

Study Question Strategy and Senior Secondary Two Students' Achievement in Prose Fiction in Education Zone C of Benue State

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effects of study question strategy and senior secondary two students' achievement in prose fiction. It also examined the effects of gender on students' achievement in prose fiction. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the research. The study used a non randomised quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting schools, gender and 360 students drawn from six public secondary schools in Otukpo and Oju Local Government Areas in Zone C of Benue State. Prose Achievement Test as instrument was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained from pilot study test scores using Kuder Richardson's formula 21 and it was found to be 0.78%. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions and ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that students taught prose fiction using study question strategy significantly achieved higher mean scores ($F = 31.135$; $p = 0.000$) than those taught prose fiction using the conventional method. Male and female students exposed to study question strategy in prose fiction did not significantly differ in the mean achievement ($F = .082$; $p = .775$). Based on the findings, the study recommended among others, adequate training of prose teachers in the use of study question strategy in teaching prose fiction at secondary school level.*

Keywords: Study Question, Students, Achievement, Prose, Fiction

1. Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there have been public concern and outcry over the poor performance of students in Literature-in-English in public examinations such as West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO). The persistent poor performance of students in literature has continued to be a source of worry to scholars (Abubakar, 2006; Folashade, 2006&Azikiwe, 2007). They attribute the problem to poor teaching methods. Anyone who is familiar with literature teaching in our schools and colleges will agree that literature teachers emphasise the product of reading at the expense of its process. The effect of this emphasis is that our students are drilled to respond cognitively to literature. Affective responses, which should be the most important outcome of literature lessons are not emphasised and developed.

The current methods of teaching prose in our schools and colleges do not enable the students to acquire a set of skills which they can use to interpret and understand literature texts. Students are usually unable to take a stand since they do not understand the point of view being presented. More importantly, our students are usually unable to share the feelings of pleasure or displeasure when they read some literature texts because they fail to understand when the experiences in such texts are directed towards eliciting emotional responses from them. In addition, gender and school location issues are not considered in teaching and learning of literature in our schools and colleges.

In a typical conventional class, students sit in rows and listen to the teacher. They are denied opportunities of self-assertion and articulation, and are made passive observers or subjected to drills and rote memorisation. Often, the teacher

orders the students to commit portions of a text to heart without essentially explaining the importance of such portions (Oyetunde, 2006). This has led students to rely entirely on the teacher for everything which distances them from such rich literary components that could add up to develop their language power, rational and critical thinking.

The implication of this lopsided emphasis is that it does not aim at the overall development of the individual. Thus, students' responsiveness to lessons and eventual achievement are considerably dependent on the methods and strategies adopted and implemented by teachers in the classroom. Considering the need to improve students' performance in literature in secondary schools, it becomes imperative to explore vibrant alternative strategy of teaching literature to enable students improve their performance and achieve better result. It is against this backdrop that this researcher looked into how study question strategy could affect students' achievement in prose fiction. The researcher also examined the effects of gender on students' achievement in prose fiction.

Study questions are questions teachers ask during instruction to set students' minds to acquire knowledge. Faggella-Luby, Schumaker and Deshler (2007) refer to study questions as "questions asked by teachers in instructional setting to stimulate the mental activity of students to a higher level of thinking".

Another strategy used in this research is study questions. In this strategy students are exposed to questions prior to instruction as attention focusing and background knowledge activation strategy. Research conducted by Hay and Robert (2008) to determine the value of providing activities or strategies to assist in attention focusing and activation of

students' background knowledge before reading the text indicate that such activities and strategies increase comprehension by a significant and impressive amount. Therefore, exposing students to study questions prior to reading novels, texts or stories is considered vital in literature instruction, because it helps to place cues and clues at the beginning of instruction before a student progresses to more structured and detailed information in the novel, story or text. The strategy also helps the students to develop a conceptual framework and a global overview of the content of the text, novel or story.

