

Assessing Literacy Curriculum Variables for Equitable Student Achievement in Public and Private Universal Basic Education Schools in Ebonyi State

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This paper assessed the Availability of Literacy Curriculum Variables in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State. A purposive sample technique was used to select a sample of 440 respondents from public and private schools and the instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Analysis of covariance was used to test the hypothesis at an alpha of 0.05 level of significance. Results of the study indicated that percentage of literacy curriculum variables that facilitate learning in public schools were much lower than that of the private schools. While test of hypothesis indicated that there was no significant difference on the opinion of teachers on how non provision of literacy curriculum variables affects student academic achievement.

Keywords: literacy, curriculum, language, skills, private and public schools, facilities

INTRODUCTION

Achieving literacy and numeracy have been the pre-occupation of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for her citizens. These have been stated in the National Policy on Education (2014). The Federal Government of Nigeria in 1979 introduced a free Universal Primary Education to see that every Nigerian child achieve literacy and numeracy but have not been successful as the programme was not matched with functional and equitable literacy curriculum. Literacy besides meaning the ability to read and write and compute at a specified level of performance, can be said to be a psychological and sociolinguistic capabilities to decode and encode meaning or message through graphemes or letters and sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into generic text or discourse in that order of linguistic hierarchy and complexity (Lawal, 2016). Curriculum is the totality of the environment in which education takes place which involves the learner, the teacher, the content, the method, the subject, the assessment of examination and its methods, the physical; and psychological environment. It is a systematically planned experiences the learners are exposed to under the guidance of the school. Curriculum involves a guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the guidance of the school for learners' continuous and willful growth in personal social competencies (Onwuka, 2005 and Apaji, 2017).

Education is rooted in literacy curriculum and it is the basis of development and updating the knowledge and the skills of the individual for the purpose of making them useful to themselves and the community. The curriculum is organized and designed in such a way that it takes the channel of education which is under the guidance of the school (Onwuka, 2005). The schools are meant to provide curriculum through which literacies are disseminated for equitable students' achievement. Literacy curriculum impact sound knowledge and educate people so as to be able to solve social economic, buoyancy and control, it also reflects in individual's identify, economic emancipation because literacy determines who has access to power and economic recourses (Okebukola and Jimo, & 2010). They stated that the strategy for fighting poverty had consisted in investigating resources in production activities, job creation, income generation and improving literacy rate.

The school is categorized under the public and the private schools. The school is expected to equip the pupil with quality literate programmes. The programmes equip the pupils with literacy skills for equitable achievement. Fasea (2016) explained that literate people are later able to access continuing educational opportunities to improve them and literate societies are better placed to press development needs. There seem to be education wide apart between the public and the private schools. Ehigiamusoe (2012) noted that students' academic performance in the private schools are better than those of them in the public schools.

Public schools are programmes of instruction offered to children by state and local government (Encarta, 2009). Nwafor and Oka (2018) explained that schools are managed, funded, maintained and supervised by the government. The local government takes charge of primary school while the state government manages the secondary education. Private schools are programmes of instruction that are created, controlled operated and financed by individuals and groups rather than by the government. The curriculum of both the public and the private schools are the same but the mode of implementation seems to differ. Students in the private schools seem to perform better than those in the public schools.

This poor academic performance may have been as a result of many factors in the past years. Nigeria was one of the countries in the past that could boast of high standard of education from the primary to the university level. Then, people send their children or wards to public schools without fear, but in recent time public school now degenerate in academic performance because the schools had been neglected for ages.

This ugly situation cannot facilitate effective literacy curriculum. Although fees in the private schools are very much higher compare to the public schools, most people especially the affluence in the society prefer to send their children to the private and the mission schools. As it stands, the public primary and secondary schools are only attended by the maids, servants and children of the very poor people in the society. This is in line with Okebukola and Jimo (2010) that lack of access to literacy diminishes individuals and national capabilities and this leads to continuous recycling of poverty. A good literacy programme equips pupils with literacy skills for better achievement.

