

Effect of Constructivist Teaching Method on Students' Achievement in French Listening Comprehension in Owerri North LGA of Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of constructivist teaching method on students' achievement in French listening comprehension in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. It used a pre-test, post-test non-equivalent control group design. The study was guided by one (1) research question and hypothesis. The population of the study comprised three hundred and fifty (350) French students in Owerri North while forty five (45) students participated in the study. French achievement test was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research question while the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis. The findings of this study show that there is significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist method and those taught with the conventional method. Based on these findings, some recommendations were made, which include that teachers should adopt constructivists teaching method in teaching French listening comprehension since it has been found to improve students' achievement.

Keywords: Achievement, constructivist, French and listening comprehension

Introduction

Language is a medium of communication which helps the members of a community in the society to communicate and interact with one another. There are different languages used in communication by people in Nigeria and all over the world. Some of these include among others English, German and French. French language is a subject taught both at the junior and senior secondary schools in Nigeria. It is a compulsory subject at the junior secondary school level and elective subject at the senior secondary school level. French language is divided into oral comprehension (which includes listening comprehension), oral expression, written comprehension and written expression, its teaching and learning is guided by the curriculum. The main philosophy of the French curriculum as stated by the Federal Ministry of Education (2007) is to provide the Nigerian youths with the necessary competence to enable them use the French language, as a veritable tool of self-expression in relevant circumstances, for self-enlightenment and as a basis for enhancing self-reliance and value re-adjustment. The main focus of the curriculum is on skills that will promote competence. The skills are built around listening, speaking, reading and writing about issues that inspire social interest and critical judgment (National Examinations' Council (NECO), 2010).

An aspect of French language learning that has been neglected is listening comprehension. Listening comprehension is the ability to recall and understand what is heard. O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper (2008) view listening comprehension as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge. Listening comprehension is important in the learning of French, yet students' achievement in it has not been encouraging over the years. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) chief examiners' reports (2006-2011) revealed that students performed poorly in French III (oral expression, which involves listening comprehension), despite the fact that the questions were straight forward. This is not surprising because listening comprehension has not been well taught in French language. Some of the schools that attempted to teach their students adopted the conventional method like audio lingual method which may not be appropriate in teaching listening comprehension. The audio-lingual method is a teaching method which states that learning a language means acquiring habits. In support, Azikiwe (2007) opines that much emphasis is laid on constant drills and practices, because it recognizes that language learning is a process of habit formation. It is a method that fosters dependence on mimicry, memorization of set of phrases and over-learning (Kerper, 2012). Furthermore, Taylor (2012) is of the opinion that it does not lay emphasis on the understanding of words, but rather on the acquisition of structures and patterns in everyday dialogue. Apart from the fact that the audio-lingual method lays much emphasis on drills, it does not encourage the students to construct their own knowledge based on their past experience. Thus, this method may not be very good for teaching certain aspects of French, especially listening comprehension which requires selective perception, construction of meaning and relating of information to previous knowledge. This is so because it only encourages memorization of information without promoting meaningful understanding.

Another alternative method, the constructivist method, which is student-centred, may change the trend of achievement in French. Constructivist teaching method is a method which holds that knowledge is personally

constructed and reconstructed by the learners based on their prior knowledge and experience. Akinbobola and Folasade (2009) explain that constructivist learning is based on the cognitive theory of learning, which holds that learning takes place as a result of intuition. This implies that individuals intuitively bring a number of events together to serve a purpose in knowledge construction. Gray (2011) notes that constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of learning and knowledge construction, rather than passively receiving information. Constructivism therefore is a set of beliefs about knowing and learning that emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their own knowledge with new experiences. D'costa (2010) opines that Constructivist teaching fosters critical thinking and creates motivated and independent learners. It can be inferred from the foregoing definitions that the constructivist method is a method of teaching that encourages the students to be active participants in the classroom. It also helps them to construct their own knowledge based on the previous learning. It means that learners are actively involved in the knowledge construction and not mere spectators. This reveals that there is no dull moment during the knowledge construction. In this method of teaching, the teacher serves as a guide and the learner takes the responsibilities of constructing his or her knowledge based on his or her previous experiences. The method is learner centred.

