

PRINT MEDIA STRATEGIES AND DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' COMPETENCE IN READING

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the influence of print media strategies (magazines and Novels) in determining the development of students' reading competence in Akwalbom State, Nigeria. An Expost-facto research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all the 7,467 senior secondary two students in Uyo senatorial district. A sample size of 1,190 students formed the sample size, which was selected through the simple random sampling technique (hart and draw). Two hypotheses were formulated to guide in the study. The research used two instruments for data collection which included a researcher-made four-Likert scale questionnaire called 'Print Media Strategy Questionnaire' (PMSQ) and an adopted Reading Competence Test' (RCT). Independent t-test was used as the statistical tool with a df of 1088 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypotheses were rejected the findings revealed that students more exposed to print media strategies developed higher reading competencies.

Keywords: rint Media, Reading, Students' Competence

INTRODUCTION

Media influences on youths in modern society are not likely to abate, as new technologies force rapid convergence of established communication tools with innovative ones. This is obvious as communication explosion due to continuous invention has hampered any attempt to control information that filter to unspecified audience. In this regard, Onukaogu (2002) observed that the mass media have had the greatest influence on youths; because they learn about the world through the print and non-print media. By implication the information received from the print media serves as a source of energy to those exposed to them because helps them in intra and interpersonal relationship including general adjustment in life. The print media agencies include newspaper, magazines, books etc. What link these media with their audience is language and the power to decode messages lie in the quality of their competency in reading.

However, during the teaching and learning process, most educators observe that their students can read but they do not understand. The most import thing about reading is comprehension, which is the reason that students read. Although, Scharlach (2008) is of the view that comprehension improves through extensive reading. Thus, the print media under investigation in this research are magazines and novels which form part of extensive reading or recreational reading.

Most well-established findings in reading research agree that comprehension develops through a variety of purposeful, motivated reading activities. According to Guethrie (2002) in Scharlach (2008) educators should encourage students to become active, engaged readers by making them gain competence and a sense of self-efficacy.

By implication, competence in reading only be attained when students read and understand as their comprehension is consciously enhanced through purposeful varieties of reading activities like magazines and novels.

Furthermore, researchers like Abbot (2003) observed that intelligent reading involved the decoding of signs and extraction of meanings, but it does not stop there. The meaning then has to be considered, judged and then accepted, rejected or put on hold. He was of the opinion that a book is not made to be believed but to be questioned. Hence, the ability to question a given text lies in the reader's reading competence. High reading comprehension competence is attained when words are decoded and

associated with their meanings in the reader's memory, and phrases and sentences are processed rapidly or fluently enough so that the meanings derived from one word, phrase or sentence are not lost when the next is processed. (Abbot, 2003 & Mercurio, 2005). This state can only be achieved when students are actively engaged in what they are reading as well as enjoying reading. A reader with developed quality of competency in reading, reads with a purpose, is motivated, and uses his personal background knowledge to interact with the text. Undoubtedly, the magazines, and novels as print media are best tools that offer both direct and incidental reading strategies for students which can also develop their reading competencies.

Furthermore, Assimonye (2004) posited that the print media is an important tool for learning. This includes textbooks in all subjects taught in class, as well as novels, magazines and newspapers which offer information and entertainments in all spheres of life. The quality and effectiveness of the message may be superior, through the media's ability to illustrate abstract concepts using animation and dramatization. In recent times, print information could be accessed through electronic means like the internet where newspapers, magazines, novels etc. are read. Hence, students can interact to gain information and entertainment as well as enhance the quality of their competency in reading. This is because they are already motivated through the myriad things presented through the print media.

Despite various opinion by researchers on print media influence on students' learning, by Bamgbose (1991), Williams (2005), and Assimonye (2004), they tend to agree, to the fact that children had to master quality reading skills before they were able to have access to print information. Thus, young children without quality symbolic skills were automatically forbidden from having access to information contained in print media. This directly motivated children to develop quality reading skills in order to access the information.

