

READING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN MODERN PERSPECTIVES: GREATER EXPERTISE FOR TEACHERS IN CONTEMPORARY PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This article aims at updating pre-primary and primary schools' teachers with capabilities for satisfying the educational needs and expectations of these fundamental levels of formal education. Accordingly, the article examines the reading skill as a literacy and receptive skill of language in contemporary perspective. It also highlights on the types and importance of reading according to current practices. Moreover, the article describes strategies of effective readers as well as ways for improving pupils' reading skills as they are related to teachers of modern pre-primary and primary schools. Furthermore, it explains atmosphere/environment for reading at early childhood, and the factors that influence reading readiness as well as methods of teaching reading to beginners for the benefit of the trainers explicitly and the trainees in return. In the process, these concepts are explored upon through library-based research in which the researchers consulted books and articles obtained from libraries and the internet. This is because it is found to be a suitable means of collecting required data and information in a qualitative research like this one. In this regard, important contemporary knowledge, experience and expertise are found and gathered for modern-day teachers to fit and meet the current needs and expectations of the present education system.

Keywords: Reading Skill, Effective Readers, Reading Readiness and Teaching Beginning Readers.

Introduction

Reading is an active receptive skill that comprises the interaction between the reader and the text to be read where comprehension and analyses of information presented in the text are required (Okonkwo & Danner 2010). That is, reading is an activity of receiving someone ideas, feelings and thoughts through written symbols in which there is a need to make effort to understand the content information. So, reading is the extraction of the necessary information from a text, and a complete understanding of what had been read (David 2010). This implies that to read is to comprehend the information contained in a text.

Therefore, reading is the foundation to

education and learning other subject areas as well. Subject areas depend on reading so that they should be understood and the reader can comprehend the content as well as ask/answer questions. Consequently, a person with limited reading skills may not accomplish many tasks that are related to reading such as reading signs, reading passages, reading correspondence and applying for a job among others. Without information on reading readiness and family characteristics influencing it, foundation for reading will not be laid for children. Accordingly, pupils are likely to have reading shortfall as well as understanding deficit as they start schooling. Lack of foundation for reading will in turn affect

pupils' academic performance and progress through pre-primary and subsequent levels of schooling. In addition, it is likely to hamper their social progress as well (Ponizt, et al 2009).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Reading is the basis for learning. Through it other subject areas can be understood especially where the reader can comprehend the content, ask as well as answer questions during the teaching-learning process. Therefore, any deficiency in the foundation of reading will in turn affect academic performance of pupils as well as their progress from the pre-primary and primary levels and other subsequent levels of schooling. Besides, reading deficiency is likely to hamper social progress of pupils. Consequently, this article attempts to explain and describe essential concepts and issues pertaining to reading readiness and strategies for teaching reading to modern pre-primary and primary pupils as postulated by contemporary scholars (David 2010, Carder 2010 and Swartz 2012) for improving the teaching-learning activities.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this article is to keep contemporary teachers of pre-primary and primary schools abreast of the competences required for fulfilling the educational needs and expectations of these indispensable levels learning. Specifically, the objectives of this article are to:

- i- explain the concept of reading skill, the types of reading and importance of reading based on current perspectives;
- ii- describe strategies to adopt in ensuring effective reading as well as ways for improving pupils' reading skills in line with modern pre-primary and primary teaching learning activities;
- iii- clarify reading environment for early childhood, the factors that influence reading readiness as well as methods of teaching reading to beginners using contemporary best practices;

2.1.1 Reading as a Language Skills

Reading skill is one of the four language skills. Without it, language acquisition will be difficult. Reading is a gate way of comprehension. A good reader is able to understand sentences and

structure of written text. Therefore, one important way to develop communication competence is through extensive reading. Study by reading extensively, which is necessary in reading comprehension, will expose students to a new range of vocabulary (Pazhach & Soltani, 2010). Abetunji (2007) describes reading skill as the act of translating symbols or letter into word or sentences that have meaning to an individual. This indicates that it is the ability to understand what is seen in a text, through processing the information and obtaining meaning from it.

