Developing Writing Skill in Nigerian Children: Insights from the Macmillan New Primary English Series

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Abstract

The scarce attention paid to course books' role in developing writing skills in primary school children motivated this in-depth analysis of the Macmillan New Primary English (MNPE) series aimed at determining its provisions for writing skill development in Nigerian children in terms of content and strategy. Each writing lesson was examined to identify the type of writing to which it belongs, the exact topic exposed, and the presentational strategy adopted. The data comprised 104 writing topics, with essay writing, letter writing, and special text writing constituting 57, 22, and 21 percent respectively. While exposition was the prominent essay type (57 percent) and formal letter writing was nearly twice as frequent as informal letter writing, creative writing and autobiography topped the twelve special text writing subtypes found. Mechanics of writing and letter-writing formats were featured five times each. Although twenty-one strategies recurred 158 times, they functioned eclectically. The questioning was the most frequent, followed by discussion/group work, and pictorial illustration. The study noted that what MNPE offers the Nigerian child is adequate for writing skill development but the average primary school product's writing proficiency level is disappointingly unreflective of these provisions.

Keywords: Essay Writing   Letter Writing Special Text Writing   Presentational strategy Mechanics of Writing   Features of Letter Writing

Introduction

One of the four basic skills of language is writing, the others are listening, speaking and reading. Writing is a productive skill like speaking and a literacy skill like reading. Writing is the graphic representation of speech sounds on a surface to convey information. It entails the organisation of thoughts or ideas in a logical, cohesive and coherent manner using the kind of language that is appropriate for the subject matter, reading audience, situation, and goal of writing. Being a literacy skill, writing is learned formally by the individual as a deliberate act and this is only after successfully acquiring the first language. The formal school setting, therefore, presents the most appropriate environment for the development of writing skills, and this is often achieved through integrative skills teaching since the four primary acts of language are complementary in practice. The relevance of teaching writing lies in the fact that modern man relies on literacy skills for their practical, everyday survival. Writing is assuredly the most effective way of coding, storing in a recoverable manner, transmitting, and retrieving information because written language is characterised by permanence. Though speech is now stored electronically, its reliability and durability can never match writing. Moreover, writing refines thought and enables the individual to note what they listen to, what they want to say, and what they read. The school child requires the skill of writing to cope with learning and with post-school life. This is why attention has to be paid to how children are assisted to acquire skills in writing, especially in ESL learning contexts.

Writing skill is an integral part of the English language curriculum for Nigerian primary schools and, like listening, speaking and reading skills, it complements the core language elements of grammar, phonology and lexis, the knowledge of which in turn aids its development. The ultimate aim of teaching writing is to develop in pupils the ability to communicate their thoughts, feelings or ideas meaningfully and logically through the use of conventional graphic symbols on paper or any other appropriate surface. This might however vary according to the type of writing, learners' age, and learners' level of linguistic development. The gradual and systematic development of writing skills depends, to a large extent, on the teacher who patiently and skilfully guides the young school child through the processes. Astonishingly many teachers saddled with the responsibility of assisting pupils to develop writing skills are themselves deficient in the skill. This is where course books such as the Macmillan New Primary English (henceforth MNPE) series come in. Over the years, the MNPE books have proven to be an invaluable resource for teachers and pupils alike, and have made the teaching and learning of English a pleasurable experience for many Nigerian children. It would be interesting therefore to find out what it holds concerning writing skills and how it goes about presenting it to learners. Studies on the development of writing skills have concentrated on secondary school children (Akinyeye, 2015; Ugboaja, Ifumanya, Eze & Offor, 2015) and, where attention is paid to the primary level, it is focused on classroom practices (Hussain, 2017), teaching

approaches (Ahn, 2012) or pupils' actual writing ability (Chang, 2001), neglecting the course books that teachers and pupils heavily rely on.

It is against the foregoing background that this study examines how MNPE contributes to the development of writing skills in Nigerian children in terms of content and strategy. More precisely, the study's goals are:

(a) To ascertain the presence of essay writing and its types and determine their distribution

(b) To ascertain whether or not there is letter writing, identify the types and determine each one's frequency of occurrence

(c) To provide evidence for mechanics of writing and features of letter writing and account for the same

 (d) To identify non-essays and non-letters as evidence of the development of special text writing and account for them.

(e) To identify the writing topics presented, assign them to appropriate writing types, and explain their distribution

(f) To identify the presentational strategies adopted for developing writing skills, determine their frequency of occurrence, and evaluate their adequacy

Review of literature

Writing as a language skill

This study is on the development of writing skills in Nigerian children and, to properly situate it in the context of existing knowledge, it is considered expedient to begin this review of the literature with the conceptualisation of writing as a language skill. Writing is synonymous with composition, essay, and continuous writing. Thus Aje (1987) defined continuous writing as the "ability to sustain unbroken written communication both formally and informally", and added that writing involves "the ability to maintain or sustain good, intelligible communication in writing" (p.214). Raimes (1999) and Nunan (1999), as cited in Akinyele (2015, p.71), defined writing and composition respectively as "a clear, fluent and effective communication of ideas" (p.6) and a "coherent, fluent extended piece of writing" (p.271). Writing is an extended form of listening and speaking (Nalliveeti & Manasneh, 2017), and it is cognitively connected to reading (Andersen &Nielsen, 2022). In FL teaching, three inseparable concepts of writing are often emphasised, namely (a) "writing as a *channel* of FL learning", (b) "writing as a *goal* of FL learning", and (c) "writing with *cohesion*" (Wingard, 1981, p.140). Writing is broadly classified into essay writing and letter writing (Aje, 1987) while four kinds of essay are generally differentiated thus: descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative (Adegbija, 1987). With particular reference to ESL writing, the suggestion was made that the composition course should cover a wide range of kinds of writing, including stories, descriptions, explanations, instructions, personal letters, autobiographies, business letters, expositions, reports, and serious poetry (Bright & McGregor, 1970, p. 143).

Theory of writing

Bright and McGregor (1970) proposed a theory of composition which consist of fulfilling certain conditions to improve pupils' prospects of writing successfully. Four of the conditions, which I regard as the fundamental principles underlying the teaching of writing, are *problem*, *purpose*, *experience*, and *audience*. For effective development of writing to take place pupils must be "presented with a problem" and be made to see the necessity "for a written solution". The problem and need serve as a stimulus. The problem also defines the purpose of writing and the reader to whom it is addressed. Lastly, there must be experience and imagination, which the pupils must bring "into focus upon the problem" (p.141-144). Wingard (1981) emphasised purpose and audience as pre-writing considerations to be made. Scrivener (2011) stated that "in real life, we can judge if our writing was successful by whether it did what we wanted it to do" and concluded that "the existence of an audience and purpose are worth bearing in mind in class" (p.243). Hussain (2017) noted that Hyland (2003) and Yu and Lee (2016) separately advocated a broader approach to L2 writing that focuses on audiences, contexts, functions, and purposes of the texts. The teaching of writing has also been theorised from the perspective of the acclaimed "bi-directional relationship" between reading and writing. Andersen and Nielsen (2022), citing Fitzgerald and Shanahan

(2000), identified four types of shared knowledge and competencies thus: "meta-knowledge", "procedural knowledge", "domain knowledge", and "knowledge about the text attribute" (p. 2). The shared knowledge underlies reading and writing and explains the positive effects reading has on writing and why reading should be encouraged as a strategy for developing writing skills. It is this assumption that reading aids writing and that children imitate what they read that is behind Critical Literacy, a theory that seeks the integration of reading and writing to achieve greater writing skills development (Hsu, n. d, citing Flower, 1999). There is thus the suggestion that learners should be encouraged to read extensively to develop their ability to write (Al-Gharabally, 2015). Cheng (2001) reviewed three L1-derived theoretical perspectives on children's writing (cognitive, social, and cultural), and concluded that the act of creating texts is a cognitive one for young children. The assertion that ESL learners use their knowledge of print in their L1 and control the process actively however lacks universal validity. Nigerian children learning to write English are invariably first-timers in the act of writing, for instance.

