

INTEGRATING STUDENTS' INTERESTS INTO LESSONS: A PANACEA FOR MAKING LESSONS RELEVANT AND WORTHWHILE TO STUDENTS IN ABA EDUCATION ZONE, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine the integration of student's interest into lessons as a panacea for making lessons relevant and worthwhile in public secondary schools in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. In order to carry out this study objectively, two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was the 1,670 public secondary school teachers in Aba Zone, Abia state, Nigeria. The sample size was 310 teachers obtained through random Sampling method. A questionnaire with 16 structured items designed by the researchers was used for data collection for this study. The questionnaire was face validated by three experts from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia state. Cronbach's Alpha technique was used in determining the reliability of the instrument and a correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. Mean statistic and standard deviations were used in answering the research questions. The z-test statistics was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study in the first instance revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean responses on teachers on the integration of learning interest into lessons. On the other hand, there was significant difference in the mean responses of teachers on government educational policies and support to students' interest in the teaching-learning content. Based on the findings, it was concluded that teachers should keep integrating students' interest into their classroom instructional activities. Again, the government needs to make legislations to promote the integration of students' interest into the school curriculum. It is recommended among others that both teachers and the government should make lessons worthwhile, Comprehensive and holistic to evoke students' interest.

KEYWORDS: Integration, Students' Interest, Panacea, Relevance, Government Education Policies, Public Secondary Schools, Support, Teaching-Learning Content.

INTRODUCTION

The term interest can be described in two distinct (though often co – occurring) experiences: an individual's momentary experience of being captivated by an object as well as more lasting feelings that the object is enjoyable and worth further exploration. Generally, when students are interested in an academic topic, they are more likely to go to class, pay attention, become engaged, take more courses, as well as process more information effectively and ultimately perform well (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). Students who discover academic interests in high school and college are better prepared for satisfying careers. Interest is a powerful inspirational process that energises learning and guides academic and career trajectories (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Educational policies can help instructors develop effective learning contents thereby helping students to develop interest.

Interest is therefore, both a psychological state characterised by increased attention, effort, and effect, experience in a particular moment (situational interest), as well as enduring predisposition to reengage with a particular object or topic over time (individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). This duality not only highlights the richness of the interest concept but also contributes to the complexity of defining interest precisely. Situational interest combines affective qualities, such as feelings, enjoyment and excitement, with cognitive qualities, such as focused attention and perceived value, all fostered by features of the classroom situation.

For instance, a student might enjoy an entertaining lecture about computer, becomes fascinated by their power, engages more in the class, and appreciates the subject's personal relevance. Thus, being in a state of interest means that affective reactions, perceived value, and cognitive functioning intertwine, and that attention and learning feel effortless (Ainley, 2006; Hidi, 2006). Situational interest on the part of the students relates to self-regulation, task engagement, and persistence (Thoman, Smith, & Silvia, 2011).

Experiencing situational interest can directly promote learning by increasing attention and engagement. A student who sees a painting work for the first time in an art history class may be captivated by the bright colours and unusual brushstrokes, and as a result, will pay more attention and engage more deeply. If that interest develops into an individual interest, the student will likely reengage with the material over time and explore the topic further (Harackiewicz et al, 2008). Interest, therefore, predicts traditional measures of educational success, including future course taking and academic performance.

Individual interest highlights individual's stable preferences for specific learning content. Here, the immediate experience of interest reflects a well – developed personal preference to enjoy and value a particular subject or activity across situations. Individual interest is, therefore, a stable underlying disposition activated in particular situations. For instance, students' interest in phonology and phonetics might be especially likely to be in a state of interest during the lecture on vowels and consonant sounds, whether the lecture is entertaining or not, because their interest is more developed and less dependent on situational factors.

SITUATIONAL INTEREST BECOMING INDIVIDUAL INTEREST

The four – phase model of interest development (Renninger & Hidi, 2016) integrates these two perspectives and their development: particular situations trigger interest, which can then develop across situations and over time to become more enduring. First, features of the environment (e.g, novelty, ambiguity, surprise) catch the person's attention. This situational interest can last longer, beyond a single situation, if the learning tasks seem meaningful and involving (i.e, if the student perceives the lesson or learning content as valuable and enjoyable). Over time, repeated experiences of triggered and maintained situational interest can develop into an emerging individual interest, such that the individual seeks opportunities to reengage with the object.

