Effects of Socratic Seminar and Story Grammar Strategies on Students' Achievement in Prose in Literature-in-English

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Abstract

The study determined the effects of Socratic Seminar and Story Grammar instructional strategies on senior secondary two (SS II) students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. It also examined the moderating effect of learning style on the dependent variable. The study adopted a pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. The sample for the study consisted of 243 senior secondary school two (SSS II) students drawn from six purposively selected secondary schools in Owerri. Prose in Literature-in-English Achievement test (r = 0.88) and Learning Style Preference questionnaire (r = 0.81) were used to collect data for the study. The Analysis of Covariance was used to test three hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English ($F_{(2,215)}$ = 3.32; η^2 = 0.03). Socratic seminar instructional strategy group had the highest posttest achievement mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 29.71), followed by control group ($\bar{x}$ = 27.35) and story grammar group ($\bar{x}$ = 26.84) respectively. There was no significant main effect of learning style on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. The two-way interaction effect of treatment and learning style on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English was not significant. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Literature-in-English teachers should adopt Socratic seminar instructional strategy to enhance students' performance.

Introduction

Education, the world over is grounded on several fields and disciplines which could help learners find meaning and relevance in their societies. The study of Literature-in-English is aimed at the complete development of the learner which embraces the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. It is one of the school subjects on the curriculum in Nigeria's educational system that contributes greatly to the realisation of the national educational goals for the inculcation of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. It also includes the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (National policy on education, 2004). According to Timucin (2009), Literature equips one to live meaningfully in one's environment. It also helps one to face and cope with life experiences. To achieve the educational goals and objectives of Literature-in-English, effective teaching and learning of drama, poetry and prose are important.

Literature-in-English, as a subject of study, is sub-divided into three genres namely: drama, poetry and prose. Prose, which is the focus of this study, is generally regarded as a popular and easy-to-read literary genre probably because the linguistic structure of most of the

sub-genres of prose in Literature-in-English is closer to the language of everyday life than those of drama and poetry. According to Bamisaiye (1982), students prefer prose in Literature-in-English to poetic and dramatic literature because, students have been given short stories and prose versions of plays right from the junior classes. To this end, Bamisaiye concluded that because students see prose writing all the time, they would rather read prose writings than other forms of writing. Contrary to expectation, as popular and simple as prose in Literature-in-English is considered to be, students' performance in this genre has not been impressive in recent times. The *WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports* on Literature-in-English paper three (Prose) for four consecutive years (2009-2012) have shown that the questions set were within the examination syllabus, and the marking scheme was quite exhaustive to accommodate all possible answers. However, there was no remarkable improvement in candidates' performance. Candidates continued to exhibit lack of essential skills necessary for literary appreciation. This problem has been blamed on students' poor language proficiency resulting in poor comprehension, teachers' use of ineffective teaching methods and strategies, and students' negative attitude to reading. There seems to be a consensus among scholars that poor teaching method has more far-reaching effect on students' poor performance in any school subject than any other factor (Boardman and Holden, 2006; Peck, Ali, Matchock and Levine, 2006).

Language teaching experts have over the years decried the poor state of Literature-in-English teaching and learning particularly prose in Literature-in-English in Nigerian schools (Uwaifo, 1979; Adedokun, 2002; Mbonu, 2010). As regards prose in Literature-in-English, the general finding is that teachers focus on story narration, vocal reading of texts in the class, transmission of background information on the author and the text and review of past examination questions. These activities lead to what Kateregga (2014), Mujawar (2013) and Lange (1995) referred to as product-process or examination-oriented approach to Literature teaching which has been widely criticised. Mcahan and Robert (2012) and Tseng (2010) observed that the product-process approach does not promote students' active engagement with literary texts and it is teacher-centred. Yaqoob (2011) equally argued that the approach makes students become a storehouse of the information related to certain texts but not critical and creative thinkers and problem solvers. To them, the goal of a Literature teacher should be to equip students with reading and study skills which would enable them process relevant information, analyse and appreciate literary texts independently.

