

“Nigerian Students in the American ESL Freshman Writing Class: A Site of Resistance and Accommodation”

Yingqin Liu

Cameron University, 2800 W. Gore Boulevard, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, USA

William Carney

Cameron University, 2800 W. Gore Boulevard, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, USA

Abstract—Two groups of undergraduate students, one composed of 15 Nigerian students studying at a public university in the US and a similar one composed of US-born students from the same university composed short essay drafts in response to the same writing prompt. These essays were read by the researchers and a group of student assistants to assess the differences between the two groups. The Nigerian students wrote longer essays with longer sentences and were more likely to use subordination than were their US counterparts. Both groups then participated in focus groups to discuss their English language education, university experiences, and attitudes toward college writing. The Nigerian students viewed the development of English writing skills as much more important than did their US counterparts but expressed frustration that their instructors in the US tended to dismiss what they saw as more eloquent writing, privileging instead a brief and concise style. The article discusses the results of the study as well as the frustration expressed by the Nigerian students and argues in support of Lee’s (2014) assertion that universities seek to “internationalize” faculty and student recruitment as well as provide better training for first-year composition instructors to equip them with a more sophisticated understanding of the varieties of the English language. The authors suggest that doing so will lead to better outcomes and increased retention for this group of international students.

Index Terms—freshman composition, ESL writing, Nigerian English

I. INTRODUCTION

As the number of international students pursuing higher education opportunities in the English-speaking world increases, teachers of English composition are challenged to find the most effective strategies for teaching academic English to these students, as well as in finding ways to offer a high degree of immersion in vernacular English. Carroll & Dunkelblau (2011) discuss the challenges for composition faculty in helping non-native English speakers learn the types of writing they will be called upon to perform in a variety of academic disciplines at most universities. Yet, in many cases these courses seem to take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to the teaching of English composition and overlook the actual academic preparation of students from other countries as well as students’ actual English proficiency prior to their matriculation at universities in the English-speaking world.

As the number of Nigerian students studying in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada increases, universities attempt to find ways to welcome these students and to serve their academic needs (Manyibe, et al 2013). However, these students are often classified as second-language English learners and are enrolled in courses that offer a more-or-less traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) experience (Kolade, 2013). While the Nigerian students themselves often claim that English is their first language, many complain that their efforts are devalued as they do not meet what they felt was an often inadequately-defined “Western” standard of writing. We are skeptical of this “ESL” approach and suggest that it may be more accurate to describe English in Nigeria as a language learned concurrently (at least in urban and in private schools) with indigenous languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. Instead of focusing our attention on teaching English as a second language, it may make greater sense for us to understand the difficulties these international Nigerian students exhibit in writing “standard” or academic English as a result of widely varying access to educational facilities such as different varieties of English taught and inconsistent writing instruction at the secondary educational level at their home country (Agbatogun, 2013). Indeed, for the past two decades, there is some evidence that English has become the language of choice in many Nigerian homes (Schaefer & Egbokhare, 1999). At the same time, access to English instruction throughout the country seems to have become more unequal (Okebukola, 2012). Fakeye (2010) suggests that students from middle class or higher backgrounds who demand English instruction come from families who have the means to pay for private schooling when their district’s public schools fail to offer adequate English instruction. Those students whose families lack the means, however, often experience a poor standard of English instruction. Thus, the English levels these international Nigerian students present with when they matriculate at

American universities can be inconsistent, which may lead to certain perceptions regarding Nigerian academic English writing performance.

In order to further understand the roles English plays for these international Nigerian college students in their education and to seek the effective pedagogy to teach academic English writing to them at the universities in the United States, the present study explores the writing behaviors of a group of Nigerian university students at a small public university in southwestern Oklahoma. Although the study is qualitative in nature and involves grounded theory methodology (and is, thus, inductive), there were three discernable areas of inquiry that we aimed to explore:

- (1) What were the actual differences between the writing produced by a sample of international Nigerian university students and by that produced by a similar group of US-born students?
- (2) What were the differences in elementary and secondary English language instruction between the two groups?
- (3) How did the two groups of students view the importance of English language writing and instruction at the university level?

