



DISCUSSION METHOD AND ITS EFFECT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN READING COMPREHENSION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The study investigated the effect of Discussion method on the performance of students in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. Two randomly selected Government Secondary Schools from Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas were used for the study. One hundred (100) senior secondary class II students from two intact classes were used for the study (i.e. 50 students per class, per school). Government Secondary School, Jos, was used as the experimental group while Government Secondary School, Bukuru, was used as the control group. Students from both groups were pre-tested to establish the homogeneity of the two groups before the commencement of the treatment to the experimental group. Both groups were taught for eight weeks. Students were tested using an instrument called a Cloze reading comprehension test. The hypothesis postulated for the research was tested using T-test as a statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups. The result further revealed a higher mean score of students taught reading comprehension using the discussion method as compared with those taught using the conventional method. Based on this finding, the study recommended that teachers should be encouraged to use discussion method alongside the conventional method to enrich their reading comprehension lessons. Curriculum planners and textbook writers should equally provide topical issues/discussion topics before, during and after every reading task to make reading comprehension lessons more participatory, meaningful, purposeful, exciting, enjoyable and pleasurable.

Keywords: discussion method, effect, reading, comprehension, performance, students

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension, according to Oyetunde (2009), is a construct of varying hierarchical degrees of intensity. Students are confronted with problems of understanding what they have read and this makes it necessary for teachers to be sensitive to the issue of reading comprehension. Several researchers (Gall, 1994, Kerns, 1997, Abisamra, 2007, Uwatt, 2007) have identified eight skills of reading comprehension. These involves locating details, recognizing the main ideas, drawing conclusion, recognizing cause and effect relationship, understanding of words in context, making interpretations and making inferences. In developing reading comprehension skill, therefore, ability to read well and possess a good command of the language should be seriously encouraged.

Researches (Oyetunde, 2009, Abisamra, 2007, Yusuf, 2014, 2015) in second language (L2) reading suggest that effective reading comprehension can be taught and that students can benefit from such instruction. Research has also shown that successful reading mainly depends on appropriate method used and that learners can improve their reading comprehension by being trained to use effective strategies and techniques. Strategic reading develops students' knowledge about the reading process, introduces students to specific strategies, and provides them with opportunities to discuss and practice strategies while reading (Janzen 1996). Although there are many suggestion in the literature on L2 reading as to how reading instruction should take place (e.g. Janzen, 1996, Winograd and Hare, 1988), few studies have been conducted on how teachers can use the discussion method in their classrooms. This study integrated the use of discussion method in teaching reading comprehension in secondary schools incorporate strategy training in his secondary school English reading classes.

Reading, according to Gall (1994) is a highly complex activity, including various important aspects, such as recognizing symbols quickly and accurately comprehending clearly and with discrimination the meanings implied by the author. It also involves reacting to and using ideas secured through reading in harmony with the reading purposes and integrating them to definite thoughts and action patterns (Kern 2000).

Over the years in Nigeria, reading comprehension lessons have been dominated by teachers asking students to turn to an appropriate page or chapter in the reading comprehension text book, then read and answer the accompanying comprehension questions. Or after the reading, the teachers spend time asking students questions until the desired answer is got. This conventional approach to reading instruction suggests

that meaning resides within the text to be picked-up by readers (Oyetunde & Muodumogu, 1999).

Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) list three reasons for reading failure in schools as, ignorance of what reading entails, inadequate preparation of teachers and poor methodology. The poor performance of students in public examinations is also traced to minimal daily contact with the language (Oyetunde, 2002). These may be the reasons why majority of Nigerian secondary school students are said to be poor at reading and comprehending.

Abiodun-Ekus and Onukaogu (2007) contend that most Nigerian students are not being empowered to benefit optimally from formal education. This is because the Nigerian educational process fails to empower her students in the skills and strategies that can make them effective, efficient and strategic readers. It therefore means that basic comprehension skills necessary for effective interaction with the texts at the secondary school level is lacking in Nigerian students.

