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INTEGRATING HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACY STUDIES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Home and School Literacy Studies can be integrated to improve English Language Instruction in schools in Enugu State.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Observation/ Participant observation approach was adopted for this study. Conceptual framework was developed to connect literacy outside the school setting with those of school to get optimal results and improve the quality of literacy instruction. The study adopted emergent theory on literacy studies that emphasizes on children's literacy studies by adopting funny activities as outside school curriculum.

Findings: The paper identified home literacy practices, though mostly social in outlook, pattern and purpose, create varying experiences in the learners that get them ready for literacy and language development. The paper identified story telling art, riddles, alphabets songs, and games as some of the literacy practices in the traditional Enugu communities.

Practical Implication: Children literacy and language development may be hampered if much emphasizes is not paid to home literacy practices. Therefore effort must always be made to integrate Home and School literacy studies as that will always help the children in literacy and language development.

Originality/Value: It is recommended that there should be synergy between home and school literacy studies. It identified literacy practices, literacy and reading instructions through jolly phonics, social clubs prayer, bible reading and exhortation on school assembly among others. It suggested step for connecting home and school literacies for example, encouraging oral composition before written composition, making language lessons communicative in focus, use of ICT to support literacy and language development among others.

Keywords: Integrating, Home Literacy, School Literacy, English Language, Instruction

Paper Type: Conceptual

Introduction

Parents feature prominently in any discussion on the home environment and its significant influence on the child's school achievement. In fact, the role of parents as children's first teachers is recognized worldwide. Experts have acknowledged that the quality of preschool learning is determined by parental level of educational attainment and socio-economic status. Research (Egalite, 2016) suggests that highly educated parents are more likely than their less-educated counterparts to read to their children and those children of educated parents are capable of more complex speech and have more extensive vocabularies before they even

start school. It has also been reported that parental involvement in children's education significantly influences their achievement in English language (Ebuta&Ekpo-Eloma, 2013).

Learning of English language centres on the development of two areas oracy skills (listening and speaking) and literacy skills (reading/writing). Clearly, oracy skills are attained before literacy skills. A form of changeover occurs from the child's oral language attainment level to the written language. A growing child requires a good

understanding of the spoken word before decoding written symbols and then understanding entire texts or creating information. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine the home and school literacy studies in Enugu State communities through observations, and to highlight their potentials in English language.

Statement of the Problem

Much emphasis has been laid on the role of parents as first teacher in their children's academic development. Evidence from experts has shown that children from educated family have quality preschool knowledge than their counterparts from less privileged enlightened family. A lot of researches have been carried out to see if home literacy studies can enhance school children's quality education.

Montero et al (2014) emphasize on engaging children on home skills such as academic games to enable children have good foundation in formal education. Riddle and Honan (2016) are of the view that children need extra-home engagement such as home teachers to make the children active in learning. However, not enough attention has been given to the area of consolidating home and school literacy practice to improve the children's academic success especially in English language. This is the gap the study fills.

Meaning of Literacy

The old definition of literacy as the ability to read and write has long changed to accommodate the ever-changing learner needs and global trends. Today, literacy is defined as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society" (UNESCO, 2013). These definitions suggest that literacy embraces general skills and abilities that children need in their years of schooling and beyond. Literacy and numeracy have been called the foundations of formal education (Montero, Newmaster&

Ledger, 2014). The 21st Century is generally referred to as the knowledge-economy (Abril, 2012). For the child to become an active member of the present generation, he requires such knowledge and literacy skills that will make him access, understand, analyze and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school (Riddle & Honan, 2016). What then constitutes literacy studies? This question is considered next.

Literacy Studies: what are they?

Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe literacy studies as "the general cultural way of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives." (p.7). Put differently, it refers to what people do with literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Edwards (2012) corroborates Barton and Hamilton's (2000) view that literacy practices involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. Written texts and how they are produced and used is a crucial aspect of literacy events. These are a set of social practices that are observable in events which are mediated by written texts. Moreover, engaging in digital technology development, social networking, photo sharing, digital storytelling and conducting online searches are all part of literacy studies.

