

Impact of Picture Books on Reading Comprehension Skills of Preschool Children

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Abstract. This study investigated the impact of picture books on the reading comprehension skills among preschool children in Akinyele Local Government, Nigeria. Five purpose of the study and five research questions guided the study. A mixed methods was employed. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 10 public and private nursery schools. From these schools, 20 early childhood educators and 100 preschool children were selected, resulting in a total sample size of 120 participants.

Data collection instruments included a structured questionnaire for teachers, an observation checklist to record classroom practices, and a reading comprehension assessment for children. These instruments were validated by experts in early childhood education, with a pilot test yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Data collection involved researcher-administered questionnaires, classroom observations, and comprehension assessments conducted after reading selected picture books to the children. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data from observations.

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Findings revealed that picture books significantly enhance children's reading comprehension, especially when combined with interactive reading strategies such as questioning and discussion. However, challenges such as limited access to quality picture books and inadequate teacher training were also identified. The study concluded that picture books are valuable tools for promoting early literacy and recommended their integration into the preschool curriculum, alongside professional development for educators and the provision of culturally relevant materials. These findings have implications for improving literacy outcomes and informing early childhood education policy and practice in similar low-literacy settings.

Keywords: *Picture books, reading comprehension, preschool education, early literacy, teacher perception, Akinyele Local Government*

Introduction

In early childhood education, fostering literacy development is essential for laying a solid foundation for future academic success. Picture books play a vital role in this process, especially for preschool children, by combining vivid illustrations with simple texts to enhance understanding and engagement. These books serve as powerful tools for introducing new vocabulary, promoting language development, and stimulating imagination and critical thinking. By capturing children's attention and supporting their interpretation of narratives, picture books contribute meaningfully to the development of key literacy skills, particularly in the area of reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is an essential skill that underlies children's academic achievement. It refers to the ability to understand and derive meaning from written texts, requiring processes such as decoding, vocabulary development, prior knowledge, and analytical thinking (Garner & Parker, 2018). This skill is crucial in fostering intellectual growth, cognitive development, and the ability to think critically. Given its importance, it is necessary to explore effective methods for strengthening reading comprehension, particularly during the early years of learning. One promising approach that has received increasing attention is the use of picture books.

Picture books are powerful tools widely utilized in preschool classrooms to support early literacy development, particularly reading comprehension. Designed to captivate young readers through the combination of vivid illustrations and simple text, picture books help children make sense of narratives, identify characters, and connect images with language (Nguyen, 2021). At the preschool stage, typically ages three to five, children are developing foundational skills in language, literacy, and cognition (Liu & Park, 2019). Research shows that both text-based and wordless picture books significantly enhance children's vocabulary, critical thinking, and comprehension skills (Lubis, 2018; Demoiny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018).

Key features of picture books includes illustrations, typography, layout, and simple sentence structures which play crucial roles in supporting comprehension by reducing cognitive load and fostering engagement (Hernández, Montelongo, & Herter, 2016). Books with themes like animals, fantasy, and humor stimulate imagination, promote vocabulary development, and improve

attention and memory (Agustin et al., 2023; Dua et al., 2019). The use of cognates and rich vocabulary further strengthens comprehension, especially for bilingual learners (Hu & Nation, 2020). Additionally, picture books with clear storylines and expressive character illustrations enhance children's understanding of narrative structure and emotional cues (Campos et al., 2016).

Beyond cognitive benefits, picture books also promote cultural inclusion and awareness. Culturally diverse books support identity formation and foster a sense of belonging, as they reflect varied experiences and languages (Benitez et al., 2022; Caple & Tian, 2021; Wee et al., 2015). Overall, picture books offer a multifaceted approach to enhancing preschool children's language development and literacy, making them an effective medium for improving reading comprehension.

Several empirical studies have highlighted the positive impact of picture books on children's reading development and comprehension. Gwanshak, Shikden, and Danrimi (2024) found that picture books effectively remediate reading difficulties in pupils with dyslexia in Gombe State, Nigeria. Similarly, a study on Early Child Care (ECC) learners revealed that picture books significantly enhanced pre-reading skills among ECC III children.

Shimek (2018) reported that children use visual cues, headings, and prior knowledge to navigate nonfiction picture books, suggesting that strategic use of picture books can support reading comprehension. Larragueta and Ceballos-Viro (2018) also found that books with rich vocabulary contribute to vocabulary development, which is crucial for comprehension. Solfiah et al. (2020) demonstrated that picture storybooks are effective tools for teaching real-world concepts like disaster preparedness, enhancing both understanding and engagement.