Obviously, if the student who was originally fascinated by the Monet painting also enjoys the teacher's lecture about the impressionist movement and then notices and appreciates the Monet reproductions on display at the dentist's office, the student may decide to google Monet's paintings and order his biography from the library. Finally, this emerging individual interest can develop into a self – sustaining, well – developed, individual interest (e.g the student visits a radio/television broadcasting station and majors in broadcasting).

Progress through these phases requires educational policies and environment that support individual pursuit of interest. For example, a field to art museum can foster a student's developing interest in art. As individuals progress through these developmental phases, their connection on the object of learning interest becomes more stable and generalizable. Interest development begins in a specific situation, but by the time those interests are well developed, individuals make conscious choices and pursue their interest autonomously (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Indeed, as interest phases deepens across these four phases, individuals become increasingly aware of their own interest in diverse subjects or course areas, as an important part of themselves.

The four – phase model of interest development has implications for teaching practices. First, the model contends that interest develops gradually and that external support (e.g engaging lectures, school field trips, excursions etc.) can foster interest. This also implies that, without external support, interest can go dormant or even be abandoned. Second, the model indicates that students at different stages of interest development may benefit from different types of external supports. When students are unfamiliar with a topic, teachers may be able to create environments that catch their attention (e.g, by beginning a Chemistry class with the demonstration of a chemical reaction). When students enter a situation with some pre – existing interest, however, teachers may be able to expand their knowledge of the topic and solidify its perceived value. Thus, teachers can stimulate students' developing new interests in the first two phases (triggered and maintained situational interest) and maintain or strengthen interests for students in the second two phases (emerging and well – developed individual interest).

INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' LEARNING INTERESTS

Cultivating interest should not be an afterthought to the typical learning situations interest is essential to academic success. Interventions to develop students' interest matter

in any educational context but may be most needed in academic domains that many students do not find initially interesting or those domains in which interest typically declines over time. This is particularly evident in the decline of students learning interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. (Brophy, 2008). Interest theory informs two intervention approaches:

- Trigger and maintain situational interest: provide learning activities that use structural features (i.e; problems, challenges, surprises) to stimulate attention and engagement for all students.
- Build on emerging and well – developed individual interest: provide content and academic tasks that facilitate connecting academic topics with existing interests.

One way to trigger interest is to structure learning activities in ways that catch students' attention. Dewey (1913) argued that educational activities should awaken and excite the immediate needs of the individual. Berlyne (1970) defined a number of task features, called "collative variables", which affect attention and arousal. In a series of studies, he varied the novelty, complexity, surprisingness, and incongruity of visual stimuli, and found that each of these collative variables increased attention, arousal and interest. More broadly, these principles underlie many interventions intended to promote situational interest in educational contexts, which Renninger and Hidi (2016) refer to as "triggers for interest". Palmer (2009) talked about hands – on activities, novelty, surprise, and group work.

INTEREST IS CRUCIAL IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Both the Federal and State Ministries of Education are tasked with the mandate of developing and implementing policies in education for the well – being of students in Abia State in particular and Nigeria in general. To get a place where students interest is a valued process and outcome, policies should inform the training of our next generation of educators. One possible policy action is the pro – active design of teacher preparation programmes based on the principles of interest theory and the interventions that trigger and maintain students situational interest or build on their emerging and well-developed individual interests.

On the above, teacher preparation policy could mandate courses on how to evaluate and adopt interest intervention in curricular, co – curricular, and even extra – curricular efforts (Diekman, Weisgram, & Belanger, 2015). Teacher preparation policies and practices are useful only insofar as they translate to action in the classroom which suggests incentivising the design and adoption of interest interventions (Yeager et al., 2016).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For over two decades now, there has been a drastic decline in the interest of students towards classroom instruction. An important and compulsory subject like Mathematics is not taken seriously. Issues like teacher-factor, classroom management and other factors have been said to be responsible for students' lack of interest in learning. By far, these factors stated above do contribute to low attention, low retention and poor academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. But more importantly, the government of Abia State, Nigeria does not have an educational policy of

integrating students' learning interest in its learning contents. Again, it is obvious that teachers at the Secondary level of education in Abia State are yet to incorporate deliberately those factors that would likely trigger students' interest in their lessons. Generally speaking, there has been sharp decline in students' academic performance, reading culture and so on. This is orchestrated by their lack of interest in the subjects taught and poor reading culture exhibited by the students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to assess level of integration of students' interest into lessons: A panacea for making lessons relevant and worthwhile in public secondary schools in Aba Education zone, Abia State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which teachers integrate students' interest into their lessons in Abia State.
2. Determine the extent to which government educational policies support student interest in teaching-learning content in public secondary schools in Abia state

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are students' interest integrated into teachers' lessons in public secondary schools in Abia State?
2. To what extent do government educational policies support students interest in teaching-learning content in public secondary schools in Abia state

NULL HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were raised to guide the study at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of public secondary school teachers on the integration of students' interest in lessons in Abia State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of public secondary school teachers on the support of government educational policies and students' interest in teaching-learning content in Abia state.