Besides, in the teaching and learning process, the traditional view that the learner is a blank slate which encouraged a teaching and learning situation where material is delivered to students through the lecture method, has given way to modern approaches. The modern view of teaching according to DeCaprariis, Barman and Magee (2005) is constructivist, in which case, students are expected to be active in the learning process by participating in discussion or collaborative activities. In consonance with this view, Olagunju and Ojo (2006) explained that effective teaching involves providing students with opportunities to talk meaningfully and listen, write, read and reflect on the content, ideas, issues and concerns of an academic subject. Thus, active learning entails students developing the ability to purposefully access information from a variety of sources, analyse and evaluate the information and then integrate it to construct a personal knowledge base

from which to make intelligent decisions. Thus, with the understanding that Literature lessons should be student-centred and that classroom activities should not be limited to reading and note-taking, education researchers have recommended innovative, learner-centred and participatory instructional strategies for Literature-in-English teaching. This is because, according to Kateregga (2014), students should be taught to be creative thinkers and not mere reproducers of knowledge. Such learner-centred interactive strategies include story grammar and Socratic seminar. Researchers who have used learner-centred instructional strategies reported positive results. These include: Adesoji (2008), Akinsola and Olowojaiye (2008), Duze (2010), Yilmaz (2012), Farnazeh and Nejadansai (2014).

The concept of learning style has continued to be explored in educational research. Research concerned with identifying the relationship between academic achievement and individual learning style has provided support for the following:

i. students prefer certain methods of learning more than others i.e. students do learn differently from each other.
ii. students' performance in different subject areas is related to how individuals do learn.
iii. when students are taught with approaches and resources that complement their unique learning styles, their achievement is significantly increased.

Accordingly, teachers should provide their students with rich learning environments and a variety of learning possibilities for effective teaching which shows the importance of considering individual differences and diversity in the instructional design processes (Dembo and Howard, 2007).

Learning style is a variable that affects students' learning outcomes in school subjects. It is known that the way people learn varies from person to person due to the presence of biological and psychological differences. Compared to the extensive work done on methods of teaching and instructional activities, one variable often neglected in the area of Literature-in-English teaching and learning is the exploration of learning style in the classroom (Locke, 2008). Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork (2009) defined learning style as a term that describes the variations among learners in using one or more senses to understand, organise and retain experience. In the context of education, if someone would rather listen to things being explained than read about them, that person is said to be an auditory learner. On the other hand, if someone needs visual stimuli such as chats, maps, illustrations and other visual learning tools in order to process new information, that person is said to be a visual learner. According to Vaishnav (2013), visual learners rely on their sight to take in information. They organise knowledge in terms of spatial interrelationship among ideas and store it graphically. Then, if someone learns best by doing an activity, that person is said to be a kinesthetic or tactile learner. Kinesthetic or tactile learners prefer to learn by doing or by touching. They learn best by being active, and they often rely on physical interaction in order to master a concept (Pride, 2010).

The learning styles exhibited by learners depend on two major factors-the way they perceive information and the way they process information. Evidence abound that the inability of teachers to account for the learning preferences of learners causes frustration among a good number of them (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011; Chukwu and Akpabio, 2013). This presupposes that for teaching to be effective the method used should account for individual learner's preferred learning

style. Besides, students with different types of learning style may need different instructional strategies to suit their information processing needs. One of the weaknesses of the prevalent lecture method used by prose in Literature-in-English teachers is that it involves teacher's transmission of information to students hence, it benefits only auditory learners. It does not cater for students who perceive and process information differently.

