

Effect of Storytelling on Listening Skills of Primary One Pupil in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Listening is the first language skill that children develop and it is the most dominant communication skill in the classroom and everyday life. One way by which the skills of listening can be developed is through storytelling. Studies have shown however that listening skill is not given adequate attention in primary schools especially, through the use of storytelling. This study therefore investigated the effect of storytelling on the listening skills of primary one pupils. The study adopted pretest-posttest control group quasi experimental design. Two public primary schools were purposively selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was exposed to storytelling with illustrations while the control group was exposed to storytelling without illustrations. Morrow's 10-Point Scale for Retelling Analysis was used to measure the listening skills of pupils before and after listening to stories in Yoruba Language. Data collected was analyzed using ANCOVA. There was a significant main effect of treatment on the listening skills of primary one pupils ($F_{(1, 40)} = 0.01$; $p < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.14$). Among recommendations made was that storytelling in indigenous languages with illustrations should be adopted by teachers in primary schools to teach listening skills.

Keywords: Storytelling, listening skills, indigenous languages, illustrations

1. Introduction

Many Nigerian children begin primary education by age six and these children are still in their early childhood period. According to World Bank (2011), early childhood period is the most rapid period of development in human life. Although individual children develop at their own pace, all children progress through an identifiable sequence of physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth and change.

Physically, six year old children have improved use of all their different body parts which allows for better gross and fine motor skills and they are more aware of their body positions and movements. Socially, they are very interested in their peers' opinions and abilities, both for social comparison and for the sake of making friends. Also, they have close emotional attachments with the pivotal adults in their lives including teachers. Emotionally, they are not good in understanding accurately another person's emotions as awareness of others emotions may play a role in the reduction of aggressive and disruptive behaviours among primary school children (Torlinson, 2009). Intellectually, Anthony (2014) noted that they are in the latter phase of Piaget's preoperational period, the time during which children learn to use language. Children's thought and communications are typically egocentric (about themselves). Another key feature which children display during this stage is animism.

Animism is the belief that inanimate objects have human feelings and intentions (McLeod, 2012). While some of this thinking actually fuels creativity, supporting the development of a child's schema (her foundation knowledge) around animals and habitats is a wonderful way to advance the child's thinking and understanding of the world (Anthony, 2014) Also, children in this age group are concrete learners (Thomlinson, 2009) learning should be supported with lots of visuals or real objects in the classroom.

One of the goals of primary education in Nigeria is inculcation of permanent literacy and the ability to communicate effectively (FGN, 2004). Literacy creates the foundation for a lifetime and allows a wide range of opportunities. Primary school literacy involves developing oral and written communication in all subject areas. Primary school pupils can learn literacy skills through instruction and practice of speaking, reading, writing and listening (Grayson, 2013). Listening is the process of taking in information through the sense of hearing and making meaning from what was heard. Listening comprehension prepares young children for later reading comprehension (Jalongo, 2008). This may be the reason why Brown (2012) submitted that it is crucial for a child to develop good listening skills in order to cope with the academic demands of school and to learn adequate literacy skills. Listening skill helps children to guide their self-inquiry and discover their individual possibilities. Children who are active listeners can incorporate the things they hear faster in their framework of knowledge than a more passive counterpart. In his own view, Tramel (2011) observed that Children can also exhibit better concentration and memory when they develop good listening skill.

Listening is very important because of all the language skills that young children develop, listening is the one that develops earliest and is practiced most frequently (Roskos, Christie and Richgels, 2003). Studies conducted on children's listening, both in and outside school, estimated that between 50 and 90 percent of children's communication time is devoted to listening (Wolvin and Coakely 2000; Gilbert, 2005). Listening is central to a child's development of other skills, including survival, social and intellectual skills. (Wolvin and Coakley, 2000). Listening comprehension is considered one of the skills most predictive of overall, long-term school success (Brigman, Lane and Switzer, 2001). In their studies, Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004), Gallets (2005) and Philips (2000) revealed that storytelling improves the listening skills of children.

