

Impact Of Whole Language Teaching Approach On Junior Secondary Students' Performance In Reading Comprehension In Ishielu Local Government Area Of Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of whole language teaching approach on Junior Secondary students' performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Two purposes of the study and two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 20 Junior Secondary Schools in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State with a sample size of 500 respondents from 10 schools selected using stratified simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire whose items were constructed based on the research questions which guided the study. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that whole language teaching approach influenced students' performance in reading comprehension. The study recommended among others, that qualified and experienced teachers on reading comprehension be engaged at the Junior Secondary level, while for the time being, the present crop of English Language teachers be engaged in reading- based-in- service education.

Key Words: Whole Language, teaching, reading comprehension.

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I. Introduction

Reading is a language skill that aims at facilitating the acquisition and development of literacy skills needed for effective communication in different contexts. The need for literacy acquisition is definitely more demanding in these modern times than it was in the previous generation.

This of course is quite true about the fact that progressive and sustainable change is impossible when adolescents who are tomorrow's leaders cannot acquire adequate skills to cope with the challenges of the twenty first century. Hence, impacts of whole language approach in teaching reading comprehension forms the crux of this study. In reacting to the centrality of reading in education at the Junior Secondary School level, Oyetunde in Agwu (2004), maintains that reading is one area that is particularly problematic for the children within the school system.

Secondary school, according to Paul (2005), is a school which provides the children with part or all of their education, typically between the ages of 11-14 and 16-18 years. Although this may vary, it is preceded by the primary or middle level of the school, and may be followed by higher Education or Vocational training.

Houghton (2000) sees reading as one of the most fundamental media for acquiring and promoting knowledge at all levels of education. As the society evolves into a technological village, the need for viable communication becomes paramount in all spheres of life. We are therefore bound to read with understanding just to get along with the contemporary life and the likes. As a result of this, many of the students are taught to learn to read, yet many more are unable to read to learn, and for this reason, Bunza in Agwu (2004) warns that many children are at a risk, and unless the society comes to their rescue, the age of darkness might likely come upon them and the society. To avert that looming ugly era of literacy darkness, children have to be made to acknowledge the impact of reading to learn. As Carson (2000) observes that the doors of the world are opened to people who can read, and that reading improves learners' spellings, vocabulary and comprehension and as

well, makes classrooms more interesting. Similarly, Kolawole (2005) opines that it is only through reading that the Nigerian learner of English can meaningfully enrich his/her vocabulary.

Reading has been and is still, a powerful means of communication. It forms part of an individual to the extent that, it becomes a habit which once developed, becomes difficult to break. Reading is a means of obtaining information, entertainment, relaxation, directives or instructions from a written material. It follows logically that a good reading habit is a precursor to a good writing.

Reading can be defined as a knowledge acquiring process, involving the reader and the text, which is enhanced by the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Ngwoke (2006) sees reading as the recognition and conscious reproduction of written or printed symbols by means of the eye or finger contact.

The act of reading could be an interesting practice for the children and adolescents, if they are properly guided. This is so because, a reading habit cultivated early in life, helps the children to grow into independent adults with repertoire of knowledge. However, today, the declining interest of students in reading is quite obvious. Children now grow into adulthood with little or no knowledge of possible common educational challenges and solutions due to poor reading habit

In Nigeria no doubt, there is a general outcry and a serious one for that matter, over the falling standard in education due to poor reading culture. Several factors have been attributed to this fall, but hardly had teaching reading comprehension been mentioned.

Reading often develops along with listening, speaking and writing skills, especially in a society with a highly developed literacy tradition. Reading enhances vocabulary building which aids listening comprehension. It is quite doubtful if much can be achieved by any student who fails to develop his reading skill. Indeed, the more one reads, the more one gets exposed to knowledge, and consequently, the wiser you is likely to become. Reading is fundamentally basic for a life-time schooling and self-education. In further positioning the place of reading, Marieke (1998) states that reading is quite essential to full participation in the modern society, because it adds quality and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. It empowers and emancipates citizens and brings people together. Reading provides access to information which is crucial to individual advancement, as well as corporate educational development. Information is very important and indispensable which is mostly elicited through reading, and according to Yusuf, (2007), it bridges the gap between knowledge and ignorance.

