

EFFECTS OF DISCUSSION METHOD ON SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' ABILITY TO RESPOND TO THEME AND PLOT IN DRAMA IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of the discussion method on senior secondary students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The inability of senior secondary students to figure out the message, central ideas and plot being objectified in drama prompted this research. This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. The population consisted of 2,352 senior secondary two literature students drawn from the 22 government public secondary schools in Jos North. A sample of 151 literature students was used as intact class served as the experimental group, while the control group was made of 72 students. The instrument for data collection was the Drama Appreciation Test (EDAT) comprising objectives and essay test items adapted from WAEC and NECO past questions. The experimental group was taught the concept of theme and plot using the discussion method, while the control group was taught using the lecture method. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test for independent samples. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using test-re-test method (t-test) for independent samples. The experimental group that were taught the elements of drama-theme and plot using discussion method achieved higher scores than the students in the control group after treatment. Results of the study revealed that teaching the elements of drama using the discussion method helped the experimental group to deduce the themes and understand the plot movement and also how the writers used these elements to convey his/her message(s) in drama. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the discussion method should be integrated into teaching practices to encourage further explanations of elements of drama such as theme, plot, setting and characterization for literal, inferential and critical levels of appreciation. Secondly, drama teachers should give room for group discussions, questions and answers and encourage group activities in oral and written responses in class to help the students to form their candid opinion at the cognitive, affective aesthetic and creative levels of appreciation.

Keywords: Literature Drama, Theme, Plot, Discussion method, Drama appreciation, Senior Secondary School, Quasi-experimental Design

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a literary art form that portrays human experiences through dialogue and performance. According to Idachaba (2018) drama encompasses various elements such as theme, plot, character, setting, style and diction which collectively convey a narrative intended for reading and for theatrical enactment. In the Nigerian context, drama serves as a medium for storytelling, cultural expression, and social commentary. It reflects societal norms, values, and challenges, providing a platform for reflection and discourse. Drama plays a pivotal role in the society by educating, entertaining, and promoting cultural values. It serves as a mirror to the society, reflecting its virtues and vices, thereby fostering critical thinking and social awareness. Through dramatization, complex societal issues are simplified, making them more accessible and engaging to diverse audiences (Ogunleye, 2020).

Despite the significance of drama in promoting societal values, Nigerian secondary school students often face challenges in comprehending its fundamental elements, including theme and plot. These difficulties can be attributed to factors such as inadequate background knowledge, insufficient exposure to dramatic texts, lack of interactive teaching methods, and limited trained teachers. Traditional lecture methods may not effectively engage students in the learning process, leading to superficial understanding of dramatic concepts. Several factors contribute to students' struggles with literature, particularly in grasping the elements of drama. Traditional lecture-based approaches often result in passive learning, where students are recipients rather than active participants. This method has been shown to be less effective in fostering deep understanding and retention of literary concepts (Obasi, 2022).

The discussion method is an interactive teaching approach that encourages active participation from students through dialogue and exchange of ideas. This method fosters critical and creative thinking, enhances communication skills, and allows students to construct knowledge collaboratively (Adebayo, 2015). In the context of teaching literature, the discussion method enables students to explore different interpretations of texts, deepening their understanding and appreciation of literary elements. Research indicates that employing discussion-based strategies can significantly improve students' comprehension and analytical skills (Ugwu, Ogwu & Igbokwe, 2017). Implementing the discussion method in teaching drama, particularly concerning theme and plot, has shown to be effective in enhancing students' analytical abilities. By engaging in discussions, students can dissect the narrative structure, identify central themes, and understand character motivations. This collaborative learning environment encourages students to think critically and articulate their interpretations, leading to a more profound comprehension of reading material (Adeyemi & Adelabu, 2021).

In drama, theme refers to the underlying message or central idea that the playwright intends to convey. The theme is developed throughout the play by sets of keywords that identify the writer's subject, intention, attitude and feelings about it. Themes can be explicit or implicit, often prompting the audience to reflect on moral, ethical, or philosophical questions. Understanding the theme is crucial for students as it allows them to grasp the deeper meanings of the play and relate it to broader contexts. The theme can be suggested by the title or segment of the play and they are usually moralistic in nature ((Ugwu, Ogwu & Igbokwe, 2017). The writer utilises the theme, plot, character, and setting and style to assist the reader to deduce extract and infer the implied theme. Theme is also the idea of a literary work abstracted from its details of language, character and action.

