Cooperative Learning and Student's Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract*: This paper examined cooperative learning and academic achievement of students in English language in Imo State. The study adopted quasi experimental pre-test, post-test control group design. The sample for the study consisted of twenty (20) SS2 Students, purposively selected from two classes in a senior secondary school in Imo State. The instrument used for the study was the English Language Achievement Test (ELAT). Section A of the ELAT contained the bio-data of the respondents while section B consisted of 30 multiple-choice question items. The research questions were answered using mean rating to determine the difference between the pre-test and the post-test while the hypothesis was tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference between the achievement mean scores of subjects in the cooperative learning group and those in the control group. The study revealed that Cooperative Learning plays a significant role in students' academic achievement in English Language. The paper therefore, recommended the retraining of teachers towards using cooperative learning for student's optimal academic achievement.*
Keywords*: Cooperative Learning, Academic Achievement, Significant Difference, English Language, Senior Secondary Schools.*

I. Introduction

Proficiency in English Language is one of the greatest opportunities that the Nigerian education system ought to provide children with, as English Language to a large extent constitutes not only the mode of communication, but also the language of commerce. However, this is not the case as too many students, upon completion of secondary school, lack the required skills and competencies in the Language. Studies carried out by scholars like Ubahakwe, Obemeata, Ohia and Adeosun in Oyinloye and Gbenedio (2010) among others identified a variety of factors as responsible for what is commonly referred to as the fallen standard of English Language. Some of the relevant factors include: inappropriate pedagogy employed in schools as it relates to the learners interests and needs; teaching not directed to the attainment of the goals and purposes of the target language; the wide disparity between the language of the curriculum, the English Language class and the Nigerian society. The above reiterates the need for a classroom system which will increase motivation and achievement of personal goals and academic performance in English language.

It is evident that failure in English language is as a result of the negative attitude of students to English Language which can be linked to lack of interest in the subject which could be as a result of the variables which Ubahakwe, et.al. in Oyinloye and Gbenedio (2010) has earlier identified (Fig.1). The diagram further emphasises on the effect of lack of interest on both the teachers and the students as the teachers resort to the use of the traditional methods which is not enhancing assimilation of the subject content while the student's motivational level is drastically reduced leading to failure in the subject. This negative attitude could be reduced if students work together and learn from one another (chukwuyenum, Nwachukwu and Toochi, 2014).

Cooperative learning is an instructional program in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content. Learners in this classroom structure perceive that they are working together with other students to gain rewards. In this environment, a student's success depends on the comparable success of other students. (Chukwuyenum , Nwankwo and Toochi ,2014). An important goal of students in a cooperative classroom is to encourage and enable other students to succeed. Effective cooperative learning has two major components: Positive interdependence and Individual responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). That is, the members of the group must depend on one another to the extent that each member has responsibilities, each wants the others to succeed, and no one feels that his own success or failure will hurt the others in the group.
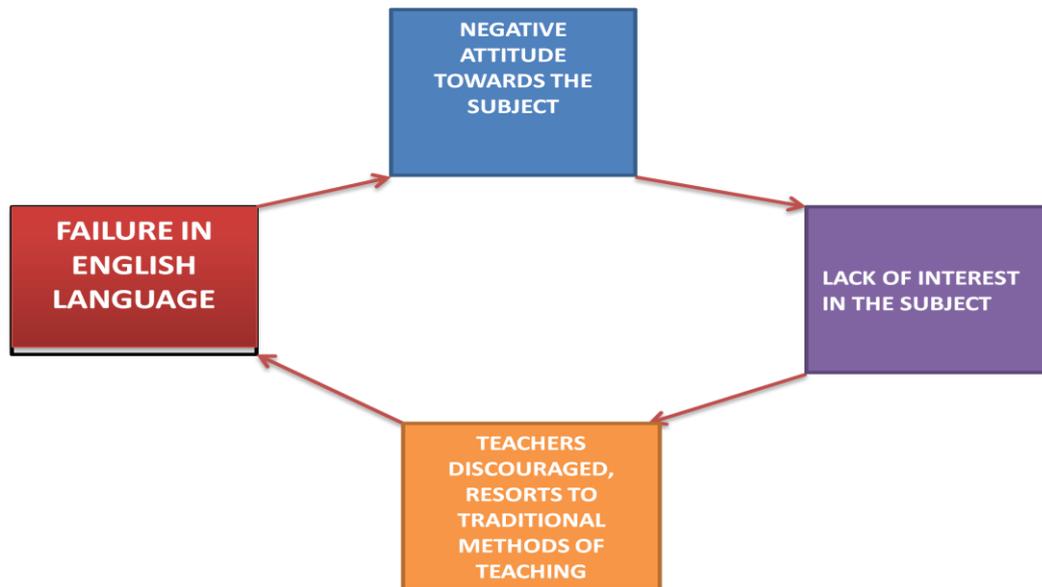
Fig. 1: The State of English Language Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools. Adopted from Tella (2007)