Even though, reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built, yet, the concept of reading habit has been relegated to the background, and the productive approach to improving vocabulary, word power and the other language skills is left unpracticed and unattended to. According to Yani (2003), reading habits of Nigerians are a matter of great concern as it affects their educational and national development. Yani maintains that, in a developing country like Nigeria, the concept of reading habits should not be relegated to the background. Because reading is immensely vital to the attainment of literacy. Onukaogu (2002) observes that reading is the fulcrum or corner-stone of literacy, without which there will be no education. This assertion re-echoes the view of Mushini and Lawal (1997) who also observe that reading provides the key that unlocks the gate to literacy.

Ezeokoli (1998), maintains that many students perform below expectation because they lack the rudiments of reading and some reading skills required for effective study in a particular subject. Onukaogu (2002) asserts that the tragedy that faces the teaching of reading in Nigeria today is that pre-school children, primary, school pupils, secondary and tertiary students are not empowered with reading skills, while Lawal (2010) is of the view that reading poses a challenge to many students who equally have realized that success in reading determines overall success in school.

In the view of Darlington and Cunningham (1996), the emphasis on reading is now on the development of skills, comprehension and motivational strategies

The importance of skill instruction is recognized as an important aspect of the reading process; hence it is vividly stated in the new English Language curriculum for the upper basic that the following new skills are to be taught.

- Reading for main and supporting ideas, including summary.
- Reading to grasp meanings of words in various contexts.
- Reading to follow directions in written communication.
- Reading to answer specific questions.
- Reading to understand the writer's mood and purpose.
- Reading for critical evaluation
- Reading for maximum retention and recall (intensive study)
- Reading for spatial description.
- Reading to recognize repeated ideas.

New curriculum therefore aims at achieving the following in students.

- i. Tackling the language deficiencies brought from the lower basic (level)
- ii. Developing language proficiency for both upper and post basic, and

iii. Developing the language proficiency necessary for performing well in other subjects (FGN, 2007: 27).

Whole language approach, also called the balanced literacy, advocates the teaching of reading by recognizing and using words in their whole, rather than realizing them through letter sounds correspondence. It is a reading theory that maintains that children should be taught to see language as a system made up of parts that work together. Whole language incorporates reading, writing, listening and speaking in a blended format. Children should be able to make sense of skills used in reading and writing and not just memorize some letter-sound and symbols.

With whole language, teachers are expected to provide a literacy rich environment for their students and combine speaking, listening, reading and writing. Whole language teachers emphasize the meaning of texts over the sounds of letters, and phonics. Here, instruction becomes just one component of the whole language classroom. Whole language is thus considered a top down approach where the reader constructs a personal meaning for a text based on using the prior knowledge to interpret the meaning of what is read. Some whole language programs place little emphasis on word analysis. When that is left out, young readers may guess or skip over words they don't know and some children may not learn. Some scholars have estimated that a whole-word memorization approach puts limitation on the number of words that children can learn to read.

Whole language approach may be an important tool in the hand of the teacher that sets to achieve comprehension in a tell-retell and a reading text that requires role-playing. Retelling is post reading or post listening recalls that require readers or listeners to retell or recast all they remember in a reading encounter either by oral or written recalls. Most readers adopt this strategy to enable them remember and internalize lessons learned. The reader, by this technique can chronologically present ideas. Retelling may call for the presence of major characters, recall of defining characteristics of the characters involved, a recall of the problems presented in the story or text, a presentation of solution to problems in discourse, a conscious attempt to present events in a sequential or chronological order and the ability of the re-teller to include only those events which are important to the story while consciously excluding the irrelevant ones.

Role playing requires the readers or listeners to act out the part played by the mimicked character in the play or book. This technique gives an enablement to the student or listener to explore realistic situations by interacting with other people in a guided way so as to internalize the actions of a character.

Students who come from "high literacy" households where young children are read bedtime stories on a regular basis, tend to enter school with large vocabularies and reading readiness skills. Some at times may have been reading before entering school. Students from "low literacy" households are not exposed much to reading in their homes, and therefore tend to have smaller vocabularies. They may speak non-standard dialects of English such as African American vernacular English, and be unmotivated students, especially if they see teachers as enemies trying to charge how they speak and act, in other words, their language and culture. It can be argued that a standard phonics approach might be unsuccessful for these students. Whole language approaches encourage teachers to find reading materials that reflect these students' language and culture.

