



IMPACT OF TEACHERS' USE OF FOLKTALES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PUPILS IN READING COMPREHENSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIAⁱ

Hanna Onyi Yusufⁱⁱ

Dr., Department of Educational Foundations and Curriculum,
Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

Abstract:

The study aimed at investigating the impact of teacher's use of folktales on the performance of pupils in reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna, Nigeria. The sample of the study consisted of forty (40) primary four pupils from two randomly selected primary school, tagged, school "A" and school "B" in Kaduna North Local Government Area. School "A" was assigned as the experimental group while school "B" was assigned as the control group. Both groups were taught reading comprehension for eight weeks. A pre-test post-test experimental design for equivalent groups was used. Pupils were tested using reading comprehension test called retelling test. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. This indicates that the use of folktales by teachers in reading comprehension may have a significant positive effect on pupils' reading comprehension. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others, that teachers should use folktales to enrich their reading comprehension lessons and to make such lessons more lively, interesting and meaningful. The reading component of the English Language Curriculum should be organized around stories that are deeply rooted in core values of the society. The curriculum should include reading comprehension passages that are based on folktales that teach moral lessons. Such moral lessons should be deeply rooted in the core values of the society.

Keywords: folktales, reading, comprehension, performance, primary, pupils, impact

ⁱ Paper presented at the International Conference on Quality in Higher Education held on 24th – 25th November 2016 at Sakarya University, Turkey

ⁱⁱ Correspondence: email hannayusuf@yahoo.com

Introduction / Background to the study

Reading is a fundamental language skill. It is also a highly complicated act that a combination of many skills and processes. Through reading, one can teach writing, speaking, vocabulary items, grammar, spelling and other language aspects. The basic goals of reading are to enable students to gain an understanding of the world and themselves, to develop appreciation and interests, and to find solutions to their personal and group problems.

Unfortunately, this important and fundamental language skill is not properly taught, by teachers in primary schools in Nigeria. Oyetunde (2009), Yusuf (2014 and 2015) claim that in some English classes, the announcement of a reading comprehension lesson or period elicits murmuring and grumbling from students as they envision the long time it will require, the laborious task of looking up words' meanings in the dictionary. What makes matters worse is that after all the time and efforts; students fail to comprehend the text. Most English as second language students, are often unable to comprehend a written text effectively (Yusuf, 2015). Hence the need to undertake this study. Any effort geared towards improving the reading comprehension of students is neither wasted nor misplaced. Perhaps, the outcome of this research could motivate students to read and improve their reading comprehension.

The benefits of folktales or storytelling in Education are being discovered as research in this area continues to grow. According to Milford (2007) when a component of art such as folktales or storytelling is integrated into the reading curriculum, students experience more meaningful learning. They are more actively involved with the text. The use of storytelling has been linked to improved literacy and language development. When children participate in storytelling, it can increase reading comprehension (Bayly, 2007). They learn to listen to stories, they must visualize the setting, character, problems and other parts of a story. These comprehension skills must be acquired and applied when students are reading in order to gain understanding (Milford, 2007).

Folktales or storytelling began with the advent of civilization. Generations heard and experienced the power of the word through oral expression. Oral interpretation gave way to the written word when cave paintings, and stone tablets, became the means of conveying and preserving the story. It was not until the end of the middle ages, when Gutenberg invented the printing press that the common person was instructed to read the written word. Prior to that time, folktales or storytelling was the primary source of the literary instruction and entertainment (MacKinney, 1996). However, to date only limited research has been done on the effects or impact of storytelling on children's learning in Nigeria.

The importance of folktales or storytelling has been demonstrated in the results of over 75 years of educational research (Wood, 1994). Gold and Gibson (2001) emphasize that storytelling is the foundation of literacy development. They also state that storytelling demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning and invites the listener into a conversation with the author. Trelease (1994) says that folktales or storytelling fosters the desire to read independently. It is like a TV or radio advert for literature. Folktales or storytelling time encourages children to grow as readers and broadens the types of literature they choose to read. The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading, is reading stories aloud to children (Anderson et al., 1985). Moreover, Beach (1993) states that oral reading instruction is a legitimate part of the developmental reading programme and can offer benefits of increased fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. It is obvious from the foregoing that researchers seem to agree that as long as teaching exists, folktales or storytelling should be incorporated in the curriculum, regardless of the students' ages.

