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The Effect of Directed Reading-Thinking Activity on Achievement in Reading Comprehension of Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

A student's ability to read and understand written texts is one of the fundamental skills that enable students to succeed in his academics. However, for many students in Nigerian schools with learning disabilities reading comprehension is the major deficiency. This study, investigated the effectiveness of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) in improving reading comprehension of secondary students with learning disabilities. The study employed a pre-test, post-test, control group, quasi-experimental research design. The design utilised a 2x2x2 factorial layout. Simple random sampling technique was used to select One Hundred (100) Junior Secondary Class 2 from two junior public schools. The presence of different levels (ranging from mild to severe) of learning disabilities was the major criterion for this selection. Screening was conducted with the Myklebust Rating Scale ($r = 0.76$). Participants in the experimental group were exposed to five weeks of reading comprehension training using the directed reading thinking activity strategy. The control group was not treated. Three null hypotheses were formulated, while data collected were analysed using t-test statistics. The results showed that participants exposed to the directed reading thinking activity strategy performed better than their counterparts in the control group. Thus, since the directed reading thinking activity strategy was found to be superior to the conventional method.

Background of the Study

Students with learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group of individuals that exhibit substantial academic deficits in the areas of reading, writing, reasoning, social skills, motor skills, memory strategies, and emotional stability as confirmed by most scholars (Lerner, 1997). Bender (2003) affirmed that difficulty in reading achievement historically has been a marker for students with learning disabilities. This observation is consistent with Haring, McCormick and Haring's (1994) assertion that most students with learning disabilities score below the tenth percentile on achievement measures in reading, written language or mathematics. In addition, Lerner (1997) stressed that as a result of their slow, laboured reading, students with reading disabilities often do not comprehend much of what they read, and the attention they give to figuring out the words keeps them from understanding the text's message.

Lerner (1997) then contended that as students progress through school, reading comprehension requirements increase substantially and difficulties with comprehension become intensified. Klingner, Artiles and Barletta (2006) further noted that as students move through classes, the curriculum makes greater cognitive demands on them, especially in the expectations of reading literacy for the content areas. According to these scholars, textbooks naturally, become more detailed and comprehensive, while teachers and parents expect students with learning disabilities to read and derive meaning from large amounts of texts in various subject areas. As a result of the great difficulties they experience in their reading comprehension, secondary school students with learning disabilities hardly get to realise these expectations. In the opinion of these researchers, unless teachers utilise effective reading strategies for students with learning disabilities particularly at the Junior Secondary School, students' learning and reading problems may worsen because of the heavy curriculum demands of the secondary school.

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) developed by Stauffer (1969, 1975) and revised by Richek, Caldwell, Jennings and Lerner (1996) is an instructional strategy, that engages students in a step-by-step process that guides them through understanding and thinking about text. This meta-cognitive strategy teaches students to acquire and activate their own purposes for reading and develops their reading and thinking processes. During DRTA, readers are encouraged to review what they know about a topic, making predictions about what they will learn, and follow through with an evaluation of what they actually learned as well as how they actually learned as well as how their assertions pertained to what they read. DRTA extends learning to high-order thought processes and is useful for processing all types of text (Tankersley, 2005).

The primary objective of this strategy is to develop a skill in reading critically. A consistent feature in a directed reading-thinking activity lesson is that students share and even challenge each other's ideas during the predict-read-improve cycle of the DRTA. Group members are responsible to one another for proving predictions, offering one another suggestions or generally maintaining self-respect for each member of the group. Similarly, students listen to the opinions of others and modify their own views using additional information provided by group or class members (Department of Education, Tasmania, School Education Division, 2004).

Stauffer (1969) described a number of distinguishing features about group DRTA activities:

1. Students of approximately the same reading level are grouped together.
2. The group size ranges from two to ten students to promote interaction and participation.
3. All students in a group read the same material at the same time. This permits each student to compare and contrast predictions, justifications for answers and evaluations with those of his peers.
4. Purposes for reading are declared by the students; students ask questions to become active readers and thinkers.

