STIMULATING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN ENGLISH ORACY SKILLS USING THE PEER TEAM GRITTY METHOD

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Abstract

There is a growing call for English as a second language teachers to explore different learning environments and teaching options to spice up the traditional 'boring' English language classes. The onus lies on the language teachers to discover innovative methods and use same in their classes. It is against this background that this study investigated the effects the peer team gritty method would have in stimulating students' interest in English oracy skills. One research question and one null-hypothesis guided the study. The quasi-experimental research design involving non-equivalent control group was used for the study. A sample of 207 Js1 students drawn from eight intact classes in Anyigba Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria was used for the study. Pre-test and post-test were administered to all the groups (treatment and control). An English Oracy Skill Achievement Test (EOSAT) was used for data collection. The data collected was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study was that students exposed to the peer team gritty method achieved higher than their counterparts who were not exposed to it. The paper recommends, among others, that the English studies curriculum should be reviewed to incorporate the peer team gritty method in teaching oracy skills.

Introduction

Students' performance in English, in recent times, either in social interaction or as an educational tool, has fallen below expectation and this may not be unconnected with its pedagogy (Owolabi, 2016). The pedagogy of English is still substantially traditional in approach. Not much revolution is taking place in Nigerian classrooms to engender a shift from the traditional approach to innovative ones that would boost performance in a language that is guaranteed to stay with us for a long time. Although there may be no one-

fix-it pedagogical approach, whatever approach is adopted must be such that will achieve proficiency in a language that has become part of us. In this wise, it is imperative to have a change in our pedagogical approach to catch up with the spate of development in the world, the medium of which is the English language. This study was geared towards investigating the effects the peer team gritty method, which is innovative and learner-centered approach, will have in stimulating students' interests in oracy skills.

Oracy is the ability to express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech. It can be seen as an outcome whereby students learn to talk confidently, appropriately and sensitively. It is a process in which students learn through talk, deepening their understanding through dialogue with their teachers and peers (Alexander, 2016). It involves teachers and their students thinking carefully and deliberately about the sort of spoken English they are using. The term 'oracy' was coined by Andrew Wilkinson, a British researcher and educator, in the 1960s. The word was formed by analogy from literacy and numeracy. The purpose was to draw attention to the neglect of oral skills in education. Oracy, therefore, is to speaking what numeracy is to mathematics or literacy to reading and writing (Millard, 2018).

With employers now rating communication skills as their highest priority, above even qualifications, the ability to express ideas is more important than ever before. As Alexander (2016) submitted, teachers and employers of young people believe that life skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication are more important than academic qualifications. Yet oracy receives less attention in the school curriculum than literacy and numeracy. Children with good communication skills are four times likely to get five As – Cs at school certificate examinations (Dawes, Mercer &Wegerif, 2014). The benefits of oracy skills go far beyond academic achievement and employability. They boost a whole range of social, emotional and interpersonal skills including self-confidence, self-awareness, resilience and empathy (Gaunt, 2018). Having the oracy skills and confidence to speak up and believe in oneself has also been shown to enhance sense of happiness and well-being, preventing the isolation that comes from feeling side-lined. "If you teach kids to debate, you give them a chance to have their voice heard, and you give them the power not to be ignored" (Millard, 2018: p.162).

Young people who cannot express themselves verbally may suffer from behavioural problems, emotional and psychological difficulties and, in some cases, may descend into criminality (Dockrell, Bakopoulou& Law, 2012). High quality spoken dialogue in classrooms can significantly improve children's educational attainment. Spoken language plays a key role in cognitive development helping children understand the world around them.

Research evidence shows that oracy has a positive impact on academic and cognitive outcomes, self-esteem, well-being and mental health, social mobility, employability and civic engagement (Hanley, Slavin& Elliot, 2015; Jay, Willis & Thomas, 2017; and Nagda&Gurin, 2017).

Speech and communication lies at the heart of classroom practice. It is the predominant way in which teachers provide instruction and support to their students and is central to how most students engage with the curriculum (Millard, 2018). Teachers are therefore saddled with the responsibility of choosing innovative methods of teaching English oracy that will put the learners at the centre of learning experience. One of such methods could be the peer team gritty method.

The peer team gritty method is a method that inculcates persistency, determination and resilience, dragging alongside with it, self- regulation and qualities of working hard as part of learning experiences (Umunna &Amazu, 2018).Duckworth (2014: p.49) defines grit as "sticking with things over a very long term until you master them." She writes that "the gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his advantage is stamina". People who are not as bright as their peers compensate by working harder and with more determination; and their efforts usually pay off. According to Duckworth (2014), the grittiest students – not the smartest ones – usually earn the highest GPAs in examinations.

The gritty method was formulated by Angela Duckworth in 2014. Duckworth's work is part of a growing area of psychology research focused on what are loosely called "non-cognitve skills." The goal is to identify and measure the various skills and traits other than intelligence that contribute to human development and success. Duckworth found that "grittier people are dramatically more motivated than others to seek a meaningful, other-centered life." (p. 50). The students who try hardest did the best, and the students who didn't try very hard didn't do very well. Duckworth wanted to know the role of effort in a person's success.

The peer team gritty method is based on the belief that learning occurs when learners are actively involved. Ngwoke (2015) is of the view that students learn best in student-centered classrooms that actively involved the learner not only with the subject matter but also with their classmates. Noble & Henderson cited in Umunna &Amazu (2018) submitted that high quality interaction with peers is vital to academic success as students involved in those interactions feel valued and have already established bonds among themselves. The students see success as more of team work as well as individual responsibility.

