

INTEGRATING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THEATRE IN EDUCATION CLASSROOM: A STUDY OF SELECT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN AWKA.

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Abstract

Recently, private access to digital technology among young learners has been on the increase. This development has made teaching and learning more challenging both for the teacher and the learner. A survey carried out by Anambra State Broadcasting Service (ABS) in 2021 showed that more children preferred playing indoors with their mobile phones and laptops than participating in the traditional outdoor play. This entails that absence of digital technology devices in their learning environment will constitute distractions to the learning process. Observations have also shown that pupils in Theatre in Education classroom usually perceive TIE activities as recreational activities, hence the inadequate attention they attach to it. The need therefore arises for TIE instructors to key in to the technological upsurge in order to sustain the interest of their learners. This paper investigated the effect of digital integration in the TIE classroom on the attention and interest of the learner in two primary schools within Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 pupils from the two schools. The population is divided into two to form the experimental and control groups. Each of the groups was subjected to a pre-test before treatment to ascertain their homogeneity levels. The instrument used was listening comprehension test based on an improvised drama "The Reward of Wickedness". The control group was exposed to storytelling using live performance of the story while experimental group was exposed using recorded clips of the same story. The result revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The paper therefore concluded that Theatre in Education class will be better appreciated if digital technology is integrated into the process. The study hence recommended that TIE instructors should integrate digital technology in TIE classroom for optimal teaching and learning.

Keywords: Integrating, Digital Technology, Theatre In Education, Classroom.

Introduction

Sustaining the attention of the learner in classroom activities is of paramount importance to the cognitive ability of the learner. The attention of the learner is the interest demonstrated during the teaching and learning process. Bethany Calderwood defined it as the "ability to focus on and process specific information and the simultaneous ability to timeout other stimuli"(np). Sustained attention is the ability to remain focused in a particular activity over a longer span. Cognitive experts are of the opinion that the attention a learner gives to any learning process determines his or her cognitive level. According to John Dewey, attention is "the whole state of active development, the objective results of what are foreseen and wanted, and the personal emotional inclination"(126). Sustained attention therefore aids the learner to concentrate and participate actively on the teaching and learning process for better learning opportunities. This is because paying attention is an important part of the learning process that aids the development of interest, hence concentration. The attention span of the learner is needed to implement the teaching and learning objectives. It aids them to concentrate on the assignments and offers them the opportunity to recall given information. Sustained attention therefore builds interest and once interest is aroused in the learner, he or she tends to exhibit positive attitude towards the teaching and learning process. Attention sustenance and interest development work hand in hand in the cognitive process of the learner. Attention arouses interest without which, learning simply does not take place. The importance of attention of the learner in the classroom is further emphasized by Amber Hodgson who stated that it "aids the learner to 'time out' unrelated information background noise, visual distractions and even their own thoughts. By doing this, students are able to concentrate and focus on the important information being given by the teachers (np).

Sustaining the attention of the learner in the classroom in this digital era is becoming a herculean task. This is because these young learners are witnessing various forms of distractions both internally and externally. Where the external distractions may be easily handled, the internal ones are not easily controlled because most of their internal distractions are influenced by mood and Mind-set. The need therefore arises for the teacher to discover and implement a teaching technique that can wholly engage the learners in the classroom for optimal performance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on John Dewey's Interest in Learning Theory which postulates that although efforts, positively affects learning, it does not necessarily improve deeper learning neither does it promote personal engagement when compared to high interest. Dewey's opinion here is that a child's learning ability increases simultaneously with his interest. When a child is genuinely interested in any activity, he or she automatically becomes motivated to learn more about such. This entails that inasmuch as interest is a relevant component of the learning process, it cannot be imposed on the learner, rather it should be fostered. It is when the attention of the learner is sustained that he or she develops interest. This theory is relevant to this study because Theatre in Education requires the full attention of the learner for its core objectives to be achieved. Observations have shown that without attention and interest of the learners in a Theatre in Education classroom, the learners usually see the TIE project as a welcome leisure activity there by mitigating the objectives of the project.