Previous studies on the relationship between learning style and students' academic performance have shown conflicting results. Khaki, Ganjabi and Khodamoradi (2015), Rohrer (2008), Pashler, Rohrer and Bjork (2009), Cox (2007) reported that there is no significant relationship between students' learning styles and their academic achievement. To them, students can perform equally well regardless of their perceptual learning style preference. However, other researchers reported significant correlation between learning styles and students' academic achievement (Cassidy, 2008; Udeani and Adeyemo, 2011). The results of their studies suggested that the manner in which a learner chooses to or is inclined to approach a learning situation has impact on his performance. Given the conflicting results on the influence of learning style on academic achievement, there is therefore need to carry out more research on the variable. Besides, there is difference between previous studies and this study in terms of the learning style model used. Review of literature revealed that a large number of studies on the effect of learning style on academic achievement tend to focus on the use of the sociological dimension of learning style while this study used the physiological dimension.

Statement of the Problem

Literature-in-English is a subject that is expected to develop students' love for reading, provide pleasure and develop language skills among other values. Contrary to expectation most students manifest apathy to reading in almost all the genres of Literature especially prose. They prefer to read "short note" commentaries and key points at the expense of the actual texts. This practice has led to persistent poor performance in Literature-in-English including prose. The low achievement in prose has been traced to students' negative attitude to reading, lack of familiarity with texts, lack of qualified teachers of Literature, low language proficiency and unsuitable methods and strategies of teaching. Studies have focused on the use of cognitive instructional strategies like literature circles and advance organisers to reduce poor performance in Literature-in-English. However, literature revealed the neglect of the use of metacognitive strategies that focus on the affective aspect of the learner and the issue of text structure awareness which is necessary in reading and comprehension of literary texts. Thus, this study determined the effects of Socratic Seminar and Story Grammar instructional strategies on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. It also examined the interaction effect of learning style on the dependent variable.

Hypotheses

(1) There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English.
(2) There is no significant main effect of learning style on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English.
(3) There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and learning style on students achievement in prose in Literature-in-English.

Methodology

The study adopted a pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. The sample for the study consisted of 243 senior secondary school two students drawn from six purposively selected public senior secondary schools in Owerri, Imo State. From each of the six schools, one intact class was randomly selected. Thereafter, two intact classes were randomly assigned to each of the treatment and control groups. The criteria for the selection of schools included the following:

1. The schools must be co-educational.
2. The schools must be willing to take part in the study.
3. The schools must have qualified Literature-in-English teachers who have degrees in education.
4. The schools must have presented at least three sets of candidates for WAEC and NECO examinations.
5. There must be at least 20 students in the Literature-in-English class in the schools.
6. The schools must be using the same prose texts as the ones used in the study.
7. The schools must be willing to allow a trained research assistant from another school to handle their prose in Literature-in-English lessons for the period of the study should teachers from their schools fail to meet the study inclusion criteria.

Prose in Literature-in-English Achievement Test (PLEAT) and Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (LSPQ) were the major instruments used to collect data. PLEAT contained 20 questions set on two prose texts: Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime* which is an African prose text and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* which is a non-African prose text. The questions set on the texts comprised 16 short-answer questions and 4 essay type questions. The test was used to measure students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English before and after exposure to treatment. The items were structured to test students' cognitive knowledge in the three levels of the cognitive domain according to the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives namely remembering, understanding and thinking (Airasian, 2000). LSPQ is a 30-item questionnaire. The questionnaire items are statements and questions that address the concerns of students with regard to their learning styles. Each statement or question is followed by three options lettered V (visual), A (auditory), and K (kinesthetic). After students' response, the number of responses for each option was added. The option with the highest number of responses was taken as a student's primary mode of learning. The LSPQ was used to categorise the study sample into three learning style groups i.e. visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Both research instruments were assessed for face and content validity by lecturers in the Departments of English and Teacher Education. To ascertain the reliability of PLEAT, it was trial-tested on a sample of 48 senior secondary school two students who did not take part in the main study. Using the test-retest method, a reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. For LSPQ, the instrument was test-run on 50 SSS II students that did not take part in the study. The reliability was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained.

