

---

## Narrative Techniques in the Essays of Nigerian Undergraduates

---

BY

Usoro Mark OKONO, Ph.D  
Department of English  
Akwa Ibom State University  
Nigeria

---

### ABSTRACT

*This work set out to examine the narrative techniques in the essays of Nigerian undergraduates. The objectives were to discover how students in Nigerian universities handle narrative essays, what narrative techniques they employ to narrate events, how they make their narration interesting, and the problems of language some of them encounter in writing narrative essays. The major theoretical base adopted for this research is applied linguistics. Two groups of first year degree students: 46 from the Department of Civil Engineering and 45 from the Department of Marine Engineering of the Faculty of Engineering, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria were given an essay test on the topic: The Last Road Accident that I Witnessed. The test was conducted under strict supervision. The students were asked to write it in 400 words within 50 minutes. After marking, 10 essays were selected from each department through systematic sampling procedure making the sample size of 20. It was found out that students (subjects) who have a good grasp of English grammar and vocabulary do well in narrative essays and creative writing. Other students on the reverse side commit a lot of lexical and grammatical blunders. It was concluded that this other set of students are not educated in the use of English; they have imperfect knowledge of the language. It was suggested that the use of English programme in Nigerian Universities should be extended to two years in addition to other remedial measures.*

**KEYWORDS:** Narrative, essay, techniques, calendar, clock-time, temporal, transition, specific, action, dialogue, systematic, sampling, aesthetic, lucid, prose, accident, road, subjects, experienced, ghastly.

---

### Introduction

Writing is one of the four skills of language. Essay writing as a major branch of the sub-discipline of writing definitely has some technicalities. The

genres of essay are: argumentative, descriptive, expository and narrative. The focus of this study is on the last of the four: narrative. Narrative essay appears to be the simplest of the four genres so students assume. This position is supported by the choices students have made in our recent studies. When a group of students numbering more than 200 was given different topics each representing one of the four genres for them to voluntarily choose one and write on it in an essay writing test it often emerged that greater number of them would choose the narrative genre.

A narrative type of writing tells a story or relates a series of events. Obah, (2005:202), Tinuoye, (1997:185), Axelrod and Cooper (2008:625) hold similar view. The most common of the narrative essays is the personal narrative (autobiography and diary). Others are reportorial such as required in the electronic and print media, biographies and historical analysis. Narration is the technique most frequently used in short stories and novels. The present research focuses on the narrative techniques employed by first year degree students of two departments of the faculty of Engineering in Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria. The overall aim of this study is to observe how the students' knowledge of English grammar and lexis and the application of the narrative techniques have helped them to produce lucid and interesting essays.

## **Methodology**

Systematic random sampling method was used to organize data for this research. [www.mathstopia.net](http://www.mathstopia.net) explains that in this sampling method we take samples from a whole population and then analyze them and reach to a conclusion. It is expected that the sample taken represents the whole population sufficiently or at least reasonably. In this arrangement we want to use our judgment as less as possible as the judgments sometimes can lead to biasness. As the simple random sampling involves more judgment and stratified random sampling needs complex of classification of the data into different classes we use systematic random sampling as a hybrid of the two. Systematic random sampling involves five processes: determine the size of the population, determine sample size, calculate the number of items in the population to be represented by each sample ( $(n) = \text{population size} \div \text{sample size}$ ), select any item as the first sample and choose next sample which comes at  $n$ th position after the previous one and finally, collect the samples and draw an appropriate conclusion.

Two groups of students were used for this study. Forty-five year one students of the Department of Civil Engineering and forty-six first year students of the Department of Marine Engineering of the Faculty of Engineering, Akwa Ibom State University constituted the experimental group for the study. The students

offered the Use of English and Communication Skills I and II coded GSS I and GSS II. Essay writing is an important unit in the syllabus otherwise called course outline. The students henceforth, subjects were given a narrative essay topic: *The Last Road Accident that I Witnessed* to write within fifty (50) minutes. The length of the essay was 400 words. The test was carried out under strict examination conditions. At the end of the exercise, ninety-one students wrote the test and ninety-one essays were collected in the test hall.