5. Answers to questions are validated. Proof is found and tested, and the group judges whether or not the offered proof is trustworthy.
6. Immediate feedback helps develop integrity and a regard for authenticity.
7. The teacher serves as a facilitator or moderator and asks provocative questions that require the students to interpret and make inferences from what they have read.

Stauffer (1969) suggested that once the students are comfortable with the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity process, they should be encouraged to use an individualised DRTA. In other words, the students should use this systematic, predictive process as they read individually. DRTA promotes active comprehension among students. In addition, it is a useful tool for teachers to model accurate and appropriate reading skills (Richardson & Morgan, 1997). The prediction component of DRTA especially encourages active reading and serves as a way for the reader to get involved and interested in the text. Almasi (2003) asserted that the DRTA, especially making predictions, helps students focus their attention on the text and encourages active reading.

According to the FOR-PD'S Reading Strategy of the month (January, 2006), a DRTA lesson may involve the following steps:

1. Students set purposes, make predictions: Begin by quickly surveying the title and/or subheadings, illustrations, tables. Ask an open ended (referential), question: What do you think the story (passage, chapter, selection) is about? What do you think will happen in the story? Why do you think so?
2. Read the selection: Students are asked to read silently or aloud to a predetermined marker or logical stopping point in the text. During this first silent reading of the selection, the teacher observes students reading to note difficulties and gives further help in eliminating word difficulties. However, before a student asks for help, the student should have gone

through certain steps in attempting to recognise a word he/she did not know instantly.

3. Confirm, adjust or revise predictions: During this step, students engage in a discussion about what they have read. Initially, the teacher will lead this discussion by asking thought-provoking or reflective types of questions. It is at this stage that students will either - confirm, reject, or refine their predictions and justify their ideas with reference to the text. Students then make new predictions. The teacher thus challenges students with the question: How do you know?
4. Read the story and initiate follow up activities: This step includes:
 - a) Repeating steps two and three as often as is necessary (to the end of the material).
 - b) Initiate the final discussion by asking open ended questions. The aim of the discussion period is to help to interpret the material. Students are led to discuss related concepts, and to consider the content of the selection in light of their own experiences. This should be relative to the purposes set, and done informally. Later, questions could be formulated that require written responses

Following the introduction of the DRTA, several researchers have carried out studies on the effectiveness of the DRTA and made interesting discoveries. For instance, Draheim (1986) investigated the effects of four instructional strategies or combinations of strategies on student recall and use of main and subordinate ideas in analytical essays about reading texts. The strategies included (i) Mapping, (ii) Directed Reading-thinking Activity. (DRTA) (iii) DRTA + Mapping, and (iv) Reading for main ideas and underlining. This four- and - a- half week experimental study involved students in remedial education courses but did not specifically mention students with disabilities. The researcher discovered that students who were taught the DRTA plus mapping strategy could recall and

use the largest number of main ideas but were less likely to use them in their writing.

Another study was conducted by Siripong (1998) on implementation of directed reading-thinking activity to develop English reading comprehension and comprehension monitoring abilities of higher vocational diploma level students revealed that after the students were taught using DRTA, their English reading comprehension scores and their abilities in using comprehension monitoring strategies were increased. This study was conducted during a period of eight weeks. It involved thirty-six second year diploma level marketing students of Rajamangala Institute of Technology, Northern Campus, Bangkok, Thailand. A positive correlation between the students' English reading comprehension and their comprehension monitoring abilities was discovered.

