

Effectiveness of Paired Reading Strategy on Reading Ability of Struggling Readers in Primary Schools in Uyo L.G.A, Akwa Ibom State

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Corresponding Author

Olota Philip Olaoluwa¹

Samitha Ebey²

^{1,2}Department of Early Childhood and Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

¹Email: eglestutors@yahoo.com Tel: 08060690742

²Email: ebeysamitha@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study examined the effectiveness of paired reading strategy on reading ability of struggling readers in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental study was adopted. The study population was all the 2,974 primary three pupils in all the 47 public primary schools. The purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 73 primary three pupils from two intact classes. Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Beginners), Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Intermediate), Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Proficient) and Struggling Readers Reading Ability Test (SRRAT) were used as the instruments for the study.. Kudar Richardson Formula 21 was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments, which yielded coefficient indexes of 0.68 for Reading Level Classificatory Test (Beginners), 0.74 for intermediate, 0.69 for proficient and 0.90 for SRRAT. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis. The study revealed a significant difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading strategy and those exposed to choral reading strategy. Based on the study's findings, the researchers recommended, among others, that all classroom teachers make efforts to integrate paired reading strategy into teaching reading.

Keywords: Paired reading strategy, Reading ability, Struggle readers.

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Highlights of this paper

- Paired reading strategy has been examined to be potent in improving the reading achievement of struggling Readers in the study area.
- Choral reading strategy seems not to improve the reading achievement of struggling Readers in the study area.
- Reading difficulty affects all genders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading ability of struggling readers is one of the ways of ameliorating numerous learning problems facing humanity across the world, including Nigeria. Doing this could be easily achieved through an interactive process of reading. This therefore, is in tandem with the objectives which among them is to provide opportunities for the child to develop life-manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability through developing every child's reading ability (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013).

Reading is an interesting learning activity which has many definitions from different scholars. Reading is an interactive process in which the reader's prior knowledge of the world interacts with the message conveyed directly or indirectly by the text (Smith, 2004). This however involves two-way of interaction in which information is exchanged between the reader and the writer. Information is transferred from a transmitter to a receiver. This also enables a reader to conduct a dialogue, actively engages with the text to decode, assign meaning, and interpret meaningful information in the form of printed or verbal symbols (Ikoh, 2014; Obanya, 2002). Through the meaningful interpretation of printed symbols, an individual can gain wide information in the society. Leipzig (2001) also views reading as making meaning from print which requires that one identify the words in print a process called word recognition, construct and understand from them a process called comprehension and coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – a process called fluency which is an achievement in reading. To Williams (2004) reading is a process whereby one looks at and understands what has been written. There is a clear understanding that reading is related to acquiring information and is done silently or aloud. The importance of reading as one of the goals of primary education cannot be overemphasised in this study. Reading also helps the child learn about the world, their own culture and other cultures. It expands the vocabulary of children, helps build independence and self-confidence, leads to their future academic success, and enhances their imagination. Reading helps the child to know sounds, words and language and develop early literacy skills. Reading helps the child value books and stories, spark the child's imagination and stimulate curiosity to focus, concentration, social skills, and communication skills. It helps the child understand new or frightening events and the strong emotions that come with them.

In this paper, reading is the heart of human knowledge where acquiring of useful information is based on the reading ability of every child to interpret printed symbols or words. Reading ability is often described using the cognitive abilities of a reader. The process involves recognition of symbols, followed by the decoding of graphic symbols and finally, converting the symbols, into verbally and visually to make them meaningful (UNICEF, 2005). Breaking reading into merely cognitive abilities discounts the social aspects of reading experiences. The act of reading in school is socially constructed and adds to the identity of high achieving readers through which readers can obtain information needed to meet up the essential needs of their study assignment (Hall, 2012). Cognitive ability is an important part of the reading process. Pupils/students who have mastered reading strategies are more likely to view themselves as proficient and have increased self-efficacy, motivation to complete a task seen as difficult (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Suyitno, 2017). This implies that a child who has strong ability to engage in reading always may acquire useful information required to succeed in life.

