Constructivism as pedagogical framework and poetry learning outcomes among Nigerian students: An experimental study

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Abstract: For poetry as a stand-alone subject, there is very scant empirical evidence that exist which estimates the impact of constructivism on its learning and teaching in Africa. There are, however, a number of existing studies in this regard in the Western context. This paper, using an experimental approach, examines the impact of constructivism on poetry learning among junior high school students in southeast Nigeria. Repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to estimate the achievement level in poetry of a randomized selection of participants across control and treatment groups. Results show a significant effect for the constructivist method on achievement among students in the treatment group compared to the control group. They also show that the effect of the constructivist method on students’ achievement is not determined by gender. The implications for research and practice are discussed according to these outcomes. The study concludes that while constructivism may stimulate increased students’ learning outcome, more interaction time between students and teachers and related resource will be crucial in further driving the gains of constructivism in pedagogy.

Subjects: Philosophy of Education; Philosophy of Education; Theory of Education

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Constructivism as a theory of learning has risen in importance in education. This resurgence is triggered by evidence of widespread acceptance of alternatives to objectivism and the knowledge explosion in the wake of the twentieth century that demanded more active learner participation. To help students become life-long learners, constructivism requires the use of metacognitive skills to constantly reflect, evaluate and reconstruct their daily experiences in order to generate meaning and solution to problems through shared understanding. As this implies, learning and teaching are no longer viewed as discreet processes. Instead, students learn by collaborating with their peers and teachers to construct and co-create understanding and experiences. Within this backdrop, the researcher examined the impact of constructivism on poetry learning. The findings showed a significant level of achievement in poetry albeit not determined by gender. Its implications for pedagogy and appropriate recommendations are discussed in the paper.
Keywords: Constructivism; Poetry; Education; Experimental approach

1. Introduction
This paper evaluates the effect of constructivist pedagogy on poetry learning among junior high school students. It, from an African perspective, attempts to corroborate existing studies which confirm that a constructivist approach to learning is more sustainable and is an effective alternative to rote learning (Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Sultan et al., 2011; Thompson, 2015) and in this regard, for poetry. Particularly in the sciences, rote learning has been disapproved because of its limitations. Studies show that rote learners are limited in their critical thinking, deep-level understanding, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Madden et al., 2017). In light of this argument, constructivism as a pedagogical tool is considered a highly effective alternative to learning sciences and other non-poetry subjects. Constructivism is a pedagogical tool that enables the learner to bring their previous experiences to bear in the “construction” of knowledge. The approach is learner-driven and significantly differs from learning by instructions issued by teachers (Kara, 2018). For poetry, however, it is unclear if constructivism improves its teaching and learning in Africa. In Nigeria, however, poetry education remains on the decline. How it is taught and learnt is crucial to stimulating and improving its popularity.

A few causes and consequences of poor poetry pedagogy in Nigeria could be considered. First is that there are few poetry teachers and this is as a result of the low remuneration and incentives poetry teachers receive in the country. A key reason is that policy makers prefer to formulate and implement policies that favor learning of STEM subjects including science, technology and mathematics, and those related to business. These preferred subjects are considered prerequisites to vocations that might better contribute to the development of the country. Poetry and related subjects are therefore considered as secondary in terms of policy priorities. As a result, the market for poetry—its demand and supply—is very limited. Since there are few poetry teachers, there are, by implication, few poetry students.

The second reason for the poor teaching of poetry in Nigeria is that the school system reflects the policy preference of the government. Poetry as a non-STEM subject is considered a “soft” subject (Roberts, 2010). Schools, therefore, allocate students perceived as more intelligent (i.e., students with higher test scores) to science classes. And the students with lesser test scores are perceived as less intelligent and are allocated to the Art classes. This fuels an unfortunate perception that Science-related subjects are better and more lucrative than Arts-related subjects (to which Poetry belongs). Furthermore, poetry has rarely become a stand-alone subject in senior high schools in Nigeria. In fact, there are no poetry exams in the senior secondary schools in the country. At best, poetry is recited as “nursery rhymes” in the nursery and primary schools. In the junior schools, however, there are attempts to make students write poems in creative ways.

A major implication of the foregoing is the loss of social and economic benefits accruable from poetry. For instance, poetry belongs to the affective domain of learning and is indicative of emotional intelligence (Morris et al., 2005; Roberts, 2010), as well as for appreciation (expression) of nature and its beauty (Edobor & Ebiye, 2017; Ugoani, 2015, 2016). In this regard, the values and virtues of cultures are aesthetically expressed and exposed. Some economists argue that visible appreciation and expression of Arts and Poetry is indicative of a high level of socioeconomic development; that is, a reflection of societies’ level of stability and prosperity. Historically, poetry was instrumental to making African American slaves resilient against the mistreatment of the white masters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

However, in spite of the apparent decline of poetry education in Nigerian schools, some parents and civil society organizations (CSOs) who understand the benefits of poetry advocate for its resurgence. Parents and CSOs enlist their children for competitions in poetry and related Arts subjects (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007). It can be argued then that mainstream poetry education
and appreciation might be taking place more outside the school system. What remains unclear nonetheless is how poetry is taught and learned at home and in the civil society spaces. Personal observation from lived experience suggests that learning is still by rote, at least, to revive the awareness of the subject and to sensitize the public about its benefits. In any case, there is no evidence to suggest that alternative pedagogical approaches such as constructivism is being deployed to stimulate and sustain students’ interest in, and possibly, initiate career in poetry in Africa. Constructivism has increased learning outcome in non-poetry subjects, for example, in Biology (see Ekon & Edem, 2015), in Business (see Koko, 2006), in Integrated Sciences (see Bimbola & Daniel, 2010; Qarareh, 2016), Mathematics (see Laz & Shafei, 2014), and in Chemistry (see Kibos et al., 2015). Similarly, constructivism has been shown to result in significant improvement in mechanical and motor skills (see Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Ogundola et al., 2010; Sultan et al., 2011).