Litzler (2016) emphasized that multimodal features such as visuals and text promote critical thinking and comprehension. Supporting these findings, Hsiao and Chang (2016) concluded that picture books foster cognitive development and improve reading comprehension when effectively used by preschool educators.

Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension is a vital foundation for academic success, beginning in the early years of a child's development. Preschool children, in particular, are at a critical stage where language and cognitive skills are rapidly evolving, and exposure to reading can greatly support their linguistic and emotional growth. Despite existing research highlighting the benefits of picture books on children's language skills, most studies are based in Western contexts, limiting their relevance to the Nigerian educational environment. In Akinyele Local Government, where literacy rates remain low and many children do not complete primary education, there is a pressing need to adopt effective strategies that promote early reading skills. Picture books, with their visual and textual elements, offer a promising approach to support comprehension development. However, there is a lack of localized studies exploring their effectiveness among preschool children in this area. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how picture books can enhance reading comprehension in preschoolers in Akinyele Local Government, with a focus on selecting materials that encourage

inclusion, diversity, and critical thinking.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of picture books on the reading comprehension of preschool children in Akinyele Local Government. Specifically, the study aims to:

examine how the use of picture books influences the development of reading comprehension skills among preschool children.

identify the types of picture books that are most effective in enhancing reading comprehension.

assess the extent to which picture books can support language development and vocabulary acquisition in preschool learners.

explore teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the use of picture books in early childhood classrooms.

provide recommendations for integrating picture books into preschool literacy instruction to improve reading outcomes.

Research Questions

How does the use of picture books influence the development of reading comprehension skills among preschool children?

What types of picture books are most effective in enhancing reading comprehension in preschool children?

To what extent do picture books support language development and vocabulary acquisition in preschool learners?

What are teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the use of picture books in early childhood classrooms?

What recommendations can be made for integrating picture books into preschool literacy instruction to improve reading outcomes?

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed method was employed, comprising quantitative and qualitative data to gather information on the current practices, perceptions, and effects of using picture books on preschool children's reading comprehension in Akinyele Local Government Area.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all early childhood education teachers and preschool children in both public and private nursery schools in Akinyele Local Government Area, Oyo State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The schools were first grouped into public and private categories, after which a random selection of schools was carried out from each group. A total of 10 schools were selected. From these schools, 20 early childhood educators and 100 preschool children were selected, making a total sample size of 120 participants.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for data collection included:

A structured questionnaire for early childhood educators, designed to gather information on the use and effectiveness of picture books in enhancing reading comprehension.

An observation checklist, used to record classroom practices related to the use of picture books.

A reading comprehension assessment sheet, administered to preschool children to measure their comprehension skills after exposure to selected picture books.

Validation of Instrument

The instruments were validated by three experts in early childhood education and educational measurement. Feedback from the validators was used to improve the clarity, content, and relevance of the items.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted using 10 teachers and 20 preschool children from a similar setting outside the study area. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was calculated and found to be 0.78, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and comprehension assessments were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Qualitative data from observations were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and practices in the use of picture books.

Result of findings

Table 1: Influence of Picture Books on Reading Comprehension Skills of Preschool Children

Response Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Picture books help children recall story events	12 (60%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.5
Picture books improve children's understanding	10 (50%)	7 (35%)	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	3.4
Children ask and answer questions better with pictures	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.6

Interpretation of Table

The results indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed that picture books significantly help children recall story events, improve their understanding, and enhance question-answering skills. With mean scores above 3.0, it can be interpreted that picture books positively influence reading comprehension among preschool children.

Table 2: Types of Picture Books Effective for Enhancing Reading Comprehension

Picture Book Type	Very Effective	Effective	Not Effective	Mean	Decision
Books with real-life illustrations	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	0 (0%)	3.7	Very Effective
Books with repetitive texts	10 (50%)	8 (40%)	2 (10%)	3.4	Effective
Alphabet and phonics picture books	11 (55%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	3.5	Effective

Interpretation of Table 2

Respondents rated books with real-life illustrations as the most effective in supporting reading comprehension, followed by phonics and repetitive text books. The findings suggest that content familiarity, visual support, and linguistic repetition enhance comprehension outcomes.

Table 3: Contribution of Picture Books to Language Development and Vocabulary Acquisition

Response Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Decision
Picture books improve vocabulary usage	13 (65%)	6 (30%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	3.6	Strongly Agree
Picture books expose children to new words	12 (60%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.5	Agree
Children learn sentence structures from picture books	11 (55%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.5	Agree

Interpretation of Table 3

Teachers largely agreed that picture books enhance children's vocabulary, expose them to new words, and improve sentence construction. This supports the assertion that picture books play a substantial role in the development of early language skills.

