Revitalizing Reading Amidst Poverty In Basic Education Schools Of Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper focuses on poverty and reading and how reading may be revitalized in the Basic Education Schools. The study was a descriptive survey. The population of the study was 215 male and 217 female teachers in Basic Education schools. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test were used for data analysis. The findings showed that: Most pupils in basic schools came from very poor background; most pupils cannot read passages fluently. Pupils find it difficult to remember and answer correctly to questions of texts. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made.
Keywords: Basic Education, development, reading, poverty,

I. Introduction

Education is the key to development in any nation. Education is the instrument to fight hunger and poverty which is experienced all over the country today. This is possible where necessary provisions have been made to achieve quality. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines education as the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction especially at a school or university. It is also an enlightenment experience for effective education which involves conducive learning that is instrumentally good. It is a worthwhile Education. Reading is the process of taking in the sense or meaning of letters, symbol especially by sight or touch. Reading is a multi-faceted process involving comprehension, fluency and motivation (Reading Rockets https:// www.readingrockets. org2023/5/2:35 am). Reading is making meaning from print which requires to:

- Identify the words in print-a process called word recognition
- Construct an understanding from them- process called comprehension
- Coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate- an achievement called fluency.

Formal education cannot take place without the ability to read. For education to be achieved effective reading must take place. Reading is indispensable in the educational process. Effective reading and education cannot take place in the midst of poverty and hunger. Poverty exists when people lack the means to satisfy their

basic needs. The Word Health Organization WHO (https://www.afro.who.int>poverty, 2020) describes poverty as the state of hunger. Most people in Nigeria especially in Ebonyi State seem to be in a state of poverty and hunger. The National Bureau of Statistics NBS (2022) gave the poverty rate in Nigeria at one hundred and thirty three million (133) of national population which is 65 percent. Okah (2020) presents the statistics as it describes Ebonyi State as the 4th poorest states in the country and the first in the South- East with regards to economic development.   Hunger is a state when people can barely feed. This state of hunger seems to have permeated the educational sector. Countries in the world highly price education which leads to economic and technological development and this can be achieved through good democratic governance which gives literacy and education a pride of place. This development eradicates poverty and gives way to better living. Udosen (2020) is of the view that reading and writing which is literacy is meant to eradicate poverty. This can be achieved through a worthwhile education. In other words, lack of education leads to poverty and most schools seem to be in a poverty state as they are in the state of collapse, poor facilities, and lack of materials, poverty stricken teachers as there seems to be poor, irregular payment with general poor welfare of teachers. Ahmadu, Ibrahim, Ariel Thumbs, Rimamchika and Solomon, 2012).

The basic school pupils are in a critical poverty state as most of them cannot pay their school fees: most pupil especially in the rural areas, look hungry and malnourished and quite unkept. The basic education is education that leads to Senior secondary and then to tertiary education and so, it is the strong hold of education that should not be neglected. Unfortunately education especially, the basic education seems to be neglected in Ebonyi State as most children in the Lower Basics seem to lack concentration, hungry, generally unkept and in a poor school environment and these no doubt negatively affect their performance. The crux of this paper therefore is to investigate poverty, reading challenges and how reading might be revitalized amidst poverty.

Statement Of Problem

English language is the language of instruction for educational attainment in Nigeria. It is crucial as a result of diversity in language and ethnicity. Hence it is used to weld all the ethnic groups with more than five hundred languages in Nigeria. Reading is an important aspect of the English language and it is used to measure extent of learning and literacy which is important in the overall education especially for pupils in the basic education. Despite the importance of reading, most children seem to lack concentration in the class leading to poor performance in their academics. This may have been as a result of poverty which is hunger and this no doubt affects other areas as poor Environment and non-commitment of some teachers. This poor state can be witnessed as pupil seem to experience, hunger, sleepy, and are in an unkept state and in very poor environment as well as teachers exhibiting non commitment to duty. All these lead to pupil's poor performance in school. This study therefore seeks to investigate how literacy and reading may be revitalized amidst poverty in the Universal Basic Education Schools in Ebonyi State.