1.1. Study objective

For poetry as a stand-alone subject, there is very scant empirical evidence on the impact of constructivism on its learning and teaching in Africa. There are however a number of similar studies in this regard in the Western countries; some of them include Villanueva (2016) and Harits (2016). These studies argue that constructivism is effective in retaining poetry learning outcome among students. Furthermore, poetry in Igbo language was the subject for analyses. This is because Igbo is the indigenous language of South Eastern Nigeria where the study was conducted. It is one of the three main languages spoken in Nigeria. The choice of Igbo is in response to a growing decline in speaking and writing of the Igbo language. Most families raise their children with English as their first language in southeast Nigeria. In fact, many children eventually grow up with poorly developed speaking and writing skills in their indigenous Igbo language even when they still do not gain proficiency in English. Some scholars suggest that students who are skilled in learning their first language will likely learn effectively a second one (Madriahan, 2014). However, in Nigeria, generally, both English and most of the indigenous languages are poorly taught, including the lexis, structure, literature and poetry of the languages (Adewale & Oshodi, 2013). A starting point in reversing this trend is improving the mastery of learning, speaking and writing of the first languages—in this regard, the Igbo language through poetry.

Poetry motivate language development at every stage of development. Infants first learn language by poems. They learn through sounds that help them to scaffold and learn words. Words when strung form language. At the adolescent and adult stages poetry’s simplicity enhances brevity of thought. It helps to paint word pictures of people, places and events (Ghopal, 2007). Thus, poetry stimulates or reinforces complex brain or cognitive development inasmuch as its outcomes are in the affective domain of learning. An interesting if not paradoxical feature of poetry is that kids first learnt by rote. It is sung out aloud, sung along and repeated often for them to relate to their meaning. Children (and adult alike) like to hear rhymes. (Ghopal, 2007 ibid.) Strongly opines that “Children like hearing rhymes and songs repeated often because it is a re-affirmation of their newly learned skills of language and it offers a familiarity with the culture that they identify and find security in”. She further supports the theory that children possess the language acquisition device (LAD) (see Hanauer, 2001; Sureshkumar, 2001)—that children can learn as many languages as they are exposed to their poems and poetry. Poetry is a “sound” medium for learning languages.

This study therefore seeks to fill an important gap in this regard and employed repeated measures ANOVA in testing the impact of constructivism approach in Igbo poetry pedagogy in Nigeria. The hypotheses are tested on whether constructivist method has a significant effect on students’ achievement when taught poetry in the treatment group versus the control group.

Since poetry is considered a “soft subject”, it then stimulates the curiosity on who learns it better between males and females. Like the Sciences however, studies suggest that there are more male
authors of poem than female in developed economies. This may not indicate sufficiently that males understand poetry better than females. There could be other factors responsible that are social and even environmental. In Nigeria, there are no empirical evidence to suggest any male dominance of the subject inasmuch as it’s teaching and learning is underdeveloped. While female enrolment in schools is becoming high (The International Organization for Migration, IOM, 2014) and may suggest likelihood of more female learners, there are yet fewer established female poets. What remains crucial however, for poetry development is the motivation for learning the subject and how more persons—male and female—will imbibe the culture of its learning for Ibo language revival and development.

Thus, we test another hypothesis on whether gender influenced poetry learning. Learning outcome is assessed for students randomly assigned to control and treatment groups through pre- and post-intervention periods of having learned poetry. The results indicated an overall significant effect of the constructivist method on achievement in poetry among students in the treatment group over the control group, but not across gender.

2. Constructivism as a pedagogical framework
Generally, authors agree that a constructivism approach to teaching and learning is based on the premise that cognition (learning) is the result of students’ “mental construction” (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Khalid & Azeem, 2012). In other words, students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know, which is “learned or previous experience” (Bimobola & Daniel, 2010). Previous experience of students, in turn, is shaped by their beliefs and attitude (Bada, 2015; Borich & Tombari, 1995). Thompson (2015) further explains that a learning outcome from a constructive mode of learning has more impact on learners than a traditional receptive and passive mode where the teacher dominates the discourse. Thus, the conclusion, according to the proponents of constructivism, is that learning is constructed by the learners.

Constructed knowledge has two basic features (Bada, 2015). First, learners form new understanding using what they already know, based on the fact that learners are no tabula rasa—learners must possess some form of prior experience that will validate or corroborate and “construct” new learning. Second, learning is active. Learners apply current understanding, note relevant elements in new learning experiences, judge the consistency of prior and emerging knowledge and, based on that judgment, modify their knowledge (Bada, 2015, citing Phillips, 1995).

Constructivism draws its background from the fields of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and education (Bimobola & Daniel, 2010). As a result, constructivism includes a good number of variations, the two most popular views of which are personal constructivism, attributed to Jean Piaget, and social constructivism, propounded by Lev Vygotsky (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). Other variants include radical constructivism advocated by Von Glasersfeld (1995), constructivist epistemologies, and educational constructivism by Mathews (1998).