2.2 The Types of Reading

The development of reading skills plays a vital role in learning of English. There are different types of reading. Each of them has its own peculiarities and serves different purposes. Therefore, understanding what each of the different types of reading entails and its situations of usage will help teachers to make better choices with their pupils. These are: scanning, skimming, extensive reading and intensive reading.

2.2.1 Scanning

According to Herbert (2006), Scanning as a reading mode is aimed at finding the necessary information in the text through deep comprehension of the facts and analysis of grammatical constructions. Often, in this mode, the text is cross-examined for the pressure of unfamiliar words so that, after their translation, it will be easier to read the text fully. Similarly, scanning refers to glancing quickly through a text to search for a specific bit of information (Nuttall 2006). In addition, Scanning denotes reading to search for specific information (Nunan, 2009). This type of reading is also known as study reading.

2.2.2 Skimming

As a reading mode, Skimming is used to get to know and understand if the information is useful such as when viewing a book in a store or a magazine on the shelf before buying it (George & Akin 2000). In this case the text is also viewed quickly but not as carefully. The goal is not to search for specific facts but to evaluate the text for complexity. Also, Nunan (2009) claims that skim reading is a type of reading in which readers read rapidly to establish what a text is about in a general way. Likewise, Nuttall., (2006) argues that

skimming means glancing swiftly through a text to determine its gist.

2.2.3 Extensive Reading

Jacob & Emmanuel (2000) stress that the purpose of extensive reading, as a type of reading, is to get acquainted with new information. In this mode, people read art or scientific literature without being distracted by new unfamiliar words. This type of reading implies the mastering of the general image and the receipt of new unfamiliar information.

2.2.4 Intensive reading

Intensive reading typically is a type of reading used in the study of English in order to intensively pursue the proposed short teaching text. With this type of reading, grammatical constructions, unfamiliar words and phrases are intensively examined (David 2010).

2.2.5 Silent Reading

Silent reading, as the natural way of reading, involves reading without vocalization in which no sounds must be made and no liping as well (Okonkwo & Danner 2010). This type of reading is especially useful to a student who needs to concentrate to comprehend and reflect on what is being read. Therefore, it is the type recommended for vital activities in teaching-learning process such as writing assignments and preparing for examinations.

2.3 Importance of Reading

Reading to children is the most important thing that parents can do to help children acquire language, prepare for school, and assist them to develop keen interest to learn (Russ et al., 2007).

- Reading to an infant helps create brain-pathways and lay the groundwork for language development (Fox 2001). When a child listens to someone reading, there is increased activity in the language output center in his/her brain as the spoken words are being stored into the memory (Keller & Just 2009). These imply that, reading accelerates brain development of children and expands their ability to memorize.
- Reading is an essential step in understanding language because familiarity of the sound system of a language enables them to move from oral to written language, understand the

individual constituents of language, and advance an understanding that letters are made from sounds (Roberston, 2011). That is, language leaning is facilitated through reading.

- Reading aloud to children inculcate long lasting desire of learning and create a good relation between the children and the individual who is reading to them (Butler, 2005). In essence, reading to a child is a great way to connect with that child and build a bond around learning.

2.4 Reading Strategies of Effective Readers

David (2001) stresses that for reading strategies to improve students' reading comprehension, teachers should introduce the strategies of effective readers: activation, informing, monitoring-clarifying, questioning, searching-selecting, summarizing and visualizing-organizing.

1. Activating: priming the cognitive pump in order to recall relevant prior knowledge and experiences from long term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from text.
2. Informing: bringing together what is spoken (written) in the text, what is unspoken (unwritten) in text and what is already known by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text.
3. Monitoring-clarifying: thinking about how and what one is reading for purposes of determining if one is comprehending the text combined with the ability to clarify and fix up any mix-ups.
4. Questioning: engaging in learning dialogues question with text (authors), peers and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering.
5. Searching-selecting: searching variety of sources in order to select appropriate information to answer questions, define word and terms, clarify misunderstands, solve problems or gather information
6. Summarizing: restating the meaning of text in one's own words different words from those used in the original text.