Sometimes, the ability of pupils to read could be difficult. When it is difficult, it naturally make pupils to struggle in reading. A struggle reader is a child who experiences difficulty learning to read. According to [Brozo \(2002\)](#) struggling readers are those children who have been documented on norm-referenced tests as reading one or more years below their current grade level and has been shown to need additional support in reading comprehension from their classroom teacher. These are pupils or children showing difficulty reading. They could have problem in identifying letters of the alphabet, identifying letter sounds, and not blending sounds to form a word. It also includes children whose reading fluency is below their present grade. Struggling readers are pupils or children who are likely not to comprehend the reading process by creating a reading system that helps them construct meaning. This set of pupils lacks the tendency to meaningfully interpret printed words or symbols. Similarly, pupils who are in this category of struggling to read may have severe challenges in decoding text, having poor meta-cognitive skills, not comprehending what they read, and struggling to apply comprehension strategies appropriately.

In this study, the researchers observed that some pupils in public primary schools in Uyo L.G.A, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria have difficulties in reading. This disturbing issue is not without its many negative implications, especially since reading correlates with academic achievement. Again, the high rate of difficulties in reading in public primary schools has continued to be a source of concern to all stakeholders in the education of learners at this level. This is because in future, its implications for the quality of education at higher levels, as stated in the [Federal Republic of Nigeria \(FRN\) \(2013\)](#) could become so disheartening.

Struggling in reading does not just happen. It could occur due to impoverished exposure to language and early literacy activities, lack of adequate instruction, biological based risk factors among others. However, according to research conducted by the U.S National Institute for Child Health and Development, there is one overriding reason above all others: the root cause of unacceptably high percentage of individuals who struggle as readers. These individuals have not been taught scientifically-based reading instruction with a comprehensive and systematic phonics component. Findings revealed that struggling readers have difficulty identifying, discriminating, and isolating sound-foundational skills in fluent reading. To [Lyon \(2000\)](#) good readers are phonemically aware, understand the alphabetic principle, apply these skills rapidly and fluently, possess strong vocabularies and syntactical and grammatical skills and relate reading to their own experiences. Difficulties in any of these areas can impede reading development. [Adebayo \(2008\)](#) observed that many teachers have an underdeveloped understanding of teaching literacy and have negative attitudes towards teaching pupils reading strategies. The employment of unqualified language teachers has harmed the quality of teaching and learning of how to read. The most significant factor in pupils learning reading, in particular, is the quality of the teacher because teachers are role models. [Njie \(2013\)](#) also noted that most pupils have poor literacy skills due to teachers' incompetency and the poor teaching strategy they use to teach reading in class. In other words, the steady use of conventional reading strategies such as choral reading strategy has not been able to solve the problem of reading difficulties of pupils. Using conventional reading strategies seem to limit pupils to engage in interactive learning and avoid innovative approach in problem solving of struggle readers. This however could make or weaken reading ability of struggle readers.

To redress the reading challenges of struggle readers, some efforts have been made. In view of this, so many strategies for teaching reading which among them are phonics strategy, look and say strategy, language experience strategy and structural analysis strategy have been used to advance reading ability of struggle reads ([Joseph, 2018](#)). These strategies for teaching reading have been used without concrete result of improving reading ability of struggle readers. Hence the need to employ a learner-centre approach that makes pupils active in reading activity becomes necessary. In this bid, this present paper seek to investigate the effectiveness of paired reading strategy on

reading ability of struggle readers to see if the struggle readers especially in Uyo L.G.A, Akwa Ibom, could benefit more from the innovative reading strategy which one of them is paired reading strategy.

Paired reading strategy is a reading strategy that encourages peer teaching and learning. Paired reading is a reading activity where a learner and a skilled reader read a text together (Adebayo, 2008; Njie, 2013). It is a research-based fluency strategy used with readers who lack fluency (Topping, 2010). In this strategy, pupils are divided into pairs and read along together or take turns reading aloud to each other. Pairs can have the same reading ability or include a more fluent reader with a less fluent reader. Again, most of the learners' problems in reading are lack of sound vocabulary. Pupils or learners can actively practice their newly learned vocabulary as they express their opinions and share ideas in discussing the reading sections in pairs. Doing this, could make learners active in learning. To make pupils active in reading could require that paired reading strategy is often used in the classroom to build literacy skills and collaborate with peers. This could serve as an option in environments such as libraries and after school programs. Since there are no specific genres needed for paired reading, they can read to one another and discuss what they have learned with two peers. It provides a great opportunity for leadership, teamwork and overall development of comprehension and literacy skills.