The theoretical framework for the study is premised on some relevant theoretical construct in support of print media and reading competence. They are discussed under the following:

The Meta-Cognitive Views of Reading Theories

It is the ability of the reader to control and manipulate the process of reading for comprehension of a text. According to Vaezi (2006) reading is seen as a psycho-linguistic model which involves the process whereby the reader samples a text, makes hypotheses, confirms or rejects them, makes new hypotheses and so on. This obviously emphasizes the interactive nature of comprehension. This view is in concordance with transaction model of reading, which believed that it is the experience of information stored in the brain that predicts the meaning the reader will get from the text (Onukaogu, 2003). Hence, the reader uses a schema strategy, a meta-cognition strategy and text structure analysis strategies in interacting with the text (Anderson and Lynch 1988). So, reading is a dynamic process in which the reader is not only involved in information search but also in information reformation, summarizing, editing, confirmation and rejection.

In addition, the learning theory propounded by a foremost 20th century psychologist, Edward Lee Thorndike, is (a study) based on the fact that learning constantly influences the behaviour of an individual. It may be conscious or sub-conscious and entails learning a positive or negative phenomenon. He formulated laws of learning to cover (readiness, exercise and effect) which have direct application to education. In the law of readiness, he explained that an individual tries learning many responses when faced with a problem. On getting the right response, the individual forms an association between stimulus and the response. Thorndike emphasized the need for reinforcement in learning. Some children will be glued to the television screen instead of reading, unless their environment is made to stimulate their interest. This means only a bond that gives satisfaction will be more likely ready to act. Thus, an individual will exhibit less often behaviour that he rarely has satisfaction when performed. The reinforcement gained while associating through reading of magazines, novels or school recommended textbooks will determine the frequency and duration of time spent on a particular association. The level of association will determine the child's quality of reading competence, which invariably dictates his academic achievement. However, the discussed psychological theories suggest quality in reading competence can be enhanced if learners are presented with stimulating good materials to encourage them to read.

It is generally accepted that most Nigerians do not read and very few read for pleasure. Majority read when there is an examination or interviews for jobs. With the tendency, their reading narrows down to prescribed textbooks alone. In essence, their reading terminates as soon as they are free from menacing examinations. As a result of this type of attitude to reading, an average Nigerian is occupied with how to make money and would not even care about or have time for reading, not even magazines or interesting novels (Uya, 2004).

Another study, by Egbe, Bassey and Otu (2004) to find out the reading regularity of preferred text type among students of polytechnic, Calabar. Their findings point to the fact that students do read other media materials for pleasure, besides academic materials like prescribed textbooks. Magazines topped the list of reading preference, followed by newspapers, novels and those students who do not read outside prescribed text ranked last. This is because print media are adapted to the taste and understanding of the general public.

Furthermore, researches carried out by Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN) (2000) Calabar, in Ansa, Bassey, Nta, Oklwe (2003), in their independent studies on the reading regularities of preferred text type among students. The studies all agreed that students learn equally well with print visuals that are engaging, presented through newspapers, magazines and novels. This is significant in view of the fact that the comprehension test was in print and required children in picture conditions to translate the iconic code into a print based linguistic one. Thus, the review shows that one of the basic ways to benefit ultimately from the potentials of print media is through media education for parents, students and other education stakeholders on how best to harness these potentials.

However, beyond this lies the power of the print media that, when used effectively could create a positive change in the lives of those exposed to them. Despite the print media laudable functions which include to record, preserve, convey and retrieve information in the process of providing education and entertainment, it is obvious that there is no limit to the kind or nature of information conveyed. Hence, the print media can be regarded as 'a double edged-sword' as it could enhance quality in students' reading competence which influences their academics either positively or negatively. For instance, newspapers, magazines, cartoons, novels etc that portray social vices (pornography, murder, robbery) etc, which expose students to how modern technology can be used to perpetrate such vices, may influence students' behaviour negatively.

The crux of the matter is, what is presented to our adolescent audience? How it is presented and how what is presented conflicts with the quality of students' reading competence. Thus, it is the need for thoughtful print media interaction with students in order to enhance the quality of their reading competence, which forms the 'navigating power' for their academic achievement that brought about this study.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to magazines and those less exposed to magazines.
2. There is no significant difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to novels and those less exposed to novels.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is controversy over whether students' exposure to novels, magazines etc enhance students academic achievement or not. This has resulted in some schools' management not allowing students to bring to school novels and magazines outside the prescribed ones for learning, as well as ineffective update of magazines in the school libraries. This decision is based on the opinion that novels and magazines can distract students' attention from their academic work. Some schools recommend such reading only during the holidays. Consequently, the general poor reading habit of students have resulted in the problem of examination malpractice that has eaten deep into the fabric of academic excellence in schools. This is because the key to unlock academic excellence is good quality reading competence.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to exposure to magazines and novels as sub-variables for print media (independent variable). It was also delimited to reading for exact meaning, for information, for summary (gist), implied meaning and relationship of thought as sub-variables for quality of reading competence (dependent variable). For precision in result, the researchers used only sixty seven (67) public secondary schools in the nine (9) local government areas in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwalbom State in Nigeria.