Rog (2001) states that reading stories aloud mean to develop children's "*concepts about print, story structure, and other elements of text*" and "*provides the child with a wealth of information about the processes and functions of written language*". It develops children's attention span and listening skills (Dragan, 2001). Reading stories aloud to children gives them new understandings on various subjects that they encounter only through books (Terblanche, 2002).

In addition, Needlman (2004) asserts that there are many good reasons to read folktales or stories aloud to students. These include: reading together is fun; reading aloud keeps interest high; reading aloud is especially important if your child is having difficulty learning to read; reading aloud builds listening skills; reading aloud builds vocabulary; stories are the building blocks of imagination and stories help teach character. Moreover, Rippel (2006) indicates that reading aloud to students has many benefits. Some of these benefits are: hearing stories read aloud expands the students' vocabulary; through read-aloud stories, students can learn about many different topics: science, history, geography, etc.; the student's attention span increases as he/she sits still for an interesting story; through hearing well-written stories being read aloud, students are absorbing proper grammar and word usage and when teachers read with their students, they are modeling an important skill for them.

In the current environment of research-based practices, many educators may be skeptical about allowing the use of a "new" educational tool until the effect of that tool has been clearly documented through quantitative research. This study investigates the impact of teacher's use of folktales on the performance of pupils in reading

comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna, Nigeria. This is an issue previous studies conducted in Nigeria, have not tackled properly. To the best knowledge of the researchers, this is the first time a research of this nature is being conducted to determine whether or not reading comprehension significantly improves when pupils are told folktales or stories by the teacher.

Review of related literature

A folktale is a popular story that was passed on in spoken form from one generation to the next. Usually, the author is unknown and there are often many versions of the tale. Folktales comprise fables, fairy tales, old legends and even urban legends. Folktales or storytelling to children builds the foundation of literacy learning. According to Fisher and Medvic (2003), the more folktales or stories students are exposed to, the more opportunities they will have for hearing rich language, learning new vocabulary, grasping story structures, and developing of love of reading. They also suggest that students who are consistently exposed to storytelling gain skills that prepare them for reading. Moreover, they noted that during storytelling, students are more attentive and relaxed, yet highly focused.

Numerous scholars believe children can benefit from listening to folktales storytelling (Alna, 1999; Isbell et al., 2004). Kim (1999), stated that *"storytelling today is increasingly recognized as having important theoretical and practical implications"*. One of the reasons for using the technique of folktales or storytelling in the classroom is that it allows the modeling of language patterns. Learners can imitate the structure and the sounds they hear. Kim (1999) explained that while the teacher is reading, he/she can infuse the syntactic order of the written language with pitch, juncture, stress and other paralinguistic cues that contribute to the interpretation of the passage. Imitation of the sounds has a direct bearing on the increased vocabulary that is a result of hearing stories and poems. He also states that hearing words in context adds to the number of meanings in a learner's receptive vocabulary and gives the listener alternative ways to express him/her.

Alna (1999) indicates that 4th- through 6th-grades have demonstrated children who are read aloud to on a regular basis over a period of several months show significant gains in reading comprehension, decoding skills, and vocabulary. It was also found that all children benefited significantly as compared to the control groups, who were read to only occasionally or not at all.

Wood (1994) emphasized that teachers should read stories to their students. Because as the teachers are reading to their students, the students get a better feel for

the language and its structure. Teacher's reading to the students is also a motivation enhancer; the reader's enthusiasm and animated mood are infectious.

Trelease (1994) found that students who had a story read aloud to them by the teacher and then asked to complete several artistic assignments produced more creative work than their counterparts who saw the movie version of the same story. The read-to students used visual imagery to create scenes and characters, while the others tended to regurgitate what they had viewed on the screen whether it was image created in their mind or not.

Alna (1999) studied the effect of systematic storytelling aloud on language comprehension and language production of pre-school and first grade children. The findings of the study showed that listening to stories read aloud helps students develop the habit of listening and at the same time gives them specific training in comprehension through exposure to the interesting and meaningful content of the stories.

Mackinney (1996) investigated the effect of the teacher's reading aloud on the reading comprehension of EFL student's reading a story. Seventy-five students participated in the study. The experimental group had a story read aloud to them by the teacher, whereas the control group read the story silently. Two dependent measures were used: a multiple-choice test and a story frame test. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on both measures. This indicated that reading aloud by the teacher may have a significant positive effect on learners' reading comprehension.