Personal constructivism views learning on the basis of personal experience or experiential learning. It is a fundamental method of learning that emphasizes how learning or knowledge is based on innate abilities and self-discovery (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). It requires that students use their natural capacities to drive knowledge through experience (Nedha, 2015). Piaget developed two important principles for personal constructivism: organization (students’ ability to connect all cognitive structure to fit new experiences) and adaptation (students’ ability to adjust to learning environment to allow for a stabilized cognitive structure) (Ngwoke & Eze, 2004). Social constructivism, on the other hand, is concerned with life experience, or the world as it is felt and understood by social actors (Schwandt, 1994). It requires that students be able to construct experience from social agents and interaction. Students’ cognitive development
therefore becomes primarily a function of cultural, historical, and social interaction rather than of individual construction (Au, 1998; Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012).

Some authors (Kushner, 1996; Gojkov, 2011; Kara, 2018), however, do not entirely agree on the advantages of a constructivism approach to teaching and learning. While acknowledging its pros and underscoring the cons, they argue that a blend of approaches derives from and ensures learning retention. For instance (Kara, 2018) recommends that constructivism requires teachers to be disciplined and consistent in engaging their students. As a result, there might be a blend of both traditional and constructivist approaches for learning. Kara (2018) further observes that the expertise of teachers on constructivism is required to handle students from diverse backgrounds. The author is also concerned about the challenges of building teacher capacity, especially in developing countries where diversity is abundant and teacher training is relatively poor.

In Nigeria, teachers may not be unfamiliar with the constructivism approach. Even if so, the school system may not allow its full implementation. Some possible reasons are firstly, little time is allotted to cover the scheme of work, thus shortage of time constrains the teachers to reel instructions to students (Anyanwu and Iwuamadi, 2015). Further, teachers are assessed on their delivery in this regard—how well they have covered the content of the scheme rather than whether they deployed constructivism or not. Secondly, the diversity of students based on their backgrounds often necessitates the need for extramural classes [MoE, New Zealand]. In this case, students with richer parents who can afford to pay for more learning time are more likely to benefit. Thus constructivism may be likely to flourish in extramural learning settings than in the regular classroom settings.

Kushner (1996), in another development, argues that constructivism is limited in evaluating learning outcome of students due to its “rampant” nature (p. 199). He argues against the role of “experience” in guaranteeing increased learning outcome due to diversity or differences in students’ cultural background. He states:

Constructivism as applied to evaluation risks losing sight of culture—one of the most powerful of integrating analyses. However, we think of culture it has something to do with how the individual reconciles him- herself to the collective. It also has something to do with how the collective, impossible to exist by itself, can only be manifest in the minds of its greatest threat—the individual. This defines an area of common struggle which people engage in every day of the week as they try to reconcile their hopes with the institutional hand they have been dealt—nurses and patients, ministers and pupils, parents and prison- ers, managers and minions. Evaluators of whatever persuasion have no right to ignore the reality of that struggle—neither the uniqueness in which it is waged, nor the universality of the experience. That paradox should live at the heart of program evaluation.

Gojkov (2011) in a related sense, observes that proponents of constructivism pedagogy make the learning process appear too simplistic, suggesting that constructivism does not factor in much of reality, that is, the learners’ emotional past and current reality, while students “construct” knowledge. The author posits therefore that “new information is rarely inscribed on the line of mastered knowledge; on the contrary, it is rather an obstacle on cognitive and emotional planes.” (Gojkov, 2011, p. 23). Thus, he implies that previous learning has to be deconstructed (and this is not easy) before learning of new concepts may occur. Curiously, while some empirical evidence suggests that constructivist method resulted in significant improvement of students’ academic performance (Kholid & Azeem, 2012; Uwalaka & Kim, 2005; Banks, 2010; Uwalaka & Offorma, 2015), other scholars reported that constructivist method did not improve students’ academic performance (Bimbola & Daniel, 2010).

There are no indications in literature that males do better than females or vice versa in the context of constructivism. Although, some research suggests gender differentiation (Duyilemi & Bolajoko, 2014), others suggest that there is significant difference between the achievement of
male and female exposed to a constructivist method (Akinbobala & Afolabi, 2009; Ogundola et al., 2010). This scenario extends to non-academic situations, for instance, in business and entrepreneurship (Wilson & Tagg, 2010). For poetry nonetheless, there remains dearth of literature on gender effects of learning it. Abraham (2017)’ and Ugwuozor et al. (2020) indicate that gender differences exist in poetry but Falvey (2019) observes that there are more accomplished male poets than female. What remains unclear is whether there is shared (equal) learning between genders but unequal career pursuit between them.

While schools of thought may differ on the applications and benefits of constructivism, most authors agree that learning by constructivism will motivate increased learner-centeredness, and increase student self-concept, self-belief, and self-development. Literature on the effect of constructivism on poetry learning is scanty. Park (2015) however observes that a collaborative approach to teaching in a literature classroom was highly effective in increasing students' literary appreciation and helping them become more comfortable working in an inclusive classroom. Also, following the constructivist method proposed by Cubukcu (2010), teachers can choose a poem, for instance, the Nigerian National Anthem—a fairly short poem with two stanzas and themes that includes the nation’s connection through freedom, peace and unity, and the expectations from the future generation to keep the nation at peace. Dividing students into groups to discuss their national anthem will likely arouse their interests, give them opportunity to express their feeling, elicit them to think deeper into the meaning of the poem in relation to them and in relation to each other and reconstruct their experience through this process.

3. Methodological considerations

3.1. Ethical approval

The ethical approval for conducting this study was granted by the University of Nigeria Nsukka Faculty of Education Research Grants Committee. The respondents’ informed consent was also obtained.