METHOD

Uyo Senatorial District constitutes the area for this study which is located between longitude $7^{\circ}40'$ and $8^{\circ}4'$ East, and Latitudes $4^{\circ}40'$ and $5^{\circ}40'$ North of the Equator. It is situated between the North and South-East corner of Akwalbom State, Nigeria (Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Uyo, 2008). The area with an estimated population of 710,355 (male) and 652,013 (female) is made up of 9 local government areas out of the thirty one (31) local government areas in the state. There are sixty seven (67) government owned secondary schools in Uyo Senatorial District. The survey approach of ex-post factor design was used for this study. This design was found fit because students' exposure to print media differentiated in terms of sub-variables such as (magazines and novels) were compared in terms of ability to enhance quality of students' reading competence (dependent variable). The target population of this study was all the 7,467 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in the 67 public secondary schools within the area of study (Akwalbom State Secondary Education Board, 2008).

The sample size for this study consisted of 1,120 students (approximately 15%) drawn from 45 of the 67 public secondary schools in Uyo senatorial district through the stratified random sampling technique. Since the population of SS2 students and the number of secondary schools in each local government were not the same in size. The ratio of 5:1 was used to select the schools and 15% of the SS2 students from each local government were used. The 1,120 subjects, which formed the sample size were randomly selected using the hat and draw method, though with a mortality rate of 30 which gave the highest probability of selecting a representative sample. Below is a breakdown of the sampling frame used for this study is seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Sampling Frame of the Population Distribution and Sample Size of SS2 Students for each School used in the Study

<i>Local Government Area</i>	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>Population of SS2 students in the LGA</i>	<i>Sampled Schools</i>	<i>15% of population per school (sample size)</i>	<i>Sample size of students per local government</i>
1	7	857	5	26	129
2	7	895	5	27	134
3	6	630	5	19	95
4	8	742	5	22	111
5	6	626	5	19	94
6	6	580	5	17	87
7	11	723	5	22	108
8	11	1803	5	54	270
9	5	611	5	18	92
Total	67	7,467	45		1,120

The table shows that 5 schools in each local government and a sample size of 1,120 although 30 respondents were absent which resulted in 1090 students used for the study.

A researcher-made instrument called 'Print Media Strategy Questionnaire' (PMRQ) and 'Reading Competence Test' (RCT) were used for data collection. The competence test was extracted and adopted to suit the students' class and background. It comprised four reading passages of which passages one and three were extracted and adopted from Azikiwe (1998), while passages two and four were from Ranjimankikum (2003). The researchers developed 10 items for the questionnaire which required respondents to tick (✓) their appropriate responses lettered A-D. Five items tested for students' exposure to magazines, and another 5 items tested for their exposure to novels. The options were graded with the highest scores ranging from A (4), B(3), C(2), D(1). To select the more exposed and less exposed groups, those who scored from 5 (marks) to 10 (marks) on the questionnaire formed the more exposed group; while those who scored from 4 below formed the less exposed group. Further, the researchers developed a 20 question competence test and respondents were required to produce their own answers.

The two instruments were validated by two professionals in the field of study. The modified research instruments were also given to research experts for necessary correction. This was done to ensure face and content validity of the research instrument before using them for the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined by using the test retest method and was administered to a group of 20 subjects from schools that were not part of the sample size. The test was repeated after two weeks and data obtained were subjected to statistical treatment, using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). This resulted in reliability indices of 0.5 and 0.8 respectively. The research instruments were administered by the researchers, while English language teachers in each school, served as research assistants. The 15% sample size of the SSII students in each public school varied in number from (17-54) as the population ranged from (92-270) in each school. Finally, 30 respondents were absent which resulted in 1090 students being used as actual sample size. The data obtained were analyzed using independent t-test statistical tool.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to magazines and those less exposed to magazines.

