Effect of Task-Based Learning on Secondary Students' Academic Achievement and Interest in English Language Learning in Anambra State

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Abstract

This research investigated the effect of task-based learning on students' academic achievement and interest in English language learning in senior secondary schools in Anambra State. Four research questions guided the study while four null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study employed quasi-experimental design. Specifically, the pre-test /post-test non-equivalent control group design. The population of the study consisted of 1182 senior secondary school two students from theeight public secondary schools in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The sample size for this study comprised 90 SS2 students in Nnewi North Local Government Area. The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. The instrument used for data collection was the English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) and the English Language Interest Scale (ELIS). Kudar-Richardson 20 (KR-20) was used to check the internal consistency of ELAT items with dichotomous choices, which yielded reliability co-efficient of .81. While Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the ELIS; it yielded co-efficient 0.77. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that the mean interest and achievement scores of students taught English Language with task-based learning method are higher than those taught using the direct teaching method; these were also significant. The finding also revealed that the mean achievement scores of male students taught using the task-based teaching method are higher than those of their female counterparts taught using the same method. Finally, there is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language taught with the task-based learning Method. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among other things, that English language learning should adopt the use of TBL in teaching English Language so as to help improve the interest and achievement of students in English language.

Key words: Learning; Task-based learning; English language; Achievement; Secondary schools; Anambra state

INTRODUCTION

The goal of every nation is to produce manpower that will contribute immensely to the nation's growth and development. This goal cannot be attained unless its members are educated formally.Formal education is defined as that type of education that is official, planned, regulated and organized by public organizations or recognized private institutions, and which involves definite stages (Young, 2016). It is the classroom- based education which is provided by trained teachers. In the National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the broad aim of senior secondary education is to prepare students for useful living within the society and for higher education. To achieve these objectives in secondary schools in Nigeria, many subjects are offered

by students and English language (sometimes called English Studies) is one of them.

The term "English" is derived from 'Anglisc', the speech of the Angles—one of the three Germanic tribes that invaded England during the fifth century. The English language is the primary language of several countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and many of its former colonies as well as the United States; it is the second language of a number of multilingual countries, including India, Singapore and the Philippines. It is,as well,the official language of several African countries such as Liberia, Nigeria and South Africa and is spoken worldwide in more than 100 countries (Evue, 2013).

In Nigeria, English language is an official language. Evue (2013) opined that one of the reasons why English is so central to Nigeria's educational growth is its significant role as a medium of knowledge delivery in Nigerian schools. English is the language of instruction in schools, particularly the upper level of primary school, secondary school and beyond. No career choice identified by students to be studied in the university level goes without the possession of, at least, a credit grade in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) (Oribabor, 2014). English language is compulsory and a pre-requisite for admission into Nigerian universities. This is why the Use of English Language is compulsory in the Unified Tertiary Matriculations Examination (UTME) for all candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions. Apart from the English Language functions as a vehicle of interaction and the instrument of communication, Olusoji (2012) is of the view that English Language is the dominant language of international business and economic development, and that dominance continues to grow with the continued globalization of businesses through mergers and international investments.

Despite the importance of English language in our daily lives, it is very disappointing to observe that students' academic achievement in the subject at the senior secondary school level of education has not been satisfactory. Apparently, there is a poor academic achievement among secondary school students in English language (Anyaegbuna, Nwodo and Enibe, 2015; Sakiyo, 2015). This is evident in available results from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) of 2016 and 2017. The analysis of SSCE results from 2009-2017 confirmed the significantly poor level of students' academic achievement in English language (Auwalu, Muhd and Muhammad, 2018). The discouraging academic achievement in English language, according to researchers, (Auwalu, et al., 2018 and Okoli and Egbunonu, 2012) is traceable to a number of factors such as lack of qualified English language teachers, lack of methodological competencies, large class size and inadequate infrastructure.

Over the years, efforts have been made by researchers as well as government and non-governmental organizations in seeking ways of improving students' achievement in various subjects, especially in English language. However, the level of academic achievement in the subject still remains unsatisfactory. With regard to this, various factors generally responsible for students' poor achievement in English language have been identified by researchers. These include the inadequacy in the number of English language teachers, especially the qualified ones, inadequate instructional materials, large class size and poor students' background (James and Taiwo, 2011; Yakubu, 2016). Other findings have revealed that the number one factor is the use of poor teaching strategies in teaching English language (Adeniji, 2019; Obioma, 2016).