Approaches to the teaching of writing
There are probably as many approaches to the teaching of writing as there are different conceptualisations of writing. Thus Chang (2001) identified Controlled-to-free Approach, Current Traditional Rhetoric Approach, Communicative Approach, Process Approach, and Social Constructivist Approach as the various approaches to ESL writing teaching. There are however three approaches that are distinctive in the literature. These are Product Approach, Process Approach, and Genre Approach. The Product Approach sees writing as an outcome and so focuses on the correctness of language and mechanics of writing. Regarded as the traditional approach to the teaching of writing, the Product Approach emphasises conformity with an established norm by providing models. In contrast, the Process Approach views writing as a process and therefore emphasises the process of writing rather than the product. It follows a sequence that begins with pre-writing activities to generate ideas before moving on to drafting and revising activities. According to Scrivener (2011), students write what they want but receive assistance and encouragement from the teacher in process writing, which makes the Process Approach a form of guided writing. An example is Controlled Writing, which is based on the Audiolingual Method that forbids errors. The Genre Approach is a blend of the product and process approaches and so has the advantage of combining their strong points, as it pays attention to the writing process without neglecting the appropriateness of language use and the conventions of writing. Cui (2019), citing Tardy (2009), particularly noted that genre knowledge is essential for L2 students' achievement in writing and that it has even become a pedagogical framework for organising syllabuses and course books. Ahn (2012) explained that the Genre Approach considers writing as a purposeful act and that it "focuses on the contextual situation in which writing takes place" (p.2). The Genre Approach has been used to analyse the teaching of writing in the ESL classroom (Ahn, 2012; Arslam, 2013, Hyland, 2004, Atay & Kurt, 2006, as cited in Akinyeye, 2015; Pratt & Gill, 1986, as cited in Richards &Lockhart, 1996; Chang, 2001; Scrivener, 2011; Al-Gharabally, 2015).

Bright and McGregor (1970) had earlier identified substitution, questioning, copying sentences, copying, dictation, vocabulary listing, and model composition as ways of teaching the development of writing skills. They regarded substitution as the "starting point of original written composition" but did not subscribe to the idea of listing words because they believed that composition writing should be planned around pupils' "lexical stock" (p.132) for meaningfulness and effectiveness. Bright and McGregor saw model composition as an imposition of the teacher's view on pupils, and argued that pupils do not learn to organise thoughts by simply guessing how others might have done theirs but by doing it themselves. Wingard (1981) added re-ordering, transfer of medium, and "situational composition" (p.152), where background information on the problem, purpose, and audience is given to enable meaningful writing to take place (The WAEC employs "situational composition" in testing essay writing). Rao's (2019, p.201) list of nine effective techniques for developing writing skills (sentence writing, braining storming, games, short paragraphs, sequencing, note-making, essay writing, story writing, and report writing) curiously includes writing types.

Studies on the teaching of L2 writing
Based on the theory that reading and writing draw upon shared knowledge and cognitive processes, Andersen and Nielsen (2022) investigated how the home literacy environment affects children's writing in Denmark. They reported that "a parent-focused shared book reading intervention with second-graders can have spill-over effects on the children's growth in sentence-level and text-level writing skills over an

academic year" (p.7). Although the materials provided to parents consisted of both fiction and non-fiction, there was no indication that they were inclusive of materials used in schools. The study however proved that children taught reading at home developed better text-writing skills. The subjects in Chang's (2001) study, which sought to find out whether ESL students could develop their writing ability through the activity of writing to a real reader whom they did not know(pen-pals), were fourteen elementary school children in Massachusetts aged six to twelve. There was a six-month writing course during which they wrote eight letters, with post-test results showing improvement in writing skills. Moses and Mohamad (2019) reviewed the literature on the challenges learners and teachers face in writing skills and identified a lack of exposure to books and reading materials as one of them. Following a diagnosis of L2 learners' writing difficulties, Al-Gharabally (2015) suggested that teachers should encourage reading to improve students' writing skills.

Ugboaja, Ifumanya, Eze and Offor (2015) studied the effects of the reading-to-write strategy on the performance of selected SSS pupils and reported a significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught using the reading-to-write method of learning composition and those taught using the conventional method. Participants were trained to read novels and comprehension passages selected from their course books, but there was no report on whether the essay topics corresponded with the materials read. Akinyeye (2015) investigated the teaching of English genres in the JSS classroom with a focus on teachers' pedagogical strategies and teaching-learning interaction. Among others, she found a prevalence of teacher-centred approaches, limited writing opportunities, gaps in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, teachers' limited knowledge of genre types, and a strong correlation between learners' performance and teaching strategies. Though an acute shortage of relevant textbooks was reported, there was no evidence that books were examined in any critical way. Hussain's (2017) study involving 160 teachers and 400 primary and secondary pupils reported the extensive use of brainstorming as a strategy for teaching writing in the Riyadh L2 context.

To answer the question "What do students need to learn to become effective l2 learners?, Barkaoul (2007) reviewed the main findings of research on L2 writing from (a) text-focused, (b) process-focused, and (c) socio-cultural-oriented perspectives. The study focused on advanced and intermediate EAP learners and drew implications for L2 writing content and teaching strategy. Nalliveetti and Manesneh (2017) studied the perceptions of EFL undergraduates on writing skills and reported that, though students had positive perceptions regarding the need for improving their writing skills, they demonstrated ignorance of strategies to adopt to gain adequate writing proficiency. The only available study on books is by Moradian and Rahmatian (2016). Although it reported a positive influence of textbooks on the development of writing skills in a group of Iranian students, the language was FFL and the three textbooks analysed were Action-Oriented Approach-based books for adults. Textbooks differ from serial course books for children like MNPE. The paucity of works on course books' place in the development of writing further justifies the current study.

Theoretical framework
To end this review of literature, I articulate the theoretical framework for this study. It is Genre Theory. with origins in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Genre Theory revolves around the term genre, which makes the understanding genre a crucial step towards explicating the theory. According to Eggins (2004), genre is a concept "used to describe the impact of the context of culture on language, by explaining the staged, step-by-step structure cultures institutionalize as ways of achieving goals" (p.9). Eggins (2004, p.55) credited J.R. Martin with two definitions said to best capture the systemic interpretation of genre. These are: (a) "a genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers often engage as members of our society." (1984, p. 25) and (b) "Genres are how things get done when language is used to accomplish them."(Martin, 1985, p. 248). Though (b) is adjudged less technical, both reveal that there are as many genres as there are different social activities that people engage in our culture. Thus there are "literary genres" (e.g., autobiographies, ballads), "popular fiction genres" (e.g., romantic novels, sitcoms), "popular non-fiction genres" (e.g., instructional manuals, news stories, reviews), and "educational genres" (e.g., lectures, essay writing, text-book writing, reports). In addition to these four, there also exists "a range of everyday genres", such as "transaction genres" (buying and selling), "telling stories" and "gossiping" (p.56). Genres can be identified by examining texts for the presence of the following features: (a) the co-occurrence of particular contextual clusters or registers, (b) the text's staged or schematic structure, and (c) the realisation of patterns in the text, as SFL suggest.

Describing "the staged, structured way in which we go about achieving goals using language" is, in essence, describing genre.

Genre Theory helps to explain the organisation of texts (Eggins, 2004, pp.9-10 & 54-84), and it is what underlies the Genre-Based Approach to language pedagogy, which has its roots in Australia where it is adjudged the most widely accepted writing pedagogies (Ahn, 2012; Christie, 1993 & Hylon, 1996, as cited in Akinyeye, 2015). In this study, Genre Theory will assist in identifying types of writing and assigning writing topics accordingly. Though the study does not deal with pupils' writing specimens, the knowledge of genres will certainly help in analysing the guidelines provided for the execution of given writing tasks to determine what type of genre the writing topic represents. Besides, as Eggins has made explicit, essay writing and course books, two areas in which this study is concerned in different ways, are different varieties of educational genres. This provides further justification for the choice of theoretical framework made.