The study will discuss the findings of these research questions in greater detail as well as the possible implications of these findings in terms of ESL and composition pedagogy. We advocate for a more nuanced and research-based approach to the design of writing courses for international students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before reporting on the methodology and the results of the study, a brief overview of the issues that affect English teaching in Nigeria as well as the issues that impact Nigerian university students abroad might be beneficial here.

First, in terms of a “Nigerian English,” there is much scholarship that supports the existence of this variety of the English spoken in Nigeria as a separate dialect. Ajani (2007) notes that, apart from loanwords borrowed from languages such as Yoruba and Igbo, Nigerian English is marked by reduplication (repetition) for intensification or sometimes for differentiation. Oshodi (2014) suggests that Nigerian English speakers employ a truncated tense system, similar to the somewhat more limited number of tenses seen in many varieties of English spoken in former British Crown colonies. The writing samples we collected were analyzed, of course, to see if any of these features existed in the writing.

In terms of student experiences in primary and secondary schools, it is helpful to understand the structure of Nigerian public education. Clark & Ausukuya (2013) report that primary and secondary education is the shared responsibility of federal and local governments in Nigeria, with local governments taking the lead in curriculum development. Most schools begin English instruction no later than the third grade for students, and after that time, virtually all academic instruction is conducted in English. Yet, the rate of English literacy for 24-50 year olds is only around 70%, due in large part to the fact that, outside of major cities such as Lagos, schools are often poorly funded and parents cannot often afford the private supplemental instruction that might compensate for deficiencies in instruction. United States Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria (2015) reports wide disparities in education funding across the country and in the quality of teachers in primary and secondary schools and notes that, as a result, there is a wide variety in the quality of instruction throughout the country. Indeed, UNESCO (2011) found very poor average assessment scores for English literacy across the country. This is very disheartening for Nigerian students and educational authorities as a strong positive correlation has been shown to exist between English proficiency and academic achievement, in general (Fakeye & Ogunsiji 2009). Most likely, good English instruction coexists with good instruction in other subjects, and this finding seems to suggest that Nigerian schools that offer good English instruction probably also do a number of things rather well.

In terms of higher education, curriculum is less a local matter and more under the jurisdiction of federal authorities. Saint, et al (2003) suggest that higher education in Nigeria, in general, is viewed as essential for economic prosperity and, thus, Nigerian collegiate education takes on a more instrumental approach than do other countries, with curriculum development being closely related to those skills that will allow students to compete for professional employment. Because of this, there exists an awareness of the need for “technical or professional education to include things such as software development, coding, and language and writing instruction” (Osagie, p.279, 2012). The reality, however, is that colleges are under-funded and demand far outstrips the number of seats available in Nigerian classrooms (Akiri, 2014). These scarcities are a primary driver for Nigerians seeking a college education overseas.

Adegbite (2010) reports that such findings as those reported above are a source of frustration for upwardly-mobile and middle class Nigerians, who hold a positive attitude toward the English language. It is these attitudes that our focus groups in the present study were designed to explore. Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2005) suggests that English provides a number of unique functions for Nigerian speakers. First, it serves as a lingua franca that unites Yoruba, Igbo, and other language communities. Second, English proficiency is viewed as a marker of academic and professional potential. Finally, English proficiency provides a performative function by which skilled bilingual (e.g., Yoruba and English) speakers can “code switch” in novel and entertaining ways. The ability to weave English and one’s other languages together becomes a matter of pride, but it is this rather performative aspect of Nigerian English that creates some difficulties for undergraduate international students. At our own institution, Nigerian students face the choice of being “punished” in standard freshman composition classes for writing in ways deemed non-standard, or being placed in ESL classrooms with students of much lower English proficiency.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a method similar to one they had used previously (Carney, 2009; Liu & Carney, 2012), in which the student writing samples and the focus group transcripts were analyzed. These “mixed” qualitative methods aimed to explore not only any observable differences in writing between the two groups (Nigerian and US students) but also their own insights into their university-level writing and about writing, in general.

