

BRIDGING THE GENDER EDUCATIONAL GAP BY USE OF COMICS AND CARTOONS TO TEACH PUPILS

Eneh, A.N.¹ and Eneh, O.C.²

¹ Formerly of Department of Education Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

² Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract

Gender educational gap in Nigeria has become an issue. This study investigated the gender disparity in the learning achievement of pupils taught by use of comics and cartoons in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The instruments were cartoon sheets and comic strips, achievement tests, and observations. The data were analysed using standard deviation. The study found out that girls achieved significantly higher than boys when taught reading using cartoons and comics as against using the conventional method of teaching reading. It was recommended that the use of cartoons and comics in the teaching process should be introduced in the curriculum of schools in Nigeria as a way to bridge the gender educational gap in the country.

Introduction

Gender educational disparity is an issue in Nigeria, where various discriminations against women and girls still thrive. Girls are denied the right of schooling or prematurely withdrawn from school for child marriage, child labour, and other girl-child unfriendly practices. Many of the girls that attend school often lag behind the boys because of discriminatory parental care, which often tilts in favour of educating the males, who are entrusted with preserving the family name, lineage and heritage. The result is widening gender inequality (Eneh, 2000).

The Universal Basic Education was launched in Nigeria in 1999, making education compulsory up to the Junior Secondary level.

Other measures to minimize the gender educational gap need to be introduced in the education system in the country. This study investigated the possible bridging of the gender educational gap by the use of comics and cartoons in the teaching process. Specifically, the study was aimed at finding out whether there is gender related differences in the achievement of pupils exposed to the use of cartoons and comics in teaching reading.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Reading means recognizing letters and groups of letter as symbols that stand for particular sounds. The sounds, in turn, form words that express ideas in written or printed form (Lundsteen and Tarrow, 1981). Reading opens up the world of books to children and gives them valuable skills to unlock words and react to ideas in print.

Poor educational performance and the attendant drop from school have been traced to weakness in reading. Table 8.1 shows the results for English Language for the May/June West African Senior Secondary Schools Certificate Examinations 1998-2003.

Table 8.1: *English language results of SSC Examination, May/June 1998 - 2003*

| Year | Total entries | Total Sat | % Pass in credits 1-6 | % failure |
|------|---------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1998 | 694,227 | 689,245 | 32.54 | 52.46 |
| 1999 | 697,736 | 499,555 | 23.70 | 56.30 |
| 2000 | 726,138 | 636,064 | 10.81 | 64.18 |
| 2001 | 1,099,987 | 1,025,027 | 26.07 | 43.02 |
| 2002 | 1,215,832 | 909,888 | 24.57 | 42.61 |
| 2003 | 1,066,831 | 929,271 | 24.53 | 33.81 |

Source: WAEC Zonal Office, Enugu

Only 32.54% of the candidates obtained “credit” passes (grades 1-6) in 1998, 23.70% in 1999, 10.81% in year 2000, 26.07% in 2001, 24.57% in 2002, and 24.53% in 2003 (WAEC, 2004).

Bridging the Gender Educational Gap by Using Comics and Cartoons

One way to build interest in learning is by the use of comics and cartoons in teaching reading. Cartoons are preparatory drawings; any large sketch or design on paper, which represents scenes with or without reproduction of sounds, and are usually humorous. On the other hand, comics are a series of drawings that tell the sequence of a story in picture forms (World Book Encyclopedia, 2001).

Cartoons and comics are adventure stories in picture form, presenting the daily but dramatic activities of people. They help to explain complicated subjects, and contain valuable information in teaching or entertainment forms. The use of cartoons and comics as instructional materials brought about a new relevance to the educational system in America and beyond. They were added to give more information and boost the narrative flow of stories. Cartoons and comics have been used and found effective in teaching in America. They have been found to be effective in teaching Igbo L2 (Igbo as 2nd Language) in Lagos State of Nigeria. They have also been found to be effective in teaching French language. They may be effective in teaching reading (Winsor, 1980 and Hand, 2000).

Materials and Methods

The quasi-experimental design was used in the study. Specifically, the non-randomized experimental/control group, pretest–posttest design was adopted because the experiment was carried out intact-classes. Intact-classes were used to avoid disruption of normal classes. For this reason, there was no randomization of pupils into treatment and control groups (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2: *Research Design*

| Grouping | Pre – test | Treatment | Post – test |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Experimental | X ₁ | T | X ₂ |
| Control | Y ₁ | C | Y ₂ |

Key

- X₁ Pre-test
- X₂ Post-test
- T Treatment
- C No treatment

The study was carried out in Enugu South Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State of Nigeria. The target population of the study was all the 861 Primary Two pupils enrolled in the 25 primary schools in Enugu South LGA in the 2004/2005 school year (State Primary Education Board, SPEB, Enugu). The reasons for the choice of Primary Two are:

- (i) The conventional method of teaching is most prevalent at this level.
- (ii) Pupils at this level need to be given an early start with correct instructional materials and method in teaching reading.
- (iii) Pupils of this level are within the “sensitive age” for the introduction of reading as recommended by Montessori (1970-1952) in Ellis (1975).
- (iv) The comic audience consists mainly of children between the ages of seven and eighteen (Robinson, 1981), and Primary Two pupils are seven years plus.

First, purposive sampling technique was used to select two primary schools, based on the following criteria:

1. The Schools are public schools.
2. The teachers of the classes are of the same sex (female).
3. These teachers possess the same professional qualifications (TC II and N.C.E certificates).