METHODOLOGY

The design that was adopted in conducting this study was a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in ten public Secondary Schools in Aba Education Zone, Abia State. Statistical information from these public secondary schools for 2023/2024 academic session indicates that 310 classroom teachers from different subject areas were used for the study. From the 310, there were 200 female teachers and 110 male teachers who were public secondary school teachers. The sample size was achieved by random sampling method. The instrument for the study that was used for data collection was self-structured questionnaire developed by the researchers and titled: Integrating students Interests into Lessons: A Panacea for Making Lessons Relevant and Worthwhile to Students Questionnaire (ISILPMLRWSQ). The instrument was divided into two parts. Part A of the instrument had information on the teachers' integration of students' interest into lessons.

On the other hand, Part B of the instrument was used to elicit information from the respondents on government educational policies on students' interest in the teaching-learning content. The instrument for the study was subjected to face validity by three experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria. Their inputs and suggestions were utilised adequately to modify the instrument before being administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient methods for a measure of internal consistency of the instrument and a coefficient of 0.72 was obtained and was considered adequate for the study. The research questions were answered by the use of mean rating, and standard deviation while hypotheses were tested with z-test inferential statistics. Decisions were made based on the mean of the boundary limits of four response options.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the study were presented as follows:

Research Question I: To what extent are students interest integrated into teachers lessons in public secondary school in Albia state?

Table I: Mean and Standard Deviation of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Integration of Students Interest into Lessons.

S/N	Items	X	SD	Remarks
1.	I always use instructional materials when teaching topics in my subject area.	2.64	0.52	GE
2.	My classroom is furnished with charts and pictures which arouse students' interest.	2.97	0.65	VGE
3.	I begin my lesson presentation from the known to the unknown to make my students more attentive	3.02	0.78	GE
4.	I often engage my students in group work to make them have a sense of ownership of the learning task.	2.77	0.88	GE
5.	Stories and illustrations are integral parts of my lesson planning, preparation and delivery.	2.81	0.58	GE
6.	Practice exercises are what I engage my Students with in my lesson.	3.14	0.77	VGE
7.	Interest evoking activities are often built into my lessons before delivery in the classroom	2.88	0.65	GE
8.	Generally, Students are always excited when am teaching	0.55	0.24	VLE
9.	Students are always attentive in the classroom when am teaching	0.65	0.47	LE
10.	Class attendance is always 100% when I teach because students do not want to miss my lessons	0.81	0.35	VLE
	Total Mean & SD	22.24	5.89	

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table I which comprises the analysis of research question one showed that seven out of ten items were agreed in affirmation. Only three out of the ten items showed low extent. More than half of the respondents responded in affirmation. On the first disagreed item, public secondary schools are fully aware that students are sometimes not always excited when they are teaching. A case in point is that of Mathematics class and other Science classes where most students feel bored, unconcerned, unattentive and uninteresting. So, where does the excitement come from? In the second case of disagreement, most teachers have understood the fact that not all students are attentive when in the classroom when lessons are being delivered. In the third instance, most classrooms are not always filled up with students during lesson time. On the other hand, there is an indication that students learning interest is integrated into learning contents by public secondary school teachers in Abia State.

Research Question 2: To what extent do government educational policies support students' interest in teaching-learning Content in public Secondary schools in Abia State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Public School Teachers Responses on Government Educational Policies in Support of Students' Interest in Teaching-Learning content

S/N	Items	X	SD	Remark
11	Both the federal and state ministries of education have clear directives on students' interest in the curriculum.	0.85	0.31	VLE
12	The Abia State government has policy in innovative learning in the classrooms.	1.05	0.26	VLE
13	All public secondary schools in Aba Education Zone are equipped with modern learning facilities	1.66	0.11	VLE
14	It is the government educational policy that enables teachers to be creative in content preparation and delivery.	0.81	0.34	VLE
15	The Abia state government has an award for the best classroom teacher yearly.	1.59	0.24	VLE
16	The Abia state government has a scholarship scheme for the best graduating secondary school students yearly in the state.	1.67	0.28	VLE
	Total mean and SD	7.63	1.54	

Source: Field survey (2024)

Table 2 Summarises and answers the extent to which government educational policies support students' interest in teaching-learning content. Obviously, 100% of the respondents shows a negative trend that denies the fact that governmental policies on education do not encourage the integration of students interest into the teachers' lessons. Generally, the table shows very low extent (VLE) on government policies from the first to the last item. From the table, it is clear that the provision of modern learning facilities is lacking, there is no encouragement for the teachers to be creative and innovative in learning content

preparation and delivery. There is no policy on scholarship award to best performing students and the like.

