

## **ENHANCING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH THROUGH LITERATURE CIRCLES AND BOOK CLUBS**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated literature circles and book clubs as instructional techniques in Benue State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study is to ascertain the effects of literature circles and book clubs on ND1 & NCE1 students' performance in Literature-in-English in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted quasi-experimental, non-equivalent, non-randomised, pretest, and posttest design and control group. Two research questions were answered and two null hypotheses were tested. A sample of ND1 & NCE1 students was drawn from two polytechnics and two Colleges of Education with the target population of 4956 in the study area using purposive sampling techniques. Experimental groups 1 and 2 were exposed to literature circle and book clubs respectively while the control group was exposed to lecture method. Data were collected using Students' Literature-in-English Performance Test (SLPT) validated by three experts. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.92. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviations to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that there is significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using lecture method ( $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) in favour of literature circles. Findings also showed that there is significant difference in performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs ( $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Based on findings, it was recommended among other things that Literature-in-English teachers should adopt literature circles and book clubs as teaching techniques to help students enhance their comprehension and academic performance.

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## Introduction

Literature-in-English is one of the courses taught in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. It is both studied as core and elective course for all student of humanities. Humanities are academic course that deal with the study of human condition using analytical, critical and speculative techniques and they include language, communication and performing arts, history, law philosophy, religion, sociology, psychology, and literature among others. Literature in-English has three genres which includes drama, poetry and prose. All these aspects of literature are taught and examined to determine student performance and achievements. It is instructive to stress here that the overall aim of teaching the course is to enable student appreciate Literature as a fundamental aspect of the all-round development target of the teaching learning process in specific terms, teaching the course aims at inculcating in students the entertainment and instructive values of Literature, broadening the cultural horizon of the student through various texts, exposing them to language in action and preparing them to pass Literature-in-English.

Teaching Literature –in-English needs a focus on specific skills that test students’ ability to identify theme, structure of story, literary devices/techniques and their communicative importance (Oyetunde, 2013). This is because the teaching of Literature –in-English exposes students to life experiences, appreciation of literary devices as well as nature and also reveals to them issues of the moment (Chieorga, Mernyi & Gwadue-Chieorga, 2023). Thus, teaching Literature-in-English is considered a key to improving the proficiency of student in English language (Ogbole, 2016). It is a way of developing the intellectual acumen and linguistic need of the student thereby making them self- realizable through constant interaction with texts. As William (2004) remarks, through literature study, the second language learner can internalize and consciously adopt the rhythms of natural speech, rhetorical and organizational devices. He further maintains that even for the native speakers, the reading of literature provides examples of expression of thought that can be committed to memory. Literature-in-English is indeed language in action and this is what makes it worthwhile. Despite the many benefit of Literature to the student for their overall academic performance, growth and national development, it is observed with dismay that students’ academic performance in recent years has been poor.

Academic performance in this context is a term that indicates students’ achievement after completing a course or subject from an institution. It measures students’ learning outcome across various academic subjects, which is assessed by formative and summative assessments (IGI Global, 2021). To determine students’ academic performance, Jones (2023) maintains that students’ behaviour, knowledge and understanding are measured in the short term, like evaluating what they have learnt at the end of the lesson to determine their level of understanding. This justifies the fact that academic performance involves meeting goals, achievements and objectives set in the programme or course. Students’ academic performance can be abysmal if the grades obtained are poor and low and can be excellently good if the grades are good or high.

Unfortunately, performance of students in Literature-in-English in recent years has been poor. Many scholars have attributed these students’ abysmal performance to different reasons. Olushola (2023) identifies poor knowledge of recommendation texts, inadequate understanding of literary concept, poor time management, insufficient exposure to literary diversity, lack of interest in reading and lack of effectively study strategies. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) (2022), Chief Examiner’s report on Literature-in-English observes that adequate attention has not been given to the teaching of literature because effective instructional techniques are not often used by teachers during teaching-learning process. According to Ugwu (2020) the rate at which student fail Literature-in-English which is getting worse each year indicates that there is a problem of teaching-

learning process. Danner and Musa (2019) and Dahiru (2020) blame it on the use of lecture method which is the conventional way of teaching Literature-in-English in Nigeria.

