

# Improving the NCE English Language Students' Achievement in Prose Fiction through Cooperative Strategy

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## Abstract

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*This paper determined the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Strategy on the achievement of the English Language preservice teachers in Prose Fiction. This study adopted a pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. The participants for this study were 120 200 Level Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students. The instruments used for the study. Were Prose Fiction Achievement Test ( $r=0.82$ ) and Instructional Guides. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 alpha level. Findings from the study indicated that Cooperative Strategy had the higher level of potency in influencing the achievement of Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students in Prose Fiction than Lecture Method. It is, therefore, recommended that cooperative strategy should be employed by teachers to stimulate the interest of learners in prose fiction*

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, Effectiveness, Literature-in-English, Prose fiction

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## Introduction

In the quest to pursue and be sure of the quality of pre-service teachers' preparation, a heart-probing question on the quality of preparation of pre-service teachers was raised as follows: how adequate and competent are the trainers of English language teachers in teacher training colleges, distance-learning programmes, Colleges of Education and Universities in Nigeria? Eno, Oden, Egbe and Ebuta (2012) assert that if the quality level of teachers of teachers can be doubted, then there is a grave problem. Notwithstanding this comment, the supervisory agencies of all the institutions of higher learning where teachers are trained, regularly monitor and moderate the curriculum of the programmes in order to ensure quality. Equally, for quality to be established and sustained, scholars who are teachers in all these institutions regularly update themselves by engaging in further studies and attending conferences and workshops. Hence, the submission may be objective or subjective.

On the teaching of the prose aspect of Literature in English which is the main focus of this study, Adeogun (2008) found it regrettable that methods used are grossly inadequate while Ogunaike (2002) stated that literature teachers used no specific method to teach in the prose class.

Without being unnecessarily judgmental and un-objective, there are many factors that could have made the situation remain. For instance, large population of students in a class where more interactive strategies could not be manipulated would be greatly denied, though; the teacher recognizes there are such other effective strategies.

Literature-in-English through which Prose Fiction is studied is an important subject in the school curriculum which demands a high level of attention from both teachers and learners at all levels of the Nigerian system of education. Considering the general attributes of literature as a work of art, it is a social instrument whose importance is unique in human history because it expresses society's views and actions in retrospect (Oladunjoye, 2012). It expresses culture, attitudes, values and norms of the society dealing with people's level of tolerance, joy, anger, sorrow, pride, frustrations, concerns, fear, love and displeasure in the language understood by the people. It develops their social outlook, religious, political, and educational orientations. Despite this array of the importance, the Nigerian society starting from the schools, have not taken advantage of its importance. This, perhaps, is as a result of the low level of people's reading culture. Adekola (2012) observed that reading culture is generally

poor and that people do not engage in active reading anymore and it is painful. She concluded that majority of school children are failing to read, while some are unable to read. Hence, it becomes a critical subject to be focused on in research activities among the school subjects in order to make the society explore and benefit more of reading's utilitarian attributes.

Pradono, Astriani, and Moniaga (2013) observe that teachers still use the old traditional method of teaching where the teaching and learning process is dominated with one-way communication mode. In this mode, the lecturer explains the teaching materials meanwhile the students take the notes and try to comprehend. Whereas, the current agitation in the education milieu as method of teaching is concerned is interactive method of content delivery which makes learners active rather than passive participants. In the active and interactive learning, the student to a greater extent becomes a subject of educational activity, enters into dialogue with the teacher and other participants of the pedagogical process, and actively participates in the cognitive activities, performing creative, searching and problematic tasks (Rimma, Aleksandra, Marina 2016). Active learning involving interactive classroom will lead to students who have strong interest to cooperate and to involve in discussion with others. In the new digital natives' era, students want to do more activities than sitting in chair, holding a pen and books. The goal for doing this is that students are able to learn and remember better what they have learned because of the involvement (Laura, 2012). This is interactivity, which the students have the ability to respond continually. Interactivity has been identified to contribute to successful teaching and learning, hence, its need to create better environment for more active and dynamic participations of students.

