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EFFECT OF AI-ENHANCED DISCUSSION STRATEGY ON STUDENTS' INTEREST IN PROSE FICTION IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The study examined the effect of AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy on Students' Interest in Prose Fiction in Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State. Three purposes, research questions, and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent control group research design. The population of the study was 8241Senior Secondary II (SSII) Students in the two hundred and twenty-one (221) Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State (3567 Male and 4674 Female students). A multistage sampling procedure was used to draw a sample size of 164 SS II students from intact classes of two coeducational schools (87 males and 77 females). The instrument used for data collection was the Prose Fiction Interest Scale (PFIS). The instrument was face-validated by three experts and tested for reliability, which yielded the KR-20 reliability coefficient of 0.91. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings of the research questions revealed that Students taught with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than those taught with the conventional approach. Female students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than male students taught prose fiction with the same approach. There is no interaction between method and gender on students' mean interest in prose fiction. The hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), and the findings revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean interest score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools students taught with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with the conventional Teaching Method; there is no significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of male and female Senior Secondary Schools students taught with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy; there is a significant difference in the interaction effect of method and gender on Senior Secondary Schools students' mean interest score in prose fiction. It was recommended that teachers of Literature-in-English should adopt the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy in teaching prose fiction, to improve students' interest in prose fiction.

Keywords: *AI-Enhanced Discussion, Strategy, Interest, Prose Fiction.*
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Introduction

Literature-in-English occupies an important position in secondary school education because it provides learners with opportunities to encounter human experiences, cultural values, social realities and diverse perspectives through imaginative literary works. According to the Collins English Dictionary (2024), literature encompasses writings in which expression is formed, in connection with ideas of permanent and universal interest, are characteristic or essential features. Beyond the acquisition of literary knowledge, the subject can promote critical thinking, creativity, communication and appreciation of language and culture. Anjorin-Ojewole (2023) observes that Literature-in-English requires learners to develop critical thinking, creativity and appreciation of literary works, but also reports that students may experience inadequate interest, motivation and confidence towards the subject. Similarly, recent research on literary appreciation in Nigerian secondary schools indicates that declining interest and reliance on teacher-centred approaches remain concerns in Literature-in-English instruction (Assimonye, 2025). These concerns make the search for more engaging instructional approaches necessary. The present study therefore situates Literature-in-English within an emerging technology environment by examining whether an AI-enhanced discussion strategy can provide students with richer opportunities to interact with literary texts, exchange interpretations and participate actively in classroom learning. Thus, Literature-in-English provides the broader subject context within which the effect of AI-enhanced discussion on students' interest in prose fiction can be investigated.

Prose fiction represents a major component of Literature-in-English through which students engage with narratives involving characters, plot, setting, conflicts, themes, language and other literary elements. According to Oguche (2021), prose fiction is a form of imaginative writing that presents a narrative structure with characters, plot, and setting, written in ordinary language and aimed at exploring societal and psychological themes. Its pedagogical value lies in its capacity to expose learners to human experiences and social realities while requiring them to interpret, analyse and evaluate the meanings embedded in narrative texts. However, effective teaching of prose fiction requires more than students' passive reading of prescribed texts; it requires opportunities for questioning, dialogue, interpretation and personal response. Recent Nigerian research has shown that students' attitudes and interest are important considerations in Literature-in-English learning, with Anjorin-Ojewole (2023) reporting that learning attitudes are associated with students' motivation and interest in the subject. Similarly, Ubi and Udeh (2022) found that an interactive cooperative learning strategy improved students' achievement in Literature-in-English, suggesting the value of participatory approaches to literary instruction. Against this background, prose fiction constitutes the specific content area of the present study because its narrative complexity provides substantial opportunities for AI-supported questioning, interpretation and discussion. The study consequently seeks to determine whether embedding artificial intelligence within a discussion strategy can make students' engagement with prose fiction more interesting and meaningful.

