



Developing Junior Secondary School Students' Reading Comprehension and Written Composition Performances through Story Telling and Retelling

Sabina Hassana Gomwalk
Department of Arts and Social Science Education
University of Jos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the impact of Story Telling and Story Retelling on Secondary School Students' Reading Comprehension and Written Composition performance. Two hundred and forty (240) Junior Secondary School Students from three selected schools in Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State were surveyed. A pre-test post test design was used to gather data from the respondents. The mean test and Standard deviation analyses showed that story telling and retelling as teaching strategies can enhance or facilitate the performance of students in both reading comprehension and written composition. The findings thus reveal that story telling and retelling can enhance the language performance of secondary school students. The implications of language teaching and learning are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Research studies have shown that story telling and retelling are important for developing language in young children and second language learners. Learners excel in their linguistic development if they are able tell / retell stories. The application of this strategy in enhancing other language skills has also been established. Apart from the fact that both reading and writing are important for literacy acquisition and utilization, they are both essential skills for teaching and learning in the school system. Because of the importance of these two language skills in school, there is need to find means of how to enhance students' performance in them.

Background to the study

The teaching and acquisition of reading and writing have over the years attracted the attention of many scholars because of their central role in scholarship. No single problem has received more attention from educational and psychological laboratories than the problem of understanding the reading

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process. According to Dechant (1977:1), both teachers and research specialists have sought to understand what reading is, how reading is developed and what adjustments in reading and material must be made in order that all pupils may profit optimally from its instruction. Dechant further states that interest in reading is anchored on the fact "that those who fail in school usually have failed first in reading... if the first button of a man's coat is wrongly buttoned, all the rest are certain to be crooked. Reading is that first button in the garment of education (Dechant, 1977:1). Given the complexity of present day culture and given the impact of cyber space technology, only the individual who can read fluently can play any significant role in the society or survive in this complex world of ICT. Aldous Huxley cited in Dechant (1977:1) states that "Everyone who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant and interesting. Studies by Abe (1984), Onukaogu (1989) and Tinuoye (1991) have that the reading achievement rates of Nigerian undergraduate students are not adequate. Since as Peterson (1992) states, effective and efficient reading leads to effective writing. It can thus be concluded that based available research evidence, Nigerian students cannot write well. In fact, Adetugbo (1973), Afolayan (1984) and Onukaogu (1994) attest this. Ngochal (2001) states that writing gives rise to print message, and the printed (encoded) message compels reading. Writing is therefore necessary for reading. If one of these skills is not properly taught, the other skill will suffer. Writing deficiencies, like other language deficiencies are experienced by students, especially junior secondary school students. The West African Examination Council Chief Examiner's reports each year give poorly prepared students as the main reason for students' poor performance. Both undergraduate and secondary school students are seen as less able to write than previously. There is also the widespread acceptance of the perception of the decline in students' writing. Unfortunately, reading and writing have posed many problems to teachers, parents and students. Educators worry about students' basic abilities in reading and writing. It is common knowledge to hear parents complain about the poor preparation of their children. Effective and efficient writing does not come by chance. It is nurtured by teachers. The yearly poor results of students in SSCE and JAMB have been traced to students' inability to read critically and write intelligently and coherently.

Telling stories to children has long been recognized as beneficial by educationists and the general public. Experts have shown that primary school pupils whose teachers teach using story telling technique experience improvement in their language development and notably, in reading and writing (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982). This method has also been known to have left a permanent impact on the lives of children. According to Jegede (2003 pp.147), such children perform better on measures of vocabulary, comprehension and decoding than children who do not have such exposure. Even though storytelling and retelling are useful tools for facilitating the

development of language skills, not many teachers, especially those at the secondary school level, utilize these strategies.