Testing of Null hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of public secondary school teachers on the integration of Students interest into lessons in Abia State.

Table 3: Z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Integration of Students' Interest into Lessons in Asia State

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The data obtained in Table 3 showed the z- calculated value of 1.34 at 384 degree of freedom

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	SE	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Decision
	310	4.21	0.78	384	0.18	1.34	1.96	0.05	Very High Extent(VHE)

and 0.05 level of significance, while the z-critical value is 1.96. Since the calculated z-value (1.34) of 0.05 is less than the z-critical value (1.96), the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that public secondary school teachers in Abia State do not differ in their mean responses that teachers do integrate students interest into their lesson preparation and delivery.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of public secondary school teachers on the support of government educational policies and students' interest in teaching-learning content in Abia State.

Table 4: Z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Public Secondary School Teachers on the Support of Government Policies and Students' Interest in Teaching-learning Content in Abia State

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	SE	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Decision
	310	1.45	0.22	384	0.18	2.55	1.96	0.05	Very Low Extent(VLE)

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The data in Table 4 showed the z-calculated value of 2.55 at 384 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, while the z-critical value is 1.96. Therefore, since the calculated z-value, 2.55 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that public secondary school teachers differ significantly in their mean ratings regarding the support of government educational policies on the integration of students' interest into teaching – learning content in Abia state.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion for this study is done according to each research question posed in this study.

THE EXTENT OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS' INTEREST INTO TEACHERS' LESSONS

The result of research question 1 showed that public secondary school teachers in Abia state do integrate the interest of their students in their curriculum. This implies that most teachers begin their lessons with interesting facts, they find meaningful connections, offer choices, maintain close proximity and eye contact, converse with students - do not talk at them, turn lessons into stories, use a variety of approaches to engage students in a lesson (Fulton, 2024).

In the same vein, the teachers were observed to be creative and innovative in the choice and selection of what interest the students. According to Lattanze (2025), students are engaged in three dimensions in the classroom of whatever interest them. These dimensions include behavioural, cognitive and emotional. In those classrooms, students had access to maps, charts, pictures and so on. That elicited their interest and curiosity towards learning. Most classes were not bored as teachers built into their lessons exciting activities that caught students' attention and attendance in classroom.

THE EXTENT OF GOVERNMENT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS INTEREST IN TEACHING-LEARNING CONTENT

The result of research question 2 showed a negation of governmental policies in the support of students' interest in teaching and learning content. This implies that the government is not deliberate or intentional in its legislation concerning the integration of students' interest into the school curriculum. Here, the task of integrating students' interest into the learning and teaching content seems to be the effort of teachers only. Since teachers are the implementers of the school curriculum, it therefore behoves that they create and recreate contents that interest students. In Nigeria, for instance, although the National Policy on Education (NPE) aims to provide a framework for a comprehensive and functional education System, emphasising quality, relevance, and national development, with a focus on free and compulsory basic education, it does not provide clear-cut rule or directive on how to make learning content interesting to students. Even the NPE has some constraints at the level of implementation (Ezeyi, Ene & Nwosu, 2023). Those constraints not highlighted by the above researchers may include lack of provision of learning facilities for schools by the government, inadequate incentives for both teachers and learners to boost learning and teaching interest in public schools.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that many teachers in their individual efforts tried to excite their students on the course of classroom instruction. They often tried to make their students exhibit learning interest in their lessons. This is evident in the classroom activities lined up for the learners by the teachers. Teachers in public secondary schools in Abia State have been proactive, creative and innovative in their lesson preparation and delivery. On the contrary, the government of Abia State in particular in its educational policies has no support for the integration of students' interest in the learning content of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Classroom lessons should be worthwhile, comprehensive and holistic to evoke student's interest.
- Well-to-do members of the public should institute schemes for academic awards and scholarships to boost students' interest to learn.
- The government should provide modern learning facilities to schools. This would make students develop curiosity and interest when those facilities are used for classroom instruction.
- Curriculum planners should integrate core activities aimed at evoking student's interest at the level of planning of the curriculum.
- Classroom teachers need to be proactive, creative and re-creative in the utilisation of their teaching materials and aids in order to enable students learn effectively.

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