Cooperative Strategy is a working team of students directed at an assignment or project demanding certain obligations from individual member including being responsible for the complete delivery of the project or assignment. Cooperative Strategy, according to Altun (2015); Prince, Felder and Brent (2007), refers to students working in team on an assignment or project under conditions in which certain criteria are satisfied, including that the team members be held

individually accountable for the complete content of the assignment or project. They explain further that relative to students taught traditionally i.e., with instructor-centred lectures, individual assignments, and competitive grading - cooperatively taught students tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, greater persistence through graduation, better high-level reasoning and critical thinking skills, deeper understanding of learned material, greater time on task and less disruptive behaviour in class, lower levels of anxiety and stress, greater intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve, greater ability to view situations from others' perspectives, more positive and supportive relationships with peers, more positive attitudes toward subject areas, and higher self-esteem. Veenman (2002) studied the implementation effect of a course on cooperative learning for student teachers. It was seen that a course on CL can have a positive effect on the cooperative instructional skills of student teachers. The majority of the student teachers subscribed to cooperative learning to achieve both academic and social goals and also showed a readiness to use cooperative learning methods in their future lessons. In Nigerian schools, there are evidences of teachers giving learners work to do in groups by assignments and projects. Equally, it is not certain that there are enough or any empirical proofs to establish that teachers in Nigeria colleges of education apply the strategy in their classes. Hence, the need to find out how effective the use of Cooperative Strategy could improve the achievement students' achievement in Prose Fiction. Hence, this study found out the effects of the use of Cooperative Strategy on the achievements of Nigeria Certificate in Education students in Prose Fiction.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The achievement level of NCE English Language students in Prose Fiction is discovered to be very low. Situation whereby students are passive and not motivated throughout classroom teaching resulting in low level achievement, and there are interactive strategies that can keep students engaged and motivated throughout learning process for higher level achievement cannot be continued. Hence, the decision of the researcher to identify and examine two interactive,

student-centred and effective strategies that would change the status-quo in the teaching and improve Nigeria Certificate in Education, English Language students' achievement in Prose Fiction. Therefore, this paper seeks to determine the effectiveness of Cooperative Strategy on the achievement of the NCE English Language students in Prose Fiction.

#### **Research Question:**

Will there be any significant post-achievement score of NCE English Language students in Prose Fiction using Cooperative Strategy?

#### **Research Hypothesis**

Ho. Cooperative Strategy will not significantly improve Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students' achievement in Prose Fiction.

#### **Literature Review**

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it (Mohammed, 2016). Several research outcomes have proven the success of cooperative learning as an instructional method regarding social skills, students' learning, and achievement across all levels from elementary through higher education. The consensus is that cooperative learning can and usually results in positive students' outcome in all domains.

A study on Effect of Cooperative Learning Strategy on Students' Achievement in Senior Secondary School by Nwogo and Anugwo (2020) showed that there exists a significant difference between the academic achievement of participants taught geometry by applying cooperative instructional strategy and those exposed to conventional method. The result revealed greater adjusted mean scores on the part of experimental group than those of the control

group. In the same vein, the results obtained by Timaji, Bolaji and Kajuru (2015) on the same subject revealed a significant difference in academic achievements among learners taught using collaborative instructional technique and those taught without it.

Akinbobola (2009) exploring how students' attitude towards Nigerian Senior Secondary School Physics could be enhanced, tested cooperative strategy along other two, competitive and individualistic strategies. The results of the study showed that cooperative learning strategy is more effective in enhancing students' attitude towards physics than competitive and individualistic strategies. Using cooperative strategy will enable the students to understand, enjoy and create more positive attitude towards Physics, so that teaching it will become more rewarding to teachers.