3.2. Population and sample

The population of students in Junior Secondary School 2 (JSS 2) in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area (LGA) in Enugu State was 12,345 with an almost equal distribution of males and females—6,340 boys and 6,005 girls. A purposive sampling was used to select the school with the largest population and most even distribution of males to females. A school with about 96 students in JSS 2 class was selected. From this cohort, a sample size of about 77 students was determined and randomly selected using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

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    n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}
\]

Students who scored more than 40% in their previous Mid Term poetry exams were replaced to shrink the size of the sample to 60 with equal distribution of male and female students for the investigation. Further, this smaller sample is ideal for effective intervention in the sense that it is a desirable classroom size. However, the major reason for this reduction is to assess the magnitude of gains in scores for low scoring students of poetry after the intervention—whether poetry can be made yet interesting to these category of students whose motivation may be low due to the low scores. Although, it would be interesting to assess if higher scoring students fared better or not by constructivism. This is a matter for another study.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents at baseline. Most of the students did not like poetry—about 42% of the male students and 28% of the female students. More female students had more appreciation of poetry, despite the overall test scores of less than 40% in their Mid Term exams, 40% being the standard minimum pass
mark. This implies that increased stimulation to learn poetry may potentially increase their learning outcome.

3.3. Research design
This study adopts a pretest-posttest experimental design. Students were assigned randomly to treatment and control groups. Randomization took place by randomly assigning each student to even and odd numbers. All the students assigned to odd numbers were designated as the Control group and all the students assigned the even numbers were designated as the Treatment group. Both groups of students were taught Poetry and analyses of Poem in English, then based on the lessons learnt, they analyzed Igbo Poem, Ojadili and one Igbo song Anya afurozi agu. The former however, is the subject for analyses. Test questions—the Poetry Achievement Test (PAT) (see Appendix II) motivated by the author but developed by Poetry teachers—were administered to students in two groups—the treatment and the control groups. Teachers were selected to teach students in using constructivism and traditional approaches in both respective groups.

3.3.1. Selection of teachers
Four sets of teachers were selected, two for each of the groups. Teachers for the control group were briefed on the “traditional” approach to teaching, while teachers allocated to the treatment group were briefed on how to teach students based on constructivism approach. Both the traditional and constructivism approaches to teaching are highlighted subsequently.

3.3.2. Intervention
3.3.2.1. Poetry lesson content. Students sorted to both classes—the control and treatment groups—were taught poetry according to Poetry Syllabus for Junior Secondary School (JSS) II. In both categories the students were first taught the concept and structure of poetry. They were taught the difference between Poetry and Playwright and other poetry concepts like Patterning, Lyrical Persona, Rhyming and Repetitions, Assonance, Emotiveness of Poem, Imagery, Sonnet. From the foregoing, each of the students was made to describe in detail their understanding of Poetry in the following aspects: Definitions of poetry, Importance of poetry, Structure of a poem, Figurative patterns, and literary terms.

The difference is pedagogy however, is that the students in the control group were taught by the regular classroom method; students in the treatment group were required to “construct” or elicit their learnings with the facilitation of the teachers [See Subsection 3.3.1 for more details of the pedagogies]

3.3.2.2. Time period. The PAT questions were administered in 9 months (within 2017/18 academic session), designated as Time 1 (First Term); Time 2 (Second Term); and Time 3 (Third Term).

Table 1. Students’ Demographic Characteristics

| Characteristics               | N (%) | M (SD) |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|
| **Group**                     |       |        |
| Control                       | 30 (50)|        |
| Treatment                     | 30 (50)|        |
| **Age**                       |       | 12.6 (1.56) |
| **Gender (Love for Poetry)**  |       |        |
| Male (Yes)                    | 5 (8.3)|        |
| Male (No)                     | 25 (41.7)|      |
| Female (Yes)                  | 13 (21.7)|      |
| Female (No)                   | 17 (28.3)|      |
Time 1 was baseline time—the first three of the 9 months, that is, when students took the first PAT, Time 2\textsuperscript{12} was a mid-evaluation—the 4th to 6th months, and Time 3 was end-line evaluation—the 7th to 9th month. Each of the time period is also designated as the pre-test, mid-test and post-test, respectively.

This study took advantage of the required extramural\textsuperscript{13} classes the students attend after regular school hours. Poetry lessons for this study were therefore extramural albeit experimental. Each extramural lesson lasts for 30 min and students take four lessons after school hours which include poetry. Poetry lessons spread throughout the terms but in concrete terms took place in 4 weeks for each term. PAT questions were administered at the beginning and end of the term and scores were taken.

3.3.2.3. Intervention integrity. To ensure undue influence and hence “contamination” of the treatment group. The treatment class and control class were far apart (the treatment classes took place in one of the empty classes in the senior block). Further, we observed that students in the traditional classes were less interested in the constructivism approach. We randomly tested their ability to “construct” learnings and we noticed they were bored. We also found that over time, students in the treatment group found it difficult to transmit constructivism approach to their peers especially to those who were completely unfamiliar with it. Thus we conclude that it is difficult to deploy constructivism without a trained personnel and experienced personnel.

3.3.3. The control groups
As earlier stated, a total of 30 students were randomly allocated to the Control group. Students allocated to this group were taught poetry using the traditional method. The traditional method is the common approach to learning in most of the schools. Teachers developed their lesson notes using the mainstream approach they had been used to. They would set induce the lessons and then write the lesson content on the board for students to copy in their notebooks. By this approach, the teachers simply delivered lesson instructions on Poetry to students using markers and boards. The poetry lessons were written on the board and students were made to recite and memorize the lessons taught—the concept and terminologies in poetry. They were made to learn two Igbo poems by recitation and repetition.

