

# Group Work and Substitution of Words in Senior School

## Certificate English Comprehension Examination

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### **Abstract**

*This study was conducted on 50 participants, all students at the Senior Secondary level. The purpose was to generate pedagogy for improved teaching of a difficult aspect of comprehension—word substitution. Word substitution is expected to be a reflection of extensive reading as it has to do with how much of vocabulary reservation the candidate possesses and how best he is able to use them. Unfortunately, not many students find this aspect interesting possibly because of the drop in attitude to reading. The researcher, therefore, experimented with Group strategy to find out if working as a group could indeed improve the teaching of word substitution and help more students acquire the skills that would make them work more independently and successfully in tackling comprehension questions. All the four research questions were treated to favor group work and the only one null hypothesis was rejected. Group work is widely recommended for words substitution but learner's autonomy is equally encouraged.*

### **Keywords**

*Substitution, Group, Strategy, Comprehension, Pedagogy*

### **1. Introduction**

English is without doubt the actual universal language; it is the world's second largest native language Carlos (1995). Although Nigeria is adopting it majorly for her business, administration and education purposes, it has not been accepted as a lingua franca. This language is one of the core subjects which serves as a medium of instruction in all subjects including itself (Oladunjoye, 2005) in our secondary schools.

The post primary education in Nigeria is a six-year secondary education system; a three-year Junior Secondary and a three-year Senior Secondary. The Senior Secondary is examined through Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examination Council. The alternate examination of the same status in Nigeria is conducted by the National Examination Council (NECO). There is also the General Certificate of Education (GCE); also of the same status, and conducted by the two bodies. All the four examinations run from late March to early August every year with WAEC SSCE coming first and NECO GCE coming last. It is hoped that

thousands of candidates desiring to have a place in a Nigerian university would have their complete papers in at least two sittings from the various examination options prior to the September beginning of any academic session.

In all the four examinations, English is designed to test students' ability to express themselves in at least two (reading and writing) of the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). Thus, candidates are given opportunity to choose one out of six continuous writing examination, covering Narrative, Argumentative, Explanatory, Descriptive, Formal and Informal letter writing. There are two comprehension passages, both of which must be attempted and a summary passage to be tackled. All these go as one paper. The second paper is the Lexis and Structure with Oral English which is actually an alternative to orals because it does not involve tape test or listening task.

This paper is concerned with an aspect of comprehension question that has to do with words' substitution or replacement which a lot of students fail.

The report of WASSCE 2011 by the Chief Examiners reveals that one of the major problems students encounter in the comprehension passage test is poor understanding of what the questions demand. They also identify the problem of reading which also contributes to the failure of many students. According to Ekpu (2005), Omojuwa (2005), Udose and Ukpu (2005), reading is making meaning from texts. The interpretation is that a poor reader, who finds reading boring will have comprehension problem. When such a person reads a passage, they have wrong interpretation and give wrong answers which culminate in failure. Also, the Chief Examiners (2006) report show that one of the aspects of English comprehension passage exercise which students fail most is words replacement due to lack of interest in reading (reading over the passage to contextualise their choice of words substitution).

Tracing the roots of failure in Nigerian schools is not a mirage as some people may think. Effective teaching is cautioned by holistic factors. Nigeria classrooms pose challenges to proper lesson delivery and a core subject like English should not be taught without recourse to the effect of an enabling environment, requisite facilities and proven methods. According to Maduabum (2004), one of the challenges of secondary schools is large classroom which can impede learning exercise; some students can get lost in the crowd. Abioye (2010) spoke in line with this, that the geometric progression of admitted students into secondary schools is on increase scale, without corresponding provision of facilities and even staff recruitment.

The implication of the above is that there is hardly a time we have enough staff to handle the number of students available. Group methods could readily come in to confront a daunting topic like substitution of words.

Group work involves students working collaboratively on set tasks in or out of the classroom. It includes any learning and teaching tasks or activities that require students to work in group. The University of Sydney 2002-2013 academic researchers recommend group work to enhance both the teaching and learning of words replacement or substitution. This strategy involves an expert student on a particular topic (substitution of words), sharing frequently his expertise topic with others in the group

(Silberman, 1996). By the time those students will attempt such a similar exercise individually there will be rapid improvement in their academic performances (Jaques, 2000).

### *1.1 Statement of Problem*

Students' academic performances are not encouraging enough on substitution of words in English comprehension. This study is to discover the effect of group work on substitution of words in SSCE English examination in senior secondary schools. It examines the effect of group work done individually and in group forms.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

This study aims at:

1. Examining the effect of group work on substitution of words in comprehension passages
2. Ascertaining students' academic performance on individual work in English comprehension passages with specific reference to substitution of words exercise
3. Determining the best method of teaching and attempting English comprehension passages on substitution of words in SSCE English examination.
4. Ascertaining the difference between students' academic performance while using group work and individual methods to attempt substitution of words exercise

### *1.3 Hypothesis*

There is significant effect of group work on substitution of words in comprehension passages.

### *1.4 Research Questions*

Four research questions were posed in the study:

- (a) Does group work have any effect on students' ability in attempting comprehension passages on substitution of words?
- (b) Does individual work have any effect on students' performance in substitution of words in English comprehension?
- (c) Which is the best method of attempting substitution of words exercise in English comprehension?
- (d) What are the degrees of differences between students' academic performances on group work and individual work in English comprehension passage substitution of words?

## **2. Brief Literature Review**

The task of a modern teacher, or better still, a teacher in a modern time, is to seek best practice. Though no particular method has been found to be wholly effective in pursuing teaching and learning at any stage of classroom work, advocates of group work and language teaching believe that appropriate application of group work—group discussion (Gross Davis, 1993), collaborative learning (Panitz, 1997), group-re-group (Oladunjoye, 2005), cooperative language learning (Slavin, 1980) etc. could make a lot of difference when applied in a copious resource setting.