Purpose of the Study

This study attempts to establish whether storytelling and retelling would have any impact on the students' reading comprehension and written composition. Specifically, the study was designed to identify:

- If storytelling and retelling can enhance JSS students' reading comprehension performance.
- If storytelling and retelling can enhance JSS students' written composition.
- If storytelling and retelling can enhance JSS students' ability to dialogue on what they have read.
- If storytelling and retelling can enhance JSS students' ability to dialogue on what they will write/ have written.
- If storytelling and retelling can enhance the achievement rates of JSS3 students in other school subjects.
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RESEARCH PROBLEM

The joy of reading is one that everyone (child and adult) should experience. But all too often in our rush to teach the mechanics of reading, we fail to provide and motivation for reading as a pleasurable activity. This is the point of this study. The reading and writing competencies of Nigerian Secondary students are weak. As stated earlier, available research show that the performance of students in these two core skill areas are marred by poor foundation among other factors. Students can neither read nor write fluently in English in spite of the various attempts to redress these problems. Researchers and experts like Onukaogu (2003), Cullinan (1991) and Altweger (1988) have recommended the use of literature based curriculum as a means of enhancing students' reading and writing competencies. Given the impact of storytelling and retelling on the linguistic development of children, it becomes necessary investigate if storytelling and retelling can impact positively on the reading comprehension and written composition competencies of some select junior secondary school students. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Can Storytelling and Retelling enhance the reading comprehension performance of JSS3 students?
2. Can Storytelling and Retelling enable JSS3 students write coherently?
3. Can Storytelling and Retelling enhance JSS3 students' ability to dialogue on what they have read?
4. Can Storytelling and Retelling enhance JSS3 students' ability to dialogue on what they will write / what they have written?

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5. Can Storytelling and Retelling enhance the achievement rates of JSS3 in other subjects?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in reading comprehension performance of students who are taught language skills through storytelling and those taught via traditional method.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in writing performance of students who are taught language skills through storytelling and those taught using the traditional method.

Literature Review

Reading and writing play a major role in education and the social lives of people. Reading and writing are in fact very important in children's literacy development. According to Smith (1997), reading and writing are two language skills which are essential for literacy. They are indispensable in the promotion of culture and civilization. Reading and writing empower the individual. A person cannot fully comprehend the hallmark of civilization if that individual can neither read nor write. Without being literate, one can never benefit from the avalanche of information which the written text presents all around one (Inyang, 2006). In the United State of America educators are increasingly concerned about the number of secondary school students who do not read well. The findings of the National Institute Child Health and Human Development (2000) encourage educators and legislators to address the gaps in school curricula and teacher training in order to effect substantial changes in reading outcomes for elementary school age children. Students read a variety materials ranging from textbooks, notes, examination questions etc. in order to obtain information from them. Unfortunately, students are failing to learn to read in Primary school. This problem gets transferred to the secondary. The yearly failure in English and other related school subjects are lined to poor preparation and inability of children to read and comprehend, and interpret such texts and questions they are asked.

Importance of reading

Reading plays an important role in the life an individual. The joy of reading is one that everyone-child and adult- should experience. But all too often in our rush to teach the mechanics of reading, we fail to provide and motivation for reading as a pleasurable activity. The strength of reading lies in its role in helping the learner appreciates his/ her physical world. Reading shapes the

reader's world. It opens doors to many worlds. Some books take us to the desert, while others take us to outer space. Our imagination also takes through varying emotions; love, hate, empathy, excitement and wonders of nature. Reading is an important and critical skill not just in school but also outside school. In school, reading is important because it is through reading that the learner gathers and learns new information and passes same. Thus the phrase "we learn to read; and we read to learn."

Story Telling and Retelling

Storytelling and retelling are common phenomena in the Second Language (L₂) classroom. A story is a particular form of narration which sometimes has contents that differ from the type of content found in other discourse types. It has structure/structures distinct from description and exposition. It has plots, characters who interact socially and themes; it can have an inside view, varying in point of view and have foreshadowing. It contains a problem or a conflict both revolving around characters' goals and have some sort of action and resolution with various elements related temporarily and causally. A story is often characterized by stylistic words and phrases such as 'Once upon a time', has entertainment in literary aesthetic force and often evokes affective feelings such as interest, surprise and suspense. According to Fitzgerald (1992:82) "stories are stories and not something or fill some needs or because they represent ourselves and our lives in some important way. Stories exist because they are ways of thinking, knowing, learning, organizing, exploring, seducing, manipulating and controlling others – and more."