Interest refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, enthusiasm and willingness that a learner develops towards a particular subject, activity or learning experience. In educational settings, interest is

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important because students who find learning activities meaningful and stimulating are more likely to participate actively, sustain attention and invest effort in learning. This is particularly significant in Literature-in-English, where students' willingness to read and discuss literary texts can influence the quality of their classroom participation and engagement. Anjorin-Ojewole (2023) identifies lack of interest, motivation and confidence as concerns affecting students' learning of Literature-in-English in Nigerian secondary schools and reports a significant relationship between learning attitude and students' motivation and interest. More broadly, recent research on AI-supported learning indicates that the perceived usefulness, ease of use, confidence and interactivity associated with AI can influence learners' attitudes and engagement (Li et al., 2024). Consequently, interest is an appropriate dependent variable for the present study because an instructional strategy may be considered educationally valuable not only when it transmits literary knowledge but also when it stimulates students' curiosity and willingness to participate in learning. The present study therefore examines whether AI-enhanced discussion can increase students' interest in prose fiction by creating a more interactive and responsive environment for exploring literary texts.

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers broadly to computational technologies capable of performing tasks that ordinarily require aspects of human intelligence, including generating or processing language, recognizing patterns, providing responses, adapting information and supporting decision-making. Its growing presence in education has created new possibilities for personalized learning, intelligent feedback, content generation and interactive learning experiences. Bali et al. (2024), in their review of AI in the Nigerian educational context, observe that AI is increasingly transforming educational environments, although infrastructural and technological challenges continue to constrain its effective adoption in Nigeria. Similarly, Sanusi, Ayanwale, and Chiu (2024) found that Nigerian secondary-school teachers' intention to prepare students for an AI-enabled future is influenced by factors including confidence and perceived social value, underscoring the importance of teacher readiness in AI integration. More importantly for the present study, AI can be used not simply as an object of study but as a supporting instructional technology that generates questions, prompts discussion, offers alternative interpretations and provides immediate responses during learning activities. This makes AI particularly relevant to prose-fiction teaching, where students are expected to question, interpret and discuss narrative elements. The present study therefore treats AI as a technological enhancement of a recognized pedagogical approach rather than as a teaching method in itself.

AI-enhanced discussion strategy refers in this study to a teacher-guided discussion approach in which artificial intelligence tools are deliberately incorporated to generate questions and prompts, stimulate alternative interpretations, clarify difficult concepts, support students' responses and extend interaction around a prose-fiction text, while the teacher retains responsibility for guiding, evaluating and contextualizing the discussion. This conception is consistent with recent evidence that AI can be used to support peer-to-peer discussion by identifying students' ideas and providing structures that guide learners to respond meaningfully to one another (Billings et al., 2024). Similarly, Liu and Zhong (2024), in a systematic review of K–12 AI education, identified group learning,

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authentic contexts, teacher involvement and learning scaffolding as important considerations in AI-supported educational practice. These findings suggest that the educational value of AI is enhanced when it is embedded within purposeful pedagogical activities rather than used independently of teaching. The strategy is particularly suitable for prose fiction because discussion is central to interpreting themes, characters, plot, setting, conflicts, symbolism and language, while AI can provide additional prompts and alternative perspectives that stimulate deeper classroom interaction. Thus, the AI-enhanced discussion strategy constitutes the independent variable in this study and provides the mechanism through which AI is expected to influence male and female students' interest in prose fiction.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, expectations and patterns of behaviour associated with being male or female, and it is frequently examined in educational research because students' learning experiences and responses to instructional innovations may vary across gender groups. In the context of the present study, gender is relevant because male and female students may respond differently to technology-supported discussion or may demonstrate different levels of interest in literary learning. Recent research on AI education among Nigerian secondary-school students provides useful evidence for considering gender as a variable: Sanusi et al. (2022) examined competencies required for AI literacy among 605 Nigerian secondary-school students and found no significant gender differences in the relevant competency patterns, suggesting that gender should not automatically be assumed to determine students' responses to AI-related learning. Conversely, more recent evidence from secondary-school AI research has reported gender differences in students' attitudes, AI literacy and career interest, indicating that gender effects may depend on the particular learning context and outcome being examined (Guo et al., 2025). These contrasting findings justify the inclusion of gender in the present study as a moderating variable rather than assuming beforehand that male and female students will respond identically to AI-enhanced discussion. The study can therefore establish empirically whether gender influences the effect of AI-enhanced discussion strategy on students' interest in prose fiction in Senior Secondary Schools.

