Teaching Strategies and Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension in Owo, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is indispensable to academic success at all levels of education but reports have shown that senior secondary school students in Owo, Ondo State exhibit deficiency in English reading comprehension. This study determined the effects of Schema Activation (SA) and Think-Group-Share (TGS) instructional strategies on students' achievement in English reading comprehension in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted the pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six co-educational senior secondary schools in Owo town. An intact class of Senior Secondary II students was selected from each school and was randomly assigned to SA (58), TGS (110) and control (99) groups. Treatment lasted twelve weeks. The instruments used were Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (r=.73), and instructional guides. Data were analysed using Analysis of covariance and Scheffe post-hoc test at 0.05 level of significance. Treatment had significant main effect on students' achievement in English reading comprehension ($F_{(2,254)}$ = 61.70; partial η2 = .33). Students in the Think-Group-Share had the highest posttest achievement mean score (10.14) followed by Schema Activation (9.63) and control (6.23) groups. Think-group-share and Schema activation instructional strategies improved students' learning outcomes in English reading comprehension in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria, while think-group-share is more effective. Teachers should adopt these strategies in enhancing students' achievement in English reading comprehension.

Introduction

The importance of reading as an indispensable skill for general literacy is quite enormous. It is regarded as the most crucial skill among the other three language skills because it is the basis for academic achievement and is recognised as the focal point of all school experiences. Interest in reading has grown over the years because of its importance in business, psycho-social life and the educational development of an individual. Reading is defined as identification of symbols and association of appropriate meaning with them (Palani, 2012). Comprehension is the basic and ultimate goal of reading, and it simply means the laying hold on the meaning underlying a text or passage (Mabekoje, 2011). It is the level of understanding of a text where the reader interacts, responds or reacts to what has been read in a meaningful way (Falayi, 2015).

Research in applied linguistics and reading shows a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages because reading is the heart and goal of learning (Townend and Turner, 2000; Nel, Dreyer and Kopper, 2004; Akinbote, Kolawole and Kolawole, 2008; Ngwenya, 2010). All these researchers are in agreement that students who have problems reading texts will experience difficulty obtaining information from texts and consequently encounter difficulties in learning. Akinbote, Kolawole and Kolawole (2008)

specifically note that reading is the bedrock of meaningful educational achievement and one of the vital skills of language. Reading ability in whatever discipline is seen as one of the key factors predicting general success in academic work at all school levels.

In recognition of the importance of reading comprehension as one of the major components of the English Language curriculum, it is examined at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in Nigeria, and specifically examined in Senior School Certificate Examination in English Language by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). The questions on reading comprehension are meant to test the students' ability to find appropriate answers equivalent for selected words or phrases; understand the factual content; make inferences from the content of the passage; understand the use of English expressions that reveal/reflect sentiments/emotions and attitudes. Furthermore, the purpose of testing reading comprehension is to ascertain whether candidates are able to: understand the main ideas of a given passage; follow the trend of thought of the writer; understand detailed information; follow given directive or instruction; and to acquire general knowledge. Paper 1 of the SSCE is made up of essay/letter writing, reading comprehension and summary writing where 70 of the 120 marks allotted to it is comprehension based because students need to possess reading comprehension skills in order to read and answer the comprehension and summary writing aspects of the paper.

In spite of the importance of reading comprehension in all academic pursuits, evidence abounds that students' performance in it in Nigeria is not impressive. West African Examination Council -WAEC (2010) and (2012) reveal that the low reading ability of the students hinders the comprehension of reading materials in internal/external examinations. It is further reported in the *WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports* of 2010 and 2012 that students' failure in English is mainly due to their inability to perform effectively in reading comprehension and summary aspects of English Language "Paper 1". Furthermore, the students are yet to grasp the skills of comprehension and as a result lost a lot of marks because of direct lifting of 'seeming answers' from the passage. From the above comments from WAEC, it is obvious, as supported by Okere (2012) and Owolabi (2012) that students in the senior secondary schools lack basic comprehension skills and give unimaginable meanings to words in the passages.

