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Effectiveness of Vocabulary Instruction on Students' Performance in Reading Comprehension in Junior Secondary Schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria: Implication for Basic Education Curriculum

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Abstract: The study was aimed at determining the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest research design was used for the study. The target population of the study consisted of 39,227 JS II students in public junior secondary schools in Kaduna State. A sample size of 117 JS II students were used in the study. The sample size was arrived at using purposive sampling technique. Sixty seven (67) JS II students were sampled for experimental group while fifty (50) students were used as control group. Both groups were taught for six weeks. A pre-test was administered to both groups prior to the six weeks of teaching to establish the homogeneity of the two groups. A cloze reading comprehension test was used to assess students' performance in the reading comprehension task. Data collected in the study was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. At descriptive level, mean and standard deviation were used to respond to the research question while t-test was used at inferential level to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The study concluded that it takes fairly intensive vocabulary instruction to guarantee measurable gains in reading comprehension. It was therefore recommended that teachers should include vocabulary instruction in teaching reading comprehension to facilitate more understanding. Curriculum planners should equally include vocabulary instruction as one of the teaching techniques in the basic education curriculum.

Keywords: Comprehension; Performance; Vocabulary instruction; Reading.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary instruction is fundamental to reading comprehension. It entails helping students to acquire new words for use in daily life, and more specifically, the basis for learning any language. Vocabulary instruction focuses on helping students learn the meaning of new words and concepts in various contexts and across all academic content areas. Teaching reading comprehension using vocabulary instruction means providing explicit instruction on important words from text and teaching students strategies to help them learn word meanings independently (Kamil *et al.*, 2008).

Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand or connect to what they are reading, they are not really reading. Good readers are both purposeful and active, and have the skills to absorb what they read, analyse it, make sense of it, and make it their own. Strong readers think actively as they read. They use their experiences and knowledge of the world, vocabulary, language structure, and reading strategies to make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it. They know when they have problems with understanding and what thinking strategies to use to resolve these problems when they pop up (Readingrockets.com, 2016). One big part of comprehension is having sufficient vocabulary, or knowing the meanings of many words. Readers who have strong comprehension are able to draw conclusions about what they read, what is important, what is a fact, what caused an event to happen, which characters are funny, and so on. Thus, one can say that comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning.

Increasing vocabulary instruction is a fundamental part of the process of education, both as a means and as an end. Lack of adequate vocabulary instruction is already an obvious and serious obstacle for many students. Kame'nui and Simmons cited in Calderón and Minaya-Rowe (2004) highlighted the causes of reading comprehension failure to include inadequate instruction, insufficient exposure and practice, deficient word recognition skills, deficient memory capacity and functioning, significant language deficiencies, inadequate

comprehension monitoring and self-evaluation, unfamiliarity with text features and task demands, undeveloped attentional strategies, and inadequate cognitive development and reading experiences.

Vocabulary instruction aids in activating and building background knowledge to make connections to text, increase reading comprehension and fluency while reading. Vocabulary instruction has been proven to increase reading comprehension in studies conducted by Oyetunde (2009), Olaofe (2013), Yusuf (2016) but according to some other studies, many widely used methods of vocabulary instruction generally fail to increase reading comprehension (Block and Mangieri, 2006)(Block, & Mangieri, 2006; Mezynski, Pearson & Gallagher; Stahl & Fairbanks cited in William, 1998). A major motivation for vocabulary instruction is to help students understand various texts they are about to read. Since traditional instruction is not having this effect, there is need to examine the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

Vocabulary instruction has not occupied a distinct role in many reading classrooms. Vocabulary instruction is one of the most important components of any language classroom which helps learners understand languages and express their meanings (Shakouri *et al.*, 2014). There are specific traits that determine how successful an individual will comprehend text, including prior knowledge about the subject, well-developed language, ability to make inferences and the ability to be self-correcting to solve comprehension problems as they arise (Tompkins, 2011). Fluent readers recognize and understand many words, and they read more quickly and easily than those with smaller vocabularies (Shakouri *et al.*, 2014).

Vocabulary instruction, along with background knowledge provides students a better chance of understanding the text they read. Beside, there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension; students need to understand the meaning of critical words they read to promote comprehension. A wealth of research (such as Anderson & Freebody cited in William, 1998) has documented the strength of the relationship between vocabulary instruction and comprehension. Other studies also found vocabulary instruction in definitional and contextual strategies to be highly significant in increasing reading comprehension (Rinaldi *et al.*, 1997; Tomesen and Aarnoutse, 1998). The more concrete and personal connections that students can make to a specific word, the better it seems to be learned.

However, Nation (2001) maintains that direct vocabulary instruction should be directed towards the high frequency words of the language and asserts that direct instruction can deal effectively with only some aspects of word knowledge and not effectively with others, which rely on quantity of experience and implicit rather than explicit knowledge. For example, when teachers explicitly teach students to analyse word parts, students may be able to remember the spelling and also the pronunciation of the words (productive knowledge) more easily but regarding collocational and grammatical behaviour of words, it may be better for learners to read in context. Schmitt (2000) points out that learners are capable of improving their reading comprehension, for example by means of word lists and the 'depth of processing' hypothesis suggests that the more a piece of information is manipulated, the more likely it is to be retained in memory.