In line with the method of systematic random sampling, 10 essays were selected from the Department of Civil Engineering and 10 essays were chosen from the Department of Marine Engineering making a sample size of 20. The ten essays from Civil Engineering were coded A to J and the essays from Marine Engineering were coded K to T. Each essay was scored on nine variables. The variables were coded for ease of scoring. Calendar and clock time was coded a; temporal transition was coded b; verb tense was coded c; specific narrative action was coded e. Other variables and their codes were: sentences – S, paragraphs - P, errors – R and score on impression – SOI. For the five narrative techniques each instance of use attracted 20%. That is to say the variable was expected to be present up to a maximum of five times. Only verb tense was calculated one for 1 percent. That is to say for 400 words verbs may be 100. Simple percentages were employed to calculate the data.

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Limitations**

Essays of all the students who participated in the test could not be analyzed and a thorough analysis of errors could not be carried out.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The major theory that covers this research is applied linguistics. Schmitt Norbett (2013:1) explains applied linguistics as using what we know about (a) language, (b) how it is learned and (c) how it is used in order to achieve some purpose or solve some purpose in real world. In the same vein Lyons (1981: 34) sees applied linguistics as a sub-field of linguistics which has as its concerns the application of the concepts and findings of linguistics to a variety of practical tasks. Accordingly, the title of this research is fundamentally keyed into applied linguistics practically and theoretically. For proper explication of the theory, Axelrod and Cooper's expatiation of narrative writing is useful. Axelrod and Cooper (2008:625) define narrative writing as one of the most versatile writing strategies which serve many different purposes. They observe that narrative writing can be used to report on events, present information, Illustrate abstract ideas, support arguments, explain

procedures and entertain with stories. The source identifies five techniques of narrative writing which are: calendar and clock time, temporal transitions, verb tense, specific narrative action and dialogue. Explaining further, Axelrod and Cooper opine that:

these strategies give narrative writing its dynamic quality, the sense of events unfolding in time. They also help readers track the order in which the events occurred and understand how they relate to one another. (Axelrod and Cooper 2008:625).

According to Axelrod and Cooper, presenting a clear sequence of action is essential to narrative. One of the simple ways of constructing a clear time sequence is to place events on a time line with years or precise dates and times clearly marked. This technique is called calendar and clock time. To do this the narrator may begin with the year, date and/or time. Whereas calendar and clock time tend to be used sparingly, writers regularly use temporal transitions such as *when, at that moment, before* and *while*. Temporal transitions establish a clear sequence of actions in time. They are used to explain both one time and recurring events. Connectives showing temporal relationships to indicate frequency are: *frequently, hourly, often, occasionally, now and then, day after day, every so often, again and again*. Temporal relations that indicate duration are: *during, briefly, for a long time, minute by minute, while*. Temporal relations which indicate particular time include: *now; then; at that time; in those days; last Sunday; next Christmas; in 2003, at the beginning of August; at six o'clock; first thing in the morning; two months ago; when*. Temporal transitions used to indicate the beginning are: *at first; in the beginning; since; before then*. Temporal transitions used to indicate the middle are: *in the meantime, meanwhile, as it was happening, at that moment, at the same time, simultaneously, next, then*. Temporal transitions used to indicate the end and beyond are: *eventually, finally, at last, in the end, subsequently, later, afterward*.

Axelrod and Cooper also explain that in addition to time markers like calendar and clock time and temporal transitions, writers use verb tense to represent action in writing and to help readers understand when each action occurred in relation to other actions. The source observes that occasionally, writers use present instead of the past tense to give the story “you are there” immediacy. Writers use simple past tense to represent one time events that began and ended at some time in the past. Verb tense can also be used to show complicated relationships between past actions. For example, a combination of simple past tense and progressive is frequently used in narrative.

Axelrod and Cooper observe that specific narrative action uses active verbs and modifying phrases and clauses to present actions vividly. Specific narrative action is especially suited to representing the intense fast moving, physical action of sports events. The two most common kinds of modifiers that writers employ to present specific narrative actions are: participial phrases: *tearing by me, stopping suddenly, moving past me at high speed*; absolute phrases: *his cleats thumping in the grass, his legs pin-wheeling, the row of cleats flicking up a faint wake of dust behind*. These specific narrative actions re-create the sights and sounds of people in motion.

