



EFFECT OF PICTORIAL READING STRATEGY ON PUPILS' INTEREST OF READING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH STUDIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of pictorial reading strategy on pupils' interest of reading comprehension in English Studies in Awka South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study while two null hypotheses were formulated. The design of the study was quasi-experimental design. Specifically, it used pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. The population of this study comprised all the 25,137 (12,963 males and 12,174 females) primary two pupils in the 43 public primary schools in Awka South LGEA. The sample for this study consisted of 139 primary two pupils using the multi-stage sampling technique. The experimental school has 68 pupils (29 boys and 39 girls) while the control school has 71 pupils (33 boys and 38 girls). The instrument is titled "Reading Comprehension Interest Inventory" (RCII) developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts using face and content validity. The scores of RCII obtained through trial testing using Cronbach Alpha Method, and a co-efficient value of 0.75 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the pictorial reading strategy was more effective than the teacher-directed method in enhancing pupils' interest in reading comprehension, as evidenced by a significant difference in their mean interest scores. Although female pupils demonstrated higher interest than their male counterparts when taught with the pictorial reading strategy, the corresponding hypothesis indicated no significant difference between the mean interest scores of male and female pupils. It was recommended that primary school teachers should adopt and consistently integrate pictorial instructional materials such as charts, pictures, and illustrated story texts into reading lessons.

Keywords: English Studies, Interest, Picture, Pictorial Reading Strategy, Reading Comprehension

Introduction

Primary education represents the foundation of formal learning for children, usually between the ages of six and twelve years. At this stage, learners are expected to acquire the basic literacy, numeracy, and communication skills needed for lifelong learning and meaningful participation in society. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013), emphasizes that primary education should provide learners with opportunities for intellectual, emotional, and social development. Achieving these objectives depends largely on the effectiveness of language



instruction, particularly the teaching of English language, which serves both as a subject and as the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools.

In Nigerian primary schools, English Studies occupies a central position because it influences pupils' understanding of other school subjects. Among the various language skills taught in English Studies, reading comprehension remains one of the most important. Reading comprehension enables pupils to derive meaning from texts, connect ideas, interpret information, and apply knowledge meaningfully. Duke and Pearson (2022) explained that reading comprehension involves actively constructing meaning from written texts through the interaction of prior knowledge and textual information. In the same vein, Smith, Snow, Serry, and Hammond (2021) described it as the ability to understand and interpret written language using vocabulary knowledge and cognitive processes. Without effective comprehension skills, pupils may struggle academically, even when they can read words fluently.

Despite its importance, reading comprehension continues to pose serious challenges to many primary school pupils in Nigeria. Several pupils experience difficulties in understanding passages, answering comprehension questions correctly, and retaining information after reading. Studies by Ezeokoli and Ezeagu (2019) revealed that many pupils possess limited vocabulary and inadequate background knowledge, which negatively affect their comprehension ability. In Anambra State, reports from schools and educational assessments have continued to indicate poor performance of pupils in comprehension exercises, especially during common entrance examinations. Many pupils can read aloud but fail to grasp the meaning of what they read, leading to weak classroom participation and poor academic outcomes.

One major factor associated with pupils' performance in reading comprehension is interest. Interest plays a vital role in learning because pupils are more likely to pay attention and participate actively when learning activities are engaging. Schiefele (2021) described interest as a psychological state that encourages focused attention and sustained engagement, while Renninger and Hidi (2022) viewed it as a motivational factor that develops through interaction with meaningful learning content. In reading comprehension lessons, pupils who show genuine interest in texts are more willing to read attentively, ask questions, and explore ideas presented in passages. Unfortunately, many primary school pupils in Anambra State appear to demonstrate low interest in reading activities due to monotonous teaching methods, limited instructional materials, and inadequate classroom interaction. This problem may not be unconnected to the teaching methods commonly used in reading lessons.

The conventional method often employed in teaching reading comprehension involves direct teacher instruction, where the teacher dominates classroom activities through explanation, reading aloud, note writing, and verbal questioning (Ajibola & Aina, 2-21). Although this method may help teachers manage large classes, it tends to make pupils passive participants in the learning process. Such teacher-centred approaches may not adequately stimulate pupils' curiosity, imagination, or active involvement during reading lessons (Adeosun, Sulaiman & Sholagberu, 2022). This situation contradicts recommendations by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, which encourages learner-centred and interactive teaching approaches in language instruction.