In teaching listening comprehension, the constructivist teaching method will offer the students the opportunity to construct ideas, skills and knowledge based on their previous experiences. The theoretical framework of constructivism holds that learning always builds upon prior knowledge that a student already has. This is because all learning is filtered by pre-existing schemata. Achor (2007) is of the view that the learning style of the constructivist student is cognitively independent of the teacher, since he/she is self-driven, self-motivating and self-inquisitive. The teacher acts as a facilitator and agent of learning, who evaluates by emphasizing understanding while the students are engaged in problem solving. Furthermore, guided discovery, anchored instruction and social constructivism are some aspects of constructivism. Constructivist teaching method has been found to be efficacious in teaching science and other language area like English. Marjah (2008) reported a significant effect of cooperative learning method on students' achievement in reading comprehension.

Therefore, this study investigates the effect of constructivist teaching method on students' achievement in French listening comprehension in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State.

French is a very important school subject and also Nigeria's second official language. Despite this important status it occupies in Nigeria educational and social spheres, performance of students in senior secondary school French is not encouraging. A survey of the May/June SSCE 2010/2011 examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and that by the National Examinations Council (NECO) for the years 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 show that students offering French language recorded a failure rate of 72 percent, 74 percent, 74 percent and 75 percent respectively for those years. Furthermore, the researcher's observation in 2011 in Owerri North L. G. A. in Owerri Education Zone 1 shows that the number of teachers and students involved in the teaching and learning of French was not encouraging when compared to other non vocational subjects. This means that there is decline in the enrolment of students in French. Therefore, the problem of this study posed as question is: what is the effect of constructivist method of teaching on students' achievement in listening comprehension.

The following research question guided the study:

What are the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist and the conventional methods?

The following null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist method and those taught with conventional method.

Method

The study was limited to senior secondary two (SS2) students in Owerri north local government area of Imo state. Besides, the topics covered are: Exprimer l'appréciation. (Expressing appreciation), Un match de football. (Football match), Exprimer la déception. (Expressing deception), L'Enfant perverse. (The wicked child), Nuancer l'expression d'une opinion. (Qualifying the expression of opinion), L'Enfant mystérieux. (The mysterious child) (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2007).

This is a pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. It was carried out in

Owerri North L.G.A of Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. The population was three hundred and fifty (350) students consists of all the Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) French students in Owerri North Local Government Area of Owerri Education Zone 1. The sample size for the study was 45 SS2 students in 4 schools from the Local Government Area selected through purposive sampling techniques, based on the criteria that the schools must have qualified French teachers, was using the new national French curriculum and Schools that have been offering French in JSS in the last 4 years.

The instrument for data collection in this study is French Achievement Test (FAT). Two passages were adapted from *An Introduction to Practice in Oral French* by Ajiboye (2009), while one passage was researcher's

made. It is divided into three sections. Section A, B and C respectively. The construction was based on the topics drawn from the SS2 scheme of work and taught to the students. The test is a 20-item multiple choice test. Each question has four options, in which the students are expected to choose one out of the options. A correct response scored 1 while an incorrect response scored 0. The instrument was face validated by three experts each in language education, foreign languages and measurement and evaluation. Trial testing was carried out using 20 selected SS2 students from Nsukka Education Zone to determine the reliability of the instrument. Kuder-Richardson 20 (K-R20) was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of the test is .86, which indicates the internal consistency.

After the pretest on FAT, treatment was administered to the subjects within the first weeks of the study by the regular French teachers who taught in their selected schools; no feedback on the test was given to the students. Scores of the students were recorded and kept aside for use after the experiment by the researcher. At the end of the teaching which lasted for six weeks, post-test on FAT was administered to both the experimental and control groups. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. ANCOVA was used to partial out the initial differences of the research subjects because intact classes were used in the study.

