Research Article

Exploring the Link Among Teaching Approach, Intervention Plan and Outcome on Nigerian ESL Learners' Competence: A Follow-Up Study

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Abstract

Several researchers have argued that teaching approach (TA) and intervention plan (IP) have a significantly positive outcome in language teaching/learning, particularly in second language (L2) learning which is otherwise fraught with first language (L1) and or interlanguage transfers. Although TAs and IPs have been known to improve student outcomes when implemented with strict control and supervision by researchers/teachers, it is uncertain whether these tools measure accurately when applied under real educational/instructional conditions. Three effective teaching techniques were used in the study with the goal of improving students' writing proficiency. This study's goal was to determine the most effective teaching strategy for improving students' writing proficiency. To that end, three different TAs—communicative, eclectic, and task-based—were compared and applied to three experimental groups—A, B, and C—over the course of twelve weeks, with the control group (D) receiving instruction in the traditional manner. A pre-test was administered on forty (40) first year students/subjects purposively selected from their school at Development Secondary School, Mbaise (DSSM). The effect of the twelve-week treatment period on their essay writing was measured using a post-test. Results varied depending on the group, but most notably, in the post-test assessment, Group B showed major improvement and Control Group D showed no significant progress, while Groups A and C's writing ability improved just little at best. Findings have indicated and established that TA, IP and outcome on Nigerian ESL learners' competence are non-negotiably (indisputably) linked with Eclectic TA as evidence-based standard measure for optimal improvement.

KEYWORDS: Teaching Approach, Intervention Plan, ESL, Learners' Competence, Nigeria.

Introduction

The importance of effectively and appropriately addressing teaching approach (TA) which is crucial to learning as well as intervention plan (IP) which is akin to damage control in the learning process cannot be ignored, considering the impact teaching approach and intervention plan have on outcome which is the overall performance of learners (Dozie, Regis-Onuoha, Madu, Egwim, Okere, and Ihejirika, 2023). Teaching, particularly second language teaching highlights the need to further educate, inform, instruct, drill, tutor, enlighten as well as train learners with a view to attaining a fundamental degree of mastery of the subject matter. Also, it is believed to help fine-tune the basics as well as learning new things, relearning that which is already established and unlearning the wrong which may have been imbibed in error or wrongly taught.

Learning on the other hand is the acquisition of knowledge or skills, new understanding through purposeful and impactful study, experience or being taught as well as retaining such knowledge, utilising and applying same routinely in an attempt to improve on an existing knowledge, activate latent knowledge, awaken residual knowledge and modify already active knowledge for sustained growth and development. The above duality helps to further assess the fineness of that line between

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teaching and learning while addressing the possibility of lapses arising from teaching approach which may not have accommodated individualised learners' differences as well as appropriating research-based techniques intended to table and tackle factors that may impede learning. Teaching approach (TA) mandates on the one hand is tantamount to applying a variegated measure of teaching strategies based on the instructional objective and learner's capability with the aim of implementing them for positively optimal results, while on the other hand, there may be concerns about what technique benefits individual learners as a whole considering that it is always a group learning environment and assessment is always learner-centered.

The inclusion of intervention plan (IP), also referred to as treatment is a functional implementation of strategies believed to help address or deal with perceived drawbacks in outcome which may be attributable to lack of engagement with the right teaching approach (TA) hence the direct resultant negative effect on learner outcome. Succinctly put, the result of a plan of action is termed – outcome. It therefore follows that in a chain or sequence of events, outcome is always the last in the series and its mandates draws from the previous links on the practices which is often judged by the last link which is the outcome. In other words, outcome details the efficiency of an ongoing process which takes off from the teaching approach (TA) through the intervention plan (IP) to the point of feedback which is the outcome.

Research and experience have shown that teachers and learners of English as a second language (ESL) encounter problems at one point or the other in the course of second language acquisition. Second language acquisition involves the learning and mastery of the four language skills (receptive and productive) – listening, speaking, reading and writing in equal measure. These problems may be teacher or learner oriented which translates to poor performance or feedback on the part of the learner at the end of the exercise (Krashen, 1987; Maduekwe, 2007). In an attempt to assess the crisis situation, one may try to query the totality of a learner's interest in the target language and his/her ability to navigate the process from the rudimentary through the linear progression of the linguistic map to appreciation of the complex maze of its nuances and mastery. The other remains the teacher's choice of teaching methodologies applied with a view to meeting the instructional goal which translates to either a positive or negative outcome.