For any subject to be effectively taught there should be trained and qualified teachers who employ appropriate instructional methods. This implies that, for the effective teaching of English language, the teachers have to select appropriate instructional methods that will appeal students, irrespective of their gender and background, arouse their interest and enable them achieve excellent results. An instructional method can be viewed as the type of activity pursued by teachers and students together in a group work, surveys, demonstrations, films and TV viewing, which is intended to help students achieve stated lesson objectives or learning outcomes (Sophia, 2016). Adeniji (2019) stated that reliance on the conventional teaching method has been criticized as molding students into passive recipients of information transmitted by the teacher and making them highly dependent on teachers for much of their learning needs. Personal observations by the researchers show that the predominant method of teaching English language in Anambra State is the direct teaching method.

The direct method is a traditional way of teaching in which knowledge flows from the teacher to the students. It is a process in which teachers do the talking while the learners absorb the lesson contents by listening (Ezeoba, 2015). The direct method allows a great deal of information to be passed to the learner and allows the handling of large classes. It also encourages students to memorize facts which are easily forgotten (Ipadeola, 2016). The direct method, however, widens the initial in individual differences among students because slow learners are unable to acquire the cognitive and effective prerequisites to comprehend subsequent units with the limited amount of instructional time provided. Most teachers use this method because it helps deliver lessons fast within the limited time allocated for each subject in the time table; but it is not ideal for a good mastery of the lesson content. There is, therefore, need to employ a method that is more learner-centered and more interactive and tasking like the task-based learning method.

Task-based Learning is an approach that has roots in the Communicative Language Teaching Method where

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the teaching process is carried out entirely through communicative tasks (Jeon and Hahn, 2015). Task-based language teaching is a student-centered approach to second language acquisition. It is an offshoot of the communicative approach, wherein activities focus on having students use authentic target language and other project based assignments to complete meaningful tasks, i.e., employing situations they might encounter in the real world (Sobirjon and Umarkhanova, 2019). Task-based language learning was defined by Breen cited in Muhammed, Kisman and Dan (2021) as any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. In order to fully acquire language, it must have real meaning by being used in natural contexts.

TBL emphasizes that language should be acquired naturally by accomplishing various tasks. It is believed that, when students learn language through accomplishing a task, they are motivated. This method is made up of specific constituents such as goal, procedure and specific outcome and it supports content-oriented, meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Ellis, 2013 and Adirika, 2012 Skehan, 2018). There is need, therefore, to explore the effectiveness of other teaching methods and instructional techniques- apart from the direct method of learning- such as the tasked-based learning method in other to find out if they can bring about positive academic achievements and interest in male and female students in English language learning.

The use of task-based learning has been found effective in some aspects of English language like grammar, (Ehsam, Ghssem and Abdolreza, 2017), speaking accuracy and fluency (Munirah and Arief, 2015) and reading comprehension (Sinaga, 2015). This study, therefore, examined the effect of task-based learning and direct teaching method in all aspects of English language learning using the SS2 English language scheme of work in other to find out if it will help in improving the poor academic achievement and interest of students in the subject.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:
• What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean achievement scores of students taught English language with the task-based learning method and those taught using the direct method?
• What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean interest scores of students taught English language with the task-based learning method and those taught with the direct method?
• What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean achievement scores of male and female students taught English language with the task-based learning method?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level:
• There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students in English language taught with the task-based learning method and the direct method.
• There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students in English language taught with the task-based learning method and the direct method.
• There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in English language taught with the task-based learning method.

METHOD

The study adopted the quasi-experimental design to observe the academic achievement and interest of students before and after manipulations of the independent variables (TBLM and DM). The area of the study was Anambra State. The population consisted of 1182 Senior Secondary 2 students from the eight public secondary schools in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State (Source of data: Post Primary Schools Service Commission, Nnewi Zone as at September, 2021). The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted which produced ninety(90) SS2 students in Nnewi North Local Government Area; From the experimental school (Community Secondary school Nnewichi Nnewi) the whole intact class consisting forty two (42) SS 2 (11 males and 31 females) English language students were used. From the control school (Akaboezem Community Secondary School, Uruagu Nnewi), an intact class consisting of forty eight (48) SS2 students (20 males and 28 females) were used. The instrument for data collection was English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) and English Language Interest Scale (ELIS). This was developed by the researchers using WAEC standardized tests of 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. The instrument is divided into two parts- A and B. Part A deals with the bio-data of the students while part B is made up of 40 multiple choice objective test items with four answer options for each test question. The topics covered the content areas in the SS2 English language second term scheme of work: phrasal verbs, debates, formal letter writing and creative writing. The researchers used the questions during the pre-test and the same questions were reshuffled and used as post-test. To develop the instrument, a test blue print was designed and used in guiding the construction of the test. Also, the interest scale which was used to test the students' interest in TBTM was developed by the researchers. A 30-item question on ELIS was developed and structured on a four point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with values