7. Visualizing-organizing: constructing a mental image or graphic organizer for the purpose of extracting and constructing meaning from the text.

However, most of these seem more applicable to intermediary and advanced readers. For example, informing strategy requires inference and context consideration to construct meaning from a text. Likewise, summarizing entails paraphrasing. To paraphrase, one needs certain vocabulary attainment. So, beginning readers may not be able to apply these strategies.

3.1 Ways for Enhancing Reading Skills in Pupils

There are certain ways to improve reading skills in children. The ways can help to improve reading skills by creating connections with the materials, building fluency in reading and increasing understanding of meaning. Swartz (2012) and Carder (2010) suggest seven ways as follows: -

1. Ask question:
Teachers ask the pupils questions about what they are reading. Question promote critical thinking of pupils and leads to lively conversation in class.
2. Make a “mind movie”
As a teacher ask the pupils to visualize what is happening in the text and describe it as movie. Making a “movie in mind” helps pupils makes sense of what they have read and retain it as well. This helps improve reading comprehension.
3. Create new endings
Discussing alternative story outcomes is an entertaining way to help pupils improve reading by using their imagination and inference skills. After the teacher and his/her pupils finish reading a book, it is important to create a different ending or the next story in a series.
4. Now hear this
Read aloud to pupils every day. Listening to reading help pupils use and understand language more easily. However, the teacher doesn't have to be to full-time reader in the class. This is because classmates often love to read to their colleague and appreciate reading together

as well. Therefore, use these as exciting alternatives to enhance reading skills.

5. Add variety
Pupils improve reading by practicing with a wide variety of reading materials including magazine, newspapers and website. Also increase reading opportunity by having reference books, poetry and picture books all-round the school.
6. Re-reading is pre-wording
Re-reading help children further clarity of the meaning behind the words. Engage your pupils in re-reading each day for at least some minutes to improve reading ability and retain information.
7. Follow the leader
Pupils will live by teacher examples. Therefore, motivate the pupils by setting aside reading time. Becoming associates with books will interest the pupils. Also, taking pupils to visit library, getting excited about new arrivals and taking books where ever you go enhance interest.

These ways are essential for improving reading readiness. In addition, motivation may play a vital role in boosting reading skills of pupils. This is because when pupils are offered or promised incentives for a reading task, attainment will be higher and greater. Accordingly, motivation, in form of words of encouragement, helps a lot in language learning to the extent that its absence can be a challenge to a learner (Msuega A., Tughgba T. E. & Ahemen M. S. 2021).

3.2 Early Literacy Skills in Children

In nursery and primary school, among the most specific and vital skills is learning to read. According to Jacob (2016), young children are eager and ready to learn. Because literacy competence opens the entries for all other academic learning, preschool and nursery school pupils are to be taught reading in emergent literacy skill to help realization of later success in school (Jacob 2016). The fundamental language skills that lead to emergence of literacy include phonemic awareness, print awareness, phonological awareness and vocabulary (Adesun 2012 & Jacob 2016).

- Phonemic awareness involves understanding that sound units exist and the recognition that they make up words (Adesun 2012). This implies that it includes understanding that spoken words are made of individual sounds. In this regard, pupils are able to read unfamiliar words because they use knowledge of phonemes to sound out the word.
- Print awareness – this is another important foundation skill that should be developed in nursery school years. Print awareness is simply the idea that spoken words are represented by written symbols. Children start to develop the concept that meaning is conveyed through words; that printed words are separated by spaces; and that some words in print look longer than other words as part learning (Adesun 2012). He added that children need to learn that, in English, a book is read from left to right and from top to bottom. Parent/teachers need to teach pupils that a book has a title, illustrations and the pupils need to read the print not the pictures in the book. Similarly, Hart & Risley (2009) postulate that pupils recognize the correspondences between the spoken and written language through listening to the sounds making a word.
- Phonological awareness, as an important foundation skill for literacy which is developed in early childhood. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to manipulate the sounds that make up language independent of meaning. That means, phonological processing is the use of information about the sound structure of language in interpreting written input. Phonics is methodically taught though starting with helping pupils to sound out individual letters and then blending these letters into a word (Adesun 2012).
- Vocabulary is a list of words that speakers of a language use (Hatch & Brown 2005). This implies that vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of learning English without which, learners find it difficult to communicate, express ideas or opinions,