Reading comprehension is more than what is happening in Nigerian classrooms. Participants construct meaning by integrating their existing knowledge with the new knowledge in the text in an activity. This process can be increased when a teacher supports students' comprehension. It is this supportive ability that is lacking in Nigerian classrooms. Moore, Moore, Cunningham and Cunningham (1994) believe that the supportive role of the teacher involves activities before students read so as to help build background knowledge and set a purpose for reading.

Students should be encouraged to engage in discussion and interaction, thereby encouraging them to share what they collectively known. In developed countries, students' comprehension could be significantly increased when teachers engage students in some before-and after-reading activities that elicit higher order thinking (Sternberg, 2002). Such interactive processes would help learners to comprehend better and faster (Moore, Moore, Cunningham & Cunningham, 1994).

When teachers experience the reading selection with students by probing their thoughts about what they are reading and questions that stimulates further thinking, it helps learners to comprehend better and faster. Reutzel and Cooter (2007) believe that the teacher can select strategies that socially involve students actively in comprehension to increase motivation. If students lack strategies, then teachers can take steps explicitly and scaffold their use to students' independence. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to investigate the effect of discussion method on students' performance in reading comprehension.

Review of Related Literature

Seweje (2010) confirmed that the methods adopted by teachers in most cases include the talk and chalk (lecture) minimal with very concern for practical activities. Seweje (2000) explained further that a teacher is expected to be a facilitator whose main function is to help learners to become active participants in their learning and thereby making meaningful connection between prior knowledge, new knowledge and the process involved in learning. Akinleye (2010) confirmed that if the children are given opportunity to be listened to and guided in a non-threatening atmosphere, they would perform wonders in terms of problem-solving and decision making.

Discussion is a type of activity, which involves breaking the class into small groups for effective talking on a topic, a problem or issue. It is thinking together process in which pupils talk freely to the teacher it is to one another a student-centered method since students participate actively. The role of the teacher is that of a moderator. There is flow of information from teacher to student, from student to student. The teacher should not allow individuals to dominate the discussion (Yusuf, 2012).

Discussion a method could also be defined as in which the teacher leads or guides the students in expressing their opinions and ideas with a view to identifying and solving problems collectively. Oyedeji (1996) explained that the discussion method works on the principle that the knowledge and ideas of several people are likely to find solutions or answers to specified problems or topics. Discussion method of teaching engages both the teachers and students in thinking. It also develops in students social skills of talking and listening. Of course, the method also has some demerits including the possibility that class may be diverted from the topic. Academically weak students may not actively take part in the lessons. Some brilliant ones may likely take over the discussion. Problems may occur among the participants owing to lack of respect for other peoples' opinions and the whole class may turn into a state of pandemonium. The above problems may arise as a result of poor handling of the discussion method.

In teaching reading comprehension, therefore, learners should be exposed to topical issues that will make them interact and process information, from print. Learner gains knowledge when appropriate information is given to them and they process the information constantly. Information does not become knowledge automatically until learners have been actively involved in its processing (Akinleye, 2010).

Discussion is a method of teaching that works on the principle that many people are to put heads together in terms of knowledge and ideas to find solutions to specified problems. The activities of the discussion group are to be regulated and directed by the teacher or an appointee of the class.

Group discussion may take a variety of forms such as small group, devil's advocate, round table, panel discussion, opposing panel and debate (Adewuya, 2003). Some of the advantages of the method are sharing of ideas by students, development of social skills of talking and listening, clarification of ideas and promotion of team work. Despite all the above mentioned advantages, the demerits are numerous. Discussion can get out of hand if not properly controlled, the class may turn to a market place and confusion may arise as a result of poor management and informal nature of the organization.

According to Stephen and Stephen (2005), discussion as a process of giving and talking, speaking and listening, describing and witnessing which helps expand horizons and foster mutual understanding. They explained further that it is only through discussion that one can be exposed to new points of view and exposure increases understanding and renews motivation to continue learning. Bridges (1988) noted that discussion is concerned with the development of knowledge, understanding or judgment among those people taking part in it. He believes that discussion is more serious than conversation because it requires students to be "*mutually responsive*" to the different views expressed. Dillion (1994) emphasized that discussion is highly "*disciplined and concerned*" forum in which people come together to resolve some issues or problem that is important to them. Dillion (1994) saw discussion as an important way for people to affiliate with one another to develop the sympathies and skills that make participatory lessons possible.