That is to say that TA has a link to outcome and the question is – which TA (serving as Intervention Plan IP) provides the best outcome in Nigerian ESL learners' competence within the writing framework. Granted that all four language skills are important with each organically and intricately woven to the other and giving rise to a complete circle of genetic relationship, writing which is an externalization and remaking of thought (Applebee, 1984) has been chosen as a conduit for assessing the investigation for its inextricable tie to the other skills and a systemic tool for holistic assessment. The objective of the study therefore is to assess which is the most effective TA employed in this study as an IP in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency.

Language Teaching Approaches in Nigerian ESL Contexts

The pedagogical domain of language teaching encompasses a diverse array of methods, each distinguished by unique principles, practices, tactical applications, and intended outcomes. This literature review provides an analysis of several language teaching approaches, emphasizing their suitability, objectives, learning environments, and the specific needs of language learners. As posited by Taylor (2019), no singular teaching method universally excels across all contexts or for every learner; instead, the efficacy of a teaching approach is contingent upon a deep understanding of the language learning process, which incorporates specialized techniques and materials executed in a predetermined sequence. Each method possesses inherent strengths and weaknesses, which catalyze a progression from effective to optimal teaching practices. This analysis will critically evaluate three predominant teaching approaches: the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach, the Task-Based Learning (TBL) Approach, and the Eclectic Approach, (EA) assessing their application in teaching English as a second language within a chronological framework.

Communicative Language Teaching Approach: Predominantly learner-centered and practice-oriented, the CLT approach enables learners to convey meanings effectively using their intrinsic language acquisition strategies, which facilitates the use of the target language in real-life contexts. Harmer (2005) asserts that the primary focus of CLT is to develop skills that enhance the delivery of messages and content, particularly through contextualizing learners' real-world experiences within the target language framework. However, despite its strengths, CLT does not comprehensively address all facets of language learning, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, grammatical precision, and the sociolinguistic functions of language.

Task-Based Learning Approach: Developed by Prabhu in 1987, this approach encourages learners to undertake meaningful tasks (e.g., role-plays in a doctor-patient dialogue or a job interview) using the target language. This method fosters a predictable, activity-driven classroom environment where learners act out scenarios and receive feedback from instructors who make necessary corrections. Although TBL is experimental and focuses on form, providing corrective feedback that aids language acquisition, it may not fully meet the language needs of all learners due to its structured nature.

Eclectic Approach: Advocated by Rivers in 1981, this approach is characterized by its flexibility and integration of various methodologies depending on the instructional objectives and the learners' capabilities. Often described as a mixed-method approach, it allows teachers to tailor their strategies to best suit the lesson and the learners, ensuring that no language skill is overlooked. AL-Khuli (1996), notes that the Eclectic method enhances learner participation, understanding, and efficiency in language activity presentation. This adaptability is crucial for accommodating diverse learner needs and for incorporating multiple pedagogical techniques to yield positive outcomes.

By and large, while each language teaching approach has its distinct advantages and limitations, the evolution of these methodologies reflects a broader aim to overcome previous shortcomings and align with best global practices. These practices include the integration of diverse knowledge sources, recognition of textual structures, application of general and personal knowledge, and mastery of detailed pedagogical patterns. Despite the recognized importance of teaching English as a second language in Nigeria, there is no universally ideal approach for all Nigerian ESL learners, underscoring the significant impact the choice of teaching approach has on developing communicative competence.

Method:

Participants The research involved all 40 Junior Secondary School (JSS1) students from the Development Secondary School Mbaise, a local community within the Ahiazu Local Government Area, with one common indigenous language – Igbo, in Imo state, Nigeria. They were carefully chosen through purposive sampling and then randomly allocated into four groups: three experimental groups (Groups A, B, and C) and one control group (Group D). The cohort consisted of 14 males and 26 females, all between the ages of 10 and 12. Almost all (38/96%) were from the Igbo and the other (2/4%) were from the Hausa ethno linguistic backgrounds but unified by English as their common second language and primary medium of instruction. As Nigerians and the education policy in Nigeria, with study participants' basic primary school education, they are believed to have been mildly exposed to English language for their level and have done well enough to gain admission to proceed to the first year of junior secondary school/junior high school.