The fifth narrative technique enunciated by Axelrod and Cooper is dialogue. Dialogue reconstructs choice bits of conversation and does not try to present an accurate and complete record. It is most often used in narratives that dramatize events. In addition to showing people interacting, dialogue can give readers insights into character and relationships. Dialogue may be quoted to make it resemble the give – and –take of actual conversation, or it may be summarized to give readers the gist of what was said.

From Axelrod and Cooper’s position onetime event implies many events occurring at the same time sequentially. Recurring events refers to events occurring sequentially over a long period of time. A remembered event essay as well as remembered person essay has to do with an event that is neither recurrent nor concurrent. For the avoidance of doubt the essay used in this research: *The Last Road Accident that I Witnessed* is an example of onetime event and a remembered event essay. The goal of this research is to assess how our subjects have applied some of or all the narrative techniques outlined above in the presentation of their essays.

### **Data Analysis**

From the data gleaned from the study the subject coded T recoded 8 instances of the use of calendar and clock time narrative technique. This represents 160%. This feat was closely followed by subject B who recorded 100% i.e. 5 instances of use of calendar and clock time technique. Subjects C and J recorded 80% and 60% instances respectively. Subjects D, G and P used the technique 2 times each. A total of 11 subjects exemplified the technique only once. Only subject O did not reflect calendar and clock time in his write-up, as can be seen in Table One.

Table 2 shows that subjects B and C made use of temporal transitions 6 times each in their essays. This means 120%. Three subjects: K, M and Q each employed temporal transitions 4 times meaning 80%. Subjects, L, O and R each used this

narrative technique 3 times in their essays. Six subjects (A, E, G, J, N and S) recorded two instances of temporal transition each in their essays. Three subjects: D, F and T made use of this technique only once while subject I did not use temporal transition at all.

Only subject B wrote his essay with 75 verbs, the highest in the group. Three subjects: L, Q and S employed 60 verb tenses each while three subjects: G, K and R used verb tense 28 times meaning 28%. Subject H employed verb tense 27 times and by far the lowest. These data are contained in table 3. In table 4 subject L employed specific narrative action eight times meaning 160%. Next was subject T who used this narrative technique 6 times i.e. 120%. Two subjects B and K exemplified this feature three times in their essays. Subjects C, J and N each used specific narrative action 2 times i.e. 40% while subjects D and Q used the technique once. Eleven subjects: A, E, F, G, H, I, M, O, P, K and S did not reflect specific narrative action in their essays. Only 8 subjects used the narrative technique of dialogue in their essays. Subjects J, K, and T employed dialogue 2 times in their essays while subject D, G, H, L and O employed this technique once as shown in table 5. The data in table 6 shows that subject T secured the highest score on impression: 17 which is equal to 85%. He wrote 12 sentences in 4 paragraphs and only 3 errors. The second highest score of 16 i.e. 80% was secured by subject L in an essay written in 40 sentences, 11 paragraphs and which contained 8 errors as shown in table 6. Subject K who scored 16 is (75%) wrote 23 sentences in one paragraph containing 18 errors. Subject D had a score of 13 (65%) in an essay of 19 sentences written in 12 paragraphs with 11 errors. Subjects A, I, J, M and P each garnered 60 score on impression. A had 8 errors, I, 8 errors, J, 19 errors, M, 12 errors and P, 16 errors. Subject C who wrote his essay in 8 sentences, 5 paragraphs with 20 errors secured 3 (15%) score on impression. The next bad essays were those of subjects H, R and S whose scores on impression stood at 25% each. Subject O wrote his essay in 13 sentences, 3 paragraphs had 23 errors and attained a score on impression of 35%. Subject E and G scored 40% each. Subjects F, N and Q scored 50% each. The data are presented in tables 1- 6 below:

**TABLE 1 Showing use of Calendar and Clock Time by Subjects**

S/N	SUBJECT'S CODE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	A	1	20
2	B	5	100
3	C	4	80
4	D	2	40

5	E	1	20
6	F	1	20
7	G	2	40
8	H	1	20
9	I	1	20
10	J	3	60
11	K	1	20
12	L	1	20
13	M	1	20
14	N	1	20
15	O	0	0
16	P	1	20
17	Q	2	40
18	R	1	20
19	S	8	160
20	T	1	20

