

The Effects of Warm and Varying Individualized Teacher Attention (WVITA) Classroom on Students' Achievements

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of Warm and Varying Individualized Teacher Attention (WVITA) Classroom on students' Achievements. The design of the study is the within subject design. This is a variant of independent group method without a control group in which all subjects are exposed to treatment. Independent t-test and one sample t-test analyses were used to test the three hypotheses generated. The results showed significant difference in performance among high achievers and low achievers. The average achievers were too stable to provoke anxiety for any significant result ($t = 1.72, a < .05$). It was recommended that attempts should be made to engage effective teachers that can create a warm and highly interactive classroom climate, and also moderate factors that are outside the purview of the classroom for improved learning.

Keywords: WVITA, Warm, Varying, Individualized, Teacher, Attention

Introduction

The crisis in the Nigerian classroom is taking an alarming proportion. This is as a result of the harsh economic and social situation and the very slow response of government to the academic and general educational needs of learners. These intervening factors have combined to reduce the learner to a mere psychological individual which has precipitated the confusion that is obvious in the classroom today. The students carry their psychological burden to the classroom and so, desire as little contact as possible in the teaching learning intervention.

Though other natural factors do impinge on the performance of learners, the modifying and facilitating role of a teacher in the classroom is the major consideration for the study. Irrespective of the magnitude of the efforts of government, educators and parents, the effects do always manifest in the classroom. This calls for serious attention and emphasis on the teacher as a modifier and facilitator of learning. The teacher helps the learner to interact more effectively with the learning experiences. That is the central role of the teacher.

According to Postholm (2013), classroom management refers to the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task and academically productive during a class. When classroom management strategies are executed effectively, teachers minimize the behaviour that impedes learning for both individual student and group of students while maximizing the behaviours that facilitate or enhance learning. Generally speaking, effective teachers tend to display strong classroom management skills, while the hallmark of the inexperienced or less effective teacher is a disorderly classroom filled with students who are not working or paying attention. To Spencer (2018), classroom management is when a teacher exhibits complete control over their classroom through a series of strategies and techniques that encourage positive student behaviour. The practice of effective classroom management turns the classroom into the optimum learning environment for students to engage with their studies and work to the best of their ability.

Teachers do not focus on learning classroom management, because higher education programmes do not put an emphasis on the teacher attaining classroom management; indeed, the focus is on creating conducive learning atmosphere for the students. These tools enable teachers to have the resources available to properly and successfully educate upcoming generations, and ensure future successes as a nation. According to Moskowitz and Hayman (1976), once a teacher loses control of their classroom, it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to regain that control.

Several studies have shown that one major factor that can improve students' achievement is a knowledgeable and skillful teacher (Wong, 1999). He further states that classroom management is the number one factor in governing students' learning. Cawelti (1999) supports this position of Wong by stating that classroom management skills can substantially improve students' achievement. Wright, Horn and Sanders (1997) in their studies of the teacher and classroom revealed that the teacher effects are dominant factors affecting students' academic gains and that other variables have relatively little influence on academic gain. Their core belief is that "teachers make a difference" in the classroom (Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997: 57). Using two group design of pre-test and post-test to investigate the effect of Smart classroom on academic achievement of high achievers and low achievers, the study revealed that Smart classroom has a significant difference in performance. To further buttress the point, Ranjan and Rahman (2002) assert that the changes in the character of the system have made the role of the teacher even more critical than what it was earlier. The study advocates for the assessment of the teacher on the basis of learning achievement of the students. Their focus is on the classroom where primary learning takes place, and any efforts to improve the quality of the processes should ultimately be reflected here. The

monitoring and facilitating of the teaching-learning process for enhanced performance should be through suitable tools, methods and mechanisms (Ranjan & Rahman, 2002).

There is heavy reliance on achievement test as a major yardstick for assessing mastery of specified instructional domain and, of course, the extent the objective of the school system is being achieved. Perrone (2001) asserts that classroom achievement test is an essential part of the teaching process. It is for classroom level decision making regarding advancement and competency of students. The content of this assessment is often derived from textbook, course content or classroom objectives. Though the intention of administering achievement test is not to improve anxiety and frustration, it is invariably an anxiety-provoking experience to many, if not all. That notwithstanding, a well-constructed, content-valid test provides opportunity to take stock of what have been learned, and to demonstrate to ourselves and others the knowledge that has been acquired. Perrone (2001) agrees that achievement test provides the teacher with invaluable information regarding students' needs, abilities and how well the students have met the course objectives. Achievement test fosters self-confidence and positive feelings. Classroom achievement is thus "an approach designed to help teachers find out what students are learning in the classroom and how well they are learning it" (Angelo & Cross, 2010:1).

