

Effect Of Cooperative Learning Method On Interest In English Reading Comprehension In Nsukka Education Zone Of Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study determined the effect of cooperative learning method on students' interest in English reading comprehension. The study adopted a quasi-experimental 2x2x2 factorial research design. It was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The population of the study comprised all the 3,430 senior secondary school two (SSS II) students in Nsukka Education Zone. Using a purposive sampling technique, a sample of 194 SSS II students were drawn from four senior secondary schools in the zone. The instrument for data collection was a Reading Comprehension Interest Inventory (RCII) prepared by the researchers. The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the English Language Education Unit of the Department of Arts Education and one from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Department of Science Education, all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument was trial-tested on 30 students randomly selected from another zone. The data was collated and analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha Statistics and an internal consistency reliability index of 0.91. Based on this reliability index obtained, the instrument was considered reliable. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance, using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The findings of the study revealed that students exposed to cooperative learning method had higher interest in English reading comprehension than those taught using the lecture method. Also, gender has no significant influence on students' interest in reading comprehension. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended, among others, that English language teachers should adopt the cooperative learning method as an alternative to the conventional lecture method in teaching reading comprehension in secondary schools since it has been proved to improve and accelerate students' interest in reading comprehension.

Keywords: English language, Interest, Reading Comprehension, Cooperative Learning Method

Introduction

English is taught at various levels of education in Nigeria. The essence of English language teaching is geared towards mastering listening, speaking, reading and writing which are the basic skills of any language. Of the language skills, reading has been considered as the most important skill in learning a second language (Yadav, 2014). This implies that English language learners need to be given early exposure to reading. According to Turner (2012), reading is a total integrative process that starts with the reader and involves the affective, perceptual, and cognitive domains. It is a complex cognitive process of decoding written or printed symbols. In other words, reading can be described as a receptive skill that involves the identification and interpretation of graphic representations of symbols and words to understand a writer's message. It requires that readers use their eyes to receive written symbols and as well use their brain to convert them into words, sentences, and paragraphs that communicate meaning or comprehension to them.

Reading is a tool for students' academic success and for obtaining information in other endeavours of life. To be academically 'informed or deformed' depends, to a large extent, on one's reading effectiveness. For effective reading, Igbokwe and Obidike (2013) suggest acquiring the rudiments for reading. The implication of their suggestion is that anyone who desires to be an effective reader needs to develop some rudimental skills to process and derive meaning from printed or written texts or materials. Such skills include the knowledge to understand how speech sounds are connected to print, the ability to decode unfamiliar words, the ability to read fluently, sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension, the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print, and the development and maintenance of a motivation to read.

An aspect of reading skills taught to English language learners is reading comprehension. Reading comprehension means the ability to read, process, and understand the meaning of a text, message or any written or printed material or document. Wallot (2016) defines reading comprehension as a means of understanding by extracting the necessary information as efficiently as possible from written material. Wallot's definition suggests that reading comprehension involves a process of meticulous sifting of information in order to extract the underlying meaning of any written material. This makes reading comprehension a vital part of reading.

The fundamental aspects of reading comprehension are the ability to deal with unfamiliar words encountered in a text and to have a clear understanding of the reading materials. Hand-in-Hand Education (2015) believes that reading comprehension involves various levels of comprehension such as the lexical, literal, interpretive, applied, and affective levels of comprehension. Knowledge of lexical comprehension assists students to understand the key vocabularies in a passage while knowledge of literal comprehension helps students to answer questions on who, what, when and where on a reading passage. On other hand, interpretive comprehension aids students to answer the what if, why and how questions on passages. Applied comprehension will assist them to relate the story in the passage to existing knowledge opinion in

a passage while affective comprehension will help them to understand social and emotional aspects in a passage. The knowledge of the various levels of comprehension is needful for students to effectively read and comprehend ideas that are discussed in paragraphs of a given passage. Also, students will be able to properly provide appropriate answers to questions on the passage. When all these levels of comprehension are properly taught to learners, they can effectively read, understand ideas that are discussed and extract meaning from any materials they read.