Treatment Procedure

The study lasted eleven weeks and it went through four stages. The study commenced with identification of schools for the study and seeking permission from the school authority, the selection and training of research assistants. This was followed by administration of pretest. Giving of

treatment to the experimental and control groups followed next. This stage lasted eight weeks. At the end of the treatment, the prose in Literature-in-English achievement test (PLEAT) was administered to all students in both the experimental and control groups as posttest. The experimental and control groups received treatment as follows.

Treatment for Experimental Group 1 (Socratic Seminar)

Pre-seminar Activities

Step 1: The teacher introduces the lesson by asking one or two students who have participated in a debate before to share their experience with the class.

Step 2: The teacher explains the difference between a debate and a discussion for e example:

(a) discussion is collaborative: multiple sides work towards shared understanding while debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.

(b) in discussion, one listens to make meaning and to find a common ground while in debate one listens to find flaws, to spot differences and to counter arguments.

Step 3: The teacher explains the importance of the strategy which is to help students have a deeper understanding of the ideas and values in the text through shared discussion. Thereafter, the teacher states and explains the seminar rules which include:

(a) only one person speaks at a time.

(b) no hand raising.

(c) be respectful of others and their views.

(d) base your views on something in the text.

(e) come to the seminar prepared.

(g) be not afraid to ask questions.

Step 4: The teacher assigns chapters to be read in class. Note: classroom reading of text is done for the first lesson. For subsequent lessons, the students read at home before coming to seminar.

Step 5: The students read silently and independently. After reading, the teacher divides the students into three groups: discussants (four students), observers (four students) and note-takers (every other student in the class).

Step 6: The teacher gives students Discussion Partner Evaluation Sheet and Note Taking Guide to observers and note-takers respectively.

During Seminar Activities

Step 7: The teacher poses the seminar opening question and the students engage in discussion as they respond to the question. The teacher as the facilitator prompts students deeper into the text with some guiding questions like:

(a) where do you find evidence for that in the text

(b) why do you say that

(c) who has a different perspective?

(d) how does that relate to what (someone else) said?

Post-seminar Activities

Step 8: The observers and note-takers give their feedback on the seminar. Thereafter, teacher shares his/her own observation about the seminar.

Step 9: The teacher asks a closing question e.g. how does the action of Manolin's parents relate to us today? One or two students briefly share their views. Thereafter, teacher assigns chapters to be read at home.

Experimental Group 2 (Story Grammar)

Step 1: The teacher stimulates students' prior knowledge of story elements by telling the class a story or asking a student to tell a story.

Step 2: The teacher guides the students to identify the elements in the story he or a student told the class and explains story grammar strategy and procedure.

Step 3: The teacher gives a mini lesson on the components of story grammar used in the study which are: setting, characters, initiating event, internal response, attempt, consequence and reaction.
Step 4: The teacher and the students generate wh-questions which guided students in their reading thus:

(a) where and when did the story happen?
(b) who is the main character?/Who is the story about
(c) what is the main character's problem?/What is the big problem that the story is about?
(d) how did the main character feel about the problem?
(e) what did the main character try to do to solve the problem?/What did he do about the problem?
(f) what is the result of the main character's action?
(g) how did he feel at the end?

Step 5: The students read silently and independently assigned chapters. As they read, they find and write down answers to the wh-questions.
Step 6: Each student prepares a story map of what he/she has read.
Step7: The teacher assesses students' work and comments on their strengths and weaknesses. Thereafter, the teacher discusses the episode read and shows the students a model story map. After, the teacher assigns chapters to be read at home.

Control Group
Step 1: The teacher gives students background information about the text to be read and the author.
Step 2: The teacher discusses elements of prose in Literature-in-English which are: setting, plot characterization, theme and point of view.
Step 3: The teacher asks students to open their texts to a particular page/chapter.
Step 4: The teacher assigns reading portions to some students.
Step 5: The students take their turns in vocal reading of text while teacher stops them at intervals to explain.
Step 6: The teacher asks some questions to assess students' ability to recall information from their reading.
Step 7: The students copy notes.