Objectives Of The Study

The objectives of this study is to investigate how literacy and reading may be revitalized amidst poverty in the Basic Education Schools. Specifically, the study intends to find out the following:
1. Extent of indications of poverty among pupils in a reading class
2. Find out extent poverty affects the pupils in a reading class
3. Ways poverty may be revitalize among pupils in a reading class
Ho: There is no significant difference on male and female teachers' responses on the way poverty affect pupils in a reading class.

II.   Literature Reviewed

Literacy, Reading And Basic Education

Literacy is the ability to read and write. It is a human right and a tool for personal development. A good quality literacy programme equips people with literacy skills for life and better learning (Okonkwo and Obeka, 2020). 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 (Erin and Native, 2016). The UNESCO (2010), defines literacy as the ability of an individual to function in all activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of group and community and also for enabling individual to continue to use reading, writing and calculations for personal and community development. Okonkwo and Obeka (2020) note 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.

Literacy and reading are the basics of education. Unfortunately, poverty is a barrier to education. Poverty which is hunger affects children in most schools in Nigeria especially in Ebonyi State. Pupils who are in the basic education should acquire literacy skills that will empower them for the senior secondary education and subsequently to tertiary institution. Academic growth and successful career are all tied to high literacy rate

because one needs to read and write and be able to understand oral and written communication (Udosen, 2018). Literacy and reading is no doubt a weapon for poverty eradication.

Quality Education And Sustainable Development Goal

Quality education is one of the 17 sustainable development goals of (SDGS) which were adopted by the United National General Assembly in 2015 for transformation of the world by the year 2030. Qualitative education is meant to achieve the intended objectives of education. The Basic Education is meant for Children aged 0 - 15years, 1 year – 6 years is for preprimary education, 6 years to 12 years for primary and 12 years to 15 years for junior secondary education. This Basic Education according to the National Policy on Education by the Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN (2014), should provide the following goals:

1. Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for interpretership, wealth generation and educational advancement;
2. Provide patriotic young people to contribute to social development and in the development of their civic responsibilities;
3. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour;
4. Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, ethnic and socioeconomic background;
5. Provide an opportunity for the child to develop manipulative skills that would enable the child function in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.

The implications of the above are that the basic education is the root for the nation's development because it is on top of it that all other levels of education rest on. Udosen (2018) explains that it is on it that the child would acquire literacy skills that would make her/ him lead a functional life and the fact that there are potentials the Basic Education holds for Nigeria. The stake holders are concerned that this level of education should be made qualitative to achieve the desired gold.

Unfortunately, this beautiful goals seem to be marred by poverty as millions of children are out of school and most others cannot afford the basic necessities of life as they struggle with hunger (Samphina.com.ng retrieved, 5/2023. 2:35 am). This hunger adversely affects reading and literacy and education generally especially in the UBE schools.

Bad Policy, Poverty And Reading And Literacy

The progress of any nation in the world is good leaders. These good leaders make good policies that would be beneficial to the people because the resources of the country are managed to the development and benefit of the entire nation. In such country, education is highly priced and indices of education are made available for effective teaching and learning which yields quantitative and qualitative education (Ajuzie and Akukwe, 2018 and Okonkwo, 2020). Quality determines how much and how well and the extent which their education achieved a range of personal, social and development goals. Poverty endangers academic growth whereas good food brings satisfaction on the body. With a satisfied body and mind one can have better concentration and self-actualization. If there is no fuel provided to the body, the mind becomes sluggish too and there is a lag in the need to excel in studies. Hence food is necessary for the optimum realization of one's cognitive and economic potential. (Brilliant-Savarin, 2022). Most people seem to experience hunger and are in a state of lack and this adversely affect literacy reading and the overall education. Poor education generates poverty and hunger which are indices of bad leadership.

Good governance indicates the tradition and institution by which authority is exercised for the common good (wikipedia, global academic group.com 2023/3/27, 4:21 am. Further explanation is that the economic growth of a country significantly impacted when exposed to indicators of bad governance but different indicators influence the degree of impact. Etum, Jaribe and Okah (2016). Bad governance and bad government encompass a variety of situations from corruption, deceit and passing of unfair policy which subject people to poverty and hunger. The World Bank (2023) explains bad governance has been centralized around corruption and lack of transparency, accountability, arbitrary policy making and cheating of those who are governed. Bad governance most often subject people to poverty and hunger, killings, maiming, treats, intimidation and harassment, nonpayment of salaries and promotion of workers, poor environment and stifling of business activities through heavy taxation and hostility to investors, unwanton destruction of lives and properties. Such are being experienced in Nigeria today especially in Ebonyi State for the past eight years and all these adversely affected education in the face of literacy and reading.

