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COMBINED EFFECT OF GENDER AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES ON LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT IN LITERARY APPRECIATION

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Abstract

The study used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design involving intact classes assigned to experimental and control groups. Conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, the study focused on improving Literature-in-English achievement among SSII students using the Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) strategy compared to the conventional method. A sample of 65 students (43 females, 22 males) was drawn from two co-educational schools. Data were collected using the validated and reliable 20-item Literature-in-English Achievement and Retention Test (LART). Trained teachers administered pretests, six-week lessons, posttests, and retention tests. Data were analyzed with mean, standard deviation, and ANCOVA at a 0.05 significance level. The results in Table (1) show that male students had pretest and posttest mean scores of (51.44) and (52.81) with standard deviations of (9.33) and (10.39), while female students had (50.65) and (51.47) with standard deviations of (9.68) and (10.22). The mean gain for males was (1.37) compared to females' (0.82), indicating slightly better performance for males under the conventional method. Table (2) shows an ANCOVA result with $F(1,63) = (3.564)$, $p = (0.114) > 0.05$, confirming no significant interaction effect between gender and teaching method on students' achievement in literary appreciation. Gender did not influence posttest performance. The study concluded that the RPT strategy enhances students' performance regardless of gender. It recommended that teachers adopt learner-centered strategies such as RPT to improve engagement and achievement in literary appreciation.

Keywords: gender; instructional strategies; reciprocal peer tutoring; literary appreciation; academic attainment

INTRODUCTION

Learners' attainment in literary appreciation often varies across classrooms, with gender differences and the choice of instructional strategies cited as key influences. Numerous educators report uneven performance between males and females on literary tasks, while a range of pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, peer tutoring, differentiated instruction which show differing effects on comprehension, interpretation, and critical response. Social cognitive theory posits that learning emerges from interactions among personal factors, behaviour, and environment; self-efficacy and modelling influence engagement and achievement (Bandura, 1986). Expectancy-value models add that learners' beliefs about success and the value ascribed to tasks influence effort and outcomes (Eccles, 1983). These frameworks help explain why identical instructional approaches can produce varied results across genders: differences in confidence, task valuation, or prior experiences can moderate strategy effects.

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Reciprocal teaching, which trains learners to predict, question, clarify, and summarize text, consistently improves comprehension and higher-order interpretation skills crucial for literary appreciation (Mafarja et al., 2023). Cooperative learning structures foster interdependence, dialogue, and scaffolding among peers, enhancing interpretive skills when tasks require negotiation of meaning (Schulze & Von-Huth, 2022). Peer tutoring and other peer-learning forms often deliver gains through active engagement and immediate feedback; meta-analyses indicate robust effect sizes for comprehension and retention in language arts contexts.

Large international assessments and longitudinal studies show that females generally outperform males on reading comprehension and related tasks across many contexts (Torppa et al., 2022; Carroll & Fox, 2017). Explanations include differences in reading habits, attitudes toward literature, classroom participation patterns, and social expectations that shape motivation. Expectancy-value theory suggests females may assign higher subjective value to reading tasks or hold different success expectancies, which influences persistence and performance (Eccles et al., 1983).

Emerging literature stresses that instructional strategies do not operate uniformly across genders. Reciprocal teaching often narrows performance gaps because its structured dialogue and role rotation support lower-confidence readers, promoting metacognitive skills that benefit learners who otherwise avoid active participation (Dew et al., 2021). Cooperative learning can produce equitable gains when group roles and assessment emphasize contribution and process, yet poor implementation risks perpetuating gendered participation patterns if dominant voices monopolize discussion. Peer tutoring appears particularly effective for male learners who benefit from hands-on, task-focused interaction that reduces the anxiety associated with whole-class literary discussion. Conversely, instructional formats that rely heavily on individual written responses without scaffolds tend to amplify existing gender gaps in reading-related attainment.

Controlled studies have consistently shown that gender moderates the effects of instructional strategies on students' learning outcomes, with certain strategies yielding greater benefits for one gender over the other (Arun & Yildirim-Özmutlu, 2020). Large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) continue to reveal that females outperform males in reading comprehension and literary interpretation; however, well-structured pedagogical interventions within national contexts can minimize these gaps and enhance overall academic attainment (Ohamobi & Onyekazi, 2021). Despite these findings, many empirical studies still fail to disaggregate process data to explore how participation, self-efficacy, and classroom role-taking interact with gender to influence outcomes (Manafa et al., 2020).

