

Teacher's Literacy Materials and Functional Literacy

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Abstract

The Focus of this paper is to find out how teachers are involved in the provision of literacy materials and by so doing functional literacy. Two questions were used to guide the study. The study was carried out in Enugu Metropolis. A total of 150 teachers were randomly sampled out of the 602 teachers of English in the 22 public junior secondary schools in Enugu metropolis. The instrument used was a structural questionnaire with 3 sections. Each section was designed to find out preliminary info, how teachers influence the sourcing of resource materials and what teachers do to improve and influence functional literacy respectively. Following some findings recommendations were made

Introduction:

Literacy has always been concerned with the ability to read and write. The journey to literacy begins with leaning to read at the level of basic literacy and progresses to the level of functional literacy (Dike 2004:2) with the increasing complexity of the society, Literacy has become central to the proper functioning of an individual in the society . Heath (1997), a functional literate person is expected to deploy language to idealize and realize goals in specific social occasions: Therefore, Literacy is central to life and living.

The federal republic of Nigeria has been making concerted effort to encourage the development of literacy. FRN(2004:14) states that one of the goals of primary education is to “inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively” in the pupils. This concern is due to the fact that literacy is an index of development. High literacy level goes with high level of development. Unfortunately, the level of literacy in Nigeria in primary schools leaves much to be desired. According to Enesi

(2005:59) the poor literacy level is causing lots of individual and national concern. She further decried the abysmal low level of literacy at the primary school saying that the children neither learn to read nor read to learn (p.59).

The Role of the Teacher

In Nigeria, as elsewhere, the teachers are central to the implementation of the educational curriculum. They are the role models. What they say or do affects the children they groom and the society.

Experience has shown that children from birth imitate what they see and hear. One of the things that children imitate is speech. This is how they acquire their language. This has implications for literacy development. Learning to read and write should be natural extensions of the early learning experiences at home and so teachers must build their instructions on the language learning the children bring with them to school. In other to be effective, the teacher has to create the same natural and friendly environment that the children are familiar with in order to make his learning functional. It has been observed that the children learn what is natural and functional to them. They learn nothing without a meaning, utility or function,(Udosen & Ukpak 2005). Unfortunately, many homes are not meeting up with the expectation which leaves us with no alternative than the teacher (Moudumogu & Oyetunji 2006). A Positive, enthusiastic and dynamic teacher will inspire and encourage the development of functional literacy through positive attitude, good literacy habits and demonstrated eagerness to improvise literacy materials. The teacher's ability to choose appropriate literacy materials and organize them well will enhance functional literacy. The teacher's ability to improvise reading materials

out of pictures, picture books, story books, hand bills, posters etc will go a long way to helping children develop functional literacy, especially at the early stage of schooling. Where the materials are not readily available the teacher is expected to improvise using handy objects and scraps such as cardboard sheets, old calendars and other discarded materials. Motivated teachers can create and sustain lively classes using a lot of speech work, demonstrations, songs and jingles. Teachers can do a lot to positively influence and reshape the reading habit of our children. Razak cited in Tahir(2005:1) emphasized the indispensability of the teacher when he said that teachers are the spark and plug of the educational system Teachers are the role model and their activities can make or mar functional literacy. Unfortunately, many teachers in this country are poorly disposed to their work. The teachers sampled by Ene (2005) in her study had reasons to feel neglected, insecure, abandoned and frustrated. Their reasons range from poor infrastructural facilities leading to poverty in the learning environment, lack of teaching aids and poor attitude of the government to the educational system.

Since the teacher is the focal point of the educational process, this implies that if literacy will be achieved, the teachers himself/herself must be well equipped, well disposed towards the literacy project and knowledgeable enough to inculcate literacy programmes. Functional literacy materials will be a function of mixture of well-trained and motivated teachers working with good literacy materials to cause the desired change in the children. Page and Thomas (1979:145) describe a functional literacy as one who possesses the level of literacy necessary for one to function normally in the society. That I to say that literacy must incorporate the ability to make use of reading, writing and manipulation of skills for meaningful and productive living. It is the opinion of this researcher that the teacher has a lot to do concerning the provision and use of literacy materials in the basic schools. This will in turn affect functional literacy. Above all, the teachers' positive attitude to literacy material

Method of data collection: the questionnaire was administered to the teachers in their meeting

access, provision and use will go a long way to affecting functional literacy.

It became necessary to find out how actively teachers are involved in the provision of literacy materials and by implication functional literacy. It is against this background that this study wishes to investigate the role the teachers' play in promoting functional literacy. Specifically, the following research questions will guide the study.

- A. Do the teachers influence the provision of literary material?
- B. What role do teachers play in influencing functional literacy?

Method: The study employed survey design to obtain the responses of teachers regarding the provision of literacy materials and how these influences functional literacy.

Area of study: The study is conducted in Enugu Metropolis of Enugu State.

Population: The population was all the 602 teachers in the 22 junior public secondary schools in Enugu urban.

Sample: 15 out of 22 junior public secondary schools in Enugu were randomly. Ten teachers were also randomly picked from each school giving a total of 10 teachers for the sample. The choice of urban junior secondary schools is based on the assumption that educational practices should be receiving full attention at the level in the cities.

Instrument: the instrument use was a structured questionnaire that has three

sections Section A elicited preliminary information. Section B sought information on how teachers influenced the sourcing of literacy materials while Section C was on what teachers do to influence and improve functional literacy.

Validation: The instrument was face-validated by language education experts of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Their inputs were built into the questionnaire.

at the teachers' house at Enugu. All the 150 questionnaires distributed were returned.