The plot of a drama refers to the sequence of events that unfold in the narrative, encompassing the actions, conflicts, exposition, climax, anti-climax and denouncement or resolutions that drive the story forward. It is the structural framework that organises the story line, ensuring coherence and logical progression. Plot structure are categorised into linear plot, sub-plots, double parallel sub-plot and anti-clockwise technique. A well-constructed plot captivates the audience, maintains engagement and effectively delivers the playwright's intended message. Writers employ plot devices such as flashback, suspense, authorial intrusion and steam of consciousness to sustain readers' interest, give illustrations and emphasize opinions. For students, analysing the plot involves identifying key events, understanding cause-and-effect relationship and recognizing the climax and denouncement of the story. Plot establishes general atmosphere of tone, mood, setting, introduces character and supplies facts preceding action. Sub-plots increase interest provide due complications and also afford relief.

The achievement of students in literature-in-English, particularly in a version relating to the elements of drama such as theme and plot, has remained consistently poor over the years, raising significant concerns among educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. This deplorable state is highlighted in successive reports by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Chief Examiners' Reports (2023) which have repeatedly noted students' inability to effectively analyze and respond to questions on these fundamental dramatic elements. The 2023 Report indicated

that only 37.8% of candidates who sat for Literature-in- English achieved credit-level passes, with most candidates demonstrating shallow understanding and poor analytical skills in responding to questions on theme and plot. Similarly, in 2022, the report showed that only 39.2% of candidates passed Literature-in- English, with drama-related questions accounting for a significant proportion of the poor performance (Ezenwosu & Okoye, 2020).

Despite concerted efforts by stakeholders in English education, including the introduction of curriculum reforms, professional development programmes for teachers, and research into effective instructional practices, the problem still persists. Teachers continue to predominantly use traditional, teacher-centered methods of instruction, which often fail to actively engage students or foster critical thinking skills (Adedigba & Sulaiman, 2020). Literature teachers should therefore consider the following strategies of discussion:

- the discussion group may be whole class, small group or panels.
- the teachers should present the students with broad course outline (theme, plot, characterization, events, style etc.).
- give an introductory lecture- biographical, historical, literacy information.
- give the students extensive list of questions.
- ask each student to present the concept of there and plot for discussion.
- guide the students to discuss the literacy terms in class.
- relate the theme/plot to the author's message(s) as a problem solving exercise.

However, the adoption of these strategies in classrooms remains, inadequate. Teachers should be trained to facilitate discussions effectively, creating an inclusive, environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thought and interpretation. This paper aims to specifically, investigate on the impact of the discussion method on senior secondary students' ability to analyse and respond to theme and plot in drama appreciation.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the effects of discussion method on senior secondary students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama. Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. determine the extent to which discussion method would affect senior secondary school students' ability to discuss theme(s) in drama.
2. find out the extent to which discussion method would influence senior secondary school students' ability to discuss plot in drama.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent would discussion method affect senior secondary school students' ability to discuss themes in drama?
2. To what extent would discussion method influence senior secondary school students' ability to discuss plot in drama?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students exposed to and those not exposed to theme, using discussion method;
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students exposed to and those not exposed to plot, using discussion method.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study was a quasi-experimental research design. Specifically, the pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. This design allows the use of intact classes, as such, assignment of participants to treatment conditions was not on the basis

of randomization, but assignment of participants was on the basis of intact classes. The design is adopted to investigate the effects of discussion method on senior secondary students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State. The central aim of this study was to compare the gain scores of the two groups; the Experimental and the control groups.

The population of the study consisted of 2352 SSS two students: 950 boys and 1,402 girls, in the twenty two (22) government-owned public secondary schools located within the Jos North Coverage Area. Two schools were randomly selected from the 22 government secondary schools. The 151 students were randomly selected from the total population of 2352 students: 950 boys and 1,402 girls in the 2 selected schools. In each of the two schools, number of participants from two intact classes, was maintained. The sample has 79 students serving as the experimental group and 72 as the control group to constitute a total of 151 students as sample of the study. The instrument used for the purpose of data collection in this study was the Element of Drama Appreciation Test (EDAT). It was used for the conduct of both pre-test and the post-test exercises in the study, The DAT instrument was made up of two components, labeled as 50 objectives test items and 4 essay test items respectively.

