



## Effects of Two Constructivist-Based Instructional Approaches on Senior Secondary School Students' Interest in English Language Narrative Essay Writing: Implications for Curriculum Studies

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### Abstract

The study investigated the effects of two constructivist-based instructional approaches on senior secondary school students' interest in English Language Narrative Essay writing: Implications for curriculum studies. The study employed the pretest-posttest non-equivalent groups quasi-experimental research design. The study's population comprised all the 4,022 senior secondary two (SSII) students in 50 government owned co-educational secondary schools in the 2022/2023 academic year in Umuahia Education Zone, Abia State. A sample of 109 SSII students in four sampled co-educational schools in Umuahia Education Zone was drawn for the study through multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was Narrative Essay Writing Interest Inventory (NEWII), developed by the researcher. The instrument was face-validated by three experts from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96, using the Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance ( $w$ ). The data obtained were analysed using mean, standard deviations and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results showed that there was no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches. Also, the findings showed that gender does not significantly influence students' interest in English language narrative essay writing. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others, that English language teachers should be trained and retrained to incorporate cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches when teaching narrative essay writing and other aspects of English Language.

**Keywords:** Cognitive and Social constructivist, Interest, Gender, Location.

### Introduction

Curriculum studies is a vital discipline for educators, as it allows for the examination of the content, methods, and purposes of education. It gives one understanding of how learning is structured and delivered, which can help inform decisions on how to best meet the needs of students. Curriculum according to Offorma, Ikonta, and Ogunleye (2019) is the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences, under the auspices of the school, for the learners' continuous and willful growth in personal social competence. This means that curriculum is the total guided learning experiences designed to facilitate learners' learning for establishing quality relationship between what is learnt and what operates outside the school. This should be reflected in the teaching and learning of English language.

English language is both the language of communication and instruction in all fields including science and technology. The Federal Government in its National Policy on Education (FRN, 2021) made English language compulsory at secondary levels of education. This means that English language is a compulsory subject in Nigerian secondary educational curriculum. English language has four skills which includes; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The four language skills are embedded in the curriculum to achieve total language mastery. In language development, writing is the fourth language skill and a higher order skill. English language writing has different aspects such as essay writing, summary writing, report writing, letter writing, article writing, and speech writing, but this research is limited to essay writing.

Essay writing is an integral aspect of English language in Nigeria. It is taught and learned as a

component of the English language, not as a separate discipline. An essay is a piece of writing that methodically analyses and evaluates a topic on issue. It is designed to get the academic opinion on a particular matter. It is of different types, which includes; expository, argumentative, descriptive and narrative. A narrative essay requires the writer to tell a story from his/her point of view or personal experience, providing all the specific details to get readers involved and understand the storyline. Caulfield (2020) stated that a narrative essay tells about a personal experience one had, which could be an imaginative exploration of something you have not experienced. The imagination must be accurate to everyday experience. Every narrative essay should have features, such as; plot, setting, character, conflict, and theme. Also, narrative essay should have a distinct beginning, middle, and end.

The West Africa Examination Council Chief Examiners' Reports from May/June of 2018 to 2021 shows that students' interest in writing English language essays was extremely low and has been declining annually. The report explained the poor interest as a result of lack of linguistic foundation. The majority of the candidates lost all the marks assigned to spelling, punctuation, grammar, and tenses sequencing. In addition, the assessment noted that the candidates had not been exposed to writing skills sufficiently. Also reacting to similar poor interest in essay writing, Jibowo (2016) states that teachers' poor approach of teaching is responsible. Also, Akogwu (2019) confirmed that there is need for a good teaching method.

The teaching of English language narrative essay writing in secondary schools in Nigeria is dominated by the conventional teaching approach. This method lays emphasis on definitions and giving of notes to passive learners which does not give the students the opportunity to construct their own meanings collaboratively through discussions and arriving at their own conclusions. The conventional lecture method of teaching and learning narrative essay writing focused on the teacher writing the ideas on the chalkboard, while the students observe the process and listen. This is teacher centered approach. Therefore, it may not encourage meaningful learning outcome. Another approach which may be used in teaching English language narrative essay writing is the use of cognitive constructivist and social constructivist-based instructional approaches.