Other factors that may have accounted for the poor state of reading and consequent poor performance in comprehension passages in English language include: students' poor linguistic background or low language proficiency (Jibowo, 2007), negative attitude to reading, poor reading culture/habits (Kolawole, 2005; Bodunde, 2006; Maduabuchi, 2008; Aina, Ogungbemi, Adigun, and Ogundipe, 2011). Most importantly, the non-exposure to the use of effective strategies and their wrong usage hinder students' performance in reading and other language skills (Ezeokoli, 2005; Babalola, 2012 and Salako, 2012).

In secondary schools in Owo, Nigeria, the teaching and learning of reading comprehension has been largely teacher-centered. In the typical conventional reading comprehension classroom, the teacher reads the passage, pronounces and writes the key/difficult words on the board. He or she explains the passage to the students asks them to answer the questions that follow the passage and corrects their mistakes where necessary. Here the teacher is the central focus of information transfer and

he/she is regarded as the repertoire and custodian of knowledge, whose authority is not questioned (Babalola, 2012).This method has become the model for most schools and it is still in use because of the unprecedented expansion in the school enrolment, shortage of infrastructure and funds. According to Babalola (2012) and Salako (2012), most teachers prefer this method because it makes it possible and easy to educate large number of learners at once. Many also use it because they lack access to recent developments and research findings in the methodology of second language teaching and learning.

To overcome the problems associated with reading comprehension, some researchers have suggested the use of instructional strategies that could be of help to students in reading comprehension. The use of effective comprehension strategies is highly important to solve the students' problems in reading comprehension. These are advanced organizers, Adelabu (1998), schema activation and concept mapping, Adekunle (2011), guided and unguided reading, Okere (2012); multimodal and literature circles, Chikwendu (2014); storytelling and literature circles, Kolawole (2015) and differentiated and scaffolding strategies, Awolere, (2015). The different strategies reviewed were found to be effective, still students' performance have not met with great improvement. This could be because some of these strategies did not fully explore/activate students' prior knowledge (schema) which is culture-specific as a means of comprehending reading passages through pre-reading, during reading and after reading activities. Research has revealed that good learners link their prior knowledge to new information, reorganise it and create their own meaning (Taboaga and Guthrie, 2006). This justifies the researcher's attempt to investigate the extent to which students' prior knowledge using schema activation instructional strategy can be explored to enhance better reading performance of the students. Another justification for this study is the fact that the teaching and learning of reading comprehension aspect of English Language has been so much bereft of participatory learning. The majority of these studies did not employ enough dialogue/discussions among students during reading instruction which helps to promote team spirit, cooperation, critical thinking, tolerance and social interaction. There is therefore, the need to examine the effects of Schema Activation and Think-Group-Share instructional strategies on students' achievement in reading comprehension in Nigerian secondary schools to compensate for these deficiencies in previous studies. This is because previous studies have not examined the combination of these strategies in reading comprehension before.

Schema activation is the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text (Stott, 2006) .The reading tasks in schema activation include: the presentation of a summary, the discussion of pictorial and verbal cues, short story narration and good text structures (Linderholm, Everson, Broek, Mischinski, Crittenden, and Samuels 2000; Plass, Chun, Mayer, and Leutner, 2003). Schema activation is assumed to be the mechanism underlying some strategies that facilitate reading because most of these strategies rely on knowledge activation. It is an important concept in English as a Second Language teaching and is often designed to build or activate the learners' schemata which will lead to a better understanding of

what is being read. This strategy has been successfully applied in children's language learning and has been shown to be useful for children with reading comprehension difficulties (Cain, 2003). Prior knowledge schema activation leads readers to create a mental representation which guides the understanding of incoming information (Kintsch and Franzke, 1995).

Studies have documented the effectiveness of schema activation in enhancing students' achievement in reading comprehension (Zhaohua, 2004; Adekunle, 2011 and Maghsoudi, 2012). The majority of these studies on schema activation focused on the teaching of reading comprehension, prose and poetic literature outside Nigeria. They were found to be significant and improved reading performance of learners.

Zhaohua (2004) conducted a similar study to identify effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on reading comprehension of EFL students working with American documentary narratives. Seventy-eight non-English major students attending the agriculture college of Yangzhou University in China participated in that study. The results reveal that the background knowledge group had superior performance over the control group. However, there was no difference in participants' performance between the preview group and the control one.