LITERACY CURRICULUM

Literacy is a human right and a tool for personal empowerment and a means for social development. A good quality literacy programme equips pupils with literacy skills for life and further learning. The united National Education scientific and cultural organization 2003, explains that literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpreter, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying context. The Canadian council of learning CCL in 2007 stated that true literacy involves the ability to analyze things, understand general ideas or terms, use symbols in complex ways, apply theories and perform other necessary life skills including the ability to engage in social and economic life of the community (Etim, 2016).

Effective literacy curriculum is achieved through functional programmes. Functional literacy curriculum is a tool that should equip one with skills, potentialities and intellect to carry out one's job effectively and respond to the global demands of the society in his field. Schools should be made to be functional and literacy curriculum is a tool that should equip one with skills, potentialities and intellect to

carry out one's job effectively in his field and be able to respond to the global demands of the society in his field. Schools should be made to be functional literacy curriculum dispenser. Unfortunately most public schools are not functional and implementing literacy curriculum remains very poor. This may have been as a result of many variables.

THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

Literacy curriculum demands students to be efficient in the language skills especially in language such as the English language which plays dominant role in students' academic achievement. Ibrahim and Muoduogu, (2018) explained that a critical step in making the learning of English in schools effective is to first develop in the child the ability to understand and speak English. Speaking the second language skill should be developed as it is the expressive concept of the language. Speaking is usually interwoven with the listening skill. This is because the language skills are not separated from each other. Reading is the ability to recognize and comprehend graphic codes and symbols occurring in individuals or in groups. Reading is a basic skill that pupil acquire from the primary schools. The effective functioning of any curriculum is dependent on the learners' ability to read and comprehend printed symbols.

Writing is a means of expressing feelings, using the appropriate graphic symbols that are acceptable to the target language. Writing encourages thinking and learning and it motivates communication and makes thought available for reflection (Ghaith, 2006). Reading and writing are built on oral language foundation. For effective literacy curriculum to be instituted in schools, it means that the form of language skills-listening speaking, reading and writing must be facilitated using effective variables-funds, learning facilities and learning materials as well as human resources. These unfortunately are either lacking or poorly provided in the public schools (Ehigiamusoe, 2012).

PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND FACILITATION VARIABLES

Facilitation means to make easy or easier or to help bring out. It also means to make an action or a process possible or easier (Advanced English Language Dictionary, 2010). For schools to thrive and give effective literacy curriculum, facilities must be provided such as befitting structures and equipment. Obanya (2014) opined that quality in education is in form of quality processes which include policies, programmes, psycho-social infrastructure which are all that make the school a welcoming environment to the learning. It also means to make an action or a process possible or easier. The curriculum and human resources manager help the system and promote facilities and above all financial resources to ensure quality and equity in education. Ogar and Ehigiamusoe (2012) noted that unconducive learning environment, Information Communication Technology ICT facilities as well as poor funding bedevil the public schools. Most public schools are in a sorry state and these make literacy curriculum implementation cumbersome. Obanya (2014) explained that financial resources require genuine policies that require plunging funds equitability into educational sector for effective literacy curriculum and this should be effectively managed through human capacity who ensures appropriate utilization of such finds. On the basis of this, Mbachu and Ebi (2018) and Adedeji (2001) pointed out that the importance of policy of participatory that are people oriented, relevant and attainable curriculum, management which must be institutionalized with competent teachers as well as available teaching and learning materials and facilities are geared toward effective literacy curriculum and equitable student achievement. These unfortunately are lacking in most schools especially in the public schools.

Lack or inadequate facilities is another variable that bedevil effective literacy curriculum. In the public schools, most buildings are in the verge of collapsing. Pupils are taught under trees or in dilapidating structures. Most classes barely have seats and in some cases children are made to carry seats from their homes to school. Okeke (2008) stated that lack of facilities and funding of schools lead to poor students' performance.

Inadequate or lack of instructional aids kills learning. Adedeji (2014) emphasized the importance of teaching gadgets and learning materials and lamented that most public schools lack facilities such as good

structures, electricity and gadgets that boast teaching and learning. Azikiwe, (1998) and Chukwu, (2007) pointed out that the purpose or need of charts are to present visual ideas or concepts which are likely to be difficult to understand if presented orally. Literacy curriculum in any language needed posters, photographs, magazines, pictures, books, flannel boards, television, radio and computer as well as internet facilities made possible by provision of power. Others include water supply and toilet facilities good playing grounds. All these would generate child friendly environment.