3.3.4. Treatment group
The teachers’ interaction with the students in the Treatment group is called Intervention using the constructivism approach to learning. The teachers guided the students around an orientation process in constructivism learning that follows the framework by Cubukcu (2010):

(i) **Orientation:** This required arousing students’ interest, imagination, creativity, emotion, and intellect by engaging in poetic experiences that are easily accessible, e.g., reading and discussing a poem about a subject to which students can relate.

(ii) **Elicitation/structure:** Students were engaged with poetry and each other’s ideas by allowing time for students to respond individually and as a group. This was intended to involve periods of quiet meditation or “thinking time” followed by shared responses: ideas, feelings, and experiences that are stimulated by engaging with the poem.

(iii) **Intervention/restructure:** Students were encouraged to experiment and play with language through engaging in activities such as sharing favorite lines, writing in different forms, and communicating their thoughts and feelings in exciting ways. Students were guided to see poetry as an exciting medium of expressing feelings, thoughts, and ideas, which can be worked on together or individually, and shared among the classroom community. In this way, in-depth meanings are clarified.

(iv) **Review:** Students were helped to recognize the significance of their play with language by sharing what they had found out about poetry, about themselves, and about the constructs of language through meta-language. Application is the last stage in creative and critical thinking.
From the foregoing, students in this group were required and/or expected to “internalize” and “assimilate” all they learned about the concept and structure of poetry. They were taught to bring their individual experiences to bear in explaining in detail their understanding of poetry in Igbo. They were to answer the PAT questions in their own words.  

3.4. Measures

The Instrument, Poetry Achievement Test (PAT), developed by the author was used for the study. It is a 17-item essay-type questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to elicit the baseline and gains on achievement on poetry by JSS 2 students. It was developed based on the Nigerian JSS II unit plan in poetry. A test blueprint was used to derive the list of items of the PAT (see Table 2). The PAT Questions were divided into two sections. The first section is the General Questions. It assesses students’ poetry learning from various lessons taught them. The second section contains questions on the Ibo poems the students are taught and then to individually and jointly recite. Each lesson is intended (through the traditional and Constructivistic approach) to stimulate students’ curiosity to deeper language meaning, in this regard Ibo.

3.4.1. Validity

The test questions were sent to two colleagues and poets (PhD holders) in the Department of Art Education for their assessment on the relevance and applicability of the test questions to the research objectives. They first assessed the PAT at face value and then an examined its relevance to the research objectives—if each question would stimulate increased poetry learning (face validity). Content Validity could not be conducted. Content validity could not be conducted because there are few subject matter specialists, i.e., poets available at the time of the study. However, the inter-coder reliability of the PAT was 81 (measured by the Pearson’s r).

3.4.2. Test questions and scoring

The total score for PAT is 100. Each section carries maximum of 50 marks. The second section concerns analysing an Ibo poem based on the poetry lessons the students had earlier received. The traditional approach was used for scoring in the sense that the students did not determine the right answers. The right answers had been determined or given by the teachers. For the purpose of this study, students in the treatment group were required to “construct” the right answers—the answers consistent with or the same as the predetermined answers. We considered students at junior secondary school level inexperienced and unknowledgeable enough to determine the right

| Table 2. Test Blueprint on Poetry Achievement Test |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| **S/N** | **Content Dimension** | **Ability Process Dimension** |
|        |                      | **Lower Cognition** | **High Cognition** | **Total** |
| 1      | Definitions of poetry | 10                  | 1                   | 0         | 1         |
| 2      | Importance of poetry  | 10                  | 1                   | 1         | 2         |
| 3      | Structure of a poem  | 20                  | 2                   | 1         | 3         |
| 4      | Figurative patterns  | 25                  | 4                   | 2         | 6         |
| 5      | Literary terms       | 35                  | 5                   | 3         | 8         |
| Total  |                      | 100                 | 13                  | 7         | 20        |

Note. S/N = Serial Number.
answers. There would be no basis for assessing gains in poetry learning if we allowed the students to determine the answers—there would be no right or wrong answers.

3.5. Data analyses
The study used a repeated-measures (within-subject) design, which measured students’ poetry achievement scores at Time 1 (pre-intervention) and Time 2 (post-intervention). Specifically, repeated-measures ANOVA were employed to test the significance in improvement or change in individual participant and across control and treatment groups. Univariate ANOVA was used to test gender differences in test scores. Mean, standard deviation, and partial eta, squared ($\eta^2_p$), that is, the effect size is also reported.

4. Results
The analysis (Table 3 and Figure 1) revealed that at Time 1, PAT scores obtained from participants in the control and treatment groups were 28.13 ± 0.43 and 28.27 ± 0.98, respectively. At Time 1, low scores and no significant difference were observed in the mean achievement in poetry among the participants in both groups, with the degree of freedom $F(1, 58) = 0.68$, the critical value $p = .49$, and effect size, $\eta^2_p = 0.008$.

At Time 2, PAT scores obtained were 27.60 ± 1.13 and 85.13 ± 0.35 in the control and treatment groups, respectively, which showed that the level of students’ achievement significantly changed, $F(1, 58) = 266.11$, $p = .000, \eta^2_p = 0.99$. In terms of effect size, the $\eta^2_p$ values of about 0.99 indicates that about 99% of the between subject variance is accounted for by the intervention. That is, about 99% of the changes (improvement) in the scores of the students in each of Time 2 and Time 3 is attributed to the intervention—the constructivism approach to learning the poetry (see Table 4). At Time 3 (6-month follow-up till the 9th month), the impact of the constructivism method on achievement in poetry remained consistent among the students in the treatment group versus those in control group, $F(1, 58) = 137.58, p = .000, \eta^2_p = 0.99$.

