A SIX-WEEK PROGRAMME USING SELECTED BELIZEAN SONGS, POEMS AND SHORT STORIES TO DEVELOP READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN STD I STUDENTS AT EBENEZER SCHOOL

Submitted to the Principal of Belize Teachers' College in Partial Fulfillment of a Trained Teacher's Certificate

presented

by

Seydi L. Blanco

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who participated and contributed as I struggled to complete this research.

To the principal and teacher of Std. I at Ebenezer Methodist School and my supervisor during Block 1999, I express my gratitude once more.

To my family, husband and child, who in one way or another helped and bore with me through this difficult year.

To my friends and colleagues who motivated me to carry out the research every time I went astray.

I also give thanks to the Almighty for giving me strength and life that without it I would not have accomplished it.

Thanks to everyone.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The problem of how to teach reading to children is not new. Teachers throughout the world are faced with the challenge of teaching reading. "Reading is much more than the decoding of black printed marks upon a page: it is a quest for meaning and one, which requires the reader to be an active participant." (Des/Wo 1989) Many of us can read the word printed on paper but do not understand what we read. The researcher has encountered many children who can read whatever material is given to them but these same children do not grasp the meaning of the material read.

In many schools the researcher encountered the problem of memorization instead of reading for understanding.

Based on observations this is caused by the lack of reading readiness. The researcher believes that adequate development of comprehension skills can effect developing literacy. "Literacy is the ability to read and write, to say one's name, completion of certain amount of schooling and the ability to read and write sample messages.

However, a person could meet these criteria but yet be considered functionally illiterate, that is, unable to

understand the reading matter encountered in everyday life." (Encyclopedia 1989).

In many cases there is not a 'smooth sailing' in reading in the classroom because teachers encounter children with different backgrounds, personalities, and previous knowledge. It is difficult to teach children to read only through memorizing sight words or through phonetically approach. The researcher believes that reading for understanding can be attacked with good reading comprehension skills. Higher level skills such as interpreting, predicting, etc. can help in reading printed materials for understanding.

Identification of the Problem

Many students seem to read and memorize what they read. This type of reading is not effective especially when the reading material is a lot. Some students can read the printed words but if they should be asked what they read, they wouldn't be able to respond adequately. This can lead to frustration that could contribute to students' developing negative attitude towards reading.

There are a number of possible causes for students poor comprehension skills but the two most advanced by teachers and educators in Belize are that English is the

second language for the students and the reading text is in English. The second reason is that some students do not have the required textbooks.

When students cannot read for understanding they experience problems with other subjects that require them to read and understand, for example, in Science, Social Studies and Arithmetic. It is very difficult, if possible any at all, to solve arithmetic problems if one cannot read and understand the problems.

Purpose

It is expected that at the end of the six-week program the students of Std. I would have improved their reading comprehension skills. The researcher hopes that the following will also be achieved but might not be measurable at the end of the program.

- Developed positive attitudes towards reading or any written or printed material.
- Developed reading skills including predicting, characterization and drawing conclusions.

Significance of the Study

On a long-term basis the researcher hopes that this study will prove beneficial to the following:

- The Ministry of Education could use the findings of the study to guide teachers when they encounter similar problem. Education officers could better equip themselves when supervising teachers in the teaching of reading.
- Teachers can also use the study to alleviate similar reading problem. This study will increase the teacher's repertoire for dealing with students who cannot read.
- 3. Lecturers, especially the language art lecturer, at

 Belize Teachers' College can use this study in

 preparing teachers to teach reading in primary school.
- 4. The Curriculum Development Unit of QUAD can use this study when developing curriculum. Ideas of contents and activities could be gotten from this study.
- 5. Other researchers might find this study useful.

Definition of Terms

Cloze: a coherent passage, usually of paragraph length, from which every fifth to seventh word is deleted.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is one of the most important subjects in school because it helps with the mastering of all the others subjects. Once students can read and understand they are better able to learn. They can learn on their own when the teacher is not present because they can read, comprehend, and learn for themselves. In such a situation, the teacher is a facilitator of learning and not a giver of information. This makes the students independent learners who can learn even when the teacher is absent. This, however, takes some discipline on the part of the student and not only his/her ability to read and understand.

Some students can read with correct pronunciation and decoding skills but don't understand what is read. This for most teachers is not considered reading. Reading is defined as the process of constructing meaning from written texts (Anderson, 1984). In other words, reading only takes place when the reader understands what is read. Escalante (1994) in agreement with Anderson (1984) said a good reader could interpret words in their contextual setting. In this case the reader would be able to comprehend words as part

of a sentence, sentence as part of a paragraph and paragraph as part of a story.