Good textbooks and well equipped modern libraries boast literacy curriculum. Baldeh, (2004) stated that all language teaching is textbook oriented. Unfortunately, most schools especially the public schools do not have textbooks. Afangideh (2007) lamented that student attend schools without basic reading materials and majority of those who have, do not read them. These poor states of things do not seem to boast effective literacy curriculum and do not improve student academic achievement.

Effective literacy curriculum needs qualified teachers in adequate numbers. Most schools especially public schools do not have adequate and qualified number of teachers. Literary curriculum requires good number of teachers. Most schools are without teachers or lack qualified teachers in various fields of studies (Afangide and Kosumeni, 2007).

Effective teaching is skewed towards the learner. Conventional method of teaching such as talk and chalk method are what teachers adopt previously, in the present; teachers, not all the teachers, though, are trained and retrained through workshops and seminars to adopt strategies that are stewed toward the learner. Teaching that would embrace all teachers, therefore needs to be transformed from passivity to active participatory teaching. Okebukola (2016) viewed that pedagogy must teach students to be flexible, tolerate different viewpoints and be able to analyze and solve problems in situations strategically. Seminars, workshops and symposiums are effective ways teachers learn new methods and strategies that would aid teaching. The seminars and workshops need government sponsorship. Lawal (2001) explained that physical and human development are very important and that teachers needed to be trained and retrained for effective and efficient performance in their duties.

Students' academic performances in public schools remain very poor and this has been worrisome to the society at large. This is because three third of the total number of Nigerian children attend public schools and these children are supposed to be the future stake holders of this country. The crux of this paper therefore is to assess literacy curriculum variables and how they affect students' performance in the public and the private schools in the Universal Lower Basic Schools in Ebonyi State.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to investigate the following:

1. The type of literacy curriculum facilities that exists in the public and the private schools
2. The nature of instructional strategies and how they would enhance literacy curriculum in schools.
3. How non provision of literacy curriculum facilities affect students' performance

***Ho₁**: There is no significant difference on the mean opinion of public and private teachers on how non provision of literacy curriculum facilities affects students' performance.*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Abakaliki Urban in Ebonyi State because this is where there are large concentration of public and private schools. A descriptive survey was adopted. The purpose of the study was to investigate the availability of literacy curriculum facilities in the private and the public schools. The target population comprised all the teachers of Lower Basic schools in both public and private schools, twelve schools each were selected among the public and private schools randomly. Each school in the State had the chance of being selected through purposive sampling technique which was strategically employed to choose respondents that were deemed knowledgeable and well informed on

schools. Twenty (20) teachers each were used in each of the 11 schools, this brought it to a total of four hundred and forty four (440) teachers, from 220 public schools and 218 private schools. Questionnaires titled literacy curriculum facilities for equitable student achievement (LCESAQ). The questionnaire comprised forty seven (47) question items with three sub-headings based on the objectives of the study were used for each. The instrument was validated and all the input made by experts in the measurement and Evaluation in the science Education Department and the Arts and social science Education Department were put into consideration. A test-re-test was carried out in pilot schools that were not used as part of the study to test the reliability of the instrument. A correlation co-efficient of 0.79 using person product moment correlation was obtained which was high enough to warrant the use of the instrument. Simple percentage used to answer research question one while mean and standard deviation on a 4 Likert scale were used to answer questions 2 & 3. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. Decision rule was based on the 2.5 and above as being high and accepted. Anything less was regarded as being low and rejected. Analysis of Covariance ANCOVA was used to test the null hypothesis at an alpha of 0.05 level of significance.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