Amongst the various sources of distractions challenging the attention sustenance of learners in the classroom is digital technology. Technology has become an integral part of human existence thus virtually every aspect of human environment has been affected either positively or negatively by technology and the education sector is not an exception. Technological impact on the society in recent times could be likened to a swift flowing river that carries all that it meets on its course; the education sector inclusive. In the words of Richard Igbunu "technology is causing massive changes in all sectors of the global economy especially in the education sector which is a key sector that have been affected by the global economy "(13). The National Communication Commission (NCC), the overall body that oversees digital technology in Nigeria, defines digital technology as the "electronic tools, systems, processes, devices and resources that generate, store and process data to achieve a particular set of defined objectives "(7)

The introduction of digital technology into the Nigerian education system is a turning point both for the teacher and the learner. Digitalization of this sector has given learners the opportunity to access information with ease using various electronic gadgets and computerized devices like desktop, smart phones, tablets, mini pads, laptops. These devices can maximally enhance learners' motivation by making learning more exciting and personal. Researchers have proven that the advent of digital technology has exposed learners to varying sources of knowledge that the conventional classroom techniques of learning is becoming monotonous, less interesting and less attractive. Digital technology has made it possible for young learners to spend more time on their computers, Android phones, laptops, etc., that removing them from these devices constitutes serious distraction in their learning process. The NCC corroborates this when it confirms that "children in this era have been exposed to digital technology for their entire lives and are the most frequent users of emerging online and digital services "(10). The commission emphasis that these devices have great influence on the manner these children learn, play and communicate because greater percentage of them have access to one digital device or the other.

The availability of these innovations in schools have been of great benefit for both the teacher and the learner. Education experts also agree "when properly used, ICT (information communication technology) hold great promises ti improve teaching and learning and i addition to shaping workforce opportunities"(Omoskejimi, ,Brum-Ezewu, Nwobu and Nweke, 54)this scenario, one can justifiably state that the absence of these devices in any classroom activities constitute distractions to learning especially among young learners. It is against this backdrop that this paper investigated the effect of digital technology in sustaining the attention of young learners in TIE classroom using Aquinas Model Primary School, Awka and Maria Faustina Model School, Awka as case studies.

The importance of education in the development of every society is such that it is regarded as the prerequisite for all round development. The imperative is that quality and inclusive education is paramount to ensuring positive economic growth. Education is many things to a child. It has the ability to empower him or her mentally, physically psychologically and socially. Consequently efforts need to be consciously made to ensure that the learner is given all the opportunities needed to accomplish his or her educational goals. Thus the need to create and maintain an enabling functional environment for teaching and learning that is appealing and attractive to the teacher and the learner.

Theatre in Education (TIE) is a teaching technique that uses interactive theatricalities in the classroom setting to impact knowledge especially to young learners. Trig Ericsson defines it as “a deliberate application of dramatic means of expression and forms in education to facilitate aesthetic experiences, knowledge and formation”(33). Isayar and Kay perceive it as a teaching technique that...”uses skills of actor/teacher (trained in both disciplines) in structured projects with young people that enables non judgmental critical thinking”(14). This teaching technique encourages creativity, improves critical thinking, team work, among others. Thus Aghamelu opines that the ideals of Theatre in Education lie on “the use of drama and other theatrical performances to teach children in school which help them in improving interpersonal relationships and skill”(85). The benefits of TIE in teaching and learning have attracted the attention of scholars like Obadiogwu who observes that Theatre in Education is a teaching technique that “incorporates democratic shared control, mutually of participation, dialectical generation of knowledge and egalitarian communication”(31). This democratic attribute of Theatre in Education gives it an edge over other techniques because it offers the learner the opportunity to fully and freely express his or herself. However, with the introduction of digital technology into the education system and its influence on the teaching and learning process, sustaining the attention and interest of learners in TIE classroom is becoming more and more difficult. The need therefore arises for TIE instructors to device means of integrating the use of digital technology into the TIE project to allow the learners to work on familiar ground for better concentration. The interest in the present study is to investigate the effect of digital technology on the interest sustenance of the learner in TIE classroom focusing on how the integration of digital technology in TIE could help in sustaining learners' attention and interest for better concentration and optimal performance in Theatre in Education classroom. The following research questions and hypothesis guided the investigation.

