THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AMONG NIGERIA PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study examines the role of storytelling in literacy building and critical thinking skills among second language learners. Researchers have established strong significant relationship between storytelling and imaginative literary appreciation and achievements but less is known about how this pedagogic tool can enhance second language learners' writing and reading skills. This is quasi-experimental research which purposively chose one hundred primary schools students divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group was given literacy instruction through storytelling while the control had their instruction without the variable. The effect of storytelling on the learners' outcomes was measured through observation, and post tests administered to the two groups to measure their reading and writing abilities. Results showed that the students in the experiment class showed curiosity in reading the assigned passages and scored higher than their counterparts in the control group. Results further showed that students in the experiment class were curious to discuss and write about their understanding of the story thereby increasing their oral communication skills than their counterparts. Results suggest inquiry-based instruction through storytelling as key to developing critical thinking, reading and communication skills among second/foreign language learners.

Keywords: literacy development, story, storytelling, inquiry-based instruction.

Introduction:

From society to society the standard of what constitutes 'literacy' differs. The traditional definition of literacy is the ability to read and write. Therefore, a literate person is one who is able to read and write in a particular language or languages. Literacy has also in modern times been expanded to include skills in speaking, listening, computer, basic numeracy, sound, still and moving images and graphical elements in digital based communication (Eno Edem etal 2010). "Literacy can be seen as dependent on instruction, with the corollary that quality of instruction is key to literacy development. This view emphasizes the developmental nature of literacy-i.e. the passage of children through successive stages of literacy, in each of which the reading and writing tasks change qualitatively and the role of the instructor has to change accordingly" (Snow 2004:13).

Story telling is crucial to child development, and it helps to strengthen neural pathways that make learning of all kinds possible. Storytelling, once viewed by many educators as being a pleasant way to spend time at best, and a complete waste of time at worst, is now being recognized as a powerful tool that can help build literacy development and critical thinking skills in students.

Story telling as Louise Philips (2004) argues isn't just about entertaining children but it can also play an important part in early literacy development. Story telling is the art of using language vocalisation, physical movement and gestures to reveal the element and images of a story to an audience, (Haven,2000). According to McDury and Alterion (2003), Storytelling is an activity through which information is passed from person to person and from one generation to the next generation and therefore the use of

story telling as a teaching tool cannot be over emphasised.

Children within primary school age (6 -11 years) have an innate love for stories. This is because stories create magic and a sense of wonder of the world and the language used in telling the story. Needleman (2004) in Al-Mansour (2011) adds that reading aloud through storytelling can build students' imagination which in turn enhances literacy development. Storytelling increases the student's willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings; as well as increase in verbal proficiency. This is because in a storytelling event, the words though sometimes memorized, are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by student's participation and interaction. Storytelling has been discovered as one of teaching techniques that enables primary school students in Nigeria to enjoy reading and writing and it also builds their interest in literacy and learning of English as a second language. This means that storytelling can be an alternative tool to enhance primary students' literacy development in a second language classroom. Storytelling is able to stimulate second language students to be more enthusiastic during learning process in Nigeria. As a pedagogical tool, it has shown some benefits in literacy development that cannot be over emphasized; it motivates students (Wright,2008); helps children in memorizing words learnt during the process (Satriani, 2019); improves their vocabulary mastery (Widiastika,2011); encourages students to pick interest in learning English language (Slattery & Willis,2001); increases students' moral values as they listen to the stories (Rusdi, 2006); provides inexpensive media in teaching rich language experience (Wright, 2008); and it enhances students' interest in reading and writing (Slattery & Willis, 2001).

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Moreover, storytelling is useful in improving students' listening, reading and writing skills (Mc Grath, 2000). As a technique of literacy instruction, it may influence students' language proficiency. Literacy practice on the other hand has some important characteristics such as: - to develop language and brain to practice logical and critical thinking (Metcalfe et al. 2013) and to apply value or morals (Taylor, 2000). There are many activities that can enhance literacy development but story telling is one of the most complete strategies available for teaching literacy learning in second language situation. Story telling is probably the oldest percussor to literacy and every culture has used it to explore identity because it improves the students' ability to summarize and deconstruct stories while improving memory and the ability to summarize plot, setting and characterization which is necessary for developing literacy.