Methods and materials
The Macmillan New Primary English series is the source of data for this study. It consists of six books, one for each year of primary education, as shown in the reference list. The modules in each course book were carefully examined to find out whether or not they contain lessons on writing as defined (This excludes handwriting and related subskills). Books 1 & 2 lack lessons explicitly designated as writing but bear exercises on writing skills. So it is the presence of writing tasks such as "Write 7 sentences about what your family did last week" (MNPE 1, p. 92) that justifies their inclusion as databases. Each lesson on writing was closely studied to identify the broad class of writing to which it belongs, the exact topic exposed and the specific genre it depicts, and the strategies employed for the presentation. This yielded information on the number of lessons on writing skills in each book, the total number of writing topics in MNPE, and the relative distribution of the subtypes of writing identified. It also provided information on the different strategies of presentation employed and how they were variously combined. The books were also surveyed for evidence of attention paid to two equally significant aspects of writing, namely the mechanics of writing and features of letter writing. These were ascertained and their frequency and specifications were determined. There were 90 lessons in which writing skill was presented either explicitly or implicitly. A total of 104 distinct writing topics were identified and this constitutes the data for the study. Tables and simple percentages complemented the analysis of data.

Analysis of data and interpretation of results
This presentation of the analysis of data and interpretation of results is theoretically in two parts. The first deals with the content of writing skill development while the second covers the strategies employed to present it. On content, it is considered useful to immediately differentiate between essay writing and letter writing. This is quickly followed by the less-known kind of writing hereby christened special text writing, mechanics of writing, and features of letter writing in that order. A listing of all the writing topics in MNPE seals off the part. Finally, all the strategies of presentation identified are discussed and illustrated. There are thus seven subsections. In the presentation that follows, illustrative extracts are provided in their original layout despite space constraints. This is important. Pictures and colours are excluded for technical reasons, but colour schemes are indicated by enclosing the initial letter for colour in square brackets after an extract (e.g., "[B]" for "Blue"). Bold prints are similarly marked using "[Bº]".

Essay writing
Descriptive, expository, narrative and argumentative essays totalled 59, respectively featuring 14, 30, 10, and 5 times representing 24, 51, 17, and 9 percent of the data. Table 1 displays these facts and some more.

Table 1: The Distribution of Essay Types According to Books.

Book	Descriptive	Expository	Narrative	Argumentative	Total	Percentage
1	0	0	2	0	2	3.4
2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	2	10	3	0	15	25
4	9	9	3	0	21	36
5	2	3	2	2	9	15

6	1	8	0	3	12	20.3
Total	14	30	10	5	59	
Percentage	24	51	17	8.5		100

Table 1 reveals that the expository essay topped the list while the argumentative essay was the least. More strikingly, it shows that expository writing was three times more frequent than a narrative essay, with their respective 30 and 10 occurrences. This is inconsistent with the report that, in the early grades, most writing activities in school focus on narrative writing rather than expository writing (Curtler & Graham, 2005 as cited in Andersen & Nielsen, 2022). So why were narrative essays far less visible in MNPE? Table 1 also reveals the total absence of essay writing in Book 2 and two incidences in Book 1. Furthermore, essay writing was more frequent in Book 3 (15 or 25 percent) and Book 4(21 or 36 percent) than in Book 5 (9 or 15 percent) and Book 6 (12 or 20.3 percent). Not until all the other forms of writing are examined will it be possible to generalise on the pattern of distribution of writing skill in MNPE. However, while the absence of essay writing in Book 2 is understandably appropriate, its presence in Book 1, given the basal state of pupils' English, is disconcerting. Each essay type is examined separately as follows.

Descriptive essay
Fourteen instantiations of descriptive essay writing were encountered as already seen and the topics were thematically categorised into places (5; e.g., church, mosque or shrine), persons (2, e.g., best friend), personal experience (2, e.g., "What I do every day"), sports (2, e.g., a wrestling contest), animals (1, dog), objects (1, house), and organisations (1, The Boys Scout Movement). Description of places was the most frequent as the enclosed figures show and, as the extract will reveal shortly, all the places, persons or objects lie within the scope of pupils' experience. Where it was felt that direct experience might be absent or inadequate, MNPE provided simulated experience in the form of reading passages or questioning for meaningful description to take place. Here is a sample lesson on the description.

(1) "1(a). How do you spend your holidays? Do you often travel with your parents?
   Do you sometimes visit places of interest? [R]
   (b). Think of such visits. Answer the following questions to help you write your
   description of such a visit. [R]
   A visit ………………………………………………………… (Name the place)
   (i)   Where did you visit?
   (ii) When did you go there?
   (iii) Why did you go there?
   (iv)Who invited you? (v)How did you prepare for the visit?
   (vi)When exactly did you leave for the place?
   (vii)How did you feel on the way?
   (viii) Did you see any interesting things on the way? What were they?
   (ix)Did anything happen to you on the way?
   (x)When did you arrive at the place?
   (xi)What important things did you see there?
   (xii)How did you feel when you returned?
  2. Now write the answers to the questions in your exercise books." [R]   (MNPE 4, p.42)

Expository essay
The thirty expository essay topics were classified into eleven themes. Ceremonies, home and family, and school life were the highest occurring themes with six, five and four manifestations respectively. Examples are "A festival in my village", "Things that we share at home", and "Why I go to the school library". Health featured thrice, e.g., "The effects of smoking Indian hemp". Themes with two occurrences only were foods and eating (e.g., "The food I like Best"), travelogues (e.g., Causes of road accidents"), clubs and organisations (e.g., "The Young Readers Club"), nature and the environment (e.g., "Why it is bad to burn bushes"), and places (e.g., A proposed excursion to a publishing house). Lastly, animals and culture and society featured once each thus: "Honey Bees" and "How foreign ways of life have changed our culture". Because of its numerical superiority, two extracts will serve as illustration:

The first is on travelogues ("A Motor Park") while the second is on nature and the environment ("Some of the uses of rocks to man"). Notice that in (2) the options were enclosed unconventionally in separate brackets and on different lines. Why?

(2) "Copy the following sentences. [B] Choose the right words where 2 words are written.

I (like) going to the motor park. There are (a lot of) vehicles there. Sometimes I go with my
  (do not like)   (a few)
(brother). When he goes there, he wants to travel to (Jos). It is a long journey. He always
(father)   (Lagos)
looks for a (young) driver to take him there. He is (worried) there might be an accident.
          (an old)   (not worried)
He takes down the (number) of the vehicle as well as the name of the driver. He is
               (name)
quite (afraid) but he always gets home safe". [R] (for options below only)
   (brave)   (MNPE 3, p.24)

(3) "Some of the uses of rocks to man. [B]

  1. Read the comprehension passage in lesson 1 again. [R]
  In groups, talk about the uses of rocks to man. Use the following questions and points to guide you. You may look into your social studies book and other books in the library to find out facts about rocks.

  (i)What are rocks?

  (ii)How many types of rocks do we have?

  (iii)Do you know that igneous rocks produce granite?

  (iv)Do you know that we use granite to build houses, bridges, roads and dams?

  (v)Do you know that sedimentary rocks produce chalk and limestone?

  (vi)Do you know that we use chalk to make paints and the chalk we use in the school?

  (vii)Do you know that we use limestone to make cement which we use in building houses,

     bridges and dams?

  (viii)Can you think of some other things we use these rocks for?

  (ix)Why do people use marble for their homes?

  (x)Do some of your school children play with marbles?

2. Now write ten sentences on "Some of the uses of rocks to man?" [R] (MNPE 4, p.85)

Narrative essay
With ten occurrences narrative essays accounted for 17 percent of essay writing. The stories centred on home and family life (3), school (2), farm (1: a chain story), animals (1), ceremonies (1), strange events (1), and social ills (1: robbery) and as frequently as the enclosed figures indicate. Here is an example.

(4) "Pre-writing activities [B]
  1. You have heard or read about strange things that happened to people you know or to those you don't know. They may be true stories or just make-believe. [Bº]
  2. Let's try to remember the strange story with the help of these questions: [Bº]
   (i) What's the title of your strange story?
   (ii) Where did it happen?-e.g. place- a town, a village, in the forest, by a river, a room, etc.

(iii) When did it happen?-e.g.- night, daytime, in the dark, time of the year etc.
(iv) Who are those in the story- animals? people? children or adults? Give them names.
(v) What shocked, surprised or impressed you?
(vi) How did the story start and end?
3. You may need to discuss the questions with your partner. Tell your story to your partner in turn before writing it down. [B°]
4. Your teacher will help you to write the titles of the stories on the chalkboard." [B°]
(MNPE 5, p.114)

Argumentative essay

The five argumentative essay topics fell into two thematic categories: worldview (Three topics on city/village life and school) and labour (Child labour and self-employment). An example of the first thematic field is (5).