Research questions

1. What difference is there between the mean achievement scores of pupils exposed to digital technology in TIE classroom and those not exposed?
2. What is the impact of digital technology on the mean achievement scores of pupils in Theatre in Education classroom?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis were formulated and tested on 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of pupils exposed to digital technology in TIE classroom and those not exposed to digital technology.
2. There is no significant effect of digital technology on pupils achievement in listening comprehension in TIE classroom.

Methodology.

The study adopted a quasi experimental design of non randomized pre-test control group. This was because it was not possible for the researcher to meet all the conditions for a true experiment. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to enable the researcher select two schools with ICT facilities. The study was carried out using two randomly selected private and mission schools in Awka, Anambra State. A total of 50 pupils between the ages of 8-9years were purposefully selected from basic two classes from the two schools. 20 (twenty) pupils were selected in the first school while 30(thirty) pupils were selected in the second school. In each of the schools, the population is divided into two to form the experimental and control groups respectively. A pre-test/post-test experimental method was applied. The pre-test was administered on the two groups before commencement of treatment to ascertain the homogeneity of the two groups. The same questions administered in the pre-test were reshuffled and used for the post-test

The instrument used for the study is story telling/listening comprehension test. Pupils were pre-tested using listening comprehension test based on the improvised drama 'The Reward of Wickedness'. 10 (ten) comprehension questions were designed for the study.

The control group was exposed to storytelling using live performance of the story while the experimental group was exposed to the same story using recorded clips of the same story in their computer Laboratory simultaneously. Both groups were post-tested at the end of the production.

The results of the findings are presented in the table below

Table 1.

Mean and standard deviation of Pre-test and post-test scores of pupils in experimental and control groups.

Group	N.	Mean pre-test.	Post-test	Standard Pre-test.	deviation Post-test.
Experimental	25	1772		8.2	16
Control	25	14	56	7.014	

Table 2.

The Two Tailed Test (t-test) of the difference in scores of the two groups in learning gained.

Group	N	X	SD	a	df.	t-cal.	t-crit.
Experimental	25	56	18	0.05	48	2.86	1.68
Control	25	41	19	0.05	48	2.86	2.02

Table 2 reveals that the calculated t value of 2.86 is greater than the critical value of 2.02. This shows a significant difference in the learning gained. This rejected the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference in learning between the achievement scores of pupils exposed to digital technology in TIE classroom and those taught with live performance.

Discussion of Findings.

The result of this study revealed that pupils taught with digital technology group performed better than the pupils taught with live performance. The mean of the post-test group of the pupils in the experimental group were higher than those of the control group. This shows that there is significant difference between the achievement scores of pupils exposed to digital technology in TIE classroom.

The statistical analysis in table 2 also showed that the calculated t value (t-cal.) of is greater than the critical value (t-crit.) of. This corroborates with the separate works of Olibie and Mustapha that found that students taught with digital technology (ICT) perform better than those taught with conventional method. This could be attributed to digital technology's ability to sustain the attention of the learner for a greater length of time than live performance in Theatre in Education classroom.

Conclusion

Interest and attention are vital elements for cognition. The learning ability of the learner, according to the Interest in Learning Theory of John Dewey, increases with sustained interest. Hence the more the attention of the learner is sustained, the more interest he develops towards the learning activities and more cognition gained.

As Jamie Trost stated, “attention lapses during class can have negative effects on retention and learning gains” (np). A learner with difficulty in maintaining attention in a classroom setting will definitely struggle in a conventional classroom hence, the need to infuse into the learning process transformational elements of interest to aid the learner. One experience of the researcher in TIE classroom is that young learners see TIE projects as a welcome pass time activity, not attaching the expected seriousness to it. This aligns with Simon, Mellor's fears that “in a world in which the public experience more and more of their culture online, our fear is

that many of our publicly funded Theatres will lose their relevance, stuck in an analogue world, reaching fewer and fewer people (12).

The paper thus concludes that TIE will be better appreciated by young learners especially in this digital world if digital technology is integrated. The digital era demands the teacher to introduce techniques and approaches to meet the demands of the learners. The paper recommends that TIE instructors should integrate any available digital technology in the immediate environment of the learner to make them more relaxed and less distracted in order to get their maximum attention and interest in the class.

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