

EFFECTS OF TARGET TASK INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT AND RETENTION IN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effect of target task instructional approach (TTIA) on students' achievement and learning retention in English language. The study adopted a pre-test, post-test non-equivalent control group, quasi-experimental research design which involved group of students in their intact class assigned to experimental and control groups. The population of the study was all the Senior Secondary school (SSS) two English language students in Gwagwalada Area Council of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Two research questions and two null hypotheses, tested at .05 level of significance, guided the study. The instrument used for data collection was English language achievement test (TDAT). The reliability coefficient for the TDAT was found to be 0.75 using Kuder-Richardson formula (K-R 20). Mean was used to answer the research questions; while ANCOVA was employed to test the hypotheses. The study found out that TTIA is more effective in enhancing students' achievement in English language. The students taught English language with TTIA retained more learning than those taught using conventional method. The difference between the mean scores of students taught with target task instructional approach and conventional teaching method was significant. The study recommended among others that in view of the established efficacy of TTIA in promoting achievement and retention of learning in English language, it should be included in the curriculum of pre-service teachers of English language teachers so as to popularize its use and hence bring about more effective learning of English language.*

Keywords: *Achievement, Conventional Method, Instructional Approach, Learning, Retention, Target, Task*

1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of the huge investment by successive Nigerian governments on secondary education programme aimed at improving the image and performance of secondary school students in English language, the performance of the students in English language has not been encouraging, specifically in the Federal Capital Territory. The average statistic of students performance in English language between 2012 and 2016 in West African Examination Council are below expectations while the National Council Examination results show that average failure rate in English language in the same years were 35%, 38%, 46% 39% and 37% respectively (WAEC, 2012-2016; NECO, 2012-2016). The Federal Ministry of Education (FGN, 2000) has observed that some of the factors responsible for high failure rate of students in the examinations, particularly in the English language include lack of motivation, poor attitude toward technology education, poor quality of teaching staff and poor teaching in the secondary schools. Moreover, it has been discovered that the persistently poor academic achievement and low interest and retention of students in technical subjects

such as English language is as a result of the inappropriate teaching methods (that do not incorporate proper techniques) adopted by teachers (Aina, 2000).

It has also been observed that the lecture and demonstration methods which are teacher-centered are the main teaching methods employed by secondary school teachers for implementing the curriculum (Oranu, 2003). Obviously, the adoption of only teacher-centered methods of teaching by the teacher results into ineffective use of varieties of instructional method and instructional facilities and inability of teachers to effectively implement the curriculum to naturally increase students' interest, involvement and commitment in learning. The shortcoming in this teacher-centered method of teaching could be responsible for poor performance of English language students in both internal and external examinations. In addition, the consequence of the use of these methods in teaching arts subjects such as English language in the schools is that students are unable to retain their learning and apply it in new situations (Rojewski, 2002; Doolittle and Camp, 2000; Roegge, Wentling and Bragg, 1996). Therefore, there is need for a change of methods and techniques in the teaching of English language, so as to encourage students' better performance in examination and further studies. To ameliorate the problem of students poor achievement, low interest and low retention in English language, there is need for a shift from the traditional methods to more efficacious teaching strategies. One of the teaching strategies which has been speculated to be effective is the Target Task Instructional Approach (TTIA).

Despite the success recorded in the use of TTIA in sciences (Eze, 2002), the use of TTIA has not been tried in arts subject like English language where students are faced with a lot of tasks. The TTIA is an adaptation of the guided discovery method of teaching. As a teaching strategy, the TTIA involves the presentation of a major problem (the target Task), the solution of which requires the application of some rules and principles which the student may not be familiar with. Expectably, the problem may not be easy for the student to solve immediately. The teacher then presents some solved and graded problems similar to the target task and guides the students to solve them by providing some hints or clues. As the students' progress in the solution of such related problems, the provision of hints is minimized. The knowledge and experience gained from the solution of the graded questions transfer positively to the target task. Eventually, the students are able to solve the target task.

English language is regarded as the universal language in Nigeria. English is a West Germanic language that was first spoken in early medieval England and eventually became a global lingua franca (Wardhaugh, 2010). Named after the Angles, one of the Germanic tribes that migrated to the area of Great Britain that would later take their name, England, both names ultimately derived from the Anglia peninsula in the Baltic Sea. It is closely related to the Frisian languages, but its vocabulary has been significantly affected by other Germanic languages, particularly Norse (a North Germanic language), and to a greater extent Latin and French. (*Finkenstaedt,; Dieter, 1973*). *English language comprise of four major skills namely: reading, listening, speaking and writing*. The knowledge of these skills are vital for effective education and communication. In the present information age, they becomes critical skills for students' success both in and out of school