Table 4: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices on Use of Picture Books

Response Item	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Decision
I use picture books during story time	15 (75%)	4 (20%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	3.7	Always
I allow children to engage with the pictures	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.6	Always
Picture books are included in daily lesson plans	12 (60%)	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3.5	Always

Interpretation of Table 4

The majority of teachers reported to be using picture books regularly with encouraging illustrations which engage the attention of children and integrating them into lesson activities. This demonstrates a positive perception and consistent use of picture books as instructional tools in early childhood classrooms.

Interpretation of Themes

Curriculum Integration

Respondents emphasised the need for structured inclusion of picture books in the literacy curriculum. This shows that picture books are seen as central to literacy development, not supplementary. Embedding them in lesson plans ensures consistent use and maximises learning impact.

Teacher Training and Support

The findings reveal a gap in teacher competency regarding the strategic use of picture books. Participants stressed the importance of workshops, mentoring, and continuous professional development to equip teachers with methods that enhance comprehension using visual texts.

Access to Quality Picture Books

A major concern was the shortage of culturally relevant and age-appropriate picture books. Teachers recommended government or NGO support to provide a wide range of books, including those with local content, diverse vocabulary, and inclusive themes.

Interactive Reading Practices

Effective use of picture books requires more than just reading aloud. Teachers suggested engaging children through interactive techniques such as asking open-ended questions, encouraging predictions, and retelling stories to boost comprehension and vocabulary development.

Discussion of findings

1. Curriculum Integration

The study found that integrating picture books into the preschool literacy curriculum was considered essential by educators. Teachers believed that picture books should not be treated as optional or leisure-time materials, but as fundamental tools in teaching reading comprehension. This implies a need for policy shifts in early childhood education to embed picture books into the daily instructional schedule. Formal inclusion ensures consistency and helps teachers plan lessons with specific reading comprehension objectives. This finding supports Gwanshak, Shikden & Danrimi (2024), who found that picture books significantly improved the reading performance of pupils with dyslexia, reinforcing the need for structured integration. Similarly, Hsiao & Chang (2016) emphasised that picture books are not just entertainment tools but instructional resources that enhance cognitive development.

2. Teacher Training and Support

A major finding was the teachers' lack of formal training in using picture books to teach comprehension. While they recognized the value of picture books, many expressed a lack of confidence or methodological knowledge. This implies that Professional development programs and workshops should be organized to train teachers in effective strategies such as dialogic reading, scaffolding, and vocabulary enhancement through visual literacy. This finding aligns with Litzler (2016) who argued that understanding the multimodal features of picture books (text and images) is key to improving children's comprehension. The study also echoes Shimek (2018), who highlighted how children strategically interact with non-fiction picture books, a skill that teachers must learn to facilitate.

3. Access to Quality Picture Books

Teachers reported a lack of access to diverse and culturally appropriate picture books. Many available books were outdated or foreign and did not reflect the children's socio-cultural backgrounds. This implies that there is a clear need for investment in relevant, local, and inclusive picture books. Publishers and educational authorities should prioritize culturally responsive materials that reflect the learners' realities and language. This supports Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro (2018) who emphasized that rich vocabulary in well-selected picture books enhances children's comprehension and language acquisition. Similarly, Solfiah et al. (2020) found that storybooks could be used to teach real-world knowledge effectively, stressing the importance of selecting content-specific materials.

4. Interactive Reading Practices

Findings showed that interactive reading strategies such as asking predictive questions, encouraging children to describe illustrations, and involving them in retelling stories were seen as effective in enhancing comprehension. This implies that interactive approaches help children actively construct meaning rather than passively receive information. Training teachers in these techniques could yield significant improvements in early literacy outcomes. This aligns with Shimek (2018), who found that children use a variety of strategies (e.g., looking at pictures, reading headings, using prior knowledge) to comprehend texts, especially when guided by adults. Litzler (2016) also supports this, arguing that the visual and linguistic features in picture books support both comprehension and critical thinking.