Adekunle (2011) reported that students exposed to schema activation and concept mapping strategies performed significantly better than those in the conventional group in reading comprehension. Furthermore, Maghsoudi (2012) also advocated the activation of schema through the use of some pre-reading activities. He emphasized the use of pre-reading activity especially for culturally burdened texts to facilitate the combination of what readers already know and what is new to them. Her sample was composed of 76 undergraduate Iranian EFL students. They were divided into experimental and control groups. The former was trained through previewing, pictorial text, and the pre-teaching of vocabulary whereas the latter was not exposed to any particular treatment. The results indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group.

The related studies reviewed above indicate that although all the variables and factors surrounding the issues of how background knowledge influences reading has not been fully understood, there is an agreement that background knowledge is important, and that content schema plays an integral role in reading comprehension. Overall, readers appeared to have a higher level of comprehension when the content was familiar to them. Consequently, the current study also ensures that students' comprehension ability can be enhanced if the schema is activated.

The Think-Group-Share (TGS) strategy is the second instructional strategy and is a modified form of the Think-Pair-Share strategy which is a cooperative learning strategy developed by Lyman in 1978. It is a multi-modal discussion cycle in which students listen to a question or presentation, have time to think individually, talk with each other in pairs, and finally share responses with the larger group. Cooperative Learning (CL) strategies help learners to study in small groups in their learning process in order to achieve a common objective (Açıkgöz, 2003). Cooperative Learning (CL) strategy comprises "instructional methods in which teachers organise students with various/mixed abilities, gender, nationalities and different level of social skills into small groups, which then work together to help one another learn academic content (Slavin, 2011).

The Think-Group-Share instructional strategy is inspired by three stages of the students' action, with emphasis on what

students are to do in each of those stages (Ofodu (2009). The first stage of this strategy is thinking. This is where teacher provokes students thinking with a question or prompt or observation while the students take a few moments to think about it. The second stage is grouping. Using designated partners, students are grouped into eight or ten to read the passage and talk about the answer each comes up with. They compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique. The third stage is sharing. After students talk in groups for a few moments, the teacher calls for groups to share their thought with the rest of the class. The teacher goes around the groups or he/she can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board or on the overhead projector.

Think-Group-Share provides an opportunity for all students to share their thinking with one another, which in turn, increase their sense of involvement in the classroom teaching learning process. Discussing an answer with partners serves to maximize participation, focus attention and engage students in comprehending the reading material. It can be observed that the Think-Group-Share is slightly different from the TPS because it is modified to suit a typical Nigerian public secondary school classroom situation and also because it is culturally appropriate where there is a large-class population, and under-resource classrooms which may be a hindrance to the possibility of pairing the students.

Several studies (Carss, 2007; Ofodu, 2009;Sormin, 2012;Marwan, 2015 and Khaghaninejad, Saadabadimotlagh and Kowsari, 2015) have examined the use of Think-Pair-Share instructional strategy in improving students' reading comprehension.

Carss (2007) explored the effects of TPS during guided reading lessons. The study selected 6 classrooms with two intervention groups, each enclosing six children. One group was reading above their chronological age and the other below. Control groups reading at these levels were also used. Three variants of Think-Pair-Share were implemented during the eight week intervention; Predict-Pair-Share, Image-Pair-Share and Summarize-Pair-Share, and the research centered on the impacts of the intervention on reading comprehension. The findings highlight the positive effects of the technique on reading attainment, particularly for those learners' reading above their chronological age. Moreover, oral language use, thinking, meta-cognitive awareness, and the development of reading comprehension strategies were marked. The study reveals the versatility of the Think-Pair-Share strategy as a tool to foster conversation over the control group, and one that can be adapted to suit the learning focus and the needs of particular groups of students.

Using the Think-Pair-Share strategy and Reciprocal Teaching strategy as cooperative strategies, Ofodu (2009) examined the comparative effects of these two strategies on 144 Ekiti State students' reading performance. The findings indicated there was a significant effect of the think-pair-share and the reciprocal teaching strategy on reading comprehension of students of high, average and low performance levels than students in the control group.

Sormin (2012) examined the effect of Think-Pair-Share strategy in improving senior high school students' achievement in reading comprehension. The research conducted in Classroom Action Research (CAR) consists of two cycles

and each cycle consists of three meetings. The results of the research show that TPS strategy can improve students' reading achievement.