**TABLE 2 Showing use Of Temporal Transitions by Subjects**

S/N	SUBJECTS CODE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	A	2	40
2	B	3	60
3	C	6	120
4	D	1	20
5	E	2	40
6	F	1	20
7	G	2	40
8	H	0	0
9	I	1	20

10	J	2	40
11	K	4	80
12	L	3	60
13	M	4	80
14	N	2	40
15	O	3	60
16	P	6	120
17	Q	4	80
18	R	3	60
19	S	2	40
20	T	1	20

**TABLE 3 Showing Use of Verb Tense by Subjects**

S/N	SUBJECTS CODE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	A	54	54
2	B	75	75
3	C	51	51
4	D	44	44
5	E	42	42
6	F	30	30
7	G	28	28
8	H	27	27
9	I	34	34
10	J	40	40
11	K	28	28
12	L	60	60
13	M	54	54
14	N	47	47



15	O	43	43
16	P	35	35
17	Q	60	60
18	R	28	28
19	S	60	60
20	T	29	29

**TABLE 4 Showing Use of Specific Narrative Action by Subjects**

S/N	SUBJECTS CODE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	A	0	0
2	B	3	60
3	C	2	40
4	D	1	20
5	E	0	0
6	F	0	0
7	G	0	0
8	H	0	0
9	I	0	0
10	J	2	40
11	K	3	60
12	L	8	160
13	M	0	0
14	N	2	40
15	O	0	0
16	P	0	0
17	Q	1	20
18	R	0	0

19	S	0	0
20	T	5	100

**TABLE 5 SHOWING USE OF DIALOGUE BY SUBJECTS**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>SUBJECTS CODE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
1	A	0	0
2	B	0	0
3	C	0	0
4	D	1	20
5	E	0	0
6	F	0	0
7	G	1	20
8	H	1	20
9	I	0	0
10	J	2	40
11	K	2	40
12	L	1	20
13	M	0	0
14	N	0	0
15	O	1	20
16	P	0	0
17	Q	0	0
18	R	0	0
19	S	0	0
20	T	2	40

TABLE 6 SHOWING SUBJECTS' PERFORMANCE IN ESSAY WRITING

S/N	SUBJECTS CODE	NO. OF SENTENCES	NO. OF PARAGRAPHS	NO. OF ERRORS	SCORE ON IMPRESSION	PERCENTAGE OF SCORE
1	A	37	6	8	12	60
2	B	17	11	13	11	55
3	C	8	5	20	3	15
4	D	19	12	11	13	65
5	E	21	8	20	8	40
6	F	17	9	16	10	50
7	G	14	6	17	8	40
8	H	10	4	14	5	25
9	I	25	5	8	12	60
10	J	15	10	19	12	60
11	K	23	1	18	15	75
12	L	40	11	8	16	80
13	M	36	6	12	12	60
14	N	21	2	16	10	50
15	O	13	3	23	7	35
16	P	15	6	16	12	60
17	Q	22	3	10	10	50
18	R	17	7	22	5	25
19	S	33	5	39	5	25
20	T	12	4	3	17	85

## Discussion

### Calendar and Clock Time Narrative Technique

Our data show that subject S applied calendar and clock time narrative technique eight times in his essay. The writer narrated the accident which occurred along Nassarawa – Abuja road in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria. He used calendar and clock time to chronicle the events as they unfolded sequentially from the beginning to the end. His essay began thus: *I Started my journey from Benue*

around 6:50am on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. We started from Benue Links Park. The subject has stated precise time, date and place. These attributes make the essay vivid. Toward the end of the essay, the subject stated. *We were taken to the General Hospital around 9:25pm.* The subject added at the end of the essay. *This is a work of non-fiction* meaning his writing is a report of actual experience. But reading through the essay one is bound to believe that it is actually an event which the writer experienced.