Paired reading strategy encourages pupils to share the idea and knowledge; pupils can help each other explore the meaning of the text. According to Adebayo (2008) paired reading builds collaboration, encourages cooperation and supports peer-assisted learning. Based on adolescent literacy, this strategy allows young learners to take turns reading and creates an additional opportunity to monitor comprehension and build literacy skills. The reader serves as the "player", while the listener takes on the role of the "coach". Though only one learner reads at a time, the coach must stay attentive and follow along to correct any mistakes. The coach can assist when the player struggles with a difficult task.

Several studies supported that paired reading strategy encourages cooperative and builds collaboration in learning activity. In view of this, literature revealed that students performed highly in learning using cooperative learning approach irrespective of their ability level (Ajaja & Mezieobi, 2018). Further studies revealed improvement on academic activities of students after using paired intervention strategy in building cooperative and collaboration in learning (Kristin, 2015; Rahma, Idah, & Marzuki, 2019; Ugwu, 2019). Similar study on the effect of extensive reading strategy on students' achievement in reading comprehension revealed that an extensive reading strategy is more effective in improving achievement in reading comprehension (Owodunni, 2018).

On the contrary, Wael (2014) conducted a study on using a cooperative learning strategy on graduating students' academic performance which revealed that cooperative learning strategy had no significant improvement on students' academic performance. All these reviewed studies above were taken into consideration to be useful in promoting pupils active learning process.

This study is however guided by the Bandura (1977) which postulates that learning is a cognitive process that can occur by observing other people's actions. This theory explains that most human behaviour and skills are learned through observation, imitation and modelling. In application to this study, paired tutees learn behaviours and skills especially reading skills, from their paired tutors all the time. Paired tutors are the models to follow for their tutees. In other words, the pupils need paired reading so that the struggling readers can be observed and imitate the proficient readers in the classroom. This theory however supports the independent variable (paired reading) and the population of the study (struggling readers). The next theory is Social Constructivist Theory (1898 – 1934) by Lev Vygotsky which seeks to explain how people learn in social contexts (learn from each other). He suggested that cooperative learning exercises occurs through pupils/students' interactions with their peers, teachers, and other experts. This theory further explains that interaction with peers is an effective way of

developing skills and strategies where less competent children develop with help from more skilful peer-with the zone of proximal development. The theory is relevant to this study in that Knowledge is not a result of observing the world; it results from many social processes and interactions. Therefore, the pupils need to be involved in group or paired reading activity with intention to improve reading ability of struggle readers.

All in all, improving on reading ability of struggle readers could be anchored on paired reading strategy. Teachers and parents are expected to implement the paired reading strategy in school and at homes so that the goal of reading, especially at the early childhood and primary schools, should be attained to the point that each child should be functionally literate; being able to communicate effectively, even when the child's academic pursuit terminates at the primary school level. In view of this, many reviewed studies on cooperative/paired learning strategy were carried out on learners in University and secondary schools outside Nigeria (Rahma et al., 2019; Selina, Paul, & Agnes, 2019; Wael, 2014). Another related study which focused on peer-assisted learning strategy to increase the students with autism's math fluency skills and social skills was also investigated (Woodward, 2014). Many of these reviewed studies were carried out outside the shores of Nigeria which is an environment different from the present study. However, none of these studies to the best knowledge of the researcher vividly focused on enhancing reading ability of struggle readers which the present study captured. Above all, it is uncertain that effectiveness of paired- reading strategy on reading ability of struggle readers in primary schools in Nigeria has been widely investigated. Hence the need for this presents study.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Reading is truly one of the greatest intellectual accomplishments of childhood. Yet, many otherwise intellectually capable children fail to attain a reading skill level necessary to promote other later forms of learning. It has been argued that children are learning to read before the third grade, and after that time, they are reading to learn. Reading proficiency then becomes more central to school learning as children advance through the grade levels. Children who experience difficulties developing efficient reading skills do not do as well as other children in reading.

