

Improving Primary School Pupils' Achievement In English Language Using Specialist And Generalist Teaching Approaches In Anambra State

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Abstract: The study focused on improving primary school pupils' achievement in English language using specialist and generalist teaching approaches on in Anambra state. The study employed a non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design. The sample of study comprised 133pupils drawn from two primary schools located at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Nursery / Primary School (NAUNPS), Awka and Nnewi. The instrument for data collection was Achievement Test for Upper Primary School (ATUPS). The data collected with ATUPS were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and ANCOVA. The result revealed that the specialist teaching approach had greater positive effect on pupils' academic achievements in English Language than the generalist teaching approach. There was no significant gender difference in academic achievements in English Language on the basis of the use of teaching approaches. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended that the advocacy of Federal Government on the use of specialist teaching for only core subjects should be implemented through the Universal Basic Education Commision.

Keywords: English, subject specialist, generalist, achievement, pupils

I. INTRODUCTION

The education of the child is a step by step process. The primary level of education is an important stage at the child's educational level as it involves laying the foundation for other levels of education. Laying a solid foundation for other levels of education demands that primary education attains its objectives which include; inculcating permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively; providing a sound scientific, critical and reflective thinking and promote patriotism, fairness and understanding and national unity among others (FRN, 2008). The child, the subject and the teacher at the epicenter of educational experiences needed to meet these objectives. Therefore, National Policy on Education also stipulated twelve subjects to which the Nigerian child will be exposed among which English language occupies a prominent place. An examination of the current English language curriculum shows an expansion both in number and in depth of concepts to reflect

current Basic Education requirement and global changes. It also shows a marked difference from previous curricular provisions of 1977 and 1988 National Policies on Education.

The teacher is pivotal to the successful implementation of the curriculum. To ensure quality teaching and learning at the primary levels, the minimum qualification for teaching in primary schools was upgraded from Teacher's Grade II Certificate (TCII) to Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Furthermore, the National Policy on Education states that:

'Specialist teachers shall be provided for particular subjects such as Mathematics, Basic Science & Technology, Physical & Health Education, Language Arts (in relation to English, Arabic, French, Sign Language and Nigerian Languages), Music, Fine Art and Home Economics (FRN, 1998; 2008, p.21)'

Evidently, it is expected that teaching and learning of core subjects such English language in primary schools require that every child must receive excellent instruction from professionals specifically trained and committed to teaching

particularly the core subjects in primary education curriculum. This was further promoted by the provision of teacher performance standards which stipulate, among other things, that teachers should know; the content of the subjects they teach and how to teach the subjects to their students (pedagogical knowledge); the national curriculum requirements; literacy and numeracy; the diverse socio-cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of students and effects of these factors on learning. The professional skills they are to exhibit, include but not limited to; planning, resourcefulness, teaching and communication skills, evaluation of learners' performance, reporting, record keeping and programme monitoring and evaluation, creating and sustaining exciting learning environment based on excellent classroom management and leadership skills (Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), 2010).

The TRCN specifically provided that the primary school teacher (NCE holder) is expected to know all the subjects being taught in the primary school and the pedagogical skills required to teach them. In view of the expansion in primary school curriculum and the pre-service training which prepare the primary school teacher as subject specialist, the possibility of a generalist teacher meeting these performance expectations and uplifting the academic achievement of primary school pupils became doubtful. The need arose therefore, to empirically establish the effectiveness of generalist and specialist English language teachers' in improving pupils' achievement.

Subject specialist is one who has training in a specific discipline taken as a major in undergraduate studies or taken throughout the university education programme (Boscariol & Neden, 2008). This training prepares the teacher with the knowledge and skills necessary to bring about effective teaching of the specific subject. Stephens (2004) argued that teacher preparation can better meet teachers' needs if training will be focused on measurable outcomes and more knowledge of theory and principles that describe how instruction influences learning. He further explained that teachers are not provided with professional development needed to implement an innovative programme and that a specialist instead of a generalist teacher has better background, will be more experienced about subject ideas, and will understand the relationships between concepts and units that are being studied. This will make the pupils to see the wholesomeness of the subject and develop logical and critical thinking.

Generalist teacher according to McGrath & Rust (2008) is a teacher with knowledge, skills and interest in many areas but with no specific ability to provide instruction in all key subject areas. The prevalent approach in use in primary school is the generalist approach or self contained classrooms /one teacher per class. The generalist teacher is expected to deliver a diverse range of subject-matter in the primary school curriculum and consist of one teacher, who teaches all the curriculum content, spends longer time in class alone with the pupils in the classroom and can readily adjust to daily programme to suit special circumstances.

