

Effect Of Task-Based Language Teaching Method On Students' Achievement In Igbo Essay Writing

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Abstract

The study focused on finding out the effect of task-based language teaching method on students' achievement in Igbo essay writing in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The non-randomized control group, pre-test post-test quasi-experimental research design was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample out 4 schools and 303 students out of the 22 co-educational secondary schools and 1686 SSII students in the area. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The results revealed that students taught Igbo essay writing with task-based language teaching method achieved significantly higher than those taught with the lecture method. Based on this, it was recommended among others that Igbo language teachers should adopt task-based language teaching method in their essay teaching in order to promote active participation of the learners and consequent better performance.

Key words: Igbo language, Lecture method, Task-based method, Writing.

Introduction

Igbo language as one of the Nigerian three major languages is a core subject in Nigerian secondary schools. As such, it is seated for in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Igbo language pedagogy in secondary schools has three aspects which include culture, literature and grammar. It is in the aspect of grammar that the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing are taught.

Writing is the representation of language in a textual medium through the use of a set of signs or symbols acceptable to a particular language. It is an active, productive skill that enables the writer to express himself to the reader. Writing according to Uzoegwu (2005) is a complex skill which is perceived as being hard and difficult. In affirmation, Azikiwe (2007) referred to writing as a very difficult aspect of language learning, because the writer may not be available to explain things that are not clear to the reader. It is therefore, necessary that the skill be properly learnt. This is to enable the writer ensure that what he has written is exactly what he has in mind to communicate to the reader.

Again, the importance of writing skill in the life of a student cannot be over emphasized. It is a skill that distinguishes literate people from the illiterates. It is a major means of finding out what students know, especially during examinations. This signifies that writing is an indispensable skill for every student. Despite the place of writing in the literate society, it has been observed that secondary school students find it difficult to write intelligibly in Igbo language. Corroborating this, WAEC Chief Examiner's Report

(2008; 2009; 2010) pointed out that many students performed poorly in Igbo essay writing due to their inability to write up to the required number of words, spelling errors, poor punctuation and failure to write Igbo words with the official orthography. Poor performance of students in Igbo essay writing has been attributed to many factors such as inadequate number of Igbo teachers, insufficient time, dialectal problems and poor method of teaching. Omeje (1990), Nwadike (1993), Umo (2001) and Omeje (2009) noted that Igbo language teachers usually use only the lecture method which according to them is teacher-centered. Awotua-Efebo (2002) described lecture method as a teaching technique in which the teacher presents a spoken discourse on a particular subject to the learners. The teacher is seen as an embodiment of knowledge and he purposefully dishes out this knowledge to students through verbalization. In lecture method, most of the activities are carried out by the teacher, thereby making the students passive listeners. The unproductive nature of the lecture method in Igbo essay writing instruction has led some researchers into investigating on some other methods that could be adopted in Igbo essay writing pedagogy. As such, a method that could be used in the teaching and learning of Igbo essay writing is task-based language teaching method (TBLTM).

Task-based language teaching method is an approach based on the use of tasks as a unit of planning in language pedagogy. Task, according to Willis (1996) is an activity in which the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose in order to solve a problem and achieve an outcome. Task-based language teaching method is therefore an instructional method in which the learners are exposed to different communicative tasks/problems which they use the target language to solve. The task can be oral or written and the students can solve it in groups or individually.

Task-based language teaching method is anchored on the principle that students learn better and faster when they are actively involved in their own learning. This method therefore involves a lot of activities. Wesche and Skehan (2002) opined that these activities should be organized from simple to complex and from known to unknown. Activities in task-based language teaching method are organized in three phases comprising pre-task phase, task phase and post-task phase.

The aim of pre-task phase is to prepare students for the task, to engage their attention. Lee (2000) described the importance of 'framing' the task to be performed and suggested that one way of doing this is to provide an advance organizer of what the students will do in the main task and the nature of the outcome they would arrive at. Dornyei (2001) like Lee emphasized the need to explain the purpose and utility of the task to the learners at this stage. According to him, it will serve as motivation to them. Alternative ways of engaging the learners in pre-task activities include: supporting learners in performing a task similar to the task they will perform during task phase, asking students to observe a model of how to perform the task, engaging students in non-task activities designed to prepare them to perform the task or strategic planning of the main task performance.

The during task phase is where the students actually carry out the task. For example, the teacher can ask them to discuss the topic of the essay they are going to write in groups. Each group is expected to write down the points they agreed upon, which will be developed and used in writing the essay. The duty of the teacher at this phase is to go round, noting the areas she discovers that each of the groups is having problem. At the end, each group will read out what they have written. The teacher will then give them guidance where necessary before they proceed to the next stage.

At the post-task phase, the learners are expected to show what they have

achieved from the task. As regards to essay writing, the teacher may ask them to use the already developed points to write essay on the discussed topic. This can also be in groups or individually. At the end, the teacher would mark the works and give them necessary corrections.