During a practicum organised by the Nova Southeastern University, DeFoe (1999) utilised the directed reading-thinking activity strategies to teach reading comprehension skills to middle grades language arts students who frequently failed to make passing scores in reading comprehension exercises. The programme included three specific strategies. The first strategy was to teach the students higher-order thinking and metacognitive skills by using SRA (Science Research Associates) activities, Directed Reading/Thinking Activities, and Question and Answer Relationship Strategies. The second strategy was to teach the students decoding by analogy. The third strategy was to use cooperative learning while working on reading comprehension assignments. An analysis of the data revealed that students did improve their reading comprehension skills, but not significantly.

In a similar study, Schorzman and Cheek (2004) investigated a teacher-directed version of DRTA in general education classroom; this research may or may not have included students with disabilities. Schorzman and Cheek (2004) examined the use of DRTA in combination with a 'Pre-reading Plan' (Langer & Nicholich, 1981) and graphic organisers (Barron, 1969). Three middle school teachers in one school used a combination of strategies to teach reading

and the results were compared to a control group of three other teachers at a different middle school in the district under different conditions in which intensive test preparation was a focus for reading instruction. The findings of the study were mixed. The package of instructional strategies appeared to create significant pre-post students' gains on a cloze test but not on a standardised reading test. Findings were complicated by issues such as logistical constraints on instructional time, teachers, lack of willingness to change curricula for the control group setting, and a research design using intact classrooms that may have had some pre-existing differences in student ability levels.

On the issue of gender and reading comprehension, Dolittle and Welch (1989) noted that boys are better in reading than girls depending on the material to be read, whether it is a masculine or feminine material. On the contrary, Falaye (2001) argued that girls are more articulate verbally than boys. She added that girls also possess superior vocabulary than boys. Ayodele (1986) also, shares the same conviction that females have a slight edge over males in language performance. However, Obe (1983) found no difference between the reading performance of boys and girls. Lazarus (2009) found no significant differences between achievement in reading comprehension of male and female participants that were treated with Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) and Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) and the control group. Additionally, Allan, Ellis and Pearson (2005) reported that a gender analysis of the impact of literature circles on vocabulary showed that the boys' vocabulary scores revealed significant improvements but the girls' did not. Further investigation by the researchers found a significant difference on the attitudes and engagement in reading for both boys and girls. According to them, both the boys and girls developed more positive attitudes to reading in school at the end of the study, but the gain for boys was larger than that of girls.

Statement of the Problem

Although several Nigerian learners in the junior secondary classes exhibit some level of preparedness for academic activities, because of the subtle nature of learning disabilities some of these students not only encounter problems with decoding but also do not have the necessary skills sufficient to deal fluently with subject-matter reading demands. They also lack the skills and strategies necessary to meet comprehension expectations. Understanding printed text requires proficiency in a number of skills such as reading words, comprehending language and accessing background language. All these are basic language skills that students with learning disabilities do not possess. This study therefore, seeks to investigate the effects of directed reading-thinking activity strategy to enhance achievement in reading comprehension of secondary school students with learning disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined whether the directed reading thinking activity strategy would have any influence on achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities examined in this study. Furthermore, the study determined whether gender difference would have any influence on achievement in reading comprehension of the participants using the directed reading thinking activity strategy. It further ascertained if levels of reading disabilities (mild/severe) would have any effect on achievement in reading comprehension of participants through the use of the directed reading thinking activity strategy.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of students

- with learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and those taught using the conventional method of teaching.
2. There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of male students with learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and that of female students with learning disabilities who were exposed to the same treatment.
 3. There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of students with mild learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and students with severe learning disabilities exposed to the same treatment.

Research Design

This study employed a pre-test, post-test, control group, quasi-experimental research design. The design utilised a 2x2x2 factorial layout consisting of six cells. There are two cells of male and female students with learning disabilities assigned to the experimental group (directed reading thinking activity) while two other cells of male and female students with learning disabilities were assigned to the control group. Similarly, there are two cells of mild and severe students with learning disabilities assigned to the experimental group as well as two other cells of mild and severe students with learning disabilities assigned to the control group.

