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Effect of literature in the school library on the development of communication and conflict resolution skills of children

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This study was done with private primary schools children in Orerokpe Educational Zone of Delta State, Nigeria in 2018. A quasi experimental design was adopted. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study was 28,172. The sample comprised 63 primary four pupils. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used to sample 32 pupils in the experimental group one and thirty-one in the experimental group two (control group). Cluster sampling technique was further employed to draw out the two intact classes for the experiment. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings show that exposing children to literature is effective and significant in both the improvement of their ability to resolve conflicts and their communication skill. The implication of the study is that schools should emphasize on conflict resolution and development of communication skill of the students when recommending literature texts for them because such skills will help them to resolve challenging issues, ward-off inferiority complex and stage fright.

Key words: Literature, children's literature, school library, social development, conflict resolution, communication kill.

INTRODUCTION

A child is a person that has not attained independence and cannot take decisions for himself. There is no clear cut definition of a 'child'; however different groups andpersons define it from their view points to suit their purposes. Biologically, a child is a human being between the stages of birth and puberty. The legal definition of child generally refers to a minor, otherwise known as a person younger than the age of majority which is between 15 and 18 years in many countries of the world, but still as high as 21 years exist in some jurisdictions (Wikipedia). On the other hand, the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sees a child as an individual below the age of 18 years, unlessunder the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. This definition is ratified by 192 of 194 member countries (of which Nigeria is one) and this makes it the most

popular definition of a child in the Nigerian context. This definition is not rigid as it gives room for variations. For the purpose of this paper, the author will use the opportunity provided by this variation to consider a child (primary pupil) as an individual between the ages of 3 years and twelve years. A child below the age of 3 years is still an infant and cannot take part in group activities, while a child of 12 years is in the primary six (Akanwa and Chimdi, 2020). At these ages, the child needs literature for all round development which include social, moral, psychological and cognitive developments. For the child to be exposed to literature relevant for these developmental areas, he should be introduced to the school library.

A school library the world over is of many forms. In Nigeria specifically, it is a library that is situated in a nursery, primary, secondary school and Teachers' Training Colleges (TTC) with the aim of meeting the academic and social needs of pupils, students and staff, through the provision of a wide range of information resources. Anyanwu (2016) avers that a school library is a resource centre found in the school environment where students and teachers have access to a variety of resources. It is fundamentally established for the purpose of acquiring, organising, storing and disseminating information materials for use by teachers and students. The school library plays a crucial role in the social development of children because it affords them the opportunity of getting exposed to the world of literature. In this case, it becomes a veritable means of attracting and sustaining children's interest in reading. In addition to providing appropriate library furniture and conducive environment to encourage children to read, the school library should stock relevant and appropriate literature books that can make children grow into reasonable adults and impact on their development of communication and conflict resolution skills. Ker (2015)'s assertion that books intended for children must teach them honesty and should be visionary lends credence to this view.

Resolution of conflict is a way for two or more parties to find peaceful solution to disagreement between or among them. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political or emotional. Conflict resolution is very important in the human society because if conflicts are not resolved timely, they may result into serious disputes, and sometimes wars. Communication on the other hand is the ability and desire to connect verbally or non-verbally by exchanging ideas and feelings. It is a chief tool in the realization of individual and collective goals, and as such should be inculcated in children from childhood to enable them gain mastery of the art. The authors believe that these social traits (conflict resolution and communication skills) can be developed in children by exposing them to literature in the school library.

Literature is a creative work which can be described as written material, usually characterized by excellence of style, expression and themes of general interest. It can come in form of prose, drama, essays, poetry, folklore etc. Literature has three major functions in the lives of readers, which are; to educate, instruct and entertain. It is also important for many other reasons like,it has the ability to provide pleasure to readers, helps build experience, helps readers empathize with others, and develops thinking skills. As a result, literature has the potential of instilling lifelong values in children. Exposing children to literature early is of great importance because at this stage they are still malleable and easily impacted. Akanwa (2013) corroborated this in her assertion that literature has its place in the education process of the child that no other media can take. Similarly, Hade (2007) avers that we think in stories, and they are incredibly powerful in the lives of all humans, especially children.