The t-test analysis of the difference in competence scores of SS2 students more exposed to magazine and those less exposed to magazines is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.Independent t-test analysis of the difference between the qualities of reading competence of students' more exposed and less exposed to magazines

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Reading competence of students more exposed to magazines	670	37.8284	21.30865	45.951	1.960	Ho rejected
Reading competence of students less exposed to magazines	420	33.0000	21.33772			

*significant at 0.05 level; df = 1088; t-crit = 1960

The result in Table 2 is an indication that the calculated t-value of 45.951 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.960. The null hypothesis which postulated that there is no significant difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to magazines and those less exposed to magazines is hereby rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to novels and those less exposed to novels. The t-test analysis of the difference in competence of SS2 scores more exposed to novels and those less exposed to novels.

Table 3. Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed and those less exposed to novels

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Reading competence of students more exposed to novel	662	33.2401	21.2079	39.117	1.960	Ho rejected
Reading competence of students less exposed to novel	428	32.2402	20.86386			

*significant at 0.05 level; df = 1088; t-crit = 1960

The result as shown in table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value of 39.117 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.960. The null hypothesis that there is no significance difference in the quality of reading competence of students more exposed to novels and those less exposed to novels is therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION

The result of data analysis in table 2 shows that student more exposed to magazines gain higher quality of reading competence than those less exposed to such medium. This is because in order to efficiently access the medium, one must possess high quality of reading skills as the only tool. Through this continuous exercise of reading, the readers' quality of competence is enhanced. This is supported by Thorndike's law of exercise which advocated that a response between stimulus and response are strengthened through doing the exercise frequently. Hence, a research carried out by Omojuwa (1997) demonstrated how the newspaper and magazines can be used to teaching reading to English as second language (ESL) students. The result indicated that newspaper articles, editorials and magazines that are stimulating and accessible can sustain readers' interests and make them competent readers. In addition, students who read magazines learn skills of critical thinking, retaining information and transferring it to the realities of their daily live. This medium have the capacity to motivate teachers, because the reader has already been built into the planning and packaging of the paper (Omojuwa, 2004). Another research conducted by Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN, 2000) Calabar, in Ansaet (2003) showed that when students are exposed to media reading in the form of newspapers and magazines, they will develop effective language usage and comprehension. This also implies that when a task is engaging, any child can be motivated to try to read.

This will enhance the quality of readers' reading competence. The study also reveals a significant difference in quality of reading competence of students more exposed to novels and those less exposed to novels. This indicates that students more exposed to novels gain higher quality in reading competence than those less exposed. The low quality of reading competence of those less exposed to novels is because readers' metacognition do not rhyme with the ideas presented in the medium. Hence, comprehension becomes slow. Only those whose metacognition was similar to the themes in the story gained high comprehension in the study.

The study also support the findings of Assimonye (2004) who posited that the print media is an important tool for learning especially novels, as various issues of life are read for information and entertainment. The information so provided on different subjects may be sources of inspiration and motivation for students. This is because the skills required for reading a novel is the same skill and proficiency required to read any prescribed textbooks in any academic subject. As they are entertained while reading novels their reading competence is invariably developed in the process. This is why the reading competence of those more exposed to novels was higher than those less exposed to novels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the study, it is thereby recommended that:

- a. Authors and publishers should be encouraged to produce reading materials that are attractive to maintain the interest of students and also good content that suit the psychology and class of the students.
- b. Parents and teachers should ensure that good quality of reading materials are made available early enough in the child's environment (home/school). They should be good readers themselves, in order to motivate students to love reading as a hobby,
- c. Students should be consciously exposed to positive media interaction. They should be taught their right to question, analyze and evaluate any information presented to them through magazines and novels. They should not regard all information received as absolute truth. By so doing they will develop positive interaction with the media.

CONCLUSION

As can be deduced from the research findings, it is concluded that print media (magazines and novels strategies) significantly enhance the development of students' reading competence which is needed for intellectual excellence. Therefore, instead of viewing them as distractions, parents and teachers should monitor and encourage children to read good print materials that can enrich their language competence and broaden their horizon for meaningful interaction in their environment.

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