comprehend simple text, and listen to instruction. However, there are some generally known aspects in teaching vocabulary namely, pronunciation, spelling, meaning and word usage. Consequently, Ur (2009) states that form (pronounce and spelling), grammar, collocation, meaning, and word formation are the aspects of vocabulary which are needed to be taught. Methodically, when teaching vocabulary, introduced the new words; practice the words to help move them into long-term memory and use some visuals in teaching activities attract the pupils' attention and deliver the information easily.

These basic literacies are to be taught chronologically. Thus, the attainment of the skills moves from phonemic awareness, phonological awareness to vocabulary. This is because vocabulary involves meaning and word usage in addition to pronunciation and spelling. It is crucial for a language learner to attain these basic skills. This is because the phonemic system of the English language is irregular in terms of orthography and phonology unlike in most of African indigenous languages (Muhammad M. & Ishaku J. 2020). That is, the spelling system and sound system have no direct similarity resulting to the inconsistency between spellings and pronunciations rules in English.

3.3 Reading Environment for Early Childhood

Field & Quthrie (2013) stress that the atmosphere and environmental setting up serve as the key factors influencing young children learning and playing. Environment, with regard to children education, focuses on systematic recognition of the alphabet and word reading opportunities so that it will be easy for children to grasp and develop a good reading habit. Pictorial books are more appealing to children and more likely to attract them unconsciously to reading. In addition to environment, reading needs to become part of family and school activities (Shufee 2012).

Therefore, at home, parents should be in charge of offering a place of visual reading experience for children including arranging mini library, as well as living in a comfortable, love and warmth surrounding (Ponitz et al., 2009). In this

sense, reading is not restricted to school environment, but it is extended to any small library or study room functions as an artistic reading environment provided by parents for their children at home. Consequently, the environment serves as the key factor influencing young children's reading which deals with providing adequate and functional reading opportunities for children at home then in school (Buyes et al., 2009). For pre-school children, an efficient and relevant environment serve as a motivation toward comprehensive and meaningful reading (Jones & Brown, 2011). In this regard, designing reading environment for pre-school children offers effective incentives for them to engage in reading activities in various situations.

4.1 Reading Readiness

Reading readiness is a state of development which prepares the child mentally and emotionally for reading experiences where the child becomes ready, willing and capable of reading (Okonkwo & Olayemi 2016). This entails that reading should be taught only when the child has attained a mental maturity, possessed adequate listening and speaking capability as well as has interest and desire to read. Reading readiness is influenced by a group of inter-related factors which can be broadly classified as physical and mental, social-emotional.

4.2 Factors that Influence Reading Readiness

There are certain factors that influence reading readiness. These include the following as postulated by Okonkwo & Olayemi (2016):

1. Physical readiness

For a child to be physically ready for reading, he must:

- Hear and see properly;
- Possess functional speech organs;
- Demonstrate evidence of word recognition and perception.

2. Mental readiness

Mental readiness has to do with the child's intellectual capability to demonstrate his ability to:

- Demonstrate evidence of word recognition, for example, recognizing a word as the name of an object, person, place etc.;

- Pronounce words properly by accurately producing the sounds;
- Speak in complete sentences;
- Recite rhymes and short poems;
- Tell and listen to simple stories and poems;
- Participate in conversation and discussion;
- Give and reports of activities carried out;
- Use a variety of vocabulary items in oral communication;
- Name pictures and shapes;
- Demonstrate eagerness to read.

3. Social-emotional readiness

For a child to be socially and emotionally ready for reading, he should:

- Show good emotional adjustment to the school;
- Possess satisfactory social traits;
- Have adequate experimental and conceptual background;
- Have a keen interest and desire to read.

