

The Teaching of Literature as a Tool for the Development of Literacy Skills in Wukari

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Abstract	<i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i>
<p><i>This quasi-experimental study investigated the effectiveness of using literature to teach literacy skills to pupils at the Central Primary School, Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. A sample of 330 pupils in primary three and four participated in a 6-week long, literature-based literacy intervention. Pre- and post-intervention tests were used to measure phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Regression analysis was used to compare pre-post gains in both classes. Results showed significant improvements in the post-intervention scores. The findings support the use of literature as an effective tool to teach literacy in primary schools in Nigeria. It also has implications for educators, curriculum designers, policy makers and future researchers.</i></p>	<p><i>Vol. 16. Issue 1 (2024)</i> <i>ISSN(p) 1597-9385</i> <i>ISSN (e) 2814-1091</i> <i>Home page</i> <i>https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds</i></p> <p>ARTICLE INFO: Keyword: <i>Literature, Literacy, Literacy Interventions</i></p> <p>Article History Received: <i>27th July 2024</i> Accepted: <i>21st September 2024</i> DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v16i1.17</p>

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1. Introduction

The success of early education is often greatly influenced by the content of its curriculum. At this stage, the approach to education is one that propels learners to acquire basic skills which prepare them for life. Crucial among these skills are foundational numeracy, literacy and critical thinking, which ultimately lead to better quality lives for individuals, achievement of national goals, culminating in economic prosperity and development. This is why research has shifted in the direction of how early education can benefit technological and scientific advancement (Liu, 2020). The general aim of this current study was to inculcate literacy skills in primary school pupils in Wukari, Taraba state, Nigeria. Literacy development is the process through which learners acquire the sounds and structure of language, as well as how to use these tools to perform personal, group and organisational tasks.

As early as the first year of life, infants start to manipulate the sound structures of language, which is known scientifically as Phonological Awareness. Subsequently, they devise means of manipulating these basic units of sound into syllables, morphemes, words and other larger structures (Gillon, 2004). These structures are stored and retrieved when children need to express their thoughts in either spoken or written forms. According to (Maher et. al, 2001) delays in literacy development can occur, which could indicate that a child has impairment. However, with swift and careful intervention, many learners overcome the early setbacks. Only a few learners will eventually fail to meet their literacy milestones.

The first objective of the study was using literary texts to teach the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. By the end of six weeks, there was noticeable improvement in all these skills among the pupils as pre and post-intervention assessment tests revealed. The second objective of the study was to promote reading culture among the pupils as well as to create a love of books among them. At the end of the project, the pupils were allowed to keep the texts. Another objective of the study was to expose the research assistants, who are undergraduate (B.A English Language and Literature) students of the Federal University Wukari to the challenges of the classroom. In many instances, the research assistants had to improvise or come up with ingenious ways of tackling the challenges. Three of the research assistants, who had education backgrounds before registering for the B.A programme, were assigned to work with primary three as the lower class, while the other three worked with primary four. They each kept meticulous records of their classes; these included such details as number of pupils, age range, gender mix, topic for the day, date, basic objective of each lesson, previous knowledge and so on.

2. Motivation for the Study

Magaji-Idris & Eragbe-Chatta (2013) trace the important role that Literature plays in helping children understand concepts better. They observe that children who have been exposed to Literature have a more extensive vocabulary and are more fluent in their use of language. In the three sample texts used in the study, a glossary is provided to make understanding easier. Additionally, the texts provide questions, which help comprehension, and cloze tests which simultaneously test comprehension, lexical as well as structural knowledge. The core submission of Magaji-Idris & Eragbe-Chatta (2013) was that, giving the far-reaching contributions of

Literature to learning in general, the national curriculum for education should prescribe that it be taught from primary school level onwards.

3. Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the use of Literature to teach literacy, using regression analysis to compare the performance in pre-intervention and post-intervention tests. The study participants were primary three and four pupils of the Central Primary school, Wukari, Taraba state, Nigeria. There was a class average of 55 pupils in the 6 classrooms that participated in the study. The intervention consisted of 30-minute sessions, twice a week, over the course of 6 weeks. The undergraduate research assistants taught these sessions and administered the tests at the scheduled intervals. The intervention made use of two level-appropriate texts; *Eze Goes to School* (for primary 4) and *Sugar Girl* (for primary 3). The choice of what text to assign to what class was made based on the number of pages in each text and the level of complexity of the words in each. In order to ensure uniformity in treatment and outcomes, the research assistants had to adhere strictly to a pre-agreed model. Pupil assent to participate in the study was sought, prior to starting the project, and the school Head Teacher had to grant approval for the study to be carried out at the school.