A. Participants

During June 2013, two groups of students at a small public university in southwestern Oklahoma were recruited to participate in the study. Cameron University is home to approximately 300 international students with students from Nigeria comprising the biggest part of this cohort. The first group in the study was composed of 15 Nigerian undergraduates, all of whom had successfully completed both required courses in the freshman writing sequence, English 1113 and English 1213. All but three of the students in this group had received instruction in special sections of English 1113 and 1213, sections of each course that were limited to students designated as “non-native English speakers. These course sections were designed around the same course outcomes as every other section of the Freshman writing sequence but were limited to and composed of international students. The group was almost evenly split between men and women with 8 females and 7 males. The average age of the group was 21.7 years and no student in the group had taken one of the university’s remedial English courses. A similar group of 15 US-born students was also recruited with the same stipulations, namely, that they too had completed the 2-course sequence. This group was composed of 10 females and 5 males with an average age of 20.9 years. Two of these students had taken a remedial English course before enrolling in our freshman composition sequence.

B. Data Collection

a. The Writing Prompt

Students in both groups were asked to compose an essay. The prompt (created by the researchers) reads, “Every nation has its own educational system. Describe the differences between the one you experienced and what you know of education in other places.” Students were told that the task should take around 30 minutes.

b. The Focus Groups

An hour-long focus group followed for each of the two groups. The method described by Kruger and Casey (2014), in which participants were asked to make assessments of their experiences more than they were asked to share recollections of these experiences, was used. A 10-question protocol (See Appendix A) was used for each of the two groups to: (1) ensure consistency between the two groups and (2) establish parameters for the discussion. Even with parameters, the discussions were wide-ranging in scope. One of the primary researchers in this study conducted all the focus group discussions and two undergraduate research assistants took notes, employing a “keyword” method of note-taking. The assistants were two senior-level Nigerian students and one US-born senior-level undergraduate English major. They were chosen for their high grade point averages and familiarity with Nigerian culture and English Language Arts, respectively. While none of the student assistants had any experience in qualitative research, they were chosen for areas of knowledge important to the study. Liamputtong (2011) suggests that familiarity with subject matter often trumps one’s skill as an interviewer in the interpretation of focus group interviews, and, indeed, our students’ knowledge was vital to the study.

C. Data Analysis

First, the essays from both groups were read by the researchers and the three student research assistants or errors. The three assistants counted the words in each of the 30 essays, the length of each sentence, and the number of subordinate clauses in each student essay. They also searched for the performative and reduplication features of Nigerian English in the essays composed by the Nigerian students, as described by Ajani (2007) and Oshodi (2014) in the section above. Then, the notes and transcripts from focus groups were analyzed via a system of coaxial coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Unlike hypothesis testing which seeks to determine whether phenomena (including texts) fit predetermined categories, this approach allows participants to exhibit or demonstrate what is meaningful to them regarding a particular subject. The three assistants and one of the researchers met to review the transcripts and determine the themes and understanding that emerged from them. Three of the four coders (three students and one researcher) had to agree on what a particular part of the transcript meant, in order for it to be used in the study.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Results from Writing Samples

The writing samples students produced were analyzed for a variety of features as well as for the appearance of grammatical or mechanical errors. Table 1 shows a comparison of some of these aspects.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF WRITING SAMPLES COMPOSED BY NIGERIAN AND US COLLEGE STUDENTS

Aspects of Writing	Nigerian Students (N=15)	US Students (N=15)
Average Word Count of the Essays	282	236
Average Number of Subordinate Clauses	12.7	8.4
Average Sentence Length	18.1 words	14.3 words

Overall, one displayed similarity (not included in Table 1) was that there were no differences in the number of errors appearing in the writing composed by the two groups. To assess this, we used Lunsford and Lunsford (2008) as our guide for the 20 most common errors in freshman writing and found not only very few errors, in general, but no significant differences between the two groups. In terms of rhetorical strategy, the Nigerian students were more likely to use hyperbole (e.g., “the most difficult course”; “the shining jewel of Africa”) and to suggest a more indirect appeal to readers (e.g., “one might think”: “a person seeing this might assume”), but there were no other remarkable differences in this aspect.