(5) "Writing on an argumentative topic [B]…Exercise [B] 1…

2. In the last lesson, you went through an argument that "City or town schools are better than village schools'. This time, you are talking about village life and city life.[B°]

Topic [B]: Village life is better than city life. [B°]
Your class is going to have a debate on the topic. As one of the speakers, write ten points on why you think that village life is better than city life. You can also write ten points on why you think that city life is better than village life. Now, make your speech in a debate the teacher will arrange for each group." (MNPE 6, pp.12-13)

Letter writing

Formal letters and informal letters respectively accounted for 65 percent and 35 percent of the twenty-three instances of letter writing seen. Thirteen authentic letter-writing exposures translating to thirteen themes were recorded. Before they are separately discussed, here is Table 2 exposes more details.

Table 2: Thematic Classification of Formal and Informal Letters

S/N	Letter Type/ Addressee	Books						FL Sum	Books						I-L Total	Grand Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	Permission to visit	0	0	0	0	2	0	2								
2.	Letter of Complaint	0	0	0	0	1	1	2								
3.	Letter to the Editor	0	0	0	0	2	1	3								
4.	Letter of Appreciation	0	0	0	0	2	0	2								
5.	Letter of Invitation	0	0	0	0	1	1	2								
6.	Response to Invitation/Request	0	0	0	0	2	0	2								
7.	Business Letter			0	0	0	2	2								
8.	Letter to a Sister								0	0	1	0	0	0	1	
9.	Letter to a friend								0	0	0	1	1	0	2	
10.	Letter to a teacher								0	0	0	2	0	0	2	
11.	Letter to an uncle								0	0	0	1	0	0	1	
12.	Letter to an elderly sister/brother								0	0	0	0	0	1	1	
13.	Letter to Parents								0	0	0	0	1	0	1	
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	10	5	15	0	0	1	4	2	1	8	
	Grand Total							15							8	23
	Percentage							65							35	100

Formal letters

It is evident from Table 2 that learners were introduced to seven types of formal letter writing thus: letter of permission to visit, letter of complaint, letter to the editor,   letter of invitation, response to

invitation/request, and business letter. While the letter to the editor featured three times, the remainder featured twice each, accounting for the fifteen instances of formal letter writing. A lesson on formal letter writing is shown as (6).

(6) "Formal letter [R]:

1. You have noticed a woman living under the footbridge without shelter and clothes. People say she has HIV/AIDS.
Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, explaining what you saw and requesting assistance from the public to take care of those living with AIDS." (MNPE 5, p.17)

Informal letters

Informal letters were less thematically diversified and were nearly two times less frequent. The addressees were six and were typically sisters, brothers, uncles, parents, friends, and teachers, with only the last two featuring twice. The subject matter of the letters varied according to the addressees. One of them is financial assistance, which is appropriately addressed to an uncle.

(7) "Write a letter to your uncle, telling him about your success in the last examination and asking him for help with your fees. [R]   Follow these guidelines [B]:
  (i)   Your address
  (ii)   Greetings
  (iii)   Pleasantries
        ----asking about everybody at home
        ----asking about his work
  (iv)   Write about four sentences on your first term examination. Do not forget to tell him that you are one of the best students in the class going by the result.
  (v)   Ask him for financial assistance as you want to begin to prepare for the National Common Entrance Examination which you intend to attempt next year.
  (vi)   Closing remarks
  (vii)   Your name"   (MNPE 4, p.127)

Special text writing

Special text writing consists of twelve text types with a combined occurrence of twenty-two. Creative writing and autobiography had the highest representations of five each, followed by telegrams and e-mails with two each. The following genres were featured only once: report writing, filling out forms, statements, formal invitations, congratulatory messages, instructions, and text messages. Book 6 hosted 68 percent of special text writing (15), including seven single-occurrence cases, while Book 5 contained six. So why was special text writing concentrated in Books 5 & 6? More importantly, why was it presented in Book 2 when pupils are yet able to string sentences together? Could it be a case of error in judgement? What was categorised as special text writing in Book 2 actually consisted of the directive to write a poem (See Pictorial Illustration under Strategies below). Two excerpts, one on creative writing and another on writing statements, serve as an illustration. Meanwhile, Table 3 displays more details.

Table 3: Distribution of Special Text Writing in MNPE

S/N	Forms of Writing	Books						Total	Percentage
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	Report Writing	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
2.	Creative Writing	0	1	0	0	1	3	5	23
3.	Biography/ Autobiography	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	23
4.	Filling Forms	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
5.	Writing Statements	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
6.	Formal Invitation	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	5
7.	Writing Telegrams	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	10

8.	Congratulatory Messages	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
9.	Writing Instructions	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
10.	Text Messages	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
11.	Writing E-Mails	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	10
12.	Directions	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	5
	Total	0	1	0	0	6	15	22	100

(8) "1. Think of the funniest thing that has ever happened to you. Tell the other pupils what it was. Where did it happen? What did each person say or do? How did you feel? (Bº)

   2. Write it out as a short play. Your teacher will tell you how a play is written. Here are some important points. [Bº]

   (i)   Write it scene by scene, that is according to the place where it happened.

   (ii)   Name the cast, that is, the people who are in the play

   (ii)   Write the name of each person before his/her words.

   (iv)   Show how the person says the words e.g. <u>loudly</u>, <u>softly</u>, <u>angrily</u>.

   (v)   Say what the person does e.g. <u>shuts the door loudly</u>.

Write your group's play and display it on the class door notice board." [Bº] (MNPE 5, p.125)

(9) "How to write a statement [B]

You were out shopping with your uncle in his car when a man in another car ran into him. An argument broke out which led to a fight and both your uncle and the man were arrested by the police for causing public disorder.

  As an eyewitness, you have been asked to write a statement on what happened.

In not more than fifteen lines, write your statement using the guide below:

   (i)   The date and time of the incident.

   (ii)   Where did the incident happen?

   (iii)   How did it happen?

   (iv)   What was your uncle's first reaction?

   (iv)   What was the other man's first reaction?

   (v)   How did the argument and fight start?

Remember that your statement should be formal and factual." [Bº] (MNPE 6, p.37)

Mechanics of writing

Some attention was paid to the mechanics of writing in MNPE, and this covered punctuation marks in Book 3 and paragraphing in Book 6. The first lesson titled "Using full stops and commas" directed pupils to study a well-punctuated, four-line sample text-let. Two exercises captioned "Put 'commas' and 'full stops' in the appropriate place." and "Put commas where appropriate." then followed. "Adeolu and Jide are playing football on the field" and "The woman bought the pepper onion and tomatoes" were respectively the first sentences in each exercise (MNPE 3, p.28). Further exercises aimed at distinguishing "full stop" from "question mark" and testing the correct use of commas followed (p. 96). Thereafter, how to use a full stop and a question mark was explained, and the contexts for the obligatory use of capital letters were spelt out and illustrated. Ample practice exercises on the placement of capital letters in appropriate contexts (e.g., "Moses is living at oke ado, Ibadan.") concluded the presentations (MNPE 3, pp.113-114).

The lessons on paragraphing focused on introductory paragraphs and concluding paragraphs. The introductory paragraph began by directing pupils to re-examine the reading passage and count the number of paragraphs in each section. It highlighted some features of a paragraph (e.g., multiple sentences) and defined a paragraph as "a group of sentences which give information about one main point or idea". A model paragraph was presented and analysed, with the topic sentence highlighted and explained. A longer sample paragraph was given, followed by a practice exercise requiring pupils to "Write two different paragraphs on two different topics", each paragraph begins with an introductory sentence, followed by "four sentences on the topic mentioned in the first sentence." (MNPE 6, p.49-50).