Despite this assumed proficiency, it was crucial to objectively assess their English language skills prior to junior secondary education. This assessment aimed to evaluate their writing competence to establish a datum for subsequent treatment i.e. intervention plan (IP). A pre-test that assessed their English essay writing skills was administered on all (40) study participants prior to randomized grouping. For the Inclusion criteria, only all 40 JSSI students/freshmen ($\geq$12years) in the school were required for the study while for Exclusion criteria, students who were not first-year students i.e. sophomores, juniors, or seniors were not eligible and were excluded from the study. As a pilot study, informed consent and permission were obtained from the school authority and ethics

committee to be able to have their students as partners in the study while introducing research assistants (ESL teachers) for the period of investigation.

Study design:
Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the principles of Krashen's Monitor Model (1987), which significantly influences the understanding of language acquisition and learning processes. The model outlines several key principles:

- Language acquisition occurs subconsciously through natural and informal interactions.
- Language learning is a conscious effort, relying heavily on correction and formal education.
- Grammar acquisition follows a predictable sequence and progression.
- Effective language acquisition happens when language exposure, through speaking or reading, provides comprehensible input.
- A monitoring mechanism, either a person or a device, provides essential feedback and corrections during the language learning process.

This model illustrates that by exploiting similar elements within the language learning and acquisition processes, one can enhance the writing fluency of ESL learners.

The study adopted an experimental design with a randomized pre-test, post-test, and control group structure to evaluate the efficacy of various teaching strategies on improving the writing proficiency of learners. Over a period of twelve weeks (one term), three experimental groups (Groups A, B, and C) received instruction via communicative, eclectic, and task-based teaching methods, respectively, while the control group (Group D) was taught using a conventional approach. The main focus was on the experimental groups, with routine observations made on the control group. Students' performances in weekly assessments during this period were recorded, analyzed, and interpreted for both the experimental and control groups.

Instruments

To gather quantitative data, three instruments were employed: (i) Oxford Placement Test (OPT): This test ensured participant homogeneity, verifying their English language exposure at primary school level. (ii) Pre-test: This initial assessment determined participants' proficiency in English with a common and simple on-the-spot examination and assessment – a composition about the participant's self, chosen for its straightforward nature and as a precursor to more complex writing tasks which was used to establish a datum since all 40 of them recruited for the study were in jss1. (iii) Post-test: Used to measure the effectiveness of the teaching methods by comparing results with the pre-test and weekly assessment scores during the intervention. These sample tests were designed following slight modifications of earlier studies on English as a foreign and second language EFL/ESL by Nazri & Mansouri 2014 and Dozie, Regis-Onuoha, Madu, Egwim, Okere, & Ihejirika, 2023 respectively.

Data collection procedures

Data collection took place at the Development Secondary School Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria between September and December 2023 which is an entire 12 weeks (a term) the first term within the academic year. Participants were all the first-year (JSS1) students of the School. Since this study involved human subjects, prior to commencement, the objective of the research was clearly explained to the principal and the ethics committee of the school for their consent and express permission to have the JSS1 students as partners. The school authority provided verbal consent and permission to carry out the study within the stipulated time. Four research assistants who were ESL teachers were enlisted for the exercise, each assigned to a particular group (A B C as experimental group and D as control group) with specific intervention plan (IP) i.e. communicative, eclectic, task-based and traditional methods respectively for the duration. Each group was made up of a total of 10

students taught and drilled thrice weekly on the same topics using the explicit approaches planned for each, in the same setting, for the same length of time and same environment concurrently for twelve (12) weeks. In addition, the weekly performance evaluation checklist designed for the study was used to observe, gather and document all practical progress made in terms of writing skill. All four (4) research assistants recorded performances religiously following the parameters outlined in the checklist with emphasis on the integral parts of essay writing – Content (C), Organisation (O), Expression (E) and Mechanical Accuracy (MA). These key indices of essay writing were considered one and the same and allotted an even 25- mark score during grading giving rise to a total of 100%. This system took a three-step course: Pre-test – Treatment – Post-test.

