Competitive Learning Style and Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State

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Abstract: This study investigated the effect of competitive learning style on secondary school students' academic achievement in English Language in Imo State and also the interactive effect of gender on the academic achievement of secondary school students in English Language. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were formulated and tested at $p < 0.05$. The study adopted the quasi- experimental pre-test, post-test design. The sample consisted of 100 SS2 students drawn from two government secondary schools in Imo State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools, while random sampling technique was used to assign the schools to experimental groups. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made English Language Achievement Test (ELAT). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. The result revealed that Competitive Learning Style improved the academic achievement of students, and females were better receptors of the instructional strategy. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made which includes that regular workshop should be organized so that teachers in secondary schools can be acquainted with effective active learning pedagogies, which can be combined with Competitive Learning Style to improve the academic achievement of students in English Language.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Competitive Learning Style, English Language, Gender

1. Introduction

Student's learning is influenced by a number of factors which includes: individual characteristics of learners and academic environment [1]. Competitive learning refers to a learning style which enables students work against one another to achieve a learning goal. This is one in which learners perceive that they will be rewarded based on comparisons with other learners [2]. One person can win in a competition only if another loses. The goal of students in a competitive classroom is to do better than their classmates.

Competitive learning style takes advantage of the apparently natural inclination of human beings to develop and enhance their own self-esteem by comparing their own performance to that of others [3]. There is considerable evidence, especially, for extremely high-performing students; competitive environments stimulate higher levels of learning and performance than would be likely to occur in non-competitive environments. In the field of sports, it is a truism that teams are likely to improve when their competition improves. The role of competition is likewise obvious in business: competitors encourage businesses to provide their best products and services [4]. Competition plays a comparable role in education: many students thrive on favourable comparisons to other students. Schools that introduce academic competitions (e.g., science bowls) that are similar to athletic events often find that students benefit

tremendously from the motivation and recognition that accompany the competition.

According to Attle [5], the problem with competition is that we often tend to ignore the downside. When everyone is forced to compete, losers often lose more than the winners gain. In sports, the losers often simply quit the team or give up the sport; in business, the losers go out of business. In school, on the other hand, the losers are often required to keep on losing. Constant exposure to failure in competitions is likely to lead to learned helplessness - an extremely debilitating form of failure avoidance. In order to harness the beauty of competition to improve the academic achievement of students, Walters [6] advised that the use of competition should be fpr those students who are likely to benefit from it. In general, this means to use competition only for students who have a chance to win; structure the competition so that all participants have a good chance of winning. There are many ways to do this: ask different questions to people of different abilities; arrange the students in teams so that abilities even out; or introduce an element of chance into the competition; have students compete against themselves rather than against other students. By evaluating students on the basis of their own personal gains, we can give everyone an opportunity to succeed. In fact, since the weakest students have the most room for improvement; this procedure can even give an advantage to the very students who are usually at a disadvantage; combine competitive environments with cooperative environments in order to derive the benefits of both. Have students work together on a team to compete against other teams. If a competition will reward combined group scores on a test, then a weak student who raises his score from 60% to 80% can contribute more to a team than a strong student who raises her score from 90% to 100%; reward effort and improvement as well as pure performance. This does not mean to reward effort and improvement instead of performance, it means, reward effort and improvement as well as performance; rather than rejecting competition completely, it is desirable to use it in accordance with the preceding guidelines in order to maximize its benefits while avoiding its shortcomings especially in English Language [7].

A person's proficiency in a language refers to the degree to which that person is able to use the language [8]. Language is used for various purposes. In education, the use of language is classified into two dimensions: the social dimension and the academic dimension [9]. Language can be compared to an iceberg. The portion that is visible on the surface, usually the social dimension, is only a fraction of the total iceberg. In order to use a language in academic work, the speaker must have a good foundation in the language. According to Anderson [10], this foundation is acquired through using the language over an extensive period of time in settings designed to build that foundation. Unfortunately, most Nigerian children are not exposed to such extensive use of English language in the school environment, what more at home [11].