Subject-knowledge is one of the conditions for effective teaching. Machamana, Jaworski, Rowland, Hodgen, and Prestage, (2001) confirming the importance of subject knowledge to effective teaching states, that teachers cannot

teach well that which they do not know themselves. The key question is 'can teachers teach all subjects as expected by the curriculum? It is only a teacher who has specialized in a discipline that can do this. Therefore, departmentalization would allow this specialization. One strong argument for better subject knowledge and subject specialist teaching focuses on teachers' in-depth understanding of the underlying concepts, principles and ways of thinking that underpin the subject in order to be effective teachers of that subject. They need such in-depth knowledge in order to cope with novel situations (Machamana et al., 2001). However, Yearwood (2011) insists that there is no research evidence to support the theory that child's social adjustment and individual attention, in any way suffer when taught by more than one teacher. Furthermore, McGrath and Rust (2008) says that on the basis of present information, it must be assumed that the adjustment of children in a departmental situation is not inferior to that of children in a self- contained classroom. The desire and pressure for more subject specialist teaching is not as yet a feasible option for most heads given the current funding arrangements and staffing of primary schools.

The use of generalist approach is commonly employed because it allows for greater flexibility in scheduling (Garvis, 2008). One would logically argue that the generalist approach would increase time on task because of the reduced time required to organize materials and change subjects. A generalist may be regarded as one who may be a specialist in a course of study but due to school structure type may find himself teaching all the curriculum of a particular class all alone. The subject knowledge of generalist class-teachers has been questioned, with suggestion that something, approaching excellent results is required in all specialist subjects and serious demands are now placed on the competence of the current serving generalist teachers. The implication is that specialist teacher may be required to teach these specialist subjects like English as stipulated by the FRN or that the current teachers should be retrained as to lay good foundation on the teaching and learning of core subjects in primary schools. The on-going discourse shows that the investigation of the effect of specialist and generalist teaching approaches on pupils' achievement in English language is a worthwhile quest.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the effect of the use of subject specialist and generalist teaching approaches on pupils' academic achievement in primary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study:

- ✓ examined whether primary four pupils (4th grade) taught under subject specialist approach (departmentalized classroom) scored higher in English Language than students taught under the generalist teaching approach (self-contained classrooms) in primary schools.
- ✓ Determined the influence of gender on the achievement of pupils those taught English language using specialist approach and those taught using generalist approach.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ✓ How effective is subject specialist teaching approach on primary school pupils' academic achievement in English Language when compared with achievement of pupils taught with generalist teaching approach?

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- ✓ There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores in English Language of pupils taught with subject specialist and generalist teaching approaches.
- ✓ There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught with subject specialist teaching approach based on their gender.
- ✓ There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught with generalist teaching approach based on their gender.

II. METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a Quasi-experimental Research Design. Ali (1999) explained that quasi experimental research design could be used in a school setting where it is not always possible to use pure experimental design which they consider as the disruption of school activities. The specific design the researcher employed was a 2x2 pretest posttest non-equivalent control group factorial design. In this design there was both experimental and control groups. Intact classes were used.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Nursery/Primary Schools (UNIZIK N/P Schools), Anambra State in the South East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The UNIZIK N/P School has primary school in her two major campuses, Awka and Nnewi.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of this study is 1001 primary school pupils in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Primary school pupils. This number consists of 767 pupils from Awka campus and 234 pupils from Nnewi campus. The two schools are headed by one Head teacher and controlled by one Board of Governors. The policy guidelines, mission and vision are the same. They operate the same scheme of work, write the same internal examination. Both write the same external examination with the public schools in Anambra State. They wear the same uniforms and maintain the same school programme. Most of the parents of the children are staff of the university living around Awka and Nnewi. The choice to use the schools may allow for maximum co-ordination of the

experiment since the researcher was conversant with the areas as the Headmistress of the schools.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A sample of 133 pupils was used for this study. This was drawn from four intact classes of primary four, consisting of three classes of 101 pupils at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Nursery / Primary School, Awka, as experimental group and one class of 32 pupils at Nnewi as control group. Cluster sampling technique was used to randomly select one arm (primary 4). Its equivalent in Nnewi campus was used as control g.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The instrument used in this study was Achievement Test for Upper Primary School (ATUPS). It was constructed by the researcher using the Universal Basic Education Curriculum on English Language, group. The ATUPS was constructed according to the four subjects' first curriculum comprising 20 questions with four multiple choice test items. The test items were specifically used to measure the academic achievement level of the pupils.

VALIDATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

The instruments for the achievement tests were validated by three experts in the departments of Educational Management and Policy, Measurement and Evaluation and Guidance and Counseling, from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. It was also given to an expert on the field, Area Inspector of Education, Awka South, Awka Education zone. These experts were requested to assess the relevance, adequacy and comprehensiveness of the items of the tests. To guide the experts in the validation exercise, the topic of study, purpose of study, statement of problem, research questions and hypotheses, together with the draft instrument were given to the experts. The expert observations, comments and suggestions are incorporated in the modification of the instruments.

RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

Twenty copies of ATUPS was administered by the researcher to the primary four pupils of University Primary School, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The data generated was used to find the internal consistency of the instrument. Kuder-Richardson formula-20 procedure was used in testing the internal consistency of the items for scores derived from the trial test and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.91

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The instrument (ATUPS) was administered separately to both experimental and control groups as pre- test. This was followed by the treatment which lasted for one term of 10 weeks. After 10 weeks, the post-test was administered to the experimental and control groups.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Mean scores were used to analyze the research questions. Analysis of co- variance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0. 05 level of significance. ANCOVA was used in order to take care of the initial differences in the ability levels among the pupils. The decision rule was that where the Pvalue was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, otherwise the null hypothesis was retained.