Subject B applied calendar and clock time narrative technique five times i.e. 100%. He wrote phrases like: *three days after, three days to the ceremony, one (a) day to the ceremony, on that fateful day and after fifteen minutes.* These specific dates and times make the essay look real. Similarly, subject C used calendar and clock time narrative technique four times in his essay. His clauses were: *It was very late in the evening at around 9pm, mom...had already been up at around 5am, so at about 6am,... as we started the journey down to Anambra State at exactly 8.30am.* Subject C reflected this technique three times in his essay. Excerpts from his essay are: *It all began on a Saturday morning, the town was busy as it was the great Watt's Market day, At around 12 noon.* The reference to these dates and time line would position the mind of the reader on a specific time frame. Apart from subject O who made no reference to date or time in his essay other subjects began their essays with the date of occurrence of the event at the beginning of the essays. An example is Subject A who began thus: *20 August, 2009 is a day I will never forget.* Calendar and clock time narrative technique is very necessary for both one time and recurring event essays. The essay used in this research: *The Last Road Accident that I Witnessed* is an example of one time event and a remembered event essay. The narrative technique of calendar and clock time helps the reader of a narrative essay to have a focus on time and season and also follow the sequence or the chronology of the event as it unfolded.

### **Temporal Transitions**

A temporal transition is useful in reporting the sequence of events in a narrative essay. Subjects C and P exemplified temporal transition 6 times in their essays. This figure translates into 120%. For instance, Subject C in paragraph 2 began: *so early Monday morning...* within the same paragraph he wrote: *so at about 6am.* Beginning paragraph 3: he wrote: *After eating....* He began paragraph 4 with: *Finally,...* and toward the end of the paragraph, he stated: *So, finally,...* These transitions have streamlined the actions in the narrative essay thereby fostering a definite sequence. Consequently, the reader follows the unfolding events with understanding. Suspense is equally created through these temporal transitions. Thus at the opening of a sentence with a temporal transition one is curious to

follow and discover what actually happened. In his essay subject P expressed transitions such as: *On that very day..., close to an hour..., Immediately I reached the house..., That very day..., That very night... When I eventually....* Subjects K and Q exemplified temporal transitions 4 times in their essays. i.e. 80%. K for example recorded transitions such as: *In a few minutes' time..., When I saw a little child....* Temporal transitions by subject Q included: *Some minutes back..., thirty minutes later..., During the course of preparing the meal....* In his essay subject M wrote: *Shortly after..., while my only prayer..., Meanwhile, most passengers were deeply asleep, in a twinkling of an eye....* Only subject h did not express temporal transition in her ten-sentence essay of four paragraphs. Of course she had 25% score on impression and exhibited indeterminacy and un-English expressions in her essay.

In his essay in paragraph three subjects M wrote thus: *His style of driving was more than dangerous. He had no respect for the traffic signs. On two occasions he was ordered to stop by VIOs and the police but he waved them aside. My heartbeat increased more than ever before, while my only prayer was to get to my destination. Meanwhile, most passengers were deeply asleep.* In the above paragraph the two temporal transitions while and meanwhile have directed the focus of the reader to what happened before and what came next.

### Verb Tense

It was estimated that an essay of 400 words should contain up to 100 verb tenses and therefore in the statistical analysis 100 verb tenses were taken to be equal to 100%. Subject B used 75 verb tenses, the highest in the sampled essays. It is noted that she wrote her essay using 17 sentences in 11 paragraphs. She also had 11 (55%) score in the use of simple past tense. On page one, she used such verbs such as *was received, started, loved, told, accepted, said, was booked, realized.* She however got it wrong with the auxiliary: *that I will be attending a traditional marriage* should have been: *...that I would be attending a traditional marriage* to reflect the sense of the past.

Three subjects (L, Q, S) wrote their essays with 60 verb tenses. Subject L used 60 verb tenses in his essay. This subject has the ability to mix present tense with past tense appropriately. For example in the first paragraph which he brought in philosophy of life he wrote: *...good or bad as the creationists would say.* This is a good example of the use of modal auxiliary. In the same paragraph he wrote: *It could fade away as a rose trampled by troops of marching soldiers that its real beauty is no more conspicuous.* Again he exhibits a good use of modal auxiliary. His second paragraph begins thus: *27<sup>th</sup> March, 2003 is a date that I'll never forget,*