Afan, Marhaeni and Dantes (2013) carried out an experimental research aimed at finding out the effect of Think-Pair-Share technique on the English reading achievement of the Students differing in achievement motivation at grade eight of SMPN 13 in Mataram. 80 students were taken from six regular classes as the research sample with cluster random sampling technique and then divided into experimental group and control group. The result of the analysis reveal that there is a significant difference in English reading achievement between the groups of student who were taught by using think-pair-share technique and those taught with conventional teaching technique. In yet another study, Andik (2013) also examined how TPS strategy can develop reading comprehension of the first grade learners. According to the findings, the mean score of learners' reading comprehension was improved from 65.85 to 90. It denotes that TPS significantly enhance learners' reading comprehension.

Khaghaninejad, Saadabadimotlagh and Kowsari (2015) investigated the effects of strategy-based instruction of reading passages to undergraduate Iranian EFL learners. The study particularly explored the effects of using Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review (SQ3R) and Think-Pair-Share (TPS) reading strategies on learners' reading performance of sixty EFL learners. Findings indicate that SQ3R and TPS learners significantly outperformed their peers in the control group. The results certify the efficacy of strategy-based approach of teaching reading passages, namely SQ3R and TPS, in promoting learners' reading comprehension in academic Iranian EFL context.

Marwan (2015) also examined the effect of using think-pair-share, co op-co op and traditional learning strategies on undergraduate students' academic performance in educational psychology course. The sample consisted (70) undergraduate students of educational psychology course, from faculty of education at King Saud University. In the study, educational psychology performance test (EPPT) was used to measure the students' performance. Findings of this study reveal that there was significant difference in the posttest academic performance mean scores between the experimental groups (Co Op-Co Op), (Think-Pair-Share) and control group (conventional method). There was significant difference between experimental group (Co Op-Co Op) and control group (conventional method) on the delayed posttest mean difference and significant difference between experimental group (Think-Pair-Share) and control group (conventional method).

Significance of the study

The study revealed that the strategies were effective in improving students' achievement in reading comprehension thereby helping to reduce failure rates of students in English language reading comprehension of internal and external examinations. The findings of this study should provide empirical information for teachers on the usefulness of activating students' prior knowledge and active participation of students in reading comprehension for better performance because of the innovative and interactive nature of the strategies. It is also hoped that students should be able to explore their previous knowledge as a means of making meaning from reading. These strategies should also help the students to develop team spirit, cooperation, improve class discussions and consequently upgrade their meta-cognitive awareness. It is also expected

to help curriculum planners in the designing of students learning outcomes and textbook writers to incorporate the use of these strategies into English Language instructional materials for the use of the teachers and students.

Hypotheses

Based on the stated problems, the following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{O1}: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students'.

a. achievement in English reading comprehension.

Scope of the Study

The study covered six public senior secondary schools from Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State. A total of two hundred and sixty-seven Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students were purposively selected for the study. This study determined the effect of Schema activation and Think-group-share instructional strategies on students' achievement in English reading comprehension.

Methodology

The study adopted the pretest- posttest, control group quasi-experimental design to determine the effects of schema activation and think-group-share strategies on students' achievement in English reading comprehension. Using simple random sampling technique through balloting, six co-educational schools were selected. Two intact classes (one from each school) were assigned to each of the treatment groups and the control group.

Instrument

The instruments used for the study were Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT)and instructional guide.

The test consists of eight comprehension passages adapted from SS2 reading comprehension textbooks in English language (New Edition Senior English Project for Secondary Schools 2 and New Oxford Secondary English Course for Secondary Schools 2). The instrument was used to measure the students' performance before and after the treatment. The reliability was determined using Kudar Richardson (K-20) formular. The reliability coefficient of 0.73 was obtained.

Method of data analysis

The data collected from the pretest and posttests were analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics of Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the pretest as covariates. Estimated Marginal Means (EMM) was used to find the direction of difference among the groups with significant main effect. Scheffe post hoc test was used to ascertain the specific effect of each treatment.

Data Analysis

Ho_{1a}: There is no significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in reading comprehension

Table 4.1: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Posttest Achievement Scores by Treatment, Gender and Home Background

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1628.690[a]	12	135.724	59.800	.000	.739
Intercept	672.614	1	672.614	296.354	.000	.538
PreTest type	628.402	1	628.402	276.874	.000	.522
Treatment	280.084	2	140.042	61.703	.000*	.327

Table 4.1 shows that there was significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in reading comprehension ($F_{(2,254)} = 61.703$; $P < .05$, $\eta 2 = 0.327$). Thus, Ho_{1a} was rejected.