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A 30-pupil intact-class was randomly sampled from each of two primary schools in Enugu South LGA (Uwani area of Enugu Urban). This gave a total of 60 pupils. The one served as Treatment Class, while the other served as Control Class. The Treatment Class contained 12 male pupils and 18 female pupils. The Control Class contained 16 male pupils and 14 female pupils. Thus, total number of male pupils in the Treatment and Control Classes was 28, while the female pupils totaled 32 for both classes. Each of the classes was used intact because the school authority did not allow randomization of pupils into treatment and control groups to avoid disruption of normal classes in the school.

The instruments used for the study were:

- (i) Comic strips and cartoon sheets;
- (ii) Observation schedule; and
- (iii) Achievement tests.

Two different researcher-made achievement tests were used to assess reading comprehension of the pupils. The two classes were observed by the researchers during reading lessons with the following aims:

- (i) Identification and spelling of objects on the flash cards;
and
- (ii) Establishing reading fluency.

Cartoon sheets and comic strips (teaching aids), based on the topical content in the module from the National Primary Education Commission Curriculum, were prepared and presented to the teachers of the Treatment Class. These teachers were trained and used as research assistants. They taught the lessons and administered the tests. The teachers also recorded the scores. On their part, the teachers of the Control Class repeated the teaching process without comics and cartoons. The researchers did the observation and monitoring in both classes.

The period of reaching lasted for three weeks. The topics were based on the content in the module. The content was ‘Passages describing actions in the past’ and taken week by week as arranged below:

- i) Week 1: Identification of letters of the alphabet and letter sounds.
- ii) Week 2 Topic: Mrs. Agu the school teacher.
Step I: Use of flash cards to introduce key objects in the first cartoon sheet. Step II: Reading of the comic sequence.
Step III: Questions based on the cartoon sheets.
- iii) Week 3 Topic: Chika and his school.
Step I: Use of flash cards to introduce key objects in the second cartoon sheet.
Step II: Reading of the comic sequence.
Step III: Questions based on the cartoon sheet.

Results and Discussion

Table 8.3a contains the gender performance in reading when comics and cartoons were not used in teaching.

Table 8.3a: *Gender performance in reading without using comics and cartoons in teachin.*

| Groups | Gender levels | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|------|--------|-----------|------|-------|-----------|------|
| | Male | | | Female | | | Total | | |
| | N | \bar{X} | SD | N | \bar{X} | SD | N | \bar{X} | SD |
| Treatment | 12 | 1.76 | 0.08 | 18 | 1.77 | 0.09 | 30 | 1.77 | 0.09 |
| Control | 16 | 1.73 | 0.04 | 14 | 1.72 | 0.06 | 30 | 1.72 | 0.05 |
| Total | 28 | 3.49 | 0.12 | 32 | 3.49 | 0.15 | 60 | 3.49 | 0.14 |

When the pupils were taught reading without comics and cartoons, the male pupils in the Treatment Group had a mean score of 1.76, while the females had 1.77, showing an inconsequential difference between the performance of the males and females. In the Control Class, the males had a mean score of 1.73, while the females had 1.72. Again,

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there was insignificant difference between the performance of the males and females.

Table 8.3b contains the gender performance in reading when comics and cartoons were used in teaching.

Table 3b: *Gender performance in reading, using comics and cartoons in teaching*

| Groups | Gender levels | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|------|--------|-----------|------|-------|-----------|------|
| | Male | | | Female | | | Total | | |
| | N | \bar{X} | SD | N | \bar{X} | SD | N | \bar{X} | SD |
| Treatment | 12 | 3.50 | 0.08 | 18 | 8.72 | 0.06 | 30 | 8.63 | 0.07 |
| Control | 16 | 1.75 | 0.03 | 14 | 2.00 | 0.06 | 30 | 1.88 | 0.04 |
| Total | 28 | 5.25 | 0.06 | 32 | 10.72 | 0.12 | 60 | 10.51 | 0.11 |

The average performances were 1.77 for females and 1.76 for males when teaching was done without comics and cartoons. This is in line with other research findings that girls generally perform better in reading than boys. Doman (1994) maintained that boys do better in subjects like mathematics and sciences than in reading. Jans (1997) opined that boys manifest traits such as competitiveness and leadership in class and are less interested in reading and languages. Also, female pupils achieved significantly better than their male counterparts, especially in tasks relating to verbal concepts studies (Mansaray, 1988; Okeke, 1994; and Eze, 1999).

According to a recent work, only 51% Level III male pupils passed into Level IV Class in English (broken into reading and writing), compared with their female counterparts with 63%. Also, 38% of the male pupils passed into the said Level IV Class, whereas 49% of female pupils passed the examination in 1997. Still in 2005, only 89% of boys passed the examination to Level IV, as against 91% of girls who passed the same examination in England (Sewell, 2006).

When comics and cartoons were used in teaching reading, the male pupils in the Treatment Group had a mean score of 3.50, up from the score of 1.76 when comics and cartoons were not used. This

showed 98.9% improvement in learning reading by males when comics and cartoons are used in teaching upon when they were not used. The females had a mean score of 8.72, up from the score of 1.77 when comics and cartoons were not used.

Learning reading improved for both male and female pupils taught reading with comics and cartoons, from when they were taught without comics and cartoons. But, the experiment showed 392.66% improvement in learning reading by females when comics and cartoons are used in teaching over and above when they were not used. It also showed that learning reading by females was better enhanced (by 392.66%) when the pupils were taught with comics and cartoons, than in the case of males enhanced by 98.9%.

Since, reading is a formidable tool for acquiring education, using comics and cartoons in teaching it will bridge the gender educational gap. While the males will move at a rate of 98.9% improvement, females will move at a rate of 392.66%, until the gap is bridged.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study discovered that teaching reading with cartons and comics improved the performance of female pupils in reading better than it did for boys. The introduction of the use of comics and cartoons in teaching reading in schools is therefore recommended as a means of bridging the gender educational gap in Nigeria.

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