognitive actions in learning a language item. First learners need to be aware of learning goals and prepare learning strategies. They then adopt their own goals and select suitable tasks to perform. After this, they modify, create their new learning goals and design their new tasks. Details are presented in **Table 1** below which is a five-level model of learner autonomy adapted from Nunan (1997):

Level	Student Action	Content	Process
1	<b>Awareness:</b> Students are exposed to different types of easy writing with the differences and special features of each essay type.	Students become aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using. They also decide on which essay type to write depending on their learning style, strategy and the goal they intend to achieve.	Students identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies for instance, the ideas or points they intend to discuss, how they intend to do so, number of paragraphs and the type of writing style they intend to adopt.
2	<b>Involvement:</b> They think of what to write, how to write the essay, make drafts and focus on the essay type they have chosen.	Students are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer. They want to write essays that can fetch good grades such as A, B or at least C – no student wants to fail.	Students make choices among a range of options of putting in the best of their abilities. They try to be creative and resourceful in writing the chosen essay so as not to fail.
3	<b>Intervention:</b> They engage in the actual essay writing.	Students are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and contents of the learning programme. They begin to put into practice what they learnt in Igbo or English language (depending on which subject they are writing the essay) such as grammar rules, idiomatic expression, figures of speech and rules of concord. Their aim is to achieve their goals which are essay writing mastery and passing essay writing examinations.	Students modify/adapt tasks and contents of the learning programme. They endeavour to strategize and correct themselves where they discovered that they have violated the rules or for instance, used wrong expressions.
4	<b>Creation:</b> They finally write the essays to their satisfaction and get them ready for peer assessment.	Students create their own goals and objectives. By now, students are convinced that they have achieved their goals. At least, they can attempt writing any type of essay.	Depending on the learning materials, social and psychological constraints and the learning environment and condition to which they are subjected, students create their own essay writing tasks.
5	<b>Transcendence:</b> After passing through the peer assessment process, students internalize the corrections made and begin to apply the new writing skills they learnt.	Students go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom and their new learning.	Students become researchers and teachers. They can now keep on learning by continuous practice of essay writing and teaching one another.





### **Empirical Evidences for Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy**

Peer assessment has been the subject of considerable research interest over the last three decades with numerous educational researchers advocating for the integration of peer assessment into schools and instructional practice (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2019). The considerable research attention given to peer assessment by various studies could be attributed, as noted by Duttagupta, Abdullah, Li & Xueshuang (2019), to the growing interest in the student-centered approach (in instructional process) because learners need to be involved in the learning process even in the assessment.

One of such studies was a meta-analysis that conducted by Sanchez, Atkinson, Koenka, Moshontz & Cooper (2017) using pupils and students in primary and secondary schools to determine the effect of self and peer grading (assessment) for formative and summative assessment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. In another study, Liu, Lu, Wu & Tsai (2016) investigated the impact of peer review (assessment) on students' creative self-efficacy and learning in web 2.0 learning activities. The findings of the above studies indicated that students who engaged in self and peer grading (assessment) performed better in subsequent tests than students who did not.

Although peer assessment and learner autonomy appear to be opposed to each other, it is suggested that they both contribute positively to the enhancement of learner autonomy dimensions. According to Smith (2001), group-based activities built on a cooperative learning approach have been identified to enable students maintain an appropriate working agenda, as well as effectively implementing it, and constantly evaluating learning outcomes. For instance, in a study carried out by Dang (2012), a student was asked to participate in designing content for a methodology course that she was resistant to the initiative. She did not like sharing ideas with other peers during discussion sessions. However, she became involved in the activity and developed a close relationship with other group which also enabled her to identify learning goals and increase motivation. Similarly, other students reported that their attitude towards the course became more positive as they could freely participate in and manage their learning process.

Learner autonomy and peer assessment can be enhanced in a classroom setting through the modification of curriculum. This may require changing materials or adding an extra component to the existing curriculum of the two subjects. For example, students in a collaborative project in Hong Kong, China were asked to undertake several activities apart from their normal curriculum, resulting in improvements in different dimensions of learner autonomy (Miller, Hopkins & Tsang, 2005). These activities included collecting authentic materials for a self-access centre, conducting extra tasks in relation to the class topics and conducting project work. Students reported that they became more motivated and confident after collaboratively managing these processes on their own.