Children's literature refers to books that are specifically written and designed to appeal to children; it has special appeal to children. According to Akanwa (2013), it is any literature that interests children in the following aspects – education, recreation, enlightenment and travels. It is a very valuable resource which plays a pivotal role in the social development of children as they grow from one stage of life to another. The themes depicted in children's literature are intended to affect their general outlook and way of life. Books that can help children develop positive behaviour and acquire necessary skills that will help them through life should be made available in the school library. Through reading of literature, a child interacts with superior minds and acquires some skills through the various themes portrayed in literature. Children should therefore be encouraged to read books from the earliest age possible, especially in their formative years. The knowledge acquired at this stage goes a long way to instil values that the child grows up with, in the development of communication and conflict resolution skill.

Development is basically an economic concept that has positive connotations. It involves the application of certain economic and technical measures to utilize available resources to instigate economic growth and improve people's quality of life. It is also a social concept which refers to the changes that occur in the life of people at different stages of life - childhood and adult stages, and the process through which human beings typically grow and mature from infancy through adulthood. Therefore, development in a child or children starts from conception, beginning with physical development to other developmental facets viz-a vis communication and conflict resolution which sets in as the child is born and begins to relate with others.

Early exposure of children to literature is very beneficial for positive social development in children; therefore literature books should be a priority in school libraries. However, there is general observation that the reading habit of Nigerian children is quite poor. The school library which is supposed to lay the foundation for good reading and library habit for children, unfortunately, does not exist

in most nursery and primary schools in Nigeria. The few that have libraries do not see the need to stock books in generous quantity while some are biased in the type of literature to keep. As a result, children are denied the opportunity of reaping the benefits of being exposed to the world of literature at the early stages of their lives. The question here is, does children's literature in the school library have effect on the social development of the child in the areas of conflict resolution and communication? The answer to this question is the thrust of this study.

The study aims at investigating the effect of literature in the school library on the social development of children. Specifically, it intends to:

(1) Examine the effect of children's literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.
(2) Ascertain the effect of children's literature on children's communication skill as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

The following questions were asked:

(1) What is the effect of children's literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test?
(2) What is the effect of children's literature on children's communication skill as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test?

The following hypotheses guided the study:

HO$_1$: There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts at pre-test and post-test.
HO$_2$: There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on children's communication skill at pre-test and post-test.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is a powerful teaching tool and a valued work of art in written form that is used to expose ills of the society and at the same time to correct them. Ugboma cited in Otitigbe (2015) sees it as a universal means of communicating the emotional, spiritual or intellectual concern of mankind. It is a dynamic entity in its own right that offers its readers many avenues for pleasure, reflection, and emotional engagement (Mallan, 2017), and body of written works accompanied with illustrations to entertain or instruct young people (Fadiman, 2017) and

also encourage their personal development. The writings are meant to instruct, inform, entertain, express personal joy or pain, reflect religious devotion, glorify a nation or a hero, advocate a particular point of view –whether political, social or aesthetic. The "magic" of literature for children is necessarily bound with the nature of their development socially, physically and mentally. Literature for social development of children is used to depict real life situations and as a result is not just for entertainment but also for the development of communication and conflict resolution skill.

Communication is the act of speaking clearly and processing speech sounds, to understand others, to express ideas and interact with others. It is a fundamental building block for a child's development. The ability to communicate effectively is a key skill for better life. (Kumon Blog, 2016). As children develop, it is important to nurture their communication skills so as to enable them express themselves clearly and confidently as children and adults in future. Developing the communication skill requires developing language, thinking skills, and understanding the rules necessary for social interaction, and literature gives children one vehicle to develop these skills. Communication skill differs within age groups, and literature can re-enforce various types of communication that children come across during the day. This is because, children learn communication skills through reading, talking and books. Folklores and digital storytelling among others can also show children how to communicate in different ways. Children can learn language by reading and listening to stories, and they also can develop socially by reading books that explore social and cultural topics (Grayson, 2017). Children's Bureau (2017) expressed that book language is more descriptive, and tends to use more formal grammatical structures thus reading to a child will enable him to latch onto vocabulary and language he or she hears around him or her, introduce reading into his auditory learning and also introduce the language of books, which differs from language heard in daily life. Furthermore, Ayman (2019) discovered that digital story telling has positive effects of sparking children's imagination, providing information, and showing how other people lives. Therefore, as early as first grade, children's social skills are compelling predictors of their future success both in and out of school. Thus, as they are exposed to literature, their communication skill will be improved.