Cognitive constructivism as propounded by Jean Piaget views learning on the basis of personal experience or experiential learning. It lays emphasis on

the importance of learners building their own knowledge. It also views learning as a developmental process that involves change and construction building on previous knowledge (Piaget, 1971). Cognitive constructivist focuses more on facts and constructing knowledge within one's own schemas. It is a method of instruction that maintains that individuals actively create their own knowledge and that the learner's experiences shape reality (Elliotte et al., 2000 in McLeod, 2019). In teaching of Narrative Essay writing, the cognitive constructivist approach provides the learners a good opportunity to carry out their individual task and projects which will help them to generate new ideas, and acquire skills. Also, another type of constructivist teaching approach that could be used in teaching Narrative essay writing is social constructivist.

Social constructivist is a learning theory propounded by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in 1978. Vygotsky believes that life long process of development is dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development. In other words, all learning tasks irrespective of the difficulty level can be performed by learners under adult guidance or with peer collaboration. According to the theory of social constructivism, knowledge is not an individual experience but rather a common one that arises from language use and social interaction (Lynch, 2016). This means that learning concepts are transmitted by means of language, interpreted and understood by experience and interactions within a cultural setting. This theory helps to give a backup to the establishment of opportunities for students to collaborate with the teacher and peers in constructing knowledge and understanding. As research has shown that the cognitive and social constructivist approaches can improve students' performance when writing essays in the English language (Akogwu & Offorma, 2018), it is necessary to determine whether these approaches can also increase students' interest in English language narrative essay writing.

In addition to instructional approach, research has indicated some close connection between gender and interest in language learning. Gender refers to the opportunities and characteristics that come with being a woman or a man in terms of the economy, society, politics, and culture. It is the social characteristics, opportunities, and dynamic between boys and girls, as well as between men and women (Scott, 2014). Gender is acquired through the socially created traits that are associated with males and females (Worgu, 2017). The roles that are accorded to the various sexes may be

similar in certain communities but may differ in others, which may have an impact on their educational interest. However, Ifeacho (2017) reported that males perform better than females in essay writing. Other researchers like Ukume, Agbum and Udu (2018) established significant differences regarding the success of both genders in English language. Due to the disparities on the views of gender, it is included as a possible intervening variable in this study since the exact influence of gender on language is not clear.

Based on the foregoing, therefore, the researchers felt the need to establish through empirical evidence, the effects of two constructivist-based instructional approaches on senior secondary school students' interest in English language narrative essay writing, as well as the implications for curriculum studies. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated for that purpose.

1. What are the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing using cognitive constructivist approach and those taught using social constructivist approach?
2. What are the mean interest scores of male and female students in narrative essay writing in English language?
3. What is the interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language?

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught English language narrative essay writing using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist approaches.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in English language narrative essay writing.

## Methods

The design of this study was pretest-posttest non-equivalent groups quasi-experimental research design. The population consisted of all the 4,022 senior

secondary two (SS II) students in 50 government-owned co-educational schools in the 2022/2023 academic year in Umuahia Education Zone, Abia State. Out of this number, 1,826 were males while 2,196 were females. The sample for the study was made up of 109 SS II students in four intact classes which were drawn through a multi-stage sampling technique. Out of this sample, 49 were males while 60 were females.

The researchers used one instrument for data collection, namely: Narrative Essay Writing Interest Inventory (NEWII). The NEWII is a test with twenty questions developed by the researcher. The instrument and the lesson plans for the experimental groups were subjected to face validation by three specialists: one from curriculum studies, one from Language Education, and one from Measurement and Evaluation. All of them were from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The inter-rater reliability of the instrument was established using the Kendall's coefficient of concordance ( $w$ ), and the reliability coefficient of 0.96 was obtained.

The NEWII was administered as pre-test to the subjects before the commencement of the treatment. This was done by teachers of English in the schools that were used for the study. These teachers served as research assistants. The researchers trained these research assistants to get them acquainted with the skills involved in the use of cognitive constructivist approach as well as the social constructivist approach in teaching English language essay writing. The training was carried out in each of the schools that were used for the study. It lasted for four days. The first four days in week 1 was designated to training of the research assistants in each of the four schools that were used for the study.

