© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 1251-1260 | ISSN: 2636-4484

PEER COLLABORATION AND PROJECT-BASED STRATEGIES: EFFECTS ON STUDENTS' INTEREST IN POETRY AND PERFORMANCE IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Friday Eje Adoga[1], *Usman Idris Mohammed, PhD[2] & Paul David Abor[3]
[1]Department: Arts and Social Science Education, Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
ejeadoga@gmail.com
[2,3]Department of English Language, Federal College of Education, Odugbo, Benue State
***Corresponding Author:** usmanidris@fceodugbo.edu.ng**

ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0509
Accepted Date: 30/07/2026
Published Date: 25/08/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
This study investigated comparative effects of peer collaboration and project-based learning strategies on students' interest and performance in poetry in Makurdi, Benue State Nigeria. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design, specifically the pre-test, post-test non-equivalent groups design. The population was 2005 SS2 students who offer Literature-in-English in the 89 government secondary schools in Makurdi. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample 111 SS2 students from two intact classes. The instruments used for data collection were Interest in Poetry Rating Scale (IPRS) and Poetry Performance Test (PPT). The instruments were validated by experts and subjected to reliability testing. Kuder Richardson Formula 21 was used to ascertain the reliability estimate of PPT; this yielded 0.81. on the other hand, IPRS yielded a coefficient of 0.88 using Cronbach Alpha. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). It was found that there was significant difference ($p = 0.001<0.05$) in the mean interest rating of students taught poetry using peer collaboration strategy and those taught using project-based strategy. There was also significant difference ($p = 0.002<0.05$) in the mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration strategy and Project based learning strategy. Based on these findings, it was recommended that educators should adopt both peer collaboration and project-based strategies to determine students' interest and performance in poetry.
Keywords: peer collaboration, project-based learning, performance, interest, strategy

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 1251-1260 | ISSN: 2636-4484

Introduction

Literature is a tool for bringing desirable change in the society. All fields of human endeavour such as economy, culture, politics and social relation have their distinct literature. Literature expresses hope, fears, doubts, joy, love and how humans experience these feelings every day. The literary artist draws his or her raw materials from the events, norms and traditions of the society. Through these materials, he/she reforms the society by bringing to its consciousness the practices that are inimical to the progress or development of the society as well as promote the values which are worthwhile.

Literature-in-English, a subject that introduces students to literature, could be considered from different dimensions. Adewoye (2016) explains that the Literature-in English occupies an essential place in the school curriculum because it helps students to develop higher order thinking skills, improve their language competence and broadens their understanding of human experiences. Through engagement with diverse literary texts, learners gain entry into the world of imagination and deepen their imaginative appreciation of artistic expression. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) submits that as a subject, Literature-in English provides opportunities for students to develop cognitive abilities and language skill as well as expand their knowledge base. The subject also affords learners the opportunity to explore the world of artistry by reading different works of literature.

Literature is sub-divided into three genres, namely, prose, poetry and drama. From these genres, poetry stands out in terms of profound technicalities in language and form. While Prose could be described as a continuous writing in sentences, paragraphs and chapters and drama as a depiction of human actions on stage, poetry is a form of literary expression that emphasises the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language. Poetry often uses meter, rhyme, symbolism, imagery and figurative language to convey emotions, ideas, and experiences in a condensed form (Nwachukwu & Agbada, 2022).

Throughout history, poetry has served as a medium for personal reflection, social commentary, cultural preservation and artistic creativity. It continues to play a vital role in fostering critical thinking, emotional expression and linguistic appreciation (Obi & Adegbite, 2023). The poet conceptualises an idea based on an object, incident or an aspect of life. He uses words, phrases and poetic devices like figures of speech and imageries to concretise ideas in a poem. The poet arranges words in a systematic pattern to achieve rhythm, harmony and symmetry.

Poetry is a key aspect of Nigeria curriculum. However, despite the role the genre plays in promoting effective and productive language use, the persistent poor performance of students in this aspect has continued to be a source of worry to scholars. In 2022, West African Examination Council Chief (WAEC) Chief Examiner reported that in 2021, students struggled with literary appreciation especially in poetry. Adewale and Nwachukwu (2023) attribute this trend to poor or ineffective instructional methods. Teacher's use of defective teaching methods often make poetry to appear abstract and difficult for students to comprehend. Traditional teacher-centred approaches fail to engage learners actively in the class. Teachers who use this approach often fail to connect poetic texts to students' experiences, thereby reducing their interest and comprehension.