Review of related Studies

What Research has said about Home Influence on School Literacy Development

In the early years of primary education when children generally learn to read and write, the emphasis is on the 'how' of reading and writing (Riddle & Honan, 2016). The Nigerian curriculum for primary education emphasizes that children need to make connections between their oral language and written language they are learning (FRN, 2012). At this early stage, children need to learn how to understand and recognized the sounds of letters and words as well as the connection between spoken and written words. They also need to develop reading fluency, be able to read without stumbling, to recognize and use a variety to learn, pupils and students are expected to engage in literacy practices across

all the subjects in the curriculum. Modelled, shared, guided and independent reading and writing would therefore, be a daily practice (Riddle & Honan, 2016).

Students seem to learn the meaning of print when they have access to literacy materials in their immediate environment and understand its role in their daily lives. Students' literacy practices can be accessed from what they do throughout the day and which one involves reading and writing. Or anything they do or like to do that involves reading and writing. Or pictures/icons that represent reading and writing practices that are really important to them and define who they are or want to become. These activities also define the child's interest in literacy in the home, school and beyond.

There are differences in the nature of the home and school for various students. According to McCarthy (1997), some students' homes and school are highly connected. In homes where parents are educated and have professional employment, children have frequent contact with the two parents, it can be observed that such children engage more in literacy practices that have facilitation for their academic work. In such homes also, it is common to see items associated with traditional literacy such as novels, books, newspaper, magazines and children's books. Children /students have family members who read to them on a regular basis or encourage them to read regularly. In such homes, children and parents are involved in literacy activities that focus on instrumental and social interactional purpose. They use literacy for recreation as well. At school, such children tend to be more open to literacy activities. They may share their writing and or stories with the entire class and comfortably express themselves verbally or through writing about events that occurred outside the school. They could bring items to show classmates or tell stories of what they have seen on television. In the same vein, children who share features of their lives at school through writing and storytelling, also tell their parents about things that happened at school.

For such children, home and school are tightly intertwined-the school setting supported home activities and vice versa (McCarthy), 1997).

Students from low socio-economics background are more reticent in classroom activities. Such students do not feel comfortable sharing items or stories from home. They seem to keep their home and school lives more separate. Because of the socio-economics situation of such parents, they develop negative attitude to school functions. They do not forge relationship between the home and school through frequent contact with the school and reinforcing the curriculum at home. Literacy is not necessary means of entertainment to them too (McCarthy, 1997).

Theoretical framework

The study adopted Emergent literacy theory development by Marie Clay in 1967 which states that there are aspects of literacy behaviours skills, ideas, knowledge and attitudes which children informally acquire before they formally get into classroom which facilitates the acquisition of conventional reading and writing related skills, knowledge and attitude which are precursors to conventional reading and writing skills (Leigh, R. 2015).

Emergent literacy theorists believe that children's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills which children experience in the home set up are all interrelated and that they are strengthened by literacy rich home environments (Kaunda, 2019). In this theory he emphasizes the components of a literacy rich home environment that promote literacy in children include having books and print materials available in home with caregiver's reading, allowing children to scribe by providing platforms. Emergent literacy theorists believe that literacy development starts in the maternity ward (birth) to when children can read and write and in some cases it is on-going. Emergent literacy theory is applicable in research to help understand a variety of literacy behaviours associated with children such as forms of emergent literacy taken to school teaching and learning materials for children so as to help promote their children's learning at early grade.

Research Methodology

The researchers adopted naturalistic/covert observation research method, which is considered effective in studies involving ways of improving English Language instruction through integration of home and school literacy practice. Observation research method according to McLeod Soul (2015), as the name implies is a way of collecting data through observing/watching what one/people do. Observation data collection method is classified as participatory study because the researchers have immersed themselves in the setting where the respondents are while taking notes and/or recording. Therefore, the researchers adopted naturalistic/covert observation method which involves studying the spontaneous behaviours/response of the participants (children) in the natural surroundings of the school classroom. The researchers simply record what they see during language instruction in whatever way they can, they applied unstructured observation method which coincides with the type of research carried out, they recorded all the relevant behaviours/response of the school children without a system.