The relevance of reading comprehension is emphasized in the English language curriculum as indicated by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2017). According to NERDC, adequate and proper instructional delivery of reading comprehension helps students to develop the knowledge, skills and experiences they must have if they are to become competent and enthusiastic readers. This is because students' interest is generated when they show a sense of concern or curiosity in acquiring knowledge or skill in reading comprehension (Ibegbu, 2012). Also, when there is high interest in reading comprehension, students' achievement will be high (Alikemuo, 2014). This means that increased interest may provoke more reading and better learning and students who have interest in reading comprehension are likely to learn to read, comprehend and perform better not only in English language but also in other subjects. They are also likely to communicate more effectively.

It is, therefore, important to teach reading comprehension in a manner that will arouse the interest of students especially those in secondary schools. According to Uloh-Bethels, Akabogu, Ede, Nnamani & Ukoha (2019), interest is an important factor of achievement in language learning, especially in English language learning. It is necessary to activate and determine students' interest in any subject so as to make important decision pertaining to the subject. This is because when one is interested in, for instance English language, one becomes eager to learn it. However, in trying to activate students' interest in reading comprehension, a number of factors such as complexity of the reading text, environmental influences, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation, decoding/word recognition and speed need to be considered.

Considering the importance of reading comprehension, one would expect high interest of students in this aspect of the English language. Unfortunately, students do not perform well in reading comprehension, thereby jeopardizing their overall performance in English language. The seemingly lack of interest and the resultant poor performance by the students in reading comprehension may be traceable to classroom size, school location, teachers' mode of assessment of the students' exercises and especially teaching methods (The West African Examinations Council Chief Examiner's Report, 2019). Inability to use appropriate teaching method that will arouse students' interest and encourage them to actively engage in learning reading may adversely influence students' general interest in English language. Bolunde (2005) asserts that the teaching method used by English language teachers can affect students positively because it is a weapon of enhancing the language ability of their students. Lending credence to Bolunde's assertion, Patrick, Uloh-Bethels & Ukwueze (2020) stress that the sustainability of how much students learn and

what content they absorb may be assured when appropriate instructional methods are used alongside appropriate instructional materials.

In some secondary schools, the conventional/traditional lecture method is the most common method of teaching used by teachers in carrying out the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Ughamadu (2006) sees the lecture method as the easiest, cheapest, and most familiar of other methods. Perhaps, this is why it is the dominant method of teaching reading comprehension in secondary schools. Ughamadu observes that although the lecture method is the most dominant, it is the most abused and least effective in many respects, situations, and circumstances. Moreover, apart from being teacher-centred, this method appears not to activate students' prior reading knowledge of reading. As a result of these shortcomings, there is a need to investigate other methods that are capable of arousing and sustaining students' interest so as to make them effective and efficient. One of such methods is the cooperative learning method. This study therefore investigated the use of cooperative learning method as an alternative method that may rouse and sustain students' interest in English reading comprehension.

Cooperative learning method refers to highly structured classroom experiences involving students teaching each other and working together on projects outside the class. It is a teaching method that can help learners to actively participate in reading comprehension lessons. Muniz, Garcia & Fernandez (2017) and Page (2017) define the cooperative learning method as an educational methodology based on work in small and, generally, heterogeneous groups, in which students work together to improve their own learning and that of other members of their group. This means that this method allows discussion and critical thinking. So, students learn more and remember what they have learned for a longer period of time. It also requires students to learn to work together. According to Cariasco, Alarcon, and Trianes (2015), the cooperative learning method implies the presence, during group work of essential characteristics such as resources and rules, face-to-face interaction, individual responsibilities, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing through which the group identifies the behaviours that manifested during the development of the task and which ones were harmful, in order to reinforce the first behaviours and propose alternatives to the second. This type of teaching method decreases competitiveness and individualism and increases opportunities to actively construct or transform knowledge among students.

English language teachers can incorporate this method into the teaching of reading comprehension to help to stimulate students' interest, stimulate them to acquire knowledge, and also help them develop interpersonal and team skills. According to Johnson & Johnson (2014) and Casey & Goodycar (2015), five essential elements are identified for the successful incorporation of cooperative learning in the reading comprehension classroom. They include social/interpersonal skills (active listening), feedback of comments/praise for the efforts of others, group processing (discussing and reflecting on group work), positive interdependence (which refers to all group members depending on each other to achieve the expected purpose) and supportive interaction (face-to-face interaction of group members during the task).