The instructional procedure for exposing learner to study questions prior to instruction, according to Stalian (2007), involves the teacher setting the purpose for reading the text, prose or story by providing the study questions as outlines and guides to the learners. He directs students' attention to the outlines and develops their expectation about what is coming next and what is important to look out for. The teacher then ensures that learners stay actively engaged with the text and helps them to use the pre-reading clues to identify and focus on the main ideas within the text. As a check on the understanding of the text, novel or story, questions are posed by the teacher periodically on the content. At the end, the teacher summarises the selection, touching on the main points.

Exposing students to study questions prior to literature instruction therefore, would assist them achieve the motivational set they need to assume a personal responsibility for their learning and to acquire the necessary skills for self-regulating of their own reading of the novel, stories or texts (Day & Park 2006). In addition, the initial clues the strategy provides would enable the students gain confidence and some ability that could enhance comprehension of the novels, texts or stories read.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of study question strategies on students' achievement in prose fiction. In order to achieve this purpose, the following specific objectives are stated.

- 1) To find out the effect of study questions on students' achievement in prose fiction;
- 2) To identify gender differences in students' achievement in prose fiction when exposed to study question.

3. Research Questions

Based on the stated objectives, the following research questions were raised for the study:

- 1) Would there be any difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of students exposed to study question and those taught with conventional method?
- 2) Would the achievement of students in prose fiction differ among boys and girls when exposed to study questions?

4. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of senior secondary two students taught using study question and those taught using the conventional method.
- 2) There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of male and female students taught using study question.

5. Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on Ausubel's theory of Advance Organiser and Bartlett's Schema theory.

Theory of Advance Organiser

The theory of advance organiser was propounded by Ausubel (1960). The theory states that an advance organiser is a tool used by teachers to introduce a lesson topic and illustrate the relationship between what the students are about to learn and the information they have already learned. Fakults, (2009) asserts that advance organiser is a useful tool for teachers to help students understand, retain and remember new learning material. By using an advance organiser to link the new information to old information, the new information can be remembered more easily.

Ausubel believed that understanding concepts, principles and ideas are achieved through deductive reasoning. Similarly, he believed in the idea of meaningful learning as opposed to rote memorisation. According to this theory, to learn meaningfully, individuals must relate new knowledge to relevant concepts they already know. New knowledge must interact with the learner's knowledge structure.

This theory is relevant to the current study because advance organisers direct students' attention to what is important in the lesson to be learnt. Secondly, they highlight relationships among ideas that will be presented. Thirdly, they remind students of relevant information that they already have.

6. Methodology

The study utilized a non-randomized pretest posttest quasi experimental design. The population of the study consisted of all senior secondary two (SS 2) students of 2013/2014 academic session who were offering Literature-in-English in Education Zone C of Benue State which stood at 3,510 students in the 94 grant-aided secondary schools in the area (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The sample for the study comprised 360 literature students selected from six schools. Prose Achievement Test (PAT) and Lesson Plans prepared by the researcher and validated by two experts in language education were the research instruments used for data collection.

The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained from the pilot study test scores using Kuder-Richardson's formula (KR_{21}) and it was found to be 0.78. Six experienced literature teachers were used as research assistants in the study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

7. Results

The results of this study are presented based on the research questions raised and hypotheses earlier formulated.

Research Question 1

Is there any difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of students exposed to study questions and those taught with conventional method?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of students' scores in study question and conventional method

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
Exp. G 2	121	12.25	3.31	56.03	11.94	43.78
Control G	118	11.24	4.07	46.76	12.77	35.52
Mean Diff.		1.01		9.27		8.26

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of students' scores in Experimental Group (study questions) and conventional method. The table reveals that the mean achievement score of students in experimental group was 12.25 with a standard deviation of 3.31 at pre-test. Students in the control group had mean achievement score of 11.24 and a standard deviation of 4.07. The mean difference between the two groups was 1.01.

Table 1 equally reveals that at post-test, the mean achievement scores of students in experimental group was 56.03 with a standard deviation of 11.94. Students in the control group had mean achievement scores of 46.76 and a standard deviation of 12.77 with an achievement mean gain of 35.52. The mean difference between the two groups was 8.26 in favour of experimental group.

