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Influence Of Teachers’ Activity-Based And Social Reinforcement Techniques On Students’ Academic Performance In English Language In Public Secondary Schools In Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of teachers’ reinforcement techniques on students’ academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study, and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised 21,272 SS2 students across 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State, including 9,550 male and 11,722 female students (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, PPSSC, Awka, 2024). Using a multistage sampling procedure, 320 students were selected as the sample. Data were collected using the Teachers’ Reinforcement Techniques Questionnaire (TRTQ) developed by the researcher and Students’ Academic Performance Scores. The instruments were validated through face and construct validation by three experts and further through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The KMO measure was 0.860, and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1231.431$, $p < .001$), confirming suitability for factor analysis. Data analysis involved mean, standard deviation, and t-test. Mean values answered research questions, standard deviations measured homogeneity of ratings, and t-tests at 0.05 significance tested hypotheses. Findings revealed that teachers’ tangible, activity-based, social, and intangible reinforcement techniques influence students’ academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent. Findings further showed that teachers’ activity-based and social reinforcement techniques significantly influence students’ academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on these findings, the study concluded that teachers’ reinforcement techniques are crucial determinants of students’ academic performance in English Language. The researcher therefore recommended among others that teachers should be trained by the Anambra State Ministry of Education on the effective use of School administrators should encourage teachers to integrate activity-based reinforcement strategies, including group work, role plays, debates, and quizzes, into English lessons to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Activity-Based, English Language, Social, Reinforcement Technique, Influence,

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is a complex concept that has been extensively studied and defined by scholars across various research disciplines. It encompasses a broad range of skills, abilities and knowledge acquired through formal education and related experiences. Academic performance is demonstrated by the outcomes and results attained in the classroom, indicating how well students have met their learning objectives. Students' academic performance reflects the outcomes of education and gauges the extent to which students, teachers, or institutions have reached their educational goals. Onwugbufor and Udebuana (2021) defined academic performance as the knowledge or skills acquired in school subjects, evaluated by test results or grades awarded by instructors. In the context of this study, academic performance is defined as the level of student's success in their educational activities. Academic performance reflects the extent to which a student has mastered subjects' contents, applied acquired knowledge, and demonstrated engagement and diligence in their studies. However, there is increasing concern among scholars and researchers regarding the declining performance of secondary school students in subjects like English Language.

English Language is a core subject in public secondary schools in Nigeria. English Language is the official medium of instruction and a crucial determinant of students' academic success. It plays a fundamental role in communication, literacy development, and access to higher education and employment opportunities. Given its significance, proficiency in English is essential for students to excel in other subjects and participate effectively in national and global discourse. In Anambra State, English Language remains a compulsory subject, yet recent observations suggest a decline in students' academic performance. Scholars like Akunne and Anyaneme (2021) and Okeke and Okoli (2022) have expressed concerns over this downward trend, highlighting factors such as poor reading culture, ineffective teaching methods, and limited access to instructional materials as contributing to the problem. Similarly, Osigwe (2024) reported that students' academic performance in English Language in secondary schools in Anambra State has been on the decline. The problem of this study was the persistent poor academic performance of secondary school students in English Language. This has serious consequences as it limits students' ability to effectively communicate, comprehend other school subjects taught in English, and reduces their chances of further educational and career opportunities. Scholars have linked poor academic performance to teachers' inability to implement reinforcement techniques in the classroom (Yonas et al., 2023).

The term reinforce means to strengthen, and is used in psychology to refer to anything stimulus which strengthens or increases the probability of a specific response. Reinforcement refers to techniques employed by teachers to strengthen students' positive behaviour in learning (Onyekwelu, 2025). Sheffield (as cited in Green & Owo, 2020) defined reinforcement as a method of shaping or influencing behaviour by controlling the outcomes associated with that behaviour. Reinforcement is any consequence that strengthens behaviour (Fitriate et al., 2020). Similarly, Fajrin et al. (2019) perceived reinforcement as the introduction of a favourable stimulus into a situation or the removal of an unfavourable stimulus, with the aim of enhancing or encouraging the preceding response. Reinforcement in this study can be defined as the application of various techniques, techniques, or activities to bring about positive behavioural changes in an organism. It entails the balanced use of both positive and negative consequences to promote the repetition of desirable behaviour while discouraging or reducing the occurrence of undesirable behaviour (Onu et al., 2023). Thus, reinforcement techniques are techniques used to increase the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated. These techniques involve providing a stimulus, such as praise, recognition, or a reward, after a desired behaviour occurs (Fitriate et al. (2020) opined that reinforcement techniques for teachers can be in the form of praise, symbolic rewards, token rewards, tangible rewards, or activity rewards. On the other hand, the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCNI) (cited in Onyekwelu, 2025) classified reinforcement techniques as tangible, activity-based, social and intangible reinforcement techniques. For this study the researcher will examine activity-based and social reinforcement techniques. Activity-based reinforcement techniques allow students to participate in enjoyable activities as a reward for appropriate behaviour. Green and Owo (2020) asserted that activity-based reinforcement techniques

involves granting students access to preferred activities such as drawing, playing games, or having extra computer time. Onyekwelu (2025) further explained that allowing students to select an activity partner can enhance the reinforcement effect by promoting social interaction. Fitriati et al. (2020) averred that this technique is particularly beneficial in encouraging academic success, as students are motivated to complete tasks in order to engage in enjoyable activities. Similarly, social reinforcer is another reinforcement technique.