Research has shown that instruction in comprehension can help students: understand what they read, remember what they read and communicate with others about what they read. This probably informed the prominent place of reading comprehension in Nigerian school curriculum. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of the purpose for which reading comprehension was entrenched in the school system would depend, to a large extent, on the caliber of teachers who handle English language. This therefore aligns with the position of the federal government that no educational system of any nation can grow beyond the quality of its teachers.

Teachers to a large extent, determine what happens in the classroom, including reading comprehension lessons. Wendelin (1999) observes that secondary school teachers typically, are not instructed on how to intervene appropriately or adequately when confronted with the challenges of non-reader in their classroom. They however, feel their purpose satisfactorily accomplished whenever two or three good students/ learners can read, comprehend and answer questions. Consequent upon this, Isiugo-Abanihe (1991) suggested that teachers get more committed to directing text comprehension strategies, and ensure students are more committed to the use and learning the comprehension strategies.

Researches have confirmed the fact that many secondary school students cannot read and comprehended simple English passages. Lawal and Adegbileje (2005), have observed that reading instruction in most Nigerian secondary schools, is grossly misunderstood and mishandled by teachers. According to her, teachers more often than the learners, talk about the text while the learners, especially the average and poor readers have little or no opportunity to interact with the text. Udosen (2006), adds that one reason for this particular attitude is that, most teachers developed a bottom-up view of reading when they were in school, and thus, have not changed. This view sees reading as consisting of sub-skills that must be mastered individually and the reader's business is to retrieve information passively from the text.

Ofori (2003), mentioned that the approaches teachers adopted while teaching reading comprehension were, the reading and the read- and-explain methods. The difference between the two approaches is that in the read- and explain method, the teacher makes effort to read and explain to the students. Again, findings indicate

that, there is teacher- student interaction, teachers-text interaction and student-text interaction, but there's no place for student-student interaction. Based on the foregoing, there is no group interaction or pair work discussion. This, no doubt, informed the search for instructional methods that facilitate the teaching of reading comprehension in schools.

English language has four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. A number of fundamental relationships exist among these skills. Very central to these skills is the fundamental place of comprehension. English comprehension is an integral part of language learning process. Much of what people learn comes from their understanding and interpretation of oral interaction through listening, it is through listening comprehension that learners acquire the vocabulary and syntax of the language. Speaking activities such as oral re-telling activities pave way for future reading and writing abilities. Comprehension is also required in learning activities that involve role-playing. To listen and read efficiently, learners must have comprehension of the word meanings. Comprehension goes beyond getting facts; it includes interpreting and critically analyzing points raised, making judgments, and appreciating the content and style of presentation. Comprehension embraces all fields of knowledge. The ability to read, is one determiner of students' success or failure. Students must form the habit of reading to perform well in all other subjects. A good reader is a good learner, and has a better opportunity for greater achievement.

It is commonly believed that there are various factors militating against effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension in our Junior Secondary schools. Oyetunde and Unoh (2006), listed impediments to positive reading habits and attitude to include; lack of interest, poor libraries, lack of materials, poor preparation of teachers, and home background. As a result of this, Oyerokun (1993), emphasizes the need to use appropriate techniques and materials in teaching reading.

It is therefore, against this background that the study seeks to investigate the impact of whole language approach on junior school students' performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is a language skill that aims at facilitating the acquisition and development of literacy skill needed for effective communication in different contexts. Teaching reading in the Junior Secondary School classroom has become a great concern among educators around the world. It is a widely known fact that success in reading is essential to success in school and self sustainance, especially in this age of global information dissemination. In spite of all this, it has been observed, that English Language teachers often test students' reading comprehension instead of teaching them how to read and comprehend. They usually employ traditional approach where reading is seen as a one-directional affair in which, the learner is hooked to text, and not giving opportunity to read and dialogue with his peers in class or practice in groups. Jegede, Onukaogu, Aru and Lyang (2003), lamented that discussion as a technique of teaching reading is hardly ever mentioned in many English Language course books, syllabus and teachers' manuals. As a result of this, therefore, many teachers know little or nothing about the potentials of discussion in teaching reading. Equally, students are not empowered with the basic reading skills that make for examination success, especially in standard examinations such as the West Africa School Certificate Examinations (WASCE) resulting in poor achievement in English.