Stronge, Ward and Grant (2011) state that teachers have major influence on pupils learning, and use as the point of departure for their study, the question of what make a teacher 'good'. The finding in the study, which also relates the teachers' teaching to pupils' learning, is that the manner in which the teacher manages the class, and the teachers' personal qualities and relationship with the pupils, are the most significant factors in the work of learning in school. They conclude that the crucial factor for improvement in school and for the pupils' success is the teacher. Several studies also indicate that pupils in class where the teacher has good control of the class and also shows care for the pupils have higher cognitive achievement and more positive attitude to the subjects than pupils who do not have such teachers (Brok, Breklemans & Wulbbels, 2004). Evertson and Weinstein (2000) use the construct 'warm demanders' when they speak of teachers who are warm, attentive, caring and supportive, and who also set demands on their pupils. Such teachers balance between supporting, challenging and demanding effort from their pupils.

In their research, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) focus on the importance of teachers looking at themselves in interaction process. In this context they point to teachers' social and emotional competence and their own sense of well-being. The researchers point out that teachers with this type of competence and who experience well-being are well positioned to contribute to supportive teacher-pupil relations. They also state that such teachers may be good classroom managers and role models for the pupils

when it comes to desired social and emotional behaviour. The teacher may be able to contribute to a good class environment, which in turn contribute to a social, emotional and academic outcome of the pupils.

The purpose of this study is to establish how to manipulate classroom climate for effective learning. It is hunched that a Warm and Varying Individualized Teacher Attention (WVITA) classroom will enhance higher achievement in students than the normal classroom. The normal classroom is the usual conventional classroom setting; the principal feature of which is that the teacher dishes out facts and students listen and take down notes under relatively tense situation. It is likened to a prototype lecture method. The basic assumption here is that performance of students under this learning is the standard achievement in a normal classroom climate; while Warm and Varying Individualized Teacher Attention Classroom is a highly friendly and interactive classroom atmosphere with varying degree of teacher attention to individual needs and queries.

The significance of this study is that it contributes to the array of tools, methods, and mechanisms available to the teacher in making teaching-learning interaction in the classroom more effective in improving learning achievement and the attainment of classroom objective. It also lends itself to the general appreciation of the central role of a teacher in a classroom setting. The study therefore investigates the effect of WVITA on achievement of students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated for the investigation:

Ho1: Classroom atmosphere does not significantly influence students' academic performance.

Ho2: Academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

Ho3: Academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

Methodology

The design of the study is the within subjects design. This is a variant of independent group method without a control group. According to Joshua (2005), this design is appropriate when the subjects are few. There is no acceptable matching task with which to equate small independent groups of subject which characterized this study. Besides, within subjects design is preferred because of its convenience and efficiency which Joshua (2005) had advanced to justify the usage of this method. The investigation is a learning experiment which requires studying changes in subjects'

behaviour over time. To introduce a second group will make the design deficient. The weakness of this design is the practice effect, sometimes called stage-of-practice effects. This has however, been removed by ensuring that the subjects were not tested repeatedly.

The population of this study is made up of Diploma in Education students in the Institute of Education of the University of Calabar. The sample size is the 36 Diploma II students who enrolled for “Introduction to Special Need Learners” course. The class was tested twice in 12 weeks. The first test was administered after 6 weeks of normal teaching in the usual classroom atmosphere and the second test came after the 12th week of highly friendly and interactive classroom climate, paying individual attention to those with peculiar problems and giving assurances where necessary. The results of the test were then compared using the independent t-test analysis to test the first hypothesis and population t-test in testing the remaining two hypotheses generated.

Presentation of results

The data generated was analyzed on the basis of each of the three (3) hypotheses and the following results emerged;

Ho1: Classroom atmosphere does not significantly influence students’ academic performance.

To test this hypothesis, the academic performances of students from warm and normal classrooms were compared using independent t-test analysis. Here classroom atmosphere is categorized into warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere and normal classroom atmosphere. The result of analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of classroom atmosphere on students’ academic performance

Classroom Atmosphere	N	Mean	SD	t
Warm Classroom		7.95	1.26	
	36			4.79 *
Normal Classroom		6.26	0.97	

*Significant at 0.05, df = 34, critical t = 2.042

Table 1 show that the calculated t-value of 4.79 at 34 degree of freedom is higher than the critical t-value of 2.042 at .05 level of significance. With this result, the hypothesis

is rejected. This means that classroom atmosphere significantly influence students' academic performance. The result shows that students who studied under a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere performed better than those who studied under a normal classroom atmosphere as indicated in their mean scores.

