

EFFECT OF CLOSE INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an empirical study, which is aimed at finding out the effect of the close instructional method on the achievement of senior secondary students in reading comprehension. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The study was a non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design involving one treatment zone and one control group. Four schools in Enugu Education population comprised all SSII students. One intact class from each of the four schools giving a total of 186 students made up the sample for the study. The English Language Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (ERCAT), the instrumental plans for the treatment and conventional groups and lesson achievement tests (form I and II) were used for the study. The and post-test assessments. The data obtained were analyzed using means, standard deviation, and analyses of co-variance. The result showed that the cloze method has a significant effect on the students' achievement in reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the active language skills and it is very important in the life of every literate person. According to Berk (1979), learning depends on the comprehension and retention of new information.

34

This means that a lot of emphasis must be placed on reading comprehension in schools. For some time now, the question of how best to teach reading has frequently been a subject of keen research. Fairly modern language learning methods such as guided reading lessons approach (Herber 1992), Reading study systems (Hill 1992), Individualized reading (Guthrie 1981), were still criticized as being ineffective (Gray 1995). So there was a renewed call for more affective teaching strategies for reading comprehension. This quest led to the emergence of linguistic psychologists who postulated that passages should be conceived as wholes and not as discrete units. They referred to a seminar held at Indiana on psycholinguistics in 1953 during which it was speculated that the cloze approach could be useful in evaluation as well as in teaching reading comprehension.

The cloze originated from the Gestalt theory of closure in psychology founded by Max Wertheimer in 1880s. This law shows the tendency of human beings to perceive unfinished or incomplete figures as complete. This means filling the gaps in broken pattern. In language, patterns are linguistic in nature. Taylor (1953), who originated the cloze unit defines a cloze as any single occurrence of a successful attempt to reproduce accurately a part deleted from a passage by deciding from the context that remains what the missing part should be.

Two broad types of cloze exist. The fixed ratio type which involves the deletion of every nth word in a passage i.e. every 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th or 10th word. The deletion of every 5th word is the standard deletion. The other type is the variable ratio type which involves the deletion of content words that are rich with meanings e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. So the cloze procedure is a technique by which words are systematically deleted from a reading passage and are replaced by blanks of uniform lengths. Cloze tests differ from ordinary filling in the blanks (i.e. completion tests). The difference is that in ordinary completion tests, words are selected subjectively for deletion. In the cloze test, words are selected systematically. The cloze procedure

deals with blanks that are contextually related. When Taylor (1953) first developed the cloze technique, it was used in assessing the readability of prose and in the construction of instructional exercises for teaching remedial reading. With time, the cloze was also found to be very useful as a teaching technique (Schoenfield 1980). It encourages the use of contextual clues and strengthens vocabulary (Bortnick and Leopardo 1976).

The objectives of the JSS reading comprehension syllabus as stated by the Federal Ministry of Education (1981) are to emphasize and facilitate the systematic development of reading and listening comprehension. These objectives are also re-emphasized and broadened at the senior secondary levels. But the performance of students in Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School Examinations in English Language continues to decline. Teachers are at a loss on how best to teach the reading comprehension aspect of the language in order to achieve greater reader competence. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore the effect of the cloze instructional approach on the achievement of students in reading comprehension.

One research question and one hypothesis guide the study;
 What is the effect of the cloze instructional approach on students' mean achievement in reading comprehension?
 Ho: There will be no significant difference in the mean reading comprehension scores of students taught reading comprehension using the cloze method and those taught using the conventional method.

METHOD

The non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design was used. To avoid disruption, intact classes were used. The pre-test post-test design which does not involve random assignment of subjects was used. They were both experimental and control groups.

The study covered Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State. The population comprised all the SSII students numbering four thousand eight hundred and twenty two (4822) from the 28 secondary schools in Enugu Zone in the 2003/04 academic session. The reason for choosing SSII students is to ensure that the subjects are adequately exposed to the senior secondary school curriculum in reading comprehension.

In each of the schools, one intact class was selected through a simple random sampling. The total number of students involved in the study is 186. The instrument used was the English Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (ERCAT) developed by the researcher. This comprised five comprehension passages drawn from the students' literature texts with five questions accompanying each passage. The ERCAT is of two types- form I and form II, and the two were face - validated by specialists in Research and English Language Education Department of University of Nigeria Nsukka. The pre-test (ERCAT I) was administered to both treatment and control groups before the onset of the experiment. After six(6) weeks of treatment, the post-test (ERCAT II) was administered to the study group.. The hypotheses were tested using Analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean scores of reading comprehension Achievement of students taught reading comprehension using the cloze approach and the conventional approach.

Groups	n	Mean	S.D.
Cloze approach	80	58.25	13.23
Conventional approach	106	31.36	6.55

Table 2: ANCOVA table showing students' achievements in reading comprehension.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	D/F	Mean squares	Fcal	Fcv	Dec
Co-variables	5614.136	1	5614.136	268.023		
Main effects	37122.255	2	12374.085	592.069		
Teaching method	31274.308	1	31274.308	1496.398	3.89	5
Explained	47791.941	7	6827.420	326.675		
Residual	3720.150	178	20.900			
Total	125522.79	189	56110.849			

DISCUSSION

The result of table 1 reveals that the cloze approach is more effective than the conventional approach in the teaching of reading comprehension at the senior secondary school level. The cloze approach yielded a mean achievement score of 58.25 while for the conventional approach the mean score was 31.36. On the test of significance of students taught reading using the two procedures, summary of data analysis in table 2 shows that the cloze instructional approach is superior to the conventional approach in fostering students achievement in reading comprehension since the f-cal is greater than the f-cv at 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the conclusion is that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of students taught reading comprehension using the cloze approach. This finding is in line with the opinion expressed by Osakwe 1997 and Smith (1971) who argued that concepts occur in logical relationships and are better perceived as wholes. This is because the ability to fill gaps systematically in a passage invariably depends on the ability of the learners to make genuine analysis of basic concepts in the passage so as to form a conceptual whole that determines the general comprehensibility of a passage.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has shown that students taught using the cloze approach performed better than those taught with the conventional approach. Based on this, it is recommended that effort should be made to incorporate the cloze approach into the secondary school curriculum.

Also cloze should be put into use in teaching different parts of speech and also in evaluation.

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