Similarly, the findings of a study conducted by Christopher (2006) in a technology-rich learning classroom showed that interacting with technology enabled students to exercise their controlling ability; to tailor their own learning process and to also increase their learning engagement. The study used *El Investigator en Español*, a software application for learning Spanish, to assist undergraduate students navigate through their learning activities. The software offered students a number of topics from which they were free to choose one in which they were interested. They then used the classroom computers to research the topic, develop and revise it and send to their friends for assessment. This gave them the opportunity to work with a topic related to their interest and directly shape the content

of the course in which they were involved. The implication of the study is that learner autonomy and peer assessment are practicable in the classroom settings such as the Igbo and the English language classrooms.

However, in spite of the apparent practicability of learner autonomy or peer assessment in the classroom settings, its use or application is yet to be popularized especially in language teaching and learning in Nigerian schools. Learner autonomy emphasizes learner centeredness and this is quite antithetical to what obtains in Nigerian schools today. In most of the schools in Nigeria, the teacher dominates virtually all aspects of classroom activities. The teacher teaches, asks questions and assesses the learners. In fact, he or she takes absolute control of almost all the activities in the classroom. This kind of situation can hardly give room to learner autonomy or peer assessment especially in Igbo and English language essay writing classrooms where active participation of students is very significant.

### **Application of Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy in the Teaching and Learning of Essay Writing in Igbo and English Languages**

Applying learner peer assessment and autonomy to Igbo and English language essay writing classroom requires proper articulation by teachers. Teachers may begin the application by exposing students to the pedagogical goals and content of the essay types they intend to write. In other words, students are made to become conscious of learning objectives and the areas to be assessed after the essay writing such as content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy. Students are to be made to understand what these terms mean in assessment of essays and the marks allocated to each. According to the West African Examination Councils (WAEC, 2019), 10 marks is allocated to content, which refers to the relevance of the ideas and points discussed to the central theme of the essay and its development; organization (10 marks) refers to correct use of formal features such as appropriate use of emphasis, ideas, and chronological, spatial and logical arrangements of paragraphs; expression (20 marks) refers to choice of words (use of appropriate vocabulary, tenses, idioms, figures of speech and jargons associated with the chosen essay type) which should reflect the language of the general audience and atmosphere and which should also be controlled by sentence structures. Mechanical accuracy (10marks) refers to compliance with the mechanics of either the Igbo or English language such as punctuation, spellings and grammar rules. This brings the total assessment score allocated to essay writing to 50marks. Students are also to be made to understand that the essay is not expected to be less than 450 words. Achieving this feat by students through peer assessment therefore requires the collaborative efforts of both the teachers and students – the teacher being the facilitator while students are critically engaged in the essay writing assessment.

Writing is one of the four major skills in every given language. Other skills are listening, speaking and reading. Writing is a conventional graphic representation of an author's thoughts, ideas and feelings on paper in an acceptable language for readability, comprehension of a particular audience and for communication. According to Heick (2017), writing is thinking aloud but only the paper is listening. Benwell (2020) notes that writing skills includes all the knowledge and abilities related to expressing ideas through the written words hence, poor writing skills create poor first



impressions and many readers will have immediate negative reaction if the spot any mistake in any writing especially essay writing.

An essay is a piece of articulated writing that tells a story, describes, exposes or argues about a specific subject matter. In other words, an essay projects a writer's perspective, interpretation, persuasion or argument for or against a particular issue or topic in a creative, imaginative and in an interesting way. Scribbr (2019) notes that an essay is a focused piece of writing that develops an argument or narrative based on evidence, analysis and interpretation. Writing an essay requires a three-stage procedure which involves preparation, writing and revision. Scribbr explains that preparation entails deciding on the topic to write; doing the necessary (mental) research and creating the essay outline. The actual writing, on the other hand, involves setting out the argument in the introduction; developing it with evidence in the main body and wrapping it up with a conclusion while revision has to do with checking the content, organization, grammar, spelling and formatting of the essay.

The choice of essay writing for this study is necessitated by the fact that it is a very important aspect of both English and Igbo language studies which have posed great difficulty for students especially in external examinations (WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports 2017, 2018 and 2019). The reports have it that candidates were unable to punctuate their sentences accurately and there were a lot of spelling errors which drastically reduced their marks especially in essay writing. There are four major essay types in both language Igbo and English languages. These are narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative essays. The two subjects also use the same parameters to measure students' in essay writing. These parameters are content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy in English language and *ndina, nhazi, nka asusu and ndezi/ndema* in Igbo language. The content, organization or expression and the type of information conveyed through any of these essay types are dependent on the subject matter of the essay. Adequate mastery of these four parameters by the students will therefore, not only help them to pass the essay writing examinations but will also help them answer correctly the questions that are from other sections of the examination such as those that have to do with grammar and comprehension exercises.