As a result of these concerns, attention has increasingly shifted towards innovative teaching strategies capable of making reading lessons more engaging and meaningful. One such approach is the Pictorial Reading Strategy (PRS). Pictorial Reading Strategy refers to the use of pictures, illustrations, diagrams, and other visual materials to support pupils' understanding of reading texts (Ajayi & Nyong, 2023). Rahmawati (2018) noted that pictorial



learning promotes dual coding, where information is processed both visually and verbally, thereby improving understanding and memory. Similarly, Ajibola and Aina (2021) explained that pictorial reading helps simplify difficult texts, sustain learners' attention, and improve comprehension.

The use of pictorial materials in reading lessons has the potential to increase pupils' interest by making learning more attractive and interactive. Visual representations help pupils connect unfamiliar ideas with real-life experiences, thereby improving understanding and retention (Gwanshak & Gyang, 2017). The authors further revealed that pupils exposed to pictorial reading activities demonstrated greater enthusiasm and better comprehension outcomes than those taught with text-only methods. Likewise, Nandi, Abani, and Hassan (2024) found that the integration of visual aids significantly improved learners' retention and participation during reading activities. Considering the persistent challenges associated with pupils' interest and retention in reading comprehension, there is a need to explore teaching approaches that can actively engage learners and improve learning outcomes. It is against this background that this study investigates the effect of pictorial reading strategy on pupils' interest and retention of reading comprehension in English Studies in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

The current reality in Anambra State presents a rather concerning picture regarding pupils' performance in reading comprehension. Evidence from educational assessments consistently shows that many primary school pupils struggle to make meaning from written texts. This difficulty is reflected in their low interest in reading activities and poor ability to retain what they have read. In many cases, pupils report frustration and disengagement during reading comprehension lessons, often describing such tasks as difficult and uninteresting. Observations from classroom interactions further reveal that the teaching of reading comprehension is still largely dominated by conventional, text-based instructional methods. These approaches are typically teacher-centred and place heavy emphasis on explanation, repetition, and rote learning, with minimal use of visual or interactive teaching aids. As a result, pupils are often passive recipients of information rather than active participants in the learning process. A teacher from a rural primary school in Anambra State aptly captured this challenge when she noted that it is difficult to sustain pupils' attention using only text, as they quickly become bored and lose focus.

In addition, pupils' performance in standardized assessments, including the common entrance examinations in Anambra State (Awka South LGEA inclusive), continues to reflect a worrying trend of low achievement in English Language, particularly in reading comprehension. Beyond performance scores, there are growing concerns about pupils' level of engagement and their ability to retain information from reading passages over time. Many pupils are unable to recall key ideas or apply what they have read after a short period, suggesting weak retention skills. This persistent situation raises questions about the effectiveness of the instructional approaches commonly used in teaching reading comprehension in primary schools. The continued reliance on traditional methods, with limited integration of engaging and visually stimulating instructional materials, may be contributing to pupils' lack of interest and poor retention. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to determine the effect of pictorial reading strategy on pupils' interest and retention in reading comprehension in English Studies in Anambra State. On this premise, the following research questions were raised:



1. What is the difference between mean interest scores of pupils in reading comprehension taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction?
2. What is the difference between mean interest scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension taught with pictorial reading strategy?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between mean interest scores of pupils in reading comprehension taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction
2. There is no significant difference between mean interest scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension taught with pictorial reading strategy.