The TTIA has been found effective in mathematics instructions and Chemistry (Haborpeters, 1989; Eze, 2002) but there is paucity of research evidence on the use of same teaching strategy in English language which differs directly from mathematics and chemistry in terms of content. Also, given the fact that teaching methods have been found to have differential effects on students of varying academic ability and retention level (Alonge and Agusiobo, 1984; Ezech, 1992), the study also sought to find out the effect of the TTIA on achievements of English language students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The present methods of teaching English language in the senior secondary school are based on the behavioural learning theories. These methods include demonstration, discussion, expository, narrative and lecture methods (Oranu, 2003). Oranu maintained that these methods which are based on behavioural learning theories are teacher-centred and do not give students enough opportunities to participate in the classroom instructions. The shortcoming in these methods of teaching which is due to absence of students' active involvement in classroom activities during instruction could be responsible for poor performance of students in arts subjects which include English language in public examinations. According to Federal ministry of education (2005; 2003; 2000) and Aina (2000), a close examination of the factors responsible for the high failure rate, among others, includes poor quality of teaching in the schools and colleges. Doolittle and Camp (1999) argued that traditional learning-teaching approaches based on behavioural learning theory do not adequately equip students with higher-order thinking skills, collaborative and problem solving skills, but TTIA does. Besides, students taught with methods based on behavioural learning theories are unable to retain their learning and apply it in new situations (Rojewski, 2002; Doolittle and Camp, 2000 Roegge, Wentling and Bragg, 1996; Ukoha and Eneogwe, 1996). This raises the questions as to whether beside the teacher-centered method there is no other instructional approach which can affect this ugly trend in the subject. Hence, what are the effects of target task instructional approach on the achievement and retention of English language students?

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of target task instructional approach on Senior Secondary School Students achievement in English language. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The effect of TTIA on students' achievement in English language.
2. The level of retention of learning of students taught English language with the TTIA and those taught using the conventional teaching methods

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of TTIA on students' mean achievement in English language?
2. What are the mean scores of students taught English language with TTIA and those taught using the conventional teaching methods in the test for retention of learning?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught English language using TTIA and those taught using conventional method.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students taught English language with the TTIA and those taught using the conventional teaching methods in the test for retention of learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was a quasi-experiment involving the use of non-equivalent control group design. The study was carried out in Gwagwalada Area Council of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The population comprised all the SS2 English language students in all the senior secondary schools in the Council. The sample consisted of 85 SS2 English language students

randomly sampled from four schools in the area of study. Two schools were randomly assigned to the experimental group while the remaining two schools constituted the control group. Students in the experimental group were taught some English language topics using the TTIA while the control group was taught the same topics using the Lecture method. The teaching was done by the regular English language teachers of the sample schools using lesson plans prepared by the researcher. The study lasted for five weeks. One week was spent in training the teachers on the use of the TTIA while four weeks were used for the actual experiment. An instrument known as English language Achievement Test (TDAT) was developed by the researcher, validated by experts and used for data collection. The TDAT is a 25 item multiple choice developed from the three units of English language. Each correct response scores 1 mark, giving a total of 25 marks for all the items. A reliability index of 0.75 was obtained for the TDAT using Kuder-Richardson formula (K-R 20). The TDAT was administered to the subjects before and after the experiment as pre-test and post-test respectively. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the hypotheses.

3. RESULTS

The results are presented in tables below in line with research questions formulated and hypotheses tested.

Research Question One

What is the effect of the target task instructional approach on students' achievement in SSS English language?

Table 1: Mean of Pretest and Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in the Academic Achievement Test

Group	N	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Gain
		\bar{X}	\bar{X}	
Experimental (TTIA)	43	4.23	19.78	15.55
Control (L/M)	42	4.45	12.56	8.11

The data presented in Table 1 show that the experimental group had a mean score of 4.23 in the pretest and a mean score of 19.78 in the posttest making the pretest, posttest mean gain in experimental group to be 15.55. The control group had a mean score of 4.45 in the pretest and a posttest mean of 12.56 with a pretest, posttest mean gain of 8.11. With this result, the students in the experimental group performed better in the achievement test than the students in the control group. Hence, Target task instructional approach is effective than the Lecture method on students achievement in English language

Research Question 2

What are the mean scores of students taught English language with TTIA and those taught using the conventional teaching methods in the test for retention of learning?

Table 2: Mean of Achievement Scores of Experimental and Control Groups in Cognitive Achievement Post-Test and Test for Retention Learning

Group	N	Post-test	Test for Retention
		\bar{X}	\bar{X}
Experimental	43	19.78	18.65
Control	42	12.56	9.08

Table 2 shows that students in the experimental group had a post-test mean score of 19.78 and a mean score of 18.65 in the test for retention of learning, while the students in the control group had a post-test mean score of 12.56 and a mean score of 9.08 in the test for retention of learning. The results therefore indicates that students taught English language with the TTIA retained their learning better than those taught with the conventional teaching method.