The researcher believes that reading comprehension deals with literal or inferred meaning of reading material. This is a high level of meaning that requires more skills of the reader than just to recall what was read. Many from our Belizean teachers teach comprehension as just recalling or remembering what was read. The researcher concurs with Anderson (1984) and Escalante (1994) that reading must go beyond this. For example, the reader must be able to understand the mood, tone, feeling and attitude of the author. According to Escalante (1994) the reader must comprehend implied meaning and prejudices of the writer, summary statements, make references recognize applications and see the broader implication of a passage. He must familiarize himself with the time and place in which the words were written and use periods, commas, quotation marks and questions as aids to interpretation. So teachers should always set the purpose for reading in order that it is meaningful to children.

A lot of household items, computers, appliances, utensils, calculators, etc. come with small booklet explaining assembly and/or instruction for usage. The owner must be able to read and follow these instructions to

get maximum usage from these items. The ability to read and understand is very critical to be functional citizens. Imagine travelling to some unknown area and not being able to read the signs on the highways and streets. Imagine not being able to read the labels on food containers. being out and your family had to leave so they had to leave a message for you and the only way they could have done so was through a note but you can't read the note. Each day the average person has to read something. Then there are those professions that require one to read to information. These include doctors, lawyers, teachers, policemen, journalist, etc. A student has to read to get information. He/she can't solely rely on the information orally given by his/her mentor. These applications of reading demonstrate the importance of reading to functional in society.

English is not the first language of almost all students in Belize. This makes learning to read more complicated because they are taught to read in a language that is not their first language. In many cases it is not even their second language. The literature shows that for students to be able to read and draw inference, they must understand the author's mood, setting, goal, etc. It is difficult for someone who has been exposed to a language

for the first time (a person's second or a third language) to elicit these from a reading text.

To encourage students to read for understanding the information should be relevant to their experience. Duffy (1972) stated that reading skills are learned. Although sometimes a child may learn to read by himself, the typical reader must be taught. Researchers have used folk-tales, puppetry, drawing, dramatization, cooperative learning, cloze procedure, phonetic approach and others to develop reading skills of students.

Escalante (1994) used folk-tales and puppetry through cooperative learning to develop reading skills of a standard four class at Our Lady of Guadalupe School. He found that these methods made a statistical significant improvement in students' reading skills. Escalante emphasized relevant materials in his program which concurred with the theories of reading.

The cloze method was used a lot but is not reported as much in recent literature. It is commonly used in the lower and middle divisions. The cloze method is concerned with the supply of words that have been deleted from given passages. Tyndall (1994) used this method to develop reading skills of standard one students at Big Falls Schools in the Toledo District. Tyndall concluded that the

program was success but he would have like to see a greater increase in the students' performance. Tyndall ran the program for only five weeks, which is considered too short to see meaningful changes. He said the pictures used on some of the worksheets motivated the students.

Trapp (1997) did a study to develop reading skills of students in standard one at James Garbutt Seventh Day Adventist School, using the phonetic approach. She found that five of the eighteen students did not achieve the 60 percent on the posttest but the t-test of the program showed that there was statistical difference between the pretest and the posttest. The researcher thinks that the cloze method to teaching reading comprehension is effective because she has used it and gotten good results.

Comprehension problem is not only in primary school but in secondary schools too. Worrell (1992) found that a group of students at Corozal Community College had difficulty in understanding what they read. Most of them could recall one or two events but could not go deeper or make inferences and relate the reading to personal experiences. Most teachers in Belize experience difficulty in teaching reading comprehension because students are not well prepared for reading comprehension; they can pronounce words but they don't understand what they read. Many times

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they can only recall what was read and unable to draw inferences.

Conclusion

Many teachers experience poor reading comprehension skills among their students. The reasons for this is mixed but two of the most common beliefs are that the reading materials are not relevant, and English is not the first language of students but the reading materials are in English. There is an obvious need for students to be exposed to more activities to develop reading comprehension skills bearing in mind the characteristics of the students.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

A six-week program using folklore was administered to students who had difficulty reading to be better able to read. These students all had problem reading and understanding what they read. A t-test, with a significance level of .01, of a pretest and a posttest was used to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Sample

The sample was seven girls and three boys from a standard one class of seventeen students at Ebenezer School in Belize City who had problem in reading comprehension. These students were between the age of seven and eight years old. The majority of these students was Creole and Mestizo and spoke Creole as their first language. They were mainly from lower socio-economic families and had the required textbooks. These students did not experience any difficult with the other subject areas so could not be classified as overall weak students. They were also in a class appropriate for their age.

