



APPLYING METHODS THAT IMPROVE STUDENTS' COLLABORATIVE SKILLS BASED ON MULTI-VECTOR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article aimed to develop early grade learners' collaborative skills through group work and play-based pedagogy because collaboration is among the twenty-first century's core skills needed among learners. Thus, its development among early-grade learners is paramount, if they are going to fit seamlessly into the twenty-first century. Participatory-action research, as a research design and professional development workshop, guided this study. Three public primary schools ($n = 3$) and nine teachers ($n = 9$), who were purposely sampled, constituted the sample for the study. The study was conducted in the Owerri Education Zone, and the data were captured by using semi-structured interviews and learners' performance-rating scales. Respondent validity was employed through member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration skill is among the indispensable skills needed for effective functionality in the twenty-first century. In present-day living, many people continue to depart from communal and collaborative living that characterised the past of a more individualistic and virtual society (Ogihara, 2023; Castells, 2014). Although this trend is heavily supported by technological advancement, the value associated with physical collaboration remains indispensable, especially for early-grade learners.

METHODS

Collaboration is one of the 4Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) in the twenty-first century's core skills (Ahonen, & Kinnunen, 2015; Valtonen et al., 2017). It entails a team of two or more individuals working effectively to achieve a common goal or task (Ciampa, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2013). It is a skill cherished in the workspaces; as it enhances performance, creativity, and productivity in any organisation (Ciampa, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Young learners who are prepared to fit into the workspace in the future, they must develop collaborative skills in their early years. Although collaboration can be physical or virtual, learners must develop collaborative skills with their peers, since learning will always progress from the concrete to the abstract, known to unknown, and simple to complex (Wood, 2013). Any learning facilitated in the twenty-first century devoid of this skill does not adequately and efficiently prepare learners to engage in their present-day society (Valtonen et al., 2017). Collaborative skills are a factor in developing interpersonal skills among early-grade learners; when this skill is overlooked, learners become hostile to themselves, their teachers, and everyone around them; because there is a gap in their relational (interpersonal) development. Hence, teachers are tasked with utilising their appropriate teaching pedagogy, such as group work play-based pedagogy, in order to improve their collaborative skills among twenty-first-century learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching pedagogy remains a viable means of educating humans. Moreover, teachers are critical in determining a pedagogical strategy to facilitate their learning (Ahmad, 2016; Victor-Akinyemi, Uyanne, Udoji, & Oladele, 2021). Teachers are inarguably one of the critical actors that determine the pedagogical strategies to use in facilitating the learning of any learning community (Sellami, Ammar, & Ahmad, 2022). This is why teachers' approaches to learning are crucial to avoid colossal damage to learners. Nevertheless, teachers face various challenges that impede the effective delivery of their lessons, especially in a dynamic society, where approaches to teaching and learning are not static. In recent decades, Nigerian early-grade classrooms have continued to experience content and teacher-centred pedagogical approaches to learning (Ahmad, 2016; Victor-Akinyemi, Uyanne, Udoji, & Oladele, 2021). However, in recent years, there has been a relative departure from this pedagogical approach because of the passive characteristics of learners to a learner-centred approach that actively involves learners in their learning (Ahmad, 2016; Victor-Akinyemi, Uyanne, Udoji, & Oladele, 2021). However, teachers' inadequate resourcefulness in upgrading their knowledge of current research on active teaching and learning pedagogies impedes learners' interpersonal performance, which ought rather to enhance their collaboration and skills (Ekeh, 2020). This situation requires teachers' professional development to enable them to function effectively in their classrooms.

