

EFFECT OF CONSTRUCTIVIST –BASED INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ESSAY WRITING

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of Constructivist-Based Instructional Method on Senior Secondary School Students’ Achievement in English Language Essay Writing. One research question was posed, and one null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was quasi - experimental. It adopted a pre-test, post-test design. The population of the study comprised all the SS2 students in Obio Akpor Local Government Area. The population was made up of 6,589 students in the 14 senior secondary schools in the local government. The sample for the study comprised of 207 SS2 students in eight intact classes from four co-educational schools within the local government. The researcher used multi-stage sampling technique to draw the respondents. The experimental group was taught using the Constructivist-Based Instructional Method while the control group was taught using the Conventional Method. The instrument used for data collection was English Language Essay Test (ELET) which was face validated by experts within the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability index for (ELET) was 0.83 showing that it was reliable. The data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA).The results showed that students taught English Language Essay Writing using the Constructivist–Based Instructional Method performed better than their counterparts taught the same topic using the Conventional Lecture Method. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the study provided empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CBIM in improving students’ achievement in English Language Essay Writing. It is therefore recommended that teachers of English, should adopt the method as an alternative to the Conventional Lecture Method (CLM) in the teaching of English Language Essay.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental instrument in the development of the society. It is the method of human communication either spoken or written,

consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. It is a means of expressions between two or more individuals. Corroborating this, Dienye (2005 p.172) opines that “language is a veritable tool in the socialization process; that it forms the basis for creative thinking and therefore, gives an individual or a group their identity.” it is through language that people can communicate their feelings, thinking and their perceptions of the world at large.

Language is also seen as “consisting of symbols that convey meaning, plus rules for combining those symbols that can be used to generate an infinite variety of messages.” (Weiten,2007p.125).

Language is the most important aspect of the life of all human beings. Man uses language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thoughts, communicate with others, fulfils his wants and needs as well as establish rules and maintain his culture.

From the various definitions of language, one can say that language is a system of communication using sounds or symbols that enable one to express one’s feelings, thoughts, ideas and experiences.

There are numerous languages in the world that humans use in communication. These languages include French, Greek, Efik, Swahili, Spanish, Igbo, English, Hausa, Yoruba and so on. English Language is one of the numerous languages that are spoken in the world. It is equally the official language of Nigeria. The origin of English as the official language of Nigeria dates back to the colonial era. It was adopted because of the multilingual nature of Nigeria for effective communication among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is seen as playing a very important communicative role in Nigeria. It permeates every aspect of Nigeria’s life-be it political, educational, business, commercial, mass media and so on.

The importance of English Language in Nigeria is mostly noticed in the field of education where it is seen as performing two important functions- English Language as a tool for effective learning of other subjects; and also, as a school subject. That is why in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), it is stipulated that English should be the language of instruction from the 4th year of Primary Education. As a core subject at the Senior Secondary School Level, the Federal Ministry of Education (FGN, 2004) because of the importance placed on English Language in the Nigerian education system made English Language a compulsory subject in the school system. Because of this, it is expected of all Secondary School as well as higher education students in Nigeria to be proficient in the use of the language to be able to function properly in this era of globalization. The importance placed on English Language in Nigeria especially in the school system, calls for better

ways of teaching the subject especially the essay aspect. This is because a person who writes good essays is expected to have acquired the skills of listening, speaking and reading. However, the current traditional method of teaching and learning of Essay Writing has much to be desired. The poor achievement of students in Essay Writing has been established by available research works.

The Conventional Lecture Method or Traditional Teaching Methods is the method teachers used in teaching Essay Writing over the years which is. The Traditional Teaching Methods are described as teacher-oriented, more of the lecture style are inflexible. Lessons are usually taught by the teacher who introduces the skills using a blackboard accompanied by a verbal explanation or lecture. Practical work for students is then assigned, followed by feedback from the teacher. The disadvantage of Traditional Method is that, students who have learning difficulties are unable to cope with how the lessons are delivered. Above average students are also disadvantaged because the lessons are not challenging enough. This means that students in either category are at an instant disadvantage compared to an average student without disability. The teachers are the controller of the learning environment, who often regards students as having "knowledge holes that need to be filled with information"(Novak, 1998). In fact, there exists at times an invisible and imposing, impenetrable barrier between students and teachers. The teaching of Essay Writing in this method is accuracy based and teacher centered. Students are made to work individually and are assessed on individual basis. Teachers who adopt this method, emphasize only the final product as presented by the students while the students are given little or no guidance. This in turn makes the writing process to be boring and uninteresting to students. Many teachers who use this method pay much emphasis on students' errors which should be an opportunity for instruction rather, this has become a point of reference for criticism in the process of teaching.