The researchers also ensure undisclosed method of observation through keeping their real identity secret from their research subjects i.e. the school children by acting as genuine members of the schools. The research was conducted in an open and free manner in the schools in a sense that there were no pre-determined variables.

The researchers randomly observed eight schools during English Language instruction in different localities/communities in Enugu state.

The schools observed are nursery/primary school children in Enugu State communities:

- May Blossom School, Enugu.
- Madonna Nursery and Primary School, Udi.
- Union Primary School, Ndu-Akpoti-Eha-Aniufu.
- Air force Primary School, Enugu.
- Grace Ville Nursery and Primary School, Nsukka
- Central School, Umulokpa, Uzouwani

- NOWA Nursery and Primary School, Abakpanike Enugu
- Obioha Amagu Primary School, Ishiagu...

Discussion

Nature and types of literacy studies in traditional homes in Enugu communities

The following describe the nature and types of literacy studies found in traditional Enugu communities. Though largely socio-culture in purpose, these practices have the potentials to be connected to school literacies and language instruction.

1. Storytelling Art: storytelling is a very old and popular African practices that has been preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Many of the tales told have anonymous authors, but their lessons have relevance to practical human living. Storytelling art of the three dominant Enugu groups, namely: Nsukka, Udi, Enugu Zone, told as a form of social entertainment, information dissemination, inculcation of moral values and development of cognitive abilities in children. Among the Nsukka speaking group, it is called *o,nwereotuubochi* both adult and children engage in *o,nwereotuubochi* especially after the day's work in Enugu communities. *O,nwereotuubochi* has very many linguistic forms and features. It is interactional in nature and contains leader-response pattern. The story teller begins with the poetic wordings:

Story teller: *O,nwereotuubochi* (once upon a time)

Audience: *otuubochi wee ruo* (Time, Time, Time)

After this, the story teller narrates his story. If the story requires a song a dramatic performance to accompany it, the story teller will demonstrate before the story actually begins. Nsukka *Ewhetales* help children to develop both good character and cognitive abilities. Qualities such as hard work, tolerance, honesty, obedience to parents and constituted authority, and

the repercussion of deviant behavior are learnt through this art. On the cognitive aspect, children learn to think creatively and give intelligent solutions to societal problem (Udu&Udu, 2013). *Ewhetales* help children to also learn life incidents while participating in Ewhe.

Children learn to combine factual information present in the storyline with their background experience in order to draw useful moral lessons, which is the main target of the story art. In this way, the children inadvertently become familiar with the reading comprehension process. These skills and abilities are crucial for later reading instruction in school. The art storytelling itself is a way of building mental capacities to be creative writers.

2. **Riddles:** Riddles are called *okwumkpabiile* in Nsukka and *kpuruchichi* in Udi like storytelling, *GwamGwamGwam* takes a formalized pattern, which all players must conform to. *GwamGwaGwam* involves asking very creative question giving intelligent and suitable answers. If the poser of the riddle does not get a suitable answer to his riddle, he is required to not only unravel the answer, but to reveal justly why all other answers were wrong. The knowledge acquired from riddles is suitable for literacy and literature instruction. Through riddles, children develop creative thinking and anticipation abilities. They can also learn and improve on the practice of interpreting events after combining factual information with implied information, making judgment and evaluation. These higher order skills are required in reading comprehension.
3. **Vernacular alphabet songs:** Enugu communities have a significant number of alphabet songs in the home languages. A good example of an Alphabet song in Nsukka is blended with the vowel letter 'a' added to all consonant letters as follows:

a buch d l f g m n x y ye we z

The above song is based on the Nsukka Alphabet below:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n

o p r s t u v w y z

Through the alphabet song, children learn and master the Alphabet inadvertently. This constitutes a good avenue for children to see the similarities between the features of their home language and English.

