

Imaginative story writing: An effective tool in the acquisition and use of English language skills among school children in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

While rudimentary English classes lays the ground work for understanding the nature of language, creative writing helps elaborate on the importance of story. There are few opportunities for children to study creative stories in the school system. There is even less encouragement of this process of learning. Yet, such creative activities ought to be encouraged and established. This is because it serves as a bridge between the past, the present and the future. More importantly, it plays a unifying role in the socio-cultural harmony, particularly in a multi-lingual country as Nigeria. This study revealed a significant positive influence of creative writing with emphasis on imaginative story making, on the student language arts skill acquisition. The Solomon four design methods were used for the study and eight schools were randomly selected for the study. Four schools served as the experimental schools, while the other four served as the control schools. One hundred and sixty pupils were randomly select from all schools for this exercise. Inferential and descriptive statistical methods were employed for the analysis, and all analysis was tested at the 0.05 alpha levels. Thus the results obtain shows a 95% reliability.

Keywords: Imaginative Story, Creative Writing, Effective Tool, School Children, Cross River State

Introduction

Imaginative story writing can be seen the pinnacle of imaginative writing. Imaginative writing entails artistry display in creative writing. Creative writing on the other hand is any writing that goes outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic, or technical forms of literature, typically identified by an emphasis on narrative craft, character development, and the use of literary tropes or with various traditions of poetry and poetics. Creative writing is writing that expresses the writer's thoughts and feelings in an imaginative, often unique, and poetic way. Creative writing is guided more by the writer's need to express feelings and ideas than by restrictive demands of factual and logical progression of expository writing. While they are characterised by such attributes as clarity, emotion, meaning and connection and language style; they can take any form as short stories, poems, letters to self (future/past), letters to others, scripts, diary entries, interior monologues, prologues/epilogues, speeches, or even autobiography, etc.

While rudimentary English classes lays the ground work for understanding the nature of English language, creative writing helps elaborate on the importance of story, and it is not an extraneous lesson. Stories overwhelm our culture. Stories help us build strong relationships. Story structure is at the base of all things (Sheaffer, 2013; Brunner, 1967, Dewey, 1938)

Statement of problem

Creative and imaginative writing should be taught in elementary schools. This form of education is very important. Imaginative story making is a unique and profession skill that displays mastery in language arts, and has been exploited by every notable writer and orator. This skill was fully depicted in the works of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Illiad*.

The level of language skills among school children in Nigeria is fast deteriorating along with academic performance (Olanipekun, Atteh, Zaku, & Sarki, 2014; Ojo, 2008). The use of the English language in Nigeria dates back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century when British merchants and Christian missionaries settled in the coastal towns called Badagry, near Lagos in the present day South Western Nigeria and Calabar, a town in the present day South Eastern Nigeria. The merchants initially traded in slaves until the slave trade was abolished in 1807, at which time freed slaves of Nigerian origin returned to the country. Many of them, who had been exposed to Western education and Christianity, later served as translators or interpreters for the Christian missionaries. Although the primary aim of the Christian mission was to propagate Christianity, but with the attainment of independence, English grew to become the major medium for inter-ethnic communication. Like most African nations, the country, after independence, had to grapple with multi-ethnicity and acute multilingualism (Taiwo, 2009, Babatunde, 2001, Bamgbose, 1991). The most vulnerable being the elementary school children.

Thus to address the challenges of English language among school children in Nigeria, it is important to introduce creative story making as an identifiable too in helping them school children acquire the necessary English language art skills early enough. This is because English language plays a unifying role in the national development of Nigeria, because no indigenous language(s) is acceptable to all Nigerians (Adedimeji, 2014; Igboanus, & Ohia, 2001)

Also, there are few opportunities for children to study creative stories in the school system. There is even less encouragement of this process of learning. Yet, such creative activities ought to be encouraged and established. General communicators will use such skills. Professional writers, performers, artist and even scientist would also benefit from these skills, and they are to emerge nowhere else, but from the mist of our children. Therefore the goal of this study was to find out how imaginative story writing enhances language art skills amongst school children in Nigeria.

Materials and method

The experimental method adopted for this study was the Solomon Four – Design. The simple random sampling technique was adapted to randomly sample school from four different pairs of nursery and primary schools in Calabar metropolis (TABLE 1). The major dependent variables of the study are proficiency in imaginative story writing and punctuation skills. The independent variable is the mode of instruction (creative story). While other independent variables include sex, type of school and socio economic background of children.

