

EFFECTS OF GAMES TECHNIQUE ON JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ORAL ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of games technique on junior secondary school students' achievement in Oral English. One research question and one null-hypothesis guided the study. The quasi-experimental research design involving non-equivalent control group was used for the study. The sample consisted of 304 JS III students drawn from eight intact classes in Idah Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria. Pre-test and post-test were administered to all the groups (treatment and control). A 60-item Oral English Achievement Test (OEAT) which was validated by three experts from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using Kuder Richardson formula 20. The reliability co-efficient based on $K - R 20$ estimate was 0.86. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that students exposed to games technique achieved higher than those taught Oral English with the conventional method. Based on this finding, the paper recommends that the English Studies Curriculum should be reviewed to include the use of games technique in Oral English instruction at the JS level

Introduction

The English language plays a vital role in Nigeria's education. It is a core subject in all the levels of education as well as the medium of instruction from upper primary to the tertiary level. According to Shittu (2008), the English language enjoys a lot of prestige over and above other Nigerian languages. The language has thus become the nation's second language, crucial for success in the educational process and in other areas of national life (Olajire, 2004). This has necessitated the nation's huge investment in its teaching and learning.

The teaching and learning of the English Language involve four skills. These are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The speaking skill is second in order of language acquisition skills. Speech is the oral activity in which people express themselves freely through words. To speak means to utter words or to express oneself orally (Offorma, 2009). It entails using a language in talking. Without adequate knowledge of speech skills, language learners will have difficulties in pronunciation, spelling, stress and intonation.

Oral English (as the spoken component of the English language is commonly called) has therefore become a special concern in education. However, Oral English is not given adequate attention in the classroom. Tomayo (2009: p.ii) observes that, "Over the years the oral aspect of the English language has been treated with levity as most students and even some teachers find it difficult or abstract." Research findings show that teachers do not use innovative techniques in the teaching of Oral English (Bodunde, 2006; Huyen & Nga, 2008). The traditional teaching methods like the lecture and discussion methods cannot arouse the interest of learners enough. Since innovative techniques seems to be lacking in the teaching of Oral English, there is need to try one which will be both activity oriented and students' centered to see if it could arouse the interest of learners. The use of games technique may be useful since games are activity centered.

A game is a form of play or sports especially a competitive one played according to rules and decided by skills. It is a complete episode or period of playing typically ending in a definite result. Avedone (2009) defines games as structured play, usually undertaken for enjoyment and sometimes used as educational tool. Key components of games are goals, rules, challenges (competition) and interactions. Technique, on the other hand, is a systematic procedure, or routine by which a task is accomplished. It is the manner and ability which a professional employs the technical know-how of a particular field of endeavor (Cohen, 2007). Games technique, therefore, is the use or adaptation of existing games for teaching and learning. It incorporates game mechanics into teaching and learning to make it more engaging. Game includes three principal elements: competition, rules and enjoyment, which should be well established by teaching/learning objectives. The goal is to maximize enjoyment through capturing the interest of learners.

Many researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of games technique in different subject areas. For instance, Njoku (2008) and Denga (2008) found that games technique was superior to the conventional methods for enhancing interest in Mathematics. Games technique has also been shown to have advantage in learning Igbo Grammar and vocabulary of the English

language as were shown by the studies of Umo (2004); Ugwoke (2006); and Huyen & Nga (2008) respectively.

In spite of the benefits that games have in the improvement of teaching and learning, there seems to be no meaningful application of this technique in Oral English instruction in most Nigerian language classrooms. Thus, students find this aspect of English language difficult to understand. There is, therefore, the need to seek ways of making the teaching of Oral English more effective in order to enhance students' achievement in Oral English. The problem of this study, therefore, posed as a question is: what are the effects of games technique on junior secondary school students' achievement in Oral English? To guide the study, one research question and one null-hypothesis were formulated. These are:

What is the mean achievement score of students taught Oral English with games technique and those taught with the conventional method?