TABLE 1
%TYPE OF LITERACY CURRICULUM FACILITIES THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

S/N	Items Types of literacy materials available in Schools	Public Schools Number 120		Private Schools Number 120	
		% Yes	% No	% Yes 90	% No 10
1.	Current language textbooks	18	82	92	8
2.	Current literature materials	18	82	82	18
3.	Other current reading texts	25	75	85	15
4.	Newspapers/magazines	45	55	87	13
5.	Charts/maps/pictures	45	55	75	25
6.	Print out excerpts related reading	0	100	25	75
7.	Flannel board	0	100	51	49
8.	Computer, laptops	0	100	88	12
9.	Radio cassettes	2	98	92	8
10.	Televisions	2	98	81	19
11.	Models	20	80	69	31
12.	Electricity supply/generator	21	79	57	43
13.	Classes with seats/desk	29	71	85	15
14.	Good toilet facilities	5	95	96	4
15.	Clean water supply	10	90	85	15
16.	Qualified number of teachers	50	50	75	25
17.	Science laboratories	12	88	65	35
18.	Train and retraining of teachers	50	50	52	48
19.	Teachers committed to duties	50	50	55	45
20.	Payment of teachers as and when due	52	48	92	38
21.	Promotion of teachers	35	65	35	65
22.	Good welfare packages for teachers	25	75	50	50
23.	Funding of schools	<u>12</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>60</u>

Table 1 revealed that the percentage of types of available facilities that boast literacy curriculum in the public schools were very much lower than that in the private schools.

Research question 2: *What is the nature of instructional strategies in the literacy curriculum that would aid equitable students' achievement?*

TABLE 2
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND EFFECTIVE LITERACY CURRICULUM

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1.	Instruction should be child centered	3.5	6.4	
2.	Teacher should form group work among children	3.4	6.4	
3.	Teacher allows children to ask questions and teacher to explain	3.4	6.4	
4.	Teacher gives children opportunity to share idea within group	3.5	6.3	
5.	Each group consists pupil of high and a pupil of low intelligence quotient	3.7	5.4	
6.	Teachers encourage children to believe in oneself	3.4	7.1	
7.	Teacher gives exercises, marks, corrects and makes children effect corrections by going through what had been done	3.4	6.4	
8.	Teacher uses reinforcement	3.7	5.4	
9.	Teacher uses capital punishment	2.0	9.3	
10.	Teacher should use abusive words	2.1	9.4	
11.	Segregate children of high intelligence from children of low intelligence	1.1	1.51	
12.	Teacher shows nonchalant attitude to pupil academic activities	1.2	1.64	
	Grand mean	2.72		

Data on table 2 indicates that effective strategies in the literacy curriculum had mean of 3.4 and above while those regarded as poor and ineffective had less than 2.1

Research question 3: *How would non provision of literacy curriculum materials affect equitable achievement of students?*

TABLE 3
NON-PROVISION OF LITERACY CURRICULUM MATERIALS AND HOW THEY AFFECT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

S/N	Non availability of literacy curriculum materials leads to the following:	\bar{x}	SD
1.	It leads to poor lesson delivery	3.7	6.4
2.	It leads to students poor attention in lessons	3.5	6.8
3.	It leads to poor students' achievement	3.7	6.4
4.	It leads to examination malpractices	3.6	6.5
5.	It leads to students joining bad groups	3.4	6.7
6.	It leads to students loosing confidence of themselves academically	3.6	0.64
7.	It leads to students' drop out of school	3.2	0.84
8.	It leads to aimless seeking of certificate without working for it	3.8	0.87
9.	It leads to depreciation	3.1	0.87
10.	It leads to killing, maiming and insecurity of lives.	2.8	0.96
	Grand mean	3.3	

Data from the table above indicates that non provision of literacy curriculum materials adversely affects students' academic achievement with the grand mean of 3.3.

Test of Null Hypothesis

Hypothesis was tested using opinion of teachers in the private and public schools which showed that there was no significant difference in the mean opinion of teachers on effect of non literacy curriculum facilities on students achievement in public and private schools.

TABLE 4
INDEPENDENT T-TEST SAMPLE STATISTICS OF OPINION OF TEACHERS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Type of school	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	Sign
Public	222	3.5	1.64	265	2.45	1.96	1.36
Private	218	4.5	2.05				

Result from the table shows that there was no significant difference in the mean opinion of private and public teachers on the provision of literacy curriculum facilities on student achievement.