At the end of the training, the research assistants administered the NEWII as a pretest. The experiment started after the pre-test. One group was taught using cognitive constructivist approach, while the other group was taught with the social constructivist approach. At the end of the teachings, the NEWII was administered as posttest. The data from both the pre-test and the post-test were used for data analysis by the researchers. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer all the research questions and the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Table 1: Pretest and posttest mean interest scores of students taught English language narrative essay writing using cognitive constructivist teaching and those taught using social constructivist teaching**

| Teaching Approaches      | N  | Pre-test  |      | Post-test |      | Adjusted Mean Score |
|--------------------------|----|-----------|------|-----------|------|---------------------|
|                          |    | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   |                     |
| Cognitive Constructivist | 53 | 47.42     | 6.84 | 66.00     | 5.40 | 65.90               |
| Social Constructivist    | 56 | 45.46     | 6.29 | 64.45     | 6.00 | 64.63               |

**Note:** N = Number of Respondents,  $\bar{X}$  = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

The result in Table 1 shows that students taught English language narrative essay writing using cognitive constructivist teaching approach had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X}$  = 47.42, SD = 6.84) at pretest and a mean interest score ( $\bar{X}$  = 66.00, SD = 5.40) at posttest. While, those taught English language narrative essay writing using the social constructivist teaching approach had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X}$  = 45.46, SD = 6.29) at pretest and a mean interest score ( $\bar{X}$  = 64.45, SD = 6.00) at posttest. The posttest standard deviations of 5.40 and 6.00 for students taught using the cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches

respectively, indicate that the interest scores of students in the social constructivist teaching group were slightly wide spread more than the scores of students in the cognitive constructivist teaching. The posttest adjusted mean scores of 65.90 and 64.63 for students taught using cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches respectively implies that although both cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches have positive effects in terms of boosting students' interest in English language narrative essay writing, the cognitive constructivist teaching approach proved to be slightly more effective.

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches.

**Table 2: Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of the difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches**

| Source                    | Type III Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared ( $\eta^2_p$ ) | Dec. |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|---------|------|------------------------------------|------|
| Corrected Model           | 725.002 <sup>a</sup>    | 8   | 90.625      | 3.195   | .003 | .204                               |      |
| Intercept                 | 8247.670                | 1   | 8247.670    | 290.763 | .000 | .744                               |      |
| PRENEWI                   | .184                    | 1   | .184        | .006    | .936 | .000                               |      |
| Group                     | 41.972                  | 1   | 41.972      | 1.480   | .227 | .015                               | NS   |
| Gender                    | 70.714                  | 1   | 70.714      | 2.493   | .118 | .024                               | NS   |
| Location                  | 20.947                  | 1   | 20.947      | .738    | .392 | .007                               | NS   |
| Group * Gender            | 2.782                   | 1   | 2.782       | .098    | .755 | .001                               | NS   |
| Group * Location          | 465.333                 | 1   | 465.333     | 16.405  | .000 | .141                               | S    |
| Gender * Location         | 39.836                  | 1   | 39.836      | 1.404   | .239 | .014                               | NS   |
| Group * Gender * Location | .298                    | 1   | .298        | .010    | .919 | .000                               | NS   |
| Error                     | 2836.558                | 100 | 28.366      |         |      |                                    |      |
| Total                     | 466951.000              | 109 |             |         |      |                                    |      |
| Corrected Total           | 3561.560                | 108 |             |         |      |                                    |      |

**Note:** df = Degree of Freedom, F= F-ratio, Sig.= Significant/probability value, Dec.= Decision, NS = Not Significant, S = Significant

The result in Table 2 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches, ( $F(1, 108) = 1.480$ ,  $p = .227$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .015$ ). This is because the associated probability (Sig.) value of .0227 is greater than 0.05

level of significance at which the result is being tested. Hence, the null hypothesis one ( $H_{01}$ ) which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches is not accepted.