From the above explanations, it is obvious that task-based language teaching method is quite different from the lecture method. Lecture method has rigid procedures while task—based has loosed procedures. As such, a teacher using task-based is free to bring in different kinds of classroom activities that would make the learners active participants in the teaching and learning process. Another glaring distinction between lecture and task-based methods is that in lecture method, language is an object of study whereas in task-based, language serves as object of study and the tool for studying language. Ellis (2001) averred that both the teacher and the learners use language as a tool to solve a communicative problem in task-based language teaching. It is against this backdrop that the researcher believes that task-based would help in ameliorating the persistent problem senior secondary school students are having in Igbo language essay writing. This study therefore intends to find out the effect of task-based language teaching method on senior secondary school students' achievement in Igbo essay writing. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study.

- What is the effect of task-based language teaching method on senior secondary school students' achievement in Igbo essay writing?
- H_0 : There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught Igbo essay writing using task-based language teaching method and those taught using lecture method.

Method

The non-randomized control group, pre-test post-test quasi-experimental research design was used for the study. The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The subjects were all the 1686 SSII students in the 22 co-educational secondary schools in the area. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample out 4 schools and 303 students for the study. In each of the schools, one intact class was used. Two schools served as experimental group while the other two served as the control group. A narrative essay test was used as an instrument. The students were asked to tell a story that would depict this Igbo adage “Onye ndidi na-eri azu ukpoo” (meaning) ‘A patient dog eats the fattest bone’. The researcher decided to use narrative essay type because it is the simplest form of essay, which involves story telling. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) was used to assess the reliability of the instrument. It yielded a reliability index of 0.84. The test was administered to the two groups as pre-test before the commencement of the experiment which lasted for four weeks. At the end, it was re-administered as post-test. Data obtained from the research question were analyzed using means while the hypothesis was tested using the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the study are presented in the tables below.

Research Question: what is the effect of task-based language teaching method on secondary school students' achievement in Igbo essay writing?

Table 1: Mean scores of students' achievement in Igbo essay writing using the task-

based language teaching method and lecture method respectively.

Group	Pretest			Posttest			
	Number	Mean	SD	Number	Mean	SD	Mean gain
TREATMENT	136	21.58	11.10	136	32.54	14.47	10.96
CONTROL	167	22.61	10.79	167	23.52	11.56	0.91

As shown in table 1 above, the mean scores of the treatment group for the pre-test is 21.58 while the post-test mean is 32.54. The group's gain mean is 10.96. Conversely, the mean scores of the control group for the pre-test is 22.61 whereas the post-test mean is 23.52. The group's gain mean is 0.91. This implies that the experimental group obtained a higher mean score than the control group. Their gain mean is 10.05 greater than that of their control counterpart.

Table 2: ANCOVA table of students' post achievement scores in Igbo essay writing.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	44129.577	8	5516.197	130.484	.000
Intercept	1557.650	1	1557.650	36.846	.000
Pretest	34793.720	1	34793.720	823.037	.000
Method	4927.824	1	4927.824	116.567	.000
Error	12428.786	294	42.275		
Total	286831.000	303			
Corrected Total	56558.368	302			

a. R Squared = .780 (Adjusted R Square=.774)

H_0 : There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught Igbo essay writing using task-based language teaching method and those taught using lecture method.

Table 2 shows that F-Calculated which is 116.57 is significant at .000 level. This value is lower than 0.05 at which the hypothesis was tested. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion

The analysis of the scores in table 1 indicates that task-based language teaching method had a positive effect in Igbo essay writing teaching and learning. Students taught with task-based had higher mean achievement scores than those taught with the lecture method. On the test of significance of students taught Igbo essay writing using the two methods, table 2 shows that task-based is superior to the lecture method in fostering students' achievement in Igbo essay writing. Since the hypothesis is tested at 0.05 level of significance, and the value of F-Calculated which is 116.57 is significance at 0.00, the null hypothesis could not hold. Instead the alternative hypothesis is upheld. This indicates that there is a significance difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught Igbo essay writing using task-based language teaching method and those taught using lecture method, in favour of the experimental group. This finding is in line with Osakwe (2000), Majid (2010) and Sarani and Sahebi (2012) who discovered that task-based method was more effective in facilitating students' achievement in various aspects

of English language. This is due to the fact that task-based teaching method gives learners opportunity to be actively involved in the learning process through different tasks they carry out in the classroom. Okwor (2009) made it clear that students achieve more whenever they are learning through activities. In other words, students were able to achieve more with task-based because it is a pedagogical approach that encourages active participation of learner, and is therefore student centered.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations emerged:

- That Igbo language teachers in secondary schools should use task-based method in teaching Igbo essay writing.
- That task-based language teaching method should be made known to Igbo language teachers through workshops and seminars.
- That the curriculum planners should also incorporate the method for Igbo essay teaching and learning during curriculum review.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the method used in teaching affects students' performance in Igbo essay writing. As such, the use of task-based language teaching method had facilitative effects on students' achievement in essay writing. Students taught Igbo essay writing using the task-based method performed significantly better than their counterpart that were taught with the lecture method.

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