Conflict is a friction, disagreement, or discord arising when conscious beings (individuals or groups) wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. Conflict, arguments, and change are natural parts of our lives, as well as the lives of every agency, organization, and nation. At home, or school, conflict between children is inevitable. They occasionally become embroiled in conflict, disagreement or a battle of wills with peers or adults. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political, or emotional

(Community Tool Box, 2016). Ashby and Neilsen-Hewett (2012) noted that studies addressing conflict within infant and toddler interactions have identified the primary cause of disputes as objects (sharing of resources or toys), with disagreements stemming from children attempting to exert control over the play environment. As ironic as it sounds, it is even desirable because some bickering and conflict in childhood help kids discover positive ways of resolving disagreements. Mar et al. (2009), in their study, discovered that there is growing evidence that reading narratives, even those explicitly labelled as fiction, is far from a meaningless leisure activity that ends when one closes the book, rather the experience gathered from reading will help a child surmount difficultsituations in the future. When conflict resolution skill is instilled into an individual through exposure to literature as a child, it comes in handy at home and work place throughout life (Stephens, 2007).

Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them. According to Shonk (2019) it is the process of resolving a dispute or a conflict by meeting at least some of each side's needs and addressing their interests. The resolution does not eliminate conflicts but helps call for different resolution techniques (Pike et al., 2000).Teaching children constructive and specific options for resolving conflict is one strategy for raising socially skilled and well-behaved children. Children who are taught how to confront conflict with a variety of cooperative strategies will grow into adults who are better able to form and maintain close emotional ties with others (Stephens, 2006). According to an Online Study (2017), conflict resolution for kids is an important skill to learn, and books can be used in teaching this skill. In elementary school, conflicts may seem large to pupils even if they are not. The following stories can be helpful in illustrating many different types of conflicts.

(i) Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell – This story is all about bullying
(ii) Enemy Pie by Derek Munson – This story is a positive example on how children can deal with their enemy.
(iii) Simon's Hook by Karen Gedig Burnett – This book is about a young boy who learns how not to take the bait of people who make fun of you.
(iv) Confession of a Former Bully by Trudy Ludwig – This is another book about bullying.

GoodReads (2017) outlined some children's literature on conflict resolution; they are: *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* by Douglas Stone, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating an Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* by Christopher W. Moore. According to Delightful Children Books (2013), many anti-bullying books focus on what kids should not do rather than what they should do. Stronger self-esteem and better language skills can ultimately lead to a better

ability to resolve differences with peers.

METHODOLOGY

A two phased quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 28,172. The exercise was conducted in DSC Model Primary School I and School II Orhuwhorun both in Udu Local Government Area of Delta State. Male and female primary four pupils were used as the population of the study. The sample comprised 63 primary four pupils. Purposive and clustersampling techniques were used to sample 32 pupils in the experimental group one and thirty-one in the experimental group two (control group). Cluster sampling technique was further employed to draw out the two intact classes for the experiment. The pupils were asked to study the books till the end of the library period. At the end of each period, those who completed their reading were asked to exchange while those who were not capable of finishing theirs were encouraged to go home with the books. Every pupil in each group was given the literature texts. Knowledge gained was deliberated on and at the end summed up by the librarian. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The use of ANCOVA statistical tool served as a method for controlling extraneous variables and experimental contamination of subjects. The decision rule was based on the calculated f-cal against the tabulated f-tab.

Data analysis

Research Question 1: What is the effect of children's literature on children's communication skill as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test?

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on children's communication skill at pre-test and post-test.

It is indicated in Table 1 that at pre test, the mean scores of the two groups (Experimental and Control) were low as 10.41 and 11.39 respectively, but at post test, the mean scores of experimental group increased to 14.78 while that of control was still minimal at 10.10. The increase in the mean score of the experimental group implies that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's communication skills in primary schools. It was further indicated in the table that the f-calculated is 55.190 and its significant value is .000. This significance value is less than 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and concluding that there is significant difference in the effect of literature on children's communication skill as measured by the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of children's literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test?

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts at pre-test and post-test.

It is indicated in Table 2 that at pre test, the mean scores of the two groups (Experimental and Control) were low as 10.78 and 10.65 respectively, but at post test, the mean scores of experimental

Table 1. Sample size (n), Mean ($\overline{X}$), standard deviation (S), and ANCOVA F-test statistics.