**Table 3: Pretest and posttest mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing**

| Gender | Pretest |           |      | Posttest  |      | Adjusted Mean Score |
|--------|---------|-----------|------|-----------|------|---------------------|
|        | N       | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   |                     |
| Male   | 49      | 48.02     | 6.14 | 66.16     | 5.72 | 66.10               |
| Female | 60      | 45.10     | 6.73 | 64.42     | 5.69 | 64.43               |

**Note:** N = Number of Respondents,  $\bar{X}$  = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Result in Table 3 shows the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing. The result shows that male students had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 48.02$ ,  $SD = 6.14$ ) at pretest and a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 66.16$ ,  $SD = 5.72$ ) at posttest. While the female students had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 45.10$ ,  $SD = 6.73$ ) at pretest and a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 64.42$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ) at posttest. The posttest standard deviations of 5.72 and 5.69 for male and female students respectively, indicates that the interest scores of male and female students were almost equally spread across the groups. The posttest adjusted mean scores of 66.10 and 64.43 for male and female students respectively, shows that the male students had slightly better level of interest in English language narrative essay writing than their female counterparts.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing.

The result in Table 2 also shows ANCOVA analysis of the difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing. The result is indicative that the difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing is not statistically significant ( $F(1, 108) = 2.493$ ,  $p = .118$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .024$ ). This is due to the fact that the associated probability (Sig.) value of .118 is greater than 0.05 level of significance at which the result is being tested. Therefore, the null hypothesis two ( $H_{02}$ ) which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of male and female students in English language narrative essay writing is upheld.

**Table 4: Pretest and post-test mean interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in English language narrative essay writing**

| Teaching Approaches      | Gender | N  | Pretest   |      | Posttest  |      | Adjusted Mean Scores |
|--------------------------|--------|----|-----------|------|-----------|------|----------------------|
|                          |        |    | $\bar{X}$ | SD   | $\bar{X}$ | SD   |                      |
| Cognitive Constructivist | Male   | 24 | 48.83     | 5.69 | 67.46     | 5.15 | 66.90                |
|                          | Female | 29 | 46.24     | 7.56 | 64.79     | 5.38 | 64.91                |
| Social Constructivist    | Male   | 25 | 47.24     | 6.56 | 64.92     | 6.06 | 65.30                |
|                          | Female | 31 | 44.03     | 5.78 | 64.06     | 6.03 | 63.96                |

**Note:** N = Number of Respondents,  $\bar{X}$  = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

Result in Table 4 shows the interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in English language narrative essay writing. The result shows that male

students taught using cognitive constructivist approach had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 48.83$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ) at pretest and a mean score ( $\bar{X} = 67.46$ ,  $SD = 5.15$ ) at posttest. Whereas, the female students taught using the



same approach had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 46.24$ ,  $SD = 7.56$ ) at pretest and a mean score ( $\bar{X} = 64.79$ ,  $SD = 5.38$ ) at posttest. The posttest adjusted mean scores for students in the cognitive constructivist group were 66.90 and 64.91 for the male and female students respectively. Also, the result in Table 4 shows that male students taught using the social constructivist approach had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 47.24$ ,  $SD = 6.56$ ) at pretest and a mean score ( $\bar{X} = 64.92$ ,  $SD = 6.06$ ) at posttest. While, their female counterparts had a mean interest score ( $\bar{X} = 44.03$ ,  $SD = 5.78$ ) at pretest and a mean score ( $\bar{X} = 64.06$ ,  $SD = 6.03$ ) at posttest. The posttest adjusted mean scores obtained for students in the social constructivist group were 65.30 and 63.96 for male and female students respectively. Observably, the result shows that male students had slightly better interest scores in English language narrative essay writing than their female counterparts when taught using both cognitive and social constructivist approaches.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language.

Result in Table 2 also shows ANCOVA analysis of the interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language. The result shows that the interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language is not statistically significant, ( $F(1, 108) = .098$ ,  $p = .755$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .001$ ). This is because the associated probability (Sig.) value of .755 is greater than 0.05 level of significance at which the result is being tested. For this reason, the null hypothesis three (H0<sub>3</sub>) which stated that there is no significant interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language is not rejected.

## Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that both cognitive and social constructivist instructional approaches have similar positive effects in terms of boosting students' interest in English language narrative essay writing. Although, cognitive constructivist teaching approach proved to be slightly

more effective. Further analysis however revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean interest scores of students taught narrative essay writing in English language using cognitive constructivist and social constructivist teaching approaches. The findings to some extent are consistent with the findings by Akogwu (2019), whose study revealed that students taught English language using the constructivist-based instructional method showed greater interest in English language essay writing than those taught using the conventional method. The findings are also in consonance with the findings of the study by Nnamani and Akabogu (2020), which showed that reciprocal peer tutoring teaching approach which is akin to the social constructivist teaching approach, was effective in promoting interest in expository essay writing among students.

The findings of this study also show that male students had slightly better level of interest in English language narrative essay writing than their female counterparts. However, further finding showed that male and female students do not differ significantly in their interest in English language narrative essay writing. In other words, gender has no considerable influence on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing. These findings are in line with Babalola and Oyinloye (2012), who reported no significant difference between male and female students' interest in peculiarities in English language learning. In the same vein, the finding to some extent, is consistent with that of Attah and Ita (2017), which showed that gender had no significant influence on senior secondary school students' learning of English language. This is possible given the fact that adoption of constructivist teaching approaches give students freedom and opportunities that can boost the interest of both male and female students alike. To this effect, gender may not have a substantial influence on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing as shown by this present study.

The study also shows that there is no significant interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language. These findings to some extent agree with the findings by Agene (2009) whose study disclosed that there was no significant interaction effect of instructional approaches and gender on the mean interest scores of students. Similarly, the finding is in line with the finding by Kurumeh, Achor, Akume and Mohammed (2012) whose study showed that the interaction effect

of instructional approaches and gender on students' interest was not statistically significant. This implies that both male and female students' interest improved alike in the two constructivist teaching approaches adopted because the male and female students were given equal opportunity of learning that helped to motivate their interest in Narrative essay writing. This could be the explanation for the above finding that there is no significant interaction effect of constructivist instructional approaches and gender on students' mean interest scores in narrative essay writing in English language as depicted by the finding of this present study.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches are effective in enhancing students' interest in English language narrative essay writing. This therefore implies that both cognitive and social constructivist approaches when adopted in teaching English language narrative essay writing by the teachers would have similar effects in terms of increasing students' interest in that aspect of the subject. The findings also revealed that gender has no significant influence on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing. In addition, there is also no significant interaction effect of constructivist teaching approaches and gender on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing.

### Implications for Curriculum Studies

The findings of the study have the following implications for curriculum studies. The finding which showed that the use of cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches effectively enhances students' interest in English language narrative essay writing means that students' interest in narrative essay writing will greatly improve if the two instructional approaches are adopted in the curriculum than depending on the traditional approach of teaching. The implication of these finding to curriculum studies is that the two instructional approaches if implemented will enhance effective teaching and learning.

Also, the finding which showed that gender has no significant influence on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing means that both male and female students would demonstrate similar levels of interest in English language narrative essay writing when taught with both cognitive and social constructivist instructional approaches. This entails that

both male and female students stand a chance of benefiting maximally in terms of promoting their interest in English language narrative essay writing when taught with the two instructional approaches.

In addition, the finding which showed that there is no significant interaction effect of constructivist teaching approaches and gender on students' interest in English language narrative essay writing implies that both male and female students are likely to benefit equally from the two instructional approaches in terms of enhancing their interest in English language narrative essay writing.

### Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. English language teachers should be trained and retrained to successfully adopt the cognitive and social constructivist teaching approaches when teaching narrative essay writing in order to enhance students' interest in the topic.
2. Curriculum planners and developers should also make effort to incorporate the use of cognitive and social constructivist approaches as necessary tools for effective teaching and learning of English language narrative essay writing.
3. The school authorities should provide equal opportunities for both male and female students in order to close the achievement gap between male and female students.

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