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HARNESSING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' SOCIAL INTERACTION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: THE EFFECTS OF PEER STUDY GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

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Abstract

In conventional learning situations, students work alone to accomplish goals unrelated to those of classmates. Students' achievements are independent; for they perceive that the achievement of their learning goals is unrelated to what other students do. In peer study group situations, there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments. Students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals. Hence, students learn best when they are motivated and fully engaged in the learning process. This study adopted a pretest-posttest, control group, quasi-experimental design, with 2X2X2 factorial Matrix. Seventy (70) undergraduate social studies students were sampled from two universities in Southwest Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select

the sample. Four instruments were used for data collection. The study lasted 10 weeks. The data were analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the three stated hypotheses. Also, the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) was used to determine the magnitude of the mean scores of the different groups. The Scheffé Post-hoc Analysis was used to determine the sources of such significant difference. All the hypotheses were tested at $P < .05$ level of significance. The result showed a significant main effect of treatment on social studies students' network of friends ($F_{(1,62)} = 224.065$ $P < .05$ ($a^2 = 0.739$), social interaction with friends ($F_{(1,62)} = 730.172$; $P < .05$ ($a^2 = .902$) and academic achievement ($F_{(1,62)} = 276.459$, $P < .05$ ($a^2 = .778$) in the two universities. The students exposed to peer study group had the higher interaction means score (30.211); which was significantly more than those in the conventional strategy (15.290). Peer study group was found to be a good and variable alternative to the traditional methods of teaching. It now behooves on university lecturers, scholars, relevant government agencies and all stakeholders in the education industry to adopt peer study group instructional strategy in social studies concepts for better students' network of friends, social interaction and academic achievement.

Keywords: Peer study group instructional strategy, network of friends, social interactions, academic achievement, social studies.

Word counts: 343

Introduction

In the traditional approach to teaching, most class time is devoted to teachers' teaching while the students are largely watching and listening. The students work individually on assignments, while inter-personal social interaction is discouraged. Such teacher-centered instructional methods have repeatedly been found inferior to

instruction that involves active learning, in which students solve problems, answer questions, formulate questions of their own, discuss, explain, debate, or brainstorm during classes. Teacher-centered methods discourage social interactions among students who are supposedly to work together; most especially in social studies courses that have human's interactions as their core value and principle. There is no gainsaying in the fact that teacher-centered and subject-focused methods impinge on the social interactions of students and invariably affect their academic performance. Such methods also inhibit development of social skills in the students.

Regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught, students also retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes. In peer study group approach, students work in teams on problems and projects under conditions that ensure both positive interdependence and individual accountability. Students learn best when they are actively involved in the process. (Smith, 2004). Effective and efficient learning is facilitated when differences among learners are recognized, and attempts are made to teach different students differently. Learning is facilitated, topics are taught in depth rather than covered in breadth. Meaningful materials and meaningful tasks are also learnt more readily.

Furthermore, with peer study group, teaching and learning of social studies is influenced considerably by individual needs, aspirations, level of interest, values and motivation in the environments. Grouping and social relation develops general mutual concern and interpersonal trust among students and increases students' propensity for pro-social behaviour. This therefore suggests the overwhelming effectiveness of peer study group for promoting students' achievement and social relations (Slavin, 2003).

Olubela (2008) found that students who were initially prejudiced against one another evidenced greater interpersonal interactions in an experimental group setting than did students in competitive and individualistic settings. Students' learning goals may be structured to promote cooperative, competitive, or individualistic

efforts. In contrast to cooperative situations as found in peer study group, competitive situations in conventional methods, make students to work against each other in order to achieve a goal that only one or a few can attain. In competition, there is a negative interdependence among goal achievements; students perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other students in the class fail to obtain their goals. The result is that; students either work hard to do better than their classmates do, or they take it easy because they do not believe they have a chance to win. In conventional learning situations, students work alone to accomplish goals unrelated to those of classmates and students' goal achievements are independent. Students perceive that the achievement of their learning goals is unrelated to what other students do.