Senior Secondary School constitutes an important stage of secondary education at which learners are expected to develop more advanced intellectual, linguistic, analytical and critical abilities in preparation for higher education, employment and responsible participation in society. At this level, Literature-in-English requires students to move beyond simple recall of literary information towards interpretation, analysis, evaluation and appreciation of literary texts. The suitability of this level for the present investigation is reinforced by research showing that students' interest and attitudes can influence their engagement with Literature-in-English in Nigerian secondary schools (Anjorin-Ojewole, 2023). Furthermore, recent AI research involving K–12 learners demonstrates that technology-supported learning can incorporate interactive, experiential and collaborative activities, although effective implementation requires teacher involvement and appropriate scaffolding (Liu & Zhong, 2024). Senior Secondary School students are therefore an appropriate population for investigating AI-enhanced discussion because they possess sufficient reading, language and cognitive capacities to engage in sustained discussion

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and interpretation of prose fiction while also being capable of interacting with emerging digital technologies. Consequently, the present study focuses on Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State to determine whether an AI-enhanced discussion strategy can provide a more engaging approach to prose-fiction instruction and ultimately improve students' interest in the subject. This study, therefore, examines the effect of AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy on Students' Interest in Prose Fiction in Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of Literature-in-English in developing students' critical thinking, creativity, language competence and appreciation of literary works, students' interest in prose fiction remains a concern in Senior Secondary Schools, partly because the teaching of literary texts is often dominated by conventional teacher-centred approaches that provide limited opportunities for active interaction, questioning and interpretation. Prose fiction requires sustained engagement with characters, plot, setting, themes, conflicts and language, yet students may perceive the subject as difficult, abstract or less engaging when instruction relies predominantly on explanation and passive reading. At the same time, the increasing availability of artificial intelligence (AI) presents opportunities for transforming classroom interaction through the generation of questions, prompts, alternative interpretations and immediate feedback; however, there is limited empirical evidence on the effect of deliberately integrating AI into a discussion strategy for teaching prose fiction, particularly among Senior Secondary School students in Ebonyi State. More importantly, it remains unclear whether such an AI-enhanced discussion strategy can significantly improve students' interest in prose fiction and whether its effect differs according to gender. This gap in evidence necessitates the present study to determine the effect of AI-enhanced discussion strategy on students' interest in prose fiction in Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy on students' interest in prose fiction in senior secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The mean interest scores in prose fiction of senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method.
2. The mean interest scores in prose fiction of male and female senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.
3. The interaction effect of teaching method and gender on senior secondary school students' mean interest scores in prose fiction.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean interest scores in prose fiction of senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method?
2. What are the mean interest scores in prose fiction of male and female senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy?
3. What is the interaction effect of teaching method and gender on senior secondary school students' mean interest scores in

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prose fiction?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores in prose fiction of senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in the mean interest scores in prose fiction of male and female senior secondary school students taught using the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.

$H0_3$: There is no significant interaction effect of teaching method and gender on senior secondary school students' mean interest scores in prose fiction.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test non-equivalent control group research design. According to Abonyi, Okereke, Omebe, Anuguwo and Nnachi (2022), quasi experiment is an experiment where it is not possible to randomly assign subjects to experimental and control group. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to measure the effect of **AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy on Students' Interest in Prose Fiction** by comparing experimental groups exposed to this teaching method with a control group taught using traditional method. The study made use of intact classes in order to avoid disrupt of normal class setting. The study made use of two groups: one experimental group and one control group. The experimental group was taught prose fiction using AI-Enhanced Discussion strategy while the control group was taught prose fiction using conventional method. The design can be illustrated thus:

O_1 X O_2
O_1 C O_2

Where:

O_1 represent pre-test of experimental and control groups.