It has also been discovered that for storytelling to be more effective in teaching literacy development, it needs to be embedded within the inquiry-based instruction. Inquiry based instruction may be identified as constructivist learning whereby students' ideas are the basis for activities (Harlen, 2006). Inquiry-based instruction which comes under the umbrella of inductive learning is relevant in coaching students for literacy development because in it, learners become active participants and experience many advantages that can help in literacy development. Literacy development emerges from children's oral language development and their initial attempts at reading and writing (Etor, 2019). Researches in this area of literacy suggest that roots of both reading and writing are established in the oral language experience of very young children (Glazer, 1989; Strickland and Freely, 1991). Literacy development involves some activities which are inter related such as:

i.Oral language development: receptive and expressive vocabulary
ii.Alphabetic code: Alphabet knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness.
iii.Print knowledge: environmental print, concepts about print and others skills include: rapid naming of letters and numbers, visual memory and visual perceptual abilities (Morrow, 2009)

STAGES OF LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL
At the primary school level, there are established stages of literacy development. These are:
i.Alphabetic fluency
ii.Words and patterns
iii.Intermediate reading

i.ALPHABETIC FLUENCY (6-7) YEARS
Some literacy behaviours found at this stage are:
1. Pointing on words while reading
2. Admitting inability to read certain words
3. Using pictures and context clues to figure out words

ii.WORDS AND PATTERNS (7-9) YEARS
Some literacy behaviours found at this stage are:
1. Stronger ability to comprehend reading text
2. Ability to self – correct
3. Less sound by sound reading
4. Ability to spell and read out complex words

iii.INTERMEDIATE STAGE (9-11) YEARS
Children at this stage exhibit the following literacy behaviours:
1. Develops independent reading
2. Desire to explore new ideas and concepts
3. Interested in learning and developing new vocabularies

IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY DEVELOPMENT
Literacy development lays the foundation for the reading and writing skills in primary students as they progress in school. It is a critical part of every child's overall academic development. It also supports the thinking ability of students and helps them develop properly as lifelong learners. Lacking reading and writing skills is a tremendous disadvantage. Thus, although there are various researches on literacy development, there is still lack of studies investigating the role of storytelling in teaching literacy.

RESEARCH PROBLEM
Literacy problems in primary education in Nigeria has been traced to the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme, that was introduced into Nigerian educational system in the former Western and Eastern regions in 1955 and 1957 respectively (Etuk 2005). The Universal Primary Education bequeathed to Nigerian primary education reduction in the number of years of learning from 8 to 6 years in this basic stage and automatic promotion of learners without minding their learning capabilities. This resulted in the turning out of pupils from primary schools with majority of them not acquiring basic skills of literacy and numeracy.
Associated with the above-mentioned problem is the problem of learning English as a second language(L2). Because English is a second language in Nigeria, most pupils are introduced to English language too late in school; and in addition, they are taught by teachers who themselves are not proficient in the language (Okon,2003). The result is poor oral language skills and reading and writing difficulties at the primary education level in Nigeria. Many primary school leavers in Nigeria constitute Okedara's (1997) class of ''newly created illiterate Nigerians''. This study therefore wants to ascertain to what extent the use of storytelling in teaching literacy can help in inculcating basic literacy skills in primary school students in Nigeria.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on using observation, pre-test and post-test to establish corelation between storytelling and literacy development among primary school students in Nigeria.

To find out to what extent the use of storytelling in teaching literacy in Nigerian primary schools can bring about the development of critical thinking, reading, writing and communication skills among Nigeria primary students as second/foreign language learners.

METHODOLOGY

This present study is quasi-experimental research, which purposively chose one hundred primary school students, divided into control and experimental groups of 50 students each. Each group was divided into ten subgroups having five participants. The participants were between ages of 9 – 11 years drawn from primary six. The whole experiment lasted for a period of three months which is a complete term. After two weeks of commencement of the experiment, a pre-test was administered to both groups to ascertain their level of literacy development; all had the same level of literacy skills at this stage of the experiment.

The experimental group was given literacy instruction through storytelling for eight weeks while the control group had their instruction for the same eight weeks without the variable. The effect of storytelling on the learners' outcomes was measured through observation and post tests administered to the two groups on the eleventh week of the procedure to measure their reading and writing abilities. The participants' responses to the tests were graded and the raw scores given to an expert in measurement and evaluation for analysis. Also, keen observation was used to determine improvement in comprehension and oral communication skills as the participants were retelling the stories in their various groups.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instruments used in this study include observation, pre-test and post-test which were administered on the two groups. The pre-test was used to establish that all the participants in the two groups are at the same level of literacy development. The post-test consisted of reading and writing tasks modelled after cloze procedure. This type of test instrument was chosen in this research because it can support assessment of students' understanding of spelling, grammar and sentence construction (Hancock & Leaver,2006). The questions were piloted with 30 students who were not part of the experimental or control groups in order to validate the instrument. The result of the pilot test was given to an expert in measurement and evaluation to establish the validity and reliability index of the instruments. Thus, they fulfilled the reliability requirements, obtaining a Cronbach Alpha of 0.73.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Pre-test scores of the Control Group

	SCORES OF PRE-TEST PARTICIPANTS OF CONTROL GROUP					
	READING SKILLS		WRITING SKILLS			
Pre-Test Participants	Word recognition and decoding 20mrks	Fluency in reading simple sentences 10mrks	Writing of words and phrases 10mrks	Word recognition and decoding 10mrks	Total [50mrks]	Total%
Group 1	8	2	3	2	15	30%
Group 2	7	2	3	2	14	28%
Group 3	7	2	3	2	14	28%
Group 4	7	2	2	3	14	28%
Group 5	6	3	2	3	14	28%
Group 6	6	4	2	2	14	28%
Group 7	6	4	3	3	16	32%
Group 8	6	4	3	2	15	30%
Group 9	5	3	3	3	14	28%
Group 10	5	3	3	3	14	28%

