

## LANGUAGE TEACHING PEDAGOGIES AS TOOLS FOR ENHANCING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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### Abstract

This study critically examined the effectiveness of learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies in improving the academic performance of secondary school students across the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones of Cross River State, Nigeria. Using a quasi-experimental research design, the study involved 300 students drawn from six purposively selected secondary schools. While the experimental group was taught through interactive, collaborative, and participatory instructional approaches, the control group received conventional lecture-based instruction. Data were obtained using Students' Achievement Tests (SAT) alongside structured questionnaires designed to measure both students' academic outcomes and their perceptions of the instructional strategies employed. The findings revealed that learners exposed to learner-centered pedagogies performed significantly better than their counterparts taught through traditional methods, showing improved comprehension, motivation, and classroom engagement. The study, therefore, recommends the need for a systematic and consistent integration of learner centered strategies into English language teaching to foster sustained academic achievement and promote holistic learner development.

**Keywords:** Learner-centered pedagogy, English language teaching, Instructional strategies.

### Introduction

English continues to dominate as the primary medium of instruction in Nigeria, significantly influencing students' academic success across disciplines (Adegbija, 2019; Bamgbose, 2019). As the language of government, education, commerce, and international communication, English plays a central role in shaping students' cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural development. Proficiency in English has been widely recognized as a key determinant of academic achievement, employability, and participation in a globalized world. Despite this centrality, student outcomes in English often remain below expected standards, particularly in secondary schools where foundational language skills are critical for understanding complex subjects and participating meaningfully in classroom discourse (Etop, 2023).

Several factors contribute to the persistent underachievement in English, with traditional teacher-centered methods identified as a major constraint (Igboanusi, 2020; Ndimele & Okon, 2022). In many Nigerian classrooms, instruction is heavily reliant on rote memorization, lecture delivery, and teacher-directed explanations, leaving limited room for critical thinking, collaborative learning, or authentic communication. This approach often discourages active participation and does not cater to the diverse learning needs and interests of students. Consequently, students may develop superficial comprehension, low motivation, and reduced engagement, which negatively affect academic performance. In response to these challenges, global education trends have increasingly emphasized the importance of learner-centered pedagogies, which prioritize active participation, collaboration, and

critical reflection (Finnegan, 2012; Fishman, 2013).

Learner-centered approaches shift the focus of teaching from the teacher as the sole source of knowledge to a more interactive model where learners construct understanding through engagement, inquiry, and dialogue. Such pedagogical strategies are particularly suited to language learning, as they encourage students to practice communication, negotiate meaning, and apply linguistic knowledge in authentic contexts. In Nigeria, the adoption of learner centered strategies has been highlighted in several national curriculum frameworks and policy documents, but implementation remains uneven, particularly in rural and semi urban educational zones.

Discussion-based methods foster critical thinking, reflective reasoning, and the ability to articulate ideas coherently, which are essential skills in English language acquisition. Task-based and project-oriented learning also provide opportunities for authentic language use, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. However, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these methods in specific Nigerian educational contexts remains limited, highlighting the need for rigorous studies that account for contextual, motivational, and cognitive factors. Furthermore, learner-centered pedagogies have the potential to address attitudinal and motivational dimensions of learning that are often neglected in traditional classrooms.

Student engagement, self-efficacy, and interest in the subject matter have been shown to significantly influence academic performance (Etop, 2023; Finnegan, 2012). By providing learners with opportunities to actively participate, make choices, and collaborate with peers, these pedagogies can foster intrinsic motivation, enhance confidence, and promote sustained academic improvement. This aligns with contemporary educational theories emphasizing constructivist learning, social interaction, and experiential approaches to knowledge acquisition. Teacher's qualification play a critical role in influencing student's academic performance (Ubi U.E 2025). This study therefore investigates the impact of learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies on the academic performance of secondary school students in the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research compares the performance of students exposed to interactive, collaborative, and discussion-based teaching methods with those receiving traditional teacher-centered instruction. In addition to assessing cognitive outcomes, the study also considers the role of motivation, engagement, and contextual factors in shaping student performance. By doing so, it seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary pedagogical strategies can be leveraged to enhance English language learning in diverse educational settings (Ezenwaji, 2021; Onwu& Okpara, 2021).