O_2 represent post-test of experimental and control groups.

X represents treatment (AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy) for the experimental group.

C represents the conventional method for the control group.

This research was conducted in Abakaliki Education Zone. The population of the study consist of 8241 Senior Secondary II (SS II) students in the two hundred and twenty-one (221) Senior Secondary school students in Ebonyi State (3567 Male and 4674 Female students) (Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board, 2026). The SS II group was chosen because they have successfully completed their SSI and are presently not in exam class. The sample size for the study was 164 SS II students in Ebonyi State. 87 males and 77 females. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select SS II students who took part in the study. In the first stage, all the secondary schools in the three Education Zones were clustered (Abakaliki, Onueke and Onicha Education Zones). In the second stage, simple random sampling by balloting without replacement was used to select two Education Zones from the three Education Zones in Ebonyi State. The Education Zones are Abakaliki and Onueke Education Zones. In the third stage, stratified random sampling was used to select one local government from each of the Education Zones. In the fourth stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select one coeducational school from each of the two Education Zones. This sampling technique was adopted to ensure that male and

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female students, in the same schools, take part in the study. This yielded 2 co-educational secondary schools. The schools are Abakaliki High School (75) and Community Secondary School, Umuoghara (89), respectively. This yielded a total of 164 students who took part in the study. One of the schools was assigned to the experimental group and the other one to the control group through simple random sampling approach. The instruments used for data collection was Prose Fiction Interest Scale (PFIS). The instrument was face validated by three experts and tested for reliability which yielded the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.91.

Two instructional packages were used for this study. The first package is the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy, which is identical to the conventional method package in terms of content, basic objectives and mode of evaluation. The only difference is in the instructional activities where the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy deviates from the conventional method by using AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy during the instructional process. The AI-Enhanced Discussion Teaching packages were used for the treatment group while the conventional package was used for the control group. Before the onset of the experiment, subjects in the treatment and control group were given the pre-test. After the pre-test, the regular Literature-in-English teachers (research assistants) started the experiment in their respective schools adhering strictly to the lesson procedure that were developed from the packages during the pre-experimental briefing between the researcher and the research assistant. The experiment was conducted during the normal school period following the normal time-table of the school. At the end of the procedure that lasted for 6 weeks the Teachers administered the post-Tests in the two groups. This was used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

The following procedures were adopted by the researcher to ensure that extraneous variables, which might influence the internal validity of the findings, were controlled. Teacher Variable: In order to minimize errors, which could arise as a result of teacher difference, the researcher organized pre-experimental training for the research assistants (Literature-in-English teachers) that was used for the study. Separate trainings were organized for teachers in the two groups (experimental and control). The essence of the training is to help establish a uniform standard among the Literature-in-English teachers. A manual containing the specification of the packages were given to the participants. The researcher also monitored the research closely to ensure that no teacher deviates from the agreed format. **Inter Group Variable:** Since intact classes were used for this study, it implies that initial equivalence was not achieved for the researcher subjects in the two groups. In order to eliminate the error of non-equivalence arising from non-randomization of the subjects, the researcher used Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) for data analysis. **Subject Interaction**: The researcher did not have same school treatment and control group to ensure that the students in the control and experimental group do not interact at all. This is to reduce the possibility of John Henry Effect (which refers to the bias introduced to an experiment when members of the control group are aware that they are being compared to the experimental group and behave differently than they typically would to compensate for their perceived disadvantage). **Instructional Situation Variable**: To ensure that instructional situations were the same for all the schools, the researcher issued out instructional guide

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to the teachers in each group. The teaching was conducted in all the groups and also pre-tested to avoid hawthorn effect.