4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Face and content validation of the ELAT and ELIS was established by three experts: one expert from the Curriculum Unit, one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka and one expert from the English Language Department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The content validity of the ELAT and ELIS was ensured by the use of the test blueprint. The guiding principles for developing the test blue print was based on sub-topics that were taught under phrasal verbs, the debate, formal letter writing and creative writing from the SS2 English Language scheme of work. The test blueprint was constructed considering the period to be covered in each concept. To establish the face validation of ELAT, the ELAT and the lesson plans, together with ELIS, the title of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions and the hypotheses were given to three experts. The corrections, recommendations and suggestions of these experts were incorporated into the final production of the instrument. Reliability is concerned with the degree of consistency of the measuring instrument. The ELAT was administered to 23 SS2 students (intact group) in Idemogwa Comprehensive Secondary School, Ogwa outside the research area but which has similar characteristics with the research area in terms of educational settings. The scores for ELAT obtained from trial testing exercise were used to estimate the reliability coefficient of the instrument using Kudar Richardson Formula (KR-20) which yielded a reliability of 0.81 (computed using SPSS, version 23). To determine the internal consistency of ELIS, Cronbach Alpha was used, a co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained. This value was considered acceptable by the researchers as this was in agreement with Ogundare (2008) that any value above 0.70 is an acceptable reliability value. The justification for using KR-20 is that the items in the instrument were dichotomously scored.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean achievement scores of students taught English language with the task-based teaching method and those taught using the direct method?

Table 1
Mean achievement scores of SS 2 students taught English language using Task-Based Teaching Method (TBTM) and those taught using the Direct Method (DM)

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test	SD	Mean gain
		X	SD	X		
TBTM	42	38.93	2.11	76.74	2.04	37.81
DM	48	26.12	2.89	48.16	2.54	22.04
Mean difference		13.94		20.18		15.77

Table 1 shows that students taught with task-based teaching method had 38.93 as the pre-test mean score and 76.74 as the post-test mean score with 2.11 and 2.04 respectively as their standard deviation with a gain in mean of 37.81. The direct method had 26.12 as the pre-test mean score and 48.16 as their post-test mean with 2.89 and 2.54 respectively as their standard deviation, with a gain in mean of 22.04. The analysis revealed that the mean achievement scores of students taught with task-based teaching method is higher than those taught using the direct method because the gain in mean of 37.81 for the experimental group is greater than 22.04 gain in mean for the control group. The mean difference is 15.77 in favour of the experimental group. The standard deviation of 2.04 for the experimental group is smaller than the 2.11 for the control group. This implies that the post-test mean achievement scores of the experimental group is more homogenous than that of the control group.

Research Question 2

What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean interest scores of students taught English language with the task-based teaching method and those taught using the direct method?

Table 2
Mean interest scores of SS 2 students taught English language using TBTM and those taught using DM

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		X	SD	X	SD	
TBTM	42	55.27	2.21	61.66	2.09	6.39
DM	48	39.04	2.59	41.54	2.33	2.50
Mean Difference		16.23		20.12		3.89

Table 2 indicates that students taught using task-based teaching method had 55.27 as the pre-interest mean score and 61.66 as the post-interest mean score with 2.21 and 2.16 respectively as the standard deviation with mean gain of 6.39. The direct method had 39.04 as the pre-interest mean score and 41.54 as the post-interest mean score with 2.59 and 2.33 respectively as the standard deviation with mean gain of 2.50. The mean difference is 3.89 in favour of the experimental group. The standard deviation of 2.09 for the experimental group is smaller than the 2.33 for the control group. This implies that the post-test mean interest score for the experimental group is more homogenous than that of the control group.

Research Question 3

What is the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean achievement scores of male and female students taught English language with the task-based teaching method?

Data analysis in Table 3 reveals that the male students had mean scores of 48.54 and 77.16 for their pre-test and post-test respectively with standard deviation scores of 2.65 and 2.32 for their pre-test and post-test scores.

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Also, female students had mean scores of 41.93 and 68.34 for their pre-test and post-test respectively with standard deviation scores of 2.58 and 2.44 for their pre-test and post-test scores. The gain in mean of 28.62 for male students was higher than that of their female counterpart with 26.41 gain in mean. This means that the mean achievement scores of male students taught using task-based teaching method is higher than their female counterparts taught using the same method. The post-test standard deviation of 2.32 for the male students is lower (2.44) than that of the female counterpart which shows a more uniform distribution of scores for the male students.