Instrument

The researcher used a pretest and a different posttest to determine the effectiveness of the program. The two tests were equivalent as evaluated by three colleagues and

the researcher supervisor for Block Practice Teaching. In addition to these two major tests three formative tests were administered when a story was finished. All the tests were made by the researcher based on the story. Each test was based on a story that was given to students on a handout with the questions. The questionnaire was distributed at different cognitive levels ranging from recall to comprehension. See one of the tests as sample in Appendix A.

Data Collection

The pretest was administered the first day of the program and the posttest was given the last day of the program. The formative tests were not administered at any regular interval; they were given during the second, forth and fifth weeks. The pretest and posttest were done in the entire class period and the formative tests were done during the first fifteen to twenty minutes of the class. Samples of the students' work are in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using a t-test to determine if there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. The p-value will be set at 0.01. This test will allow the researcher to make generalization about the effectiveness of the program. The results of the three

formative tests will be compared to show how well students did in the different types of stories.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

The researcher used selected Belizean songs, poems and short stories to develop reading comprehension skills of students. The lessons used are individually presented below.

Lesson 1

Topic: Comprehension (The Miller, his son and his donkey)

Concepts: 1) The story takes place on the road.

- 2) The three characters in the story were a man, a boy and a donkey.
- The main idea of the story is a boy and his father riding on a donkey to a neighboring fair.

Skills: Appreciate reading, reading skills, critical thinking

Time: 10:15 to 10:50 a.m.

Objectives: 1) Children will be able to read the new words presented to them.

2) Children will be able to read the story and answer a few questions. For example, Who are the characters in the story?

Previous

Knowledge: Children have seen a donkey either on picture or in real life.

Reference: New Nelson West Indian Reader. Page 89 to 91

Materials:

Procedure: Introduction

Play the game with the donkey and the tail.

Teacher draws a donkey on shop paper and a tail on a separate piece of paper. Children will be going to place the donkey tail on the correct place butt with their eyes folded. Talk about the donkey.

Development

- Present new words from 'The miller, his son and his donkey' on flash cards. Children will read the words and use them in oral sentences.
- 2) Children will read the story 'The miller, his son and his donkey'. Children will have in mind questions such as, Where is the story taking place.

3) Discuss on the main idea of the story.
Conclusion: Children will answer some questions based on the story and their findings. (Pre-Test for action research paper)

Pre-Test: After reading the story "The miller, his son and their donkey, answer the following questions using complete sentences.

Recall

Questions: 1) Where does the story take place?

- 2) Who are the people in the story?
- 3) Where are they going?
- 4) Who rides the donkey at first?

Higher Level

Questions: 5) Who do you think should ride the donkey?

- 5) What do you think the man and his son did after they reach the fair and after he
- 6) was down.

Evaluation: For the introduction, teacher caught the attention of children but it was very short.

There is a disciplinary problem with children.

For the development, teachers changed the activities. She presented the story's new words

then they were asked to read by themselves. Some did and some did not. So, teacher had to read the story to them for the second time. Children then answered dome questions. The pre and post tests given as conclusion were a bit difficult for some children. Others did well. Next time teachers need to use a different approach in presenting the story, for example puppet

Lesson 2

Topic: Vocabulary Development (Jimbo)

Concepts: New vocabulary words are relaxing, rocking, verandah, tomato, Governor,

Group I: Marigolds, hibiscus, carib gals, bleeding hearts, vegetables, tilled, excited, awakened, constantly.

Group II: New vocabulary words are look, cook, book, took, sing, ring, sang, rang, duck, luck, sack, and pack.

Skills: Identifying

Class: Standard I

Time: 10:15 to 10:50 a.m.

Date: 20 January 1999

Objectives: 1) Children will be able to use vocabulary words in oral sentences.

2) Children will be able to complete five sentences using the new words.

Previous

Knowledge: Children have had the opportunity to play with puzzles.

Reference: Jimbo, "The mystery of the Tommy Goff snake." Nelson New West Indian Reader.