Methods

The design of the study was quasi-experimental design. Specifically, it used pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The population of this study comprised all the 25,137 (12,963 males and 12,174 females) primary two pupils in the 43 public primary schools in Awka South LGEA. The sample for this study consisted of 139 primary two pupils using the multi-stage sampling technique. The experimental school has 68 pupils (29 boys and 39 girls) while the control school has 71 pupils (33 boys and 38 girls). The instrument is titled Reading Comprehension Interest Inventory” (RCII) developed by the researcher. RCII is a 15-item questionnaire structured on a 4-point scale of Always, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never with nominal values 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The instrument was validated by three experts using face and content validity. The scores of RCII obtained through trial testing on the same 20 primary two pupils selected in Awka North Local Government Education Authority were subjected to test of internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha Method, and a co-efficient value of 0.75 was obtained. The following measures was employed to control the extraneous variables in this study: initial group difference, Hawthorne effect, pre-test and post-test sensitization, maturation and teacher variables. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Mean interest scores of pupils reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction

Source of Variance	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD	Mean Gain
PRS	68	35.69	16.08	48.75	16.06	13.06
Control	71	32.86	14.92	40.54	16.02	7.68
Mean Diff						5.29

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of pupils’ interest scores in reading comprehension for those taught with the Pictorial Reading Strategy (PRS) and the Teacher direct instruction. At pre-test, the PRS group (Mean = 35.69, SD = 16.08) and the control group (Mean = 32.86, SD = 14.92) showed similar levels of interest, indicating comparable starting points. After the intervention, the PRS group recorded a higher post-test mean of 48.75 (SD =



16.06), while the control group had 40.54 (SD = 16.02). The calculated mean gain reveals a greater improvement in interest for the PRS group (13.06) compared to the control group (7.68). Although both groups maintained relatively wide standard deviations indicating diverse individual responses the consistently higher mean gain in the PRS group demonstrates that pictorial reading strategy more effectively stimulated pupils' interest in reading comprehension than the teacher-directed method.

Table 2: Mean interest scores of male and female pupils reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy

Source of Variance	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Male	29	36.21	16.01	48.66	16.52	12.45
Female	39	35.31	16.33	48.82	15.93	13.51
Mean Diff						1.06

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation of interest scores of male and female pupils taught reading comprehension using the pictorial reading strategy. At pre-test, male pupils recorded a mean of 36.21 (SD = 16.01), while their female counterparts had a slightly lower mean of 35.31 (SD = 16.33), indicating nearly identical baseline interest. After the intervention, male pupils achieved a post-test mean of 48.66 (SD = 16.52), while females scored 48.82 (SD = 15.93). The computed mean gains show that females (13.51) experienced a slightly higher improvement in interest than males (12.45). The standard deviations for both groups are high and remained relatively unchanged from pre-test (Male: 16.01, Female: 16.33) to post-test (Male: 16.52, Female: 15.93) mean difference of 1.06. This indicates a wide variation in individual interest scores within each group both before and after the intervention. Nonetheless, the result revealed that female pupils demonstrated a more effective interest compared to their male counterpart using pictorial reading strategy reading comprehension in English Studies.

Table 2: ANCOVA analysis on the mean interest scores of pupils reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	34848.346 ^a	2	17424.173	863.589	.000	.927
Intercept	2612.152	1	2612.152	129.465	.000	.488
Interest	32504.412	1	32504.412	1611.00	.000	.922
TM	1004.585	1	1004.585	49.790	.000	.268
Error	2744.000	136	20.176			
Total	313515.000	139				
Corrected Total	37592.345	138				

a. R Squared = .927 (Adjusted R Squared = .926)

The ANCOVA result in Table 3 examines pupils' mean interest scores in reading comprehension taught with the pictorial reading strategy (PRS) and teacher-directed instruction method (TDI). The corrected model was statistically significant, $F(2,136) = 863.59$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .927, indicating that approximately 92.7% of the variance in post-test interest scores was explained by the model. Importantly, the teaching method (TM) had a significant effect on pupils' interest, $F(1,136) = 49.79$, $p < .001$, meaning that that p-value of 0.000 is less



than the significant value of 0.05. This result implies that there is significant difference between mean interest scores of pupils reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the mean interest scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	33846.430 ^a	2	16923.215	614.418	.000	.900
Intercept	2342.802	1	2342.802	85.058	.000	.385
Interest	33685.499	1	33685.499	1222.99	.000	.900
Gender	2.670	1	2.670	.097	.756	.001
Error	3745.915	136	27.543			
Total	313515.000	139				
Corrected Total	37592.345	138				

a. R Squared = .900 (Adjusted R Squared = .899)