Rippel (2006) investigated the relationship between storytelling and reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that storytelling positively affected the subjects' reading comprehension.

Terblanche (2002) examined fourth graders' responses to a story presented in three different delivery systems: read independently, read aloud, and told as a shared storytelling experience. The findings of the study indicated that using the oral delivery systems of read-alouds and storytelling provokes more positive responses than does independent reading. Moreover, students in the read aloud treatment group made more interpretational responses. More free responses came from the storytelling group indicating that storytelling as a mode of delivery may generate more conversation about literature than reading independently.

Queini et al. (2008) conducted a 10 weeks study with fifty three 5–6 year-old kindergarteners to investigate the effect of read-aloud on children's vocabulary development and comprehension skills. The read-aloud strategy consisted of two teachers reading storybooks to children and explaining unfamiliar words. The teachers

engaged children in meaningful discussions about the text, involving logical and critical thinking. Data were collected through observations, conferences with children and children's writing samples. Findings revealed gains in children's vocabulary and comprehension skills.

The present study is aimed at investigating the impact of folktales or storytelling on pupils reading comprehension in Kaduna State, Nigeria, since literature search revealed a dearth of empirical data from Nigeria in this specific study area.

Objectives of the study

To determine the impact of teacher's use of folktales on the performance of pupils in reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna, Nigeria.

Research Question

What is the impact of teacher's use of folktales on the performance of pupils in reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

Teacher's use of folktales has no significant impact on pupils' performance in reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in two randomly selected public primary schools in Kaduna North Local Government Area. A pre-test post-test experimental design was used for the study. Two primary four intact classes were used for the study. Each group was randomly assigned to either control or experimental group. Both groups were exposed to eight (8) weeks of teaching.

However, the pupils of the control group were not exposed to folktales during the course of teaching. Both groups were subjected to a reading comprehension pretest before the commencement of the experiment and the same test was administered as a post-test immediately after the treatment.

The population of the study consisted of all primary school pupils in Kaduna North Local Government Area. The sample of the study consisted of 40 primary 4 pupils from two intact classes. The two classes were assigned as experimental and control group in each of the respective schools.

In order to answer the question of the study, the present researcher chose a number of folk stories from Tales by moonlight stories, which contains some moral lessons. The stories were chosen according to length and difficulty level. The more complex structure the story included, the more difficult it was considered. The researcher also developed a 25-item-multiple choice test on four reading passages. The test items had four choices only one of which is correct. The pupils were instructed to read the reading passages, one at a time, answer the questions by circling the correct choice. The test included items dealing with vocabulary questions, understanding certain grammatical constructions and reading implied meaning by the passage. In scoring, pupils' performance was computed out of 100 allotting (four) points for each correct answer and (zero) for each wrong answer. The time interval between the pre-test and the post-test was eight weeks, a period long enough to minimize the effects of the pre-test on the results and the conclusions of the experiment. The test was designed and administered by the researcher. An independent-sample T test was used to measure the gain scores of both groups on the pretest and then on the post-test. A One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to measure the gain scores of the subjects in order to eliminate any possible differences between the two groups on the pre-test.

The usability of the test was tested through pilot study of 10 pupils who were excluded from the sample. The reliability coefficient of the test calculated using Cronbach-Alpha was 0.85.

Treatment

- Teacher encourages pupils to build personal relationships in pairs and in groups as folktales are being read aloud to them.
- Teacher provides daily opportunities to pupils for language development by telling pupils lots of stories with moral lessons.
- Teacher creates opportunities for pupils to interact regularly on a one to one basis.
- Teacher challenges pupils to think, talk and explore their knowledge of the world.
- Teacher provides support to pupils as they develop language and learning strategies necessary to articulate and extend their interactions with the world.