Equipping teachers for optimal performance is paramount in discharging their duties, especially for teachers who have been in the teaching service long after they graduated from a training College or University. Tuncel and Çobanoğlu (2018) mentioned that in-service teachers must continuously update their knowledge of new research on their learners' teaching skills, curricula, and pedagogy. Osamwonyi

(2016) contended that the absence of in-service training results in teachers' professional retardation. Teachers would also be stunted in meeting their professional demands and productivity levels because of career gaps (Osamwonyi, 2016). Many researchers; and education stakeholders have underscored the importance of professional development programs for teacher improvement, including workshops, conferences, seminars, classes, and exhibitions (Mahmoudi & Özkan, 2015; Osamwonyi, 2016). In this study, it is imperative to prioritise professional development programs for early-grade teachers to develop learners' collaborative skills through group-work and play-based pedagogy.

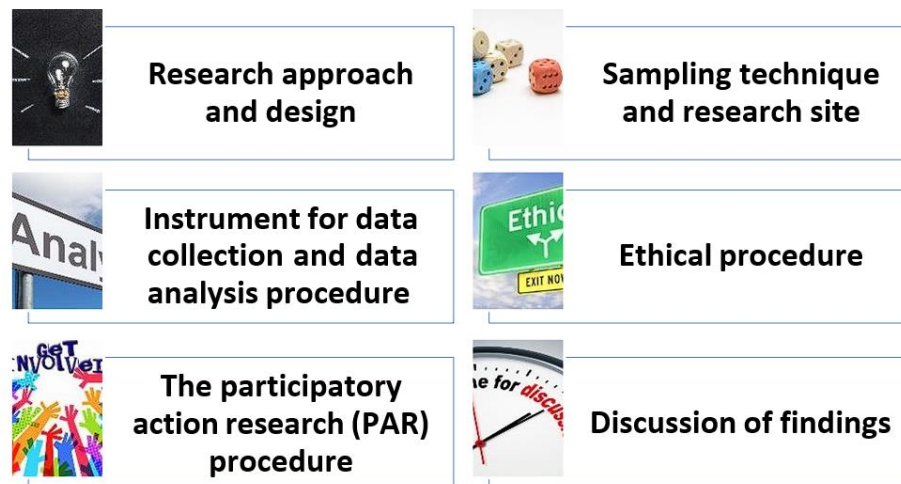


Figure 1: Flow chart on research methods (created by author)

The qualitative research approach was used in the study because of its capacity to generate in-depth data from participants on the research phenomenon (MacDonald, 2012; Morales, 2019). Participatory-action research design was considered suitable for the study because it allowed the teacher-participants to collaborate with the researcher and take those actions that would bring about the desired change in teacher participants and young learners (MacDonald, 2012; Morales, 2019).

A professional development workshop that lasted three months was mounted with nine teachers as participants, who were purposely selected for the study. These teachers were deliberately selected because the researcher considered specific criteria (Creswell, 2020). The criteria included that they must be teachers with at least three ($n=3$) years of teaching experience, either in the pre-primary or junior primary (primaries 1-3 or grade 1-3) school levels. Next, public primary school teachers must be within the Owerri Education Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. Similarly, three public primary schools ($n=3$) were randomly selected to ensure fairness in selecting schools within Owerri's educational zone. In summary, three teachers ($n = 3$) represented each school selected for the study, for a total of nine teachers ($n=9$). However, at the time of the appraisal of the implemented program, two teacher participants were indisposed and dropped out of the study, leaving seven ($n=7$) participants to complete the study. However, this did not affect the study because the remaining seven participants were sufficient for the qualitative study to provide the required response.

The data for this study were analysed by using a thematic data-analysis procedure. In doing so, the researcher acquainted himself with the data, transcribed the data, and generated initial codes that were translated into themes. The themes were further modified until they were coherent and repeated the patterns that were reported. In particular, semi-structured interviews were conducted. After the teacher participants were capacitated at different workshops, they returned to implementing the pedagogical

strategies learned in their classes. After three (3) weeks of implementation, they reconvened to appraise and analyse the implemented pedagogical strategies. Their appraisal and analysis formed part of the analysis used in this study, as the results were built into the findings.