Table 2. Post-test scores of the Control Group

	SCORES OF POST-TEST PARTICIPANTS OF CONTROL GROUP					
	READING SKILLS		WRITING SKILLS			
Post-Test Participants	Word recognition and decoding 20mrks	Fluency in reading simple sentences 10mrks	Writing of words and phrases 10mrks	Word recognition and decoding 10mrks	Total [50mrks]	Total%
Group 1	10	4	5	2	21	42%
Group 2	9	4	4	3	20	40%
Group 3	9	3	3	2	17	34%
Group 4	8	5	3	4	20	40%
Group 5	8	4	3	4	19	38%
Group 6	7	6	5	4	22	44%
Group 7	7	5	4	5	21	42%
Group 8	9	4	4	5	22	44%
Group 9	7	4	5	4	20	40%
Group 10	6	5	4	5	19	38%

Table 3. Pre-test scores of the Experimental Group

	SCORES OF PRE-TEST PARTICIPANTS OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP					
	READING SKILLS		WRITING SKILLS			
Pre-Test Participants	Word recognition and decoding 20mrks	Fluency in reading simple sentences 10mrks	Writing of words and phrases 10mrks	Word recognition and decoding 10mrks	Total [50mrks]	Total%
Group 1	7	2	2	3	14	28%
Group 2	6	3	3	2	14	28%
Group 3	5	4	3	2	14	28%
Group 4	7	3	2	4	16	32%
Group 5	6	3	2	4	15	30%
Group 6	7	3	2	2	14	28%
Group 7	7	4	3	3	17	34%
Group 8	6	4	3	2	15	30%
Group 9	5	3	2	3	13	26%
Group 10	6	3	3	2	14	28%

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Table 4. Post-test scores of the Experimental Group

SCORES OF POST TEST PARTICIPANTS OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP					
Post-Test Participants	READING SKILLS		WRITING SKILLS		Total [50mrks]	Total%
	Word recognition and decoding 20mrks	Fluency in reading simple sentences 10mrks	Writing of words and phrases 10mrks	Word recognition and decoding 10mrks		
Group 1	16	8	8	7	39	78%
Group 2	17	8	8	7	40	80%
Group 3	17	7	8	7	39	78%
Group 4	17	8	7	7	39	78%
Group 5	17	8	8	8	41	82%
Group 6	17	8	7	8	40	80%
Group 7	17	8	8	7	40	80%
Group 8	16	8	8	8	40	80%
Group 9	17	8	8	8	41	82%
Group 10	18	8	8	8	42	84%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

This section delineates the depiction of the research finding of the study and the discussion dealing with the data investigated and collected from the observation, pre-test and post-test. The presentation of this section is divided into two. The first section discusses the research finding from the pre-test and the second section elaborates the research finding of the post-test.

Before implementing the storytelling activities, the students in both groups were informed by the researcher about the teaching program. This is according to what (Feez, 2002) postulates that what is to be learnt should be made clear to the students. English language was the primary language of interaction throughout all the stages of the experiment. The selection of suitable materials (stories) was considered very paramount in the implementation of the story telling intervention in the course of the study. The stories used were carefully selected based on the characteristics of the learners in both groups. Gestures and dramatization were used to show a character's behaviour, emotions and expression.

Data gathered through observation showed that the students enjoyed the stories as the researcher explained the story expressively. After telling the story, the students were asked to think of the moral values of the stories and retell the stories to demonstrate comprehension and oral communication skills.

Analysing the results of the pre-test, we obtained a p-value of 0.39; which means that the difference between the control and the experimental group was not statistically significant; in other words the two groups were comparable. With respect to the post-test results, the analysis showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group after the intervention. These results suggest that intervention with storytelling had a positive impact on primary school students' reading, writing and oral communication skills. The students improved in their literacy development, thereby establishing that inquiry based instruction through storytelling is a key to developing critical thinking, reading, writing and oral communication skills among primary school students in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION:

Storytelling had a positive impact on Nigeria primary school students' reading, writing and communication skills; since the participants in the experimental groups showed a significant improvement. It was also discovered that storytelling embedded within the inquiry-based instruction as a constructivist learning, whereby students' ideas are the basis for activities makes for faster literacy development (Essien, 2005). Inquiry-based instruction which comes under the umbrella of inductive learning is relevant in coaching students for literacy development because in it learners become active participants and this has a significant role to play in literacy development. We recommend that primary school teachers should select suitable stories along with adequate materials and a good pedagogically methodology, like inquiry based method to inspire students' creativity and motivation for literacy development. We recommend also that further research may consider the use of storytelling and story reading for enhancing not only literacy skills but also oral communication and other language skills.

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