Apart from being used to stimulate students' interest, Gillies (2016) considers cooperative learning method as an important teaching-learning strategy that can promote academic, social and affective-motivational achievements for students, bearing in mind those with specific educational needs. This is why the English language teacher has to play a key role in establishing cooperative learning experiences such as structuring groups and tasks so that students understand what they are expected to do and how they are expected to behave in the reading comprehension classroom; promoting students' interaction during small group discussions.

These teachers' roles, if effectively played, could promote students' interest. Slavin (2014) and Gisbert, Senba, and Coll (2017) observe, obstacles to students' interest in reading comprehension may be overcome through teachers' use of this method. This is because cooperative learning method improves individual responsibility for group success as well as motivation to continue working and learning with the help of their group. In addition, this method is flexible for teaching reading comprehension. It is hoped, from Sharon's (2010) perspective, that English language teachers would understand how crucial the cooperative learning method is in capturing and sustaining students' interest and as such, choose it as best suited to their reading comprehension classroom depending on students' needs and interests.

Cooperative learning method, as a method that engages students in the learning process, is theoretically hinged on the constructivist theory. Lopez-Cancelos, Comesana & Badaoui, (2013), opines that cooperative learning method is a constructivist method that makes possible a significant learning for students. Lev Vygotsky's constructivist theory of language learning is a theory of learning in which learners are provided with opportunities to construct their own meaning about what is being learned by building the connection through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. It is relevant to the study as the cooperative learning method is based on the active participation of students to construct their own interpretation, understanding, and acquiring knowledge from the content of any given comprehension passage they read. Active participation of the learners in classroom activities as a result of the use of cooperative learning method could enhance students' interest and achievement in reading comprehension. It provides a pathway to help students to gain critical thinking and creative skills to engage in activities that will arouse their interest in the learning process.

It has been observed from empirical studies that cooperative learning method can influence students' interest in some secondary school subjects and some aspects of the English language as shown by researchers such as Jacobson & Baribor (2012); Hyun, Ediger & Lee (2017); Morales (2019); Ugwu (2019); Marcos, Fernandez, Gonzalez, Phillips-Silver (2020) and Gillies (2020). For instance, the result of Ugwu's (2019) investigation on the effect of two cooperative learning strategies (the student teams-achievement divisions and think-pair-share methods) on students' interest in reading comprehension showed that cooperative learning method influenced students' interest in reading comprehension. Apart from a good teaching method, gender is another variable that plays an important role in the learning process of reading.

Gender is regarded as a social attribute designated to an individual as male or female. It is a social construct that deals with capacities and attributes assigned by the culture of the people.

These assigned capacities and responsibilities are dependent on the sex of the individual (Offorma, 2016). There are conflicting reports on whether gender plays a significant role in language learning or not. For instance, the study carried out by Zudonu (2013) indicated that females do better than males in language. While Okeke's (2013) investigation revealed that gender had no significant influence on students' achievement, Uloh-Bethels' (2018) showed that gender had a statistically significant influence on students' achievement in English vocabulary with males achieving significantly higher than the females. All the above findings are inconclusive in their respective reports as to whether females and males differ in the way they learn and interact cooperatively in the classroom. Also, none of the reports showed the effect of gender on students' interest in reading comprehension. It is, therefore, important to find out any gender differences regarding students' interest in using cooperative learning method in teaching reading comprehension. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the effect of the cooperative learning method on students' interest in English reading comprehension among secondary school students in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. To carry out this investigation, the following research questions and hypotheses were posed:

Research Questions

1. What is the mean interest rating scores of students taught reading comprehension in English language using cooperative learning method and the traditional lecture method?
2. What is the influence of gender in the mean interest rating scores of students in reading comprehension?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of students taught reading comprehension using cooperative learning method and the traditional lecture method.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of male and female students in reading comprehension.