Table 1, however, shows that the Nigerian students tended to write more, to write longer sentences, and to use more subordination in their writing. It is this “complexity” in their writing that the Nigerian students complained was not appreciated by their college writing instructors, a subject this paper will cover in the next section. None of the features such as reduplication described by Ajani (2007) were seen in the essays composed by the Nigerian students. Certainly, this is not an unexpected finding as the research cited in the previous section of this paper concerned itself with vernacular Nigerian English. However, Roberts and Cimasko (2008) suggest that, when faculty members respond to “ESL” student writing, they report semantic difficulties across various ethnic groups. None of the people (the primary researchers and the three student assistants) who reviewed the essays saw any differences between the Nigerian and US student groups, though.

B. Results from Focus Groups

Focus group transcripts were evaluated using methods described by Krueger and Casey (2000). The transcripts were read by the three coders and emergent themes were suggested and agreed upon. Again, if both researchers could not agree on the “meaning” of a particular statement, then that statement did not become part of the analysis. The four major emergent themes that came out of the focus groups discussions were as follows: 1) differences in previous writing instruction, 2) writing to and for an audience, 3) “good” writing and rhetorical concerns, and 4) writing as a way to professional advancement. These themes will be discussed below.

Theme 1: Differences in Previous Writing Instruction

Both writing samples described very different experiences in previous writing instruction. The Nigerian students all came from Lagos or were educated in Nigerian private schools. Thus, all of them explained that they would have had more opportunities for intensive in-class writing, grammar instruction, and more and earlier experiences with standardized (i.e., state-sponsored) testing aimed at writing skills than did the Oklahoma students. Six of the Nigerian students recalled taking separate courses in “English Studies” (or “Language Arts”) and separate courses in literature. In contrast, students in the Oklahoma/American sample discussed taking only one English course each year in Middle School through High School which combined all aspects of English studies. All of the Oklahoma/American students were educated in the state’s public school systems. Interestingly, the US-born students expressed a high degree of confidence in their knowledge of grammar while the Nigerian students all admitted to having some weakness in what one termed “hard grammar.” One male student offered the following assessment that most of the other Nigerian focus group members expressed agreement with: “When the teacher starts talking about nouns and verbs, I don’t listen because I figure I have been speaking English real good for a long time. But, I got to admit that I’m not real interested in it.” Conversely, one of the female American students offered that, while she probably couldn’t diagram sentences, she felt confident that she could identify the parts of speech.

Theme 2: Writing to and for an Audience

Students in both groups spoke about writing to an audience and of having to tailor their writing to specific readers. The Oklahoma students tended to speak of a vague collective notion of “audience” in a more disembodied manner. One student noted that his High School teachers emphasized the point that writing must be meaningful to whoever reads it. “You have to make it make sense to the reader. You wouldn’t write about gaming or use the language of gamers to someone older, would you?” he stated. The Nigerian students also emphasized the necessity of writing for an audience, but six of them suggested that they actually picture a person when they are writing. “I keep my teacher in mind when I write. He was very critical, so I’m aware of what it takes to satisfy him,” one male student reported. “I think of my mum,” one female reported. “I want her to be proud of me and I want her to smile.”

Theme 3: “Good” Writing and Rhetorical Concerns

Both groups expressed that they valued “entertainment” in expository or persuasive writing (Cooper, 1993). Here, however, the two groups expressed some differences. For the Nigerian students, entertainment was something they valued in the work of others as well as in their own efforts. For the Oklahoma/American students, they wanted to be entertained when they read the work of others but tried to avoid “flowery” language or too much descriptive detail in their own writing. Two of the Oklahoma/American students explained that this rather “minimalist” sort of approach seems in line with what First-Year Composition instructors at our university tend to reward. On the other hand, almost

all of the Nigerian students expressed dissatisfaction with the responses their work received at the University. A junior female Biology major stated, "Our vocabulary is so much more advanced than other students but we never get credit for it." Two students discussed the idea of "sophistication" in their writing. A sophomore male Business major argued that Nigerian students have a better idea of how "people in authority" express themselves but are often confused by professors indicating that they prefer simplicity in student writing. "We are college students," he stated. "We should be writing and speaking in more complicated ways." A junior female Communication Studies major explained that political and business leaders in Nigeria show their status by speaking eloquently and that this eloquence is what students strive for. One of the students mentioned then-President Goodluck Jonathan as an example of someone who has used a very eloquent style of speaking to move up through the ranks of Nigeria's political leadership.