Results:**Research question 1: Do the teachers influence the provision of literacy materials?****Table 1:** Sources of Literacy materials for secondary schools.

S/No	items	Yes	%	No	%
1	Teachers make parents buy textbooks	142	95	8	5
2	Newspaper, magazines by schools	65	43	8	57
3	Books/novels from other children	71	47	79	53
4	Rotatory class library	90	60	60	40
5	Teachers ensure that materials are purchased by school	71	47	79	53
6	Teachers insist that school library is well stocked with literacy materials	71	47	79	53
7	Textbooks are bought by teachers	72	48	78	53
8	Teachers buy their own books etc	72	48	78	52
9	Teachers insist on non-print media e.g radio, video etc	55	37	95	63
10	Teachers improvise some literacy materials using cardboard, calendars	125	83	25	17

Table 1 shows that teachers may not influence the provision of literacy materials a lot. Apart from item 1, with 95% where teachers influence parents buying textbooks for their children, the

only other item with high percentage is teachers improvising literacy materials. This has 83%. Others are barely above average

Research question 2: How do teachers influence functional literacy?

How teachers influence functional literacy (items 11 to 20)

S/No	items	Yes	%	No	%
11	Teachers as good role model	140	93	10	07
12	Teachers exchanging reading materials with students	60	40	90	60
13	Teachers discussing materials read with students	80	53	70	47
14	Selecting interesting materials for class notice board	120	80	30	20
15	Teachers reads always to his students	110	73	40	27
16	Teachers advices students to read always	120	80	30	20
17	Teachers gives reading assignments	70	47	80	53
18	Teachers gives prizes to best students	25	17	125	83
19	Teachers links reading to life out of school	65	37	85	63
20	Teachers encourages students to take part in improvisation	73	49	77	51

The above table shows that teachers can do a lot to influence functional literacy. Apart from item 2, teachers exchanging reading materials with students which has 25% and item 18, that is, teachers giving prizes to best students which has 17%, all other items have high percentages

which shows that teachers can do a lot to influence functional literacy.

Discussion

From table 1 above, it can be seen that teachers' influence is only minimal in the provision of

literacy materials. Only item 1 which insists that parents provide textbooks has a high percentage of 9%. The other items like sourcing newspaper and magazines from school had only 43%. It is well known fact that the economy is bad and this affects the provision of textbooks by the parents. In the same way, not many schools make provisions for books, newspapers or magazines.

Table 2 shows how teachers encourage and prepare the children to achieve functional literacy. 93% of the respondents agree that the teacher being a good role model is important. Except for item 2, teachers exchange reading materials with students which has only 25% Yes, and teachers giving prizes to students which has 17%. All other items recorded high scores as ways of encouraging functional literacy by teachers. There is no doubt that teachers' attitude and commitment will affect the achievement of functional literacy. Nobody gives what he has not got. If the teachers display a high level of literacy, students will automatically follow. Unfortunately, many teachers are nonchalant and uninterested in the pursuit of literacy or to even foster it. They hardly find time for personal reading talk less about reading to the children. According to Aboderin (1987), teachers should read a lot for pleasure because there are areas of knowledge and information that are worth exploring for personality development, Cardarelli introduced a program which could help teachers come together to read and discuss best-selling books with their colleagues. This could help to "increase teachers' personal reading and decrease the feeling of isolation often experienced by classroom teachers" (p 664). This program will help teachers to share, discover and appreciate books and literature (p 665) If Nigerian teachers could adopt this practice it will inculcate good reading habits in our teachers and help them to serve as good literacy models A positive attitude to reading and literacy materials will show in the teachers' positive disposition towards books and this will impact positively towards instilling functional literacy in children.

Enesi (2005) did sound the alarm about the low level of literacy in Nigeria which is causing a lot of concern. This is because literacy is central to the efficient functioning of an individual especially in a modern world like ours. It is obvious that an individual without functional literacy is seriously handicapped. Literacy was defined as the state of being able to read and write. Today, the definition has been expanded to include the ability to communicate effectively with everyone, numerate and engage in document processing (Aboderin 1999). A functional literate must be seen to possess certain skills. Heath (1980) believes that a functional literate must possess the active knowledge of how the written work operates and the ability to deploy and idealize language to idealize and realize goals in various social situations (Emmitt and Pollock 1997).

Teachers themselves need the encouragement to read beyond class texts and note of lesson. The need for teachers to read various types of texts cannot be over-emphasized.

This study was designed to find out the teachers' role in the provision of literacy materials and therefore functional literacy for the future of our nation. The main findings were that:

1. Teachers only insists on the provision of textbooks by parents
2. Teachers are not able to influence the school authority to provide newspapers and magazines or even teachers text.
3. Many teachers don't know about rotational library.
4. Many teachers don't take extra pain to link classroom reading to outside world.
5. They don't encourage students to read for pleasure
6. They try to read to students at times.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that teachers have a lot to do to improvise functional literacy. Since it appears that many homes are not literate enough to assist the children to acquire functional literacy and the government is not showing the expected commitment the teacher may still be

the last resort in inculcating functional literacy in our children.

Recommendation

To ensure functional literacy a number of things have to be considered,

1. The stakeholders should empower the teachers to create and maintain an environment that can promote functional literacy
2. Government, individuals and non-governmental organisations should promote book fair, book presentations that will help the children to have sustained interest in literacy materials
3. Language teachers and other persons involved in propagating literacy should be encouraged.

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