TABLE 1: The Four Group Design

S/N	Status	School(s)		Pretest (Y ₁)	Independent Variable	Post Test (Y ₂)
1	R	Auntie Mmargaret Covenant Holy Child	nE ₁ pE ₁	Y ₁ Y ₁	X X	Y ₂ Y ₂
2	R	Calabar Preparatory Govt. School Barracks Road	nC ₁ pC ₁	Y ₁ Y ₁	- -	Y ₂
3	R	Command Children Calabar Academy	nE ₂ pE ₂	- -	X X	Y ₂
4	R	Unical Staff school Obufa Esuk	nC ₂ pC ₂	- -	- -	Y ₂ Y ₂

Source: Researchers field work, 2005.

KEY:

- nE = samples are pretested and exposed to the independent variable (imaginative stories writing(x)).
- nC₁ and pC₁ = samples are pretested but not exposed to the independent variable (X).
- nE₂ and pE₂ = samples are not pretested but have been exposed to the independent variable (x).
- R = All groups are randomly assigned.
- Y₂ = All groups are post tested.
- n = Nursery school
- p = Primary school

Two schools make up the experimental (nE₁ and pE₁). The second pair constitutes the first control (nC₁ and pC₁). The third pair make up the second experimental (nE₂ and pE₂) and the last pair, the second control (nC₂ and pC₂). Twenty (20) children were randomly assigned to each group from the class population of the schools. This gave the entire sample population of one hundred and sixty children for the experiment.

The 'Breath Approach' was adopted in the control groups, while the 'Depth Approach' was employed with the experimental groups. This simply means that a one-dimensional and traditional teaching method was used with the control groups, while the rich language approach was used with the experimental groups. The depth approach classes employed a variety of stimuli as source materials for the creation of new stories, these included pictures (that tell stories), poems, music, props and costume and literature. The children in these classes were also given the opportunity to explore language in situations that are imaginative e.g. reporting on past events, informing, instructing, defending and justifying, hypothesizing and reconstructing.

In order to develop mastery in the use of supportive writing skills or mechanics, children in the depth classes were given taped recorded materials to read their materials out loud to determine where punctuation was necessary. The experiments were carried out in a period of eight weeks; each class had an hour of teaching for the duration of the research. There were sixteen teachers in all, eight teachers and eight record keepers.

Discussion of findings

The descriptive statistics associated with the experiment is shown in TABLE 2. The superior performance by the experimental groups cannot be due to chance alone. For the pretested group, the marginal increase of the posttest mean scores for the control group over their pre-test scored may be due to maturation and or information received from their normal classroom experience. It is clearly evident that the effect of such exposure cannot be compared to exposure to creative story making mode of instruction. For the pretested group, a comparison of the mean pretest performance of the experimental and control groups were found to be non-significant. This implies that the groups equivalent or comparison before treatment was similar.

TABLE 2: Means, standard deviations and independent t-test analysis results of influence of Imaginative Story Writing (ISW) and passage punctuation skill (PPS) for experimental and control subjects' performance.

Schools	Variables	Experimental Groups			Control Groups			t
		N	X	SD	N	X	SD	
Nursery	ISW	20	17.75	6.40	20	8.40	3.14	5.88
Exp I	PPS	20	13.00	3.87	20	5.00	1.92	8.29
Nursery	ISW	20	15.70	4.95	20	6.45	2.26	8.59
Exp II	PPS	20	12.45	3.15	20	4.65	1.42	10.09
Primary	ISW	20	8.70	5.40	20	6.35	2.35	1.78
EXP I	PPS	20	8.60	3.35	20	4.95	1.90	4.24
Primary	ISW	20	8.25	3.55	20	5.15	3.05	2.95
EXP II	PPS	20	8.95	2.03	20	4.70	3.02	5.25
Overall	ISW	40	10.75	5.74	40	7.43	2.87	9.21
Nursery	PPS	40	12.73	3.51	40	4.83	1.67	12.95
Overall	ISW	40	8.48	4.52	40	5.75	2.75	3.28
Primary	PPS	40	8.78	3.15	40	4.83	1.95	6.81
All	ISW	80	12.61	6.61	80	6.59	2.92	7.43
	PPS	80	10.75	3.86	80	4.83	1.80	12.34

Source: Researcher's field work, 2005.