The essential components of peer study group are positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. Systematically structuring those basic elements into peer study group situations helps to ensure cooperative efforts and enables the disciplined implementation of grouping of long-term success. Peer study group is working together to accomplish shared goals. Within group activities, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. (Ajiboye, Ajitoni & Olubela, 2010)

In peer study group, class members are organized into small groups after receiving instruction from the teacher. They then work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. Group efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts (your success benefits me and my success benefits you). Recognizing that all group members share a common fate (we all sink or swim together), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (we cannot do it without you), and feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement (we all congratulate you on your accomplishment) (Maggioni, 2010).

A team member's success depends on both individual effort and the efforts of other group members who contribute needed knowledge, skills, and resources. Not one group member will possess all of the information, skills, or resources necessary for the highest possible quality presentation (Ajitoni & Olubela, 2010). The first and most important element in structuring peer study group is positive interdependence. Positive interdependence is successfully structured when group members perceive that they are linked with each other in a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds. Group goals and tasks, therefore, must be designed and communicated to students in ways that make them believe they sink or swim together. When positive interdependence is solidly structured, it highlights that:

(a) each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success and

(b) each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources and/or role and task responsibilities.

Doing so creates a commitment to the success of group members as well as one's own and is the heart of peer study group. If there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation.

Students need to do real work together in which they promote each other's success by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging, and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. There are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that can only occur when students promote each other's learning. (Ogunsanya, Ajiboye & Olubela, 2010) This includes orally explaining how to solve problems, teaching one's knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned, and connecting present with past learning. Each of those activities can be structured into group task directions and procedures. Doing so helps to ensure that groups are both an academic support system (every student has someone who is committed to helping him or her learn) and a personal support system (every student has someone who is committed to him or her as a person). It is through promoting each other's learning face-to-

face that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their mutual goals.

Moreover, Bora (2003) emphasized that social interaction is a dynamic, changing sequence of social actions between individuals (or groups) who modify their actions and reactions according to the actions by their interaction partner(s). In other words, there are events in which people attach meaning to a situation, interprete what others are meaning, and respond accordingly. Social interactions can be differentiated into:

- Accidental Social Interaction (also known as social contact) – not planned and likely not repeated. For example, asking a stranger for directions or shopkeeper for product availability.
- Repeated Social Interaction – not planned, bound to happen from time to time. For example, accidentally meeting a neighbour from time to time when walking on your street;
- Regular Social Interaction – not planned, but very common, likely to raise questions when missed. Meeting a doorman or a security guard every workday in your workplace, dining everyday in the same restaurant, etc.
- Regulated Social Interaction – planned and guided by customs or law, will definitely raise questions when missed. Interaction in a workplace (coming to work, staff meetings, playing a game), family, etc.

Social Cognitive Theory – Albert Bandura

Albert Bandura and his colleagues conducted a series of experiments using a Bobo doll. In the first experiment, children were exposed to either an aggressive or non-aggressive model of either the same sex or opposite sex as the child. There was also a control group. The aggressive models played with the Bobo doll in an aggressive manner, while the non-aggressive models played with other toys. They found that children who were exposed to the aggressive models performed more aggressive actions toward the Bobo doll afterward, and that boys were more likely to do so than girls.

In social cognitive theory, the peer group functions as an interdependent subsystem in gender differentiation not a socially disembodied one (Bandura, 1977). Experimental and field studies graphically reveal that the group stereotyping dynamics can be activated through subgroup formation on the basis of even an arbitrary characteristic, socially invested with superior or inferior value.

Social learning theory has numerous implications for classroom use. These include but not limited to the followings:

1. Students often learn a great deal simply by observing other people.
2. Describing the consequences of behaviours can effectively increase the appropriate behaviours and decrease inappropriate ones. This can involve discussing with learners about the rewards and consequences of various behaviours.
3. To promote effective modeling, a teacher must make sure that the four essential conditions exist; attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation.
4. Teachers and parents must model appropriate behaviours and take care that they do not model inappropriate behaviours.
5. Teachers should expose students to a variety of other models. This technique is especially important to break down traditional stereotypes.
6. Students must believe that they are capable of accomplishing school tasks. Thus, it is very important to develop a sense of self-efficacy for students.
7. Teachers can promote such self-efficacy by having students receive confidence-building messages watch others successful and experiences success on their own. .
8. Teachers should help students set realistic expectations for their academic accomplishments.
9. Self-regulation techniques provide an effective method for improving student behavior.