Data Analysis
Data collected over the twelve weeks were analyzed to ascertain the most effective teaching strategy. The initial analyses include summary statistics such as mean and standard deviations. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was used to test for significant differences in mean at 5% significant level, however, due to lack of fulfilment of test assumptions, Kruskal-Wallis test (non-parametric test) was conducted on the data. It was followed by post hoc Dunn test (multiple comparison tests) to establish the factors that varied significantly.

Study Hypotheses
Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the mean ranks across the groups.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the mean ranks across the groups.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical approval was secured from the Ethics Committee of Development Secondary School Mbaise, Imo State. The study emphasized the importance of voluntary participation and partnership as the research involved human subjects, with informed verbal consent obtained from the school authorities after thoroughly explaining the study's objectives.

Results and Discussion

Results
Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants
The study involved 40 JSS1 students aged between 10 and 12 years from Development Secondary School Mbaise. The average age of the students is 11.2 years (standard deviation: 0.87). The demographic breakdown showed 65% females (26 participants) and 35% males (14 participants). Regarding linguistic background, the clear majority (38: 95%) spoke Igbo as their mother tongue, and the other (2: 5%) spoke Hausa. All participants (100%) recognized English as their second language, affirming its role as Nigeria's second/official language and the medium of instruction across educational levels. (Table 1)

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Student's Characteristics (n=40)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (Mean ± standard deviation)	11.2 ± 0.87	
Gender		
Male	26	65.0
Female	14	35.0
Total	40	100
Native Language/ Mother Tongue		
Igbo	38	95.0
Hausa	2	5.0
Others	0	0.0
Total	40	100

Second Language		
English	40	100
French	0	0
Other	0	0

Twelve-Week Treatment Outcomes on the key indices of essay writing in the observation checklist

Over the Twelve-week period, data collected revealed that the performance in essay writing indices across the groups was initially low but showed gradual improvement. Experimental group B consistently outperformed the other groups, with a notable peak in week 12 scoring an average of 19.6 points out of a possible 25 (standard deviation = 4.6). In contrast, the control group started with the lowest mean score of 10.3 points (standard deviation= 3.3) and slightly improved to 11.1 at week 6 and 11.0 at week 11.

Table 2: Summary Statistics: Twelve-Week Treatment Outcomes on the key indices of essay writing

Weeks	Average Marks Allotted	Experimental Group			Control Group
		A Mean (s.d)	B Mean (s.d)	C Mean (s.d)	D Mean (s.d)
WEEK 1	25	11.1 (3.1)	12.9 (3.2)	11.4 (3.0)	10.3 (3.3)
WEEK 2	25	11.0 (2.8)	13.5 (3.1)	11.4 (2.9)	10.3 (3.1)
WEEK 3	25	11.2 (2.7)	14.3 (3.4)	11.5 (3.3)	10.0 (3.3)
WEEK 4	25	12.0 (3.4)	14.8 (3.6)	11.9 (3.6)	10.6 (2.9)
WEEK 5	25	13.2 (4.0)	15.1 (3.9)	13.7 (3.4)	10.5 (2.6)
WEEK 6	25	13.5 (3.3)	15.8 (4.6)	13.5 (3.8)	11.1 (2.9)
WEEK 7	25	10.9 (3.0)	15.9 (3.3)	11.6 (2,9)	10.0 (3.3)
WEEK 8	25	10.7 (2.9)	16.3 (3.0)	12.5 (2.9)	10.1 (3.1)
WEEK 9	25	11.1 (2.6)	17.6 (3.5)	11.3 (3.6)	10.4 (3.3)
WEEK 10	25	11.9 (3.4)	17.9 (3.3)	11.7 (3.4)	10.3 (2.9)
WEEK 11	25	13 (3.8)	18.1 (3.5)	12.7 (3.8)	11.0 (2.6)
WEEK 12	25	14.0 (3.6)	19.6 (4.3)	13.9 (3.7)	10.8 (2.9)
Total		12.0 (2.4)	16.0 (3.6)	12.3 (3.3)	10.5 (2.8)