The concluding paragraph was similarly introduced by explaining its significance thus: "When you write an essay, you need to end it with a concluding paragraph. That paragraph shows that you have come to the end of what you want to say." A model composition followed, with pupils instructed to read and pay attention to the last two sentences. Pupils were then asked if they thought those sentences enabled them to know what happened at the end of the story and told that that was "the work of a concluding paragraph". A practice exercise requiring pupils to read a story and end it with a "good concluding paragraph" (MNPE 6, 57-58) ended the explicit treatment of the mechanics of writing. The expository writing on UNICEF (S/N 44) consolidated what had earlier been done on paragraphing. It directed pupils to write two paragraphs using answers to questions (i) to (iv) and (v) to (vii) respectively. (MNPE 6, p.150)

Features of letter writing

Features of letter writing were described in Book 4 and Book 5 only, and the five lessons focused on (a) the term informal letter, (b) types of letters, (c) formal letter formats, (d) formal and informal letters, and (e) features of informal letter, as (10a)-(10e) show.

(10a) "In this exercise we are going to write what is called an informal letter. It is like a letter
    but you don't have to write your address and the closing remark. Just write the date and
    the opening greetings." [B°] (MNPE 4, p.29)

"It is like a letter" gives the impression that a formal letter is *a letter*. A short letter from a pupil to a teacher who is in the hospital nevertheless followed. Fifteen words (e.g., hospital, well told, and cheer) were provided for its completion, and the initial sentence was: "This is just to -------you up".

(10b) "Letter Writing [R]
   1. Let us talk about the types of letters people write. [R]
      e.g. invitation letter, letter of apology, request letter, letter of application, thank-you letter, letter of warning, a sack letter.

     (i)   Why are these letters so-called?
     (ii)   They have different names because the name tells us what each letter contains." [B°] (MNPE 4, p.40)
   2. Now, let us read the letter below and answer some questions about it. [R]

Whereas only generically formal letters were listed as letter types, the sample letter provided was an informal one as the addressee "Dear Uncle Chukwu" affirms. Ten questions on sundry matters concerning letters, their contents and formats were asked, e.g., "What type of letter is this?"

(10c) "Letter writing (formal) [B]
   1. Note the format below [B°]:

     (i)   A formal letter has two addresses: (a) the address of the writer and (b) that of the recipient/addressee".
     (ii)   There must be a salutation, e.g. Dear Sir/Ma, etc.
     (iii)   There must be a title which must be underlined.
     (iv)   The opening paragraph states the purpose of the letter.
     (v)   There is no room for unnecessary greetings or information.
     (vi)   The use of language must be formal and the tone must be impersonal.
     (vii) There must be a clear conclusion."   (MNPE 5, p.12)

Could the assumption that the teacher would explain the material content of each lesson justify the choice of "formal language" and "impersonal tone", two expressions that are certainly above the comprehension level of nine-to-ten-year-olds learning ESL? A practice exercise consisting of pupils writing a letter to their class teacher complaining about the quality of chairs in the class ended the presentation.

(10d) "Features of formal and informal letters [B]
Formal and informal letters have several differences. These are shown in the table below. [Bº]

Formal	Informal
(i)The writer's name is written at the top of the address.	The writer's name is not written at the top of the address.
(ii)The name, office and address of the addressee are written at the top left corner of the letter.	The name, office and address of the addressee are not written at the top left corner of the letter.
(iii)The letter begins with "Dear Sir" "Dear Ma" or "Dear Mr Olubi."	The letter begins with a personal name, e.g., "Dear Bola", or "My dear sister".
(iv)The letter ends with "Yours faithfully."	The letter ends with "Yours sincerely" or "Yours" with the first name"

(MNPE 5, p. 25).

The points of contrast identified, the details highlighted, the examples provided, and the tabularisation mode of presentation devised would facilitate understanding, retention and correct application of the differences between formal and informal.

(10e) "Writing an informal letter [B]
    l. Read this letter silently. [Bº]…
     What to do
    Read the letter silently again. This time, pay attention to the following features of informal
    letters: [Bº]
    The salutation   "Dear Uche" and not "Dear sir or ma."
    The closing   "Yours sincerely" and not "Yours faithfully."
    The writer   "Aduke" (first name) not "Aduke Odeniyi."
    Reference to the classmate's name   "Ibrahim" (first name) not "Ibrahim Tofa."
    The tone of familiarity and friendship"   (MNPE 5, pp.68-69)

Notice that the features of informal letters were subtly contrasted with those of formal letters. To ensure that the format was properly learnt, a directive to follow the pattern and "Write a letter to a friend who had just lost her very dear grandmother" ended the presentation.

The spectrum of writing skill development in MNPE
It is clear from the foregoing that the development of writing skills in the Nigerian child encompassed five broad aspects: essay writing, letter writing, special text writing, formats or features of letter writing, and mechanics of writing. Essay writing constituted 52 percent of the pupils' total exposure to writing with 59 occurrences. Letter writing and special text writing attracted almost the same amount of attention, given that they were credited with 23 and 22 topics respectively representing 20 percent and 19 percent. Because of the recognition of the peculiar nature of letter writing and the conventions guiding it, letter and features and formats were explained and illustrated. The understanding that written language is fundamentally different from spoken language and that the graphological conventions have to be mastered at an early stage similarly informed the incorporation of mechanics of writing. Mechanics of writing and letter formats and features attracted five lessons each. There thus occurred 114 instantiations of writing skill in MNPE. The writing was most frequent in Book 6 with 35 representations accounting for 31 percent and least frequent in Books 2 &1 with one and two occurrences respectively. Books 3, 4 & 5 accounted for 17, 24, and 26 percent with 19, 27, and 30 representations respectively. Essay writing was highest in Book 4, followed by Books 3 & 6. Whereas 52 percent of letter writing occurred in Book 5 and 26 percent featured in Book 6, there was a reversal with respect to special text writing, which saw 68 percent occurring in Book 6 and 27 percent in Book 5. The presence of two essay topics in Book 1 and one special text-writing incident in Book 2 provokes both positive and negative reactions: Could it be said that the authors probably went too far given the pupils' level of L2 acquisition? Or, should they be

commended for such an early exposure? It would be interesting to find out what actually happens in the classroom in this respect. More details are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Typological and Technical Summarisation of Writing Skill Development

Types of Writing	Books						Total	Percentage
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Essay writing	2	0	15	21	9	12	59	52
Letter writing	0	0	1	4	12	6	23	20.2
Text writing	0	1	0	0	6	15	22	19. 3
Letter formats	0	0	0	2	3	0	5	4.4
Mechanics of writing	0	0	3	0	0	2	5	4.4
Total	2	1	19	27	30	35	114	100
Percentage	1.8	0.9	17	24	26	31	100	

Turning to more specific types of writing, it would be seen that the contents of writing skill development are classifiable into seventeen subtypes. These are listed with their total manifestations enclosed in brackets thus: expository essay (30), formal letter writing (15), descriptive essay (14), narrative essay (10), informal letter writing (8), argumentative essay (5), creative writing (5), writing biography/autobiography (5), telegrams (2), text messages (2), congratulatory messages (1), report writing (1), filling out forms (1), writing a statement (1), formal invitation (1), writing instructions (1), and writing e-mails (1). The list shows that expository essay writing was the most frequent and that it was about two times more recurring than the closest subtypes, formal letter and descriptive essay. It also shows that seven subtypes are featured only once each and that they belong to special text writing. All the seventeen subtypes of writing had a combined occurrence of 104, which gives an average of 17 books/per year. Bright and McGregor (1970, p.144) recommended thirty compositions per year for secondary pupils. Table 5 glosses over the 104 writing topics, the subtype of writing to which they belong, and the specific books to which they are featured with page references. `

Table 5: The Spectrum of Writing Topics Covered in MNPE

S/N	Topic	Writing Subtype	Book	Page
1.	My best friend (in the class)	Descriptive Essay	3	**7**
2.	My friend's dog		3	53
3.	Anita and Kalio (A comparison)		4	12
4.	My first day in a new place		4	20
5.	A visit to … (Pupils to name a place)		4	42
6.	A visit to the zoo		4	60
7.	A journey to a strange place		4	78
8.	My place of worship(church, mosque or shrine)		4	90
9.	A football match I cannot forget		4	92
10	The Boys Scout Movement in my school(or any voluntary organisation)		4	95
11.	What I do daily before coming to school		4	157
12.	Describing a house		5	57
13.	A visit to a farm		5	109-
14.	A wrestling context		5	160
15.	Honey bees (Five sentences)	Expository Essay	3	7
16.	The food I like best (Ten sentences)		3	19
17.	A motor park (?) (unspecified but inferable)		3	24
18.	A festival in my town		3	35
19.	The Young Readers Club (Inferred)		3	47
20.	My family		3	56
21.	My town's anniversary (Inferred)		3	63
22.	Folasade's naming ceremony		3	110
23.	Things that we share at home		3	110

