

The State of Reading Instruction in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State: Implication for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

We are familiar with the hue and cry of our students' reading failures and lack of interest in reading. But we have never paused to find out whether these children are being taught how to read. Research has shown that reading instruction plays vital role in whether students would have interest in reading and eventually become efficient readers. This study therefore sought to find out how the teachers teach reading in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State; whether their reading instruction reflect the modern view of the reading process thereby preparing the learners for developmental challenges outside the classroom. Ten out of the thirteen public secondary schools in Uyo urban were strategically selected for the study. Two classes in each school were observed using an observational checklist developed by the researcher. Two research questions were answered and two null hypotheses tested. Frequency distribution, percentage and chi-square statistic were used for data analysis. The results show that majority of the teachers still teach reading using the old traditional methods that rendered learners passive in the process of reading. Among the recommendations made was the need to train teachers in the modern understanding of the reading process as well as the strategies they could use in conducting effective reading instructions that would equip the learners with reading strategies they need to become efficient readers

Keywords: reading instruction, secondary schools, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the language skills and a pivot for meaningful development. The child in the school needs reading to learn. Effective communication is also enhanced through extensive reading where the child is exposed to good writers of varied styles; reading such works help to improve his communication skills. Poor writing expressions by secondary students have recently been blamed partly on their poor reading habits. This is true because reading enables students to acquire language learning skills. Where they do not read, it becomes doubtful that they will ever develop good language learning tools. In the vast technological advanced global village confronting man, reading is one of the most relevant skills to unravel all the advances made by man. Whether one is talking about computer, e-mail, internet browsing, etc., all require the ability to read to be able to function well.

Reading also reduces ignorance and increases one's self-esteem. This is because reading facilitates learning. Learning imbues one with knowledge and knowledge we all know is power. Reading provides a bank of information (Udosen, 2009) and equips the reader with the power to take appropriate actions in his interest and that of his community. Reading can help one to avert danger. In the world of business, success also depends on ability to read. A farmer who can read stands a better chance of improving the yield

of his farm; for he will always learn better farming techniques from others through reading.

In the family circle, reading plays important role also. It enhances unity and love among family members. Parents who read aloud to their children nurture love and inculcate important life skills to their children. Discipline is fostered as the children eagerly look forward to the reading time. Conflict is reduced and love promoted. In summary, we can say that reading is essential for psychological, emotional, social and political development of the human family. The above importance of reading can be summarized thus: "Reading feeds the life of the mind with insights into humanity, the world, and the new way things work.... Reading is also a cultural experience that creates an entrée into shared communities.

Reading is a Prerequisite for joining knowledgeable communities and participating in democratic societies" (Hampton and Resnick, 2009). Despite the invaluable role reading plays in our lives, it appears to pose the greatest obstacles to students in all levels of education (Ayodele, 1985; Umolu, 1985; Gunderson, 1991). The problems that students have with reading emanates from the fact that they have to grapple with the demands of learning English as a second or third language and also using it as a vehicle for learning other school subjects. Learning from texts with various new technical vocabularies; the use

of new items in new contexts coupled with features of particular discourse styles is indeed challenging to Nigerian students as with other nations who use English as a second language. This raises the issue of reading instruction to be given in schools so that students can acquire the language learning facilities needed for sustainable development. But what is reading, reading instruction and how is it handled by teachers in secondary schools and the implication such practices have for sustainable development.

The Concept of Reading Instruction and its Treatment in Secondary Schools

The way reading is conceived has influenced how reading is taught over the years. For example, the earliest model of reading by Gough (1972) labeled Information Transfer, views reading as a process of meaning transfer where the reader is only to extract meaning from text effortlessly. This model often regarded as bottom-up process; has the reader read letter-by-letter and word-by-word. Teachers who hold this view believe that success in reading is determined by tests which measure how much information is transferred by the students. Such teachers also engage students on work aimed at developing discrete /isolated reading skills which they feel when put together will equal reading efficiency .This model was however challenged by the interactive theories of Goodman (1970) which emphasizes the role of the reader and his/her schema in the reading process. The argument here is that efficient readers always use their background knowledge to interact with the text to be able to construct meaning. This view of reading places much responsibility on the teacher, as he has to spend more time teaching students how to engage in texts. There are yet the transaction theories of reading, as an extension of the interactive models. The major thrust of this model is that meaning is not simply in the text and in the reader. Rather, that the meaning created as readers and writers encounter texts is greater than the written text or the readers' prior knowledge (Cairney, 1990). These various views of reading certainly affect how reading is taught in schools.