It has been observed that most teachers are ill-prepared to teach poetry; so, students are taught little or no strategies of appreciating the genre. Ogunyemi (2020) expresses concerns over the persistent decline in the teaching of Literature-in-English in Nigerian schools by stressing that many individuals handling the subjects lack the professional training required for effective instruction. As a result, students completely lack the convention by which poetry is read. The challenge of poor teaching of poetry is evident in the persistent students' under-achievement in

Literature-in-English in Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examination Council (Godshield, 2014); and the National Examination council (NECO).

Considering the low interest of students in poetry, their poor performance and the need for them to learn effectively, there is need to adopt strategies such as peer collaboration. The team work of both the teacher and students coupled with the students' activity involved in the strategy could lead to effective teaching and learning of poetry. Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999 p.81) point out that hearing different readings of a single poem could benefit an audience by offering a range of possible interpretations, from which students might find one that seems to be supported by the whole work. Stressing on the need for students to be fully involved in the process of poetry learning, Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) also opined that both the teacher and the students should be actively involved in the process through peer collaboration.

Learning is made easier when teachers guide students to work in peers to engage activities or projects. On suitable strategies to promote effective teaching and learning of poetry, Moyles, et al. (2011) advocates peer collaboration. They note that humans are social animals who could have achieved little or have neither cities, nor even rural area if each person had worked in isolation. According to Okereke (2021), meaningful learning for children thrives in environments that promote interaction and purposeful dialogue. The author further explains that peer collaboration learning encourages students to work together, share ideas and support one another in achieving common academic goals.

. Collaboration learning helps students to realise the real essence for learning and self-development. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) submits that, educational activities shall be learner centred for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment; learners should be put in groups in their learning tasks so that the low and high achievers could harmonise their learning preferences and styles towards a common goal.

Recent studies reaffirm that peer collaborative learning is grounded in the socio-cultural view of learning, particularly in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Hammond and Gibbons (2021), the ZPD represents the gap between what a learner can accomplish independently and what can be achieved with support from a more knowledgeable peer or adult. Collaborative learning continues to serve as an overarching label for instructional approaches that engage learners in shared intellectual tasks (Barkley, et al. 2024). This type of learning is typically demonstrated when students collectively construct meaning, solve problems, develop understanding or produce tangible academic output.

Like peer collaboration, project -based strategy has been found to improve students' interest and performance in poetry project-based strategy has been examined by Okafor (2021) as an instructional approach in which students engage in real world, to achieve specific goals through active participation. The project is usually designed and conducted by students under the guidance of a teacher. This learning strategy emphasises students' interests and needs. Project is conducted by individuals or groups for a given period of time.

A project is an activity willingly undertaken by students for the solution of a felt need. It is a concrete activity directed towards the learning of significant skill or process. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013, p.3) clearly stipulates that ''teaching should be practical, activity-based and experiential". Project-based strategy could include any activity like drama, drawing maps and charts, collecting pictures, preparing scraps, books, going on historical tours and exhibitions. (Kumar & Rao, 2016).

Research by Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) emphasises that collaborative learning and project-based strategy encompass a range of activities such as group projects, joint problem-

solving task, structured debates, study teams and cooperative writing assignment and social interaction among learners. Together, these activities may make teaching and learning of poetry productive. Odey (2014), after a study on the efficacy of peer collaboration method, recommended that the strategy should be used in teaching learning literature. Similarly, Kokotsaki, et al. (2021) found that project-based learning can heighten engagement by enabling learners to experience authentic and purposeful tasks. This reflects the findings of Umi Slammer and Fadhil (2025) who agreed that project-based recorded high students' performance in poetry and writing skills.

Studies have also established the effective of project-based strategy. Collier (2017) found out that project-based learning strategy significantly affected students' performance in Grammar and vocabulary. Similarly, Belland et al. (2020) submits that project-based learning strategy improved learning outcomes by supporting deeper conceptual understanding and application. These findings align with Harm-Han et al. (2023) and Chukwuegu and Excelokoye (2025) whom in separate findings established the efficacies of the strategy in improving students' academic performance in Literature-in English.

Despite the importance of poetry as a genre that promotes effective language use, students' ineptitude in the genre in Makurdi Local Government Area pervades. This problem is partly due to the paucity of studies that address how teachers could adopt or adapt strategies that could improve interest and academic performance of students in Literature-in-English. The present study investigated effects of peer collaboration and project-based strategies in improving students 'interest and academic performance in poetry.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of peer collaboration and project-based learning strategies on SS2 students' interest and performance in poetry in Makurdi Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the interest of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy (PCLS) and those taught poetry using project-based learning strategy (PBLS).
2. determine the academic performance of students taught poetry using PCLS and those taught poetry using project-based-strategy.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the mean interest ratings of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy?
2. What is the mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaborative learning strategy and project-based strategy?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy.