Lecture method is regarded as the oldest method of teaching (Kapur, 2020). It is the traditional method of teaching where the lecturer (teacher) transmits information in autocratic fashion to passive student listeners (Alorvor, 2014). The method is teacher-centred as it does not permit active participation of the students in learning process. However, the method allows the teacher to present his lesson to a very large class without interruption from the students who are just passive listeners. It is indeed not an effective teaching method that enhances students' performance. The method does not give feedback to the teacher/lecturer about what the students have learnt and the extent to which they have learnt. This is why Uzoegwu (2017) remarks that if the teacher must use this method, he/she should plan properly and punctuate the lecture with suitable demonstrations and/or use media to make the lesson/lecture effective. Lecture method has remained the conventional method of teaching Literature-in-English. However, Reutzel and Cooter (2023) suggest that teachers should often adopt various teaching techniques to improve students' performance.

On the strength of that Literature circles and book clubs are proposed as some of the techniques that could enhance students' performance in Literature-in-English. It is also on that basis that there is a dire need to investigate the effect of literature circles and book clubs on students' performance in Literature-in-English.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The poor performance of students in Literature-in-English at various Academic levels has always been a thing of concern to all and sundry. Students' recurring abysmal performance is often blamed on wrong use of instructional techniques in the pedagogical practices by teachers/lecturers as students often find it difficult to appreciate literary works, have a deep understanding of literary concepts and knowledge of recommended texts, lack exposure to literary diversity, inability to identify literary devices and decipher literal and implied meanings of artistic works among others when faced with such tasks during examinations.

Students' poor performance negatively affects their overall language development. This is indeed a serious problem. As a way forward to this recurring decimal, the researcher sought to investigate if literature circles and book clubs could enhance students' performance in Literature-in-English among polytechnics and colleges of education students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study intended to investigate the effects of literature circles and book clubs on ND1 & NC1 students' performance in Literature-in-English in Benue state, Nigeria.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the difference in the performance of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method.
2. Ascertain the difference in the performance of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method.

### **Literature Review:**

This study will be anchored on the theory of social constructivism by Vygotsky (1968). The theory explores the Vygotskian perspectives on the interaction as a collaborative task.

Literature circles are structured and student-led discussions that focus on specific aspects of a literary text like character, plot, setting, theme and diction among others. They are a group of students who share roles while reading a selected literature text. The reading group often consists of 4 or 5 people where students with different academic success levels and reading abilities voluntarily come together to read literary texts such as novels,

stories or expository texts such as essays, articles, or textbooks they like and share their reading experiences with each other (Karatay, 2017). Each student in a literature circle has a different role such as summariser, questioner, connector, or illustrator and prepares a task based on their role. From the sitting arrangement, members of the group sit in a semi-circle or full circle from facing one another to pave way for easy eye contact that is where literature circles derive their nomenclature. In literature circles, every group member reads the same text, takes part in the conversation and presents his or her reading task after the conversation. Karatay (2017) strongly believes that literature circles activities are meant to help students in the acquisition of skills such as text analysis, making of guesses, drawing of conclusions, critical thinking, speaking, writing, enhancing vocabulary and improving independent reading desire. Apart from the collaborative learning opportunity that literature circles provide, students learn to socialize, assign reading responsibilities equally and cross-fertilize ideas which help them in no small measure to improve their understanding, learning abilities, analysis, communication, academic performance and achievement.

Literature circles also give students the opportunity to direct and guide their own learning by themselves while the teacher simply serves as a Facilitator. Thus, literature circles increase quality talk, meaningful discussion and critical thinking skills among students (Young & Mohr, 2016). It is indeed an effective instructional technique which allows students of the same group or like minds to organise themselves and assign different roles to one another while reading selected literature texts such as plays, poetry, novels and so on. The techniques is student-centred and provides the students with the opportunity to understand deeply what they have read through structured discussion and extended written response. The students also enjoys a common experience, form different interpretations across layers of meaning and can positively contribute and response to important discussions within the reading circles (Fletcher, 2018). Thus, Literature cycles as an instructional technique is good enough to enhance students' performance in Literature-in-English because of its ability to provide avenues for students to not only read but discuss and write summaries and illustrations of the texts they read (Ochogwu & Agule, 2023)

On the other hand, book clubs are reading groups usually consisting of several people who come together to read and discuss books based on agreed topics (Abimbola & Aramide, 2023). They are formed by students who volunteer to read a certain book and so meet regularly to discuss the book (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). It is on that basis that McComb and Saunders (2023) describe book clubs as an excellent teaching and literacy strategy that gives students choice of the book to read, choice of book club style, choice of what to talk about in the club meeting and choice of what to share with the class about their book. Book clubs are usually non-formal learning for students who meet on a regular basis to have discussions about specific parts of the book that each of them has read. This provides a rich opportunity for them to discover their interests, learning abilities and encourage exploration among them. The students share information by themselves and this makes the teacher become only a facilitator rather than a lecturer (Shoemaker, 2020). Teaching and learning through this strategy is more beneficial to the students than the conventional method. According to Ray (2019), book clubs helps students to discover books of interest and the discovery of exciting genres makes them more inclined to spend more time exploring the reading of such genres. Forrest (2011) believes that book clubs help students to be accountable, enhancing comprehension of facts and ideas presented in the reading as participants are allowed to contribute meaningfully in their discussions. Above all book clubs enhance vocabulary development as students are encouraged to benefit from learning the meaning, synonyms and antonyms of the words. The result of good writing and research skills is encouraged at the book clubs as the participants desire to know more about what is read and discussed (Abimbola & Aramide, 2023.)