4. **Vernacular Number Songs:** counting is one of man's core activities. Knowledge of number system is essential in the process of counting. Every African community and language group has a number system that has to be known to every member. The process of getting the counting system known to children often begins in the form of songs and play. Literacy and numeracy go hand in hand. And this facilitated by vernacular number songs.
5. **Children Games and Interactional Activities:** *kpukpukpuogene* and *dam mmsamsa obi* example of two interactional activities that can foster literacy. According to Udu and Udu (2013) the two games have an identical playing pattern and there is no limit to the number of participants. The use of songs, chants and dialogue enable children to practice language in real life situations. Through these, they learn cooperatively and they are able to learn important skills like turn taking, negotiation, interviewing, and so on.

Nature and Types of Literacy practices in modern Enugu Homes

1. **Loud Reading recitation of verses of holy books and preaching:** The typical modern Enugu family is affiliated to either Christianity or Islam. Families demonstrate their faith by reading the holy books, quoting from it to illustrate a point, praying, singing from the hymnals, reading and studying passage of the holy books and preaching publicly. In recent times, Christian and Muslim organizations organize quiz and recitation competition for members of such religious faiths. This exercise is a relevant practice that makes the participants to practice language aspects orally and in writing. This

experience is both similar and relevant to school activities, especially that it embraces element of assessment and evaluation. Children who want to win prizes often memorize large verses of the holy books. Although rote memorization has been criticized for its inability to make the learner use the knowledge acquired or transfer it to new situation (Mayer, 2002), the process prepares the ground for such children to develop the love for reading. By constant acquaintance with the religious books, children learn and gain print literacy skills awareness of important book concepts such as left-to-right orientation, top-bottom movement, etc. Research also shows that reading aloud has numerous advantages for example; it promotes language and literacy development through interaction (Hoffman, 2011). "it also exposes readers to a wide range of genres, topics, formats, stories, and information.....and select for themselves that which is relevant and interesting" (Serafini, 2011, p.32).

2. **Use of Board and Card Game in the Home:** Board games such as draught, scrabbles, ludo, chess and card games What are found in many homes. Parents sometimes play these games either with their family members or with their friends. Children have the opportunity to play such games themselves or to observe how they are played. Through this, they develop print awareness for literacy.
3. **Use of computers, Tablets and Smart Phones:** In today's world, highly dominated by ICT tools, many homes have acquired personal computers, tablets and phones to serve the dual purpose of assisting the family with educated services and to meet the day to day communication needs. Smart phones and tablets are themselves very attractive to both adults and children, and many children like to have them as companion. Mostly used for communication, the educational value of tablets and smart phones cannot be estimated. Through them, very vital verbal written information is exchanged via email, text

message and chats on the social media platforms. These platforms stimulate creativity and interest as they contain helpful prompts and multifaceted sample of the kind of writing we intend to do. As children explore the ICT world to play games, chat with friends, learn to type or use higher applications such as online dictionaries, YouTube videos, demonstrated videos and clips; their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are enhanced. This is without regard to whether or not the teacher is there to give further help.

4. **Creation of print-enhanced Home Environments:** In an information era, it is a common thing to find most homes that keep books, posters, invitation card, programme brochures, and newspaper. All members of the family have access to these resources. More importantly, the graphic images and designs of the above print resources attract reading, and curious learners who need further help with interpretation can seek such from their parents, other adult and their teachers.
5. **Parent' Involvement in Children's Academic Endeavour.** Today parents are involved or expected to be involved in their children's academic endeavors in the following ways: (a) Helping their children with homework; (b) reading interesting stories to the children; (c) visiting the school the children are attending and participating in parent-teacher meetings; (d) buying all recommend books and materials; (e) paying their children's school fee as and at when due; (f) monitoring their children's school progress; (g) discussing **disciplinary** cases with the principal; (h) discussing children's health challenges with the head teacher; (i) attending school social events, etc. All these have connections with the child's literacy development in particular and overall success in school in general.