Social reinforcement techniques rely on positive interpersonal interactions to encourage desirable behaviour. Onyekwelu (2025) asserted that expressions of approval, such as verbal praise, written feedback, smiles, and nods, serve as powerful motivators. Ofoha (2017) explained that teachers can reinforce positive behaviour by publicly recognising students' achievements, thereby motivating others to emulate them. Additionally, Onu et al. (2023) suggested that teachers can send positive notes home to parents, further reinforcing students' confidence and commitment to maintaining good behaviour. Aliyu et al. (2023) reported that positive reinforcement contributes to students successfully reaching lesson objectives. In the same vein, Igwilo et al. (2023) revealed that praise, other forms of verbal reinforcement, tangible rewards, and token incentives can be utilised to encourage cooperative student performance. These reinforcement techniques are also linked to improved academic performance (Fajrin et al., 2019). However, it is important to note that these perspectives have not yet been empirically tested in public secondary schools in Anambra State. It is against this background that the researcher sought to investigate the influence of teachers' reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

English Language remains the principal medium of instruction in secondary schools in Anambra State and across Nigeria. Students' academic performance in the subject reflects their ability to demonstrate essential skills such as comprehension, analytical reasoning, coherent communication, and effective engagement with academic tasks. However, recent trends suggest a decline in students' performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State, raising concern about their readiness for broader academic demands.

Field observations by the researcher, who teaches English Language, indicate that students' challenges go beyond weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary. Many students experience notable difficulty in writing well-structured essays, constructing logical arguments, analysing literary texts critically, and delivering articulate oral presentations. Furthermore, they struggle to apply language skills to interpret and solve problems in other subjects. These problems appear to be compounded by the negative reinforcement techniques used by some teachers—such as ridicule, sarcasm, insults, or corporal punishment when students fail to express themselves adequately. Such practices cause embarrassment, discourage participation, and may lead to avoidance of English Language classes altogether.

The concern arising from these observations is that persistent poor performance in English Language can significantly hinder students' comprehension across the curriculum, thereby undermining their overall academic achievement. This situation calls for examining whether teachers' reinforcement practices, particularly activity-based and social reinforcement techniques, are being effectively utilised to motivate learners and support improved performance. It is on this premise that the present study investigates the influence of teachers' activity-based and social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of teachers' activity-based and social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the extent of influence of teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

2. examine the extent of influence of teachers' social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. To what extent does teachers' social reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant influence of teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant influence of teachers' social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The design was appropriate because the study sought information from students in public secondary schools on the influence of teachers' reinforcement techniques on their academic performance in English Language. The study was carried out in Anambra State in South Eastern Nigeria. The state was selected because of the growing concern over declining student performance in English Language, despite its reputation for strong academic outcomes. Reports of weak language mastery, low comprehension, and poor written expression among students made Anambra State a suitable context for examining teachers' reinforcement practices.

The population consisted of 21,272 SS2 students (9,550 males and 11,722 females) across 267 public secondary schools in the state. A sample of 320 students was drawn using a multistage sampling technique. Two education zones were randomly selected, followed by the selection of two public schools from each zone. Two intact streams of SS2 students from each school, with 40 students per stream, formed the final sample of 320 students. Data were collected using two instruments. The first was a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Teachers' Reinforcement Techniques Questionnaire (TRTQ), which contained 20 items arranged in two clusters covering activity-based and social reinforcement techniques. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point rating scale ranging from Very High Extent to Very Low Extent. The second instrument consisted of Students' Academic Performance Scores (SAPS) in English Language obtained from the Post Primary Schools Service Commission.

The instruments underwent face and construct validation by experts in English, Arts and Social Sciences Education, and Measurement and Evaluation. Their suggestions guided the refinement of the instrument. Construct validity was further confirmed using Exploratory Factor Analysis, which yielded a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .860 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. All items loaded above .50, indicating that the instrument was suitable for measuring the variables of the study. Reliability was established through a trial test conducted with 20 SS2 students in Enugu State. The data were analysed using Cronbach Alpha, which produced coefficients of 0.80 and 0.82, for the two clusters, with an overall reliability coefficient of .81, indicating good internal consistency.