Books clubs as teaching-learning strategy therefore gives the students ample opportunities to choose any book of their choice for reading as a group but not necessarily literature texts. Book clubs do not assign formal roles to its members like literature circles. They are more informal and flexible than literature circles. Besides, the books selected for reading and discussion could be on any topics or subjects unlike literature circles that are only concerned with literature texts. The biggest difference between them is that book clubs primarily focus on comprehension of the story while literature circles explores not only comprehension but also other aspects of literature such as author's words and the reader's connection to the story.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method?
2. What is the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method?

### **Hypotheses**

These null hypotheses, which guided the study, were tested at a 0.05 alpha level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method.

### **Research Method**

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design of a non-randomised pretest, posttest with a control group. Three non-equivalent groups were assigned to literature circles, book clubs, and lecture method. The study was conducted in four tertiary institution of Federal Polytechnic Wannune, Akperan Orshi Polytechnic Yandev Gboko, Collage of Education Kastina Ala and College of Education Oju all of Benue State, Nigeria. A sample study population of 2956 comprised of NC1(S) and ND1 students respectively was drawn across the research schools using Purposive sampling techniques.

The instrument for data collection was the researcher's self-made Students' Literature-in-English Performance Test (SLPT). The SLPT contained four sections, namely: A, B, C, and D made up of biodata like sex in sections A, African and Non-African Drama in B, African and Non-African Poetry in C, African and Non-African Prose in D respectively. Sections B-D had four questions each. Students were required to answer only one question from each section, making a total number of three questions. All the questions carried equal marks of 20% each. Six lesson plans designed with activities and instructional materials used for teaching Literature-in-English using literature circles and book clubs were used as treatment for both groups to avoid bias, while lecture method had no treatment. The SLPT was validated by three experts. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.92.

Three trained Literature-in-English teachers were co-opted to assist in the task of data collection during the intervention period. This involved the administration of pretest, treatment, and post, which lasted for eight weeks. Pretest was administered in the first week while treatment lasted for six weeks and the posttest took place in the eighth week.

Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviations to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. In making valid decisions, the hypotheses were rejected where the probability value was less than the significant value.

### **Results**

#### **Research Question One**

What is the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method?



**Table 1: Mean Performance Scores and Standard Deviations of Students Taught Literature-in-English Using Literature Circles and Those Taught Using Lecture Method.**

Techniques	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Literature circles	46	13.64	6.354	36.89	5.668	23.25
Lecture method	50	11.23	3.898	21.88	6.129	10.65
Mean Difference		2.41		15.01		12.6

Table 1 shows the mean performance scores and standard deviations of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method. It reveals that the pretest mean performance scores of the students in the literature circles is 13.64 with a standard deviation of 6.354, while the lecture method had a mean performance score of 11.23 with a standard deviation of 3.898. At posttest, literature circles had a mean performance score of 36.89 with a standard deviation of 5.668, while the lecture method had a mean performance score of 21.88 with a standard deviation of 6.129. The mean gain for the literature circles was 23.25, while the lecture method gained 10.65. The difference in mean gain of the two groups was 12.6 in favor of literature circles.

### Research Question Two

What is the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method?

**Table 2: Mean Performance Scores and Standard Deviations of Students Taught Literature-in-English Using Book Clubs and Those Taught Using Lecture Method.**

Techniques	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Book Clubs	45	14.32	7.351	38.99	6.967	24.67
Lecture method	50	12.03	4.681	19.88	5.137	7.85
Mean Difference		2.29		19.11		16.82

Table 2 shows the mean performance scores and standard deviations of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method. It reveals that the pretest mean performance scores of the students in the book clubs is 14.32 with a standard deviation of 7.351, while the lecture method had a mean performance score of 12.03 with a standard deviation of 4.681. At posttest, book clubs had a mean performance score of 38.99 with a standard deviation of 6.967, while the lecture method had a mean performance score of 19.88 with a standard deviation of 5.137. The mean gain for the book clubs was 24.67, while the lecture method gained 7.85. The difference in mean gain of the two groups was 16.82 in favor of book clubs.