In view of the foregoing, the present research sought to investigate the effect of discussion method on the performance of students in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to determine the effectiveness of discussion method on the performance of students in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state.

Research Question

What is the effect of discussion method on the performance of students in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Discussion method has no significant effect on students' performance in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. Two randomly selected Government Secondary Schools from Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas were used for the study. One hundred (100) senior secondary class II students from two intact classes were used for the study (i.e. 50 students per class, per school). Government Secondary School, Jos, was used as the experimental group while Government Secondary School, Bukuru, was used as the control group. Students from both groups were pre-tested to establish the homogeneity of the two groups before the commencement of the treatment to the experimental group. Both groups were taught for eight weeks. Students were tested using an instrument called a Cloze reading comprehension test. The hypothesis postulated for the research was tested using T-test as a statistical tool at 0.05 level of significance.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through test-re-test and estimation of internal consistency. The instrument was first administered on 20 students from two schools that were not used for the study. After two weeks, the instrument was administered again on the same sets of students. The scores of the two sets of students were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis. A correlation coefficient of 0.77 was obtained.

Treatment (Discussion method)

Step 1: Teacher introduces the lesson by asking students some thought provoking questions related to the reading comprehension passage to be discussed.

Step 2: Teacher encourages students to participate actively in class by making each student to make contributions to the questions asked.

Step 3: Teacher sets a purpose for reading by asking topical questions or raising topical issues pertaining to each paragraph of the reading task.

Step 4: Teacher encourages students to relate what is being read to their background knowledge by asking students questions such as "*Have you ever had a similar experience like the one expressed by the author*"? Such a question will stimulate students to express themselves in the process of narrating their individual experiences.

Step 5: Teacher relates students' individual experiences to those of the author the reading text.

Step 6: Teacher pairs up students so they can share their experiences as they relate to the reading text. Teacher goes round to ensure that students are actively involved in the conversation.

Step 7: Teacher further groups the students in small groups of five students to discuss and share their experiences. Teacher goes round to ensure that all students in each group are actively involved in the discussion.

Step 8: Teacher guides students as they return to their seats. Teacher encourages students to share all that they have discussed in their various groups by asking them thought provoking questions that will make them think about what they have discussed in their various groups.

Step 9: Teacher guides students as they read through the reading text, paragraph by paragraph.

Step 10: Teacher asks students questions before, during and after the reading exercise to ensure that students are actively interacting with the reading task.

Step 11: Teacher concludes the lesson with a summary of the major issues discussed as they related to the reading task.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The research question earlier stated for the research which says “*what is the difference in the performance of students taught reading comprehension using discussion method and those taught using the conventional method*” was answered using table 1&2.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of students' scores in the experimental and control groups

Group	Test	N	X	SD
Experimental	Pre – test	50	3.0	1.10
Control	Pre – test	50	2.48	1.12

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of students post-test scores in the experimental and control groups

Group	Test	N	X	SD
Experimental	Post-test	50	3.34	1.18
Control	Post-test	50	2.92	1.42

Table 1 and 2 has revealed the students’ mean scores and standard deviation in the pre-test and post-test. In Table 1 the mean and standard deviation of students in the pre-test of the experimental group is 3.0 and 1.10 respectively while that of the control group is 2.48 and 1.12 respectively.

In Table 2 the mean and standard deviation of students in the post-test of the experimental group is 3.34 and 1.18 respectively while that of the control group is 2.92 and 1.42 respectively. There is a slightly higher mean scores of the experimental group (3.34) as compared with the control group (2.92) in the post-test result. This means that the effect of the treatment on the experimental group was positive.

The hypothesis postulated for the research which says “*Discussion method has no significant effect on the performance of students taught reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau state*” was tested using T-test as shown on Table 3.

Table 3: Mean, SD and t-test of students taught reading comprehension using discussion method (experimental group) and those taught using the conventional method (control group)

Group	N	X	SD	DF	Tcal	t-crit
Experimental	50	3.34	1.18	98	1.60	0.60
Control	50	2.92	1.42			

Significant at 0.05 level of probability $P > 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the mean score of students taught reading comprehension using the discussion method (that is experimental group) was 3.34 while the mean scores of students taught using the conventional method was 2.92. In order words the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, signifying that the experimental group performed better than the control group.