Table 1: The 2x2x2 factorial matrix of the quasi-experiment is presented below:

Treatment	Mild Reading Disabilities		Severe Reading Disabilities		Total
	Male (M)	Female (F)	Male	Female	
Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (T ₁)	12	13	12	13	50
Control (C)	12	14	12	12	50
Sub-Total	24	27	24	25	
		51		49	
Grand Total					100

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study adopted multi-stage and random sampling technique in selecting the participants for the study. One hundred (100) students with learning disabilities (50 boys and 50 girls) were engaged in the study. The presence of different levels of learning disabilities was the major criterion for this selection. The Pupil Rating Scale by Myklebust (1971, 1981) was administered to Junior Secondary Class II students in the selected schools in order to screen for learning disabilities. A further screening with the Reading Ability Test was conducted. Students who did not show significant degrees of learning disabilities were excluded from the study. Finally, fifty (50) participants were randomly selected from each of the following public junior secondary schools in Lagos State. Selected students were further assigned to treatment and control groups through random sampling.

1. Stadium Junior Grammar School, Ifako/Ijaiye Local Government Area.
2. Oke-ira Junior Grammar School, Ikeja Local Government Area.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three instruments were used in the study. The Pupil Rating Scale is a screening instrument for students with learning disabilities. It was designed by Myklebust in 1971 and revised in 1981. The scale consists of questions on five major behavioural characteristics namely: Auditory comprehension, Spoken language, Orientation, Motor co-ordination and Personal social behaviour. In the section on auditory comprehension, for instance, students are rated on questions that focus on students' ability in comprehending word meanings. Specifically, the teacher indicates on the rating scale whether a student has extreme immature level of understanding (1), whether he fails to grasp simple word meanings, and misunderstands words at grade level (2), whether has good grasp of vocabulary for age and grade (3), whether he understands all grade-level vocabulary as well as higher-level word meaning (4), or whether he has superior understanding of vocabulary and understands many abstract words (5). Another question in this section requires the teacher to indicate the student's ability in respect to following instructions. For instance, is the student unable to follow instructions; always confused (1), does the student usually follow simple instructions but often needs individual help (2), does the student follow instructions that are familiar and not complex (3), does the student remember and follow extended instructions (4), or is the student unusually skilful in remembering and following instructions (5)? Pupil Rating Scale is a standardised instrument. The author of this scale normalised it on a large population and found the instrument to be valid as a screening device. Ikujuni (1995) and Kanu (2004) revalidated the scale on Nigerian population and also realised high construct validity. Likewise, Lazarus (2009) obtained a Guttman Split-half test on the instrument that showed a reliability coefficient of 0.76.

The reading ability test is a thirty-item test developed by the researcher. The purpose of the test is to: (i) measure the reading ability of students. (ii) categorise participants into mild and severe reading disabilities groups. This test measures the ability to relate information, draw inferences,

recall fact, identify main ideas, understand sequence of event, use context clues to derive meaning and spell words correctly.

Section A has ten questions based on test of reading comprehension. Section B was based on vocabulary development including questions on context clues, as well as arrangement or matching of words to form meaningful sentences. There are ten questions in this section.

Section C is a test of spellings. There are five questions in this section. While Section D is a test of writing skill that requires students to tell a story by completing the blank spaces in given sentences with the right words. Examples of test items in the reading ability test are: Section B: Vocabulary Building---Complete the following sentences by filling in the blank spaces with the words given. (*unfriendly, exciting, performance, wedged, entertained*).

- Children are often very ----- as they tease, mock and laugh at each other.
- The housemaster praised the ----- of the winning team.
- The native dancers ----- the guests with their beautiful dances.

Lazarus (2009) validated this instrument by administering the test on eighty students with learning disabilities. The test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70. This was adjudged to be highly satisfactory.