The result of the dependent t – test analysis was found to be significant for imaginative story writing ($t = -8.21$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$) in nursery schools and primary schools ($t = 2.01$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$). A significant result was also obtained for proficiency in punctuation skills acquisition for nursery school pupils ($t = -11.67$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$) and for primary school pupils ($t = 6.96$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$). For the control groups, the calculated t – value was also found to be significant for proficiency in imaginative story writing ($t = -3.24$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$) and punctuation skills ($t = -7.10$; $df = 19$; $p < .05$). However, the result was insignificant for primary school control groups I in imaginative story writing ($t = -0.50$; $df = 19 > .05$) and punctuation skills ($t = 1.59$; $df = 19 > .05$). The result showed that there is a significant influence of creative story making on pupils proficiency and language arts skills acquisition.

TABLE 3: Dependent t-test of significance in the mean performance in ISW and PPS for experimental and control Nursery schools.

Schools	Variable	No of Cases	Mean(x)	Standard Deviation	t-Value
Experiment	ISW	20	-10.75	1.31	-8.21*
	PPS	20	-8.85	0.76	-11.64*
Control	ISW	20	-1.00	0.3	-3.22*
	PPS	20	-1.35	1.18	-7.50*

*Significant at .05

Source: Author's field research, 2005

TABLE 4: Dependent t-test of significance in the mean performance in ISW and PPS for experimental and control Primary schools.

Schools	Variable	No of Cases	Mean(x)	Standard Deviation	t-Value
Experiment	ISW	20	-2.40	1.19	-2.02*
	PPS	20	-5.35	0.77	-6.95*
Control	ISW	20	-0.35	0.70	-0.50
	PPS	20	-1.10	0.69	-1.59

*Significant at .05

Source: Author's field research, 2005

Summary of findings

The result showed the following.

1. A significant difference between the post-test mean performance of the experimental group I and control group I in imaginative story writing ($t = 5.88$; $df = 38$; $p < 0.5$) in nursery school.
2. There is a significant difference between experimental group I and control group I in Primary school in their mean post-test performance in punctuation skills ($t = 4.24$; $df = 38$; $p < .05$) with an insignificant result in imaginative story writing ($t = 1.78$; $df = 38$; $p > .05$).
3. There is a significant difference between the nursery schools experimental group II pupils and control group II pupils mean post-test performance in imaginative story writing ($t = 8.59$; $df = 38$; $p < .05$) and punctuation skills.
4. There is a significant difference between the primary schools experimental group II pupils and control group II pupils post-test mean performance in imaginative story writing ($t = 2.95$; $df = 38$; $p < .05$) with proficiency in punctuation skills still significant ($t = 5.25$; $df = 38$; $p < .05$).
5. There is a significant difference between the experimental and control subjects in the nursery school in their mean post-test performance in imaginative story writing ($t = 9.21$; $df = 78$; $p < .05$) and proficiency in punctuation skills ($t = 12.95$; $df = 78$; $p < .05$).
6. There is a significant difference between the experimental and control subjects in the primary school in their mean post-test performance in imaginative story writing ($t = 3.28$; $df = 78$; $p < 0.5$) and proficiency in punctuation skills ($t = 6.82$; $df = 78$; $p < .05$).

7. There is a significant difference between the experimental and control subjects mean post-test performance in imaginative story writing ($t = 7.43$; $df = 158$; $p < .05$) and proficiency punctuation skills ($t = 12.34$; $df = 158$; $p < .05$).

The high significance between the experimental and control groups in both primary and nursery is probably due to the treatment rather than the effect of random fluctuation. This then shows that there is a significance difference between experimental and control groups in terms of proficiency in imaginative story writing and punctuation skills. Since in all cases, the experimental group outperformed the control group, it then means that the experimental groups are more creative in story writing with proficiency in the usage of the punctuation skill than the control group pupils.

This study has shown that children taught with creative methods perform better than children taught with conventional methods. This supports the position of Piaget (1967), Bruner (1967) and Dewey (1938) who all accepted the position that this kind of learning environment appeals to real activity, to spontaneous work based on personal need and interest of the child.

Recommendation and conclusion

In line with the study findings, it is therefore recommended that creative writing should form the major part of elementary and nursery education. Imaginative story writing should become the major driving mechanism to achieving this goal. Since pupils with these exposures have been found to develop mastery in punctuation skills, it further proves that it is an invaluable tool in learning.

In conclusion, while rudimentary English classes lays the ground work for understanding the nature of language, creative writing helps elaborate on the importance of story. Stories in themselves overwhelm our culture and help to build stronger relationships. Hence its unifying potentials should be exploited to the fullest, through early learning in child education.

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