By contrast, the US college students almost all favored a simpler and concise way of writing and speaking. A US-born 23-year old female Criminal Justice major suggested that, "the more you write, the more it looks like B.S. Better to keep things simple." A male Biology major similarly referred to the "KISS Principle—Keep it simple, stupid." Two of the Nigerian students discussed feeling insulted about being steered toward ESL classes as they considered themselves native English speakers already. One student, a female Communications major, considered this phenomenon a subtle form of racism. She said, "I'm black and African so I can't possibly know English, right?"

Theme 4: Writing as a Way to Professional Advancement

It was with this fourth emergent theme, that genuine differences between the two groups started to become quite apparent. The Nigerian students tended to see writing in particular and language skills in general as ways to ensure professional success. The Oklahoma students, on the other hand, were far more sanguine about writing. A 24-year old male Business major from Oklahoma suggested that error avoidance in your professional writing would "make your boss happy." However, most of these students viewed writing skills as just one of a variety of things that ensured academic and professional success. For the Nigerian students, however, there was a sense of urgency in how they spoke about writing. A Nigerian female freshman (undeclared major) made a rather passionate case for writing:

We have to compete with everybody. We don't have enough jobs at home so we compete with people from all over the world.

Our English has to be the best. We even compete here. We can't get all the scholarships other students are eligible for, so we have to write better than anybody else for the scholarships we can get.

Indeed, the Nigerian students talked about middle-to upper middle-class families in urban areas paying for either private schools or for private tutoring, if they were dissatisfied with their children's English instruction.

To summarize, the focus groups indicated that Nigerian students experienced somewhat more intensive English studies at the primary and secondary levels and had somewhat more experience with standardized writing or English testing than did the US students. Both groups, however, expressed being more-or-less satisfied with the English instruction they received. The Nigerian students valued eloquence in writing while brevity and conciseness seemed to be the goals for the US students. For the Nigerian students, the emphasis on eloquence or performance in their writing seemed at odds with the sort of writing that freshman composition instructors at our university tend to reward, and this expectation of difference led them to feel somewhat devalued in their attempts to write at the collegiate level. The Nigerian students in this study also tended to place a premium on writing as a means of moving through one's academic career and for entering professional employment while the US-born students tended to take a somewhat more lackadaisical attitude toward writing. Both groups expressed a high degree of confidence in their writing skills, however.

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

To recap the findings of the present study, we can see that we have answers for all the three research questions introduced at the beginning.

In our first research question inquiry, we wanted to determine if differences existed between the writing produced by our group of International Nigerian university students and the writing produced by a similar group of US-born students. The finding shows that the Nigerian students wrote longer sentences and longer essays and were more likely to use subordinate clauses than were the US students. And it also reveals that the Nigerian students preferred to use more decorative languages while the US students focused more on brevity, but the finding also demonstrates that the number and types of errors in the writing by the two groups did not differ. For our second research question, we aimed to assess the primary and secondary educational experiences for the two groups. The finding shows that while the Nigerian students tended to have more English classes, both groups described similar learning experiences. Finally, in our third and last research question inquiry, we intended to explore the attitudes of both groups toward their present English writing instruction and about writing in general. It is in this part that we found some real differences and obtained some implications, which are discussed in some detail below.

Two of the primary issues that emerged in the present study centered around: (1) whether it was appropriate to place Nigerian English speakers in freshman ESL composition classes with students for whom English is truly a second language such as students from Nepal, China, and Mongolia and (2) the fact that faculty members at our university hold different expectations for freshman writing than do the Nigerian students.