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean cognitive achievement scores of students taught English language with the TTIA and those taught using conventional teaching method.

Table 3: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for Test of Significance between the Mean Scores of Experimental and Control groups in the Achievement Test

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Covariates	7.086	1	7.086	1.544	.391
Pre-test	7.086	1	7.086	1.544	.212
Main Effects	21366.499	1	25567.398	2215.456	.000
Group	25567.398	1	25567.398	2315.601	.000*
Explained	20051.872	2	10003.402	1167.211	.000
Residual	2561.708	84	5.356		
TOTAL	23268.731	85	56.831		

*Significant at sig of F<.05

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the F-value for group is 2215.456 with significance of F at .000, which is less than .05. The null-hypothesis is therefore rejected at .05 level of significance. With this result, there is significant difference between the mean scores of students taught English language with TTIA and those taught using conventional teaching method in achievement test

HO₂: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students taught English language with the TTIA and those taught using the conventional teaching methods in the test for retention of learning.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for Test of Significance between the Mean Scores of Experimental and Control groups in the Test for Retention of learning

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Covariates	14.248	1	14.248	2.654	.097
Pre-test	14.248	1	14.248	2.654	.097
Main Effects	45890.856	1	45890.856	4832.067	.000
Group	45890.856	1	45890.856	4832.067	.000*

Explained	4670.362	2	21674.731	2538.046	.000
Residual	2067.234	83	5.478		
TOTAL	46187.732	85	99.345		

*Significant at sig of $F < .05$

Table 4 shows that the F-value for group is 4832.067 with significant of F at .000, which is less than .05. The null-hypothesis is therefore rejected at .05 level of significance. With this result, there is significant difference between the mean scores of students taught English language with TTIA and those taught using conventional teaching method in test for retention

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data presented in Table 1 provided answer to research question one. The finding revealed that students taught with target task instructional approach had a higher mean score than those students taught using the conventional teaching method in the achievement test. In the same vein, the analysis of covariance presented in Table 3 confirmed that the difference between the mean scores of students taught with target task instructional approach and conventional teaching method was significant. The significant difference is attributed to the treatment given to the experimental group. This finding indicated that the target task instructional approach has a positive effect on students' achievement in English language. This implies that the target task instructional approach is more effective than the conventional teaching method in enhancing students' achievement in English language. The findings that target task instructional approach has positive effect on students achievement is similar to the finding of Harbor-Peters (1989) in which the TTIA was found to be more effective than the expository method in enhancing students' achievement in mathematics (geometry). The relative superiority of the TTIA over the conventional method in enhancing students' achievement could be attributed to the fact that, as a teaching strategy, the TTIA ensures active participation of students in the teaching-learning process more than the conventional method. The conventional method often subjects the learner to the position of a passive recipient of facts as handed down to him/her by the teacher.

The data presented in Table 2 provided answer to research question two. Finding revealed that students taught with target task instructional approach had a higher mean score than those taught with the conventional teaching method in the test for retention of learning. The analysis of covariance of the retention test presented in Table 4 confirmed that the difference in the mean score of the students taught with the target task instructional approach and those taught with conventional teaching method is significant. This showed that the target task instructional approach have positive effect on the students retention of learning in English language. These findings stemmed from the fact that target task instructional approach engage students in different activities during learning which allowed them to be involved in the learning process. The provision of active learning environment where students can be engaged and participate actively in class discussions increase the students' ability to explore issues and articulate their own ideas. These consequently improve students' cognitive achievement and also retention. This affirms Tochonites (2000) and Bonwel and Elson's (2003) views that active learning approach facilitate active knowledge construction, develops higher order thinking skills, improves memory and enhance transfer of learning to other situation. Von Glasersfield (2001) was of the opinion that by teaching students to think, they will gradually begin to realize that conscious reflection secretes understanding. He maintained that when students learn to think, they will be able to tackle all sort of new problems creatively and will have acquired some confidence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the effect of the target task instructional approach on the achievement and retention of English language students in senior secondary school. The target task instructional approach used in this study greatly affected the students learning of English language. This was reflected in the students' achievement and retention of learning. In other words, students learnt English language and retained it when they are assigned a given task which allowed them to participate actively in the classroom teaching and learning process. It is hoped therefore, that if the target task instructional approach is taken into consideration in the teaching of English language in senior secondary school, the students will be able to retain more learning and pass their examinations with better grades and this might also encourage more students to offer English language related courses in higher institutions.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. In view of the established efficacy of the TTIA in promoting achievement and retention of learning in English language, it is recommended that it should be included in the curriculum of pre-service teachers of English language so as to popularize its use and hence bring about more effective learning of English language.
2. Government should provide equipment and materials needed to teach the state-of-the-art of English language in the secondary school.
3. Ministry of education and administrators of secondary schools at both Federal and State levels should always organize seminar, conferences and workshops to sensitize English language teachers on the use of target task instructional approach

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