Moreover, the researcher used the English Comprehension Achievement Test to obtain the pre-test and post-test data for this study. The test consists of two reading passages which are related to the background of the subjects and selected from Effective English for Junior Secondary School, Book 2. Participants were expected to answer ten questions from each of the two passages to give a total of twenty questions. These questions (which include multiple choice questions and recall/inferential questions) are intended to examine students' ability to identify main ideas, supporting details, draw inferences, recall facts and comprehend the meaning of words in context.

In an earlier study, Lazarus (2009) administered the English Comprehension Achievement Test to eighty (80) students with learning disabilities in Junior Secondary II, who were not part of the sample selected for this study, the responses were used to compute the reliability using Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21) and the reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, showing that the instrument was reliable.

Procedure for Test Administration

The researcher obtained permission from the school principals of the two schools before commencement. In each of the two schools, the researcher used the school library because it is a noise free area. Lessons were fixed during long-break periods. The researcher introduced token reinforcement system (such as giving students chips, stars, biscuits for each desirable response or behaviour displayed by the participants) to serve as a source of motivation.

The programme was carried out twice a week for five weeks. The duration for each lesson was forty minutes. Five reading passages were carefully selected from Junior English Project by Grant, Olagoke, Nnamonu and Jowitt. A total of ten lessons were held apart from the pre-test and post-test sessions. At the end of the fifth week training in reading comprehension the post test was administered. Students in the experimental group and those in the control group answered the post test questions.

Data Analysis

The three listed hypotheses were analysed using t-test statistics. Their analyses are presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and those taught using the conventional method of teaching.

Table 2: Comparison of Post Treatment Result of Reading Comprehension of Participants in Experimental Group versus the Control Group

Instructional Strategy	No.	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t cal.	t tab.
Directed Reading Thinking Activity	50	18.12	11.61	98	2.02	1.96
Control	50	13.92	9.06			

Table 2 above shows that t-calculated (2.02) is greater than t-tabulated (1.96). The meaning of this is that after the treatment had been given using the directed reading thinking activity, there was significant difference between the control group and the experimental group. The result further reveals a post-test mean score of 18.12 by students who were taught with directed reading thinking activity as against a lower post-test mean score of 13.92 obtained by participants in the control group. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of male students with learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and that of female students with learning disabilities who were exposed to the same treatment.

Table 3: Comparison of Post Treatment Result of Reading Comprehension of Male and Female Students Exposed to Directed Reading Thinking Activity

Gender	No.	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t cal.	t tab.
Male	24	19.25	14.07	48	.657	1.96
Female	26	17.08	8.93			

The null hypothesis is accepted following data on Table 3 above. This reveals that there is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of male students with learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and female students

exposed to the same treatment. In addition, the mean scores show that male participants performed better in the reading comprehension achievement test than their female counterparts ($x = 19.25$ for males and $x = 17.08$ for females).

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of students with mild learning disabilities who were taught using directed reading thinking activity and students with severe learning disabilities exposed to the same treatment.

Table 4: Comparison of Post Treatment Result of Reading Comprehension of Participants with Mild Learning Disabilities and those with Severe Learning Disabilities Exposed to Directed Reading Thinking Activity

Gender	No.	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t cal.	t tab.
Mild	26	26.77	6.94	48	8.73	1.96
Severe	24	8.75	7.66			

The null hypothesis is rejected following data on Table 4 above. It shows that there is a significant difference between the achievement in reading comprehension of students with mild learning disabilities and students with severe learning disabilities who were exposed to the directed reading thinking activity strategy. Moreover, participants with mild learning disabilities obtained a higher mean score ($x = 26.77$) than their counterparts with severe learning disabilities ($x = 8.75$).