Instances of storytelling in promoting ESL learning and teaching seem inexhaustible. At the macro- environmental level they range from naturalness, learners' role in communication, availability of concrete referents, target models; while at the micro-level they include salience, frequency and correction. Reading stories to children have been found to help them learn more about the features of written language (Jegede, et al. 2003). According to Jegede et al. (2003:147), children perform better on measures of vocabulary, comprehension and decoding when exposed to storytelling than children who do not have such exposures. It is therefore possible that in the hands of an experienced Second Language teacher, Story Telling and Retelling can be useful tools for facilitating language skills like reading and writing. Given the impact of storytelling and retelling on the linguistic development of children, it becomes necessary investigate if storytelling and retelling can impact positively on the reading comprehension and written composition competencies of some select junior secondary school students.

Importance Writing

Both reading and writing are essential in literacy. Reading enhances writing and vice versa. According to McCarthy and Raphael (1992:7), better writers

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tend to be better readers; better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poor readers. Writing experiences influence reading comprehension. As shown above, writing is crucial to scholarship as is reading. Reading and writing two connected activities that need to be enhanced in children if they are to perform well in them. That is why in answering the question “what helps children to read and write?” Oxley et al. (1991: 5) state that adults need to talk about everyday happenings, listen to what children say, read to them, and encourage them to write making sure they see people that love reading and writing. Children love and enjoy stories and want to read them. They get to learn how books work and where they begin and end in addition to getting to know how to write their own. Meaning construction is a product of reading and writing.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The test retest design using two groups was used for this study. The intervention I.e. story telling/retelling was used with the experimental group only.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of two hundred and forty (240) students from four randomly selected Junior Secondary Schools in Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State in Nigeria. Two groups of thirty (30) students (one group, experimental; the other group, control) were selected from each school; making a total of sixty (60) students from each school. Intact groups (i.e., classes) were used so as not disrupt the workings of the schools. The participants consisted of 120 experimental members and 120 control group members. The intervention (treatment) was not given to the latter. The class teachers were used for the study.

Instrument

Three instruments (Reading Comprehension and Writing Competences, An Aspectual marking guide for assessing the performance of the participants, and Storytelling and Retelling Outlines) were used for the study. The first instrument was designed to ascertain the reading comprehension and writing competencies of the participants. The first part consists of a passage with a readability level of that of JSSII students. The passage tested for the literal, interpretive and the critical/creative reading comprehension competencies of the students. The second part tested for the narrative and expository writing competencies of the participating students. Three versions of the instrument were employed (a pre-test version, mid- intervention version, and post-

intervention version). A second instrument ;an Aspectual marking guide for assessing the performance of students in the pre-intervention, mid-intervention, and post-intervention stages of the study was also used. The third instrument (An Outline of storytelling and retelling) was used by the teacher during the instructional interventions.

Method of data collection / Analysis

To gather data for the study, teachers in the experimental classes were trained in a two- week intervention workshop on how to use storytelling and retelling strategies to enhance the reading comprehension and writing competencies of their students. This group of teachers were given the story telling and retelling guidelines and shown how to use them during the intervention stage. The school syllabus and scheme were strictly followed. The teachers were also trained on how to use the marking schemes to assess the participants’ reading comprehension and writing performance at the pre-test, mid-intervention, and post-test stages. Teachers in the experimental group were told not share the story telling and retelling strategies with teachers in the control group. This was to eliminate or reduce the effect of contamination.

Before the intervention commenced, both groups of participants were pre-tested. When the study commenced the teachers in the experimental group taught reading comprehension and writing using storytelling and retelling strategy while teachers in the control group used their traditional method to teach. Mid way in to the study, the participants were again tested. A post- test was administered to the participants at the end of the intervention period which lasted four weeks.

The data collected from the three tests on reading comprehension and writing competencies as well as the data from the classroom interaction were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results are presented here below.

Analysis and discussion of data

At the end of four weeks of treatment a reading comprehension and writing test was administered to both the Control and the Experimental Groups to establish whether the treatment had any impact at all on the students’ performance. The results of the test are presented in tables. The Pre-test performance of the participants is presented in table one below.

Table 1: Pre-test Performance of the participants on Reading Comprehension task

Group	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	t-Test	
Control	47.12	11.66	6.59	t- value	Critical value
Experimental	48	58.37	7.24	0.12	0.66

n= 120

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Table 1 above indicates that the pre-test mean for the control group on reading comprehension was 47.12 with a variance of 11.66 and a standard deviation of 6.59 while the mean of the experimental group 48 with a very high variance of 58.37 and a standard deviation of 7.24. The pre-test t value is 0.12. Since the t calculated is less than the critical t, we accept the hypothesis. This means that there was no significant difference between the performances of the two groups.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in reading comprehension performance of students who are taught language skills through storytelling and those taught via traditional method.