And upon the face of these, there is the concern that poverty seem to make the realization of quality literacy reading and education difficult as critical level of inflection overwhelmed the country   which lead to poverty and hunger in almost the entire country especially in Ebonyi State, (Okah, 2020). For example the fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria as was announced by the president of Nigeria on the May 29th 2023 brought another

triple hardship in the entire country. This announcement was done based on what obtains in other countries. However, this announcement was done without considering salary wages. Below are income wages comparisons income countries including Nigeria:

Comparison Of Income Wages And Fuel Subsidy Removal In Some Countries January 30, 2023

Minimum Wages	Without Taxes
Spain = 535559 Naira per month.	Spain = 246.9 Naira per litre.
USA = 535340 Naira per month.	USA = 403.3 Naira per litre.
UK = 955876 Naira per month.	UK = 330.6 Naira per litre.
Germany = 947618 Naira per month.	Germany = 330.6 Naira per litre.
France = 866241 Naira per month.	France = 335.7 Naira per litre.
Nigeria = 30000 Naira per month.	Nigeria = 350 to 600 Naira per litre.

Source: globalpetrolpumpprice.com

The table above indicates some countries income per head in a month and fuel subsidy removal.

The purpose was to introduce a legal and government framework to guide fuel subsidy removal. Unfortunately as can be seen that cognizance was not taken of minimum wages of any of these countries before Nigeria who has the poorest income wage (which most of the states, Ebonyi inclusive have not implemented) announced fuel subsidy removal. The national income minimum wage in Nigeria fall below the world standard and it spelt nothing but abject poverty and untold hardship on people (Ahmed et al, 2012). However, this if not solved would further lead to utmost hunger and starvation, malnutrition, sickness and death of more millions of people, especially, children within school age. This will further leads to very poor academic performance of children especially in a reading class as the children would lack concentration, emotional, physical and physiological ability. Again is that, teachers at all levels are neglected as they have very poor salaries which are irregularly paid and their general welfare are not taken care of. The result is that, most atimes, most teachers pursue their personal business to make ends meet, and leaving the pupils under their care and this in no great measure adversely affects pupils' academic performance. Quality teachers account for quality education because no education system can rise above the level of its teacher, (Agwu , and Okonkwo, 2015). Poverty as stated by Khan Nghiem and Rahman (2014) is hunger and a state of uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes poverty as hunger. It is a condition a person cannot eat sufficient food to meet basic nutritional needs for a sustained period. Such seems the condition of most pupils in the UBE schools especially in Ebonyi State and hunger is not gender sensitive.

Review Of Empirical Studies

Ahmadu (2012) carried out a research on lingering hunger among primary school pupils in Borno State. 400 pupils from eight different schools in Bama and Banki rural areas were used. Students test was used to compare for significance of data, 220 boys which was55 percent and 180 girls which was 45 percent were used and the pupils were within bracket of 13 years old. It was discovered that the diary intake of 68 percent of the pupil (278) was inadequate, large no of population were under weight and population of underweight children increased with age.

This work relates to the present as both work on hunger among school children, however, both differ because while the former worked on hunger on male and female pupils the present worked on the opinion of male and female teachers on hunger and performance of pupils

Also Samphina Academy (2023) carried out a research on effect of hunger on learning capability of primary school pupil in Edo State using Orodo LGA. The study was a descriptive study and data collection was used. Five Schools with a purposive selection was used. The sample size was 150, and 30 were drawn from each school. Simple percentage in frequency was used and hypothesis test was conducted using Chai-Square statistical package for social science. Findings revealed that pupils who were hungry did not concentrate in the class due to hunger and that hunger had a significant effect on pupils academic performance but that malnutrition of primary school pupil cannot distort their learning capability. It was recommended that parents should invest in improving nutritional status of young ones, so that when they grow up, their lives would be better.

This work relates with the present study because both worked using descriptive survey design but differs on the population. While population of the former were 150 pupil, the present employed 432 teachers. Also the former worked at Orodo LGA in Edo State, the present study focuses on Ebonyi State.