4.3 Method for Teaching Beginning Reading

In reading activities, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge and phonetic knowledge referred to as knowledge of individual sounds, are all necessary for children to become literate but they are not sufficient. This is because the main goal is reading with understanding. Other methods such as 'look and say' and learning experience are ways of helping children to make meaning of words. If taught proper, pupils should be able to read with fluency. Fluency is the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, with expression, and with comprehension. Fluent readers recognize words automatically and organise them into phrases in order to help understanding (USAID 2018). Similarly, fluent reading comprises accurate reading of connected text at a conversational rate with appropriate prosody or expression (Hudson, Mercer, and Lane, 2000).

4.3.1 Sound, Letter and Syllables

The phonics method is based on the connection between individual letters and sounds. Children study how to put together letters and sounds such as 'b-a-t, bat'. This method is also called bottom-up approach. This is because it starts

with smaller units and moves towards a bigger situation of reading. It involves children becoming acquainted with the sound that letters or sets of letters make known as phonics and appreciating how these are appropriately put together to make sounds within words. This is referred to as phonemic awareness.

Thus, phonics and phonemic awareness are important methods because they enable pupils to 'sound out' written words that they don't recognize even if they do not comprehend the meaning of the word. Teachers need to know which sound(s) are represented by which letters or spelling in the language they are teaching. This is because letter representations of sounds and combinations of letters are not the same in all languages and pupils need to learn what sounds are represented by single letters and combination of letters such as 't' 's' or 'g' and 'sh' 'th' or 'nk' respectively for them to be able to read single sounds then simple words.

Accordingly, this approach can be useful and exciting when it is embedded in rhyming. Hearing and prediction rhyming words and syllables is a strong guess of reading ability. For example, if pupils realize that certain words sound similar and carry similar spellings, they do not have to sound each one out:

man, fan, ran, can,
send, spend, trend, end,

Words like the above are called 'word families'. Word families and words with repeated sounds and syllables are often found in children's songs, rhymes and riddles. Pupils can learn to recognize and read syllables and then put them together to make words.

4.2.2 The Look-and-Say Method

The look-say- method of teaching reading links whole words with their meanings without breaking them down into sounds first. In this regard, children need to remember the shape and look of the word so that they recognize it again. The look-and-say method is very useful for the many words whose spelling do not match their sound such as the 'said' or 'when'. Look-and-say also known as whole word is a method in teaching initial reading where learners are encouraged to acquire a sight vocabulary through memorisation (Nunan & Carter 2001). However, effective

teachers combine the phonics method and the look-and-say method when teaching reading.

4.2.3 Language Experience Approach

The language experience approach focuses on children's experience and enables them to read about their own lives, in their own words. In this regard, skills for reading are based on their knowledge of the language they are using and, on their home, and community background. Because reading through this method is based on the people known and the experiences possessed, the pupils work whole words and sentences rather than letter and parts of words. This approach allows pupils to speak before they read and write.

Steps in Language and experience approach:

- Experience: children talk about or do many things at home and at school, usually with other people.
- Description: children talk about what has happened to them, to each other and/or to the teacher or the class.
- Transcription: children write about the experiences they have described. Before their writing skills have developed. They can draw or try out writing, or the teacher can write down what they want to say.
- Reading: the children read what they have written to the whole class or to the part of the class.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adding to the experience of teachers to facilitate learning activities, the article explains the concept of reading skill as a receptive and literacy skill of language; the types of reading; and importance of reading as well according to current viewpoints. Furthermore, it describes strategies to adopt for ensuring effective reading as well as ways for improving pupils' reading skills as they are related to teachers of contemporary pre-primary and primary schools. Likewise, it explains environment for reading at early childhood and the factors that influence reading readiness as well as methods of teaching reading to beginners to enhance teaching-learning activities at these essential levels of learning. These are done in an effort to improve teachers' expertise to enable them deliver more appropriately in the teaching learning activities

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