Table 4 and Figure 2 shows that at Time 1, PAT scores obtained from both male and female participants in the treatment group were 28.44 ± 1.09 and 28.07 ± 0.83, respectively. At Time 1, low scores and no significant difference were observed in the mean achievement in poetry among those in the treatment group, $F(1, 28) = 1.02, p = .32, \eta^2_p = 0.17$.

At Time 2, PAT scores obtained were 85.13 ± 0.34 and 85.14 ± 0.36 among male and female participants in the treatment group, respectively, which showed that the effect of the constructivist method on level of students’ achievement is not determined by gender, $F(1, 28) = 0.14, p = 0.89, \eta^2_p = 0.05$. At Time 2, a $\eta^2_p$ value of = 0.001 is an indication that the effect of the constructivist method on students’ achievement in poetry is not determined by gender (see Table 4). At Time 3, the effect of the constructivist method on achievement in poetry remained consistent among the

| Table 3. Summary Statistics for Repeated-Measures ANOVA of Outcome Variables by Treatment Condition and Time as Measured by PAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group Treatment Group | Time 1 | Time 2 | Time 3 | Time 1 | Time 2 | Time 3 | df | $F$ | Sig. | $\eta^2_p$ | Obs. Power |
| PAT | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | (1, 58) | 0.68 | .498 | .008 |
| -- | 28.13 (0.43) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.13 (0.43) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.27 (0.98) | (1, 58) | 266.11 | .000 | 0.999 | 1.000 |
| -- | 28.13 (0.43) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.13 (0.43) | 28.27 (0.98) | 28.27 (0.98) | (1, 58) | 137.58 | .000 | 0.997 | 1.000 |
| -- | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | (1, 58) | 137.58 | .000 | 0.997 | 1.000 |
| -- | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | (1, 58) | 137.58 | .000 | 0.997 | 1.000 |
| -- | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.60 (1.13) | 27.03 (1.81) | 27.03 (1.81) | (1, 58) | 137.58 | .000 | 0.997 | 1.000 |
students in the treatment group despite their gender, \( F (1, 28) = 0.40, p = 0.69, \eta^2 = 0.006.\) In sum, the insignificance of the \( p \) values suggests that gender had influence on learning gains due to constructivism.

5. Discussion
The study examined the effect of the constructivist method on junior school students’ achievement and interest in Igbo poetry. First, the study tested the hypothesis that the constructivist method would have a significant effect on students’ achievement when taught poetry in the treatment group versus the control group. The results indicated that the constructivist method had a significant effect on achievement in poetry among students in the treatment group versus
the control group (see Table 1). This finding disagreed with Bimbola and Daniel (2010), who reported that the constructivist method did not improve students’ academic performance. On the other hand, the result supported Khalid and Azeem (2012), who found that the constructivist method of teaching increases students’ rate of proficiency, raises their satisfaction, and increases their participation. This finding also supports previous studies like Uwalaka and Kim (2005), Banks (2010), and Uwalaka and Offorma (2015). The effectiveness of constructivism on students’ achievement in poetry could be based on the fact that it gives students opportunities to discover and explore information, probably because the constructivist teaching method gives room for students to use their innate abilities and critical thinking to actively employ the knowledge that is important to them. Since this approach equips learners with fundamental knowledge and better prepares them for problem-solving tasks that can position them to face the challenges of contemporary society, school counselors and teachers must consider opting for a constructivist method of teaching and learning instead of the conventional one.

Second, the study examined whether students’ gender would predict the impact of the constructivist method on their achievement in poetry. The results indicated that it would not (see Table 2). This finding agrees with Akinbobola and Afolabi (2009), who found that there is no significant difference between the achievement of male and female students in physics who are taught with a guided-discovery teaching approach. The finding corresponds with Ogundola et al. (2010) who also found no significant difference between male and female students exposed to the constructivist method. In contrast to this result, Duylemi and Bolajoko (2014) found that male students had higher achievement scores than their female counterparts who are exposed to the constructivist method. This is not surprising as both male and female students appear to have discovered the teaching method that will be most effective in boosting their learning capacities.
This shows that their minds are not totally tabula rasa, or empty slates. It may be that the conventional method allows gender difference among junior secondary students. By contrast, Kim (2005) argued that the constructivist method is not effective in relation to self-concept and learning strategy, but had some effect upon motivation, anxiety toward learning, and self-monitoring. This may be attributable to the time factor (the multiple times when scores were taken).

6. Conclusions
The application of the constructivist method during teaching and learning grooms and produces higher achievers, since students in these poetry classes who were exposed to constructivist teaching performed better than those who were not. This paper therefore emerges as one that contributes to supporting constructivism as a viable alternative to traditional teaching and learning of poetry. However, more detailed and wider-scoped studies will determine the extent constructivism will significantly reduce students’ disinterestedness and increase their level of emotional intelligence due to poetry. The results of this study also indicate that gender had no impact on students’ achievement in poetry when using the constructivist method since both male and female students can have shared learning in poetry. Poetry teachers may therefore consider more gender-inclusive approaches to boost their students’ readiness to learn poetry.

Poetry is still not a priority subject in many Nigerian secondary schools. This is because it is not perceived as an important aspect of body of knowledge critical to national development in the same way as the sciences are assumed. Consequently, science becomes more favored and prioritized, and as a result, there have been more practices and policies to sustain scientific learning and discourse. In terms of practice, constructivism is one of the many pedagogical approaches that have been implemented or tested and have gained the attention of scholars and educational practitioners (Altun & Büyükduman, 2007; Khalid & Azeem, 2012).

This study concludes that the constructivist method had a significant impact on achievement in poetry among students in the treatment group compared to those in the control group. It also showed that the effect of a constructivist method on students’ achievement in poetry is not as gendered as earlier studies found. Students’ academic performance depends not only on what, how, and where they learn, but also on their critical thinking.