III.   Methodology
Design of the study
The design was a descriptive survey design

Area of the study

The study covered the three education zones in ebonyi state - abakaliki, onueke and afikpo education zones. The population of the study constituted all the ube teachers in ebonyi state with a sample population of 432 teachers from both male and female.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection, reading and literacy in the basic education school questionnaire (rlbes) was developed by the researcher.

Validation and reliability of the instrument

The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts in the field of arts and social science education and sciences education in measurement and evaluation departments of ebonyi state university. The instrument was further subjected to a reliability test in a test retest and an index of 0.78 was realized using spearman's correlation coefficient method.

The instrument was divided into four sections. Section a was on the demographic data of the respondents. Section b has six structured items on indications of poverty on pupils in a reading class

Section c has seven items on extent poverty has effect on pupils in a reading class. Section d has seven items on how reading and literacy may be revitalized. The respondents were expected to agree based on extent or level of acceptance. A total of 432 questionnaires were distributed and on the spot- distribution and collection was used to avoid mortality of the instrument.

Data analysis

The data generated were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The instrument was analyzed based on a four point scale of a. Very high extent vhe - 4, b. High extent he- 3, c low extent le 2, d very low extent 1. The t test statistics was used to analyze the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance using analysis of covariance (ancova)

IV.   Findings

The results of the study were based on the three research questions and a null hypothesis that guided the study. The responses of what constituted indications of poverty among pupils in a reading class, effects of poverty on pupils in a reading class and revitalizing reading literacy among students.

Research questions 1

What are the indications of poverty on pupils in a reading class?

Table 1: indications of poverty on pupils in a reading class

S/N	Indications of poverty on pupils in a reading class	Mean	SD		Remark
1	Children wear worn-out and tattered school uniform.	3.4	0.61	VHE	Accept
2	Children wear worn out sandals or a pair of worn out slippers.	3.3	0.91	HE	Accept
3	Children feel very hungry.	3.3	0.91	HE	Accept
4	Most children had bushy hairs.	3.4	0.61	VHE	Accept
5	Most children generally look unkempt.	3.2	0.94	HE	Accept
6	Most children do not have ready textbooks and writing materials.	3.2	0.94	HE	Accept

The table 1 had the highest mean of 3.2-3.4 on indications of poverty on pupils in a reading class

Research Questions 2

In what ways do poverty affect pupils in the literacy and reading classes?

Table 2: Extent Poverty Affects Pupils In A Reading Class

S/N	Effects of poverty on pupils in reading class	Mean	SD		Remark
1	Poverty leads to pupils lack of concentration.	3.3	0.91	HE	Accept
2	Poverty leads to stealing.	3.3	0.61	VHE	Accept
3	Poverty leads to poor health.	3.3	0.94	HE	Accept
4	Poverty leads to fighting and bickering among pupils.	3.4	0.97	HE	Accept
5	Poverty leads to pupils excessive sleeping.	3.4	0.87	VHE	Accept
6	Poverty leads to most pupils' general poor performance.	3.5	0.71	VHE	Accept
	Poverty make pupil play a lot.	2.3	1.67	LE	Reject

Data on table 2 indicated very high acceptance of effects of poverty in various ways with high mean of 3.5 and 3.4 with exception of low mean of 2.3 item no 7 which was rejected

Research questions 3
How would literacy and reading be revitalized among pupils?

Table 3 Revitalizing Reading Amidst Poverty Among Pupils In A Reading Class

S/N	Revitalizing reading amidst poverty	Mean	SD		Remark
1	Teachers should engage pupils using a more strategic teaching methods as play way, song didactic and other stimulus variations	3.1	9.8	HE	Accepted
2	Government should engage on policies that would enable good living of the people	3.3	9.1	HE	Accepted
3	Governments to make provisions of English textbooks and other reading materials	3.0	1.1	HE	Accepted
4	Government to improve welfare of teachers to motivate them for a better service delivery.	3.2	9.4	EX	Accepted
5	Parents and guardians to persevere in providing and taking care of their children and wards academic needs	3.2	9.4	HE	Accept
6	Government to use strict measures in compelling children and teachers to teach and learn	2.1	1.34	LE	Reject

Data on table 3 had highest mean of 3.1 to 3.3 in all the items which were accepted except item 6 with low mean of 2.1

Ho: There is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female teachers on how reading may be revitalized in the Basic Education schools

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-value	Remark
Male	215	2.94	1.01			
				1.81	1.97	Rejected
Female	217	3.14	0.89			

The t-calculated value indicated 1.81 which was less than the t-critical value of 1.97, Therefore there is no significant difference on male and female responses on how poverty affect pupils in a reading class.