*a day that has seared y heart with pains, pains and pains.* In the third paragraph, he begins with a simple past tense: *It was a trip to one of the most amazing places in the world which has attracted millions of tourists all over the world yearly-Ibeno Beach. My entire family and I embarked on this journey that turned a menace to my destiny.* Note the use of past tenses: *was, embarked and turned* in addition to the present perfect tense *has attracted* used appropriately. Note that this subject attained 80% score on impression. Subject Q is also good at use of verb tense in his writing, some of his clauses are: *it was, as we would have it, you know the joy, I, on the other hand woke up...Mother had plans. I got out, It was an accident that had happened.* Note the use of single past tense and past perfect tense. The subject ends his essay with: *I have never forgotten about that day, March, 14<sup>th</sup> 2019.* This is an example of present perfect tense which shows habitual behavior. This subject had a 50% score on impression. Subjects G, K and R used only 28 verb tenses in their essays. Subjects G wrote a short essay in only 14 sentences while subject K is not conversant with English verbs and chooses to write phrases without verbs. Subject K wrote a relatively short essay in 23 sentences but she fumbled generally in paragraphing as the entire essay was written in one paragraph nevertheless his essay is good in aesthetics. His score on impression is 15 i.e. 75%.

### **Specific Narrative Action**

Specific narrative action as a narrative technique is suited to sport commentaries but can be used for narrating events other than sports. It consists of active verbs, modifying phrases, participial phrases and absolute phrases. Subject L expressed 8 instances of specific narrative action. Participial phrases were: *exposed to the sun, perused by the wind, trampled by the troops, filled to the brim.* Absolute phrases were: *those coming down the bridge and those heading up, overtaking every single road user, hiding it from the uniformed men.* Note that this subject expressed complete variables in this research and achieved the best in aesthetics and had 80% score on impression. This feat was perhaps made possible partly by the use of specific narrative action in six instances.

Subject T also exemplified beautiful use of specific narrative action. His four instances were: *mothers calling their children, a detached vehicle tyre rolling on the road, blood dripping from a car, people running helter-skelter, people roasting chicken.* All the five instances exemplify absolute phrases. Incidentally, the subject attained 85% score on impression and the highest in the research. Subjects B and K exemplified three instances of specific narrative action in their essays. B's examples were: *a big caterpillar destroying things and killing many innocent souls.* These are absolute phrases. Similarly, subject K specific narrative action

examples were: *The gentle breeze offering little relief, wondering many people who had lost their lives, little remembering to pray for myself*. The first example is absolute phrase while the last two are participial phrases. Subjects C, J, N portrayed specific narrative action in two instances in their essays. Subject C's examples were: *going straight to the back seat and agreeing on who to stay*. For subject J exemplified two instances of specific narrative action thus: *knocking down two more people, causing a catastrophic destruction to the goods inside the shop*. In like manner subject N wrote: *walking by the roadside, discussing between ourselves*. All the six instances exemplify participial phrases which are an aspect of specific narrative action. In our data subjects D and Q exemplified one instance of specific narrative action in their essays. Subject D wrote: *lying unconscious and bleeding on the hot coal-tar road, some people gathering and chattering*. The first is a participial phrase and the second example is absolute phrase. Eleven subjects did not reflect specific narrative action in their essays.

## Dialogue

Dialogue in narrative essay reconstructs choice bits of conversation. It is mostly used in narratives that dramatize events. Only 8 subjects exemplified dialogue in their essays. Subjects J, K and T wrote dialogue in two instances. Subject J for example wrote: *the next I heard was Jesus! Jesus!! Jesus!!!, oh! What a tragedy!*. Subject K wrote: *what is happening, I thought, Oh God! I screamed*. Subject T recorded a long dialogue: *I know you might be wondering where was I when this happened? What took me to the place? Let me take you back to the beginning how it all started....* Though the above excerpts from the essays are not full dialogues since no character talked back, but they bear semblance of dialogue (conversation) because they're direct statements. They may be regarded as monologue or soliloquy. The effect they have on the essay is making the narration more real. The other five subjects (D, G, H, L, O) exemplified dialogue in one instance in their essays. In his narration subject D wrote: *"pick her up quickly," a nurse screamed, "her mother is a good friend of mine"*. *The nurse was talking to onlookers and sympathizers at the scene of the accident*. Subject G wrote: *everyone was shouting "oh! Oh! Oh! My God"*. Subject H wrote: *the young lady who got hit was continually shouting "mme akpa-o" meaning I am dead*. Subject L recorded. *"With this lorry right in front of us, "where do we run to?"*. Finally subject O wrote: *...and the driver replied, "I am okay"*. Dialogues in narration evoke vividness and a sense of reality.