24.	A marriage ceremony I attended		3	110
25.	Some of the uses of rock to man		4	85
26.	The effects of smoking Indian Hemp (Sentences)		4	109
27.	Why families should meet regularly		4	115
28.	If I were the headmaster of my school		4	121
29.	What Bola's class captain can do to control the class (10 sentences)		4	143
30.	My family's eating habits		4	151
31.	The rules of eating		4	152-
32.	My wishes (10 sentences)		4	163
33.	Why I go to the school library(10 sentences)		4	168
34.	Children's Day March Past (15 lines)		5	130
35.	A proposed excursion to a publishing house		5	151
36.	A visit to a zoo		5	165
37.	Causes of road accidents (12 lines)		6	31
38.	Nigeria's National Day (Two paragraphs)		6	46
39.	Why it is bad to burn bushes		6	64
40.	How foreign ways of life have changed our culture		6	75
41.	Effects of normal and excessive use of drugs (3 paragraphs)		6	81
42.	What I like about my school		6	113
43.	HIV/AIDS: A deadly disease		6	146
44.	UNICEF or any other organisation (two paragraphs)		6	150
45.	What Mr Chike and his family did last week	Narrative Essay	1	92
46.	What my family did last week		1	92
47.	Chain story: "One day…"		3	6
48.	Bayo and his friends (A story)		3	89
49	A happy /sad event that happened in my class		3	105
50.	The hare and the tortoise run a race		4	45-6
51.	The day a thief (thieves) came into our house		4	132
52.	The last prize-giving day ceremony in my school (10 sentences)		4	140
53.	A strange story (Teacher to supply the titles)		5	114
54.	An excursion to…(To narrate events that happened) (15 sentences)		5	174
55.	I prefer living in a city to living in a village.	Argumentative	5	134
56.	Should a young child work outside the home for pay?		5	139-40
57.	City or town schools are better than village schools. (10 sentences for and against)		6	13
58.	Village life is better than city life.(Class debate) (10 sentences for and against)		6	13
59.	Working for the government is better than working for oneself. (Four paragraphs)		6	18
60.	My school attendance for a week	Report Writing	6	42
61.	Write one or two lines about your mother or a friend (A poem)	Creative Writing	2	56
62.	The funniest thing that has ever happened to me (A short play)		5	125
63.	A child in trouble (A short play)		6	102-3
64.	A story I have had or read (A Story)		6	141
65.	An animal (e.g., "The Patient snail") (A poem)		6	142
66.	Two celebrities: Femi and Dotun Oyewole	Biography/	6	124

	(12 sentences)	Autobiography		
67.	An important person in my area(15 sentences)		6	124
68.	My best teacher (12 sentences: 3 paragraphs)		6	133
69.	A member of my group(Six lines)		6	133
70.	My autobiography (One page)		6	137
71.	Application for Admission to JSS 1	Filling Forms	6	86
72.	A man in another car ran into my uncle's car (15 lines)	Writing Statement	6	37
73.	Invitation to my school's prize-giving day ceremony	Formal Invitation (Card)	5	35-6
74.	A telegram to your father telling him to pick you up from school because you are ill	Telegram Writing	5	31
75	A telegram to an elder brother/sister, telling the person about your plan to visit him or her for Christmas (Twelve words)		6	118
76.	A congratulatory text to a friend on his admission	Text Messages	5	31
77	A text sympathising with a friend who lost his grandmother		5	31
78	How to get from my school to my house	Directions	5	145
79.	A message to the captain of the school's football team for winning the LG Chairman's competition (GSM or Postcard)	Congratulatory Messages	6	26
80.	Instructions on e.g., how to cook rice	Instructions	6	95-
81.	Send a message to your friend on the computer	Writing E-mails	6	165
82.	A letter from someone visiting a town to a sister in the village	Informal Letters	3	104
83.	A letter to a friend describing your first travel by air, sea or road		4	17
84	Amina's letter to her teacher who is in the hospital		4	29
85.	A letter to your teacher who is ill in hospital		4	53
86.	A letter to your uncle telling him about your success in the last examination and asking him for help with your school fees		4	127
87.	A letter to a friend who has just lost her dear grandmother aged eighty		5	68-69
88.	A letter to your parents asking them for some money for an outing with your club		5	85
89.	A short letter to an elder brother or sister telling the person that you plan to visit him or her for Christmas		6	118
90.	A letter of permission to visit a fire station or soft drink factory	Formal Letters	5	6
91.	A letter to your class teacher complaining about the quality of desks in your class		5	12
92.	A letter to the editor of a newspaper requesting public assistance for a woman living under the footbridge		5	17
93.	A letter to your school's PTA chairperson inviting him or her to the finals of an intra-class debate in your school		5	42
94.	Response to the letter from school pupils who want to visit Owena Cocoa Farm		5	73
95.	Response to a request for assistance		5	90-91
96.	Letter of appreciation to the manager of Owena Cocoa Farm		5	96-97
97.	A letter to the head teacher of your school for making		5	97

	your excursion to Owena successful			5	102-3
98.	A letter to the editor of *The Tribune* thanking him for retaining the English Language Column…			5	102-3
99.	A letter to the postmaster for permission to visit the Post o\Office for an excursion (class captain)			5	126
100.	A letter to the head teacher turning down an invitation to attend the anniversary of a school			6	91
101.	A letter to the editor of a newspaper reporting an accident			6	107
102	Reordering of sentences in a business letter			6	146
103.	A letter to a bookshop asking about a book you would like to buy			6	147
104.	A letter to the LG Chairman complaining about the lack of some facilities in the area where you live			6	155

Strategies of presentation of writing skill

Table 6 exposes the strategies adopted for the development of writing skills in Nigerian children as seen in MNPE, arranged in descending order of magnitude. They were twenty-one and their combined frequency of occurrence was 158 (This is strictly in respect of the 104 writing topics). Questioning as a strategy of the presentation was the most frequent with 32 occurrences or 20 percent. It was distantly followed by discussion/ group work, pictorial illustration, points/guidelines, and model/sample essays/letters, which featured 27, 17, 14 and 13 times respectively representing 20, 17, 11, 10 and 8 percent. Four strategies exemplified by drawing and substitution occurred once. Using a class interval of 5, the twenty-one presentational strategies ranged as follows: 30-35(1), 25-29(1), 20-24(0), 15-19(1), 10-14(2), 5-9 (5), and 0-4 (11).

Table 6: Strategies Used in Presenting Writing Skill and their Frequency of Occurrence

S/N	Presentational Strategies	Frequency in Books						Total	Percentage
		1	2	3	4	5	6		
1.	Questioning	0	0	5	13	3	11	32	20.3
2.	Discussion/Group Work	0	0	2	8	4	3	27	17
3.	Pictorial Illustration	1	1	3	3	5	4	17	11
4.	Points/Guidelines	0	0	0	5	4	5	14	10
5.	Model/Sample Essays/Letters/Poems	0	1	1	1	4	6	13	9
6.	Vocabulary Listing	0	0	2	2	3	2	9	6
7.	Reading	0	1	1	5	0	1	8	5.1
8.	Completion	0	0	5	1	0	1	7	4.4
9.	Model Sentence Patterns	1	0	4	1	0	1	7	4.4
10.	Copying	0	0	4	0	0	1	5	3.2
11	Tabulation	0	0	0	1	1	2	4	2.5
12.	Comparing	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1.3
13.	Publishing	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.3
14.	Dictionary Use	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.3
15.	Defining/Describing/ Explaining	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1.3
16.	Ruled/Blank Lines/Sheets	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1.3
17.	Researching Topics	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1.3
18.	Acting out a Play	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.6
29.	Substitution	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.6
20.	Re-ordering Sentences	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.6
21.	Drawing	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.6
	TOTAL	2	3	30	4	25	55	158	100

				4				

Twenty-one presentational strategies featuring 158 times in 90 lessons imply a co-occurrence of strategies. This is evident in Table 6. Indeed, except questioning which featured only seven times (4.4 percent) as a lone strategy, all the strategies combined in twos or threes and even fives. Eclecticism is understandably the characterising feature of the presentation of writing skills in MNPE, as multiple convergences of strategies on a single writing encounter prevailed. This is pedagogically sound and rewarding. Moreover, the nature of writing skill and indeed language does not easily lend itself to straight-jacketing with regard to teaching strategy, as the literature reviewed shows. Wingard (1981) alone discussed nine. Pictorial illustration, for instance, cannot be used as a stand-alone strategy in any meaningful way. Having made these remarks, attention now shifts to specific strategies.