In spite of the many advantages embedded in teaching listening to children, an observation of the teaching and learning activities in our primary schools revealed that it is not given adequate attention. This supports the report of Smith (2003) that despite the fact that listening is the language skill that is used the most, it is the one that is taught the least in the classroom. The fact that listening has been neglected or poorly taught may have stemmed from the belief that it is a passive skill and that merely exposing learners to the spoken language provides adequate instruction in listening comprehension (Call, 1985). What may not be realized however is that stories which employ the use of illustrations are vital in teaching listening skills to children.

Tales and stories are effective and useful listening materials for children to develop listening comprehension and literacy both in their first and second language (Zevenbergenn and Whitehurst, 2003). Storytelling is one of the oldest methods of communicating ideas and images (Mello, 2001). In the traditional African societies, young children were told stories by their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. According to Omoleye (1977), folktales played a very important role in the community life of Nigerians. Although the stories were unwritten, they have been passed down from generations without losing their originality. As important as storytelling is to the education of young children, it is not accorded adequate attention in primary schools (Mello, 2001 and Philip 2000). It has been observed that children spend more time with the electronic media and lesser time listening to stories because parents lead such busy lives that they no longer have time to read bedtime stories to their children (TalkTalk Group, 2011) instead they prefer their children to fill their evenings watching the television and playing games (Paton, 2012).

Several factors such as gender and background knowledge can affect the listening skills and several researches lends support to this. Tanner (2001) stated that men and women have very distinct communication styles that influences how they listen. For example, women listen to understand the other person's emotions to find common interests whereas men listen in order to take action and solve problems. Also, males listen to hear facts, while females are more aware of the mood of the communication (Booth – Butterfield, 1984). Purdy, (2000) examined the stereotypes about listening behavior that have contributed to the sustained belief that one gender functions better as listeners than the other. Characteristics of good and poor listeners were collected. The most frequent characteristics of good listeners (top 30) and poor listeners (top 28) were randomized and participants were asked to respond to each on a scale from male, some- what- male, true of both sex, female, some-what- female.

Results showed that most of the good characteristics were associated with females, while the poor characteristics were associated with males. In a study by Isbel et. al. (2004) on effects of storytelling and story reading on the oral language complexity and story comprehension of young children, little difference was found between language measures for preschool boys and girls within and between the groups exposed to storytelling and story reading.

Background knowledge has been seen as what one already knows about a subject (Stevens, 1980) and all knowledge learners have, when entering a learning environment, that is potentially relevant for acquiring new knowledge (Biemans and Simmons, 1996). Culture is an important aspect of background knowledge and it influences all aspects of life. Culture has a major impact on all components of learning process (Al-Issa, 2006). This is to say therefore that the cultural background of listeners can affect listening skills. Few researchers have studied the relationship between cultural background and listening skills. For instance, Bakhtiarvand and Adinevand (2010) investigated the effect of cultural familiarity in improving Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' listening comprehension. Results of the posttest showed that participants who listened to the target culture texts (English and American) performed better than all the other participants who did not listen to target culture texts. A similar study by Samian and Dastjerdi (2012) also showed that cultural familiarity improved Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' listening comprehension. It is imperative therefore to find out if cultural background can influence the listening skills of primary school pupils especially when they are told indigenous stories, using illustrations. It is based on this background that this study investigated the effects of storytelling on listening skills of primary one pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria.

2. Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant main effect of treatments on listening skills of primary one pupils.

Ho₂: There is no significant main effect of gender on the listening skills of the primary one pupils.

Ho₃: There is no significant main effect of cultural background knowledge on the listening skills of the primary one pupils

3. Methodology

This study adopted a pretest-posttest, control group quasi experimental design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two public primary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. The sample comprised 49 primary one pupils selected from the two public primary schools. The two schools were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups and intact classes were used. The experimental group consisted of 24 pupils while the control group consisted of 25 pupils. Morrow's (1986) 10-Point Scale for Retelling Analysis was used to measure the listening skills of the pupils during pretest and posttest. The instrument was translated into Yoruba Language by the researcher and it was used to analyze the story retellings of primary one pupils in the study. It is divided into five sections which are character and setting, theme, plot episodes, resolution or moral of the story and sequence. Each section is graded as 4 points for character and setting, 1 point for theme, 1 point for plot episodes, 2 points for resolution and 2 points for sequence. The total score is 10 points. To verify the reliability of the Morrow's 10 point scale, the scale was administered to primary one pupils in Abiola Jacobs Primary School Ibadan South West Local Government Area of Oyo State. The data gathered was subjected to reliability analysis using the split half technique and it yielded reliability coefficient of 0.80.