Sample Lesson Plan

- Step 1: Teacher introduces the lesson by telling pupils that she is going to tell them a folktale title "the disobedient daughter who married a thief".
- Step 2: Teacher tells pupils "Once upon a time..." pupils response "Time time".
- Step 3: Teacher proceeds to tell pupils the folktales. She tells pupils the beginning part of the story.
- Step 4: As teacher tells the story, she stops intermittently to ask pupils what they think about what she has told them so far.
- Step 5: Teacher continues to tell the story and pauses at intervals to ask pupils to predict what will happen next or how the story will end.
- Step 6: As teacher tells the story, she makes sure she is creative, she sings, shows facial expressions, changes in tone of voice etc
- Step 7: Teacher encourages pupils to pair up or form smaller groups where each child is given opportunity to act as the story teller.
- Step 8: Teacher goes round to ensure that each pupil is actively involved.
- Step 9: Teacher asks pupils questions based on the story that was told.
- Step 10: Teacher concludes the lesson by telling pupils to draw pictures of their favorite character.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The hypothesis for this research which states that teacher's use of folktales have no significant impact on the performance of pupils in reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The data were collected through a pretest treatment – post-test design for equivalent groups and analyzed via the statistical packages SPSS.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of teachers' folktales on pupils' reading comprehension in primary schools in Kaduna. It compares the use of folktales with the traditional method. The researcher hypothesized that there was no significant difference in the performance of pupils taught using folktales and those taught using the traditional method. This hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

An independent-sample T test was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups on the pretest. Table 1 represents the results.

Table 1: Results of the T test of the means of the performance of the two groups on the pre-test

	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	Sig
Pretest	Control group	20	11.62	3.15	0.072	0.941
	Experimental group	20	11.54	2.93		

Table 1 shows that the difference between the performance of both groups on the pre-test is not statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, since there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest, the two groups were assumed equivalent. Another independent-sample *t* test was conducted to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups' performance on the post-test.

Table 2: Results of the T test of the means of the performance of the two groups on the post-test

	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T	Sig
Posttest	Control group	20	24.94	2.24	6.95	0.391
	Experimental group	20	28.39	1.63		

Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant difference at $\alpha = 0.05$ between the performance of the experimental group and that of the control group on the post-test in favor of the experimental group. This indicates that using folktales to teach reading comprehension to pupils in primary schools has a positive impact on students' performance. The mean score for the experimental group on the post-test was 28.20 while that of the control group was 24.21. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the difference between the performance of the experimental group and the control group on the pre-test was not statistically significant, to eliminate initial differences, a one-way ANCOVA was carried out.

Table 3: Results of the test of between-subjects effects

Source	Sum of squares	Df	Means of squares	F	Sig
Pretest	56.676	1	3.15	22.651	0.000
Group	123.681	1	2.93	49.432	0.000
Error	95.074	38			
Corrected total	273.511	40			

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group on the post-test. The performance of the experimental group, measured by the difference between the pre-test and the post-test, was significantly better than that of the control group.

Discussion of Findings

The difference in the performance of the pupils as shown tables 1, 2 and 3 could be attributed to using folktales in teaching reading comprehension. The experimental group significantly improved in their reading comprehension ability than they already have in a period of eight weeks. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was not statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researcher reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way they were taught using folk tales.

Furthermore, the differences between the two groups may be attributed to many other reasons. Firstly, using folktales or storytelling in teaching reading comprehension is a novelty. This novelty may have encouraged the pupils in the experimental group to participate actively and enthusiastically in class. Secondly, listening to stories read aloud helped the pupils in the experimental group to develop healthy listening habits and at the sometime paved the way to promoting comprehension through consistent exposure to the interesting and meaningful content of the stories. The conditions provided by the folktales or storytelling situation promoted total attention that led to greater understanding of the content, which in turn led to improving comprehension.

The teacher's use of folktales allowed the pupils to recognize units of meaning. With the continuous exposure to the stories, pupils learned to gradually realize that they could achieve a higher level of comprehension by listening to larger meaningful units rather than individual words. Constant listening to the teacher's language behavior in the classroom helped the pupils realize the feelings, moods and emotions of the characters in the texts, which helped enhance their overall comprehension of the text.

Finally, this researcher believes that reading folktales aloud to pupils allows them to become literate and motivates them to be active participants in the reading process. This research indicates that using folktales at the primary school level will produce positive results. The findings of this study concur with the results of the studies conducted by Meyer (1995), Vivas (1996), Oyetunde (2009), Amer (1997), Yusuf (2014, 2015) and Mackinney (1996). All of these studies showed that using folktales in reading comprehension has positive effects that helped pupils improve their language skills. They also found that reading folktales aloud does offer children certain educational benefits.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical evidence presented, the experimental group (i.e the group that was exposed to folktales) performed better than the control group. The comprehension of the pupils in the experimental group was greatly enhanced and improved. Teacher's use of folktales stimulated pupils' interest in the reading class. It stimulated discussion and enhanced pupils' self-confidence. It made even poor readers active in class. It gave them the opportunity to show their abilities. Although it was only an experiment where the control of all variables was not possible because of its nature. The study did definitely show significant results stressing the value of the treatment.