Statement of the Problem

The society has drastically become individualistic, and everyone minds his/her own things. This individualistic trend and tendency has been found to be a major contributor poor interaction, friendliness and academic performance of students, at all levels. Whereas, active participation of students in the learning process is better and preferable to inert and passive reception of knowledge. Research into the influence of peer study group on both students' interaction patterns and academic achievement is essential at this stage of educational development. Previous researches have been limited to primary and post-primary institutions. The potential impacts of peer study group are yet to be maximally harnessed, hence, the current study seeks to determine the effect of peer study group on social interactions and academic achievement of social studies students in University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State. The study has also determined the moderating effects of gender and age on students' social interactions and academic performance in the universities.

Hypotheses

Ho1. There is no significant main effect of treatment on social studies students' network of friends

Ho2: There is no significant main effect of treatment on social studies students' social interaction with friends

Ho3: There is no significant main effect of treatment on social studies students' academic achievement in the two universities

Method

This study adopted a pretest-posttest, control group, quasi-experimental design, with 2X2X2 factorial Matrix. Seventy (70) undergraduate social studies students were sampled from University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State. For the study, 300 level social studies students from both universities were sampled. The 300 level Social

Studies students of University of Ado-Ekiti, were thirty-eight (38) and their 300 level counterparts in Adekunle Ajasin University were Thirty-two (32). Social studies' students of University of Ado-Ekiti were exposed to peer study group strategy while students of Ajasin University were taught using conventional lecture method. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. Four instruments were used for data collection and were appropriately validated. These were Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT, r = 0.82), Peer Study Group Instructional Guide (PSGIG), Social Interactions Inventory (SII, r = 0.77) and Direct observation. The study lasted 10 weeks.

Summary of the Application of the Treatments

Steps	Peer Study Group Strategy	Control (Lecture)
I. Teacher presentation	(i) Teachers took attendance; (ii) gave the topic; (iii) identified sub-topics; (iv) specified learning objectives (v) chalkboard summary.	Teachers provided information. No teacher's Guide
II. Strategy	(i) Teacher assigned students of different abilities to groups (ii) Arranged class with students to facilitate interactioin; (iii) Gave the questions for group discussion. (iv) monitored and provided assistance and clarification throughout the session.	i. Teacher assigned student to groups ii. Teacher presentation and demonstration.
III. Student Activities	(i) Worked cooperatively in their learning groups; (ii) assumed assigned and rotated roles. (iii) discuss the questions and wrote group report	
IV. Evaluation	(i) Group reports presented and discussed in general class (ii) Teacher grade the reports (iii) Weekly group competition (iv) Achievement for groups recognized and rewarded	(i) A weekly test (ii) Achievement recognized and rewarded on an individual basis.
V. Assignment	The next topic given as assignment	The next topic given as assignment

The data were analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the three stated hypotheses. Also, the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) was used to determine the magnitude of the mean scores of the different groups. The Scheffé Post-hoc Analysis was used to determine the sources of such significant difference. All the hypotheses were tested at P < .05 level of significance.

Results

Ho 1. There is no significant main effect of treatment on social studies students' network of friends

Table 1: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on student's network of friends Dependent Variable: Post Network of friends

Source	Type III sum of Square	df	Means Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4048.789a	8	507.099	60.039	.000	.859
Intercept	593.493	1	593.493	70.407	.000	.471
Prentwf	135.94	1	135.941	16.127	.000	.170
Trtmt	1888.745	1	1888.745	224.065*	.000	.739
Sex	.400	1	.400	.047	.828	.001
Age	.672	1	.672	.080	.778	.001
Trtm * Sex	.937	1	737	.11	.740	.001
Trtmt * Age	19.830	1	19.830	2.352	.129	0.29
Sex * Age	7.741	1	7.741	.918	.341	.011
Trtmt * Sex * Age	14.982	1	14.982	1.777	.186	.022
Error	665.927	62	8.429			
Total	18043.000	70				
Corrected Total	4714.716	69				

a. R Squared = .859 (adjusted R Squared = .844)

Table 1 revealed that there was a significant difference in the post network of friends between students exposed to peer study group instructional strategy and those exposed to conventional strategy ($F_{(1,62)}$ = 224.065 P <. 05 (^{a2} = 0.739). This implies that peer study group increased the network of friends made. Therefore, Ho1a was rejected. Table 2 below showed the magnitude of performance across the groups.