The statistics from table 3 indicated that the calculated t-value was 1.60 while the t-tabulated value was 0.06. In accordance with the decision rule which states that the null hypothesis should be rejected if the t-calculated is less than the t-critical or t-tabulated. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a statistically significant difference in the mean score of students taught using the discussion method and those taught using the conventional method. The statistically significant difference is in favour of the experimental group.

Findings

This study focused on the facilitative effect of discussion method and conventional reading instructional method on students’ performance in reading comprehension. The

finding revealed that students who were taught using discussion method achieved better in reading comprehension than those who were not.

This finding supported Stahl's (2008) finding that students' comprehension of texts were greatest with the use of discussion method than other control conditions. Discussion method espouses the teacher guidance using purposeful questions aimed at directing learners' attention to important ideas and assisting them with hard-to-grasp concepts in a manner in which other methods do not offer. The finding is also in agreement with those of Beck and Mckeown (2001) who found that using discussions as part of a read-aloud may increase vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. This is because discussion creates opportunities for students to reflect on the storyline or the text language and this promotes comprehension. Gall (1994) also reported that for classroom questions to exert positive impact on students' learning and achievement, classroom instruction should include posing questions during lessons.

The finding also confirmed the finding of Isiugo-Abanihe (2002) that reading was handled poorly in most school. The authors found that teachers' strategies and pupil's activities were inadequate for any meaningful reading instruction to take place. Oyetunde (2002) also found that poor instructional practice in schools lead to poor performance of the students in reading. These findings resonate with those of the current study where the performance of the students exposed to conventional reading instructional method was significantly lower than that of those exposed to discussion methods.

The statistically significant mean performance gain under discussion method compared to conventional reading instructional method showed that it is no longer tenable for the reading teacher to wait for students to complete the reading exercise before questions are asked. The questioning and prediction activities of discussion method help to arouse and maintain students' attention and curiosity and to follow the storyline. It, therefore, means that inattentive or daydreaming students could gain from such reading lessons.

Conclusion

Based on the empirical data obtained from this research, the researcher concluded that discussion method has the potency to improve students' performance in reading comprehension. Therefore, discussion method should be used alongside the conventional method in order to facilitate and enhance students understanding of reading comprehension passages in secondary schools. The study further, established that the use of discussion method leads to improved performance in reading

comprehension. Discussion method captured students' attention and increased their involvement in the class. The discussions that ensued before, during and after the reading exercise made students retain and recall more information from the texts. The finding also imply that the teacher is responsible for helping students get a better understanding of texts by the type of reading activities they encourage before, during and after the reading exercise. The teacher needs to be educated on how to effectively and efficiently teach reading to make the lesson participatory, meaningful, functional and pleasurable. The researchers are of the opinion that the reading problems of secondary school students cannot be solved unless teachers and curriculum planners adjust to the needs of the students by using appropriate and effective teaching methods in reading comprehension lessons.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made on the basis of the findings of this research:

- Teachers should be encouraged to use discussion alongside the conventional method in order to enrich their reading comprehension lessons.
- Curriculum planners and textbook writers should provide topical issues/discussion topics before, during and after every reading task to make reading comprehension lessons more participatory, meaningful, purposeful, exciting, enjoyable and pleasurable.
- Teachers should be encouraged in every reading comprehension lesson to engage their students in discussion through series of thought provoking questions that will stimulate meaningful and purposeful discussion based on the reading task.
- Teachers should be encouraged to attend seminars, workshops and conferences in reading methodology to update their skills in reading instruction.
- Federal, state and Local Governments and Ministries of Education should initiate processes whereby teachers can be trained specially in reading instruction to enhance their pedagogical skills.
- Universities, Colleges of Education and other institutions should offer courses in reading methodology in order for teachers to update their skills in reading.
- More effective training through workshops, seminars, conferences, in-service courses on how to implement discussion method may help to give teachers more support in trying to implement the discussion method in their reading comprehension lessons.

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