

The Use of Interactive Methods in Teaching Communication Skills to Learning Disabled, Visually Impaired and Hearing Impaired Children in an Inclusive Primary Educational Setting

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Abstract

This study examined the use of interactive methods in teaching communication skills to learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired children in an inclusive educational setting. The study tried to ascertain the relevance of interactive method and its effect on the teaching of communication skills to the group of exceptional children identified. The experimental design of study was adopted with the pre-test, post-test and control group. Two research questions and hypotheses were formulated. The population of this study included both “normal” and children with special needs in the categories of learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired. A sample of 18 subjects was drawn for the study. Two sets of instruments were used for data. They included a questionnaire and Teacher Made Interactive Activities (TMIA) tests. Data were collected and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics and it was discovered that children in the experimental group could read and express themselves better than those in the control group. Thus, there is agreement that children in the inclusive educational setting perform better than those in the reverse integrated education setting. Based on the findings the use of interactive method is recommended in teaching communication skills to special needs children in an inclusive educational setting.

Introduction

Several educational methodologies are available for use by teachers to improve teaching and learning. Individuals with special needs however require proactive

teaching methods in order to ensure effective communication skills as well as mastery of content areas. Interactive methods could be employed to facilitate communication skills among persons with special needs in the inclusive educational setting. Inclusive education therefore is a formally organized system in which individuals with special needs are taught together with “normal” children in neighbourhood schools.

Inclusive education, according to Mani (2003) is an ideology that embraces the concept of effective schools where every child has a place to study and teachers become facilitators of learning rather than providers of information. In his own submission, Giangreco (2004: 78–79) emphatically argued that inclusive education means:

- All students are welcomed in general education classes in their local schools. This means that the general education classroom in the school that a student would attend if he/she did not have a disability is the first placement consideration, given individual appropriate support and services.
- Students are educated in classes where the number of those with and without disabilities is proportional to the local population.
- Students are educated with peers in the same age groupings available to those without disability labels.
- Students with varying characteristics and abilities participate in shared educational experiences while pursuing individually appropriate learning outcomes with necessary supports and accommodations. In cases where students have substantially different learning outcomes, this can occur through differentiated instruction, multi-level instruction or curriculum overlapping.
- Shared educational experiences take place in settings predominantly frequented by people without disabilities, e.g., general education classroom, community worksites etc. Educational experiences are designed to enhance individually determined valued life outcomes for students and therefore seek an individualized balance between the academic/functional and social/personal aspects of schooling (Giangreco, 2004).

Giangreco concluded that inclusive education exists when each of the above characteristics occur in an on-going daily basis. The writers agreed with Mani (2003) that inclusive education is a set of values, principles and practices that seek more effective and meaningful education for all students, regardless of whether they have exceptionality labels or not.

Interactive method on the other hand, usually literature based technique which avail children with special needs access to varieties of literature in print and Braille to manipulate and read for enhancement of communication skills. This method encourages the child to be actively engaged in planned learning activities in a conducive school environment where the teacher acts as the facilitator. Stanovich (1980) and Rumelhart (1994) stated that the interactive method recognize the importance of both the text and the reader in the reading process. Reading here is the process of combining textual information with the information the reader brings to a text. The proponents of this method view reading as the interaction between the reader and text. Thus, stimulating the child's interest to share his experiences through communication. The interactive model of reading assume that skills at all levels are interactively available to process and interpret the text. The authors assume that fluent reading entails both skillful decoding and relating information to prior knowledge. Therefore, to achieve fluency and accuracy, developing readers must work at perfecting both their bottom-up recognition skills and top-down interpretation strategies. Good reading (that is fluent and accurate reading) can result only from a constant interaction between those processes.

While agreeing with submissions made by Usman (2007) and Anikweze (2007), Yakwal (2007) posit that active learning is synonymous with interactive method of learning because of their similarity in practice. This happens when learners are given the opportunity to have a more interactive relationship with the subject matter of the lesson, encouraging them to generate rather than receive knowledge.