If this old teaching /learning method is allowed to persist, it is feared that poor achievement of students in English will persist. The problem of this study therefore was to investigate the impact of whole language teaching approach on Junior School Students' Performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the impact of whole language teaching approach on junior secondary students' performance in reading comprehension, in Ishielu Local Government Area. Specifically, this study aims at:

1. Finding out the influence of oral retelling on students' performance in reading in Ishielu Local Government Area.
2. Finding out the influence of role-playing approach to teaching reading on students' performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

Two research questions were structured to guide this study

1. What is the influence of oral retelling on students' performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area?
2. What is the influence of role-playing on teaching reading on students' performance in reading comprehension in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the ex-post facto survey design method. A total of 500 respondents, made up of 5 teachers and 45 students from 10 randomly selected Junior Secondary Schools in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State were used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to ensure equal opportunities for students and teachers from the ten groups to be represented in the sample.

For the purpose of data collection, a structured questionnaire entitled Questionnaire on Impact of Whole Language Teaching Approach on Students performance in Reading Comprehension (QI WLATRC) was developed and used by the researcher to collect information from both teachers and students.

The (QIWLATRC) instrument was based on a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). Data collected were analyzed using mean, Frequency Distribution and Standard Deviation.

In this section, the result of the data analysis is presented in accordance with the relevant research questions posed where the mean score of any variable that is equal or greater than 2.5, is accepted. While below 2.5 mean score is rejected.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of oral retelling on students' performance?

Table1: Mean and frequency on the influence of Oral retelling on student's performance.

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	X	SD	Dec. Rule
Oral retelling is a strategy that can benefit students learning in a variety of ways	240	120	90	50	500	1550	3.10	2.28	Accepted
Oral retelling helps students to organize, summarize, and process information they read or heard	260	130	60	50	500	1600	3.20	1.77	Accepted
Oral retelling helps students with comprehension as they get older and read more complex texts	200	140	100	60	500	1480	2.96	2.13	Accepted
Practice with oral language, especially narrative language, can help students' future academic performance	125	70	30	25	500	1590	3.18	2.37	Accepted
Oral retelling allows a reader or listener to structure a response according to personal and individual interpretations of the text.	120	60	45	25	500	1550	3.10	2.28	Accepted
Grand Mean							= 3.11		

Table II: Mean and frequency on the influence of role-playing Approach in teaching reading comprehension on students' reading comprehension in Ishielu L.G.A.

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	X	SD	Dec. Rule
Role-playing in teaching reading approach focuses on helping students to comprehend what they read and express meaning in what they write.	260	140	60	40	500	1620	3.24	2.44	Accepted
Role-playing in teaching reading approach emphasizes high quality literature.	196	180	56	68	500	1504	3.08	2.19	Accepted
Role- playing in teaching reading approach focuses on the integration of literacy instruction across the subject areas.	240	120	90	50	500	1550	3.10	2.28	Accepted
Role-playing in teaching reading approach focuses on cultural diversity.	200	190	40	70	500	1520	3.64	2.22	Accepted
Role-playing in teaching reading instruction creates many opportunities for students to read either independently, with other students in small guided reading	198	176	60	66	500	1506	3.10	2.19	Accepted

groups, or being read aloud to by the teacher

Grand Mean = 3.09

III. Discussion of Finding

The result of the Research Question 1, indicated that oral retelling on students enhanced and affected the students' performance on reading comprehension positively. This was consequent upon the respondents' appraisal and responses on the five item questionnaire, which has the mean scores of: 3.10, 3.20, 2.96, 3.18 and 3.10 respectively, with a grand mean of 3.11.

In regard to research question II, bothering on the influence of role-playing to teaching reading approach on students' performance in reading comprehension?"

The finding showed that role-playing approach of teaching reading influenced students' performance in reading comprehension, based on the respondents' responses on questionnaire item; 6,7,8,9, and 10. They have mean scores of; 3.24, 3.08, 3.04, 3.10 and 3.01, and grand mean score of 3.09, which showed that role-playing approach to teaching of reading comprehension is an effective tool in enhancing students' performance in reading comprehension.

IV. Conclusion

The study investigated impacts of whole language approach on teaching reading comprehension among junior secondary students in Ishielu Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Data was collected through a questionnaire administered to 500 respondents. The analysis was done through mean and frequency counts. The findings show that whole language approach does not only influence the students' performances on reading comprehension, but also improves their literacy level and as well, creates many opportunities for their further readings and studies.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made for possible implementation and further improvement.

1. That more trained and qualified teachers on reading be employed and deployed to Junior Secondary Schools in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.
2. That the Secondary School teachers especially those in English Language, be better instructed on the use of good teaching strategy or approach that will better enhance the target students' performance.

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