Method of Data Analysis
Data were analysed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to determine the effectiveness of the independent variables (Socratic seminar, Story grammar and modified lecture strategies) on the dependent variable (achievement in prose in Literature-in-English) and Estimated Marginal Means (EMM) in order to determine the group with the highest mean score.

Results
Ho_1: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in prose in
Literature-in-English.

Table1: Summary of ANCOVA of posttest prose in Literature-in-English achievement scores by treatment and learning style

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	11696.337	27	433.198	9.192	.000	.536
Intercept	4068.674	1	4068.674	86.335	.000	.287
Pretest	6205.592	1	6205.592	131.679	.000	.380
Treatment	312.592	2	156.296	3.317	.038*	.030
Learning Style	119.247	2	59.624	1.265	.284	.012
Treatment + L Style	251.979	4	62.995	1.337	.257	.024
Error	10132.239	215	47.127			
Total	219576.000	243				
Corrected Total	21828.576	242				

R Squared = .536 (Adjusted R Squared = .478) *significant at p<.05

The result presented in Table 1 shows that there is significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English ($F_{(2,215)}$ = 3.32; p<.05; η^2 = 0.03). This means that there is significant difference in the achievement of students who were taught prose in Literature-in-English through the use of story grammar, Socratic seminar and lecture instructional strategies. Based on this result, hypothesis 1 was rejected. To determine the group with the highest mean score, the Estimated Marginal Mean was computed. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Estimated Marginal Means for posttest achievement scores by treatment and learning style

	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Treatment				
Modified Lecture	27.345	.843	25.684	29.006
Socratic Seminar	29.710	.783	28.167	31.253
Story Grammar	26.835	1.001	24.862	28.807
Learning Style				
Auditory	26.784	1.003	24.806	28.761
Visual	28.771	.770	27.252	30.289
Kinesthetic	28.336	.853	26.655	30.016

Table 2 indicates that students exposed to Socratic seminar instruction obtained the highest posttest achievement mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 29.71) followed by those in the control group (($\bar{x}$ = 27.35) while students in the story grammar group have the lowest mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 26.84).

Ho_2. There is no significant main effect of learning style on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English.

From Table 1 learning style has no significant main effect on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English ($F_{(2,215)}$ = 1.27; p > .05; η^2 = 0.01) hence, hypothesis 2 was confirmed. Table 2 further reveals that the visual learners obtained the highest

achievement mean score of ($\bar{x}$ = 28.71) followed by the kinesthetic learners ($\bar{x}$ = 28.34) while the auditory learners obtained the lowest achievement score ($\bar{x}$ = 26.78). The difference is not significant.

Ho_3. There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and learning style on students achievement in prose in Literature-in-English.

As shown in Table 1, there is no significant 2-way interaction effect of treatment and learning style on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English ($F_{(4,215)}$ = 1.34; p> .05; η^2 = 0.02) hence, hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

Discussion

This study was designed to determine the effects of story grammar and Socratic seminar instructional strategies on students' achievement in and attitude to prose in Literature-in-English. It also sought to ascertain whether students who were exposed to these strategies would perform better than those taught through the modified lecture strategy.