Table 3: ANCOVA Analysis of students' achievement in study question and conventional method

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	18920.317 ^a	2	9460.159	96.674	.000	.253
Intercept	15904.176	1	15904.176	147.571	.000	.312
Pretest	13786.252	1	13786.252	165.245	.000	.224
Method	3031.001	1	3031.001	31.135	.000	.019
Error	22398.972	236	94.911			
Total	674126.000	239				
Corrected Total	41319.289	238				

Table 3 presents ANCOVA analysis of students' achievement in study questions strategy and conventional methods. Pre-test scores were used as covariate to control initial difference in the two groups. Results from the table reveals that $F = 31.135$ and $p = 0.000$ for method. The significant value (p) was less than the set significant value of the study ($p < 0.05$) therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of senior secondary two students taught using

Research Question 2

Would the achievement of students in prose fiction differ among boys and girls when exposed to study questions?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of male and female students' scores in study question group

Gender	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
Male	63	12.69	3.72	54.78	11.32	42.09
Female	58	11.76	2.76	57.39	12.52	45.63
Mean Diff.		0.93		2.61		3.54

Table presents the mean and standard deviation of male and female students' scores in experimental group. The table reveals that the mean achievement score of male students in experimental group was 12.69 with a standard deviation of 3.72 while female had mean score of 11.76 and a standard deviation of 2.76 at pre-test. The table also reveals at post-test that the mean achievement score of male students was 54.78 with a standard deviation of 11.32 and a mean gain of 42.09. While the mean score of female students was 57.39 with a mean gain of 12.52. The mean difference was 3.54 in favour of female students.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of senior secondary two students taught using study question and those taught using the conventional method.

study question and those taught using the conventional method is rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in prose fiction of male and female students taught using study question.

Table 4: ANCOVA analysis of male and female students' scores in study question group

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	3192.419 ^a	2	1596.209	13.545	.000	.187
Intercept	10996.460	1	10996.460	93.315	.000	.442
Pretest	3177.930	1	3177.930	26.968	.000	.186
Gender	9.703	1	9.703	.082	.775	.001
Error	13905.449	118	117.843			
Total	397002.000	121				
Corrected Total	17097.868	120				

Table 4 presents the results of the ANCOVA analysis of male and female students' scores in study question group. The table reveals $F = 0.082$ for gender with $p = .775$. This shows that gender has no significant effect on students' mean achievement scores in prose when exposed to study question since p – value was not greater than 0.05. The hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students exposed to study question in prose fiction is therefore accepted.

8. Discussion of findings

It was found in this study that students taught prose fiction using study question strategy achieved higher than those taught prose fiction using the conventional method. It was also found that there was a significant difference in the mean achievement between students taught prose fiction using study question strategy and those taught using the conventional method in favour of study question strategy.

This result of no significant main effect of students' exposure to study questions prior to instruction is in agreement with the findings of Mkpa (2007), Stott (2008), Ijiga (2010) and Erten and Razi (2009). These researchers in their various studies found that the mean achievement scores of students exposed to study questions were significantly higher than those in the conventional method. The finding of this study is in consonance with the finding of Mkpa (2007) who found that students in the experimental group working with inserted questions performed significantly higher than students in the control group working with the review questions.

The findings of this study are also in conformity with those of Ijiga (2010), who in the study to determine the effect of Tutorial Video Instruction Mode (TVIM) and Verbal ability on students' achievement in reading comprehension found that students exposed to TVIM had higher mean achievement gain than those exposed to the conventional method. This study is equally in line with the findings of Erten and Razi (2009) who found that students exposed to group discussion in prose significantly achieved higher than those exposed to the conventional method.

In addition, this finding is in agreement with the finding of Stott (2007) who found that students in the experimental groups performed significantly higher than those in the control group in the study to determine the effects of questioning and brainstorming on students' achievement in reading comprehension. This led the researcher to draw conclusion that experimental group excelled because the questions the students grappled activated their schema and alerted their expectations, and prediction.