Method

The researcher adopted quasi-experimental design, specifically the pre-test, post-test non randomised equivalent groups design. The study consists of two experimental groups which were assigned to two learning strategies of peer collaboration and project-based learning. Pre-test and post-test were administered to both experimental groups before the treatment. In addition, the

groups received varying treatments, depending on the activities of the strategies. Quasi-experimental design was considered appropriate because in a formal school setting, teaching and learning would be disrupted if classes were to be reorganised for the sake of research.

The population of the study comprised 2005 students. This included 882 males and 1123 females in senior secondary two who were offering Literature-in-English in the 89-government grant-aided senior secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area during the 2024/2025 academic session. The sample consisted of 111 students (53 males and 58 females). Purposive sampling technique was used to select two government secondary schools in the study area. Purposive sampling helped the researcher to select only co-educational schools for the study The technique further helped the researcher to conduct the investigation without randomly assigning students to the groups.

The instruments used in this study for data collection are Poetry Interest Rating Scale (PIRS) and Poetry Performance Test (PPT). The PIRS was used to rate students' interest in poetry especially on the aspects of language difficulty and the function that poetry plays to students. The PIRS has A and B sections. Section A contained students' bio-data while section B contained information regarding students' interest in poetry and was made up of 20 items. The items were constructed to measure students' feeling about poetry. The PIRS had a modified 4-point Likert-like rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (SD) and was weighed as 4, 3, 2 and1 respectively.

The PPT was designed based on WAEC and NECO standard to test students' performance in aspects of poetry like, identification of poetic devices, discussion of themes and explanation of literal and implied meanings. This was administered as pre-test and post-test. The PPT was divided into three sections, namely: A, B, and C. Section A contained students Bio-data. Sections B and C contained general literary appreciation and Africa and Non-African poems, i.e Caged Bird by Maya Angelou, Journey of the Magi by T. S Eliot and Black Woman, by Leopold Sedar Senghor. The poems were selected because they are among the recommended poem for WAEC and NECO Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations.

To ensure that the items in the instruments and the lesson plans were appropriate and relevant to the purpose of the study, they were validated by three experts. Similarly, in order to ascertain the reliability of the instruments, a trial test on Interest in Poetry Rating Scale (PIRS) and Poetry Performance Test (PPT) was carried out on 40 students in one of the senior secondary schools in Makurdi. The researcher used the teacher of Literature-in-English as research assistant in administering the instruments. The data obtained were analysed using Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 (K-R 21) for PPT and the result yielded coefficient of 0.81. The reliability of PIRS using Cronbach's Alpha statistics yielded reliability coefficient of .879.

The data for the study were collected using Poetry Performance Test (PPT) and Poetry Interest Rating Scale (PIRS). Two teachers of Literature-in-English from the sampled schools were used as research assistants to administer PPT and PIRS as pre-test and post-test followed by treatment within eight weeks. The research assistants were trained on how to use the two strategies namely, peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy. The researcher used the lesson plans to train the research assistants.

Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The choice of ANCOVA was due to the fact that the study involved intact classes. Besides, the statistical tool provided the researcher with the opportunity to address the initial differences in the performance of students in order to truly determine the actual effects of the strategies.

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Result

Research Question One

What is the mean interest rating of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Interest Ratings Taught Poetry Using Peer Collaboration Learning and Project-based Learning Strategies

Strategy	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain
		Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	
Project-based Learning	64	61.53	3.846	75.14	3.413	13.61
Peer Collaboration	47	62.66	3.540	73.45	3.861	10.79
Mean Difference		**1.13**		**1.69**		**2.82**

Table 1 shows that students taught poetry using project-based learning strategy had the mean interest rating of 61.53 at pre-test and 75.14 at post-test with 13.61 mean gain while those taught poetry using peer collaboration strategy had mean interest rating of 62.66 at pre-test and 73.45 at post-test with mean gain of 10.79. The mean gain difference in interest ratings between the two groups is 2.82 in favour of the students taught poetry using project-based learning strategy.

Research Question Two

What is be the difference in mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Performance in Poetry Taught Using Peer Collaboration Learning Strategy and Project-based Learning Strategies

Strategy	n	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain
		Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	
Project-based Learning	64	24.37	4.826	56.72	5.886	32.35
Peer Collaboration Learning	47	27.40	3.288	53.26	5.925	25.86
Mean Difference		**3.03**		**3.46**		**6.49**

Table 2 shows that Students taught using project-based learning strategy had mean performance score of 24.37 at pre-test and 56.72 at post-test. Their mean gain is 32.35. On the other hand, those exposed to peer collaboration learning strategy had the mean performance scores of 27.40 and 53.26 at pre-test and post-test respectively. Their mean gain is 25.86. The mean gain difference between students exposed to project-based and peer collaboration strategies stood at 6.49 in favour of the project-based learning strategy group.