The high rate of difficulties in reading in public primary schools has continued to be a source of concern to all stakeholders in the education of learners at this level. This is because of its implications for the quality of education of the higher levels, as stated in the [Federal Republic of Nigeria \(FRN\) \(2013\)](#). The increase rate at which pupils struggle with reading in public primary schools has been attributed to poor reading strategies by classroom teachers. This disturbing issue is not without its many negative implications especially since reading correlates with academic achievement. The slow and poor performances of pupils in reading have been also attributed to using conventional reading strategies by instructors. Parents' and society at large blame the high rate at which pupils' struggle with reading on teachers' poor reading strategies. The continuous use of conventional reading strategies has not tackled the problem of reading difficulties among public primary school pupils. Based on pupils' poor reading ability and difficulties in reading, the researchers intend to examine the effectiveness of paired reading strategy on the reading ability of struggle readers in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.2. Research Question

One research question guided the study:

1. What is the mean reading ability score of struggling readers exposed to the paired reading intervention and those exposed to choral reading?

1.3. Hypothesis

A null hypothesis which was tested at 0.05 levels of significance guided the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to pair reading and those exposed to choral reading interventions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

An experimental study was adopted to investigate the effectiveness of paired reading strategy on reading ability of struggling readers in primary schools in Uyo L.G.A, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specific design for this study is pre-test post- test non –equivalent control group design, with the experimental group adopting paired reading strategy and the control group using coral reading intervention. Intact classes were used in the study with the intention to avoid disrupting the regular classroom activities since the duration of study lasted for eight weeks. The researchers got ethical approval from the participating schools through the Akwa Ibom State Primary School Management Board for the study.

The study was carried out in public primary schools in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The population of this study comprised all primary three (3) pupils in the forty-seven (47) public primary schools in the study area, estimated at two thousand nine hundred and seventy-four (2,974) pupils during the 2019/2020 school year (Source: Local Education Authority, Uyo). For the sample size, 73 pupils from two intact classes through purposive sampling technique were used in the study.

Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Beginners), Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Intermediate), Reading Level Classificatory Test (RLCT) (Proficient) and Struggling Readers Reading Ability Test (SRRAT) were used as the instrument for the study. Experts in Early Childhood and Special Education and Educational Foundations determined the instrument's validity at the University of Uyo. Kudar Richardson Formula 21 was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments, which yielded coefficient indexes of 0.68 for Reading Level Classificatory Test (Beginners), 0.74 for intermediate, 0.69 for proficient and 0.90 for SRRAT. Again, a well-developed treatment package on paired reading intervention was used to engage struggle readers in reading activity and afterward, their posttest result was compared with their pretest mean score to ascertain their reading ability.

2.1. Experimental Procedure

The researchers took introductory letters from the Department of Early Childhood and Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, to the head teachers of the two sample primary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. Permission was granted from the sampled schools chosen to carry out the study. The researchers trained the teachers in both schools on different occasions, and two other researchers' colleagues were equally trained to serve as research assistants on the use of paired reading strategy in the experimental or treatment group. The classificatory tests were administered to pupils in both groups. The struggling readers reading ability test (SRRAT) was administered as pre-tests to the sampled pupils in both experimental and control groups.

After that, the treatment began in which the pupils in the experimental group were taken through paired reading strategy. The pupils in control groups were taken through a choral reading strategy as one of the conventional reading strategies in schools as contained in the treatment guide. The treatment spanned for 60 minutes thrice a week for eight (8) weeks. At the end of the treatment programme, the struggling readers reading

ability test (SRRAT) was administered to the sampled pupils by the teachers, researchers and other research assistants to both experimental and control groups as post-test. The test, at last, was scored using the validated scoring guide specifically designed for it. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research question while analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 probability level.

3. RESULTS

The results of this study were presented in the tables according to the research question and the corresponding hypothesis.

3.1. Research Question One

What is the mean reading ability score of struggling readers exposed to pair reading intervention and those exposed to choral reading?

Table 1. Mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading strategy and those exposed to choral reading.