Advocates of group work believe the strategy carries with it abundant motivation, active learning, critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills all of which require careful and proper

planning to work effectively (Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, 1991).

Group work, from whichever angle we look at it, is based on constructivism; a theory that promotes dynamic knowledge, dynamic world and the unlimited ability of both teacher and learner to both live and explore available resources to the maximum. Group work from the perspective of Constructivists includes discussion of specific concepts, problems and scenarios (Slavin, 1995), reciprocal teaching that gives room for questioning, summarizing, clarifying and predicting (Driscoll, (2005), and situated or active learning that promotes learning in meaningful context (Maddux, Johnson, & Willis, 1997).

Problem of large classes and inadequate provisions of competent teachers in secondary schools are some of the menaces posing challenges to effective teaching of English comprehension passage (including words replacement) in many Senior Secondary Schools. Therefore, Oladunjoye (2012) adopted a combination of Communicative English, Collaborative Approach and Individual Learner Autonomy altogether to make learners identify their learning strength, improve their own learning strategies and develop as independent language learners irrespective of their socio-cultural backgrounds, age, gender or academic standard.

He further stated that in tackling the problems with Comprehension, students work in groups discussing topical issues or analysing printed passages from their text books. They could also be asked to compare similar newspaper reports from different media. At another time, story books were distributed to them as part of which they were expected to read first individually (within a group or peer) and later to be discussed. Presenters were to be appointed from each group who would come to the front of the class to share the group's ideas about author's style, literary devices, setting of the story or the plot. From focusing on linked ideas in literature stories and the media, students were guided to transfer their knowledge, experience and comprehension ability to addressing examiners' questions in English Comprehension.

### **3. Methodology**

A pre and post-test quasi experimental design was adopted for this study with fifty (50) participants, (25 in each group of two) in the intact class of a co-educational institution as samples. The main instrument for this research study is a comprehension passage on words replacement exercise for the two groups. The passage was subjected to face and content validity and the reliability co-efficient of the instrument was determined by the researcher who carried out test-retest in a private Senior Secondary School, apart from the one selected for study four weeks earlier.

Touching on the procedure, the researcher taught the respondents how to replace words in the given passage. Thereafter, he divided the class (50 students) into two groups; to the first group, he administered a comprehension passage on words replacement exercise to the individual twenty-five (25) students, the second group twenty-five (25 students) were splinted into five (5) sub-groups with five (5) students each as respondents. The researcher asked them to read the passage and attempt the questions under it. The specimens were collected immediately after completion in order to ensure a substantial

return. All respondents' responses were coded and analyzed as appropriate, using frequency and percentage.

#### 4. Findings

**Table 1. Distribution of Pre-test Respondents in Comprehension Passage on Substitution of Words (Individual Work)**

Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage %
Group A (No. of students passed)	13	52%
No. of students failed)	12	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, 13 respondents passed the words replacement comprehension passage while 12 respondents failed. The percentage reveals 52% and 48% respectively.

**Table 2. Distribution of Pre-test Respondents in Comprehension Passage on Substitution of Words. (Group Work)**

Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage %
Group B: No of students passed (5students in each 4 sub-groups)	20	80
No of students failed (5 students in a sub-group)	5	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, 20 respondents passed the words replacement comprehension passage while 5 respondents failed. The percentage reveals 80% and 20% respectively.

**Table 3. Distribution of Post-test Respondents in Comprehension Passage on Substitution of Words (Individual Work)**

Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage %
Group A (No of students that passed)	15	60%
(No of students that failed)	10	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, 15 respondents passed the substitution of words items in the comprehension passage while 10 respondents failed. The percentages reveals 60% and 40% respectively.

**Table 4. Distribution of Post-test Respondents in Comprehension Passage on Substitution of Words (Group Work)**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage %
Group A: Group work (No of students passed)	25	100
Group B (No of students failed)	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, 25 respondents passed the substitution of words items in the comprehension passage while no respondents failed. The percentage reveals 100% and 0% respectively.

### 5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

This study investigated four (4) research questions with one hypothesis. Data were gathered for the study through the use of an experimental research method (Test-Rest method). The results were analysed with frequencies and percentage. Results show that there is significant effect of group work on substitution of words in English comprehension. This is because almost average respondents of individual work on the comprehension passage (words replacement or substitution) failed the exercise; especially in the result of pre-test. But many of the students performed very well under group work. In all, 52% of the respondents passed the individual work while 48% failed. 80% respondents passed the group work while 20% respondents failed it, during pre-test. Then, 60% respondents passed the individual post-test while 40% failed. 100% respondents passed the group work while no respondents failed.

With reference to the research hypothesis which says there is significant difference between students' academic performance in individual work and group work on words replacement passage, this is strongly confirmed by the post test result analysed above. Simply because, during pre-test 52% of students passed the individual passage exercise while 22% failed. But after post –test 60% of students passed the individual passage exercise while 40% failed and 80% of students passed the group work exercise while 20% failed. Therefore, this analysis implies that there is significant difference between the performance of individual work respondents and that of group work's respondents. In other words, the group work respondents performed better than the individual work respondents.

In summary, it is glaring from the above analyses that there is significant effect of group work on word replacement comprehension passage because, in the pre-test individual work some of the respondents failed unlike the respondents in group work.

- It is recommended that group work in all its facets might make a great change in the teaching of various aspects of comprehension and especially in substitution of words because it will ensure:
  - i. Interaction across levels of intelligence and intellectual ability
  - ii. Possibilities of exchange of new words from the vocabulary pool of individuals and peers.

- iii. Improvement in the speed of response to questions conditions and vocabulary development.

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