Discussion of Results

Data on table 1 shows that in the public schools percentage of materials that facilitate literacy curriculum in school had very low percentage. This is quite unlike the private school with high percentage of literacy curriculum facilities that aid teaching and learning. Percentage of items on current language reading textbooks and other reading materials had 18% each in the public schools while private schools had 90% and 2.83% and 75% respectively. Item 6-8 on print out excerpt on related reading, flannel board, computer/laptops had 0% in the public schools while private schools had at least 35%, 51% and 88% respectively. Others have very poor provision of literacy curriculum such as radio, television and good toilet facilities in the public schools with percentage of 2%, 2%, and 5% while responses of respondents in the private schools facilities available in the private schools were 82%, 81% and 69% respectively. This result corroborates the findings of Ehigiamusoe (2012) that uncondusive learning environment, internet Communication Technology ICT as well as poor funding which bedevil the public schools.

Table 2 on the nature of instructional strategies that affect students' performance indicates that item 1 on poor lesson delivery had mean of 3.7, item 2 on leads to students poor attention 3.5, item 3 poor students achievement 3.7, item 4 leads to exam malpractice 3.6, item 5 joining bad group 3.4, item 6 leads to loosing confidence academically 3.6, item 7 drop out of school 3.2, item 8 aimless pursuance of certificate 3.08, item 9 deprivation 3.1, item 10 killing, maiming and insecurity of lives in schools and society 2.8.

The findings showed high mean of 3.0 above in almost all the items indicating that poor or unavailability of literacy curriculum resources materials is capable of degenerating students to involve in all sorts of indiscipline. This is because when the actual materials that should support teaching are not available, students' attention to academics are likely to be diverted to evil practices. The findings is in line with Azikiwe 1998, (2016) that literacy materials are meant to support teaching and learning while their non provision leads to students poor academic performance which invariability have adverse effect on schools and society.

Table 3 on the non-provision of instructional facilities and how they would affect students' performances indicates that item 1 on poor lesson delivery has 3.5, item 2 on group work has 3.4, item and 3 on children sharing knowledge 3.4. item 3 on children air their opinion 3.5, item 5 group constituting both dull and intelligent students 3.7, item 6 on making students believe in themselves 3.3, item 7 on encouraging students to ask questions 3.4, item 8 teacher offering expert explanations 3.7, item 9 making students effect corrections and going through what had been done 3.5, item 10 on offering reinforcement by the teacher 3.4. While item 11 on use of capital punishment had 2.1, item 12 on use of abusive language 1.1, item 13 on non-dedication to duty 2.2.

The findings show that when teaching is skewed to the students, teaching become meaningful and effective while use of capital punishment and abusive languages do not impact positively on students. This finding is in line with Okebukola 2016, that pedagogy must be used to solve problems and analyze situations and work strategically.

Table 4 on the null hypothesis of independent t-test, sample statistics on opinion of teachers on public and private schools indicates that results showed significant difference on the opinion of teachers in the public and private secondary schools. Since the t-calculated value which is 2.45 is greater than the critical value of 1.96 on the provision of literacy curriculum facilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, it can be concluded that the availability of the literacy curriculum materials above would greatly enhance students' achievement. Unfortunately, these variables needed to facilitate literacy curriculum in schools especially the public schools were either lacking or scarcely available. There are a good number of effective strategies but which have not been fully explored by teachers. All these lead to poor state of our schools especially in the public schools. The implication is that the perennial poor achievement of students especially in the four language skills could be remedied if there are literacy curriculums facilities and teachers employ effective strategies in teaching. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Facilities and materials that enable literacy curriculum should be procured and made available in the public schools by the Federal, the State and the Local Government as well as individuals in the community.
2. Teachers should employ effective strategies in teaching from the available strategies that researchers had proved to be effective.
3. The government should train and retrain teachers through sending them to seminars, workshops and symposium and ensure that all the teachers benefit in the training.
4. The government and charitable individuals should fund the educational sector and make fund available in schools.

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