The researcher, assisted by four trained research assistants, administered the 320 copies of the questionnaire using an on-the-spot approach. A total of 308 copies were properly completed and retrieved, resulting in a 96 percent return rate. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The real limits of numbers on the four-point scale guided interpretation. The hypotheses were tested using t-tests at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis when the p-value was less than or equal to .05 and retain it when the p-value was greater than .05.

RESULTS

Research Question One: *To what extent does teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State?*

Table 1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Extent Teachers' Activity-Based Reinforcement Techniques Influence Students' Academic Performance in English Language in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State (N=308)

S/N	Item Statement: <i>As a student</i>	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Engaging in group activities encourages me to improve my English language skills.	3.18	0.74	High Extent
2	I work harder in English when I am involved in hands-on activities like role plays.	3.11	0.78	High Extent
3	The opportunity to participate in games or challenges motivates me to perform better in English.	3.07	0.83	High Extent
4	I enjoy learning English more when my teacher uses interactive activities in class.	3.15	0.79	High Extent
5	I learn better in English when the lesson includes activities like debates or discussions.	3.09	0.80	High Extent
6	Activity-based teaching methods improve my understanding and performance in English.	3.21	0.76	High Extent
7	I find learning English more exciting when activities like quizzes and competitions are included.	3.12	0.82	High Extent
8	Participating in role-playing activities in English helps me to engage more in the lessons.	3.06	0.81	High Extent
9	Group work or pair activities make me more motivated to learn and perform in English.	3.14	0.77	High Extent
10	Activity-based lessons help me to retain more information in English.	3.20	0.75	High Extent
Cluster Mean		3.13	0.79	High Extent

Data in Table 1 indicate that the respondents rated all the items on the extent teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent, with mean ratings ranging between 3.06 and 3.21. The standard deviation scores, ranging from 0.74 to 0.83, indicate that the respondents' opinions were closely related. The cluster mean of 3.13 shows that teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent.

Research Question Two: *To what extent does teachers' social reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State?*

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Ratings on the Extent Teachers' Social Reinforcement Techniques Influence Students' Academic Performance in English Language in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State (N=308)

S/N	Item Statement: <i>As a student</i>	Mean	SD	Remarks
11	When my teacher praises me for good performance, I feel more motivated to improve in English.	3.22	0.72	High Extent
12	Positive verbal feedback from my teacher encourages me to participate more in English class.	3.18	0.75	High Extent
13	I feel more confident in English when my teacher acknowledges my efforts in front of the class.	3.15	0.78	High Extent
14	Social reinforcement such as public praise makes me want to	3.12	0.80	High Extent

	perform better in English.			
15	When my teacher praises me for speaking well in English, it encourages me to practice more.	3.19	0.76	High Extent
16	Verbal encouragement from my teacher motivates me to take on more challenges in English.	3.20	0.74	High Extent
17	Compliments from my teacher increase my participation in English discussions.	3.16	0.79	High Extent
18	Social reinforcement like encouraging words makes me feel proud of my English language progress.	3.14	0.81	High Extent
19	I am more engaged in English lessons when my teacher expresses appreciation for my efforts.	3.21	0.73	High Extent
20	Praise from my teacher makes me feel more capable in English.	3.17	0.77	High Extent
Cluster Mean		3.17	0.77	High Extent

Data in Table 2 indicate that the respondents rated all the items on the extent teachers' social reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent, with mean ratings ranging between 3.12 and 3.22. The standard deviation scores, ranging from 0.72 to 0.81, show that the respondents' opinions were closely related. The cluster mean of 3.17 indicates that teachers' social reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 3: Paired Sample t-test on Teachers' Activity-Based Reinforcement Techniques (TABRT) and Students Academic Performance (SAP) in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra state

Variables	N	Mean	std. dev.	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
TTRT- SAP	308	3.13	0.79	31.232	307	0.000	Significant

**significant at p < .05*

Data in Table 3 showed the paired sample t-test of teachers on the significant influence of teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The result shows that the relationship between teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques and students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State is statistically significant at $p < .05$. With a t-value of 33.450 and a p-value of .000, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques significantly influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of teachers' social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 4: Paired Sample t-test on Teachers' Social Reinforcement Techniques (TSRT) and Students Academic Performance (SAP) in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra state

Variables	N	Mean	std. dev.	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
TTRT- SAP	308	3.17	0.77	36.320	307	0.000	Significant