III. RESULTS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How effective is subject specialist teaching approach on primary school pupils' academic achievement in English language when compared with the achievement of pupils taught under generalist teaching approach?

Source of Variation	N	Pretest	Posttest	Gained mean
Subject Specialist	101	10.40	82.44	72.04
Generalist	32	10.72	67.06	56.34

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores in English Language for Pupils taught with Subject Specialist and Generalist Teaching Approach

Table 1 shows that with pretest mean score of 10.40 and posttest mean score of 82.44 with gained mean 72.04 for the pupils taught with the subject specialist teaching approach as against pretest mean score of 10.72 and posttest mean score of 67.06 with gained mean of 56.34 for the pupils taught under generalist teaching approach.

HYPOTHESIS 1: There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores in English Language of pupils taught under subject specialist and generalist teaching approaches.

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	Decision
Corrected Model	5785.706	2	2892.853			
Intercept	43527.466	1	43527.466			
Pretest	42.623	1	42.623			
Method	5778.278	2	5778.278	20.96	.000	S
Error	35836.084	130	275.662			
Total	866154.000	133				
Corrected Total	41621.789	132				

Table 2: ANCOVA on the Mean achievement Scores in English language for Pupils taught with subject specialist and generalist teaching approaches

In table 2, it is observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 132df denominator, the calculated F 20.96 with a pvalue of 0.000 which less than 0.05. The null hypothesis was thus rejected. Therefore, there is significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught with subject specialist teaching approach when compared with mean achievement scores of those taught with generalist teaching approach in favour of specialist teaching approach.

NULL HYPOTHESIS 2: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught under subject specialist teaching approach based on their gender.

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	Decision
Corrected Model	4641.413	2	2320.706			
Intercept	41920.842	1	41920.842			
Pretest	76.506	1	76.506			
Gender	4470.222	1	4470.222	52.19	3.96	NS
Error	8393.419	98	85.647			
Total	699394.000	101				
Corrected Total	13034.832	100				

Table 3: ANCOVA on the Mean achievement Scores in English Language for Pupils taught with Subject Specialist based on Gender

Table 3 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 100df denominator, the calculated F 52.19 with a Pvalue of 3.96 which is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught under subject specialist teaching approach based on gender.

NULL HYPOTHESIS 3: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught under generalist teaching approach based on their gender.

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	Decision
Corrected Model	5924.311	2	2962.155			
Intercept	6553.619	1	6553.619			
Pretest	2.269	1	2.269			
Gender	5819.936	1	5819.936	9.98	4.18	NS
Error	16919.564	29	583.433			
Total	166760.000	32				
Corrected Total	22843.875	31				

Table 4: ANCOVA on the Mean achievement Scores in English language for Pupils taught with Generalist Approach based on Gender

Table 4 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 31df denominator, the calculated F 9.98 is with a Pvalue of 4.18. The null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there no significant difference in the mean achievement scores in English language of pupils taught under generalist teaching approach based on gender.

IV. DISCUSSION

The result of this study revealed that subject specialist teaching approach is more effective in enhancing the academic achievement in English. This result is similar to previous result obtained by Yearword (2011) in Georgia (United States) whose research showed that pupils' achievements in Reading was higher in a classroom in which a form of specialist teaching (departmentalized) was used than those taught in a one-teacher-teaches-all-subjects setting. This highly positive effect on pupils' academic achievement may be associated with the deep knowledge the specialist teacher brings to bear in the teaching of the subject. As observed by Uche (2001) teacher's mastery of English Language is the most important factor in students' performance in the subject. This is so probably because the specialist teacher empowers the student to produce higher quality work by the content knowledge the teacher possesses.

However, current finding is incongruent with some previous results that suggest that generalist teaching was more effective than specialist teaching (McGrath & Rust; 2008). The current result equally contrasts with others research findings that recorded no difference in academic achievement in English Language/Language/Communication Arts between students taught using the two approaches (Page, 2009; Cannon, 2011). Possible explanation for this incongruence lies in the teacher characteristics as some scholars have argued that the effects of specialization may largely depend on whether the high-performing or low-performing teachers specialize. Moreover, most of these studies used students from different grade levels in their studies.

V. CONCLUSION

From the evidence provided from the data analysis, the researcher concludes the specialist teaching approach had greater positive effect on pupils' academic achievements in English language than the generalist teaching approach.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are put forward:

- ✓ The provision of Federal government on the use of specialist teaching for only four core subjects should be implemented for the core subjects. Furthermore, mechanisms should be set in motion, through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), to implement and as well as monitor the implementation of this policy.
- ✓ Since NCE is the minimum qualification for teaching at the primary school level, Teachers' Professional Standard produced by the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) should be modified to provide for specific content knowledge for NCE teachers and not the

generalist status which they are currently accorded in the professional standards.

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