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Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

There is no significant difference in the mean interest rating of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and project-based learning strategy

Table 3: ANCOVA of Students' Interest Ratings When Taught Poetry Using Peer Collaboration and Project-based Learning Strategies

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	316.689[a]	2	158.345	14.488	.000	.212
Intercept	958.244	1	958.244	87.673	.000	.448
Pre-test	238.942	1	238.942	21.862	.000	.168
Strategies	121.655	1	121.655	11.131	.001	.093
Error	1180.410	108	10.930			
Total	616309.000	111				
Corrected Total	1497.099	110				

a. R Squared = .212 (Adjusted R Squared = .197)

Table 3 reveals that F (1, 108) = 11.131, p = 0.001<0.05. Since p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. The partial eta squared of 0.093 indicates that 9.3% of the difference between the students' interest ratings was as a result of the strategies. This implied that students taught poetry using project-based learning strategy gained more interest in poetry than those taught using peer collaboration learning strategy.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy project-based learning strategy.

Table 4: ANCOVA of Students' Performance when Taught Poetry using Peer Collaboration and Project-based Learning Strategies

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	366.095[a]	2	183.047	5.262	.007	.089
Intercept	7493.455	1	7493.455	215.418	.000	.666
Pre-test	41.031	1	41.031	1.180	.280	.011
Group	366.095	1	366.095	10.524	.002	.089
Error	3756.842	108	34.786			
Total	342985.000	111				
Corrected Total	4122.937	110				

a. R Squared = .089 (Adjusted R Squared = .072)

Table 4 shows that F (1, 108) = 10.524, p = 0.002 < 0.05. Since p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was significant difference in mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and those taught using project-based learning strategy. The partial eta squared of 0.089 indicates that 8.9% of the difference between the two groups was due to the strategies. This meant that students taught poetry using project-based learning strategy performed better than those taught using peer collaboration learning strategy.

Discussions

The finding from research question one and hypothesis one showed that there is significant difference in the mean interest rating of students taught poetry using Peer Collaboration Learning Strategy (PCLS) and those taught using Project-Based Learning Strategy (PBLS). Finding revealed that students taught with project-based learning strategy demonstrated significantly higher interest gain compared to those taught with peer collaboration learning strategy. The ANCOVA confirmed this with a significant F value and a partial eta squared, indicating that the variance in students' interest was attributable to the instructional strategy. The result may be due to the active involvement of students which increased their interest in poetry learning. This implies that students tend to do better when they engage in discussions and active learning. These results align with Odey (2014) who recommended that the use of different methods of teaching and learning literature. Kokotsaki, Menzies, and Wiggins (2021) found that project-based learning can heighten engagement by enabling learners to experience authentic and purposeful tasks. Similarly, Umi Slammer and Fadhil (2025) agreed that project-based recorded high students' performance in poetry and writing skills.

The finding from research question two and hypothesis two showed that there is significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught poetry using peer collaboration learning strategy and those taught using project-based learning strategy. The finding shows that project-based learning strategy received higher performance scores compared to peer collaboration learning strategy. This implies that project-based learning strategy was more effective in enhancing students' mastery of poetry. The result may be due to the exposure of students to hand-on activities offered by project-based strategy thereby engaging the students in active learning. Collier (2017) found out that project-based learning strategy significantly affected students' performance in Grammar and vocabulary. This aligns with Belland et al. (2020), who found that project-based learning strategy improved learning outcomes by supporting deeper conceptual understanding and application. Similarly, Harm-Han et al. (2023) highlighted that project-based learning supports sustained engagement and skill integration, leading to superior academic performance compared to conventional collaborative strategies. The higher mean gain suggests that designing, planning, and presenting poetry projects may better facilitate retention and skill development than peer discussions alone. Similarly, Chukwuegu and Excelokoye (2025) found that combining two interactive strategies such as cooperative learning and project-based learning is more effective for enhancing students' academic performance.

Conclusion

The need to teach students poetry effectively has never been this urgent. Based on the finding, the study supports the use of interactive learning strategies that promote active learning and activities in the classroom. The high performance and interest scores of students taught with project-based-learning strategy and peer collaboration is evidence that the strategies could be used to improve students' interest and performance in Literature-in-English. Also, a higher interest rating and performance score of project-based strategy shows that the strategy is more effective than peer collaboration.

Recommendations

The following were recommended based on the findings of this study:

1. Teachers of Literature-in-English should incorporate project-based strategy in poetry teaching to foster sustained interest. They should also integrate collaborative elements to enhance social interaction and group learning.
2. Schools should continue to use these strategies, as both have been shown to be effective across gender, ensuring equity in learning outcomes to encourage deeper engagement and mastery of complex subjects like poetry.

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