The findings reveal significant difference in the posttest achievement mean scores of students in prose in Literature in all the three groups (story grammar, Socratic seminar and modified lecture). This shows that treatment significantly affected students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. One possible reason for this result is that the strategies used in the experimental groups were learner-centred which enhanced teacher-student and student-student interactions. This made for greater learner involvement in the learning process which in turn improved their performance. The treatment produced a better performance on students in the Socratic seminar experimental group than those in story grammar and control groups. This result could be attributed to the fact that Socratic seminar strategy involved discussion which Hadjioannou (2007) noted helps students to exchange their thoughts, appraise their perspectives critically and then come to the conclusion about the topic. This result supports the submissions of VanDeweghe (2007) and Sabljić (2014) that classroom discussion helps students make sense of literary texts. They noted that discussion provides a setting where students can share ideas on issues of interest which leads to deeper levels of learning because for students to build on each other's ideas, they must first listen and understand the contributions of others in order to respond or add to it. Besides, the result may be due to teachers' active role in helping the students achieve a more accurate understanding of the texts. In Socratic seminar, the teacher asked probing questions and followed up on students' responses by seeking for elaboration. Thus, they guided the students along the correct path as they correct misconceptions and incomplete positions and views. The findings of this study also support Ogunnaike (2002) whose study indicated that discussion teaching technique was more effective in improving students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English than lecture-based technique.

The findings further reveal that students in the modified lecture strategy group performed better than those in one of the experimental groups (story grammar). This was contrary to expectation because story grammar instructional strategy is learner-centred which encouraged students' active participation in the learning process. Thus, it was expected that students in the story grammar group would perform better than those in the control group. The result obtained here may be connected with the complex nature of the structure of one of the texts used in the study. However, this result lends

support to Jaafa-furo, Abdullahi and Badgal (2014) and Al-faleh (2002). They found lecture method more effective in enhancing students' academic achievement than demonstration and discussion methods respectively. Also, this result could be in line with the submission of Yilmaz (2012). According to Yilmaz, although lecture is generally regarded as a teacher-centred strategy which does not encourage students' active participation in the teaching-learning process hence; there has been a call for a de-emphasis on its use in teaching; it is an effective method of teaching Literature. He observed that usually students will need to be introduced to a literary work before they could appreciate it. That is, they need to learn the historical background of a novel and the social conditions which the author is trying to portray in the story. He explained that it is through lecture or giving of facts approach that a Literature teacher establishes a mental set (historical background) that would enable the students to organise the cognitive and affective aspects of a text which aid them to understand a text.

Findings further reveal that learning style has no significant effect on students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. This result supports other studies indicating that students' learning style has no significant influence on their academic achievement for example: Kidanemariam, Atagana and Engida (2014), Gappi (2013), Mlambo (2011) and Al-Hebaishi (2012). One of the possible explanations for the result obtained in this study is that the instructional strategies employed in the study appear to cater for the different learning styles. Like Nilson (2003) noted, although students may show preference for one learning style, they may use the other modalities to a lesser extent.

Again, the results show that the interaction effect of treatment and learning style was not significant. That is, there was no significant influence of learning style on the effectiveness of the strategies used in the study in relation to students' achievement in prose in Literature-in-English. The implication of this is that teachers should adopt these strategies in teaching and try to imbibe the steps involved in their use since they have proved to be effective for all students irrespective of their different learning style preferences.

Conclusion

Socratic seminar instructional strategy was effective in enhancing achievement in prose in Literature-in-English in Owerri, Nigeria. Thus, the application of instructional strategies involving student-centred in-class activities like Socratic seminar is more effective in promoting students' active engagement with literary texts and achievement in prose in Literature-in-English than lecture-based strategy. Hence, if students are taught how to read literary texts using Socratic seminar strategy, they can overcome their persistent poor performance in Literature-in-English.

Based on this, it was recommended that teachers should encourage and incorporate students' activities involved in Socratic seminar instructional strategy into Literature-in-English teaching and they should discourage the use of 'short notes' and 'exam focus' pamphlets and emphasise the purchase and reading of the prescribed prose in Literature-in-English texts.

Workshop and in-service training programmes should be organised for Literature-in-English teachers on regular bases so as to keep them abreast of research based innovative instructional strategies that keep students engaged and motivated throughout the learning process. Similarly, teachers should not be learning style biased in accomplishing their pedagogical tasks. Whether a student is a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner, students must be given equal

opportunity to participate in classroom activities.

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