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement score of students taught Oral English with games technique and those taught with the conventional method.

Method

The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to draw 304 JS III students from eight schools in Idah Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria for this study. In the first instance, stratified random sampling technique was used to draw four schools from each strata (urban and rural), making a total of eight schools altogether. The balloting procedure was used to draw the eight schools. The researcher wrote the names of all the public schools in the urban area on pieces of paper which were squeezed and dropped on the floor. Then four were picked at random. The same procedure was used to sample the four private schools in the urban area. This procedure was repeated all over again to sample public and private schools from the rural area for the study. Four intact classes in the schools sampled in each location were then randomly assigned to treatment and control groups respectively by balloting. Only mixed (co-educational) schools were sampled for the study since there were no single sex private schools in the study area.

The instrument for data collection was a 60-item multiple-choice Oral English Achievement Test (OEAT). It is an audio C.D which students were required to listen to while it was playing and then answer basic questions. Three words numbered A to C were written on paper but only one word out of the three was pronounced on the audio C.D. Students were then required to identify the word they heard on the C.D and write the letter of the alphabet that corresponds with the word pronounced. Each question correctly answered

carries 1 mark, i.e. 60 marks. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two in Language Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Content validation was done using table of specification.

A trial testing of the instrument was carried out using a sample of 30 JS III students drawn from an equivalent group in Igalamela/Odolu Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria. The data obtained from the trial testing were used for both item analysis and in estimating the reliability of the instrument. The item difficulty indices ranged from 0.31 to 0.65, while the item discrimination indices ranged from 0.22 to 0.63. Based on the recommendations of Doran (2008), who classified item discrimination as “good” if the index is above 0.30; “fair” if it is between 0.10 and 0.30; and “poor” if it is below 0.10, the difficulty and discrimination levels of the test items were adequate for a good test. The internal consistency of the test items was determined using Kuder Richardson Formula 20. The reliability co-efficient based on K – R 20 estimate was 0.86.

Four weeks before the commencement of the experiment, the test instrument, Oral English Achievement Test (OEAT), was administered as pre-test on the 304 students sampled for the study. Since the test instrument was an audio C.D, it was not possible for the researcher to reshuffle the test items. This was why it had to be administered four weeks ahead of the commencement of treatment. The actual treatment session was conducted by the regular English language teachers in their respective classes using the lesson plans prepared by the researcher which were validated along with the instrument. The major treatment was the teaching of Oral English. The experimental groups were taught with the lesson plans on games’ technique while the control groups were taught with the lesson plans on the conventional method. The researcher regularly monitored the classes to ensure compliance with the procedure of instruction.

Four games developed by the researcher were used for the experiment. The games were the traditional non-computer type games that relied on props and teams and the creation of an entertaining learning environment that emphasized sound production, discrimination and placement. Specifically, they were pronunciation games that were anchored on a combination of flashcards and guessing games tagged ‘sound production puzzle’, ‘sound placement puzzle’, sound ‘identification and discrimination puzzles’. Game one dealt with production of sounds. It was aimed at developing students’ skills for the production of the sounds of English language in such a way that a listener could understand the sounds so produced without doubts as to the quality and meaning of the utterances. Games two and three dealt with

identification and placement of sounds. They were aimed at developing students' skill for proper identification of vowel and consonant sounds presented to them by the teacher. It was a kind of guessing game. While game four dealt with discrimination of the sounds of the English language. It was aimed at developing the ability of students to perceive similarities and differences between two or more speech stimuli. In this game, students learnt to attend to differences among sounds or to respond differently to different sounds. The treatment session lasted for six weeks. After treatment, the same test was re-administered as post-test on the two groups – treatment and control. The data were analyzed based on the research question and hypothesis. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation of the test scores. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis. They were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

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

Groups	N	Pretest		Post-test		Gain Score
		Mean	Stan. Dev.	Mean	Stan. Dev.	
Experimental	151	30.81	8.25	39.74	8.28	8.93
Control	153	32.07	9.24	32.61	8.63	0.09