Materials: Puzzles, flash cards

Procedure: Introduction

Present puzzle to each table. Children will complete the puzzle and read the work in groups. Development

- Teachers help them read and use them in sentences. Allow each child to give other oral sentences.
- 2) Present sentence strips with a blank space. Children will identify the words that fit correctly on the sentence.

Conclusion: Children will copy sentences and write the correct word that fits the sentences.

Evaluation: Introduction activities was very interesting for children. The puzzles caught their attention right away, but there were still a few ones fighting for the cards. Children were able to read most of the words. They gave good sentences with the words. What would have been done was to put children to try to write the sentences on their blanks.

Topic: Main Idea of the story "Jimbo, The Mystery

of the Tommy Goff snake"

Concepts: (1) The main idea of a story is the

event(s) that is/are most important.
(2) The main idea of the first two
 paragraphs is "There is a Tommy Goff

snake in school."

Skills: Identify, predicting, and drawing

conclusion.

Objectives: Children will be able to identify and give

the main idea of the first two paragraph of the story "Jimbo, The Mystery of the Tommy

Goff snake."

Reference: "Jimbo, The Mystery of the Tommy Goff

snake."

Materials: Flip chart, pictures, and handouts with

short paragraph.

Previous

Knowledge: Children can read short stories with five or

six sentences.

Procedure: Introduction

Divide children in groups. Provide them with short paragraphs or story. Children

will read the story in their groups. Teacher will ask children to find what the story is about. One individual form each group will read the story they have.

Development

- (1) Teacher writes what group will say about the story. Children will read the sentence that gives main idea.
- (2) Children will read the first two paragraphs of the story. Discuss with children what happen in the story.
- (3) Teacher will write some of their answers. Elicit form children what or which happening is the most important.

Conclusion:

Using their own words, children will give the main idea of the story. They will write it on their blanks.

Evaluation:

All the class participated during this lesson. Instead of giving children the paragraph to read in each group, teacher read the paragraph, since they were fighting when they were divided. Children then gave teacher the main idea of the paragraph. During the discussion, some children wanted to shout. Teacher only allowed them to talk one at a time. Children did give the main idea of the paragraph.

Topic:

Reading Comprehension.

Concept:

The main idea of the first three paragraphs is "Mr. Jimbo was taking a rest when Mr. Reyes came to make a complain."

Skills:

Reading

Objective:

Children will be able to read and answer questions based on what they read.

Previous Knowledge:

Children can name the main idea of the first three paragraphs of the story. Reference:

"Jimbo, The Mystery of the Tommy Goff

snake."

Materials:

Puppets, flip chart and shop paper.

Procedure:

Introduction

Selected children will be asked to role play the main idea of the story. The rest of class will give the main idea, using their own words.

Development

- (1) Teacher present new words on flash cards. Children read the words. Teacher asks individual children for sentences that contain the words.
- (2) Children read the paragraph on pages 2, 3 and 4. Teacher will ask children some oral questions based on the story.
- (3) Children relate what happens in the story using their own words.

Conclusion:

Teacher will present some questions on shop paper and children will answer question on their blanks. Teacher explains to children, by giving example, how to answer questions using correct sentences.

Evaluation:

This lesson was not as good as teacher had planned it. Children were restless and some did not want to participate. Some children gave their answers orally and some did not use sentences to give written answers. Teacher needs to encourage children to read more.

Topic:

Sequencing

Concepts:

- (1) Sequencing is listing main ideas in order as they occurred.
- (2) The main ideas in order as they occurred:

- (a) Mr. Jimbo takes a nap.
- (b) Mr. Jimbo was awaken from slumber by Mr. Reyes.
- (c) Mr. Reyes complains about the snake appearing in school.
- (d) Mr. Jimbo thinks about what he will do.

Objective:

Given main idea of pages 2, 3 and 4 children will put them in order as they occur.

Previous

Knowledge:

Children can give the main idea of the two pages.

Reference:

"Jimbo, The Mystery of the Tommy Goff snake."

Materials:

Flip chart and sentence strips.

Procedure: Introduction

Children will be asked questions through a game, Pass the Ball. Discuss and elaborate on happenings of the story.

Development

- (1) Children will read the story from a flip chart. This will be done individually and then as a class.
- (2) Discuss on the reading. Teacher will write main idea as children name them.
- (3) Number the sentences as they occur. Ask children for help.

Conclusion:

Given some sentences on sentence strips that contain main ideas, children will write them in order as they occur in the reading.