Recommendations

- Folktales should be included in the reading component of the English Language curriculum for basic education in Nigeria.
- Teachers should be encouraged to use folktales in their reading lessons. This will help to stimulate pupils' interest, build their listening and vocabulary skills. Stories are the building blocks of imagination and they help to teach character.
- This study should be replicated in other parts of Nigeria and other countries all over the world. The sample size can be larger and the duration of the treatment can be extended to 12 or 14 weeks. In addition, it would be interesting to compare results across grade levels as well as gender.
- This study may encourage further research, which in turn, may lead to the enrichment of the field of reading methodology in general, and language teaching and learning in particular.

References

1. Alna, O., (1999). The importance of oral storytelling in literacy development. *The Ohio reading teacher* 31 (1), 15–18.
2. Amer, A., (1997). *The effect of the teacher's storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of EFL students*. *ELT Journal* 51 (1), 43–47.
3. Anderson, R., Hiebert, E., Wilkinson, A., (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: the report of the commission on reading*. US Department of Education, Washington, DC.

4. Bayly, T. (2007) (n.d). Storytelling as a tool for literacy development. *The New Zealand Guild of Storytellers*. Retrieved on March 11, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.storytelling.org.nz/html>.
5. Beach, S., (1993). Oral reading instruction: retiring the bird in the world. *Reading Psychology* 14, 333–338.
6. Dragan, P.B., 2001. *Literacy from day one*. Heinemann, Portsmouth.
7. Fisher, B., Medvic, E.F., (2003). *Perspective on shared reading: planning and practice*. Heinemann, Portsmouth.
8. Gold, J., Gibson, A., (2001). *Reading aloud to build comprehension* [online]. Available at: <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/343>.
9. Isbell, R., Sobol, J., Lindauer, L., Lawrence, A., (2004). The effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 32 (3), 157–163.
10. Kim, S.Y., (1999). The effects of storytelling and pretend play on cognitive processes, short term and long term native recall. *Child Study Journal* 29 (3), 175–191.
11. Mackinney, S. (1996). Teachers Reading Aloud Books from the Battle of the Books List to Below Grade Level Sixth Grade Readers. Does it Improve the Students' Recall Details. Unpublished MA Thesis, Caldwell College, Caldwell, USA.
12. Meyer, R.J., (1995). Stories to teach and teaching story: the use of narrative in learning to teach. *Language Arts* 72 (4), 276–286.
13. Milord, M. (2007). The Effect of Using Storytelling on Reading Comprehension through Drama and Theater. A Master of Science Education thesis, University of New York. Brockport.
14. Needlman, R. (2004). Reading aloud with school-age children [online]. Available at: <http://www.drspock.com/article/0,1510,5140,00.html>.
15. Oyetunde, T.O (2009). *Beginning reading scheme empowering teachers to help their pupils become good teachers*. Jos: LECAPS Publishers.
16. Queini, H., Bahous, R., Nabhani, M., (2008). Impact of read-aloud in the classroom: a case study. *The Reading Matrix* 8 (10), 139–159.
17. Rippel, M. (2006). Reading aloud to children [online]. Available at: <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art41448.asp>.
18. Rog, L.J., (2001). Early literacy instruction in kindergarten. *International Reading Association*, Newark.

19. Terblanche, L. (2002). Read-alouds: do they enhance students' ability to read? New York: New York City Board of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED465192).
20. Trelease, J., (1994). *The read-aloud handbook*. Penguin group, New York.
21. Vivas, E., (1996). Effects of story reading on language. *Language learning* 46 (2), 189–216.
22. Wood, K., (1994). Hearing voices, telling tales: finding the power of reading aloud. *Language Arts* 71, 346–349.
23. Yusuf, H.O. (2014). Assessment of the Implementation of the Reading Component of the English Language Curriculum for Basic Education in Nigeria": *Advances in Language and Literacy Studies*, University Putra Malaysia Vol5 (6) pp 96-102 April.
24. Yusuf, H.O. (2015). "Analysis of Nigeria secondary schools students' reading habits: Implication for teacher education curriculum for English as a second language": *African Journal of Humanities* Vol 2(2) Kaduna state University, Pylamak Services Ltd.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).