Table 4.2 presents the estimated marginal means of students' achievement scores in reading comprehension across the groups.

Table 4.2: Estimated Marginal Means for Post-test Type by Treatment and Control Group

Treatment	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Schema Activation Instructional Strategy (SAIS)	9.63[a]	.245	9.145	10.108
Think-Group-Share Instructional Strategy (TGSIS)	10.14[a]	.210	9.727	10.555
Conventional Strategy (CS)	6.23[a]	.296	5.645	6.810

Table 4.2 reveals that the students exposed to think-group-share instructional strategy group had the highest post achievement mean score ($\bar{x}$ = 10.14), followed by those exposed to schema activation($\bar{x}$= 9.63), followed by those exposed to conventional strategy ($\bar{x}$= 6.23). This order can be represented as TGSIS > SAIS> CS.

Table 4.3: Scheffe Post Hoc Test of Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension by Treatment

Treatment Group	Mean	Schema Activation	Think-Group-Share	Conventional
Schema Activation	9.63[a]		*	*
Think-Group-Share	10.14[a]	*		*
Conventional	6.23[a]	*	*	

*Pairs of groups that are significantly different from each other

Scheffe Post-Hoc test on Table 4.3 shows that students exposed to English reading comprehension through Think-Group-Share instructional strategy are significantly different from their counterparts taught using Schema Activation instructional strategy and Conventional strategy in their achievement post-test type scores. Furthermore, the scores of the students taught using schema activation instructional strategy are significantly different from those exposed to conventional strategy in their achievement. This implies that both Think-Group-Share and Schema Activation instructional strategies are the main source of significant differences in the treatment.

Discussion

Main effect of treatment on students' achievement in reading comprehension

The results of the study revealed significant main effect of treatment on students' achievement in reading comprehension. It was observed that those exposed to Think-group-share instructional strategy had the highest posttest achievement mean score,

followed by Schema activation instructional strategy while the conventional strategy had the least posttest achievement mean scores. The effectiveness of the Think-group-share over the Schema activation and conventional strategy could be as a result of the fact that think-group-share instructional strategy helps the students to collaborate actively with their peers in the class discussions during the reading comprehension activities. The teacher breaks down the students into designated groups of mixed abilities where they express their thoughts through discussions about the passage and they later share their opinion, ideas and answers with the larger class. Through these activities, the learners interact; develop social skills and critical thinking skills based on cooperation and team spirit. The result is in consonance with findings of Ofodu (2009), Sormin (2012), Marwan (2015) and Khaghaninejad, Saadabadimotlagh who support that students taught using Think-pair-share strategy are directly involved in the reading activity and participatory learning is greatly enhanced through group dialogue or discussions in improving students' reading comprehension.

The result of the study is also consistent with previous findings in the area of Schema activation strategy Carrell (1987), Salmani-Nodoushan (2003), Zhaohua (2004) and Maghsoudi (2014) who found that there is a positive relationship between activation of schemas (prior knowledge and reading comprehension. Result also revealed positive effect of prior knowledge activation, text familiarity, topic familiarity and pictorial context to enhance reading comprehension. Thus, the understanding of simple comprehension tasks in reading in a second language is greatly enhanced when students are provided with some assistance before, during and after reading activities.

Recommendations

The study has underscored the need to activate students' prior knowledge and link same to active participation in English reading comprehension lessons through the adoption of Schema activation and Think-group-share instructional strategies.

The following recommendations were therefore made based on the findings of this study:

1. Teachers should adopt Think-group-share and Schema activation strategies in their teaching of English reading comprehension in order to facilitate learners' active participation during the teaching/learning process and improve students' achievement in English reading comprehension.
2. Peculiarities of the Nigerian classroom situation calls for variation of Schema activation strategy to promote better reading comprehension achievement.
3. Large classes can be effectively managed and taught by the adoption of Think-Group-Share instructional strategy.
4. Workshop, seminars and other training and retraining programmes should be organised for English language teachers to keep them abreast of new innovations and strategies to improve the pedagogical knowledge of what they impart on their students.
5. Teachers should encourage mixed ability grouping during comprehension lessons because the interests of students with low

academic abilities were taken care of through this practice.

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