Reading instruction is the process of helping learners learn how to read. It is a deliberate attempt to teach reading. It has to do with the what, the how and the why of reading by the teachers to his learners. The teacher acts as both the facilitator and instructor where the learners are engaged in "active interactive strategic processes" that develop meaningful comprehension (Cassidy, Valadez & Garrett, 2010). Such reading lessons go through three stages of pre-reading activities, during reading activities and post-reading activities.

In the first stage, the teacher initiates activities and actions aimed at arousing the student's interest, activating their schemata and linking such to the

lesson at hand. He/ She also engages the students on brainstorming exercises leading to purpose setting for the reading. The teacher encourages students to predict the text's content through the title and asks questions that help to focus attention. He tells students the objectives of the reading strategy adopted.

The second stage is where the reading proper is modeled for the students using a particular strategy. At this stage the teacher tells students what efficient readers do to construct meaning such as inferencing, predicting and using context clues and word attack strategies to figure out unknown words. He tells students how to monitor comprehension by paraphrasing and even re-reading certain sections of the text when understanding falters. The teacher shows students how to mark words, phrases and important ideas or points about text and even to question the text/author. He provides opportunities for students use what was learned, gives corrective feedback and monitoring as students learn (Cooper, 1986). All these activities are aimed at helping students realize that reading is a mental exercise that require active participation by the reader. Being actively involved in the reading process according to Anstey and Bull (2006) requires that readers bring their "social, cultural and literate knowledge" to interact with the text and these in turn would influence the way they construct meaning from the text.

The last stage, post-reading activities aim at consolidating and elaborating understanding. Thus, the stage is characterized by discussions, retelling, summarizing the plot or main idea of the text, evaluating the text to find out whether the material answers students' questions and predictions made before the reading exercise. In the end, the three types of questions- literal, inferential and critical questions are asked and the teacher help students where need be to understand how to answer such questions.

Reading instruction conducted this way over the time help wean learners and make them take responsibility of their learning. Such reading instruction conforms to the new view of reading as an interactive process of meaning construction. Such engagements in reading instruction promote students' learning of more subject specific information, serve as strategies for comprehending challenging texts as well as serve as motivation for reading (Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2009). Students who are exposed to such reading instruction are better prepared and equipped as efficient readers.

However, the information transfer often tagged traditional drill and practice model has wielded much influence on how reading is taught in most of our schools despite research findings to the contrary.

Students in this model are asked to read assigned passages in turn thereafter answer the comprehension questions on them. The teacher's role is merely that of correcting wrong punctuations and ensuring that students answer the questions correctly, according to the teacher's pre-determined criteria. Most times, the questions are multiple-choice items and the students are to make their correct choice. Students are never allowed to make personal responses to stories or texts, neither are they free to construct their own text. They are to see the world through the teacher's eye. Learners in this model are prevented from knowing that there are multiple ways of presenting the world and being in the world (Hall, 1998). Thus, the model renders students passive and inhibits the development of processes that produce knowledge. This traditional drill and practice model is highly criticized and blamed for students' poor performances and reading failures. Students in this model are less motivated and can hardly show interest on issues that affect their lives. As observed by Guthrie, *et al.* (2006) it is only students who have high motivation and interest for reading that gain reading comprehension much faster than those who are less motivated.

The fact is that reading is not deliberately taught, it is assessed. The following excerpt paints a vivid picture on what is happening in most classrooms:

"Teachers expect students to be critical readers comprehending most of the materials read in the classroom, they do not teach comprehension during social studies instruction, they merely assess it" (Benito, *et al.*, 1993). In a benchmark report, **Becoming a Nation of Readers**, Anderson et al cited by Hartman & Nielson (1989) concluded as follows: "Teacher-led instruction in reading strategies and other aspects of comprehension promotes reading achievements, but there is very little comprehension instruction in most of American classrooms".