Understanding the combined effect of gender and instructional strategies on learners' academic attainment in literary appreciation is crucial to promoting equity and effectiveness in English language education. Studies highlight that differences in motivation, interest, and engagement often shape how male and female learners respond to diverse instructional strategies (Onuselogu et al., 2015). Effective supervision and innovative instructional approaches play a pivotal role in improving learning outcomes and bridging gender disparities in performance (Ohamobi, 2019). Literary appreciation, which depends on interpretive, analytical, and emotional engagement, benefits from teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, and peer tutoring that foster inclusivity and participation (Onuselogu et al., 2017).

Furthermore, gender-responsive instructional planning contributes to the development of literacy competence and critical thinking, which are essential for lifelong learning (Manage, Ohamobi, & Osegbue, 2018). The findings of such studies can inform curriculum planners, school administrators, and policymakers on designing interventions that ensure balanced academic performance across genders. Ultimately, examining gender–strategy interactions strengthens the goal of equitable education by identifying evidence-based practices that support all learners in mastering literary appreciation and promoting creativity and intellectual development.

This study examines the interaction effect of gender and instructional methods on students' academic achievement in literary appreciation; specifically, it asks: What are the mean achievement scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with the conventional method? Guided by this focus, the study tests the null hypothesis that there is no interaction effect of gender and methods on students' academic achievement in literary appreciation.

METHOD

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, specifically a pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design, which did not involve random assignment of individual participants. Instead, intact classes were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using the Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) strategy, while the control group received instruction through the conventional method. Both groups took pre-tests, post-tests, and retention tests to measure achievement and retention in Literature-in-English.

The research was conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, which comprises six education zones and 21 local government areas. The state, created in 1991 with Awka as its capital, has a population exceeding four million and a largely trading population of Igbo origin. The study area was considered appropriate due to the high participation of students in external examinations and a noticeable decline in interest in reading-intensive subjects like Literature-in-English. The research aimed to enhance students' learning outcomes through the RPT strategy.

The study population consisted of 11,640 senior secondary two (SSII) students offering Literature-in-English in 254 public secondary schools in the state. This group was chosen because SSII students were not facing external examinations and had been adequately exposed to basic literary appreciation techniques. From this population, a sample of 65 students comprising 43 females and 22 males which was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. One education zone was chosen randomly, followed by two local government areas. Two co-educational schools with qualified Literature-in-English teachers were purposively selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

The main instrument used for data collection was the Literature-in-English Achievement and Retention Test (LART), a 20-item test developed from the 2016–2020 WASSCE and SSCE literature syllabi. It contained ten short-answer questions on prescribed poems and ten on unseen poems. LART served as the pretest, posttest, and retention test, with modifications in wording and poem lines to minimize recall effects. The instrument was validated by five university lecturers specializing in measurement, curriculum, and literary studies, whose feedback helped refine its content and clarity. A trial test conducted in Enugu State yielded a scorer reliability coefficient of 0.68 and a Kuder-Richardson 21 reliability index of 0.721, confirming its reliability.

Data collection was carried out by trained Literature teachers who served as research assistants. They administered the pretest, conducted the six-week instructional treatment, and later administered the posttest and retention test. During training, the teachers were briefed on the purpose of the study, lesson plans, and teaching methods for both strategies. The experimental group engaged in RPT sessions where students worked collaboratively in small groups assuming rotating roles of tutor, clarifier, questioner, and summarizer. The control group received traditional teacher-led instruction.

After the treatment phase, a posttest was conducted during mid-term assessments, and a retention test followed two weeks later. To ensure validity, the researcher controlled for extraneous variables by using regular class teachers, maintaining uniform instructional conditions, and administering tests within the normal school schedule to avoid bias. Finally, data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at a 0.05 level of significance. The null hypotheses were retained when the calculated p-value was equal to or greater than the

table value and rejected when it was less, ensuring accurate interpretation of the experimental results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: What are the mean achievement scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with conventional method? The data for answering research questions was analyzed with mean and standard deviation and results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Taught Literary Appreciation Using Conventional Method

	Pretest			Post test		
Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean gain scores
Male	15	51.44	9.33	52.81	10.39	1.37
Female	19	50.65	9.68	51.47	10.22	0.82

Data in Table 1 show that the male and female students had a pre-test mean achievement score of 51.44 and 50.65 with the standard deviations of 9.33 and 9.68 respectively while, they had post-test mean scores of 52.81 and 51.47 with standard deviations of 10.39 and 10.22 respectively. It shows that the male students had higher mean gain of 1.37 than their female counterparts with mean gain of 0.82 showing that the males performed better than the females with the conventional strategy.