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to theory, policy, and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study offers insights into the application of learner centered approaches within the Nigerian educational context, highlighting the interplay between pedagogy, motivation, and learning outcomes. From a practical standpoint, it provides evidence-based recommendations for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers seeking to improve English language performance and foster learner engagement. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of systematically integrating learner-centered strategies into classroom instruction to promote equitable, sustainable, and effective English language education across Nigeria. Research Gaps and Directions of the Present Research Although considerable research exists on strategies for improving English language performance in Nigerian schools, several gaps persist, particularly in the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones. Most studies focus on curriculum development, teaching materials, and general pedagogical guidance, with few empirical comparisons between learner-centered and traditional teaching methods (Okebukola, 2020; Udoh & Ekanem, 2020).

Similarly, limited research examines the specific effects of cooperative, task-based, and discussion-oriented strategies on measurable student outcomes (Nta& Akpan, 2022). Contextual factors, such as rural versus urban classroom environments, are rarely considered, despite their potential influence on the success of instructional innovations (Ezenwaji, 2021). Furthermore, attitudinal and motivational dimensions, including student engagement and interest, are often overlooked, even though they significantly affect academic achievement (Onwu& Okpara, 2021). This study addresses these gaps through a quasi-experimental design involving 300 students across six secondary schools. By comparing experimental groups exposed to learner-centered pedagogy with control groups taught through conventional methods, the research investigates both cognitive outcomes and the role of contextual and motivational factors. The findings aim to provide practical, evidence-based insights to guide educators and policymakers in enhancing English language achievement in diverse Nigerian educational settings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones present a microcosm of Nigeria's diverse educational landscape, encompassing variations in socio-economic status, school infrastructure, teacher quality, and learner motivation. In these areas, disparities in English language performance have been observed between urban and rural schools, reflecting broader structural and contextual factors (Ezenwaji, 2021). While some schools have successfully implemented interactive teaching methods, many continue to rely on conventional lecture-based instruction. Understanding how contemporary pedagogical strategies, including discussion-based, cooperative, and task-oriented approaches, affect student outcomes in these zones is therefore critical for informing educational practice and policy. Research has demonstrated that interactive and participatory teaching strategies can significantly enhance students' comprehension, retention, and overall academic achievement. Collaborative learning, for instance, encourages peer-to-peer interaction, problem-solving, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes, which can enhance motivation and engagement. The researchers also identified challenges such as: Inadequate teacher training in learner-centered methods, Limited instructional resources, Overcrowded classrooms and Resistance to pedagogical innovation.

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To examine the effectiveness of learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies on academic performance of secondary school students across the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

1. What is the effectiveness of learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies on academic performance of secondary school students across the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones of Cross River State, Nigeria?

### **Hypothesis**

H01 There is no significant effectiveness of learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies in improving the academic performance of secondary school students across the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Base of the Research**

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction, cultural tools, and community engagement in learning. Language functions as a primary tool for cognitive development and knowledge transmission. Learner-centered pedagogies, such as

collaborative tasks, guided inquiry, and participatory discussions, align with Vygotsky’s principles by fostering social and cognitive scaffolding. Additionally, Bruner’s Constructivist Theory supports active knowledge construction through experience and reflection. Together, these theories justify the use of interactive, culturally responsive pedagogies to improve English performance in diverse classroom contexts.