### Hypotheses One

There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method.

**Table 3: ANCOVA Tests of Effects of Literature Circles and Lecture Method on Students' Performance in Literature-in-English.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	6476.092a	2	3638.046	62.1	.000	.468
Intercept	6384.385	1	6384.384	143.261	.000	.464
Pre SLPT	22.132	1	22.132	.429	.414	.004
Techniques	6019.480	1	6019.480	136.245	.000	.665
Error	4464.414	94	41.442			
Total	360639.00	96				
Corrected Total	12940.606	95				

a. R Squared = .768 (Adjusted R Squared = .572)

Table 3 presents an ANCOVA report on the effects of literature circles and lecture method on students' performance in Literature-in-English. Results from the table reveal that ( $F(1, 94) = 136.245$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Since  $P$  is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method. The Partial Eta Squared of 0.665 was obtained for the techniques, meaning that 66.5% of the students' performance scores can be attributed to the techniques used in teaching literature-in-English.

### Hypotheses Two

There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method.

**Table 4: ANCOVA Tests of Effects of Book Clubs and Lecture Method on Students' Performance in Literature-in-English**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	7576.091a	2	4738.056	72.1	.000	.578
Intercept	7385.385	1	7385.385	143.261	.000	.575
Pre SLPT	22.132	1	22.132	.529	.515	.005
Techniques	7019.580	1	7019.580	237.157	.000	.578
Error	5464.515	94	51.552			
Total	370739.00	95				
Corrected Total	12940.606	95				

a. R Squared = .235 (Adjusted R Squared = .356)

Table 4 presents an ANCOVA report on the effects of book clubs and lecture method on students' mean performance scores in Literature-in-English. Results from the table reveal that ( $F(1, 94) = 237.157$ ;  $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Since  $P$  is less than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ), the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method. The Partial Eta Squared of 0.578 was obtained for the techniques, meaning that 57.8% of the students' performance could be attributed to the techniques used in teaching the students Literature-in-English.

### Discussion of Findings

This study investigated whether literature circles and book clubs could enhance students' performance in Literature-in-English in the Polytechnics and Collages of Education of Benue State, Nigeria.

Findings from the study revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using literature circles and those taught using the lecture method. The post mean performance scores of the students in the experimental group was higher than their counterpart in the control group. Findings proved the efficacy of literature circles over the traditional lecture method. This implies that Literature-in-English can be taught better using literature circles because the technique enhances students' thinking process, efficacious communication skills, and brilliant academic performance. The finding agrees with those of Karatay (2017), Ocho-gwu and Agule (2023) who confirmed in their separate studies the efficacious nature of literature circles. The finding also corroborates findings of Irawati (2016), Tosun and Dogan (2020) and Apata (2021) who revealed that literature circles have significant improvement on students' reading comprehension.

Similarly, the finding revealed that there is significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Literature-in-English using book clubs and those taught using the lecture method. Students exposed to book clubs greatly outperformed their counterparts in the lecture method. This implies that students' performance would be greatly enhanced in Literature-in-English if taught using book clubs. This finding corroborates with Whittingham and Huffman (2009) who revealed that book clubs have a positive effect on students' attitudes in reading. Finding also supports Polleck (2011) whose study showed that book clubs promote academic literacy learning and the competencies of social-emotional learning. The finding aptly corroborates with the findings of Reister (2020) who reveals that book clubs can improve students' reading motivation and are used as promotion tools to influence reading culture among reluctant readers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Literature has numerous benefits to education, language, and human development. It has to be properly taught to enhance students' overall performance and achievement in the tertiary institution of learning. Based on findings, it is concluded that literature circles and book clubs enhance students' performance in Literature-in-English far more than the lecture method. Therefore, students' abysmal performance in Literature-in-English could be overcome if Literature-in-English teachers adopt literature circles and book clubs. On that note, it is recommended that:

- I. Literature-in-English teachers/lecturers could adopt literature circles and book clubs as teaching techniques to help students enhance their comprehension and performance.
- II. Educational administrators, teaching professional bodies and proprietors of schools should organise and sponsor workshops and seminars to educate teachers/lecturers on the positive effects of literature circles and book clubs.
- III. Curriculum planners should incorporate the use of literature circles and book clubs into the components of the curriculum of pre-service teachers.
- IV. Authors of language and Literature-in-English textbooks should also incorporate Literature circles and book clubs in their textbooks and vividly explain how the techniques could be used to teach language and Literature-in-English.

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