Interventions	Pre-Test			Post-Test		Mean Gain
	n	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
Paired reading	36	21.42	11.73	34.72	10.50	13.31
Choral reading	37	20.00	10.68	25.11	10.95	5.11

The analysis of the result in Table 1 on the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading and those exposed to choral reading intervention shows that struggling readers exposed to paired reading strategy have mean reading ability score for pre-test (n=36, \bar{X} = 21.42, SD= 11.73) and post-test (n=36, \bar{X} = 34.72, SD= 10.50) with a mean gain of 13.31. The result further shows that struggling readers exposed to choral reading intervention has mean reading ability score for pre-test (n=37, \bar{X} = 20.00, SD= 10.68) and post-test (n=37, \bar{X} = 25.11, SD= 10.95) with a mean gain of 5.11. This result indicates that both paired reading and choral reading intervention effectively improve the reading skills of struggling readers. However, struggling readers exposed to the paired reading intervention had a higher mean gain than those exposed to choral reading intervention.

The null hypothesis which predicted no significant difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading strategy and those exposed to choral reading interventions was tested at 0.05 probability level. The result is presented on Table 2 thus:

Table 2. Result of two-way ANOVA of the difference in the mean reading ability to struggle readers exposed to paired reading and choral reading interventions.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	8876.493 ^a	12	739.708	30.121	0.000	0.858
Intercept	793.862	1	793.862	32.326	0.000	0.350
Pre-test	1123.831	1	1123.831	45.762	0.000	0.433
Groups	684.292	1	684.292	27.864	0.000	0.317
Status	37.667	2	18.833	0.767	0.469	0.025
Gender	23.295	1	23.295	0.949	0.334	0.016
Groups * Status	280.304	2	140.152	5.707	0.005	0.160
Groups * Gender	17.739	1	17.739	0.722	0.399	0.012
Status * Gender	36.483	2	18.241	0.743	0.480	0.024
Groups * Status * Gender	93.198	2	46.599	1.898	0.159	0.059
Error	1473.480	60	24.558			
Total	83068.000	73				
Corrected Total	10349.973	72				

Note: a = Covariate appears in the model.
R Squared = 0.858 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.829).

The analysis in [Table 2](#) on the difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading and choral reading intervention shows that an F-ratio of 27.864 with an exact probability value of 0.000 was obtained. Since the exact probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it is concluded that the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading and choral reading strategies are significantly different. The result further showed the effect size of ($\eta^2_p = 0.317$), which indicates that 31.7 per cent (31.7%) variance of the increase in mean reading ability scores of struggling readers was due to the strategies.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Paired Reading Strategy and Reading Ability of Struggling Readers

Hypothesis one focused on finding a significant difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading and those exposed to choral reading interventions. It was found that a significant difference exists between those exposed to paired reading strategy and those exposed to choral reading strategy. The first hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in the mean reading ability scores of struggling readers exposed to paired reading and those exposed to choral reading interventions, is rejected. This finding is in line with [Ajaja and Mezieobi \(2018\)](#) work, who conducted a study on the effect of cooperative learning strategy on students' performance in social studies in Rivers State, Nigeria. They found that students performed highly using cooperative learning instructional strategy irrespective of ability level. The point is that reading ability of struggle readers was able to improve significantly because primary school pupils were engaged into proactive learning approach that promotes cooperative learning exercises and interaction with peers to develop reading skills of less competent pupils using more skilful peers.

Also, the finding of this study is not in agreement with the findings of [Wael \(2014\)](#) who conducted a study on the effect of using a cooperative learning strategy on graduating students' academic performance and gender differences in Saudi Arabia. He found out that there was no significant difference in the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test levels.

5. CONCLUSION

Exposing struggle readers in using paired reading strategy in learning process had a statistically effect on their reading ability. This by conclusion implies that paired reading strategy effectively redress the issue of pupils difficulties in reading in Uyo L.G.A Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this study has revealed the effectiveness of the paired reading strategy, classroom teachers should integrate paired reading strategy into teaching reading in the classroom. The classroom teacher should create an enjoyable atmosphere in the teaching and learning process so that the pupils involve actively during the class. Teaching reading using paired reading can be a good choice as a strategy to implement in reading class. Teacher should be able to divide pupils into pairs to conduct the reading. By doing this, the pupils will be motivated to join the class and not be bored during the teaching and learning process. Institutions responsible for teacher preparation in basic or primary education should incorporate paired reading strategy into their curriculum to equip the pre-service teachers with the competencies needed to use this strategy. Parents should adopt and integrate this strategy at home to enable them to have time to read with their children, thereby serving as models to their children, especially those struggling with reading.

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