At the onset of the experiment, the researcher administered the pre-test to the students through the research assistants. Scores of the pre-test was recorded and kept. At the end of six weeks of the experiment, the post-test was administered to the entire members of the class. The mean and standard deviation was used for answering the research question and Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) statistics was used in testing the null hypotheses. The level of significance adopted for the analysis was 0.05 level of significance. Computer generated p-value was used to accept or reject the null hypotheses.

Results

Data collected for the study were analysed and presented in this chapter as follows:

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What is the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with conventional Teaching Method?

The data from the pre-test and post-test of the experimental and control group collected to answer Research Question (1) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Respondents Based on the Interest Mean Score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools Students Taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with Conventional Teaching Method.

Groups	N	Mean	S. D
AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy	75	65.83	0.99
Conventional Method	89	62.80	0.96

Results in Table 1 reveals that the mean score of students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy is 65.83 with a standard deviation of 0.99 while the mean score of students taught prose fiction with the conventional approach is 62.80 with a standard deviation of 0.96. This, therefore, indicates that students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than those taught with the conventional approach. This further suggests that the use of AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy has positive effect on students' interest in prose fiction.

Research Question 2

What is the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of male and female Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy?

The data from the pre-test and post-test of the experimental collected to answer Research Question (2) is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2: Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Respondents Based on the Interest Mean Score in Prose Fiction of Male and Female Senior Secondary Schools Students Taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.

Respondents' Gender	N	Mean	S. D
Male	39	65.47	8.18
Female	36	66.23	9.04

Results in Table 2 shows that male students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy has mean score of 65.47 and standard deviation of 8.18 while the female students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy has mean score of 66.23 and standard deviation of 9.04. This result indicates that female students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than male students taught prose fiction with the same approach.

Research Question 3

What is the interaction effect of method and gender on Senior Secondary Schools students mean interest score in prose fiction?

The data from the pre-test and post-test of the experimental and control group collected to answer Research Question (3) is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean Score of Respondents Based on the Interaction Effect of Method and Gender on Senior Secondary Schools Students Mean Interest Score in Prose Fiction.

Method	Gender	
	Male (Mean)	Female (mean)
AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy	65.47	66.23
Conventional method	65.07	60.16

Results in Table 3 indicates that the use of the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy is superior to the conventional method. For both male and female students, the interest mean scores are higher for the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy. This further implies that there is no interaction between method and gender on students mean interest in prose fiction.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 and 3

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with conventional Teaching Method**.**

HO_3: There is no significant difference in the interaction effect of method and gender on Senior Secondary Schools students mean interest score in prose fiction.

Hypothesis 1 and 3 were tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and the summary is in table 4

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Table 4: Test of Between Subject Effect for students Overall Prose Fiction Interest Scores by Teaching Method and Gender.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	955.577[a]	4	238.894	3.163	.016
Intercept	4767.956	1	4767.956	63.130	.000
Pretest	39.037	1	39.037	.517	.473
Group	426.019	1	426.019	5.641	.019
Gender	149.509	1	149.509	1.980	.161
Group*Gender	351.418	1	351.418	4.653	.033
Error	12008.696	159	75.526		
Total	688694.970	164			
Corrected Total	12964.272	163			

For hypothesis 1, the above table reveals that the p-value (0.019) is less than the alpha level of 0.05. The decision was to reject the null hypothesis when the p-value is less than the alpha level. Since the alpha level is greater than the p-value, the null hypothesis is rejected. The researcher therefore concludes that there is a significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with conventional Teaching Method.

For hypothesis 3, result reveals that for two-way interaction effects (group*gender), the p-value (0.03) is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Based on the decision rule, the null hypothesis is rejected. The researcher, therefore, concludes that there is a significant difference in the interaction effect of method and gender on Senior Secondary Schools students mean interest score in prose

Hypothesis 2

HO_2: There is no significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of male and female Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy**.**

Table 5: Test Of Between Subject Effect of Interest Mean Score in Prose Fiction of Male and Female Senior Secondary Schools Students Taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	52.171[a]	2	26.086	.350	.706
Intercept	2002.644	1	2002.644	26.880	.000
Pretest	41.247	1	41.247	.554	.459
Gender	24.312	1	24.312	.326	.570
Error	5364.316	72	74.504		
Total	330468.570	75			
Corrected Total	5416.487	74			

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For hypothesis 2, table 5 revealed that the p-value (0.57) is greater than alpha level (0.05). Since the p-value is greater than the alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The researcher, therefore, concludes that there is no significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of male and female Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.

