

Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Strategies for Teaching Literature to Enhance Students' Learning

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Abstract

Literature as a subject of study trains every learner to develop love for reading and most important, develop reading and writing skills. The area of study was Anambra state, Nigeria. All the literature teachers in the state constituted the population. All the 320 male literature teachers and 680 randomly selected female teachers constituted the sample for the study. One research question, one hypothesis, a 15- item, duly validated and reliability tested researchers-developed questionnaire were used for the study. Mean values were used to analyzed the research question while t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis. Findings revealed that literature teachers do not perceive literature circles, multimedia resources, think aloud amongst others to be effective teaching strategies. Based on the findings the researchers recommended that literature teachers should utilize all effective strategies in teaching to enhance students' learning.

Keywords: perceptions, effective, strategies, enhance, learning

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the basis for literacy breakthrough and as such reading literature involves a dimension beyond reading ordinary material (Gunning, 2010). If literature is properly taught it awakes a whole lot of feelings and thought in the learner. According to Gunning a classic tale draws out a feeling of wholeness or oneness, a carefully drawn character or situation evokes a feeling of recognition, and a poem that speaks to the heart engenders a feeling of tranquility. Rosenblatt (1978) identifies this response as characteristic of aesthetic reading. According to Rosenblatt, in aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text. In contrast to aesthetic reading is the efferent reading. Rosenblatt defines efferent reading as one in which the reader's attention is directed to concepts to be refined, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading. In other words, in aesthetic reading, the reader is enveloped with the feelings evoked by the text while the efferent reader carries away the meaning. Reading literature involves these two kinds of reading depending on the stance of the reader at the point in time. Students will become conscious of these two kinds of reading if the teacher uses effective strategies. Strategies that would awaken students' interest and make them question the author and the text critically; and interact well with the text. The need for use of effective strategies in teaching literature is crucial because of the basic role it plays in literacy. Rosenblatt (1991) believes that students

read for information but we are also conscious of the emotions about it and feel pleasure when the words we call up arouse vivid images and are rhythmic to the inner ear. Cox and Many (1992), believe that aesthetic reading results in deeper level of involvement for students, they tend to picture the story in their mind, they imagine scenes, actions, and characters. Cox and Many point out that as students read aesthetically, they become more deeply involved; they may enter the world they have constructed and try to understand events and characters, in terms of how people in their world would act in similar circumstances. Readers read for both aesthetics and meaning but their ability to experience the text, come up with their own ideas and construct their own meanings depend to a large extent on the teachers' strategies. An effective teacher uses strategies that enable students develop insights, spurs them to yearn for information, be critical thinkers and work toward applying the skills acquired.

Observation shows that teachers of literature in Anambra state teach every text using stereotyped strategies (Okoro,2007).The implication is that their strategies are not improved. There have been hues and cries about poor performance of students in English Language and Literature - in- English, teachers' strategies no doubt are part of the contributing factors. In effect the students lack the skills needed to read and understand literature and the extent to what they can do given the volumes of skills they are expected to acquire is suppressed. This

portends a problem in education .Education is expected to change behavior, equip individuals with skills necessary for self-reliance and national development.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out the strategies teachers perceive to be effective for teaching literature.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be beneficial to students. They would come to know the strategies that are effective for teaching literature. A situation where the teacher does not utilize them, the students can seek the services of a private teacher. In this way they would not be deprived of acquiring the skills needed for proper grooming in literature which would equip them to actualize their potentials. Teachers would also come to know strategies that work; assuming they do not know and they would strive to make up knowing the volume of skills students have been robbed of as a result their ignorance or negligence of duty.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question guided the study:
What are the strategies literature teachers perceive effective for teaching literature?

Null hypothesis:

The following null hypothesis guided the study at 0.05 level of significance:
Male and female literature teachers will not differ significantly in their perception of effective strategies for teaching literature.

METHODS

The design of the study was survey. The area of the study was Anambra State found in the south eastern part of Nigeria. Literature is an optional subject read only in the senior secondary schools (equivalent of high school).There are about 512 secondary schools with a population of about 1106 literature teachers. All the literature teachers constituted the population and the sample of the study. The instrument used for the study was a 15-item questionnaire titled Effective Strategies for Teaching Literature (ESTL); which was developed by the researchers. The instrument had two parts- A and B. Part A, elicited information such as name of school, subject taught and class. Part B had 15- item questionnaire structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4points), Agree (3points), Disagree (2points) and Strongly Disagree (1point).The instrument was validated by experts in literacy studies. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the reliability of the instrument; it yielded a coefficient value of 0.91.The instrument was used because of its high coefficient value. Twenty trained research assistants were used

to collect the data used for the study. Mean values were used to analyze the research question. Mean values of 2.50 and above were accepted while mean values below 2.50 were rejected. T-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis.

RESULTS

Research Question

Table 1: Male and female teachers’ mean responses on their perceived effective strategies for teaching literature.