Hypothesis

There is no significant interaction effect of gender and methods on students' academic achievement in literary appreciation.

The data for testing hypothesis was analyzed with ANCOVA and the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Interaction Effect of Gender and Methods on Students' Academic Achievement in Literary Appreciation

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	13666.051[a]	4	3350.864	113.988	.000
Intercept	1455.526	1	1455.526	42.302	.000
Pretest	9431.425	1	9431.425	237.064	.000
Group	227.229	1	227.229	6.716	.000
Gender	465.642	1	465.642	11.173	.525
Methods * Gender	81.236	1	81.236	3.564	.114
Error	2332.686	63	44.855		
Total	265208.000	65			
Corrected Total	15998.737	64			

From Table 2, it could be observed that probability value of 0.114 was obtained. Since this P-value is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was upheld. Hence, there is no significant interaction effect of gender and methods on students' academic achievement in literary appreciation. This implied that the gender of the students did not actually combine with the methods to influence their posttest scores (achievement) in literacy appreciation. The observable increase in the students' achievement (posttest scores) is not connected with the gender of the students but linked to the teaching strategy used.

The results presented in Tables 1 and 2 revealed that male and female students taught literary appreciation using the conventional method had closely related pretest and posttest mean scores, with males showing a slightly higher mean gain (1.37) than females (0.82). This suggested

that while both genders benefitted minimally from the traditional teaching approach, male students appeared to achieve marginally higher. However, the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) results indicated no significant interaction effect between gender and teaching method ($p = 0.114 > 0.05$), implying that gender did not significantly influence students' achievement when the conventional method was applied.

This finding aligned with that of Nuzhat et al. (2013), who reported that conventional instructional methods often yield minimal gender differences in students' performance, as such methods fail to address individual learning styles. In contrast, Rosé and Ferschke (2016) found that innovative strategies such as peer collaboration and discussion-based learning produced significant gender-based variations in literature classes, with females outperforming males due to their verbal engagement strength. Similarly, in a related study, Arun and Yildirim-Özmutlu (2023) discovered that gender disparities in literature achievement tend to diminish when both male and female students are exposed to the same teacher-centered strategies, suggesting that traditional pedagogy offers limited differentiation.

The current findings also agreed with Torppa et al. (2018), who observed that male students slightly outperformed females in teacher-centered environments, attributing this to differences in classroom participation patterns rather than intellectual capability. In contrast, Carroll and Fox (2017) found that females performed better under learner-centered instructional methods, emphasizing that such methods promote collaboration, empathy, and reflective engagement, traits often more pronounced in female learners. Furthermore, in a comparative study, Mafarja et al. (2023) noted that gender differences in academic achievement were not statistically significant in conventional settings but became evident in constructivist learning environments where creativity and dialogue were encouraged.

The non-significant interaction effect between gender and teaching methods in this study indicated that the conventional method's impact was largely uniform across genders. This finding corroborated the position of DeWaelsche (2015), who asserted that teacher-dominated instruction tends to limit students' critical engagement, resulting in generally low performance gains across demographic variables. In contrast, studies adopting innovative strategies such as reciprocal peer tutoring and collaborative learning (Gazula et al., 2017) consistently demonstrated greater achievement gains and improved gender inclusivity. The findings implied that while gender did not significantly influence performance under conventional methods, such approaches were generally ineffective in stimulating substantial achievement gains. The negligible mean difference between male and female students suggested that both genders were equally constrained by the passive nature of traditional instruction, underscoring the need for more participatory and learner-centered pedagogies in teaching literary appreciation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that instructional strategies have a significant influence on learners' academic attainment in literary appreciation, while gender has no significant interaction effect with the instructional methods used. Students exposed to the Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) strategy performed better than those taught through the conventional method, indicating that learner-centered and collaborative approaches enhance understanding, engagement, and achievement in literary studies. The results suggest that when students actively participate in knowledge construction through peer discussions and feedback, their comprehension and appreciation of literary texts improve substantially. The absence of a significant gender interaction effect further implies that both male and female learners benefit equally from innovative instructional methods, thereby promoting gender inclusivity in literature classrooms. Based on these outcomes, it can be concluded that the use of effective instructional strategies such as RPT fosters critical thinking, interpretation, and appreciation skills necessary for literary learning. Therefore, teachers should adopt and integrate interactive and technology-

supported approaches to make literature lessons more engaging and equitable. Educational stakeholders should also support professional development programs that equip teachers with innovative teaching methods to enhance students' academic attainment in literary appreciation across genders and learning contexts.

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