The above accounts for the increase in illiteracy level in Nigeria even among people who have been to school. That is so because in Nigeria, inability to read and write well in English Language makes one an illiterate. The report of UNESCO as cited in Tikolo [12] agreed with the above statement that the number of illiterate adults has increased from 10 million in 1990 to 35 million in 2012, perhaps fuelled by the worrying increase in children who remain illiterate even with education. This situation may have been caused by the non-implementation of classroom structural goals. The consequences of this are worrying. Nigeria requires a literate workforce in order to fulfill her vision to be one of the top 20 countries in the world by 2020 [13]. Beyond that, the country requires a population competent in English Language in order to keep up with the pressure of globalization, which has led to the increasing use of English Language in all sectors as well as its continued use as the official language and medium of instruction. The above reiterates the need for a classroom system which will increase motivation and achievement of personal goals and academic achievement in English language.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State. Specifically, the objectives are:

1) ascertaining the effects of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State;
2) ascertaining if gender differences exist in the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State.

Research Questions

Two research questions are posed to guide the study:

1. What is the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State?
2. To what extent does gender difference exist in the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{O1} There is no significant difference between the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects in Competitive Learning Style and those in the control group at post-test.

H_{O2} There are no significant interaction effects between gender and treatments in the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects.

2. Method

The design for this study is quasi experimental design. It adopted the pre-test, post-test, treatment versus control group design. The treatment groups were treated using Competitive Learning Style (CLS), and the control group was taught using

the traditional instructional method or the 'Regular Method' (RM). The two groups were pre-tested using an English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) prepared by the researcher to obtain base line data and post-tested after treatment. The population of study comprises of all the senior secondary school students in Imo State. The sample for this study consists of 80, SS2 students drawn from two secondary schools in the population. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools while random sampling technique was used to assign the experimental and control group.

The researcher's choice of SS2 students for the study was based on the fact that the SS2 class, being the next to write the senior secondary school certificate examination, would be enthusiastic to use any learning approach which would enable them improve their understanding of English Language. The instrument for data collection was an English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) which was structured by the researcher, using the SS2 Ministry of Education approved syllabus on four topics: Stress, Comprehension, Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions, and Vocabulary Development. These topics were chosen to represent the topics which are generally taught in English Language at senior secondary level. The ELAT consists of 30 question items which was carefully prepared using a test blue print also called table of specification, covering both the lower level and higher levels of knowledge (k), Comprehension (C), Application (A) Analysis (A), Synthesis (S) and Evaluation (E), of learning. The content and face validity of the English Language Achievement test (ELAT) was established by three (3) experts in measurement and evaluation, one (1) English teacher and one (1) psychologist, who after due corrections, fine-tuned them and certified them fit for administration. To ensure the reliability of the Teacher Made English Language Achievement Test (ELAT), the researcher administered the ELAT on thirty three (33) SS2 students from Madonna secondary school, a private school, which was not part of the study. The same test was re-administered to the same students after two weeks. The pre-test and post-test scores were compared using the raw score method of the Pearson product moment correlation and a reliability coefficient of 0.73 was realized which signifies very high and positive reliability.

The researcher divided the procedure for data collection into three phases and they are, Phase 1: Pre-test, Phase two: treatment, Phase three: Post-test.

Phase 1: Pre-test

The researcher having prepared the instruments for data collection which was dully validated and their reliability established, enlightened two (2) SS2 English teachers in the selected schools which acted as research assistants, on the aims and methods to be utilized and the emphasis which is on sound classroom structures which should enhance achievement in English Language. The researcher used intact classes each from the two selected schools. The necessary materials that helped the research assistants were textbooks, lesson notes, and gift items intended to be used as reward was made available to them.

The research assistants in the experimental school led the students to learn using the treatment package, while the research assistant in the school that made up the control group taught the students using the regular method of teaching.

Phase 2: Treatment

Pre-test was administered to the students with the help of the research assistants. Post-test was also administered 8 weeks after, at the end of the treatment package.

Competitive Learning Style (CLS)

For this group, the researcher introduced a reward which was endearing/ tempting enough to spore challenge. Topics were given and students were given allowed to read understand with the consciousness that the best will receive that set reward. The benefit of the reward was constantly emphasized on all through the period of treatment. The researcher enshrined competition into the method of teaching, positively reinforcing the active participant in the class and negatively reinforcing the dormant participants.

Control Group

The three phases of the procedure were applicable here, only that phase 2, which is treatment proper, was different. The control group was taught with the regular methods. The teacher as usual introduced each lesson, taught normally and summarized them.