Nature and types of literacy studies in primary schools in Enugu State communities

In schools in Enugu State, the following are some of the common literacy practices:

- 1. Storytelling in vernacular and English:** story telling is a foremost language activity in the language curriculum. With the provision by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2019) that “the medium of instruction in the first three years” and that “the curriculum for primary school shall be in the language of the immediate environment for the first three years” and that “the curriculum for primary education shall include the language of the environment” (p.12) a wide range of activities including storytelling are organized for children in the mother tongues. This makes children well-grounded in oral expression, which constitutes an important foundation for literacy.
- 2. Jolly phonetic intervention:** much is known about Jolly Phonic, worldwide, especially in the United Kingdom where it is integrated into the school curriculum. In Enugu State, it was only in the year 2013 that this novel method of teaching beginning reading before writing became popular. Before this period, many learning to read and write teachers used ineffective teaching method and thus making their products unable to use basic literacy skills like legibility in writing, identifying main ideas, etc. Jolly phonics recognized two stages of literacy – phonics (giving the basic ability to read and write) and grammar (giving the broader skills to be able to communicate well). Lloyd (1998), attest that “children learn to read much faster when they know the letter sounds and can work out words for themselves. Independent writing starts much earlier and accurate spelling develops more quickly” (p.1) The first stage jolly phonics emphasizes the five basic skills of reading and writing namely
 1. Learning the letter sounds
 2. Learning letter formation
 3. Blending
 4. Identifying

sounds in words

5. Spelling the tricky words. The grammar stage covers the structure of language including parts of speech, punctuation, and word meaning. With many public and private school in Enugu using jolly phonics, literacy activities such as pairs games learning letter names, scribbling, alternative spelling of vowels, dictation, identifying sounds in words, learning letter formation, etc have increased literacy teaching and learning outcomes.

- 2. Singing, praying and Exhortation on the school Assembly:** Singing praise songs, praying and preaching the word of God in English on the school assembly are currently being observed throughout primary and secondary school in Enugu state. Through these, student leaders such as class monitors, prefects and headboys/headgirls build confidence in public speaking, public presentation of written information, oral reading, note making, and granting interviews. This is a form of language in action.
- 3. Social clubs:** school in Enugu communities encourage the formation of social clubs such as Debating and Literacy Clubs, Young farmers’ Club, fellowship of Christian student (FCS), young scientists, Drama Club, etc. During meeting, minutes of the proceedings are taken. The president and other executive members of such clubs engage in school-related tasks such as speaking the language of meeting, turns presenting arguments logically, making notes, taking notes, financial record keeping, auditing, reporting, etc. All these literacy skills have educational relevance and continuous practice give the students lifelong skills and opportunities that will make them relevance during the world of work.
- 4. Letter formation with clay and papier-mâché:** In many schools, pupils are taught the art of moulding letters and shapes with clay or papier- mache. This activity adds a lot of fun to learning, especially when are guided to source for these materials themselves. It creates in them

the sense of adventure and creativity. Learning becomes more concrete because they have the opportunity to create new experience. In the process of doing so, they discuss and share their experiences freely. In other words, after forming the letters and shapes, they are guided to speak about them. Thus, a connection between speech and writing is fostered

Suggested strategies and steps for integrating home and school literacy

Studies /practice for the enhancement of English language Instruction in school and promoting literacy development in general.

Having successfully identified and discussed the nature and types of home and school literacies, we therefore, propose the following steps to integrate these practices in literacy student and language instruction: This will help to promote academic success among young learners.