## General Performance

A good narrative essay has vividness and suspense. Subject T used a creative style of presenting the aftermath of the accident before the actual event. This is the style adopted by Chinua Achebe in the presentation of *No Longer at Ease* (a novel). In paragraph 3, he changes from past tense to present tense for the description of the road junction where the accident occurred. Note: *I finished all my chores for the day, had my bath and left for church which is along the new stadium road adjacent to Nung Oku Junction*. He achieves a sense of immediacy “you are there” created through dialogue. This subject secured 85%, the highest in the group. Another good essayist among the subjects is subject L who exhibits complete narrative techniques. He also mixes present tense with past tense appropriately and reports exclamations. He creates suspense and his essay is the best in aesthetics. The beginning of his paragraph 2 reads: *It was a trip to one of the most amazing places in the world which has attracted millions of tourists all over the world yearly – Ibeno Beach. My entire family and I embarked on this journey that turned a menace to my destiny*. All the other sentences and paragraphs are as interesting as these. He had 80% score on impression. Subject K with 75% score on impression exhibited complete narrative techniques and achieved excellence in creativity (aesthetics). Apart from lean paragraphs subject D’s essay is very good in grammar. He also recorded complete narrative variables in his essay. His score on impression stands at 65%. Note the opening paragraphs of his essay: *just when the sun was about setting in the west, my friends and I hurriedly left the school premises knowing (that) we’d overstayed and our parents would be worried*. The conjunction which I have inserted in parenthesis is optional. The two sentences are grammatically sound and also creative. Subjects A, I, J, M and P scored 60% while subject B scored 55% and subjects F N and Q scored 50% respectively. Seven subjects (C, E, G H, O, R, S) scored below average.

The seven subjects listed above produced quite uninteresting prose with multifarious errors some of which require explanation in this research. Subject C wrote the most indeterminate essay in the group having one paragraph of 10 lines in one sentence. He is not acquainted with English spellings. For instance, he wrote: *when* for *went*, *stairing* for *steering* and *incredent* for *ingredients* and homophonous variants substitution such as *seat* for *sit*, *faithful* for *fateful*. He exhibited bad syntax such as *I and my siblings instead of my siblings and I*. Note: *when dad informed I and my siblings* instead of *when dad informed me and my siblings* or *when dad informed us*. He wrote up to 400 words but could not complete the essay due to lack of planning and co-ordination of facts. He had the lowest score of 15%. In the same vein subject E recorded lexical infelicities and illogicality in the presentation of facts. For instance in paragraph 5 he wrote: *the truck and the two buses ran into each other, before we realize we where on the*



*ground crying for help, dead was around the corner. The lexes where and dead should have been were and death. After this short paragraph the next paragraph starts: we all rushed to the spot of the accident, it was a very deadly accident that claimed the lives of people....* There is a lot of illogicalities in these paragraphs. *Deadly* or *ghastly* means involving loss of lives. Secondly the subject was in one of the vehicles that collided how was he able to rush to the spot? Where was he and where was the scene of the accident he and other inmates of his vehicle rushed to? This is a typical case of illogicality in narration.

For subject G it is appalling for a university undergraduate to write his as *is*, no as *know*, rider as *driver* and *as* as *has*. This shows imperfect knowledge of English lexis. In like manner subject H wrote indeterminate sentences and unEnglish expressions. Subject O put up a shaky control of grammar, indeterminacy, run-on sentences and sentenceless constructions. Subject R produced intrusive prepositions, light punctuation, indeterminate sentences, verbless sentences and lexical infelicities. For example, he wrote: *commercial day* for market day, *roadsigns* for signboards and *when* for went. The subject is an illiterate in English. Subject S is not acquainted with English grammar and lexis. The entire essay is written in upper case, punctuation is poor, sentences are indeterminate and the entire presentation is abysmal. This is an unEnglish essay; typically how not to write English and essay in English. For detailed work on errors see Okono, U. M (2020:67-81).