The ANCOVA result in Table 4 shows the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension taught with the pictorial reading strategy. However, gender had no significant effect on pupils' achievement, $F(1,136) = 0.097$, $p = .756$, $\eta^2 = .001$, suggesting that male and female pupils performed similarly when taught using the pictorial reading strategy. However, since the p-value of 0.756 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, this means that the null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference between mean interest scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that the mean interest scores of pupils was effective in pictorial reading strategy compared with the teacher-directed method in reading comprehension. This finding indicated that students experienced substantially greater levels of engagement and intrinsic motivation when constructing meaning through images, compared to the more passive, teacher-directed method. This elevated engagement is crucial, as it fosters a more active and personally invested learning process. The results suggest that by leveraging visual scaffolding and student-led discovery, educators can cultivate a more positive and motivating literacy environment, which is a foundational element for deepening comprehension and fostering a lasting appreciation for reading. This finding supported that of Ratnasari (2020) that pictorial storybooks were particularly effective because they incorporated engaging activities such as observing, storytelling, reading, and arranging pictorials into coherent narratives. The finding supported that of Čigarská (2025) that pictorial story books were able to improve students' reading as well as the students' interest in reading.

The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was a significant difference between mean interest scores of pupils reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with teacher direct instruction. This finding agreed with that of Ratnasari(2020) that the pictorial strategy significantly improved the reading skills of the experimental group compared to the control group.

The finding revealed that female pupils demonstrated a more effective interest compared to their male counterpart using pictorial reading strategy in reading comprehension in English Studies. This finding means that female pupils exhibited a stronger and more



effective connection to this pedagogical approach, demonstrating higher levels of interest and motivational response than their male counterparts. This disparity underscores the importance of recognizing differential engagement patterns within the classroom. This finding was in line with that of Septiani (2020) that illustrated texts enhanced affective responses (interest, enjoyment) and that, in several class-level comparisons, girls showed stronger increases in expressed reading interest when illustrations were emphasised. The authors linked this to girls' greater responsiveness to narrative and affective cues conveyed by images. Similarly, Suraya, Radik and Endri (2021) study on visual/illustrated storybooks reported that visual communication in storybooks raised children's reading interest and motivation; sample breakdowns reported somewhat larger average gains in interest for female participants, suggesting pictorial story formats may better align with girls' emerging reading preferences in some settings.

The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference between mean interest scores of male and female pupils in reading comprehension in English studies taught with pictorial reading strategy. This finding opposed that of Sun (2019) that there was a significant difference between mean interest scores of male and female students using pictorial to improve students' reading skills. The difference between both findings could be as a result of varying opinions of respondents based on geographical location.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study established that pictorial reading strategy significantly enhances pupils' interest in reading comprehension compared to the teacher-directed method. The findings also confirmed a statistically significant difference in interest levels between pupils exposed to pictorial reading strategy and those taught through conventional instruction, favouring the pictorial approach. Although female pupils recorded slightly higher interest levels than males, the difference was not statistically significant, indicating that both genders benefit similarly from the strategy. Therefore, pictorial reading strategy proves to be an effective, inclusive, and engaging approach for improving pupils' interest in reading comprehension.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since pictorial reading strategy significantly improved pupils' interest in reading comprehension compared to the teacher-directed method, primary school teachers should adopt and consistently integrate pictorial instructional materials such as charts, pictures, and illustrated story texts into reading lessons.
2. Given that there was a significant difference between pupils taught with pictorial reading strategy and those taught with the teacher-directed method, school administrators and curriculum planners should encourage a shift away from overly teacher-centred instruction in English Studies. Emphasis should be placed on interactive teaching strategies that actively involve pupils in meaning-making processes, particularly in reading comprehension lessons.
3. In view of the finding that female pupils demonstrated slightly higher interest than male pupils, although not statistically significant, teachers should ensure that pictorial reading activities are gender-inclusive. Instructional materials should be designed to appeal broadly to both boys and girls, while classroom participation should be



structured to give equal opportunity for engagement, ensuring no learner is disadvantaged.

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