The dynamics of performance over the weeks were depicted through comparative box plots (fig. 1) and progressive line graphs (fig. 2). Fig 1 indicates that in each box, the horizontal line that cuts within the box represents the average score. It can be clearly observed from the figure that the mean

score was highest on Box for eclectic method (Group B), while it was lowest at the control box (Group D). The representative box for group A and group C showed some similarities.
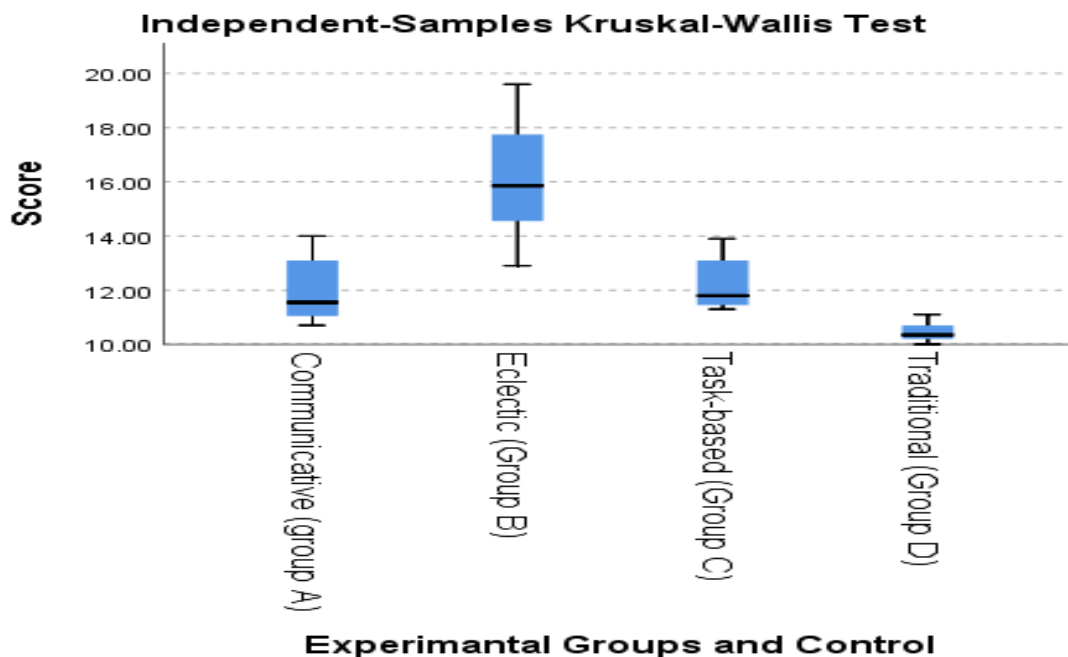

Fig 1: Comparative Box plots for the experimental groups (A, B, and C) and the Control group (D).

Fig 2 illustrated that Group B's scores increased steadily from week one to the final week Groups A and C saw a dip in weeks 7 and 9 before recovering in the later weeks. The control group's performance, although the lowest, showed a steady albeit slower increase.
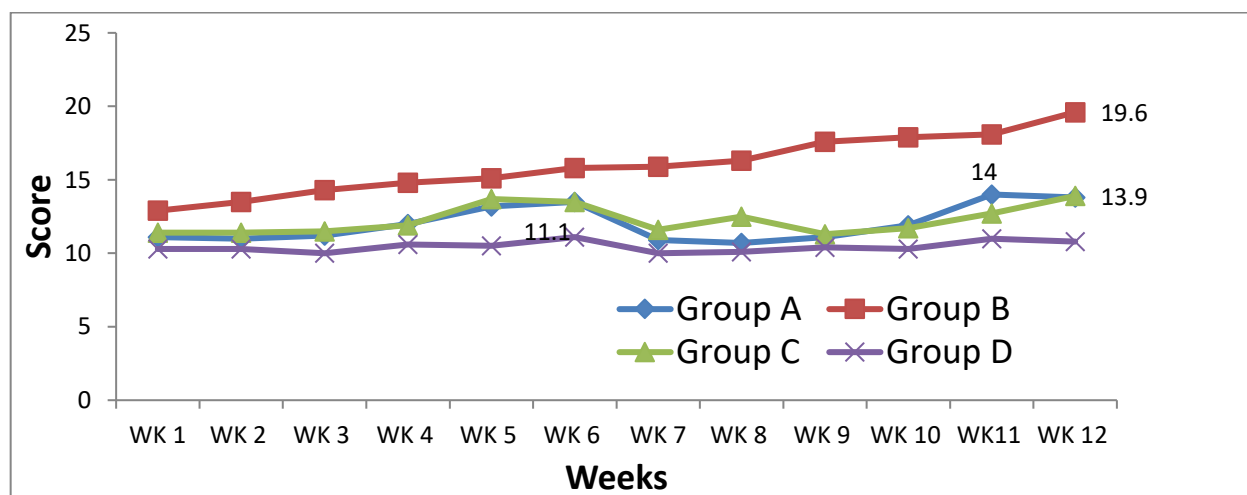