The researcher secured written consent to participate in the study. This was obtained from all the participants. This was to ensure that the participants, of their own free will had volunteered to take part in the study. They were also informed that they were free to disengage from the study at any time when they wanted to, without explaining their reasons for doing so; and that such a decision would not have any consequences for them as teachers. Pseudonyms, such as T1, T2, and T3 were used to conceal the participants' true identities, thereby ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria granted ethical approval for this research study. However, there was no vested interest from any individual or public in the research; as it did not receive any public funding or grants.

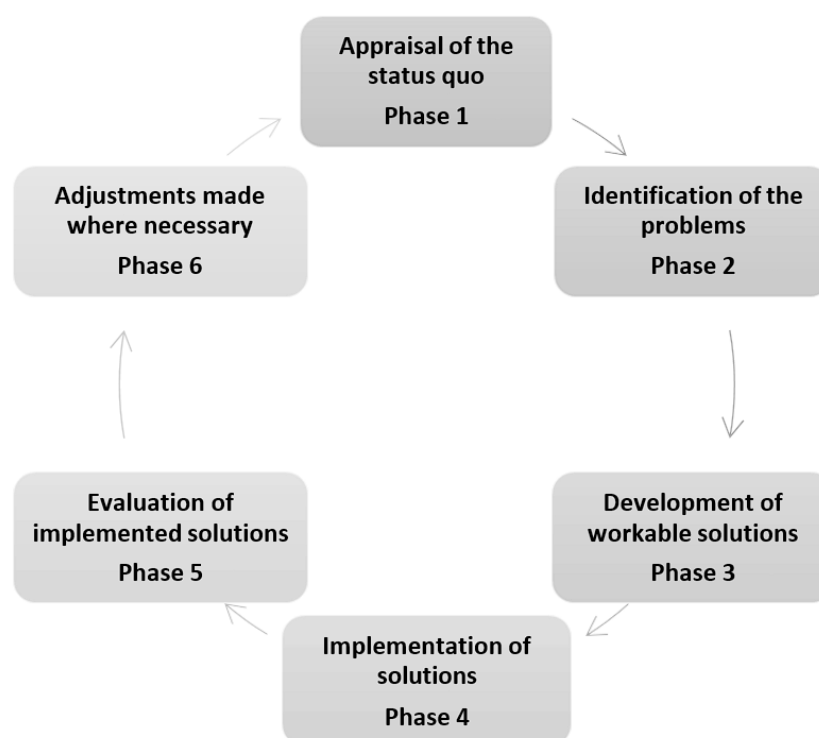


Figure 2: The participatory action research (PAR) cycle

The study aimed to determine which group-work play-based pedagogy teachers could use to facilitate collaborative skills, and how the professional development of teachers on group work play-based pedagogy fostered collaborative skills among young learners.

The findings from the study showed that think-pair-share, jigsaw and buzz-group pedagogies facilitated collaborative skills among young learners. It was also discovered that teachers had inadequate knowledge of these group work play-based pedagogies, which aided the development of collaborative skills in the early grades. Next, teachers' professional development workshops are necessary, in order to upskill in-service teachers in various group-work play-based pedagogies. Professional development workshops are indicators that the teachers' community of practice is a viable means for cross-breeding various ideas among teachers. The findings also showed that early-grade learners' collaborative skills were enhanced after teachers were capacitated on the use of group-work play-based pedagogy in

teaching early graders. The study also showed that early-grade learners are flexible in learning; and they can adapt to any teaching strategy. Early-grade learners' collaborative skills were adequately enhanced when using various group-work play-based pedagogies as mentioned earlier.

CONCLUSION

There were pockets of research evidence that reflected early-grade classroom pedagogical practice as being teacher-centred, in addition to the researcher's first-hand evidence. Such pedagogical practices hampered the development of collaborative skills among early-grade learners. This was the pivot among the motivations leading to the research "developing early-grade collaborative skills through group work play-based pedagogy." In determining the group work play-based pedagogy teachers use to facilitate collaborative skills among learners, the researcher adopted a participatory action-research approach as a professional development strategy.

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