Table 2 : Post test performance of the participants on the reading Comprehension task.

Group	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	t-Test	
Control	48.78	73.38	8.57	t-value	Critical value
Experimental	55.32	54.87	7.41	6.09	1.06

n=120

Table 2 above indicates that the post test mean for the Control group was 48.78 with a high variance of 73.38 and a standard deviation of 8.57. In contrast, the Experimental group had a mean of 55.32 with a variance of 54.87 and a standard deviation of 7.41. After computing the t. for the post test, the value of the t calculated was 6.09 while the t- critical value at the degree of freedom at 0.05 was 1.06. Since the t calculated is greater than the critical t the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in writing performance of students who are taught language skills through storytelling and those taught using the traditional method.

Table 3: Pre- test performance of the participants on the Writing task

Group	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	t-Test	
Control	23.78	31.32	5.59	t-value	Critical value
Experimental	30.30	58.19	7.63	-0.03	3.22

n=120

Table 3 above shows that the mean score of the experimental was 30.30 while that of the control group is 23.78. Going by this result, calculated t is negative (-0.03) while the t critical was 3.22. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. There was no difference in their performance.

Table 4: Post test performance of the participants on the Writing task.

Group	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	t-Test	
Control	27.08	54.1	5.20	t-value	Critical value
Experimental	50.00	49.99	7.07	26.34	1.54

n=120

Since the calculated value is greater than the t critical, the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore means that there was a significant difference in their performances on the writing task.

Table 5: Pre-test Mean performance of the Control and the Experimental Groups per school

GROUP	School A	School B	School C	School D
Control	44.07	45.70	49	49.67
Experimental	46.2	48.13	50.37	47.3

n= 120

When school comparisons are made on the pre-test scores as can be seen in Table 5 above, participants from school D had had a higher mean score (49.67). This was followed by school C with a mean score of 49. The mean scores for the Experimental group per school show that school C had 50.37, followed by school B 48.13. Schools D and A had mean scores of 47.3 and 46.2 respectively. Going by these results school C did better in the pre-test.

Table 6: Post test Mean performance of the Control and the Experimental Groups per school.

GROUP	School A	School B	School C	School D
Control	46.33	48.53	50.83	49.4
Experimental	5.47	52.4	55.87	53.33

n= 120

When school comparisons on the post test were made, Table 6 above shows that both groups of participants from School C did better in the post test than those from other schools (as they had higher mean scores). Generally, the Experimental group did better on the post test than its counterpart, the control group. This can be attributed to the treatment they received. However, when means for the two groups in both tests were compared the performance of School C was not significant.

Findings

The following findings emerged from the present study:

- The data show that the experimental group the experimental group did better on the reading comprehension task than the control group
- The experimental group also did better in the writing task.

DISCUSSION

Going by the results of the analysis of the findings pre-test revealed that the experimental group was superior as the group had a mean achievement score of 48 which is not significant while the control group had a mean score of 47.12. The latter had a high variability of 58.37. The post test mean achievement score showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group as they moved from a mean score 48% to 55.32%. This showed a mean difference of 16.32, while the control group moved from a mean score of 47.12% to 48.78% with a mean difference of 1.78. The post test mean difference between the Experimental group and the Control group is 6.54. The superiority in the performance of this group can be attributed to the four- week treatment they received. This finding is supported by earlier studies (Inyang, 2006; Jeged, 2003; and Oxley et. al. 1991) which state that children perform better in comprehension when exposed to storytelling. Consequently, it therefore implies that given the appropriate training, students can tremendously improve their reading comprehension and writing skills. When given writing tasks after storytelling sessions, the students did better. This was also true of reading comprehension tasks.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study enumerated above, it can be concluded that when used adequately, storytelling can facilitate students' comprehension and writing skills. Teachers are encouraged to see storytelling not as a means of whiling the time but as an effective and efficient strategy for teaching comprehension and writing skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested in respect of this study.

We want to plead with our teachers that they incorporate story telling into their English as a Second Language classes to help students develop their reading comprehension and writing skills.

suggest that teachers do a lot of "talking" in their reading comprehension and written composition classes.

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