Oxford and Scarcella (1994) take the position that explicit vocabulary instruction is necessary to guide learners to learn specific strategies for acquiring words, and show students how to learn words outside of their L2 classes. It is not enough just to offer good vocabulary instruction. Several important features of good reading instruction also need to be present. Otherwise, the vocabulary instruction will not hold and flourish. Students will not learn to become excellent comprehenders of any given type of text without substantial experience in reading and writing it. For instance, experience reading storybooks will not, by itself enable a student to read, understand, and critique procedural forms of text of the sort found in books, instruction manuals, and the like.

3. Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

4. Research Question

What is the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State?

5. Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State.

6. Methodology

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest research design was used for the study. The target population of the study consisted of thirty nine thousand two hundred and twenty seven (39,227) JS II students in public junior secondary

schools in Kaduna State. A sample size of one hundred and seventeen (117) JS II students were used in the study. Intact classes were used for the study. Sixty seven (67) JS II students were used for experimental group while fifty (50) students were used as control group. Both groups were taught for six weeks. A pre-test was administered to both groups prior to the six weeks of teaching to establish the homogeneity of the two groups. A cloze reading comprehension test was used to assess students' performance in the reading comprehension task. Data collected in the study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. At descriptive level, mean and standard deviation were used to respond to the research question while t-test was used at inferential level to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Treatment

- Teacher introduces the lesson by asking questions that will link the previous lesson to the present lesson.
- Teacher shows the students some keywords from the passage that may appear difficult for students
- Teacher guides student as they find the meaning of keywords in the context in which they appear in the passage.
- Students find the dictionary meaning of the keywords and match them with their contextual meaning.
- Students read the passage taking note of the keywords as they are used in the passage.
- Teacher guides students as they read and discuss the passage.
- Students answer comprehension questions based on the information provided in and outside the passage

7. Data Analysis and Results

The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Table 1 presents answer to the research question while table 2 presents the result of hypothesis testing using t-test statistical tool.

Research Question: What is the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State?

Table-1. Descriptive statistics on the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State

Method	N	Pre-test Scores		Post-test Scores	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Experimental Group	67	22.81	4.82	48.27	7.10
Control Group	50	19.37	2.91	43.03	10.00

Table 1 shows that the students taught reading comprehension using vocabulary instruction had a better performance mean scores in the pre-test and post-test administered on them. The mean score of students taught reading comprehension using vocabulary instruction is 22.81 and 48.27 in pre-test and post-test respectively with corresponding standard deviation of 4.82 and 7.10, while the mean score of students in control group is 19.37 and 43.03 with standard deviation of 2.91 and 10.00 respectively. This means the pre-test mean score difference is 3.44 and post-test mean score difference of 5.24. It also shows the mean gain of 25.46 for students in experimental group and mean gain of 23.66 for students in control group. The standard deviation at each level indicates that students' performance differs greatly from each other.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State.

The post-test administered on students was marked, scored and tested using independent sample t-test. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 2:

Hypothesis Testing

Table-2. Summary of Independent sample t-test on the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State

Method	N	Mean	SD	df	α	t-cal	t-crit	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Experimental	67	48.27	7.10	115	0.05	21.72	1.96	.003	Rejected
Control	50	43.03	10.00						

Table 2 shows that the students taught reading comprehension using vocabulary instruction performed far better than their counterparts in control group in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State. The table shows that the t-calculated value of 21.72 is greater than the t-critical 1.96, while the p-value is .003 (P<0.005). The null-hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State was rejected. This result implies that the students exposed to vocabulary instruction comprehend the passages given to them better than their counterparts in the control group.

8. Discussion of Findings

The result of the hypothesis tested revealed that the students taught reading comprehension using vocabulary instruction performed better than their counterparts in control group in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State. Therefore, the null-hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the effect of vocabulary instruction on students' performance in reading comprehension in junior secondary schools in Kaduna State was rejected. This result implies that the students exposed to vocabulary instruction comprehend the passages given to them better than their counterparts in the control group. This finding disagreed with the findings of Block and Mangieri (2006); Nelson and Stage (2007) which revealed that not all vocabulary instruction increases reading comprehension. This finding confirms the early findings of Anderson and Freebody cited in William (1998) and (Yusuf, 2013;2016) that vocabulary instruction, along with background knowledge provides students a better chance of understanding the text they read. Besides, there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

9. Conclusion

This finding indicates that it takes fairly intensive vocabulary instruction to guarantee measurable gains in reading comprehension. This is because readers must possess in-depth knowledge of a substantial portion of the words in a text before comprehension can proceed smoothly. At this point, one might draw the conclusion that effective vocabulary instruction for comprehension would require the teachers to devote absolutely large amounts of time and energy to vocabulary instruction, covering every word in the selection that students might not know, with rich, intensive instruction that ties the words in with background knowledge.

10. Implication for Basic Education Curriculum

The implication of this study is that teachers at basic education level should augment traditional methods of instruction such as memorizing definitions with more intensive vocabulary instruction aimed at producing richer, deeper word knowledge. Furthermore, comprehension of text often requires much richer knowledge of a word than simple definitional knowledge. Curriculum planners and developers should include vocabulary instruction as one of the teaching techniques in the reading curriculum for basic education.

Vocabulary words should be provided as part of the content of the reading task in the basic education curriculum for junior secondary schools.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made that:

1. Teachers should include vocabulary instruction in teaching reading comprehension to facilitate more understanding.
2. Curriculum planners should equally provide vocabulary instruction as one of the teaching techniques in the basic education curriculum.

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