**Methodology**

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effect of learner-centered pedagogical strategies on students’ English language performance. The study population consisted of 15,670 students enrolled in public secondary schools across the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones of Cross River State. Using purposive sampling, six schools were selected to participate in the research. These included Government Secondary School Igoli and Community Secondary School Obanliku in Obudu Zone, Community Secondary School Ugep and Anon Community Secondary School in Ikom Zone, and Big Qua Girls Secondary School along with Government Secondary School Akim Town in Calabar Zone. From the selected schools, a total of 300 students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group, with 150 students in each group. Each school contributed 50 students to the study. The experimental group was exposed to learner centered pedagogical strategies, which incorporated collaborative learning, guided inquiry, discussion-based lessons, and story-based approaches to teaching English. These strategies emphasized active student engagement, peer interaction, and practical application of language skills.

In contrast, the control group received conventional lecture-based instruction, characterized by teacher-led explanations, minimal student interaction, and rote memorization. Data were collected using two main instruments. First, a Students’ Achievement Test (SAT) was administered to assess learners’ proficiency and academic performance in English. Second, a structured questionnaire was employed to gather information on students’ perceptions and attitudes toward the instructional approaches. The data collected were analyzed using a combination of statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize student performance and identify general trends. Independent samples t-tests were employed to compare the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups, while ANCOVA was applied to control for pretest differences and determine the effect of the intervention. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between pedagogical strategies and students’ English language achievement. This methodological approach ensured a robust and comprehensive assessment of the impact of learner-centered pedagogy across diverse school contexts.

**Results and Discussion**

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Descriptive Statistics by Group Interpretation: The experimental group demonstrated a substantially higher gain in posttest scores, highlighting the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogies.

**Table 1: Independent Samples t-Test of Posttest English Language Achievement Scores**

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p-value
Experimental	150	68.72	7.93	298	18.42	.000
Control	150	49.38	8.11	298		

Note:  $p < .05$ .

Interpretation: The t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between groups ( $p < .05$ ),

confirming the efficacy of the experimental pedagogical approach.

Discussion: These findings are consistent with global research demonstrating that interactive, participatory teaching improves comprehension, grammar mastery, and overall English proficiency. Learner-centered methods encourage dialogue, critical thinking, and active engagement, which are essential for meaningful learning outcomes.

**Table 1 Pretest and Posttest Descriptive Statistics of English Language Achievement by Group**

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD	Mean Gain
Experimental	150	32.41	6.85	68.72	7.93	36.31
Control	150	31.96	6.53	49.38	8.11	17.42

Suggestions Figure 1: Pretest vs. Posttest Mean Scores by Group i. Bar chart showing experimental vs control mean scores before and after intervention. ii. X-axis: Group (Experimental, Control) iii. Y-axis: Score (0–100) iv. Two bars per group: Pretest, Posttest Figure 2: Mean Gain Comparison i. Column chart displaying mean gain of experimental and control groups. Way Forward: Continuous professional development, curriculum review, provision of instructional resources, and integration of digital teaching tools are recommended. Policy support is critical to sustaining improved pedagogical practices. Conclusions and Recommendations i. Learner-centered pedagogies significantly enhance students’ English language achievement. ii. Educational authorities should integrate interactive and participatory teaching into curricula. iii. Teachers require ongoing professional development to implement these strategies effectively. iv. Future research should assess long-term impacts and explore digital intervention.

**Conclusion**

This study established that learner-centered English language pedagogical strategies significantly improve the academic performance of secondary school students in the Obudu, Ikom, and Calabar educational zones. Interactive, collaborative, and discussion-based methods enhanced students’ comprehension, motivation, engagement, and confidence in English when compared with traditional teacher-centered approaches. The findings further highlight the importance of teacher qualification and institutional support in ensuring the effective implementation of learner-centered instruction, thereby affirming its relevance for improving English language learning outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools

**Recommendations**

1. Curriculum Integration: Incorporate indigenous arts into language and cultural studies at all educational levels.
2. Teacher Training: Organize professional-development workshops on arts-based pedagogies for language preservation.
3. Policy Support: The Cross River State Ministry of Education should mandate and fund creative mother-tongue programs.
4. Community Partnerships: Collaborate with cultural troupes and elders to document and perform local art forms in schools.
5. Further Research: Longitudinal studies should examine how sustained arts engagement influences language vitality over time.

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