Ho2: Academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

To test this hypothesis, the sample mean was compared with the population mean (hypothesized mean). The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: One sample t-test analysis of the academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere

Variable	N	Mean	SD	μ	t
WVITA academic achievement	36	10.39	1.60	8.96	5.36

Significance at 0.05, df = 35, critical t = 2.03

Table two shows that the calculated t-value of 5.36 is greater than the critical value of 2.03 at .05 level of significance and 35 degree of freedom. Thus the substantive hypothesis is rejected, meaning that academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere is significantly high.

Ho3: Academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

To test this hypothesis the sample mean was compared with the population mean (hypothesized mean). The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3: One sample t-test analysis of the academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere

Variable	N	Mean	SD	μ	t
Academic achievement in normal classroom atmosphere	36	10.16	2.54	9.54	1.47

Not significant at 0.05, df = 35, critical t = 2.03

Table three shows that the calculated t-value of 1.47 was obtained. This value when compared to the critical t-value 2.03 at .05 level of significance and 35 degree of freedom was found to be lower. Thus the substantive hypothesis is retained. This indicates that the academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

Summary of findings

1. Classroom atmosphere significantly influence students' academic performance.
2. Academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere is significantly high.
3. Academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere is not significantly high.

Discussion of the findings

Students in normal classroom showed a significant difference in their performance with those in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom. This is so because of the overwhelming performance effect of the high achievers on the general performance of the class. The high achievers who were highly motivated sustained this motivation and even more in a more conducive learning environment which WVITA offers. Though the teacher's attention was more directed towards bringing up the low achievers to standard, it made no significant impact on the high achievers. This is in consonance with the finding of Stronge et al (2011) that teachers have major influence on pupils' learning. The findings in the study, which also relates the teachers' teaching to pupils' learning, is that the manner in which the teacher manages the class, and the teachers' personal qualities and relations to the pupils, are the most significant factors in the work of learning in school. They conclude that the crucial factors for improvement in school and for the pupils success is the teacher. Several studies also indicate that pupils in class where the teacher has good control of the class and also shows care for the pupils have higher cognitive achievement and more positive attitude to the subjects than pupils who do not have such teachers. However, when high achievers were set apart and their performance in the normal

classroom compared with WVITA classroom, there was significant difference. This is so because the highly motivated classroom only helps the high achievers to perform better. Earlier study by Jena (2003) also supports this fact.

The result of analysis in the second hypothesis shows that academic performance of students who study in a warm and varying individualized teacher attention classroom atmosphere is significantly high. This is because they are more emotionally stable and confident about their performance level than their high and low achieving counterparts, who are ever anxious to maintain and improve their scores respectively. The result supports the findings of Jennings and Greenberg (2009) on the importance of teachers looking at themselves in the interaction process. The researchers point out that teachers with this type of competence and who experience well-being are well positioned to contribute to supportive teacher-pupil relations. They also state that such teachers may be good classroom managers and role models for the pupils when it comes to desired social and emotional behaviour. The teacher may be able to contribute to a good class environment, which in turn contribute to a social, emotional and academic outcome of the pupils.

The result of the third hypothesis indicates that the academic performance of students who study in a normal classroom atmosphere is not significantly high. Most of them perform below average and they show highly significant difference in their achievement in a normal classroom. This is because the teacher was a big interventionist in improving their performance as conscious efforts were being made by the teacher to carry along in a highly friendly and interactive atmosphere that was considered conducive for learning and learning achievement. This result confirms earlier studies by Wright, Horn and Sanders (1997) where the largest gains occurred in the lowest achievement group and Pollack and Fusoni (2015) who hold that learning is more effective and is fun through the interactive model.

Conclusion

Classroom management is at the very heart of teaching and, ultimately, affects students' learning outcomes and can have an impact on your wellbeing. Effective classroom management means a thriving learning environment and dedicated students. Unfortunately, no matter how dedicated one is as a teacher, or how passionate one is about the students and subject, this does not translate into good classroom management. In a teaching and learning process, the classroom environment created by the teacher determines how well the students will perform.

Recommendations

1) Efforts should be made to engage highly effective and professionally competent teachers in the classroom.

2) Deliberate attempts should be made by the teacher in the classroom to create a warm highly interactive but moderated by varying individualized attention to students according to needs.

3) The teacher should try to intervene in moderating factors that are outside the purview of the teaching-learning environment but which account for differences in students' achievement.

4) Conscious efforts should be made to reduce the effect of contextual variables such as class size, and classroom heterogeneity including achievement levels on students' performance.

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