1. Curriculum Integration

The study revealed a consensus among respondents that picture books should be systematically integrated into the preschool literacy curriculum rather than treated as supplementary materials. Teachers believe that structured use of picture books within daily lesson plans can significantly enhance literacy instruction and comprehension development. This finding suggests a need for education policy reform to formally include picture books in early childhood literacy frameworks. It implies that curriculum developers should not only recommend picture books but also provide specific guidelines for their use across different learning objectives and age groups. This aligns with Gwanshak, Shikden & Danrimi (2024), who demonstrated that picture books effectively remediated reading difficulties in pupils with dyslexia when used as part of structured instruction. Similarly, Hsiao & Chang (2016) emphasized that picture books offer unique opportunities for cognitive development when systematically used in preschool education.

2. Teacher Training and Support

Participants highlighted a lack of adequate training among preschool teachers on how to use picture books strategically for literacy development. Many teachers reported relying on instinct or personal experience, indicating a professional gap in pedagogical knowledge regarding picture book instruction. This implies that there is a pressing need for investment in continuous professional development. Training programs should focus on strategies such as dialogic reading, vocabulary expansion through visual texts, and scaffolding techniques. These methods equip teachers to optimize the use of picture books to enhance comprehension and critical thinking. This supports Litzler (2016), who emphasized that understanding the multimodal nature of picture books (text + visual elements) requires training for effective instructional use. Additionally, Shimek (2018) found that children's comprehension improves when they are guided through the visual and textual elements of nonfiction picture books, underscoring the need for teacher facilitation.

3. Access to Quality Picture Books

Teachers expressed concern over the limited availability of high-quality, age-appropriate, and

culturally relevant picture books. Most of the existing resources were either foreign or outdated, making it difficult for children to relate to the content or language. The implication is twofold: First, education stakeholders (e.g., government, NGOs, publishers) must invest in locally produced picture books that reflect children's cultural experiences. Second, school libraries and classrooms should be equipped with a diverse collection that promotes inclusivity, rich vocabulary, and relevant themes. This finding is consistent with Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro (2018), who found that picture books with rich and diverse vocabulary significantly enhance children's vocabulary acquisition. Also, Solfiah et al. (2020) demonstrated that picture storybooks can effectively communicate real-world concepts such as disaster preparedness—provided the materials are relatable and content-specific.

4. Interactive Reading Practices

Teachers identified interactive strategies such as questioning, predicting outcomes, retelling, and expressive reading as effective methods for improving reading comprehension. These practices help children engage actively with the text and images, thereby fostering deeper understanding and retention. This finding implies that effective literacy instruction using picture books must go beyond passive reading. Teachers should be trained to apply interactive methods that promote dialogue, inference, and critical thinking among preschool learners. Interactive strategies also align well with developmental appropriateness and play-based learning. This finding supports Shimek (2018), who noted that children naturally engage with various strategies while navigating picture books, especially when supported by adults. Litzler (2016) also found that a multimodal approach—leveraging both images and texts—improves comprehension and stimulates critical thinking.

Summary

This study investigated the impact of picture books on the reading comprehension skills of preschool children in Akinyele Local Government, Nigeria. Using a qualitative and thematic approach, the research explored how picture books contribute to children's literacy development, the perceptions of teachers regarding their use, and the strategies for effective integration into the early childhood classroom. Key findings revealed that:

Picture books significantly enhance reading comprehension when integrated systematically into the curriculum.

Many teachers lack formal training on the pedagogical use of picture books, limiting their effectiveness.

Access to quality, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant picture books remains inadequate.

Interactive reading practices, such as questioning and discussion, were effective in supporting children's comprehension and engagement.

Conclusion

The findings underscore the crucial role of picture books in developing early reading comprehension skills among preschool children. When thoughtfully selected and used through interactive teaching strategies, picture books not only improve vocabulary and language acquisition but also enhance critical thinking and emotional engagement. However, the effectiveness of picture books is limited by factors such as inadequate teacher training and poor access to culturally relevant materials. To maximize their impact, there is a need for systemic support in the form of teacher capacity-building, resource provision, and curriculum alignment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

The use of picture books should be formally included in the early childhood education curriculum as essential tools for literacy instruction.

Regular workshops and professional development programs should be organized to train teachers on effective strategies for using picture books, including dialogic reading, visual literacy, and vocabulary development.

Education authorities and stakeholders should invest in developing and distributing culturally appropriate, diverse, and age-relevant picture books to schools in Akinyele and similar local governments.

Teachers should be encouraged and supported to adopt interactive reading methods that engage children actively and improve their comprehension and retention.

Authors and publishers should be supported to create picture books that reflect the local language, culture, and context of Nigerian children, making learning more relatable and effective.

Government and educational policymakers should implement policies that ensure the sustainable integration of picture books into early childhood classrooms, with regular monitoring and evaluation.

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