Procedure

The study lasted for eight weeks. First, three indigenous stories were selected, "Ìjápá àti Yánníbo," "Ajá àti Ìjápá" and "Kókò Ìyá Arúgbó" during the first week. These are stories which usually interest children when they are told. During the second week, permission was sought from Head teachers and parents of the pupils used for the study. After the permission has been secured, the training and assessment of research assistants for both the experimental and the control groups was conducted and the pretest measure was administered to both groups during the same week of the training of the research assistants. Next, the teachers told the three indigenous stories as stipulated in the instructional guides for both groups. The trained teachers selected for the study told each of the three stories twice a week for three weeks. During the seventh week, the primary one pupils in the study were asked to retell all the three stories and the posttest measure was taken. On eight week, the pupils' retellings which were video recorded were analyzed later using Morrow's 10-point scale before data analysis.

The data collected was analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Estimated marginal means aspect of ANCOVA was employed to determine the magnitude of the mean scores of each group while Scheffe Post-hoc analysis was used to determine the sources of significant treatment effects observed on the ANCOVA.

4. Results

Table 1: Distribution of Participants Based on Treatment Groups, Gender and Cultural Background

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
TREATMENT GROUP		
Experimental (story telling with illustration)	24	49.0
Control (story telling without illustration)	25	51.0
Total	49	100.0
GENDER		
Male	30	61.2
Female	19	38.8
Total	49	100.0
CULTURAL BACKGROUND		
Yoruba	36	73.5
Non-Yoruba	13	26.5
Total	49	100.0

Table 1 reveals that 49 pupils were involved in the study. 49% were in the experimental group and were exposed to storytelling with illustration while 51% were in the control group and they were exposed to storytelling without illustration. Also 30 of the pupils were male which made up 61.2% of the participants while 19 of them were female which made up 38%. 36 of them were Yoruba indigenes which made up 73.5% while 13 of them were non-Yoruba indigenes which made 26.5%.

Test of the Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant main effect of treatments on listening skills of primary one pupils.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Covariance on Pupils' Performance

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Correlated Model	1300.134 ^a	8	162.517	7.042	.000	.585
Intercept	10715.908	1	10715.908	464.334	.000	.921
Pre score	40.861	1	40.861	1.771	.191	.042
Treatment	144.669	1	144.669	6.269	.016	.135
Gender	316.284	1	316.284	13.705	.001	.255
Cultural Background	527.178	1	527.178	22.843	.000	.363
Error	923.120	40	23.078			
Total	30769.770	49				
Corrected Total	2223.254	48				

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant main effect of treatment on listening skills of primary one pupils ($F_{(1,40)} = 0.016$; $P < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected. Table 3 shows the magnitude of performance across the groups.

Table 3: Estimated Marginal Means on Pupils' Performance

Variable	Mean	Std. Error
INTERCEPT		
Pre-score	1.659	-
Post-score	21.738	.897
TREATMENT		
Experimental group	24.157	1.411
Control group	19.319	1.218

Table 3 reveals that the pupils who were exposed to storytelling with illustration had higher listening skills mean score (24.16) than those exposed to story without illustration (19.32).

Ho₂: There is no significant main effect of gender on the listening skills of primary one pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area.

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant main effect of gender on the listening skills of primary one pupils ($F_{(1,40)} = 0.01$; $P < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.026$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is rejected. Also, table 3 reveals that female pupils had higher listening skills mean score (25.07) than the male pupils (18.41).

Ho₃: There is no significant main effect of cultural background on the listening skills of primary one pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area.

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant main effect of cultural background on the listening skills of primary one pupils ($F_{(1,40)} = 0.000$; $P < 0.05$; $\eta^2 = 0.36$). Therefore Hypothesis 3 is rejected. Also, table 3 reveals that Yoruba pupils had higher listening skills mean score (26.01) than the non-Yoruba pupils (17.45).