Summary of Results

Results presented in this chapter revealed the following:

1. Students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than those taught with the conventional approach

   There is a significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and those taught with conventional Teaching Method.
2. Female students taught prose fiction with the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy have higher interest in prose fiction than male students taught prose fiction with the same approach.

   There is no significant difference in the interest mean score in Prose Fiction of male and female Senior Secondary Schools students taught with AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy.
3. There is no interaction between method and gender on students mean interest in prose fiction.

   There is a significant difference in the interaction effect of method and gender on Senior Secondary Schools students mean interest score in prose fiction.

Discussion

AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy and Interest

The first finding revealed that students taught prose fiction using the AI-enhanced discussion strategy had significantly higher interest than those taught using the conventional approach. This suggests that integrating AI into classroom discussion can make literary learning more interactive and engaging. The finding agrees with Liu and Wang (2024), who found that AI-supported questioning, interactive activities and AI-assisted debates improved students' engagement in English literature learning. Similarly, Li et al. (2024) reported that interactivity and perceived usefulness of AI significantly influenced students' positive responses to AI-supported learning. However, Dai and Liu (2024) cautioned that the effectiveness of AI depends on appropriate pedagogical integration and teacher guidance. The present finding therefore indicates that AI is more valuable when deliberately integrated into a meaningful discussion strategy.

Gender and Interest

The second finding showed that female students taught with the AI-enhanced discussion strategy had higher interest in prose fiction than their male counterparts. This indicates that female students responded more positively to the treatment in terms of interest. The finding, however, contrasts with Strzelecki (2024), who reported more positive AI-use attitudes among male students in another educational context. The difference may be explained by the present study's focus on interest in prose fiction, rather than general attitudes towards AI. Thus, the finding suggests that gender differences in AI-supported learning may depend on the subject, strategy and learning outcome being examined.

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Interaction of Method and Gender

The third finding indicated that there was no significant interaction between teaching method and gender on students' interest in prose fiction. This means that although the AI-enhanced discussion strategy improved interest and female students recorded higher interest, the effectiveness of the strategy did not depend significantly on gender. The finding agrees with Liu and Zhong (2024), who emphasized that the effectiveness of AI-supported learning is more strongly influenced by pedagogical design, teacher involvement and appropriate scaffolding than by learner characteristics alone. The implication is that AI-enhanced discussion can be effectively applied to both male and female students without requiring a fundamentally different approach based on gender.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy is an effective approach for improving students' interest in prose fiction in Senior Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State, as students exposed to the strategy demonstrated significantly higher interest than those taught through the conventional approach. Female students also recorded significantly higher interest than their male counterparts. However, the absence of a significant interaction between teaching method and gender indicates that the effectiveness of the AI-enhanced discussion strategy was not dependent on students' gender. Overall, the findings support the purposeful integration of AI into discussion-based Literature-in-English instruction to make the teaching of prose fiction more engaging and responsive to students' learning needs.

Recommendations

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

1. Teachers of Literature-in-English should adopt the AI-Enhanced Discussion Strategy in teaching prose fiction, to improve students' interest in prose fiction.
2. Schools should encourage the use of AI-enhanced discussion activities during prose-fiction lessons, particularly activities that promote students' questioning, exchange of ideas, interpretation and discussion of literary texts, given the positive effect observed in the study.
3. Literature-in-English teachers should give adequate attention to female and male students when implementing the strategy, since the findings showed a significant difference in interest between the two gender groups, with female students recording higher interest.

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