The first of these concerns seems at first glance to be easy to dispense with, but there are a number of issues contained in the question that serve to complicate our understanding. First, there are questions concerning the writing task used in the study. As no real differences (other than sentence length and subordination) were found between the Nigerian and US student groups, it would seem rather easy to suggest that the groups have more-or-less equal facility in English writing. We have to admit, however, that the writing task we assigned students was quite unlike any they encountered in their freshman composition courses. In this study, students were asked to simply recall their own educational experiences and to possibly compare them to what they might know about the educational systems in other countries. Additionally, they only had a 30 minute time frame in which to compose it. Thus, given the simplicity of the task and the limited time frame, it may be the case that there would be few opportunities for the Nigerian students to demonstrate significant differences in their writing. Scholars such as Ehineni (2014) have shown rather persuasively that the English writing in Nigerian news reports and advertising does contain lexical structures that appear quite unusual to speakers and readers of English in other Anglophone countries. The task the Nigerian students were asked to perform did not mirror the modes and genres students at the university were asked to compose in, modes that might have yielded differences. Anecdotal evidence from our university suggests that it is not so much the grammar and mechanics in the writing of our Nigerian students that our instructors find so problematic but is, instead, the rhetorical practices these students use in their writing. Oyeleye & Adeyinka (2014) suggest that persuasive writing in Nigeria makes use of devices such as personification, metaphor, and hyperbole, practices that seem out-of-place to instructors steeped in Western “academic” writing. Perhaps, a writing task of a longer duration or of a mode drawn from our freshman writing curricula would have yielded real differences.

But, whether or not a different research design would have yielded different results still leaves unanswered the other aspect of the finding as to whether these Nigerian students are appropriately placed in classrooms with other international students. It leaves unaddressed the question of why “Nigerian English” may be viewed as farther away from a Standard English than, say, the English written and spoken by the many Native American students our university serves. Indeed, the scholarship suggests that the English spoken and written by students in Native American communities has some non-standard features that might derive from the syntax of Native American languages such as Apache and Kiowa (Leap, 2012; Newmark, Walker, & Stanford, 2015). Carley, Cheurprakobkit, & Paracka (2006) suggest that the climate on a particular campus with regard to “internationalization” affects all matters of faculty and student recruitment of those from other countries as well as concerns about curriculum design and pedagogy that best serves students from an array of nations and communities. In other words, they suggest that universities with faculty from a variety of ethnicities and nationalities would be more likely to recruit international students and create pedagogical strategies that address their needs. On the other hand, universities with a homogeneous faculty and staff make-up tend to favor approaches that create a mainstream vs. “other” approach to teaching. In the case of our university, it may be that we view students as belonging to one of two groups, those who approach a standard understanding and use of English and those who do something else. From this viewpoint, the frustration our Nigerian students express regarding their experiences in freshman writing seems understandable, and we will discuss this matter next.

The second concern of the study, the frustration our Nigerian students expressed over the perception that their writing is devalued, is more difficult to address in a setting such as the one we see at our university as well as at other small universities. Even as we see our students through a “standard vs. other” lens, the “ESL” sections of freshman composition at our university must still respond to the same course objectives that other sections of freshman composition must also do. For the Nigerian students in our study, all but three took the Freshman Composition courses in “ESL” class sections. In the past, these sections took on a decidedly “English for Specific Purposes” approach to teaching freshman writing, the specific purpose being the modes and genres taught in the courses themselves. Perhaps, we place too big a premium on teaching the objectives primarily without a deeper understanding of the variety of literacy practices all of our students bring to the classroom. Thus, there has often been little scaffolding in the way instructors build from these literacy practices. Perhaps, the focus is placed too squarely on the end results: the objectives. The courses that might provide such scaffolding are usually remedial courses and, under the budgetary challenges in our state and in many others, the creation of additional courses that serve to lengthen a student’s degree plan is unfeasible. As a result, we are left with using the courses that already exist to achieve the stated objectives and simultaneously provide support for students from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Within such constraints, perhaps there should be a dual focus on training faculty about the varieties of English discourse and an internationalization of the university itself. As universities in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia continue to welcome international students, they must seek to ensure good outcomes for these students. Faculty members should, thus, understand a variety of linguistic matters. Peacock (2001) suggests that instructors’ “mistaken beliefs” about language (e.g., grammar, vocabulary building, and form being the most important aspects of the second language classroom) can result in persistent problems for students. Cao, et al (2014) showed that a combination of linguistic and cultural sophistication along with a sense of agency on the part of faculty members were the factors that seemed to lead to better learning outcomes for international students. Faculty members with a feeling of confidence about their teaching and a better understanding of their students’ linguistic and literacy practices will likely have better outcomes. Faculty members will better understand the impacts of culture on English language communities