V.   Discussion

Summary of data based on tables indicated extent of poverty and its effects on pupils in a reading class. The tables showed clear indications of poverty on the pupils. Items 1-5 on worn out clothes, worn out sandals, feel very hungry, bushy hair and general poor outlook have high means of 3.2 to 3.4 respectively. These clearly affirm statement of the National Bureau Statistic that over 133 million people in Nigeria are in poverty and can barely afford the basic necessities of life. And this no doubt showed evidence on pupils not taken care of due to low income of parents.

Table 2 on extent poverty affects pupils in a reading class showed that items 1,2,3,4 and 5 on lack of concentration and poor performance in class stealing feeling of sickness, fighting and bickering, feeling sleepy and excessive playing have high means of 3.3 with SD of 0.91, 3.4, with SD of 0.61, 3.2 with SD of 0.94, 3.0 with SD of 0.97, 3.4 with SD of 0.87, 3.5 with SD of 0.71, 2.3 with SD of 1.67.

This findings is in line with samphina.com/that pupils who are hungry do not concentrate in class due to hunger and this clearly affects pupil's academic performance especially in a reading class. The study is also in line with Ahmadu (2012) who pointed out that childhood hunger among pupils may be as a result of food scarcity, insecurity, poor sanitation and illiteracy.

Table 3 on ways reading would be revitalized amidst poverty indicated mean responses on item 1 teachers engage pupils using a more strategic and play method has mean of 3.1 with SD of 0.98, item 2 government engaging on policy for better living of people has mean of 3.3 with SD of 0.9. item 3 on stakeholders to make available free reading textbooks on English has mean of 3.0 with SD of 1.1 item 4 improved welfare of teachers for their motivation has mean of 3.2 with SD of 0.94, items on parents and guardians to perceivers in taking care of the child has mean of 3.2 and SD of 0.94. While item 6 on government to put strict measures that would compel children to learn has mean if 2.1 and SD of 1.84 which was rejected. However all the previous items on table 3 were accepted?

The study is in line with Chinyoka (2014) who stated that children who experience hunger are more likely to have problems with memory and concentration because they do not have energy to carryout academic exercise especially in reading. The study stated that without an adequate amount of food these students may fall asleep in school or lack the energy to pay attention to an active day of classes.

Table 4 on t-test statistics on responses of male and female teachers ways poverty affect pupils in a reading class especially in the English language reading class indicate no significant difference as the t-cal value was 1.92 which the t-critical was 1.98. the findings is in line with Ahmed et al (2012)who discovered that little or inadequate intake of food leads to low and poor performances of children in the academic work.

VI. Conclusion And Recommendations

Poverty is a state which no one wishes to found her/himself. It is a state of lack, hunger and not been able to have the basic necessities of life. This state of poverty and hunger have permeated the educational section. Most children are in the state of hunger and this lead to their poor concentration and poor performance in their academic work especially reading in the English class. This points to the fact that parents and guardians are also in the state of poverty which indirectly indicated that the government have not done much on the improvement and wellness of people through good policies that would positively affect the living standard of the masses. Masses in the country generally especially in Ebonyi State experience acute lack of these basic necessities, heavy taxation, very poor state of school infrastructure and non support of aids that improve learning. Most children are hungry, parents cannot afford basic things to care for their children and the means of livelihood of people are not improved by giving them enabling environment, this ugly state would lead to poor achievement in the pupils academic work especially in the English class and education in general.

Based on the foregoing the following recommendation were made:
1. Parents should persevere in working hard to provide for the need of their children and wards and satisfy their educational needs and care for their other needs.
2. Teachers should use more engaging strategies in teaching the pupils so that pupils' attention would be captured as they learn.
3. The government should make policies that would favour people and put food on their table as well as the basic necessities of life.
4. The government should create an enabling environment that would facilitate learning teaching and learning in schools.

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