Method

The study, which was conducted in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, adopted a quasi-experimental 2x2x2 factorial research design. The population of the study comprised 3,430 students in all the 59 secondary schools in the zone. The sample for the study was 194 students drawn from four secondary schools in the zone using the purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was Reading Comprehension Interest Inventory (RCII). The Reading Comprehension Interest Inventory was made up of two sections. Section A was used to get demographic information from the respondents while section B contained questionnaire items on the level of students' interest in reading comprehension. RCII was constructed on a 4-point response option that ranged from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD). To ensure the validity of RCII, it was subjected to face validation by experts from

the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Two of the experts in English language Education and one in measurement and evaluation. To determine the reliability of RCII, it was trial-tested on 30 SS II students randomly selected from another zone but the selected students have the same characteristics as those used for the study. After the trial test, data was collated and analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha Statistics. This is because RCII was not dichotomously scored. An internal consistency reliability index of 0.91 was obtained. The researchers trained the regular English language teachers in the experimental group on the use of cooperative learning method in teaching reading comprehension as indicated in the lesson plan they used. For the control group, the teachers were asked to use lecture method. When the researchers made sure that the essential competencies had been acquired by the research assistants, the actual treatment was conducted in both experimental and control groups.

The RCII was administered on the subjects as a pre-test before treatment commenced. Students' scores in the first test served as the pre-test scores for the study. After the pre-test, the treatment commenced and it lasted for four weeks. During the treatment, the experimental group was taught using cooperative learning method while the control group was taught using lecture method. At the expiration of the treatment, RCII was also administered as a posttest. Scores from the pretest and posttest formed the data for this study. Data were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

Results

The results are presented in the tables according to the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What is the mean interest rating scores of students taught reading comprehension in English language using cooperative learning method, and those taught using traditional method?

Table 1: Mean Interest Scores and Standard Deviation (SD) of Students Taught using Cooperative Learning and Lecture Method

Method	N	Pre-interest		Post-interest		Adjusted Mean
		\bar{x}_1	SD ₁	\bar{x}_2	SD ₂	
Cooperative	86	7.48	2.24	21.09	6.41	20.97
Lecture	82	7.48	2.21	20.29	5.56	20.42

Table 1 reveals that the posttest mean score for students taught reading comprehension using the cooperative method was ($\bar{x}_2 = 21.09$, $SD = 6.41$) and adjusted mean of 20.97 while that of students taught with the lecture method was ($\bar{x}_2 = 20.29$, $SD = 5.56$) and adjusted mean of 20.42. This indicates that students taught reading comprehension using the cooperative learning method had higher interest than students taught with the lecture method.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of gender on the mean interest scores of students in reading comprehension?

Table 2: Mean Interest Scores and Standard Deviation of Students According to Gender

Gender	N	Pre-interest		Post-interest		Adjusted Mean
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
Male	81	7.38	2.23	20.68	6.07	19.21
Female	87	7.56	2.22	20.72	5.98	22.09

Table 2 shows the mean score of ($\bar{X}_2 = 20.68$, $SD = 6.07$) and adjusted mean of 19.21 for male students while the female students had a mean score of ($\bar{X}_2 = 20.72$, $SD = 5.98$) and adjusted mean of 22.09. Female students therefore, had higher interest than their male counterparts in reading comprehension.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean interest rating scores of students taught reading comprehension using cooperative learning method and those taught using lecture method.

Table 3: Analysis of Covariance of Students' Reading Comprehension Interest Scores by Method and Gender

SOURCES OF VARIATION	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	SIG
Covariates					
Pre-interest	269.038	1	269.038	7.857	.006
Main Effects (combined)	240.676	3	80.225	2.343	.075
Method	26.844	1	26.844	.784	.377
Gender	.188	1	.188	.005	.941

Data in Table 3 indicates non-statistical significant main effect for method $F(1,160) = .784$, $p = .377$. The null hypothesis, therefore, was not rejected, indicating that there was no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught using the cooperative learning method and those taught using the lecture method. The adjusted mean for cooperative learning method was 20.97, while that for the lecture method was 20.42. The difference was in favour of cooperative learning method. Students taught with cooperative learning method, therefore, had higher interest than those taught with the lecture method in reading comprehension.

For the second hypothesis as indicated in Table 3 also revealed a non-significant main effect of gender $F(1,160) = .005$, $p = .941$. The null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that there was no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in reading comprehension.