If this can be said about American classrooms, one wonders what happens in Nigerian schools where reading is a forced task and students are not deliberately taught how to read. In Nigeria, reading has no recognizable place in the curriculum. What obtains is an organizational approach in which reading is incorporated into the language curriculum. In this arrangement, reading is annexed with another language component-listening and reading (Uwatt and Udosen, 2004). The discovery that reading is not given priority attention in the school curriculum is bad enough to worry as this certainly has carry over effect on teachers' practices in the classroom. The present situation cannot guarantee the achievement of the goals of secondary education specified in the National Policy on Education (NPE). These goals among others are:

... (a) inspire its students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence; ...

(b) raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour (FRN, 1998).

These are skills that can be developed through direct reading instruction. But is reading taught in our schools? That is the basis for this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was designed to find out how teachers teach reading in secondary schools and whether their practices reflect the current understanding of reading and the implication of their practices to sustainable development. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

- (1) Do the teachers' activities at the different stages of reading instruction reflect the modern view of the reading processes?
- (2) Have teachers' years of experience any effect on their method of teaching reading?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference in the methods used by the teachers at the three stages of reading instruction.
2. Teachers' years of experience do not significantly affect their method of teaching reading.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey method to find out the practices teachers use while conducting reading lessons in their classes. Ten secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State were strategically selected and two teachers were randomly observed as they teach reading comprehension lessons at both junior and senior secondary classes.

The instrument developed by the researcher and validated for this study consisted of pedagogical behaviours expected of teachers conducting reading lessons in both the traditional and modern methods. The items were constructed to cover the three stages of a reading lesson (already described in this work) and the detailed activities for each stage were listed. The researcher visited the schools at predetermined periods to observe the teachers. While the lesson was going on, the observer ticks the activities which the teacher manifests from his schedule. Each class was observed once.

The frequency with which each item was exhibited by the twenty teachers was found and percentages calculated for them. The item belonging to the two approaches-traditional and modern-were grouped together for data analysis and chi-square comparison computed.

RESULTS

The results of the findings were presented in tables according to the research questions and hypotheses.

Research question 1: Do the teachers’ activities at the different stages of reading instruction reflect the modern view of the reading process?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the methods used by teachers at the three stages of the reading instruction.

Table 1: Frequency distribution, percentage and chi-square analysis of methods used by teachers at the three stages of reading instruction

Stages of Reading Instruction	Methods of Teaching		Total
	Traditional	Modern	
Pre-reading stage	O=17(85%) E=10	O=3(15%) E=10	20
During reading stage	O=14(70%) E=10	O=6(30%) E=10	20
Post reading stage	O=13(65%) E=10	O=7(35%) E=10	20

O=Observed frequency; E=Expected frequency; df=2; P=0.0; Calculated chi-square=13.9
Critical value of chi-square:5.991

Table 1 shows that teachers’ activities at the various stages of reading instruction reflect the use of traditional methods rather than the modern methods. This is what the figure in brackets reveal and that answers research question 1 which says that teachers activities at the various levels of instruction do not reflect the modern view of the reading process. The calculated chi-square of 13.9 is far higher than the observed chi-square of 5.991. This was shown to be significant at P=0.05; hence the null hypothesis 1 is rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers’ years of experience do not significantly affect their method of teaching reading.

Table 2: Frequency distribution, percentages and chi-square analysis showing the effect of teaching experience on teachers’ use of methods during reading instruction.

Methods of Instruction	Teaching Experience (years)			Total
	1-5	6-10	11 and above	
Traditional method	O=3(60%) E=3.25	O=4(66.67%) E=3.9	O=6(66.67%) E=5.85	13
Modern method	O=2(40%) E=1.75	O=2(33.33%) E=2.1	O=3(33.33%) E=3.15	7
Total	5	6	9	20

O = Observed frequency; E = Expected frequency
df = 2; P = 0.05; Calculated chi-square = 0.0733
Critical value of chi-square = 5.991

Table 2 indicates that teachers’ years of experience do not have any effect on their use of modern methods of teaching as their use of methods inclined towards the traditional. This is seen in the high percentages across the year categories. The chi-square calculated (0.0733) was lower than the observed chi-square (5.9910) indicating a no significant effect. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study reveals that classroom processes during reading lessons do not reflect the current understanding of reading as an interactive process where the readers are to be actively engaged with the text to be able to construct meaning. At the pre-reading stage, 85% of the teachers performed activities that reflected the traditional drill practice method of teaching while only 15% inclined towards the modern view. None of the teachers engaged the students in activities that involved prediction or speculation on the topic to be read. Only two teachers in each category discussed the title of text and pictures/ illustrations before reading the main text. Yet these activities set purpose for reading and stimulate students’ higher order thinking and make reading a meaningful exercise.