Alabekee, Samuel and Ossat (2015) studied the effect of cooperative learning strategy on students learning experience and achievements in mathematics showed that the students appreciated cooperative learning models than the traditional instruction in their learning experience measures. The mean and the standard deviation of the students' achievement scores administered under three experimental conditions respectively. Traditional instruction has the mean and standard deviation of 55.9 and 19.3 while cooperative learning jigsaw II and STAD model has the mean and standard deviations of 73.9, 24.6 and 75.0, 26.8 respectively. This again revealed that students had higher scores when taught with cooperative learning models than the traditional instruction. The scholars submitted further that the results of the study revealed the significance of cooperative learning in bringing a major change in the existing traditional method of instruction. Thus stressing that cooperative learning is both an enjoyable and effective teaching strategy and result in significantly higher learning gains and positive learning experience compared to traditional instruction. It provided the students opportunity to interact with their classmates and such interaction develops in them feelings of cooperation and care for others. The results were consistent with those of earlier studies comparing other cooperating learning methods against lecture/independent styles of instruction. Johnson (2009) found

students in cooperative learning settings compared to those in individualistic or competitive learning settings achieve more, reason better, gain higher self-esteem, like classmates and the learning tasks more and have more perceived social support.

### Methodology

This study adopts a pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental design. The participants for this study were one hundred and twenty (120), 200Level Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students. Six instruments were used for the study. Five instruments were used, which include a Prose Text (*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe), Participants Demographic Details Requisition Form (PDDRF), Prose Fiction

Achievement Test (PFAT), Cooperative Strategy Instructional Guide and Cooperative Strategy Group Discussion's Questions (SCGDQ). The instruments were validated as appropriate, and an index of correlated and result obtained gave a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The hypotheses were analysed using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 alpha levels.

### Results

**Research Question:** Will there be any significant post-achievement score of NCE English Language students in Prose Fiction using Cooperative Strategy?

**Table 1: Achievement in Prose Fiction Scores using Cooperative Strategy**

VARIABLES		N	Mean	S. D	Minimum	Maximum	Range
<b>Cooperative Strategy</b>	PRETEST	40	9.20	3.55	3.00	20.00	17.00
	POSTTEST		45.5	6.74	31.00	59.00	28.00
Control group	PRETEST	40	9.78	3.63	2.00	18.00	16.00
	POSTTEST		27.25	8.74	6.00	21.00	15.00
Total	PRETEST		10.67	3.55	2	21	19.00
	POSTTEST	80	20.59	3.26	6.00	59	53.00

From Table 1, it can be deduced that Cooperative Strategy group recorded the higher achievement enhancement mean gain of 35.3. In addition, after the implementation of the treatments, NCE English Language students in the Cooperative Strategy group recorded the higher post-test achievement of Prose Fiction mean score of 45.5 (S.D= 6.74), while the control group has the lower mean score of 27.25 (S.D=8.72). The table also shows that an NCE English Language student from the Cooperative Strategy group

recorded the higher post-test score of 59 marks while the lower post-test score of 6 marks was from an NCE English Language student in the Control group

### Testing Of Hypotheses

Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Nigeria Certificate in Education students' Achievement in Prose Fiction Scores according to cooperative strategy

**Table 2:** Tests of Between-Subjects Effects  
**Dependent Variable: POSTEST**

Source of Variations		Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Main Effects	Hypothesis	1894.864	1	1894.864	14.341	.052
	Error	2337.665	1	2337.665	282.790	.000
Covariates (Pre-test)	Hypothesis	278.568	1	278.568	28.141	.000
	Error	835.846	101	8.276		
Treatment	Hypothesis	2912.616	2	1456.308	176.171	.000*
	Error	958.907	116	8.266		
Total		55973.000	120			
Corrected Total		5090.992	119			

\*Indicates significance F at 0.05 level

Ho. Cooperative Strategy will not significantly improve Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students' achievement in Prose Fiction.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8854773 <sup>a</sup>	18	491.932	10.344	.000
Intercept	12732.060	1	12732.060	267.724	.000
PRE-TEST	18.023	1	18.023	.379	.540
TREATMENT	6214.652	2	3107.326	65.339	.000
Error	4803.227	101	47.557		
Total	186938.000	120			
Corrected Total	13658.000	119			