Fig. 2: Weekly progressive line graph for the experimental group and the control

Statistical analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated a significant difference in learning outcomes among the groups (H=35.60, df = 3, p=0.001). Post hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction (Dunn test) confirmed a significant performance disparity favouring Group B over the control group (Table 2). The table showed that the average score in group B clearly differed significantly with any other group (P < 0.05). Groups A also showed significant difference with the control group (P -0.007) but not group C which was at the borderline of being significant (P

=0.051). However, the difference in average score between group A and group C, was not found significant in this study (P = 0.493).

Table 2: Multiple comparison of Group Performances

Group Comparison	Test Statistic	Standard. Error	Std. Test Statistic	P	Adj. Sig.
Traditional (Group D)-Communicative (group A)	15.375	5.712	2.692	.007	.043
Traditional (Group D)-Task-based (Group C)	19.292	5.712	3.377	.001	.004
Traditional (Group D)-Eclectic (Group B)	34.333	5.712	6.011	.000	.000
Communicative (group A)-Task-based (Group C)	-3.917	5.712	-.686	.493	1.000
Communicative (group A)-Eclectic (Group B)	-18.958	5.712	-3.319	.001	.005
Task-based (Group C)-Eclectic (Group B)	15.042	5.712	2.633	.008	.051

Kruskal-Walis H: P < 0.0001, H (3): 36.60
P: Probability value,
Adj. Sig: Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05
Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Discussion

The objective of the study was to assess which is the most effective teaching approach TA used in the study as an intervention plan IP in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency and outcome. The results indicated relationship between TA and IP and in any case, the IP serves as a mediator between TA quality and learners' outcome. The data resulting from this study showed that there was significant positive relationship between evidence-based quality of TAs/IPs and learners' outcomes when applied accurately and with supervision under real educational/instructional conditions. The results from the analysis over twelve (12) weeks of treatment/intervention indicated significant differences in performance between the experimental groups and the control group. The null hypothesis, which suggested equality of mean ranks among the groups, was decisively rejected as Group B, which was taught using the Eclectic approach, improved steadily and significantly, outperforming the other groups (P < 0.05). Both the Communicative (Group A) and Task-based (Group C) methods yielded some improvement, but it was not as marked. The control group, taught using conventional methods, did not show significant improvements. The post hoc analysis highlighted that the experimental group B's enhanced performance was a result of the Eclectic approach, which involves a blend of multiple teaching techniques tailored to address the challenges of second language learning effectively (Rivers, 1981 and AL-Khuli, 1996). This study underscores the importance of adopting TAs and IPs that not only focus on fluency and coherence but also pay detailed attention to the mechanical details of writing. The Eclectic approach, with its holistic and adaptable strategies, has been found to significantly enhance learners' writing proficiency and outcome. This finding aligns with previous research advocating for a diverse and integrative approach to teaching ESL, tailored to individual learning needs and challenges (Dozie, et al., 2023). Given the prior research linking ESL learners' writing proficiency to teaching approach and intervention plan (Dozie, et al., 2023), it was hypothesised that there was significantly positive difference in the performance and outcome of the experimental groups which got treatment/intervention using the eclectic approach. It therefore follows that with the significantly steady improvement recorded by Group B (taught using the eclectic method) over the 12-week intervention period, Eclectic technique remains the evidence-based quality of TA and IP for enhanced learners proficiency and outcome.

Conclusion

Given the tensions between the challenges of Nigerian ESL learners' competence and its attendant link to teaching approach as well as intervention plan and the resultant outcome, it is important to document evidence-based findings from studies addressing the gap. The present study has found evidence to prove and establish that there is a link between TA/IP and outcome on ESL learners' competence and by extension fulfilled the study objective which aimed to assess the most effective TA employed in the study as an IP in enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing proficiency. This study has provided support for the validity and effectiveness of eclectic teaching approach and intervention plan for enhancing Nigerian ESL learners' writing competence.

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