**significant at p < .05*

Data in Table 4 showed the paired sample t-test of teachers on the significant influence of teachers' social reinforcement techniques on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The result shows that the relationship between teachers' social reinforcement techniques and students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State is statistically significant at $p < .05$. With a t-value of 36.320 and a p-value of .000, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that teachers' social reinforcement techniques significantly

influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

DISCUSSION

The finding of the study revealed that teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent. This indicates that interactive activities such as group work, role play, debates, games, and quizzes create a stimulating learning environment that enhances students' engagement and performance in English Language. One possible reason for this is that activity-based reinforcement provides opportunities for experiential learning, which helps students to retain knowledge better and develop practical communication skills. It also transforms the classroom into a collaborative space where students are encouraged to participate actively, thereby improving both confidence and academic outcomes in English Language. This finding is in line with Sardar et al. (2023) who found that positive reinforcement in classroom activities enhanced students' confidence and concentration, particularly benefiting low achievers and backbenchers. Although their study was conducted at the primary level in Pakistan, the similarity in results suggests that reinforcement through classroom activities boosts learning outcomes regardless of educational level. Aliyu et al. (2023) also reported that positive reinforcement techniques significantly influenced students' motivation and performance in Mathematics in Kaduna State. Their quasi-experimental results showed significant differences in performance between students exposed to reinforcement and those who were not. Although the subject focus was Mathematics, the findings support the present study's conclusion that reinforcement in activity-based learning settings leads to improved academic performance. Similarly, Nurdiana et al. (2021) found that students' perceptions of English Language lessons were strongly shaped by the reinforcement strategies used by teachers. Their results showed that the more positive and activity-driven the reinforcement, the more motivated and responsive the students became in class. In support, Kinyanjui et al. (2015) revealed that reinforcement strategies such as praise, tangible rewards, and activities significantly affected students' engagement and were influenced by factors such as class size and content delivery. Furthermore, Massaro (2022) demonstrated that activity-based tokens were more effective than traditional tokens in Applied Behaviour Analysis. Students responded more and performed better on academic tasks when activity-based tokens were used as reinforcement compared to traditional tokens. This further confirms the present finding that activity-based reinforcement creates stronger motivation and better academic performance than other forms of reinforcement.

Furthermore, the finding of the study revealed that teachers' activity-based reinforcement techniques significantly influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This suggests that such reinforcement is not only motivational but also statistically predictive of students' performance. This finding is consistent with Aliyu et al. (2023) who reported that reinforcement techniques significantly improved motivation and performance in Mathematics among junior secondary school students. Similarly, Sardar et al. (2023) found that activity-driven reinforcement enhanced students' confidence and lesson concentration, further reinforcing the significance of activity-based reinforcement in predicting academic performance.

The finding of the study revealed that teachers' social reinforcement techniques influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent. This suggests that teachers who consistently apply social reinforcement strategies such as praise, encouragement, recognition, and feedback are more likely to boost students' interest, motivation, and performance in English Language. One possible reason for this finding is that social reinforcement creates a supportive classroom atmosphere that makes students feel valued and appreciated, thereby encouraging them to participate actively in learning activities. Another reason is that praise and recognition raise students' confidence and self-esteem, which translates into greater effort and improved academic performance. This finding is in agreement with Hidayati and Yuliana (2021) who found that the use of positive reinforcement, particularly verbal praise and token rewards, significantly improved students'

motivation and English test scores in junior high schools in Indonesia. In the same vein, Ismail and Majeed (2022) discovered that positive reinforcement significantly improved students' academic scores and motivation in secondary schools in Malaysia. Majeed (2022) further supports the present finding that reinforcement strategies, especially social ones like praise, play a critical role in improving performance. In the Nigerian context, Adeyemi and Ojo (2023) also reported a significant positive correlation between reinforcement techniques (praise and token rewards) and students' achievement in mathematics. This further reinforces the present study's conclusion that social reinforcement is an essential tool in enhancing students' academic performance across subjects.

Furthermore, the finding of the study revealed that teachers' social reinforcement techniques significantly influence students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding is in consonance with Ismail and Majeed (2022) who showed that reinforcement techniques led to statistically significant improvements in students' academic performance. The findings buttressed the importance of social reinforcement in promoting better learning performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that teachers' reinforcement techniques significantly influence students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, teachers' activity-based and social reinforcement techniques were all found to influence students' academic performance to a high extent. Furthermore, each of these reinforcement techniques was found to significantly contribute to students' performance in English. It is therefore imperative that deliberate efforts be made by educational authorities, school administrators, and teachers to effectively implement a variety of reinforcement strategies in secondary schools to enhance student motivation, engagement, and academic performance in English Language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. School administrators should encourage teachers to integrate activity-based reinforcement strategies, including group work, role plays, debates, and quizzes, into English lessons to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.
2. Teachers should be sensitised on the importance of social reinforcement, such as verbal praise, recognition, and constructive feedback, to foster a supportive classroom environment that boosts students' confidence, motivation, and participation.

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