## Conclusion

The 20 subjects whose essays are analyzed and discussed in this research have shown their overall best performance in writing narrative essay. All the subjects have at least succeeded in establishing three important parameters for examining narration which are date, place and time. The most important parameter: subject matter (event) has already been supplied by the examiner, which in this is case was: *The Last Road Accident that I Witnessed*. Out of 20 subjects selected through systematic random sampling technique 7 performed abysmally in many of the criteria for producing lucid and interesting prose. They failed to reflect in their writings some of the narrative techniques which are variables in this research. The seven nonperforming subjects engaged in grammatical flaws, lexical infelicities, syntactic illogicality and indeterminacy. Imagine the writing of subject O: *This was the brutal and painful situation I passed through which I could not compromised and contain. When I dashed back home after my dad took me back home. My mum had pity on me and I was been helped to the bathroom and church for 2 weeks. After I was totally healed, I returned back to school.* So many things are wrong in this excerpt and these abnormalities have been discussed earlier. Confusion in the

use of homophonous variants is a burden of users of English as a second language as has been witnessed in the essays of particularly seven of our subjects. Some of these confusing pairs are: *faithful* for *fateful*, *went* for *when*, *where* for *were* and *staring* for *steering* etc. So many words were equally misspelt. Subject R wrote a paragraph of 9 lines in one sentence. The conclusion we have drawn from this insipid performance is that these subjects (students) have imperfect knowledge of English lexis and grammar. They have not also been exposed to Standard English both in the school and outside the school. Their pre-university scholarship did not give them adequate platform for English learning and acquisition. In other words they lack competence which would aid their performance. We also observe that the one year period for Use of English in Nigerian Universities is not adequate for remedying pre-university deficiencies of our students in the Use of English. Writing is the literate aspect of the use of language consequently it is the more important test for discovering a language user's mastery of the language.

The thirteen subjects who scored from 50% up to 85% have got a reasonable mastery of the language. The eight outstanding subjects have advanced from the level of mere mastery to creative use of the English language. For example subjects K, L and T have shown proficiency in creativity and have therefore enhanced aesthetics of language in their essays. In his opening paragraph subject K wrote: *it was a cool Friday evening, but I was drenched in sweat, the gentle breeze offering little relief from the sheltering heat, I walked on wearily down the road.* The composition of these lines shows the writer as a person who has a standard idiom of the language.

## **Recommendations**

Essay writing is a creative endeavour. Students should be made to know that they require a stylistic way of writing essay which is a little different from plain communication in English. The course content (course outline) of Use of English course in Nigerian Universities should be made more elaborate than what has hitherto been the case. As in Okono U. M. (2020:80), Freshmen English course in Nigerian Universities should be extended from one session to two sessions to accommodate detailed treatment of English lexis and grammar. Students should be encouraged to practice creative (essay) writing in the class. Essays written in the class should be scored, corrected and given back to students as a feedback mechanism. Good essays can be read by lecturers during lecture periods for emulation by others. Through this method students will develop a beautiful and creative style of writing for example narrative essays. Finally it will be helpful for prizes to be instituted for essay writing on a given topic at a particular level of scholarship in each university preferably the first year to act as extrinsic motivational value.

## REFERENCES

- Axelrod, R. B. and R. C. Cooper (2008). *The St. Martin's guide to writing*. (Eighth edition) Bedford/St. Martin's: New York
- Lyons, J. (1981). *Language and linguistics*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Obah, T. Y. (2005). *Techniques for essay writing*. In Oluikpe, B.O.A. (ed) *The use of English For higher education*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers. Pp 191-228
- Okono, U. M. (2020). "Essay writing in contemporary Nigeria: Issues and comments" *Erudite Journal of linguistics and languages*, 2(1), 67-81
- Smith, N. (2013). *An introduction to applied linguistics*. New York: routledge.
- Tinuoye, M. O. (1997). *Forms of writing: Essays 2* In Chukwuma, H. and Otagburuagu, E. (ed) *English for academic purposes*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers. Pp 178-192.

## Internet Sources

[www.mathstopia.net](http://www.mathstopia.net) Retrieved 3 August, 2020