5. Discussion

Effect of Treatment on the Listening Skills of Primary One Pupils

Findings reveal that there was a significant main effect of treatment on the listening skills of primary one pupils. Those that were exposed to storytelling with illustration had higher listening skills mean score than those exposed to storytelling without illustrations. This means that storytelling with illustration had significant effect on the listening skills of the pupils. It was found to have facilitated listening more than storytelling without illustrations. This supports the assertions that storytelling with illustration helps in the improvement of the listening skills of children. (Nicolas (2007), Isbel *et al.*, 2004). It may be because the pupils in the experimental group (storytelling with illustration) were given the opportunity to see and touch the pictures in the picture storybook as they were told the stories by their teacher and they performed better than the children in the control group (storytelling without illustration) who did not see or touch the pictures in the picture storybook as they were told the story by their teacher. This corroborates the argument of Jalongo (2008) that young children often prefer visual and kinesthetic approaches and that listening activities should be complemented with images and activities. Doing this had a remarkable positive effect on children's listening behaviours and attention span.

On the other hand, the pupils in the control group (storytelling without illustration) were not given the opportunity to see and touch the pictures in the picture story book as they were told the stories by their teacher. The lack of opportunity for the pupils to see and touch the pictures themselves explains why the pupils in the control group (storytelling without illustration) had lower mean listening score than the experimental group (Storytelling with illustrations). This finding lends support to the submission of Shin, (2006) that young children have a short attention span and a lot of physical energy therefore without visuals, the attention of young children cannot be captured and it is difficult to keep them engaged in activities.

Effects of Gender on the Listening Skills of Primary One Pupils

Hypothesis two compared the relative performance of boys and girls in both experimental and control groups (Storytelling with illustrations and storytelling without illustrations). The findings have revealed that there was a significant main effect of gender on the listening skills of primary one pupils. Girls had a significantly higher listening mean score than boys in all the groups. That means that the girls in all the groups performed better than the boys. This is not surprising because it is generally believed that women listen more than men. The finding lends credence to Tanner's (2001) submission that men and women have very distinct communication styles that influences how they listen.

Also, Booth-Butterfield (1984) had opined that males listen to hear facts, while females are more aware of the mood of the communication. The difference in listening style could explain why girls performed better than the boys, because storytelling has more emotions/moods, than facts contained in it. However, the finding of a study by Isbel et al (2004) failed to establish a significant relationship between gender and listening.

Effect of Cultural Background on the Listening Skills of Primary One pupils

Hypothesis three sought to establish the differences in the listening skill mean scores of the Yoruba pupils as well as the non-Yoruba pupils. The findings have revealed that there was a significant main effect of cultural background on the listening skills of primary one pupils. The Yoruba pupils performed significantly better than non-Yoruba pupils. This result is not unexpected considering the fact that the stories were told in Yoruba language and majority of the pupils were Yoruba indigenes. Studies conducted by UNICEF (2011), Chuo and Walter (2011) and Bender, Dutcher, Klaus, Shore and Tesar (2005) to show the effectiveness of using mother tongue to each young children all supports this findings. So, the Yoruba pupils were at an advantage more than the non-Yoruba pupils. Samian and Dastjerdi (2012), Bakhtiaryand and Adinevand, (2010) have also reported that cultural familiarity increases the listening skills of learners.

6. Recommendations

There is the need for the Nigerian government to provide picture books, other visuals and instructional materials in other to encourage active listening in primary schools. To do this, the government should encourage Nigerian local illustrators, authors, storytellers and publishers to produce picture storybooks for primary school pupils in indigenous languages. Apart from this, seminars and workshops should also be organized for the teachers during the holidays to expose them to how to make simple picture storybooks themselves and how to teach storytelling with illustrations.

Lots of brightly coloured visuals and other teaching aids should be provided in all primary classrooms and this should be available for all subjects. Primary school teachers in Nigeria should use the mother tongue or language of immediate environment to teach pupils in primary one. Teachers can deliberately bridge the gap in listening between girls and boys by giving the boys more opportunities to engage activities to build their listening skills. This can be achieved during activities such as listening games, songs, stories, discussions and interviews.

Nigerian parents should communicate with their children in their indigenous languages more than the English Language. They should also tell their children their indigenous stories regularly. This should begin even before they start school.

Due to the language policy on pre-primary and lower primary classes, all pre-service teachers of early childhood education and primary education studies should be proficient in at least one Nigerian language, since they will be teaching at the preschool and lower primary classes.

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