Phase 3: Post Test

The Teacher - Made English Language Achievement Test, (ELAT), which was previously administered was re - administered to all the groups. The result of this test was compared with that of the previous one to ascertain the impact of the treatment procedure.

Method of Data Analysis

The research questions were answered using Mean rating, to know the difference between the pre-test and the post-test, while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to know the difference between the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects in the Competitive Learning Style group (treatment group) and those in the control group at post-test.

3. Result

Research Question 1: What is the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State?

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' Achievement in Competitive Learning Style Group.

Treatment	N	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain Score
Competitive Learning Style	40	8.8	18.7	9.9

The data presented on Table 1 shows that there was an improvement in the academic achievement of students exposed to Competitive Learning Style as their post-test mean score (18.7) was higher than their pre-test mean score (8.8), with a mean gain of (9.9).

Research Question 2: To what extent does gender

difference exist in the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State?

Table 2. The extent to which gender difference exist in the effect of Competitive Learning Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Imo State.

VARIABLES	NUMBER	COGS
BOYS	40	15.2
GIRLS	40	16.2

Table 3. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on the adjusted mean scores of subjects in competitive Learning Style group and those in the control group at post test.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1044.127[a]	2	522.063	68.440	.000	.640
Intercept	1175.422	1	1175.422	154.092	.000	.667
Pre_Test	14.514	1	14.514	1.903	.172	.024
Group	1019.854	1	1019.854	133.698	.000	.635
Error	587.361	77	7.628			
Total	19963.000	80				
Corrected Total	1631.487	79				

From Table 3, The F- ratio value is 133.698 at a 0.000 level of significance which is less than 0.05. Since the calculated F-value 133.698 exceeded the F - critical value 3.07 (F-cal at 2, 77, 0.05) the null hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected. Therefore it was concluded that there is a significant difference between the

The data presented on Table 2, the boys had 15.2 mean scores in CLS while the girls had 16.2. It therefore shows that the treatments had more effect on the academic achievement of the girls more than the boys as the mean scores of the girls was higher than that of the boys.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects in Competitive Learning Style and those in the control group at post-test.

adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects in competitive learning style group and those in the control group at post-test.

Hypothesis 2: There are no significant interaction effects between gender and treatments in the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects.

Table 4. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on interaction effects between gender and treatments in the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects.

Source	Type 111 Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	30.796[a]	2	15.398	14.419	.000	.629
Intercept	22.394	1	22.394	20.970	.000	.552
Groups	8.746	1	8.746	8.190	.011	.325
Gender	18.663	1	18.663	17.477	.001	.507
Error	18.154	77	1.068			
Total	3403.000	80				
Corrected Total	48.950	79				

From Table 4, The F- ratio value is 17.477 at a 0.001 level of significance which is less than 0.05. Since the calculated F-value 17.477 exceeded the F - critical value 3.07 (F-cal at 2, 77, 0.05) the null hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected. Therefore there was a significant interaction effects between gender and treatments in the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects.

4. Discussion

The result of the analysis reveals that subject in the competitive learning style group improved after the treatment showing that competitive learning is rewarding and can improve students' academic scores in English language. The result means that students in the competitive learning style group benefitted from the treatment given. Learners in this group perceived that they will be rewarded based on comparisons with others, hence every member of the group made good efforts to improve in their understanding of the lessons taught as represented by the results of the data analysis. On testing the hypothesis, it was found to be

significant thus showing that there is a significant difference between the adjusted mean English Language achievement scores of subjects in competitive learning style and those in the control group at post-test.

5. Conclusion

The usual assumption following poor achievement of students in school is intelligence, parental status or study habit. It is therefore imperative to create the right study style which will not only improve students interest in English Language, but as well increase their academic achievement in the subject. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made on ways of improving student's achievement using Competitive Learning Style:

1. Teachers should be trained in using Competitive Learning Style in classroom instruction to enable students share their knowledge.

2. Competitive Learning Style proved to be a way of challenging students to hard work. The teacher should therefore use it when appropriate to challenge and give an

accurate feedback to students' performance. To maximise the effect of competition, the teacher should build cooperation into competition by grouping the students in teams. This enables the students enjoy the benefits of both competition and cooperation.

3. Supervision of classroom teaching is important. School supervisors should be sent to schools to monitor activities in the classroom setting. It is through this way that most teachers will be challenged in carrying out their duties effectively.

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