The peer team gritty method is slightly different from the peer team or peer tutorial method but interwoven and intertwined with the cooperative and collaborative method of learning. However, the peer team gritty method is a situation in which there is peer interaction between learners that are slow, fast, introverts and extroverts, all made to learn together in a small group in the class. To ensure that the contributions students make to group discussion improve their reasoning and develop their understanding, students are also taught a number of 'talk moves' or 'roles.' These encourage students to develop and interact with their own and others' ideas by challenging, clarifying or probing a group member's ideas. Students are also taught to build or elaborate on each other's ideas, rather than merely stating their own thoughts with no relation to what has been said previously. They are taught when to introduce new line of inquiry or summarize a discussion and are encouraged to consider how these moves can help further their thinking as a group. Teaching students the oracy skills, require them to learn effectively through group talk which helps the students to develop their thinking and understanding (Gaunt, 2018).

The traditional method of teaching may not give the learners opportunity to tackle the intricacies of oracy skills in the English language which encompass physical, social and emotional, linguistic and cognitive aspects of learning. The reason being that the learners would be faced with two languages with different phonemic disparities, as the sound system of the second and that of the mother tongue tend to be a huge challenge to the learners as the struggle to learn the alphabets and phonetic sounds of their mother tongue and that of the second language, English. The peer team gritty method seems to be a method that could tackle this challenge and stimulate students' interests in oracy skills. It is on this premise that this study sought to investigate the effects the peer team gritty method will have in stimulating students' interest in English oracy skills.

One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. These are: what are the mean achievement scores of students taught English oracy skills and those taught with the conventional method? There is no significant difference in the mean achievement score of students taught English oracy skills and those taught with the conventional method.

Method

The study adopted a non-randomized quasi-experimental research design. The population of the study was all the junior secondary school one (JS1) students in the 12 public secondary schools in Anyigba Education Zone of Kogi State. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to draw 207

students from the 5,980 students that make up the population of JS1 students. The instrument for data collection was an English Oracy Skills Achievement Test (EOSAT) which was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Language Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation of Kogi State University, Anyigba. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Kudar-Richardson Formula 20 which yielded a co-efficient of 0.83. The two groups (treatment and control) were pre-tested and their scores kept. The experimental group was taught English oracy skills using the peer team gritty method while the control group was taught with the conventional lecture method. The treatment lasted for eight weeks. After treatment the reshuffled version of the same test was re-administered as post-test to the two groups. The research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

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

Groups	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest Stan.Dev.	Posttest Mean	Posttest Stan.Dev.	Gain Score
Experimental	104	10.39	6.40	16.40	6.53	6.01
Control	103	10.51	5.73	14.51	6.17	4.00

The result on table 1 shows that the experimental group (i.e. those taught with the peer team gritty method had a pre-test score of 10.39 and a standard deviation of 6.40. Their post-test score is 16.40 and a standard deviation of 6.53. The control group had a pre-test score of 10.51 and a standard deviation of 6.17. The gain score of the experimental group is 6.01 while the control group had a gain score of 4.00. Even though both the experimental and control groups gained as can be seen on table 1 above, the experimental group with the gain score of 6.01 achieved higher in English oracy skills than the control group with a gain score of 4.00.

Table 2: Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of students' post-test achievement score in   English oracy Skills

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	4557.458[a]	8	569.679	28.892	.000
Intercept	3290.330	1	3290.330	166.874	.000
Pre-test	3414.165	1	3414.165	173.155	.000
Method	226.812	1	226.812	8.431	0.01
Error	3904.050	198	19.717		
Total	57961.000	207			
Corrected Total	8461.478	206			

The result on table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between the achievement score of those exposed to the peer team gritty method and those not exposed to it. From the result it can be seen that the F-value of 8.431 is significant at 0.01. This value of F- is significant at 0.05 because 0.01 is less than 0.05, that is ($p = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null-hypothesis claiming no significant difference was rejected.

Discussion

The students exposed to the peer team gritty method achieved higher than those not exposed to it. This can be seen in the higher gain score of 6.01 of the experimental group against the gain score of 4.00 of the control group. Similarly, the analysis of covariance shows that there is a significant difference in the mean achievement score of those taught English oracy skills with the peer gritty method and those taught with the conventional method. This finding collaborates Umunna &Amazu (2018) who found that the peer team gritty method enhance primary school pupils' performance in English language. This is not surprising because the peer team gritty method does not encourage passivity in the classroom. Exploring the strategies used in classrooms to support students' language learning, Dockrell, Bakopoulou& Law (2012) submitted that small group work is the most common language learning opportunity. Promoting oracy in the classroom using the peer team gritty method has the potential to help diversify and strengthen pedagogy, and deepen learning (Millard, 2018).

The result of this study also agrees with the social constructivism theory of Vygotsky (1998) which emphasizes the impact of collaboration and negotiation on thinking and learning. The peer team gritty method provides students with experiences that allow them hypothesize, predict, manipulate, imagine and invent.

Conclusion

The finding of this study has shown that the pair team gritty method enhanced students' achievement better than the conventional method. The implication of this finding is that language teachers need to re-assess their classroom instructional practices. There is need to shift from classroom instructional practices that make learners passive to one that will actively involve learners such as the peer team gritty method.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The peer team gritty method should be adopted for teaching oracy skills in junior secondary schools.
2. The Ministry of Education should organize intensive training workshops on the peer team gritty method for English language teachers at the junior secondary level to acquaint them with the use of the method.
3. The English studies curriculum should be reviewed to incorporate the peer team gritty method of teaching.
4. In practice, students are encouraged to develop and revise their understanding through sustained and productive dialogue with their peers. When engaging in discussion, for example, students must have a system for turn-taking; they must ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute and that when somebody speaks, his/her ideas are respected.

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