It is noteworthy, however, that the environment in which constructivism is tested and implemented is crucial for its success in student learning. The study therefore recommends that school managements permit teachers the time and space to explore this approach and provide the necessary resources needed to practice constructivism pedagogy within a time-constrained educational system. Further, it is advised that students be adequately exposed to the new approach to learning so this type of learning can take place beyond contact with the teachers.

6.1. Limitations and directions for future research
While this study has attempted to contribute to extant literature on constructivism and poetry learning outcomes, it suffers from a number of limitations. It is limited in its scope by the sample size (only one local government and only one educational venue are represented by the data set). As such, the study’s findings are relatively narrow to lend itself to wider generalization. Further research using a larger sample size and more than one local government, and more schools would likely strengthen the scope of the results.

Since there were more than one teacher in both experimental and control groups, there is the possibility of some overt or covert influences in the gradings and in the result differentials. Teachers’ Typologies (Adelson, 1960, Bernstein, 2011; Caselmann, 1970; Ryan, 1960a) and other teachers’ desirables and undesirables, personalities and different characters and their effects on students could have affected the results differentials.
The research was designed so that both categories of respondents, i.e., students who underwent constructivist method and those who underwent traditional approach in poetry learning would undergo the same PAT tests periodically. The goal of the study was to assess the consistency in the (gains in) scores of both categories of students. When they are examined by the PAT tests. Thus, after both categories of students underwent the poetry lessons, they were examined by a common set of tests using the traditional approach. This is to remove any biases. It is noteworthy that both sets of students are familiar with the traditional approach.

In each of the tests as the results of the study show, the students who underwent constructivist had higher scores that were significant more than students who underwent the traditional approach. It is noteworthy that the answers to the PAT tests are already known or determined by the evaluators and hence the need for students to undergo the tests for unbiased comparison. Nonetheless, the students who underwent constructivist approach to learning were guided through the process of constructing the right answers within the [Igbo] poetry they were taught. Thus, inherent in the constructivist approach, the students “constructed” their answers.

For this study, constructivism simply demonstrated its potential to show that students exposed to it will possess higher and better capacity to learn [poetry] than rote learning (the traditional approach).

To use constructivism in the final evaluation was not necessary for this study. This is because as earlier stated, the right answers to the questions were already predetermined. To use constructivist method for the final evaluation would mean that there would be no right or wrong answers only the ones the students constructed. Ambiguous scoring would hamper our ability to measure the gains accruable to using constructivist and the traditional methods of teaching and learning.

However, as a direction for future studies, students should be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of experiments like this for more robust results. However, it must be acknowledged that a major limitation is that constructivist approach to learning and teaching takes time, and the structure of students’ learning in Nigeria suits the traditional approach.

Further investigation comparing students’ performances based on more contact period in class and the use of specialized facilities, for example, exposure to more poems, poetry labs, language lab in poetry learning may produce valuable insights. It is recommended that further research should look into other possible moderators or content that may affect poetry learning outcomes. Specialized events or programs that encourage constructivism such as experiential learning programs could provide further areas of investigation. It is therefore recommended that further research consider examining whether technology-based constructivist learning—the use of several learning platform—could stimulate poetry learning. Students may likely perceive such innovation to be more hands-on or practical as they can practice rapid interventions without limitations in learning space and time. This recommendation is a slight improvement on the approach recommended by Cubukcu (2010).

Despite the foregoing limitations, this study has corroborated existing studies that support constructivism as a better teaching and learning technique, even for poetry. It demonstrates that when guided, students tend to understand lesson contents better with constructivism than when contents are reeled out as instructions—the traditional approach to learning. Constructivism has shown in this study that the scores of low scoring students in poetry significantly improved over time and there was no significant difference between the improvement of male students and female students. Both categories of students “constructed” their poetry understanding in similar ways. Constructivism is likely to stimulate increased learning of poetry if encouraged by policy makers and managers of the school systems.
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Notes

1. Anecdotal evidence abound in this regard. The author has yet to find conclusive evidence to support the fact that science students produce the best WAEC (West African Examination Council) results.
2. When there is prosperity, more people tend to appreciate the Arts. People attend visit theaters to listen to poems and movies and the like.
3. Black slaves made to work the plantations of the white song sparrow songs and poems in unison to endure the mistreatment of their White captors and masters.
4. Is this common knowledge. The Ohaneze nigbo—the umbrella body for Pan-Igbo Affairs locally and globally laments the dying of Ibo language and culture In The Nations Newspaper of February 18th, 2018. Find details in https://thenationonlineng.net/ohaneze-decries-decline-spoken-igbo/.
5. See also the following blog sites: https://www.googlepartnershipblogblog/children-learn-better-their-mother-tonguehttps://www.wnp.org/post/study-suggests-early-learning-native-language-can-help-english-skillshttps://www.franchisingcouncil.org/voices-magazine/why-school-should-teach-young-learners-home-language
6. See Deidre Falvey’s article on the Irish Times on 17 August 2019: “Two-thirds of published poets are male, so does poetry have a gender issue?”https://www.irishtimes.com/profile/deirdre-falvey-7. 1837399. Also see Seth Abraham’s contribution to the Huffington Post: “The Widening Gender Gap in Contemporary American Poetry” on 6 December 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/author/seth-abramson
7. Source is Enugu State Post Primary School Management Board, Enugu State, 2015/2016.
8. Ojindi is a common Igbo poem that describes the virtue of bravery. See https://www.igbonewspaper.com/2015/09/19/ojindi-episode-1-2/for a more detailed story of Ojindi’s bravery.
9. Anya afuru zo agh is an excerpt from Chief Osita Osadebe’s song. The song describes the boy that cried wolf. When he eventually needed help, there was no one to assist him.
10. The two English teachers were naturally selected. Two other teachers from the JS 3 classes were coopted with the approval of the Principal. Each of the teachers was selected because of their experience in teaching Literature in English (which includes Poetry) both in the school and extramural.
11. Find PAT Questions in the Appendix with the Ibo Poem that students analyzed and were graded.
12. There was limited use for Time 2 in the final evaluation.
13. Students are encouraged to attend extramural classes which they pay for but not to the official school accounts. The teachers are the primary beneficiaries of these payments. It is however coordinated by the School. The extramural classes serve several purposes: to further engage the students academically—rather than spending time on less productive activities, to make up for insufficient interaction or contact time between the teachers and the students during the official regular classes. However, although not compulsory, almost all the students attend school-based extramural classes two hours (2–4 hours) after regular contact sessions.
14. There was no evidence of Hawthorne Effect in the Treatment Group in the sense that students in the treatment group were likely to impress more. The students were primed to take the lessons as no different from other lessons—they were only introduced to a different technique of learning poetry. They understood that the scores might form part of their continuous assessment scores and would likely contribute to their total term’s scores.
15. We note however, that cost was a factor in accessing subject matter specialist. We decided to work with face validity alone.