The above as exhibited by teachers only goes to confirm that the main interest of teachers is on the students' weaknesses, formal correctness which according to Travers in Igbokwe (2007), should be "signs of growths». There is a saying that practice makes perfect, which implies that if students are made to practise writing essays regularly, they will perfect in the act of writing. Therefore, even if there are obvious mistakes in students' essay writing, it is advocated that teachers should endeavour to create a healthy learning environment in the classroom by not laying much emphasis on students' mistakes.

The Conventional Lecturing Method contributes to the students' persistent poor academic achievement in English Language Essay Writing

which affects their performance in essay writing. There is a constant reminder that learning should be captivating to maintain students' interest and participation. How much a given students learns in a class is not only determined by that students' native ability and prior preparation but also depends on teachers' teaching method or techniques. This study therefore is to determine the effects of Constructivist-Based Instructional Method on senior secondary school students' achievement in English Language Essay Writing.

Constructivist Method of teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of making meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information, (Vick, 1998). Constructivist Teaching Method fosters critical thinking and creates motivated and independent learners. This belief holds that learning always builds upon knowledge that a learner already knows, that is prior knowledge which is called "schema" because all learning is filtered through pre-existing "schemata". The method suggests that learning is more effective when a student is actively engaged in the learning process rather than attempting to receive knowledge passively. Some activities encouraged in a Constructivist classroom are experimentation (i.e students individually perform an experiment and then come together as a class to discuss the results); Research project (students research on a topic and can present their findings to the class); class discussion (this is one of the most important distinctions of Constructivist Teaching Method) Parker (1997); Meziro (1997); Bain (2004); Mayer, (2004); Taber (2011).

Constructivist-Based Instructional Method works from the insight that writing can deepen students' learning in any discipline because writing provides opportunities to recall, explain, apply, analyze, synthesize or evaluate materials learned. It also supports teaching students to improve their writing in all courses, "not just on essay writing" (Gottschalk & Keith; 2004 Davis, 2009). This method enhances among the students in essay writing the values of co-operation, team work, respect for one's ideas and suggestions as well as appreciations for the contributions that each student make during the discussion period. The Constructivist – Based Instructional Method appears to be useful as a method that may improve students' achievement and interest in English Language Essay Writing. It is based on this, that this study sought the Effects of Constructivist-Based Instructional Method on students' interest and achievements in English Language Essay Writing.

One research question and one hypothesis guided the study, thus:

What are the mean achievement scores of students taught English Language essay writing using Constructivist - Based Instructional Method (CBIM) and those taught using the Conventional Lecture Method

(CLM)? There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught English Language essay writing using the Constructivist - Based Instructional Method (CBIM) and those taught with Conventional Lecture Method (CLM). The hypothesis that guided the study was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Method

The study adopted experimental research design. The study was conducted using Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in the metropolis of port Harcourt. The population of the study comprised all senior secondary two (SS2) students in the fourteen public senior secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The population was made up of 6, 589 comprising 2, 972 males and 3, 617 females. The sample size was 207 SS2 students in eight intact classes. Multi-grade sampling technique was used to draw the respondents. A structured questionnaire was developed to obtain data for the study. The questionnaire was face validated and tested for reliability using Kendall's co- efficient of concordance (w) which gave 0.83. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while the hypothesis was tested using Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results.

Table 1: Pretest / posttest mean achievement scores of the experimental and control groups in English Language Essay writing.

Group	N	Pre-test \bar{X}	SD	Post –test \bar{X}	S.D	Mean Gain
Experimental (CBIM)	104	10.39	6.40	16.40	6.53	6.01
Control (CLM)	103	10.51	5.73	14.51	6.17	4.00

Table 1 shows that the experimental group (i.e. those taught with the Constructivist – Based Instructional Method) had a pre-test mean achievement score of 10.39 with standard deviation of 6.40 and a post –test mean

achievement score of 16.40 with standard deviation of 6.53. on the other hand, the pre-test mean achievement score of the control group (CLM) was 10.51 with a standard deviation of 5.73, while the post –test mean score was 14.51 with a standard deviation of 6.17. The experimental group had a mean gain score of 6.01 as against the mean gain score of 4.00 recorded by the control group. The result reveals that students taught using CBIM achieved higher than students taught with CLM In English Language Essay Writing.