4. Planning and Executing the Literacy Interventions

Literacy interventions are strategies that are designed to assist learners who have difficulty reading and writing. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers undertook the following steps:

- a. They first identified the literacy level of the study participants. They selected primary three and four pupils and this choice was based on the fact that these learners are considered mid-level learners. Even though they have better experience than primary one and two pupils, they can still benefit from an intervention, unlike the more accomplished learners in primary five and six.
- b. They then selected a valid model of intervention.
- c. Next, the model was modified to fit the specific needs of the study and its participants.
- d. Finally, the research assistants were trained to ensure that the project goals were met in an appropriate and timely manner.

The Interventions

The researchers used the following intervention strategies to administer literacy instruction after obtaining the results of the pre-intervention tests.

- a. Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize, manipulate and analyse sounds in spoken language. Components of PA include: phoneme awareness; rhyming; segmenting; blending; phoneme manipulation; and syllable awareness.

b. Vocabulary Building

Vocabulary building is essential for effective reading comprehension as it is seen as the building blocks in language acquisition (Restrepo-Ramos, 2015). Some strategies to build vocabulary are: contextual learning; repetition; visualization; word building; and vocabulary games.

c. Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension strategies are techniques readers use to understand and interpret texts. The following steps can be adopted to ensure good comprehension:

- i. Before reading, the instructor should activate prior knowledge and then connect new information to existing knowledge. Next, identify the reasons for reading by skimming the text.
- ii. During reading, the instructor helps the learners create mental images of events and characters; they are allowed to ask questions at this point. This also helps the instructors to check understanding and adjust the approach as appropriate.
- iii. After reading, learners should be allowed to re-tell the text in their own words, combine new information with previous knowledge and if possible, critique the text.

d. Fluency Practice

Fluency practice helps readers develop accuracy, speed, and expression when reading. A few ways to achieve this include: teacher reads aloud and learners follow; learners read aloud together (choral reading); and the use of audio/visual aids, where learners listen to other fluent speakers.

Components of the Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Tests

- a. Phonological Awareness Test (PAT)
- b. Alphabet Knowledge Test (AKT)
- c. Sight Word Recognition Test (SWRT)
- d. Decoding and Comprehension Test (DCT)
- e. Standardised Literacy Assessment.

Summary of the Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Tests

Mean Pre-Intervention Test Results

	PAT	AKT	SWRT	DCT	SLA
Class					
Primary 3	42%	53%	24/50	44%	31%
Primary 4	54%	61%	33/50	56%	40%

Mean Post-Intervention Test Results

	PAT	AKT	SWRT	DCT	SLA
Class					
Primary 3	79%	79%	44/50	74%	71%
Primary 4	80%	85%	46/50	80%	79%

Comparison of Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Test Results (Primary 3)

	Pre-Intervention Test Mean	Post-Intervention Test Mean	Gain
Test			
PAT	42%	79%	+37%
AKT	53%	79%	+26%
SWRT	24/50	44/50	+20/50
DCT	44%	74%	+30%
SLA	31%	71%	+40%

Comparison of Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Test Results (Primary 4)

	Pre-Intervention Test Mean	Post-Intervention Test Mean	Gain
Test			
PAT	54%	80%	+26%
AKT	61%	85%	+24%
SWRT	33/50	46/50	+13/50
DCT	56%	80%	+24%
SLA	40%	79%	+39%

5. Results

The results suggest that there is appreciable improvement in the skills after just six weeks of intervention:

Phonological awareness – +37% (primary 3); + 26% (primary 4)

Alphabet knowledge - +26% (primary 3); +24% (primary 4)

Sight word recognition - +20/50 (primary 3); +13/50 (primary 4)

Decoding - +30% (primary 3); +24% (primary 4)

Standardised literacy assessment - +40% (primary 3); +39% (primary 4)

These gains suggest that the interventions were effective in improving the learners' performance.

Benefits of the Intervention

- a. Improved reading accuracy and fluency
- b. Enhanced comprehension and vocabulary
- c. Increased writing proficiency
- d. Boosted confidence and motivation

Literature as a Tool for national Development

Beyond using Literature to teach literacy skills, it can also serve as a pathway to the introduction of the concept of National orientation. Many concepts of national and community life are captured in the two study texts. As posited by Magaji-Idris & Eragbe-Chatta (2013), Children' s Literature can be used to achieve or teach the following:

- a. Public enlightenment and understanding government policies.
- b. Unity, human rights and justice.
- c. The theme of national pride and positive national image.
- d. The place of cultural values in development.
- e. Self-discipline and self-reliance.
- f. Respect for authority.
- g. Leadership by example.

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