1. **Discovering the background of learners before and during instructions** The teacher stands a good chance to know about his learners' preferred learning style, and prior experience if he prods them to reveal to him what they already know, and what they are yet to know, or what interest them before instruction. Relevant prior knowledge is drawn from a wide array of life experience of the learners (Lee, 2014) when such experience is relevant to the task at hand, learning becomes easier. The idea of meaningful learning is made possible if the teacher is able and willing to organize instruction to make meaningful connection to what learners already know (Korb, 2012).
2. **Encouraging oral composition before written composition:** language and literacy teachers should give opportunities to engage in oral composition before writing. The practice of storytelling and asking students to share their experiences orally will prepare grounds for smooth transition from oracy to literacy.
3. **Making language lessons communicative in focus:** The communicative view of

language instruction requires the teacher to aim at producing language learners who will use target language to do what meant to do. The teacher can do this by integrating communicative activities such as dialogue, role play, interview method, interrogation, etc. in speech practice. Teachers should create opportunities for children to practice aspects of speaking and writing that they engage in on a daily basis. For example, teaching how to take minute of meeting, teaching how to negotiate for the price of a product in the market, how to explain to a doctor what is disturbing them, etc. Teachers need to switch roles with the learner-instead of talking more, as they do, the learners should talk more.

4. **Encouraging collaborative teaching and learning:** Language teaching should encourage pair and group work for the learners to work collaboratively. Children are used to playing should build on this arrangement and ensure that he introduces activities that foster interaction among students in the language classroom (Udu, 2012).
5. **Use of ICT to support literacy and language development.** The teacher and learners should take advantage of the ubiquity of internet and other ICT facilities to make teaching and learning a rewarding experience. Teachers should explore the internet and be conversant with current trends in his/her subject area. He/She should from time to time download interesting posters, stickers and short stories to support literacy instruction classes. Also, children could be encouraged to make use of computer tablets to engage in different forms of writing and creating of stickers and posters.
6. **Drawing additional/supplementary explanation in the learners' mother languages to make learning more meaningful.** This will not only make the learners see the importance of their mother languages, but will also help them

to connect the home with the school more easily.

- 7. Creating favourable classrooms that brings out the best in the learners.** The teacher should take charge of his classroom by ensuring that he adopts and adapts modern teaching methods and strategies that have good learning outcomes.
- 8. Showing Affection to the Learners:** Teachers can do this by first establishing a strong rapport with such children. Teachers need to put an assuring affection towards learners. The two-fold advantages of doing so are: (i) it will draw them close to him/her. (ii) it will remove fear in them and make them open up to reveal vital information about their family background, previously learning experiences including psychological and health challenges that are capable of marriage effective learning. Teacher will be able to identify learning gaps and so tailor teaching to meet such gaps.

Conclusion

Once an important corporation exists between the child's home experiences and those of the school, learning becomes strengthened and school outcomes are improved. Modern approach to child academic upbringing recognizes parents as the child's first teachers, caregivers, counsellors and sponsors. Parents need to be educated on the need to lay an important foundation for their children by providing children both the enabling environment and the needed support that will help children acquire relevant experience that will positively impact school achievement. Parent' lifestyles, educational, economic and social attainment all go to impact their children's education. Parents should know that if they cultivate the habit of reading to their children always, checking their children's books, helping them with assignments, buying relevant books and materials for their children, taking children to visit important places like zoo, construction industries, engaging in leisure reading and writing, such will impact their children's literacy and language development. On their part, teachers too should see parents

as important partners on issues of child education. Teachers should involve parents in child's academic upbringing by inviting them to school meetings, requesting them to help with homework, giving parents opportunities to teach subjects that they are good at, inviting parents to give during school events, and the like.

Recommendations

Result from this study has shown a positive outcome, as families with limited resources at home like those who have fewer books at home may be willing to learn and try new skills by engaging family literacy programs that help improve children literacy at school. Additionally, new Government Policy on Education for school literacy programme should have a revise of school curriculum by combing family literacy programme and school literacy programme and name it Trando-modern literacy model. This will have long positive effect in improving literacy studies in school system. Moreover, different types of community based-family literacy programme should be encouraged everywhere in schools in our state to enable children develop high interest in education.

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