In this type of learning environment, the teacher facilitates rather than dictate the direction of learning. Andzayi with Umolu (2004) observed that interactive method is characterized by several activities. These activities include among others: Shared reading which is made up of story telling and reading aloud; demonstration or role play, re-writing a story; making a big book/illustration and varieties of language activities. Andzayi (2001) noted that children will learn to read faster if their reading materials are personally meaningful to them. This is the whole essence of interactive method of teaching reading because these materials are rich and especially when the content refers to their background experiences. Similarly, this method has the potential to promote the language and culture of the Nigerian child (Umolu, 1985a).

Statement of the Problem

Usually, an inclusive educational setting provides an avenue for interaction between children with special needs (Learning Disabled, (L.D), Visually

Impaired (V.I.) and Hearing Impaired (H.I.) children) and the “normal” children. This equally helps to enhance both intra and inter personal relationship of especially the exceptional persons. However, a cursory observation of individuals with special needs in the study area revealed that majority of them have limited communication skills. Many of them can hardly express themselves both in writing (Braille), sign or orally. This problem tends to affect their social adjustment skills and encourage anti-social behaviour problems among individuals with special needs. These behaviours need to be influenced for the better through interactive methods. Whereas, Harris and Smith (1980) documented that interactive model is an effective modality for enhancement of reading in children, a number of factors influence the reader’s successful interaction with the text. One of these is the reader’s proficiency in the language of reading. Since reading is a language based process, readers are users of language. That is, they use language to obtain meaning from the text. But it was observed that many children in this study area still find it difficult to read books of their class level.

It is against this problem and the desire to improve their communication skills that the use of interactive method of teaching is being evaluated.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the use of interactive method in teaching communication skills to learning disabled (L.D); Visually Impaired (V.I); and Hearing Impaired (H.I) children in an inclusive educational setting. Specifically the study intended to achieve the following purposes:

- (ii) To ascertain the relevance of interactive method in teaching communication skills to learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired children.
- (iii) To investigate the effect of interactive method on communication skills of learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired children.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed:

1. To what extent can interactive method facilitate communication skills of “normal”, learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired children?

2. Can interactive method enhance receptive and expressive language skills of learning disabled, visually impaired, hearing impaired and “normal” children?

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the use of interactive method on communication skills of L.D., V.I., H.I. and “normal” children.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the use of interactive method to teach communication skills between L.D., V.I., H.I. and “normal” children in the inclusive and reverse integrated educational settings.

Design

This study adopted the experimental design. The nature of the design was the pre-test, post-test control group. This design ensured that there are both experimental and control groups where there was a pre-test and treatment given to the experimental group. Later a post-test was given for the purpose of finding out whether the treatment had any effect on the treatment group. The interactive activities used during the intervention included: shared reading, demonstration or role play; re-writing a story, making of big book/illustration and varieties of language activities.

The population of this study included both “normal” and children with special needs in the categories of learning disabled, visually impaired and hearing impaired children. About 18 subjects constituted sample for the study. This sample comprised 9 subjects each from Ganaka International School Jos and Gindiri School for the Blind, all in Plateau State — Nigeria. They were selected by means of simple random sampling technique. This was essential in order to give each child the opportunity of being selected for the study. The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics for the analysis of data collected from the field.

Research Instrument

The instruments used for this study include questionnaire and Teacher Made Interactive Activities (TMIA) tests. The questionnaire comprised five items and was coded using the likert scale technique. The instruments were validated by experts in special education and test and measurement from University of Jos, Nigeria. The scaling was as follows: Strongly Agreed (4), Agreed (3), Disagreed (2) Strongly Disagreed (1) and No Option (0). The average point

of 2.5 on the scale was used as criteria for acceptance of a factor as influencing communication skills.

Data Analysis

After ten (10) months of intervention, the data collected and analyzed were summarized in the following tables.