Table 2: Estimated Marginal Mean on Network of Friends

Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Error
Contentment Strategy	38	4.764	.719
Grouping Method	32	18.04	.492
Gender			
Male	29	11.495	.597
Female	41	11.309	.612
Age (in Years)			
Below 20	23	22.841	.498
21 years & above	47	22.660	.229

Table 2 revealed that students exposed to peer study group strategy had the higher network of friends means score (18.04) than those in conventional strategy (4.764). The difference between them was said to be statistically significant.

Ho 2. There is no significant main effect of gender on social studies students'social interaction with friends.

Table 3: Summary of ANCOVA on Students' Interaction with friends Dependent Variable: Post interaction

Source	Type III sum of Square	df	Means Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4442.376[a]	8	555.297	161.208	.000	.942
Intercept	534.162	1	534.162	155.072	.000	.662
reintrt	57.957	1	57.957	57.957	.000	.176
Trtmt	2515.153	1	2515.153	730.172*	.000	.902
Sex	5.179E)-02	1	5.179E)-02	0.15	.93	.000
Age	.374	1	.374	.108	.743	.001
Trtm * Sex	2.966	1	2.966	.861	.356	.011
Trtmt * Age	4.600	1	4.600	1.335	.251	.017
Sex * Age	4.562	1	4.562	1.324	.253	.016
Trtmt * Sex * Age	2.532	1	2.532	.735	.394	.009
Error	272.124	62	3.445			
Total	54352.000	70				
Corrected Total	4714.500	69				

a. r Squared = .942 9 (Adjusted R Square = .936)

Table 3 revealed that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students' interaction ($F_{(1,62)}$ = 730. 172; P<. 05 (^{a2} = .902). This implies that students in the peer study group strategy had better and more cordial interaction than those in the conventional method. Therefore, Ho1b was rejected.

Table 4: Estimated Marginal Mean on students' Interactions with friends

Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Error
Treatment			
Conventional Strategy	38	15.290	.454
Grouping Method	32	30.211	.309
Gender			
Male	29	22.71	.383
Female	41	722.784	.391
Age (in Years)			
Below 20	23	22.841	.498
21 years & above	47	22.660	.229

Table 4 showed that the students exposed to peer study group strategy had the higher interaction mean score (30.211) which was significantly more that those in conventional strategy (15.290).

Ho 3: There is no significant main effect of age on social studies students' academic achievement in the two universities

Table 5: Summary of ANCOVA on Academic Achievement
Dependent Variable: Post Academic achievement

Source	Type III sum of Square	df	Means Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1117.725[a]	8	139.716	68.710	.000	.874
Intercept	330.560	1	330.560	162.565	.000	.673
PREINTRT	93.031	1	93.031	45.751	.000	.367
TRTMT	560.154	1	560.154	276.459*	.000	.778
SEX	.458	1	.458	.225	.636	.003
AGE	.829	1	829	.408	.525	.005
TRTM * SEX	.748	1	.748	.368	.546	.005
TRTMT * AGE	.737	1	.737	.362	.549	.005
SEX * AGE	8.354E-02	1	8.354E-02	.041	.840	.001
TRTMT * SEX * AGE	.420	1	.420	.206	.651	.003
Error	160.636	62	2.033			
Total	18864.000	70				
Corrected Total	1278.364	69				

a. r Squared = .874 (Adjusted R Square = .862)

Table 5 shows that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students academic performance ($F_{(1,62)} = 276.459$, $P < .05$ ($a^2 = .778$). therefore, Ho1c was rejected.