II.   Statement of the Problem

Academic achievement deals with how students' accomplish different tasks given by their teachers or how they pass their examination. Academic achievement can be defined as "the ability to study and remember facts and be able to communicate knowledge verbally or down on paper" (Wikipedia, 2015). There is a great deal of concern that students are failing in this area. Tikolo (2012), in a research on the competency level of Nigerian students in English Language observed that WAEC examination results over the past two decades indicated a mass failure as students failed to gain the required skills in English Language. Between 1992 and 1999, a meagre 12% of examinees obtained credit passes in English with scores of 50% and above. By 2002, 35% gained credit passes, though this fell to 29% in 2004 and 25% in 2005. Subsequently, credit passes were obtained by 32%, 43% and 54% of students in 2006, 2010 and 2011 respectively. It is worthy of note that despite the improvement, the results are not reflective of an approximate 5 to 16% of examinees whose results were withheld for malpractice. The result also suggests that the average Nigerian student, who fails the examination with a meagre score of 32%, is rated incompetent in English Language. This result indicates that students' poor performance in English language has been a recurrent issue. Poor academic performance has been blamed on a number of factors such as students' attitude, ineffective instructional strategies, poor academic environment etc. It is common knowledge that English language teachers adopt instructional strategies that are mainly teacher directed and do not encourage deeper students involvement and self-regulation. The researcher therefore, wonders if improvement in classroom practises and Cooperative Learning could be of any help.

III.   Purpose of the Study

Students in Owerri Educational Zone do not perform well in English Language because they lack the appropriate motivation that could help them develop goal-directed movements, which in turn might lead to improved success in English language learning tasks. The purpose of this study is to explore how a favourable classroom environment with relevant instructional activities could be used in motivating these students in English language learning tasks, thereby improving their performance in the subject. Specifically, this work is aimed at assessing the impact of cooperation on the academic achievement of students in English Language.

IV.   Research Question
Consequently, the following research question was posed to guide the study:
1.   What is the impact of cooperation on the academic achievement of students in English Language?

V.   Research Hypothesis
H_{O1} There is no significant difference between the mean scores of subjects in cooperative learning group and those in the control group.

VI.   Population of Study

The population of study comprises of all the senior secondary school students in Owerri Educational Zone 1, Imo State, which are sixty four thousand, four hundred and sixty three (64,463).

VII.   Methodology

The study adopted a quasi experimental (pre-test, post-test and control group) design. The sample consisted of two Senior Secondary School classes purposively selected from the population. Simple random sampling was used to select 20 students (10 from each class) for the study.

Instrument

The instrument used for the study was an English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) designed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of 30 multiple choice question items used as pre-test and post-test. The face, content, construct validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and English Language, The reliability of the instrument was determined through a test-re-test method and the scores were compared using the raw score method of the Pearson product moment correlation and reliability coefficient of 0.73 was realized which signifies very high and positive reliability.

Experimental Procedure

The researcher used two intact classes in order not to affect the school timetable and activities. The students were first exposed to pre-test to check their knowledge base line. Then the two classes were assigned to treatment groups and control groups through the toss of a coin. The side of the coin that has the image of a person represented SS2A, (Treatment Group) while the side that has the Nigerian cote of arm represented SS2B, (Control Group). The treatment group was divided into 4 groups called 'Families' and students were randomly assigned to each of them. Each family was allowed to choose their leader and an assistant and also pick a family name. The families were taught to work cooperatively in solving classroom tasks (with the higher achievers helping the low achievers). The Researcher and the Research Assistant (the already trained English teacher) collaborated to ensure effectiveness. Rewards were not given individually but at a group basis. The students were taught to work together and help one another in learning so as to help their families become the best. To make sure that the students do not develop any negative attitude towards each other as a result of this treatment package, the group were reshuffled at the end of each topic. The control group on the other hand was taught using normal lecture method.

Data Analysis : The research question was answered using Mean rating to determine the difference between the pre-test and the post-test while the hypothesis was tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

VIII.   Results and Discussion

Table 1: What is the impact of Cooperative Goal Structure on the academic achievement of students?

S/N	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	GAIN SCORE
1	10	18	8
2	09	15	6
3	03	14	11
4	05	13	8
5	01	12	11
6	07	15	8
7	02	10	8
8	08	14	6
9	05	14	9
10	07	13	6
MEAN	5.7	13.8	8.1

Post-test, Pre-test mean scores shows a difference of 8.1.

Table 2: H_{O1}   There is no significant difference between the mean scores of subjects in cooperative classroom goal structure group and those in the control group.

ANCOVA Summary of the mean difference between the Treatment Group and the Control group.

Source	Type 111 Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	157.468[a]	2	78.734	19.044	.000	.691
Intercept	248.841	1	248.841	60.190	.000	.780
Pre_Test	73.418	1	73.418	17.758	.001	.511
Group	94.636	1	94.636	22.891	.000	.574
Error	70.282	17	4.134			
Total	2989.000	20				
Corrected Total	227.750	19				

Significance at 0.05; df = 1 & 17, F-cal =22.89; F-critical = 5.90

The hypothesis result shows a significant difference between the treatment group and the control group. This result is so because subjects (students) in the treatment group shared their knowledge, learning strategies and skills. The intelligent ones guided the less intelligent ones carrying them along through shared experiences and study skills.

This result is in agreement with the findings of Martins- Umeh and Fidelia (2009) on cooperative learning approach and student's achievement in sociology. Revelations from the study shows that the Industrial Technical Education students who were in the cooperative group achieved more than the Science Education students who were in another group.

IX. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is evident that Cooperative Learning plays a significant role in students' academic achievement in English Language. The research therefore, recommends the retraining of teachers towards using cooperative learning for student's optimal academic achievement. Also, the important of supervisions cannot be over emphasised as it will help monitor the activities of teachers in the class to obtain maximum academic achievement in English Language.

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