Table 3
Mean Achievement scores of male and female students taught English language using TBTM

Gender	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		X	SD	X	SD	
Male	11	48.54	2.65	77.16	2.32	28.62
Female	31	41.93	2.58	68.34	2.44	26.41
Mean difference		2.56		4.63		2.21

Test of Statistical Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students in English language taught with the task-based method and the direct method.

Table 4
ANCOVA test of significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught English Language using the task-based method and the direct method

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	1445.007a	2	722.504	100.473	.000
Intercept	4369.875	1	4369.875	607.685	.000
Achievement	.397	1	.397	.055	.815
Treatment	1308.402	1	1308.402	181.949	.000
Error	826.968	88	7.191		
Total	164629.000	90			
Corrected total	2271.975	89			

a. R squared = .636 (Adjusted R squared = .630)

Table 4 reveals a significant main effect of teaching method on mean achievement scores of SS 2 students taught English Language; $F(1,89) = 181.949$, P= 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught English language with the task-based method and the direct method.

Hypothesis 2
There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students in English language taught with the task-based method and the direct method.

Table 5
ANCOVA test of Significant Difference between the Mean Interest Scores of Students taught English using task-based method and the direct method

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	1268.389a	2	634.194	40.306	.000
Intercept	1528.879	1	1528.879	97.167	.000
Interest	107.460	1	107.460	6.830	.011
Treatment	618.797	1	618.797	39.327	.000
Error	1038.481	88	15.735		
Total	45582.000	90			
Corrected total	2306.870	89			

a. R squared = .550 (Adjusted R squared = .536)

Table 5 reveals a significant main effect of teaching method on mean interest scores of SS 2 students taught English Language; $F(1,89) = 39.327$, P= 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the mean interest scores of students in English language taught with the task-based method and the direct method.

Hypothesis 3
There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in English language taught with the task-based method.

Table 6
ANCOVA test of significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students taught English language using TBTM

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	78.437a	2	19.609	3.691	.007
Intercept	98.331	1	98.331	18.507	.000
Achievement	.068	1	.068	.013	.910
Gender	.629	1	.629	.118	.731
Treatment	7.982	1	7.982	1.502	.223
Error	600.385	40	5.313		
Total	23057.000	42			
Corrected total	678.822	41			

a. R squared = .116 (Adjusted R squared = .084)

Table 6 reveals a significant main effect of teaching method and gender on mean academic achievement scores of SS 2 students taught English Language; $F(1,41) = 0.118$, P= 0.731> 0.05.Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Thus, there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students taught English language with the task-based method.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study in Table 1 shows that students taught with task-based learning had a higher achievement mean score compared with students taught with the

direct teaching method. The achievement differences was further strengthened by the analysis of covariance in table 4 which showed significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught English language using the task-based method and those taught with the direct teaching method. This implies that the task-based method significantly enhanced students' achievement in English language learning. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Sinaga (2015) which revealed that students taught reading comprehension, an aspect of English language, using the task-based method performed significantly better than those taught using the conventional method. The result of the finding in Table 2 showed that the mean interest score of students taught English language using the task-based learning method is higher than those taught using the direct method. Further analysis in Table 5 using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught English language using the task-based method and those taught using the direct method. The result of the finding in Table 3 showed that male students had a higher achievement score than their female counterparts. Further analysis in Table 6 using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) revealed no significant difference in the achievement mean score accruing to male students as earlier seen in Table 3 was which due to chance factor. This result is in agreement with the findings of Ajitoni and Salako (2014) who reported no significant difference in the effect of teaching method and gender on students' interest in ethnic integration and sustainability in Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS

Many factors could affect learning outcome: subjective factors such as teacher factors, academic level; process factors such as teaching technique; all seem to have great effects on achievement. The finding implied that not all teaching methods are suitable for all subjects as certain subjects may require unique methods to achieve the desired goals. Using techniques which can benefit the majority of the students in learning may be advantageous.

Limitations of the Study

There was no randomization of variables. Also teacher factors such as differences in teaching techniques were not accounted for and this may, possibly, influence students' performance. However, research assistants were trained to moderate the experimental group and the results gotten are valid.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

• The task-based method should be used in English language learning because of its effectiveness in improving students' academic achievement and interest in the language.

• There is need for the ministry of Education to extensively carry out research on other aspects of task-based learning and how it may be used in teaching problematic subjects to improve academic achievement.

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