To develop balanced and representative instruments, consideration was given to the discussion method for teaching the element of drama. The elements of drama instruction curriculum for treatment were aimed at building in students the drama appreciation behaviours and competencies they need to acquire and develop. Two (2) teachers of literature in English were trained as research assistants for the study. The teachers were holders of, at least, B. Ed (English), with not less than 5 years teaching experience in any government senior secondary schools in Jos North. The pre-test was administered on the first day of the first week of the treatment programme. The (EDAT) lasted for a period of one (1) hour, followed by two (2) hours break, then the essay part of (EDAT) commenced and lasted for 2½ hours on the same day. The pre-test was administered on experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught selected elements of drama: theme and plot using the discussion method while the control group did not receive any treatment rather they were taught the elements of drama using the lecture method. The treatment programme lasted for seven (7) weeks. The same test earlier administered as pre-test was administered after post-test at the same time to all the students.

The methods of data analysis employed in this research work were descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics of t-test for independent samples. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test for independent samples were used to compute and compare post-test results of the two groups to determine the degree of differences that existed between them. The test scores obtained by the students were computed using t-test analysis, and the output of the analysis was shown using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26.0.

RESULTS

The results as present are guided by the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question One

To what extent would discussion method affect senior secondary school students' ability to discuss theme in drama?

In order to answer this research question, the experimental and control groups' pre-test and post-test scores of students' ability to respond to theme in drama were compared in terms of their mean gains. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Students in their Ability to Discuss Themes in Drama

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
Experimental	79	6.81	1.72	14.59	3.41	7.78
Control	72	6.61	1.76	9.44	1.70	2.83
Mean Difference		0.20		5.15		4.95

Table 1 reveals that the pre-test mean achievement scores of the experimental and control groups were 6.81 and 6.61 respectively with their standard deviation scores of 1.72 and 1.76. The post-test mean achievement scores of the groups were 14.59 and 9.44 respectively with their standard deviation scores of 3.41 and 1.70. The overall mean difference between the mean gains of the two groups was 4.95 in favour of the experimental group. This shows that the experimental group achieved higher in their ability to respond to theme in drama than the control group after exposure to discussion method of teaching. This means that students who were exposed to discussion method in teaching elements of drama achieved higher in their ability to respond to theme in drama than those who were taught with conventional method.

Research Question Two

To what extent would discussion method influence senior secondary school students' ability to discuss plot in drama?

In order to answer this research question, the experimental and control groups pre-test and post-test scores of students' ability to respond to plot in drama were compared in terms of their mean gains. The result of the analysis was presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Students in their Ability to Discuss Plot in Drama

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean gain
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
Experimental	79	6.51	1.80	15.05	2.33	8.51
Control	72	6.26	1.96	8.92	1.93	2.66
Mean Difference		0.25		6.13		5.85

Table 2 reveals that the pre-test mean achievement scores of the experimental and control groups were 6.51 and 6.26 respectively with their standard deviation scores of 1.80 and 1.96. The post-test mean achievement scores of the groups were 15.05 and 8.92 respectively with their standard deviation scores of 2.33 and 1.93. The overall mean difference between the mean gains of the two groups was 5.85 in favour of the experimental group. This shows that the experimental group achieved higher in their ability to respond to plot in drama than the control group after exposure to discussion method of teaching. This means that students who were exposed to discussion method achieved higher in their ability to respond to plot in drama than those who were taught with conventional method.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students exposed to and those not exposed to instruction in Theme, using discussion method.

Table 3 presents the post-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups with respect to their ability to respond to theme.

Table 3
Summary of t-test Analysis of the Difference in Post-test Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups in their Ability to Respond to Theme in Drama

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Experimental	79	14.59	3.41	1.49	11.557	0.000	Significant
Control	72	9.44	1.70				

P<0.05

From the Table above, we can observe that N (sample of students) = 79 for experimental group while N (Sample of Students) = 72 for the control groups, \bar{X} = 14.59 and 9.44 for experimental and control group respectively. Calculated t value = 11.557, df = 149 and p = 0.000. This shows that there was a significant difference between the two groups, the experimental and the control groups. We therefore reject the null hypothesis, since 0.00 was less than 0.05.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of students that were exposed to and those not exposed to instruction in Plot, using discussion method.

Table 4 presents the post-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups with respect to their ability to respond to plot.

Table 4
Summary of t-test Analysis of the Difference in Post-test Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups in their Ability to Respond to Plot in Drama

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Experimental	79	15.05	2.33	1.49	17.554	0.000	Reject Ho ₂
Control	72	9.44	1.70				

P<0.05

From the Table above, we can observe that N (sample of students) = 79 for experimental group while N (Sample of Students) = 72 for the control groups, \bar{X} = 15.05 and 8.92 for experimental and control group respectively. Calculated t value = 17.554, df = 149 and p = 0.000. This shows that there was a significant difference between the two groups, the experimental and the control groups. We therefore reject the null hypothesis, since 0.00 was less than 0.05.