Results

Research question 1: What are the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist and the conventional methods?

Table 1: Achievement mean scores and standard deviation scores of students in the constructivist and conventional (audio lingual) method.

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain score
		Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	
Constructivist	31	4.77	2.55	18.61	3.17	13.84
Conventional	14	7.28	4.44	12.71	2.99	5.43

The data presented in table 1 show students' achievement. Students taught with constructivist teaching method had a pretest mean score of 4.77 and standard deviation of 2.55 while their posttest mean score recorded a mean of 18.61 and standard deviation of 3.17. On the other hand, students taught with conventional teaching method obtained a mean score of 7.28 on their pretest and 12.71 on their posttest mean score with a corresponding standard deviation of 4.44 and 2.99 for pretest and posttest respectively. Comparatively, students taught listening comprehension using constructivist teaching method had a higher mean score than the conventional method on their posttest. The gain score of constructivist group is higher than the conventional group which indicates that the constructivist group gained more than the conventional group.

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist method and those taught with conventional method.

Table 2 Summary of the 2-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on students' Posttest Scores on Listening Comprehension.

SOURCES OF VARIATION	TYPE III SUM OF SQUARE	Df	Mean square	F	Significance
Corrected model	483.248	2	241.624	37.236	0.000
Intercept	2123.814	1	2123.814	327.295	0.000
Pretest	0.129	1	0.129	0.020	0.897
Method	196.803	1	196.803	30.329	0.000
Error	272.529	42	6.489		
Total	13423.000	45			
Corrected Total	755.778	44			

The data presented in table 2 indicate the Analysis of covariance on the effects of teaching methods (constructivist teaching and conventional teaching) on students' achievement in listening comprehension. The calculated F value is 30.329 at 0.000 level of significant set at 0.05 level of significant. Since the exact probability value of 0.000 is less than alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and the researcher concludes that there is significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught listening comprehension using constructivist method.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students in the constructive group performed better than the students in the conventional group. However, there is a significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught

listening comprehension using constructivist teaching method and conventional method. The trend of the high performance by the constructivist group could be that the method helped the students to actively participate in the class (to do it themselves.) and to discover new things through their prior knowledge. It could have also encouraged the students to internalize what they have learnt. The findings of this study is in line with the finding of Ukozor (2011), who found that constructivist teaching strategy had significantly better effect on students' achievement and self- efficacy in physics. The findings of this study also is in consonance with the findings of Muraya and Kimamo (2011), Torty (2010) and Uzoegwu (2004) on effect of cooperative learning method and collaborative method on students' achievement in Biology, English language tenses and essay writing respectively, who in their independent studies reported that method had influence on students achievement.

This study provides empirical evidence of the effectiveness of constructivist teaching method on the achievement of students' listening comprehension in French. The findings provide useful feedback on the relative efficacy of constructivist teaching method. This feedback will provide the basis upon which French teachers could build to enhance the efficacy of their instructional practice. Students should be allowed to participate actively in all aspects of teaching and learning process, especially in problem solving and constructive thinking, interacting with one another in the constructivist classroom. The result of this study shows that students, if properly guided as the teacher employs the constructivist teaching method will be at a great advantage.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since constructivist teaching method has been found to enhance the quality of achievement of students in listening comprehension, teachers should be encouraged to employ it more in the teaching of French listening comprehension by making learning student-centred and not teacher-centred.
2. The curriculum planners should modify senior secondary school French curriculum to include the use of innovative teaching methods like the constructivist teaching method in order to enhance the participation and achievement of students in French listening comprehension.
3. The Ministry of Education in Nigeria should organize seminars, workshops and conferences for French teachers on how to use constructivist teaching method in teaching listening comprehension.

Conclusions

This study has shown that constructivist teaching method has significant effect on the students' academic achievement in listening comprehension. The constructivist method appears to be outstandingly more efficacious than the conventional audio lingual method.

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