Discussions

The findings of this study showed that students taught with the cooperative learning method had a slightly higher interest in reading comprehension than those taught with the lecture method. This is contrary to expectation because it is assumed that the students taught reading comprehension using cooperative learning method should produce a statistically significant higher interest than those taught with the lecture method. However, the result showed that the use of cooperative learning method generated a higher interest in the learning of English reading comprehension. This could be that the activities involved in cooperative learning method made learning more interesting to the students because the students were given responsibility for their own learning, with just the teacher as a facilitator. This is in line with Gillies' (2019) study outcome that working together and engaging critically and constructively with others' ideas through social interaction result in academic gains.

Results in Table 2 showed that there is a gender difference in students' interest in reading comprehension in favour of female students who had a higher mean interest rating score in the post-test than the male students even though the cooperative learning method is not gender-discriminatory. It is believed that the use of cooperative teaching method will not only bridge the gap in the consistent superior interest of female students over the male students in reading comprehension and other language-related subjects but also facilitate and promote the participation of both genders in the reading comprehension process. This justifies Ajaja's (2018) view that cooperative learning method is not limited to a particular gender, but to all who engage in it.

Results, as stated in Table 3, reveal that there is no significant difference between the mean interest scores of students taught reading comprehension using the cooperative learning method and those taught using the lecture method, in favour of the experimental group. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This finding is in agreement with Gillies (2020) whose study confirmed that cooperation is significantly more effective on students' learning and socialization. This means that involving students in the learning activities motivates them to become interested in the learning process of reading.

Also, for hypothesis two, the result in Table 3 showed that gender was not a significant factor in students' interest in reading comprehension. This means that the interest of both male and female students was equally motivated and aroused towards the acquisition of reading skills through the use of cooperative learning method. The reason could be that the fun and exciting activities students were exposed to in the course of using the cooperative learning method of instruction provoked their interest in reading irrespective of gender. This is in line with Weinberger & Shonfeld (2018) and Egbe's (2015) view that gender does not influence the prediction of the use of cooperative learning in the teaching process and that gender had no significant influence on students' interest in English grammar.

Conclusions

The result of the study showed that students taught reading comprehension with cooperative learning method had higher mean interest scores than those students taught with the lecture method. The implication of this finding to the students is that as they get themselves involved in

teaching and learning from one another, they stand a better chance of developing and sustaining a higher interest in reading comprehension. With increased interest in reading comprehension, their achievement in internal examinations and external English language examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) could be enhanced. Also, the study revealed that students had a higher interest in reading comprehension using cooperative learning method when they have engaged actively in the classroom activities which showed the superiority of cooperative learning method over the conventional lecture method currently used in secondary schools in Nigeria.

On the part of the teacher, it implies that interest is dependent on the teaching method adopted by the teacher. This study has established that cooperative learning method enhances students' interest therefore, English language teachers are advised to adopt cooperative learning method for reading comprehension instruction for improved interest in reading comprehension, and by extension, better achievement in the English language.

Evidence from this study showed that gender did not significantly influence students' interest in reading comprehension. Female students slightly had higher interest than their male counterparts in reading comprehension. This shows that female students are not only mentally capable of studying the same subjects like the male students but can as well surpass males in having a higher interest in such subjects. The result of this study will erase any syndrome of the inferior complex in females. The result on gender is a boost of assurance for female students that males and females can be effectively taught in the same class. Also, the findings of the study revealed that there may not be a uniform level of interest among male and female students. It implies also that cooperative learning method had more effect with regards to interest to female students than the male students. Therefore, it can be said that cooperative learning method is not gender-sensitive. As a result, there will be a need to provide different curriculum materials for teaching male and female students in order to close the gap.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. English language teachers should adopt the cooperative learning method as an alternative to the conventional lecture method in teaching reading comprehension in secondary schools since it has been proved to improve and accelerate students' interest in reading comprehension.
2. Since cooperative learning method is found to be more effective in reading instruction than lecture method, students should be exposed to cooperative learning activities such as small group discussion, think-pair-share among others. This will stimulate and sustain their interest in reading comprehension. This will encourage them to make reading more serious and invariably lead to students' higher interest in reading comprehension and reduction in secondary school students' poor reading abilities.

3. English language teachers should be exposed to conferences, workshops and seminars where they will be introduced and guided on the use of cooperative learning method in the teaching and learning of the English language especially in reading comprehension.

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