across the world and might encourage more substantive and varied approaches to student writing even as they aim toward the same objectives. These instructors would be better able to understand the writing practices students bring to the university and offer them a path from these practices to other ways of writing for other occasions and circumstances. Additionally, to accommodate the student's some specific academic need, the instructors can teach the true meaning of audience analysis for the international students, especially Nigerian students. For example, they can draw the international students' attention to the fact that the real audiences in their academic writing in the universities here are the general educated public in the United States, who are basically following the writing style of western rhetoric, which expects a more direct and concise but clearly detailed evidence support to the thesis statement. The instructors also can help these international students understand that the proper adjustments to the new expectations of the "new" audiences, which are a bit different from their own, is a useful but challenging learning experience. However, when the students try, they will be able to do a decent job because they can transfer the writing skills they have previously acquired with the new audiences in their minds.

Lee et al (2014) suggest that campuses with a diverse (to include international) faculty and staff offer international students a way to decrease the social isolation that comes from being an exchange student and can empower them to engage in dialogue with their instructors. International faculty members can also advocate for international students. In the present study, the Nigerian students expressed dissatisfaction over the perception that their best efforts in writing were often dismissed. None of them, however, discussed engaging their instructors in a discussion of what constitutes "good" writing in Nigeria. Perhaps, a more diverse campus environment with more students and employees would make a difference and would encourage our Nigerian students to take greater initiative to understand what the university expects in writing and other skills and why this is the case, for instance, as mentioned above, teaching them the real audiences' needs. This is an approach we endorse and believe that it will lead to better writing instruction for all students as well as a more welcoming environment and academic experience.

APPENDIX. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- (1) What languages were spoken in your household? If there were more than one, which was primary?
- (2) At what age did you learn to read in English? To write?
- (3) What grade in primary school were you aware of English being taught as a separate subject?
- (4) Describe English studies in your primary school.
- (5) Describe English studies in high school or secondary school.
- (6) When you write a paper at the university, what are the aspects of writing to which you pay the most attention?
- (7) Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?
- (8) Let's talk about audience. Do you consider who you are writing to?
- (9) Do you enjoy reading?
- (10) How important is writing in your planned career?

REFERENCES

- [1] Abdullahi-Idiagbon, M. S. (2005). Ethnolinguistic influence on the attitude towards the English language in Nigeria: A sociolinguistic approach. *Journal of Language Meaning and Society*, 2(2), 417-428.
- [2] Adegbite, W., & Akinwale, L. (2010). The acquisition of bilingual literacy skills by children in nursery schools in an ESL context, Nigeria. *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*, 13(1), 87-107.
- [3] Agbatogun, A. (2013, June). Effectiveness of clickers in a second language classroom: Teacher and learners' perceptions and attitudes. In *EdMedia: World Conference on Educational Media and Technology* (Vol. 2013, No. 1, pp. 1238-1238).
- [4] Ajani, T. T. (2007). Is there indeed a 'Nigerian English'? *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 1(1), 1-19.
- [5] Akiri, A. A. (2014). Teachers' career satisfaction and students' academic performance in delta public secondary schools. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 4(1), 267-272.
- [6] Cao, Y., Li, X., Jiang, A., & Bai, K. (2014). Motivators and outcomes of faculty actions towards international students: Under the influence of internationalization. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(4), 49-63.
- [7] Carley, S., Cheurprakobkit, S., & Paracka, D. (2006). Faculty attitudes toward international education: A campus experience. *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, 1(1), 1-15.
- [8] Carney, W. (2009). Rhetorical preferences of Caribbean university students: An empirical study. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 18(2), 249-257.
- [9] Carroll, J., & Dunkelblau, H. (2011). Preparing ESL students for "real" college writing: A glimpse of common writing tasks ESL students encounter at one community college. *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, 38(3), 271-281.
- [10] Clark, N., & Ausukuya, C. (2013). An overview of education in Nigeria. *World Education News and Reviews*. March 2013. Retrieved from <http://wenr.wes.org/2013/03/education-in-nigeria/> (Accessed 10/1/2016).
- [11] Cooper, J. D. (1993). *Literacy: Helping children construct meaning*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- [12] Ehineni, T. O. (2014). Lexical, structural and rhetorical features of Nigerian English print media. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3(11), 26-32.
- [13] Fakeye, D. (2010). Students' personal variables as correlates of academic achievement in English as a second language in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 22(3), 205-211.
- [14] Fakeye, D. O., & Ogunsiji, Y. (2009). English language proficiency as a predictor of academic achievement among EFL students in Nigeria. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 37(3), 490-495.