TABLE 28.1: Responses of Teachers on Whether Interactive Method can Facilitate Communication Skills of Children in Inclusive Setting

<i>S/No.</i>	<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>S. D.</i>
1	Parents of children with special needs provide adequate reading materials for their wards in the inclusive Programme	2.32	1.18
2	Parents and teachers usually encourage their children in the inclusive school to interact with one another.	4.21	0.84
3	The teachers in the inclusive programme have adequate knowledge of the Interactive method.	4.01	0.98
4	The teachers normally use shared reading, demonstration, re-writing a story, making of big book and language activities in teaching children communication skills.	2.23	1.28
5	Different interactive activities can facilitate better communication skills of children in the inclusive settings.	4.41	0.76

Table 28.1 revealed that teachers in the inclusive education setting perceived questionnaire items 2,3 and 5 as important interactive statements that facilitate communication skills of children in the inclusive education settings. These factors are encouraging the children to interact with one another, having adequate knowledge of interactive method and the use of shared reading, demonstration, re-writing a story and making a big book. There was low variability in the teachers’ perception of the use of interactive method as facilitating communication skills of children in the inclusive educational setting. It was also observed that parents do not provide adequate reading materials for their wards and teachers do not use interactive method to facilitate children’s reading skills.

TABLE 28.2: Relationship of Interactive Method on Communication Skills

<i>S/No.</i>	<i>Nature of Child</i>	<i>Pre-test Score</i>	<i>Post-test Score</i>	<i>Total Words Gained</i>
1	Learning Disabilities	32	80	48
2	Learning Disabilities	45	97	52
3	Learning Disabilities	36	92	56
4	Hearing Impaired	52	95	43
5	Hearing Impaired	44	96	52
6	Normal Children	54	97	43
7	Normal Children	29	85	56
8	Normal Children	54	100	46
9	Visual Impaired	50	100	50

Table 28.2 above shows that there is a significant relationship between interactive method and communication skills of learning disabled (L.D.), hearing impaired (H.I.) normal children (NC) and visually impaired children in the inclusive educational setting. The table depicts both the initial and post assessment scores of the respondents. It can be observed that the total words gained after intervention for each category of the respondents shows greater performance of the subjects in the intervention.

TABLE 28.3: Summary of t-test of Difference in the Performance of Children in the Inclusive and Reverse Integrated Educational Settings

Settings	N	\bar{X}	S ²	df	t.cal	t-crit	p
Inclusive setting	9	39	2,496.0				
Reverse integrated Setting	9	82	5,312.19	16	2.35	2.120	0.05

Table 28.3 above shows that the value of t- calculated is 2.35. This is greater than the table value of t given as 2.120. This shows that the null hypothesis was significant, thus, the use of interactive method has more significant effect on children in inclusive programme than reverse integrated settings.

Discussion

The data collected for this study revealed significant relationship between the use of interactive method on communication skills of learning disabled, visually impaired, hearing impaired and normal children in the inclusive educational

setting. Results show that the children benefited immensely from the intervention effort given to them after the initial assessment. Hence, their gain scores increased from identification of few, to many vocabularies in both high frequency words and the Informal Reading Inventory. Similarly, it was discovered that children in the experimental group could read and express themselves better than those in the control group. Therefore, hypothesis one is rejected, which means that a significant relationship exist between interactive method and communication skills of the learners in the inclusive programmes. This finding corroborate Stanorich (1980) and Rumelhart (1994) who stated that the interactive method recognize the importance of both the text and the reader in the reading process, thus, stimulating the child's interest to share his experiences through communication.

The second finding shows significant difference between the use of interactive method to teach communication skills to learners in inclusive programmes and reversed integrated educational setting. Children in the inclusive educational settings, performed better than those in the reverse integrated setting. This may be due to more number of "normal" children in the inclusive programme, who constantly interacts with the special needs children as against those in the reverse integrated settings. This study gain the support of Smith (1980) and Andzayi (2001) who noted that interactive method is an effective modality for enhancement of reading in children and that a number of factors influence the reader's successful interaction with the text. One of these is the reader's proficiency in the language of reading. Thus, children will learn to read faster if their reading materials are personally meaningful to them.

Conclusion

The use of interactive method of teaching reading can influence communication skills of special learners in both inclusive and reverse integrated settings. Adequate use of the literature based activities such as shared reading (story telling/reading aloud), demonstration or role play, re-writing a story, making a big book/illustration and varieties of language activities will definitely enhance communication skills of special learners in the inclusive and reverse integrated educational settings.

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