The main reading stage was characterized by model reading by the teacher and thereafter some students were called upon to read while the teachers correct wrong pronunciation. There was no attempt to model reading for the students using any strategy. No effort was made to show students how to read critically nor how to arrive at meaning of unknown words through word analysis or context clues. Thus, 70% of the teachers performed actions at this stage which reflected traditional method of reading while 30% had features of the modern methods. Students under this kind of classrooms cannot be empowered to make reading a way of life thereby increasing in knowledge to grapple with environmental issues that affect their lives (Udosen, 2001).

At the post reading stage, 65% of teachers inclined towards the traditional methods of asking the set questions whether orally or in written form whereas 35% reflected the modern view of discussing and summarizing the main idea of text. However, none of the teachers tried questions outside those set in the text and thus, no opinion questions to evaluate the students were asked. This process does not allow students opportunity of exploring knowledge through diverse channels (Hall, 1998). What all this tantamount to is that reading is assessed not taught by the teachers and this is bad enough.

Years of teaching experiences are often an advantage in effective classroom processes. In the reading class the story is different. What this means is that for

effective reading instructions to be given in schools, teachers are either taught through their initial training programmes or through in-service programmes or workshops and conferences. Experience shows that most of these teachers never attended workshops and conferences. This again poses a big challenge to Teacher Educators to package programmes that will enhance the teachers' effectiveness with regard to reading instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the finding of this study, it is obvious that for sustainable development to start from the grassroots, students at that level of education must be sufficiently aware of the processes that produce knowledge. To achieve this, we must:

1. Equip the teachers with adequate knowledge, skills and strategies for effective reading instruction that can make a difference in the lives of students through teacher education programmes.
2. Teachers in the field should be encouraged to update their knowledge and skills through in-service programmes, workshops and conferences.
3. Encourage teachers to join professional associations that can help them have exposure to new processes that enhance teaching and learning performances.

Implication of Finding to Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has much to do with bettering the peoples' way of life now and for generations to come. Bryant (2003) describes it as infrastructures, policies and behaviours that are conceptualized, instituted, maintained overtime and which are considered essential to the vitality, general welfare and continued existence of a people, and the environment. Education is at the centre for such development. That is why the UK Government Department of International Development (DFID) in its policy paper of 1999 acknowledges that education has much to contribute to sustainable development and that skills development enhances sustainable livelihood (Taylor, 2002).

The role of education in sustainable development is further highlighted by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) thus:

Sustainable development is now widely perceived as the only way to guarantee humanity's well being now and in future generations. Sustainable development means development that continues to meet today's needs in ways that will not jeopardize future generations. The first step toward sustainable development is to encourage attempts to find solution, based on a firm understanding of the present state of the environment and the causes of environmental problems. Because environmental

problems directly affect people's interests, however, it is important to disseminate correct knowledge and promote diverse approaches to these problems, and education is an important step toward the achievement of these objectives... (JICA cited in Taylor, 2002).

From the excerpt, it is obvious that the activities that promote sustainable development lie beyond the environmentalists' lobby to that of education that seeks to raise awareness, deepen understanding and influence behavior. Reading instruction becomes very relevant here as part of efforts to provide educational programmes that will lead to the achievement of goals of sustainable development. Five means have been identified through which education can reach these goals. They include: raising awareness, increasing knowledge, training in skills, carrying out research and assessment (Taylor, 2002).

The type of skills required for sustainable development include both the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and the more practical and work related skills often tagged life-coping skills. While the school curriculum plays important role in this direction, reading educators are challenged to inculcate these skills through direct reading instruction. Such reading instruction will help to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, become aware of their environmental issues and ways they can contribute to protecting their environment. It is only when people can read that they can become aware of what is happening around them. The type of reading instruction described in this study can equip our students with the skills they need to become efficient readers with the ability to show sufficient interest and awareness in issues that affect them.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of this study, we can conclude that most classroom processes do not reflect the current understanding of reading as an interactive process. Hence, learners in the present situation are not taught how to read. This scenario does not augur well for our education system that has a major role in promoting sustainable development. For people to contribute to meaningful development, they must first of all be stimulated to learn and acquire knowledge that can be used to turn things around. Reading bears much on peoples' life and so must be taught to become a habit.

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