DISCUSSION

Pre-test results in all the aspects of drama appreciation before exposure to theme and drama using the discussion method showed that the SS two were unable to discuss writer's use of theme and plot to convey their messages in drama. The pre-test result showed a significant low level of performance in the pretest score of the experimental and control groups. Teaching of the elements of drama, theme and plot using the discussion method was very effective and helpful in aiding the students to respond positively to drama appreciation. After the treatment the post-test result indicated a significant difference in the achievement mean scores of the overall result of the experimental group students taught elements of drama using discussion method over the control group who were taught using conventional method.

The study investigated the effects of the discussion method on senior secondary students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama in Jos North, Plateau State. The findings revealed that students who were exposed to theme and plot using the discussion method achieved higher

in their ability to respond to the plot in drama than those taught with the conventional method. Similarly, the result showed that students exposed to the discussion method performed better in their ability to respond to the theme in drama compared to those who received conventional teaching.

The findings of this study align with the study by Adepoju (2018), titled "The Effects of the Discussion Method on Students' Achievement in Literary Studies in Public Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria." Adepoju's study revealed that the discussion method significantly improved students' understanding of the plot and themes in prose and drama compared to the traditional lecture method. Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with those of Alabi (2020), who investigated the impact of the discussion method on students' engagement and academic achievement in English literature in Kwara State, Nigeria. Alabi found a significant improvement in the ability of students in the experimental group to critically analyze and interpret dramatic elements, confirming the effectiveness of the discussion method in enhancing comprehension and critical thinking skills in literature.

Summary of Findings

The study investigated the effects of discussion method on senior secondary school students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama. To achieve this objective, an experiment was conducted involving pre-test and post-test to assess the students' abilities in responding to drama. Based on the data analysis, the findings revealed that;

1. The pre-test results showed that there was near-equivalence in the element of drama achievement test (EDAT) scores in both the experimental and control groups before treatment.
2. The pretest scores of both the experimental and control/groups also indicate a significantly low level of performance in the text scores of drama appreciation.
3. Students who were exposed to the discussion method in teaching elements of drama, theme and plot achieved higher in their ability to discuss the writer's use of theme to convey their messages in drama than those who were taught using the conventional method.
4. Students who were exposed to the discussion method in teaching elements of drama achieved higher in their ability to discuss writer's use of plot to convey their messages in drama than those who were taught using the conventional method.
5. The use of discussion method significantly enhances students' ability to analyse the sequence of events and plot structure and its importance in drama.
6. Students in the discussion method group demonstrated an improved ability to interpret and analyze the underlying messages (theme) conveyed in dramatic texts.
7. Thus it can be strongly argued that the discussion method should be adopted and applied to drama classroom to teach elements of drama and other drama concepts to help develop drama appreciation skills in secondary schools in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that the discussion method has significant and positive effects on senior secondary students' ability to respond to theme and plot in drama. The study demonstrated that the discussion method encourages collaborative learning and critical thinking, which improved students' comprehension and analytical skills in drama. Specifically, the discussion method fostered deeper understanding and retention of plot structure and theme interpretation.

Furthermore, the discussion method was found to provide a more engaging and interactive learning environment than the conventional teaching approach, thereby enabling students to develop interpretive and analytical abilities in drama. This highlights the potential of the discussion method in addressing deficiencies in students' responses to drama elements. Several factors contribute to the effectiveness of the discussion method, including the teacher's facilitation skills,

students' active participation, the relevance of the texts used, and the teacher's ability to create a supportive environment for open dialogue and inquiry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should adopt the discussion method as a regular instructional strategy for teaching elements of drama, as it has been proven to significantly improve students' analytical abilities in responding to theme and plot.
2. Curriculum planners should incorporate the discussion method as a core instructional strategy in literature and drama components of the curriculum, emphasizing its role in developing students' critical thinking and interpretative skills.
3. Teachers should encourage group discussions and peer interactions during drama lessons to allow students to share diverse perspectives and collaboratively analyze dramatic texts.
4. Adequate teaching aids, such as drama scripts, videos, and other multimedia resources, should be made available to support the discussion method and enhance students' engagement and understanding.
5. Teachers should ensure that drama lessons provide opportunities for students to critically engage with both plot structure and thematic content through guided discussion, reflective exercises, and intuitive process of inquiry that explores themes and plot structure.

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