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BACKGROUND

Technology

Schools

Structivist

Approaches

Council

1365-2850.2009.01500.x

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### Appendix 1.
Ojadili Ibo Poem and the English translation

| Stanzas | Ibo Poem | English Translation |
|---------|----------|---------------------|
| 1       | Obu onye k’ayi n’acho? Obu onye k’ayi n’acho? Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | Who are we looking for? Who are we looking for? It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
| 2       | Ojebe nku, nya nata Ochub’iyi, nya nata Ojebe afia, nya nata Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | If he goes to fetch wood, may he return If he goes to fetch water, may he return If he goes to the market, may he return It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
| 3       | Obu onye k’ayi n’acho? Obu onye k’ayi n’acho? Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | Who are we looking for? Who are we looking for? It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
| 4       | Ojebe nku, Ugboko elikwania Ochub’iyi, iyi elikwania Ojebe afia, uzu afia elikwania Ojebe agha, ogbonuke doo! Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | If he goes to fetch wood, may the woods not devour him If he goes to fetch water, may the stream not devour him If he goes to the market, may market noises not devour him If he goes to war, spirit-age mates, spare! It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
| 5       | Nee egwu k’onabia Nee ogu n’odaa Ogu-egwu choo Dike-ogu choa Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | See the dance as it approaches See war as it breaks out Master-singer choo War hero choa It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
| 6       | Egwu ebee nibinja! Mmonwu ayi ewelu mgbachi naa! Mmili amaa dike, maa okanga! Oja n’ojani mmoo apiar! Udu n’edu okpa-egwu awari! Okolo amem! Okolo Igbo! youngman! Okolobia n’obgo mmee! Ogulanya na be mmoo! Ojadili k’ayi n’acho Ojadili | The dance has stopped suddenly! Our mask has departed in the heat of the festival! The rains have drenched the hero, drenched his companions! The flute that praises the spirits has been smashed! The pot drum that spurred on the dancer’s feet is broken! My precious young man! Everybody’s Young man in the circle of blood! Lord in the domain of spirits! It’s Ojadili we’re looking for Ojadili |
Appendix II.
Poetry Achievement Test Questions for JS II students

Instruction to the Teachers.

Dear teacher,

(i) This research is strictly for academic purposes. Its objective is to test the effect of constructivism approach on learning poetry. Its findings may likely be useful to you and other teachers, administrators and policy makers who may wish to improve poetry pedagogy.

(ii) Since you are familiar with both constructivism approach and the traditional approach to learning, you will be assigned to any of the group of students assigned to learn poetry by constructivism (treatment group) and those assigned to learn by the regular or traditional method (control group).

(iii) The test questions are based on the JS II curriculum and spans three periods, i.e., first term, second term and third term. Hence the lessons are designed to end between fourth and eighth week of each term.

(iv) The lessons are to be conducted after schools officially dismissal, i.e., during the extramural class period.

(v) There are two sections. Section A is on General Questions. The students are to answer each of the questions on answer sheets provided according to how they understood the lessons. Section B concerns analyses of an Ibo Poem, Ojadili. The Poem is to be learned and rehearsed each term.

(vi) For evaluation, administer the questions in each term and collect their scores. You will be given a “marking scheme” for the scoring. Don’t bother whether you have covered the scheme of work or not.

(A) General Questions

(1) What are the scholarly definitions of poetry?

Is poetry inherent or acquired?

(2) What is the repetition of similar consonant sounds at the initials of words in a poetic line called?

(3) Sound patterning is used in poetry to achieve what effect?

(4) According to Wordsworth, “Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of emotion.” Explain.

(5) What do you understand by “imagery”?

(6) What is the relationship between tone and mood in poetry?

(7) What is a poem of lamentation for the dead called?

(8) Which is more important in poetry: sound or meaning? Explain.

(9) The flying feather fell flat. What is the dominant sound device in the above line?

(10) A “playwright” is to a “play” as a “poem” is to a_____?
(8) Interpretation of Ojadili

(1) What is the structural patterning of ojadili?

Describe the sound patterning of ojadili

(2) Who is the lyrical persona?

(3) What are the assonances of ojadili?

(4) What are the sonnets in ojadili?

(5) Describe the tone and the mood of ojadili