For students to assess their fellow students in essay writing in the aforementioned languages, the teachers will have to serve as a guide by providing the enabling environment for them. Teachers also need to provide the guidelines that will be easy to implement and fully train the students on the implementation and importance of the guidelines. They must insist that the assessors (students) justify their judgments and among other things, emphasize for communication that the main focus of their peer assessment should be useful feedback not grading (Falchikov, 2007 and Svan, 2010). In other words, teachers of Igbo and English languages have an enormous task to accomplish in order to ensure successful implementation of peer assessment and learner autonomy among their students.

### **Pros and Cons of Peer Assessment and Learner Autonomy in Igbo and English Language Essay Writing**

It has been earlier stated that using peer assessment and encouraging learner autonomy in Igbo and English language classrooms have some prospects for both teachers and students. For instance, it is a way of making students responsible for their learning; a way of helping them to have a deeper

and clearer understanding of the skills of writing essays in Igbo and English languages as well as enabling students to develop their criticism and objective judgement skills. Other prospects as identified by CTI (2020) include making students reflect on their role and contribution to the peer assessment process; reducing teachers' marking; avoiding confusion about assignment outcomes and expectation by using agreed marking criteria; providing more relevant feedback to students as it is generated by their peers and helping to reduce the 'free rider' problem as students are aware that their contribution will be graded by their peers.

However, the following are threats to successful implementation of peer assessment and learner autonomy in Igbo and English language essay writing:

- Teachers' talking time may increase as they keep explaining and guiding the students in the assessment process.
- Teachers may have to go through the peer assessed essays for final vetting. This increases their workload.
- Scores given by students may not be valid because students may over score or underscore the essays during the assessment depending on whether the essays belong to their friends or *enemies*. However, this issue could be reduced by asking students to explain how any suspected or non-realistic mark or score was obtained.
- Peer assessment in essay writing is not a common practice in Nigerian secondary schools so, many teachers may not welcome it and the school system may not make provision for peer assessment and learner autonomy.
- Students who are slow readers or those who lack enough vocabulary to understand certain words written in the essay may not properly assess the essays because they are ill-equipped to undertake the exercise.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the concepts of peer assessment and learner autonomy in language teaching and learning. When assessment is done or used by the students themselves or by other students of equal status, it is referred to as peer assessment. Peer assessment usually thrives when learners are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning as implied in learner autonomy. Both peer assessment and learner autonomy have been proved to be effective in instructional practice as shown by different studies and have also been shown to be beneficial to both students and teachers. Both peer assessment and learner autonomy can enhance Igbo and English language teaching and learning especially in essay writing if properly harnessed. The concepts of peer assessment and learner autonomy were therefore highlighted. The various ways in which peer assessment and learner autonomy can be harnessed to enhance the teaching and learning of essay writing in both Igbo and English languages were also discussed. Finally, the paper also discussed the pros and cons to the effective implementation of peer assessment and learner autonomy in English and Igbo language essay writing. However, peer assessment in essay writing is not a common practice in Nigerian secondary schools so, many teachers may not welcome it.



## Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are therefore put forward:

1. Considering the enormous advantages of peer assessment, curriculum planners and school administrators should encourage its utilization in schools by teachers and students through its inclusion in English and Igbo language curricula. This will not only reduce teachers' workload but will also encourage active participation of students in the learning process and also enhance students' academic achievement.
2. Government agencies at all levels, education administrators and all relevant stakeholders should from time to time organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the training of English language and Igbo language teachers on how to effectively implement peer assessment and learner autonomy in schools. Teachers should then train the students on the importance of the guidelines and its implementation and also serve as a facilitator by providing the enabling environment for the students.
3. In carrying out peer assessment, teachers should design tasks to encourage development of students' confidence and skills by repeating the experiences and assigning multiple students to assess the same work and discussing lessons learned. This will make the students not to feel ill equipped to carry out the task.
4. To ensure reliability of grades, teachers should discuss the problem with students before they engage in assessment and also explain to students what specific scores or grades mean and how non-realistic scores or grades can be harmful for learning.
5. Relevant information on peer assessment and learner autonomy should be provided for students through effective training. In view of this, teachers should emphasize the importance of evidence and criteria requiring them to justify their ratings to avoid being biased in awarding of grades to their peers because peer assessment should be useful for feedback and not just grading.

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