The no significant main effect of gender tallies with Wallentin (2008) who found no major difference between the performance of boys and girls in English language. The findings also revealed that students exposed to study questions strategy in reading comprehension performed significantly higher than those exposed to the conventional method. In conformity with this finding, Uwatt (2002) in a study to determine the effects of gender on comprehension of students discovered that there was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of boys and girls.

The author observed that the poor achievement of females when compared to males was due to social demand since there was no significant difference in achievement by gender when both sexes were exposed to the same condition. This implies that the various strategies or treatments were not differentially effective for male and female students. In other words, the treatment and control were not sensitive to students' gender as both sexes were equally endowed academically.

The findings of this study is in line with the findings of Lasisi and Onyehalu (2006) that found no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in comprehension. In agreement with this finding, Aganyi (2007) found that there was no significant gender difference in the achievement scores of boys and girls in reading comprehension, in his study to determine the effect of gender differences in reading comprehension achievement among students. Other researchers like Nwosu (2005), Ulo and Chinyeaka (2013), Weiss, Kemmler, Deisenhammer, Fleisch-hacker and Delazer (2006), and Adikwu (2008) however, found significant difference in the performance of students based on gender. Also, Nwosu's (2005) study found that girls achieved higher than boys in speech behavior.

The study on effects of pronunciation drill and gender on students' achievement in consonant clusters by Uloh and Chinyeaka (2013) revealed that girls performed better than boys. Weiss, Kemmler, Deisenhammer, Fleisch-hacker and Delazer (2006) found that women performed better than men in rapidly identifying matching items. The findings of this current study which showed no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in prose fiction could be due to the fact that both sexes were equally endowed academically. Another factor could be that when prose is taught well, everybody would learn. This is in line with Coffey (2006) who observed that learners who are motivated by the use of illustrations, activities and pre reading prompts usually become more confident and apply appropriate strategies to facilitate their comprehension. The way ideas in a text are arranged with supporting clues such

as illustrations and enriched pre-reading prompts could greatly enhance comprehension. This may have been the reason why there was no significant difference between male and female students in this current study.

This study is consistent with the finding of Abdu-Raheem's (2012) study which reflected no statistically significant effect of gender on students' achievement and retention in social studies. Also, Osokoya's (2007) research reported no statistically significant effect of treatment (video-tape instruction) and gender on students' achievement in History. Similarly, Ochogwu's (2014) study discovered that there was no significant main effect of gender on reading comprehension achievement of the group exposed to Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA) and the group exposed to Know-Want to Know-Learn (KWL) strategy.

9. Conclusion

This study has established the fact that students exposed to study questions strategy improved performance in prose fiction. It therefore implies that teachers of Literature-in-English should no longer be satisfied with only the conventional method of instruction but should employ the new strategy in teaching prose. Apart from story map, it is evident from this study that the use of study questions leads to improved performance. It thus implies that teachers should encourage exposition of students to study questions prior to instruction. This encouragement could be by way of making the study question available to students and discussing such questions preparatory to literature lessons.

This study has also shown that students' achievement in prose fiction does not depend on gender and school location but the way the students were motivated by the use of illustrations, activities, enriched environment and pre-reading prompts. These activities are very important in prose lessons because, apart from aiding comprehension and retention of facts, they make students participate in a more active way, thus preventing boredom and increasing interest. Teachers of prose must therefore encourage activities and illustrations if they are to succeed at making literature studies a discipline that would stimulate and train the students.

10. Recommendations

- 1) This study has shown that study question strategy is effective and has positive impact on students' achievement in prose fiction. Based on this finding, the researcher recommends that these strategies be used in teaching prose fiction in secondary schools to enhance students' achievements.
- 2) Teachers can draw from the society to activate the prior knowledge of the learner and effect positive changes in their perception and insight. The implication to prose is the need for careful selection and grading of prose texts recommended for study at secondary school level.
- 3) Governments, in collaboration with stakeholders should endeavour to organise and sponsor workshops, seminars and symposia for literature teachers on effective use of study question strategy.

- 4) Textbook writers could be made to incorporate study question strategy in teachers' guide in literature textbooks for teachers and students to improve on the teaching and learning of prose in secondary schools.

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