S/N	ITEMS	Male literature Teachers N=320 X DECISION	Female literature Teachers N=680 X DECISION
1.	Teacher encourages students to question author	2.43 rejected	2.48 rejected
2.	Teacher uses think aloud strategy	2.33 rejected	2.45 rejected
3.	Students are involved in pre-reading activities	2.51 accepted	2.57 accepted
4.	Students are encouraged to form literature circle	2.14 rejected	2.22 rejected
5.	Students are taught to explore activities	2.47 rejected	2.51 accepted
6.	Teacher recommends popular and award winning stories for students	2.36 rejected	2.44 rejected
7.	Teacher engages students to actively discuss issues that crop up from the text under discussion	2.58 accepted	2.61 accepted
8.	Teacher identifies and puts into use supplemental materials related to the recommended texts	2.53 accepted	2.58 accepted
9.	Teacher uses multimedia resources to further clarify the topic of discussion	2.36 rejected	2.27rejected
10.	Teacher gives the background know-ledge of the text.	2.63 accepted	2.71accepted
11.	Teacher teaches key concepts and new vocabulary before students read	2.54 accepted	2.55 accepted
12.	Teacher creates reader response environment	2.51 accepted	2.50 accepted
13.	Teacher makes the topic of discussion more accessible to less able students	2.31 rejected	2.58 accepted
14.	Teacher encourages students to discuss in groups	2.21 rejected	2.58 accepted
15.	Teacher encourages students to apply what they have learned by giving them projects	2.56 accepted	2.68accepted

Table 1 above shows that teachers do not perceive all the strategies to be effective for teaching literature. Male teachers do not perceive items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, and 15 to be effective strategies. They scored mean values 2.43, 2.33, 2.14, 2.47, 2.36, 2.36, 2.31 and 2.21 respectively. Female teachers do not perceive items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 13 to be effective

strategies for teaching literature. They scored mean values 2.48, 2.45, 2.22, 2.44, 2.27 and 2.41 respectively.

Hypothesis

Table 11: t-test comparison of male and female literature teachers' mean responses on the strategies they perceive effective for teaching literature

Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	T-cal	T-crit	Prob
Male	320	2.9	0.55	980	0.51	1.89	p<0.05
Female	680	2.8	0.61				

Table 11 above shows that T- calculated is less than T- critical, therefore there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female literature teachers on the effective strategies for teaching literature. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that literature teachers do not perceive some strategies to be effective for teaching literature. These findings collaborates the findings of Okoro (2007), which reported that literature teachers are glued to age-long methods. This may be as a result of not being abreast with new effective methods or inefficient technological growth which hinders access to information on trend of academic activities in developed parts of the world. Both male and female literature do not use questioning the author technique, think aloud, literature circles, they do not recommend popular and award winning texts, they do not use multimedia resources, and they do not make the topic of discussion more accessible to less able readers. Male teachers in addition do not encourage students to explore activities or discuss in groups. The above findings are factors that hinder acquisition of knowledge and skills. Literature teachers are expected to use all these strategies and more in order to facilitate learning for students. Questioning the author is a very effective strategy for reading texts which enable students establish interactions with texts to build greater understanding and construct meaning (Beck, Mckeown, Hamilton & Kucan, 2003). Questioning the author not only allows the reader ask critical questions that give deeper understanding of the text but also helps the reader move meaningfully along the text with the author. Teachers should use literature circles as it nurtures students' love for reading, trains them to express themselves freely, take up leadership roles and work better as a group (Raphael & Englert, 1990; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Smith, 1998 & Daniels, 2002). Use of multimedia resources is one visual strategy that enables students form a mental picture of the topic of discussion; it also provides background knowledge of the topic (Tompkins, 2004). Acquisition of knowledge and skills involve the use of the senses which aid

understanding, make the learning experience vivid, aid retention and retrieval of information. Teachers use think aloud to model for students the thought processes they go through as they use reading and writing skills (Baumann & Ivey, 1997; Davey, 1983; Wade, 1990). It helps students to become aware of the metacognitive processes capable readers use and they learn to think aloud about their own use of strategies. Use of effective strategies no doubt facilitates learning and enable learners achieve mastery. The result of the hypothesis shows that male and female literature teachers have no significant difference in their perception of strategies that are effective for teaching literature.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study implies that literature teachers are not abreast with the strategies that are effective for facilitating learning for students. On the other hand, students are not trained to acquire skills that will equip them to actualize their potentials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should as a matter of priority train and retrain teachers on new strategies that make for effective teaching and learning. The ability of an individual to acquire knowledge and skills; and apply same contributes to national development and self reliance. Part of the agenda of every government should be to equip the citizenry with skills and knowledge. To this effect the government should organize workshops and seminars to train teachers and help them improve on their methods and strategies. The government should also seek opportunities to study the curriculum of developed countries with a view to making a balance so that their students would be at par with their counter-parts in other parts of the world.

CONCLUSION

Effective teaching of literature prepares learners for literacy and goes a long way to equip learners with skills ranging from developing critical thinking, being creative in writing to acquiring skills for life-long learning. It is therefore crucial that literature teachers use effective teaching strategies to enable students come to full actualization of their potentials.

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