Questioning and drawing

Based on the revelation above that only seven instances of questioning occurred as a stand-alone strategy, it necessarily follows that the rest 25 representing 75 percent co-functioned with other strategies. Thus questioning combined with eleven other strategies as follows: discussion/group work (11), pictorial illustration (2), pictorial illustration and drawing (1), pictorial illustration, discussion/group work, and model sentences (1), reading, points/guidelines, and discussion/group work (1), reading (1), reading and discussion/group work (1), vocabulary listing (1), dictionary use and vocabulary listing (1), sample essays/letters (3), and researching (1). Only ten strategies did not combine with questioning (e.g., tabulation). Extract (1) above illustrates questioning as a stand-alone strategy for developing writing skills, (11) below combines questioning and withdrawing while (12) is a cocktail of questioning, reading, discussion/group work, and points/guidelines. Note that in (11), the only directive in the guidelines, "Draw a picture of the event", is also the only instance of drawing as a strategy for developing writing skills.

(11) "3. Think of an event that happened in the class that you will like to write about. It may
    be happy or sad. [Bº]
    Write about it.
    Here are some questions to help you. [Bº]
    (i) What is the event?
    (ii) Where did it happen?
    (iii) When did it happen?
    (iv) How did it happen?
    (v) What children took part?
    (vi) How did it end?
    (vii) Why did you pick the event?
    (viii) Draw a picture of the event." (MNPE 3, p.103)

(12) "Guided writing on "My wishes" [B]
    1. Read the passage in lesson 1 again [R]
        (i) What was the wish of King Midas?
        (ii) Did the wish come true?
        (iii) Did he like the wish later on?
    2. Think about many things you would wish for or many things you may wish to have.
        Talk to your partner about these. [R]
    Here are some of the things that may crop up in your mind. [Bº]
        (i)   pass your examination….
        (ii)   have more dresses from your parents
        (iii)   that your father should have a car
        (iv)   that you should have many cars
        (v)   that you go to a very good secondary school
        (vi)   that your parents should allow you to celebrate your next birthday
        (vii)   that you should be allowed to travel during the next holidays
3. Write ten sentences on the topic " My wishes" [R]   (MNPE 4, p. 163)

Discussion/group work

Discussion/group work was the second most frequent strategy with 27 manifestations. It entailed pupils talking about a given topic in groups or working cooperatively as a class unit. Expressions such as "Now discuss with your partner how it was celebrated", "Now, go into groups of five: discuss and write a letter to a friend describing your first travel by air, rail or road", and "Class discussion: Let's talk about 'lifestyle'" were indicators of the strategy. As a strategy for developing writing skills, discussion/group work also co-functioned with some other strategies. One instance where it co-functioned with pictorial illustration, questioning, and blank lines was on the topic "The foods I like best" in (13) below.

(13) "Things we eat [R]
    (Colourful pictures of eight foods, e.g. chicken, fish, plantain)

    Work in groups of five. [B°]
    Look at the pictures. What can you see?
    Which ones do you love eating?
    How do you like your plantains made? Cooked, roasted, fried?
        Talk about the foods you like in your group to the others in the class. [B°]
        Write 10 sentences on the foods you like best. Why do you like them? How are they
        made?" (Ten blank lines drawn on a green background followed.) (MNPE 3, p.19)

Pictorial illustration

The pictorial illustration was the only strategy of presentation found in all six books, which proves its relevance and effectiveness in the development of ESL writing skills. In all the seventeen instances of its use, pictorial illustration provided the appropriate visual stimulus necessary to understand and interpret the writing topics depicted. Pictorial illustration situation arises and concretises writing, and makes the experience more interesting, meaningful and worthwhile. In this series, for instance, pictures aided the comparative description of two friends, "Amina and Kalio" (MNPE 4, p.12). Thus pictures depicting a schoolboy in trouble, a family, a church and a mosque, a house, the hare, the tortoise and other animals, and a burning bush, for instance. These were in respect of the topics "A child in trouble" (A short play), "Members of my family", "Our places of worship", "Describing a house", "The hare and the tortoise run a race", and "Why it is bad to burn bushes". There was a diagram describing the format of a business letter and there also was a picture of a class notice board for publishing best essays. As stated earlier, pictorial illustration was complemented by discussion /group work, questioning, reading, guidelines/points, vocabulary lists, sample/model essays/poems/drama sketches, and acting out. Extract (14) illustrates.

(14) "(Picture of a zoo depicting animals in their enclosures and groups of visitors watching
    them)
  You have gone to visit your brother who is a student at Obafemi Awolowo University. On
  getting there, he took you to the Zoo where you saw many animals. [B°]
      Now, write out your experience using these guidelines. [B°]
      (a) A brief description of the campus.
      (b) The location of the Zoo
            ---how close is it to the campus?
            ---what did you see on the way?
      (c) (i)   In the Zoo, mention the types of animals you saw.
            (ii) The people you met.
      (d) Conclusion
  Note: You can have visited another zoo in Ibadan, Calabar, Nsukka, Zaria,
  Jos or Bauchi. Use your experience in writing the composition."   [B°] (MNPE 5, p.165)

One case of pictorial illustration that should not be left undiscussed is that involving poetry writing. In MNPE 2 (p.56), the lesson titled "Poems" opened with the picture of a woman watching over an infant sleeping in its cot. Immediately below that picture were the following instructions: "Read these poems aloud" and "Read these poems quietly to yourself. Read them aloud to your friend. Tell her how you feel

—*happy, sad*. Why do you feel so?" The poems "My mother" and "My friend", were obviously meant to be read, enjoyed, discussed and appreciated, then followed. Thereafter, came the directive to "Write one or two lines about your mother or a friend". It is this directive to write a poem that qualifies the lesson as creative writing and is therefore concerned with writing skill development.

Researching, defining/explaining, and comparing

Researching featured twice. The first was "Find out about the work of an organisation like UNICEF in your country. Write some points down …Write an essay of two paragraphs about the organisation…" (MNPE 6, p.150) (See *Mechanics* above). The second was "You may look into your social studies book and other books in the library to find out facts about rocks" in   (3) above. Defining/explaining terms was the strategy used in differentiating between a telegram and a text message (MNPE 5, p.31) as well as a letter and an e-mail(MNPE 6, p.165) (See (10a) above)). There was the comparison of a letter with a telegram, samples of which were provided. Pupils were thereafter asked to write a short letter and a twelve-word telegram on a planned visit for Christmas (MNPE 6, p.118).

Guidelines/points and tabulation

Providing guidelines/points was comparatively highly occurring as a strategy (14 times), with the advantage of helping learners to generate ideas and organise the same logically. One has been illustrated as (7). Another is (15) below.

(15) "In a debate competition organised by your school, you are to write an essay on: 'I prefer living in a city to living in a village'. [Bº]

Your write-up is to be submitted to the Literary and Debating Society of your school. [Bº]
Now, write the essay using these guidelines: [Bº]
(i)   Opening: e.g. Good afternoon, Mr Chairman, the panel of judges, Time Keeper, etc.

(ii) (a) Self –introduction: I am Audu Gamber, in Class…

(b)The purpose: I am here to convince you that living in the city is better than living

in the village.