- [15] Kolade, A. T. (2013). The outcomes of multiple-draft method on the performance of secondary school students in continuous writing. *Studies in English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 54-63.
- [16] Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage publications.
- [17] Leap, W. L. (2012). *American Indian English*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- [18] Lee, A., Williams, R. D., Shaw, M. A., & Jie, Y. (2014). First-year students' perspectives on intercultural learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(5) 543-554.
- [19] Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology: Principles and practice*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781473957657.
- [20] Liu, Y., & Carney, W. (2012). Multi-competence at the discourse level: A comparison of persuasive essays by Chinese college and high school EFL students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(6), 1061-1070.
- [21] Lunsford, A. & Lunsford, K. (2008). Mistakes are a fact of life: A national comparative study. *CCC* 59(4) 781-806.
- [22] Manyibe, B. M., Manyibe, E. O., & Otiso, K. M. (2013). College student leadership development: An examination of pre-college leadership development of African students in the United States. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(4), 422-432.
- [23] Newmark, K., Walker, N., & Stanford, J. (2015). English prosody and Native American ethnic identity. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*, 21(2), 17-28.
- [24] Okebukola, P. (2012). Quality assurance in higher education: The African story of achievements and outstanding needs. *Presentation at CHEA-2012*.
- [25] Osagie, R. (2012). Information and communication technologies in enhancing learning ability in secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. *Education*, 32(3), 675-682.
- [26] Oshodi, B. (2014). Assessing the so called marked inflectional features of Nigerian English: A second language acquisition theory account. *Ákala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 19(1), 15-26.
- [27] Oyeleye, A. L., & Adeyinka, I. A. (2014). Rhetoric and lexicalisation as aspects of persuasive strategy in the language of insurance advertising in the Nigerian print media. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(5), 276-286.
- [28] Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, 29(2), 177-195.
- [29] Roberts, F., & Cimasko, T. (2008). Evaluating ESL: Making sense of university professors' responses to second language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(3), 125-143.
- [30] Saint, W., Hartnett, T. A., & Strassner, E. (2003). Higher education in Nigeria: A status report. *Higher Education Policy*, 16(3), 259-281.
- [31] Schaefer, R. P., & Egbokhare, F. O. (1999). English and the pace of endangerment in Nigeria. *World Englishes*, 18(3), 381-392.
- [32] Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research* (Vol. 15). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- [33] UNESCO. (2011). Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://en.unesco.org/countries/nigeria>.
- [34] United States Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria. (2015). Education and Culture. from <https://ng.usembassy.gov/education-culture/> (Accessed 29/3/2015).
- [35] United States Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria. (2015). United States Department of State. Retrieved from <https://ng.usembassy.gov/> (Accessed 15/1/2016).

Yingqin Liu is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma, USA. She was granted a doctoral degree in Technical Communication and Rhetoric from Texas Tech University in 2007. Her major research interests are in the theories and practice of intercultural communication and intercultural rhetoric, second language teaching and writing, and technical/ business communication. She has published articles in these areas.

William Carney holds a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric obtained from Texas Tech University in 2006. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Cameron University in Oklahoma. He directs the Freshman Composition program there and teaches courses in composition, pedagogy, technical writing, and discourse. He has published articles on a variety of different pedagogical issues.