Evaluation: Children are not reading short as teacher

expects them to do it. Some read because of

memorization and others do not understand

what they read. When it was time to read

teacher to read the story for them first

because some were dragging behind. Children

did the sequencing very good.

Topic:

Predicting the outcome.

Concept:

Predicting outcome is to tell before hand

what will happen.

Skill:

Predicting and reading.

Objective:

Children will be able to write their own

outcome of the story.

Previous

Knowledge:

Children can relate the first three pages of

the story.

Reference:

"Jimbo, The Mystery of the Tommy Goff

snake."

Materials:

Typing sheets and puppets.

Procedure:

Introduction

Teacher will ask individual children to act out the first three pages of the story. Discuss on the acting. Children will relate the first three pages of the story.

Development

- (1) Teacher will read the story to children using puppets.
- (2) Teacher elicits from children what they think will happen next. Teacher writes a few answer or sentences given by children.

Conclusion:

Children will write their own outcome of the story on given typing sheets.

Evaluation:

Some children did answer the question "What happen next?" But, most of them did not answer the wrote sentences about the story. Teacher needs to do another lesson more interested. Children seemed a bid bored. Teacher will do this practice again for other stories.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The results of the pretest and the posttest show that all the students except Subjects C and E performed better on the posttest than on the pretest. Subjects E, F, H, and J had a higher score on the posttest but was only by 5 points. These students were rather weak students before the program so the difference of 5 percent was an improvement in itself.

The program had a more positive effect on the other five students in the program. Subject G score on the posttest was 15 percent higher than that of the pretest. This student was an average student.

Subjects A, B, and D had the highest improvement.

Subject A did not complete the pretest so the improvement on the posttest is not a good indication of the extent to which he improved as a result of the program. Subject D was the best student in the class. She got a past on the pretest and improved by 20 points on the posttest. This student also got the highest score of all the students on the posttest.

Seven of the ten students got a past, at least 70 percent, on the pretest and eight got a past on the posttest.

Table 1: Students' scores on Pretest and Posttest.

Table 1. Studen	Table 1: Students' scores on Pretest and Posttest.		
Subject	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
A	30	50	20
В	40	60	20
С	80	75	-5
D	75	95	20
E	75	80	5
F	70	75	5
G	60	75	15
Н	70	75	5
E	80	75	-5
J	70	75	5
Average	65	73.5	

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$$t = \frac{8.5}{9.47}$$

Overall, the posttest does not show a statistical significant difference from the pretest. The researcher's interpretation of this is that the program was not as effective as she would have liked it to be. Besides the fact that the researcher would have liked to see, the students demonstrated a higher level of skill at the end of the program, she thinks that the difference could have been because of change. According to Moore (1983) when there is no significant difference between pretest and posttest the little difference observed could be because of chance.

The t-value calculated is 0.89%, which is not significant at any level. The research does not have a problem in accepting this because in research the research may as well as may not discover what he had wanted to especially at one try. The literature shows that using Belizean songs, poems and short stories have worked for teachers in the past. The researcher thinks that the approach did not work for her because the pretest was too easy and the students did not have much room to improve,

the programme needed to run for a longer time, and the teacher probably needed to work more closely with the slower students in the group.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

The researcher concludes that the program was not as effective as she would have liked it to be but is satisfied with the results gotten. The researcher notes that although the literature has much research that show how effective the use of Belizean song, poems, and short stories are in developing students' reading comprehension skills, this study did not show the same result. Therefore, this approach will not work with all groups of students with similar problem.

The program could have been more effective if was ran for a longer period of time given the level of the students and a more difficult pretest had been given. This would have afforded the students more time to get practice the skills and develop more competency.

The researcher concludes that the short stories were more effective than the songs and the poems. The stories were interesting to the students and they always wanted to participate.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that teachers with similar problem in reading comprehension evaluate their situation before they decide on an approach to alleviate the problem. Because some teachers have, gotten good results from one approach does not meet it will be effective for you. In some cases, the teacher might need to use a combination of approaches so that the needs of the specific problem are addressed.

The researcher also recommends that a publication be made with teaching reading comprehension in Belize so that teachers can be exposed to some of the strategies and approaches that work. Many times teachers conduct research on the issue but the research is not utilized. Such a booklet would make immediate and continued use of past and present research on the problem. This should translate to more effective reading programmes in Belizean primary schools.

The researcher was not afraid to report the minimal effect of her reading program and recommend that other teachers and researcher do likewise and do not distort the data to satisfied one's objectives.

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