Table 2: Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) of students' post achievement scores in English Language Essay Writing.

Source of variation	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig	Decision
Corrected model	4557.458 ^a	8	569.679	28.892	.000	
Intercept	3290.330	1	3290.330	166.874	.000	
Pretest scores	3414.165	1	3414.165	173.155	.000	
Method	126.812	1	126.812	6.431	0.12	S
Error	3904.050	198	19.717			
Total	57961.000	207				
Corrected total	8461.478	206				

Key: S = Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table 2, shows that the CBIM has a significant effect on students' achievement in English language essay writing. This is attributed to the fact that the F- value of 6.431 in respect of treatment is shown to be significant at 0.00 level of significance. This indicates that at 0.05 level of significance, the F – value of 6.431 is significant. The result shows that Constructivist- Based Instructional Method significantly improved students' achievement in English Language Essay Writing more than the Lecture Method. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the

mean achievement scores of students taught English Language Essay Writing using CBIM and those taught with the CLM is rejected. The difference in achievement between the treatment and control groups is attributed to the method used.

Discussion of Findings

The result from the study showed that Constructivist-Based Instructional Method (CBIM) was superior to the Conventional Lecture Method (CLM) in enhancing students' achievement in English Language Essay Writing. The efficacy of the CBIM over CLM is not surprising because it does not encourage passivity and individual learning with regard to essay writing. Rather, CBIM makes provision for students' collaboration and brain – storming. Students enjoy brain storming, exchange of ideas, and helping each other where necessary. Constructivist Method encourages active and dynamic participation of all students in essay writing class discussions. Students are divided into smaller groups during class work and this gives ample opportunity to all to participate effectively even the very shy ones. All these help students to have a sense of autonomy thereby enhancing the self – worth of individual students. The use of CBIM enables students to retain and remember what they are taught in essay class thus helping to increase their level of achievements.

On the other hand, in the traditional class room, students are only given information by the teacher, that is, whatever they (teachers) felt was needed concerning the topic of discussion. Students are not given the opportunity to explore or express their ideas, students become passive listeners, and this makes it difficult for them to develop the needed content for essay writing. Of course, the result of this is poor achievement. The findings also agreed with Nzewi (2000); Guthrie et al (2004); Dogru and Kalender (2007) whose findings corroborate the fact that students' exposure to effective and appropriate teaching methods can enhance students' achievement and greater performance in any given subject. For example, Uzoegwu conducted a similar study on the Effect of Co-operative Learning Method on Secondary School Students' achievement in essay writing. The study showed that students taught essay writing using the co-operative method achieved better as they had greater achievement than their counter parts taught using the product method. The result of this study also agrees with social constructivism theory as propounded by Vygotsky (1998), which emphasizes the impact of Collaboration and negotiation on thinking and learning, CBIM provides students with experiences that allow them to hypothesize, predict manipulate, imagine and invent. The teacher in a Constructivist class can flexibly and

creatively incorporate on-going experiences in the classroom into the negotiation and construction of lessons with groups and individuals during essay lessons.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that Constructivist- Based Instructional Method is superior to the Traditional Method in facilitating students' achievement in English Language Essay Writing. Students who were exposed to the Constructivist-Based Instructional Method achieved better in their Essay Writing than those exposed to the Conventional Lecture Method.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) The Constructivist-Based Instructional Method should be adopted in teaching English language essay writing by English language teachers. The reason being that CBIM enhances the teaching and learning of essay writing because it was discovered that it helps to motivate students to participate actively in the classroom learning experiences. To this effect, secondary school teachers should be motivated to adopt CBIM in the teaching and learning of essay writing as an alternative to the Conventional Lecture Method (CLM).
- (2) English language teachers should be given training on how best to use the Constructivist-Based Instructional Method to enhance the teaching and learning of Essay Writing. This can be done through workshops and seminars for Secondary School teachers of English which should be sponsored by the Federal and State Ministries of Education. Through these media, opportunities would be provided to critically examine the concept, procedures / strategies and application of the CBIM.
- (3) Tertiary institutions that are concerned with teacher training should include in their relevant courses in English language methodology, the use of CBIM in teaching English Language Essay so that prospective teachers in training will get the requisite knowledge on how to use this method in teaching essay so as to enhance their efficiency when employed as teachers.

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