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the achievement scores of students in experimental and control groups. The result revealed that the experimental group had the mean achievement score of 30.81 and standard deviation of 8.25 for pre-test; mean achievement score of 39.74 and standard deviation of 8.28 for the post-test. Similarly, the Control group had the mean achievement score of 32.07 and standard deviation of 9.24 for pre-test; mean achievement score of 32.63 and standard deviation of 8.63 for the post-test. This result shows that the experimental group with the gain score of 8.93 in the post-test achieved higher than the control group with the gain score of 0.09 in the post-test.

Table 2: Summary of ANCOVA table for significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught Oral English

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	29532.220 ^a	4	7383.055	215.857	.000
Intercept	388.744	1	388.744	11.366	.001
Pretest	19258.966	1	19258.966	563.072	.000
Groups	5209.631	1	5209.631	152.313	.000
Error	10226.819	299	34.203		
Total	437062.000	304			
Corrected Total	39759.039	303			

Table 2 shows the Summary of ANCOVA table for significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught Oral English. The result revealed that the F-value for the groups is 15.31 with the significant value of 0.00. This value of F is significant at 0.05. This is because 0.00 is less than 0.05, that is ($p = 0.00$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis was not accepted; hence, there was significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught Oral English with game techniques and those taught with the conventional method in favour of those taught with games technique.

Discussion

In this study, games technique was found to have significant effect on the achievement of students taught Oral English as the students exposed to games technique achieved higher than those taught with the conventional method. The result on table 1 showed that the experimental group had higher mean achievement score than their counterparts in the control group. Similarly, the results on table 2 show that there is significant difference in the mean achievement score of students taught Oral English with games technique and those taught with the conventional method in favour of those taught with games technique. This means that games technique is more suitable for Oral English instruction than the conventional method. This finding agrees with Umo (2004) and Uberman (2008) who in their different studies found that games technique promotes interest in language learning and thereby brings about high gain in students' achievement.

The experimental group achieved higher than the control group probably because the games technique might have concretized learning experience, stimulated students' interests, thereby increasing their

understanding of the Oral English lessons better than those taught with the conventional method. It could also be because in games there are both media and method aspects. So, it is a special strategy that combines the advantage of both areas in one strategy. It is pertinent to emphasize Tomayo (2009)'s position that students and even some teachers find the oral aspect of the English language difficult. But with games technique students can develop positive attitudes and values as well as the relevant knowledge and skills that will allow them get along. Games technique relies on the philosophy that knowledge is essentially social in nature where learners interact through communication and co-operative efforts. It allows a balanced development in the learner's psycho-mental and social skills.

Conclusion

This study was necessitated by the concern arising from the observed failures in English Language in general and Oral English in particular. The finding of the study was that games technique enhanced students' achievement in Oral English. The implication of this finding is that language teachers need to re-assess their classroom instructional practices. Language instruction should be learner focused. There is need to shift from classroom instructional practices that make learners passive to one that will actively involve learners as in games technique. The complexity of language learning demands that the teacher should have different methods at his disposal and a number of skills at his command. The language teacher should be innovative in employing and exploiting different instructional strategies. As long as language teachers continue to use ineffective teaching methods, the performance of students would continue to be poor. Ineffective methodology and poor use of instructional materials would always produce students whose proficiency in language use would be below expectation. There is, therefore, the need for language teachers, curriculum planners and school administrators to take concrete steps that are realistic and attainable for the improvement of Oral English taking into consideration the great importance of oral communication especially in a second language environment like Nigeria.

Recommendations

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

1. The English studies curriculum should be reviewed to include the use of games technique. This will expose students maximally to learn Oral English without much stress.

2. Workshops and seminars should be organized for English studies teachers at the JS level on the use of games technique to acquaint them with this new trend of teaching Oral English.

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