Discussion of Results

This present study utilised the Directed Reading Thinking Activity and also testifies to the superiority of the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity over the conventional method. In fact, the control group proved that students with learning disabilities will continue to perform poorly in their reading comprehension if students and teachers utilise the conventional method (that is-read and explain) continually,

without adopting research-based strategies that are effective. In addition, Siripong, (1998) provided evidence to the usefulness of Directed Reading-Thinking Activity in reading instruction in regular education classroom. Her study revealed that after the students were taught using Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, their English reading comprehension scores and their abilities in using comprehension monitoring strategies were higher. This present study supports Siripong's (1998) finding that teachers' use of the DRTA strategy led to improved students' outcomes in reading comprehension as well as in the use of comprehension monitoring strategies.

In addition, it is necessary to mention that the present study corroborates the assertion made by Richardson and Morgan (1997) that with correct practice of DRTA, students will begin to engage in "sturdy-reading" and become independent and responsible learners. Almasi (2003) in her own opinion believed that DRTA especially making predictions helps students focus their attention on the text and encourages active reading. Thus, the finding of this study proves these assertions right.

The findings of this study also indicated a significant main effect of reading disabilities on reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. Participants with mild reading disabilities performed better than participants with severe reading disabilities when exposed to the two treatment groups and the control.

Furthermore, this study supports the findings of Lovett, Borden, Lacerenza, Frijters, Steinbach and De Palma (2000) who conducted a study aimed at determining the efficacy of a combination of phonological and strategy-based remedial approaches for reading disabilities. They found out that with intensive remediation, certain reading skills such as sound, blending, and letter-sound learning abilities of severely disabled sample could be improved. It then implies that although the mild participants obtained higher post-test scores in reading comprehension as indicated by this study, participants with severe reading disabilities equally benefited to some extent from this study. Therefore, teachers may need

to deliberately teach students with reading disabilities specific comprehension strategies to assist them in the remediation of their reading disabilities

This result lent credence to the previous empirical findings on the effect of gender on achievement in reading. For instance, this finding supports that of Obe (1983) who found no difference between the reading performance of boys and girls. Likewise, this finding is in line with Lazarus (2009) found no significant differences between achievement in reading comprehension of male and female participants that were treated with directed reading thinking activity (DRTA) and collaborative strategic reading (CSR) and the control group. Furthermore, the higher mean scores of male participants in this study corroborate the result of Allan, Ellis and Pearson (2005). According to these researchers following a gender analysis of the impact of literature circles on vocabulary, boys' vocabulary scores showed significant improvements but the girls' did not.

Conclusion

The weakness of the control group to develop efficient readers has been discovered. Therefore teachers in our secondary schools ought not to continue with the ineffective conventional method of teaching reading comprehension which obviously is yielding no gains as far as students with learning disabilities in reading are concerned. Therefore, directed reading-thinking activity instructional strategy should be tools for teachers to add to their repertoire of knowledge in order to enhance their effectiveness in teaching as well as improve learning outcomes for students with learning disabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Directed Reading Thinking Activity Strategy be adopted as mode of instruction

in the teaching of English Language to all students in all classrooms, particularly, students with learning disabilities.

2. English language teachers should endeavour to instruct their students on how to think critically and thoughtfully about the material they read. As revealed by this study, it is vital for teachers of reading to ensure that their students are able to locate quality information and to analyse, evaluate and think divergently. Without these abilities, students may not be able to attain a deeper understanding about the topic at hand.
3. Regular in-service trainings should be organised for teachers such as seminars, workshops, symposia, conferences, and short term certificate and diploma courses. The primary goal of such professional development training should be to expose regular and special education teachers to appropriate reading strategies and equip them for the proper implementation of such reading strategies for effective teaching of their students.
4. Policy makers should reconsider the idea of introducing reading as a subject on the school time-table. The reason for this is because students need to engage in adequate and constant practices of reading to enable them master the decoding and comprehension skills in reading.
5. Teachers should involve students actively in reading-related activities such as book talks, dramatic readings, dramatic plays, debates based on reading texts, pantomime, preparation of visual guides such as story maps to help them recall specific story elements, display of art related to the text, presentations based on recommended texts, essay writing competitions, music, videos on reading texts et cetera.

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