Table 6: Estimated Marginal Means of students' academic performance

Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Error
Treatment			
Conventional Strategy	38	10.230	.350
Grouping Method	32	17.22	.234
Gender			
Male	29	13.827	.294
Female	41	13.625	.304
Age (in Years)			
Below 20	23	13.862	.384
21 years & above	47	13.591	.176

Table 6 above showed that students exposed to peer study group strategy had the higher achievement mean score (17.222) which was significantly more than those were exposed to conventional strategy (10.230).

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of hypothesis 1 revealed that there was a significant difference in the post network of friends between students exposed to peer study group strategy and those exposed to conventional strategy ($F_{(1,62)}$ = 065 P < 05 (^{a2} = 0.739). Also that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students' interaction ($F_{(1,62)}$ = 730.172; P < 05 (^{a2} = .902). The students exposed to peer study group strategy had the higher interaction means score (30.211); which is significantly more than those in the conventional strategy (15.290). These findings corroborated those by most of the previous researches on the subject (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). They, therefore, lend support to the basic assumption of the grouping method.

These findings lend further support to earlier findings on the significance of peer study group strategy over and above the conventional of traditional method student's performances were seen to have improved better under one or more (Maggioni, 2010). Ajiboye, Ajitoni and Olubela (2010) also found a significant main effect of treatment involving two models of cooperative learning on the achievement of students in social studies.

What seems evident from the results in this current study is that peer study group has a greater potential for effective interaction in the classroom. This is important because peer study group offers the learners as individuals and together in groups, the unique opportunity to read, accept and internalize the basic social studies education concepts. It is therefore possible for the learners to work, within this strategy, at this one pace, master the subject as dictated by the accuracy of tier own responses and eventually carry such knowledge and experience to their various groups for the benefits of the other group members. The strategy equally allows learners the knowledge of immediate feedback, which serves as a great motivation in propelling learners to want to learn more.

Ajitoni and Olubela (2010) believed that in peer study group strategy, giving and receiving answers with explanation helped to obtain superior argument, which brought about change in students' network of friends, social interaction and academic achievement. This is a pointer to the existence of positive interdependence among group members which is an essential feature of group learning. That this has a very serious implication for the social interaction and academic performance in social studies education in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Social studies like other social sciences is a value-laden subject which allows for individual learners' decisions that affect learners' decision making and choice Ogunsanya, Ajiboye and Olubela (2010) further observed that if learners are then exposed to salient facts relation to social studies concepts through active participation in peer study group strategy, they will better be able to make informed and reasoned decision after due consideration, of the alternatives as presented to them in a more cognitive framework.

Another inference that could be drawn in the teaching with peer study group strategy is that groups of different size and composition could be formed either by the teachers or by the students themselves. Where group members evolve by choice of the learners, with time, the groups would tend towards heterogeneity and improved performance on the part of group members. This proposition is based on the findings of Olubela (2008).

The research evidence that informal groups composed by learners are usually heterogeneous or mixed ability, and that learners in the groups learn better in a natural company of others they socialize with. In such groups also, learners fell secured, relaxed and confident. In spite of the difference in their abilities, the learners in such groups readily interact and are willing to seek help from peers without being ashamed and offer assistance without a feeling of superiority. In the peer study group strategy, the social, psychological and academic-based needs are interwoven and catered for (Oyeleke, 2011)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study have some implications for the teaching and learning social studies as well as of other subjects in Nigeria. First, peer study group have been found to be a good and variable alternative to the traditional methods of teaching. It is not impossible, therefore, to explore the peer study group strategy to replace the face-to-face teaching practices commonly found in schools, more so when it is realized that Social Studies is not a matter of telling. These findings are pointers to the urgent need for efforts in Nigerian classrooms to be concentrated on invigorating this strategy, particularly in the teaching and learning of social studies and its allied areas. It is evident from the results of this study, the dearth of teachers, the apparent lack of adequate teachers' preparation in our schools, can be successfully overcome with the adoption of the peer study group which will result in improved students interaction and academic achievement. It now behooves on relevant government agencies and indeed all stakeholders in the education industry to prepare various grouping modules on selected social studies concepts. The results of this study have provided a basis or the advocacy for the use of the peer study group in social studies in Nigeria.

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