(c) Reasons:
(a) Mention things that are in the city which are not in the village.
(b)Explain how these things enhance your performance in your study.
(c) Mention some of the advantages of living in a city." (MNPE 5, p. 134)

To show pupils how to write reports, two identical tables titled "School Census for November 3rd to 7th, 2008" and "School Census for November 3rd to 7th, 2007" were drawn. The first contained hypothetical figures of school attendance for a week recorded by Primary Six pupils in Abuja. The second was left blank, with pupils asked to complete and use the information generated to write a report titled "My school attendance for one week". (MNPE 6, pp.41-42)

Copying, completion, substitution tables, and re-ordering sentences

Five instances of copying as a presentational strategy for writing skill development were recorded, one of which opened with the directive "Copy this story in your exercise book". Like   (2) above, there were options from which pupils could choose to complete the story (MNPE 3, p.89). Completion was more in Book 3. The instance singled out for discussion concerns "A festival in my town". The lesson opened with the directive "Talk with your partner about an interesting festival in your town or village" and noted that the teacher would ask one pupil to tell the class their findings. A directive saying "Write down your answers to the following questions" followed. There were seven questions, the first of which was "What is the name of the festival?" Another directive to "Look at this picture" (drummers, dancers, etc.) on the right preceded that saying "Complete the story with these words" (Eight of them, e.g., "drummers", "centre"). Then came the final instruction to "Write the story in your book". This consisted of seven sentences with eight gaps, e.g., "This is a -------------festival." (MNPE 3, 35). Completion combined with discussion/group work, questioning, pictorial illustration, and vocabulary listing. Only in one lesson did there occur substitution, where pupils were asked to write five simple correct sentences" to tell a story about honey bees, flowers, and a pawpaw tree. Sample sentences were provided only in respect of honey

bees (MNPE 3, p.7). Another good guided writing strategy employed was the re-ordering of sentences, most useful for logical and sequential organisation of ideas and thoughts. This was featured only once. A completely mumbled and disarranged business letter was provided, and pupils were asked to "arrange the sentences properly and write it out as a proper business letter". The date was the last of ten items while the concluding sentence was the first. (MNPE 6, p.146)

Reading and acting out

The fact that reading and writing often complement each other was exploited to a great pedagogic advantage, where eight writing topics were directly based on previously read comprehension passages (e.g., S/N 25). Pupils were instructed to re-read the passages (letters, stories, poems, plays, etc.) before attempting the writing task. An example is:

(16) "Why families should meet regularly. [B]
    1. Read the passage in lesson one again about "The Abinjo Family." [R]
    2. In groups, talk about why big families should meet regularly…[R]
    3. The following points can help you in your discussion: [R]
       (i) they can know one another…
Now write ten sentences in your exercise book on the topic: 'Why families should meet regularly'." [B] (MNLPE 4, p.115)

Not all comprehension passage-derived writing activities entailed re-reading the passage, however. One such topic was "My place of worship" which, though indisputably based on the reading passage "The Lagos Central Mosque" (MNPE 4, pp. 88-90), did not refer to it. Whether or not references were made to previously read passages, the fact that writing topics were derived from them supports what has now become axiomatic, namely that a good reader usually turns out to be a good writer. Besides, it underscores the premium placed on experience as a requirement for writing. Reading passages indirectly provide experiential knowledge for meaningful writing to take place, especially where real experience is lacking or inadequate. The reality is that no meaningful writing can take place in an experiential vacuum.

Model essay/letters, vocabulary list, dictionary use, blank lines, and publishing

Two related strategies for developing writing skills were model essays/letters and publishing. While the former featured in every book except MNPE1, the latter occurred in Book 6 only. Model essays/letters serve as a guide because seeing good pieces of writing encourages learners to produce something similar content-wise, language-wise and even organisation-wise. This justifies its use. However, there are contrary views concerning the relevance and effectiveness of providing sample essays, vocabulary lists, and sentence patterns. For instance, Bright and McGregor (1970) believed it is unhelpful, and insisted that pupils would learn to write better if they write themselves, choose their words and construct their sentences. Thirteen samples /models were identified as follows: poems (2), letters (2), formal invitation letters (2), drama sketch (1), application form (1), telegram v letter (1), instruction (1), congratulatory message (1), direction (1), and formal invitation card (1). One, titled "How to get to the Post-Office", is a dialogic format used as a prompt to write a direction from one point to another (See S/N 78). Useful words were also supplied: "T-junction, fork, roundabout, right turn, street, road, lane", etc. (MNPE 5, p.145). Publishing good essays serve as a motivational force for both the author and the readers of the published work. In MNPE 6, it came in the following ways: "Your teacher will put the best essays on the class notice board" (p.113) and "Read the poem to the whole class. Write it out neatly and put it on the class display board. Write your name" (p.142). Conscious of the fact that pupils might lack the right vocabulary and sentence pattern for meaningful essay writing to take place, sample words and sentences were provided (The latter was less frequent though, occurring mainly in Book 3). Although sample vocabulary has been mentioned severally above, an instance where it co-featured with sample sentence structure is illustrated below.

(17) "My friend's dog [Bº]
    Use the words below to describe your friend's dog. Write the sentences. Example [Bº]:
    My friend's dog is a happy dog. It always jumps around.
       nice funny angry clever fast
       lazy dirt greedy" (MNPE 3, p.53) (cf. "Mr Chike saw a long snake" in MNPE 1, p.92).

Blank lines facilitate the development of writing in terms of proper space management and control of content to avoid overwriting and underwriting. They were provided only twice in respect of S/N 4 & 16. Finally, the instance of dictionary use was "Let's talk about drug use" and "Use your dictionary to find the meanings of these words." Ten were listed (e.g., analgesic, and prescribe). (MNPE 6, p.81)

Conclusion

The foregoing presented an in-depth analysis of how Nigerian children are assisted to develop the skill of writing through MNPE. The study focused on the content and strategy of writing skill development in the six-book series, and the following are the conclusions drawn.

1. The indispensability of writing as a modern-day tool is certainly well acknowledged and greatly appreciated by the authors and publishers of the Macmillan New Primary English course books. Literally from their first day at school, Nigerian children are offered the opportunity to gradually and systematically develop writing as a literacy skill. This is attested to by the presence of writing tasks in Books I and Book 2 and the progressive increase in their frequency and variety over the remaining books. Under-representation and over-concentration did not however go unnoticed.

2. topics that adequately reflect pupils' world views, sociocultural backgrounds, experiences, and interests as well as cover diverse fields of human endeavour must be selected for writing skills to develop properly. The 104 distinct writing topics seen, each of which uniquely relates to different aspects of children's personal and educational life and more, meet these conditions. Not only did the content of writing reflect every acknowledged type and subtype of writing, but deliberate efforts were also made to acquaint pupils with the mechanics of writing and formats of letter writing. That maximum lengths were sometimes prescribed in terms of the number of lines, sentences and paragraphs indicates an intrinsic desire to assist children to, not only know what to write but how to go about writing it conventionally and effectively.

3. Well-thought-out topics are insufficient on their own for developing writing skills in children. It is of great importance that appropriate strategies that assist pupils to learn to write more effectively, meaningfully, and sustainably be adopted. The MNPE series meets this requirement also, given the variety, frequency, and mode of application of the presentational strategies identified. The twenty-one strategies used in presenting writing skills in ninety lessons functioned eclectically, as only in 4.4 percent of contexts did there occur a stand-alone strategy. The absence of a corresponding classroom component that would attest to the effectiveness or otherwise of the strategies employed is one shortcoming of this study. The findings nevertheless support actual classroom practices where the teacher does not rigidly adhere to a single mode of lesson delivery from the beginning to the end of each lesson session. Different strategies are necessarily co-function for maximum effect.

4. What MNPE offers to young Nigerian children acquiring writing skills is adequate in many respects. The content of writing skills found and the strategies used in its presentation combine well enough to produce the First School Leaving Certificate holder whose writing proficiency level would match that of the native speaker of English of similar age and educational level. A significant proportion of children however leave primary school unable to write the most basic things, which is most disappointingly unreflective of the provisions. There must therefore be something happening or not happening in the classroom that makes children taught to write using the materials and strategies identified in MNPE incapable of meaningfully expressing their thoughts and ideas using graphic symbols. This should be investigated.

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