Table 2 shows a significant effect of Cooperative Strategy on the achievement of NCE English Language Students, ( $F_{(2,116)} = 176.171$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. This by implication means that the academic achievement of NCE English Language Students in Prose Fiction largely depends on the learning strategies adopted by the teachers. In Table 3, the variability of the effect or impact of the treatment i.e. Cooperative Strategy in teaching and learning of Prose Fiction, the effect size is calculated

$$\text{Eta Squared} = 1 - \text{SS}_B / \text{SS}_W$$

$$= 1 - 6214.652 / 12732.$$

$$= 1 - 0.48$$

$$= 0.52 \text{ (Medium Effect)}$$

This implies that the treatment had a medium significant effect on the learning of Prose Fiction.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed based on the seven hypothesis tested. Findings on

the first hypothesis revealed that there was significant main effect of Cooperative Strategy in the achievement of NCE students in Prose Fiction. The mean post-achievement scores differ significantly among groups exposed to the strategies. The result revealed that the difference shown was as a result of the significant difference in the scores of the students exposed to Cooperative Strategy and Control Group. Examining the result, Cooperative Strategy had the higher mean post-test achievement score while the Control Group which is the conventional strategy had no significant effect. It, thus, implies that potency of improving achievement in prose fiction lies more in Cooperative Strategy than on lecture method. It is evident also that the Cooperative Strategy was more potent than the Lecture Method. Interestingly, one likely reason for the significant differences in the achievement scores of the two groups may be that the NCE English Language students found the Cooperative strategy, relatively new and innovative compared to the Control

Group. The nature of the procedure of engaging in the strategy may also be more interesting compared to the control group.

The Cooperative Strategy showed a level of significant difference and revealed its potency in increasing achievement in Prose Fiction different than the Control Group. With Cooperative Strategy, learners are in independent group where individuals are responsible to other members of the group, while working independently in a shared part of the work which is eventually turned to the group for appraisal. Cooperative Strategy gives learners opportunity to exercise their skills freely and according to their ability without any feeling of intimidation and coercion. This result about cooperative strategy is corroborated by Johnson (2009) as he found that learners achieve more, reason better, gain higher self-esteem, learn tasks more and have more perceived social support. In the same vein, the result of Kolawole (2008) asserted that cooperative learning strategy was more effective than competitive learning strategy in teaching mathematics at the secondary school level. Therefore, cooperative strategy has proven to be potent at improving achievement in Prose Fiction.

### Conclusion

This study focused on the effects of Cooperative Strategy on Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students' achievement in Prose Fiction. Findings from the study indicated that Cooperative Strategy had the higher level of potency in influencing the achievement of Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students in Prose Fiction than Lecture Method. In summary, Cooperative Strategy has proven to be more effective than the Lecture method in improving the achievement of Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students in Prose Fiction. Therefore, Cooperative Strategy can be adopted by Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students' Lecturers in the teaching and learning of Prose Fiction.

The findings of this study underscore the fact that teaching and learning of Prose Fiction in respect of Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students should adopt the Cooperative Strategy because of the proven potency. It implies that Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language

students must be given some level of independence in searching for knowledge while the teacher takes the role of facilitator or guide in the lecture room. Also, it means that teachers of Nigeria Certificate in Education English Language students should learn and be interested in using this strategy. Since this strategy involves working in groups, the settings of the lecture-room must change, providing adequate space to allow comfort and maximum performance of all members of the groups during sessions.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of this study as discussed, the following recommendations are offered.

Cooperative Strategy is hereby strongly recommended for teaching and learning Prose Fiction in our colleges of education.

This study also recommends that Cooperative strategy employed by teachers at all levels of education system to stimulate the interest of learners generally in other genres of Literature.

It is also recommended by this study that teachers should deliberately have the knowledge of these strategies and adopt them for use in their classes.

Finally, to the management of institutions and government in the provision of infrastructure for learning, conscious and deliberate effort must be made to give preference to halls where furniture that can accommodate rearrangement and resetting for different learning activities.

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