Test: Literature		Pre-test		Post-test	
Group	**N**	**$\overline{X}$**	**S**	**$\overline{X}$**	**S**
Experimental	32	10.41	1.52	14.78	2.98
Control	31	11.39	1.63	10.10	1.47

Tests of between-subjects effects					
Dependent Variable: Post-Test					
Source	**Type III sum of squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Corrected model	345.547[a]	2	172.774	30.475	0.000
Intercept	195.928	1	195.928	34.559	0.000
Pretest	0.011	1	0.011	0.002	0.964
Treatments	312.900	1	312.900	**55.190**	**0.000**
Error	340.167	60	5.669		
Total	10492.000	63			
Corrected total	685.714	62			
R squared	0.504				
Adjusted R squared	0.487				

Table 2. Sample size (n), Mean ($\overline{X}$), standard deviation (S), and ANCOVA F-test statistics.

Test: Literature		Pre-test		Post-test	
Group	**N**	**$\overline{X}$**	**S**	**$\overline{X}$**	**S**
Experimental	32	10.78	1.72	14.75	2.94
Control	31	10.65	1.64	10.06	1.46

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Post-Test					
Source	**Type III Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Corrected model	349.614[a]	2	174.807	31.983	0.000
Intercept	288.806	1	288.806	52.840	0.000
Pretest	3.930	1	3.930	0.719	0.400
Treatments	348.133	1	348.133	**63.694**	**0.000**
Error	327.941	60	5.466		
Total	10434.000	63			
Corrected total	677.556	62			
R squared			0516		
Adjusted R squared			0.500		

group increased to 14.75 while that of control was still minimal at 10.06. The increase in the mean score of the experimental group implies that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's ability to resolve conflicts in primary schools. It was further indicated in the table that the f-calculated is 63.694 and its significance value is .000. This value is less than 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and concluding that there is significant difference in the effect of literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts as measured by the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

FINDINGS

The following findings were made from this study:

(1) When children were exposed to literature there was improvement in their communication skill hence the effectiveness of literature proved significant when tested.
(2) Exposing children to literature is effective in the improvement of their ability to resolve conflicts and when tested, the effectiveness proved significant.

DISCUSSION

Effect of literature on children's communication skill

It was indicated in this study that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of communication skill of

children and when tested the effectiveness proved significant. This finding is a clear indication that as the children are exposed to literature, their communication skill will be improved. In line with this finding is Ayman (2019)'s discovery that digital story telling has positive effects of sparking children's imagination, providing information, and showing how other people live. It is also in consonance with the reasons expressed in Children's Bureau (2017) that book language is more descriptive, and tends to use more formal grammatical structures; thus reading to a child will enable him to latch onto vocabulary and language he or she hears around him or her, introduce reading into his auditory learning and also introduce the language of books, which differs from language heard in daily life. Consequently, it is clear that reading children's literature, either independently or through shared reading, helps children to develop their imagination, enhance creativity, strengthen oral language development and communicate more effectively.

Effect of literature on children's ability to resolve conflicts

It was revealed that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's ability to resolve conflicts in primary schools, and when tested, the effectiveness proved significant. This implies that when children are exposed to literature, the tendency of their developing ability to resolve conflicts will be high. In line with this finding, Mar et al. (2009) in their study discovered that there is growing evidence that reading narratives, even those explicitly labelled as fiction, is far from a meaningless leisure activity that ends when one closes the book. The researchers concluded that several exposures to narrative fiction can influence one's attitude towards various issues. However, children who are taught how to confront conflict with a variety of cooperative strategies will grow into adults who are better able to form and maintain close emotional ties with others (Stephens, 2006). Hence, conflict resolution for children is an important skill to learn, and books can come in handy in teaching this skill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since literature can function as children's change agent in some aspects of their human condition, contribute to their social development, and foster positive interpersonal attitudes which they can even use outside the classroom the researchers suggested that:

(1) Story hour should be an integral part of school library services because it makes the use of library more interesting and at the same time provides a platform for passing useful values to children.

(2) School administrators should employ professional librarians and train them periodically so that they will have the communication competence required to run the school library in such a way that children will gain the utmost benefit from using the library.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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