

TEACHING READING SKILLS ACQUISITION IN THE BASIC EDUCATION CLASSES: TEACHERS' METHODS

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Abstract

This study adopted a survey research design. It is geared towards finding out the method which the teachers of reading at the Basic Education Level in Isiala Ngwa South LGA used to overcome children's inability to read. To guide the study, three research purposes and corresponding research questions were formulated. The population of the study was made up of 450 teachers in the basic classes in Isiala Ngwa South LGA. A sample of 250 language teachers was selected. Data collection was done with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The research questions were analyzed using mean statistics. From the findings, it was discovered that most of the teachers of reading do not frequently use most of the current methods to intensify the teaching and learning of reading. It was therefore recommended that teachers should use current methods to ensure that learners overcome reading difficulties and also get acquainted with the contents of the National Reading Framework (NRF) as provided by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council. Findings traditional methods such as loud and silent reading were predominantly used (mean revealed that > 2.50), while modern methods were under-utilized. The research also recommended that more teaching/learning materials TLMs (reading specifics) be developed for the Basic Education Classes.

Keywords: Reading skills acquisition, Teaching methods, Basic education, Instructional materials (TLMs)

Introduction

Basic education is of great interest to educationists, parents and others who want all children to achieve academic success. Pre-basic education is referred to as nursery education or early childhood education system to children aged between three and five years before their entering the basic school (Mgbodile, 1999). At this level of education, school hours may extend to 4:00 p.m. to accommodate working parents. The Basic Education consists of the Lower Basic (Pri 1-3), the Middle Basic (Pri 4-6) and the Upper Basic (JSS 1-3). Basic Education is the education given to children aged 6-14 years. The basic education is considered as the foundation upon which the rest of the educational system is built: the basic level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system (Nwosu, 2005). This is to say that basic education is one of the most persistent concerns of man throughout history.

To make the basic school child achieve success, the federal government, among other goals emphasized the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively (National Policy on Education, 2014). The above statement shows the importance that the federal government attaches to reading success. This is because the basic school child cannot achieve academic success if he/she is unable to read. But despite the emphasis of the federal government on reading, many pupils in Isiala Ngwa South LGA still struggle with reading. The consequences of inability to read are detrimental and may lead to children dropping out of school (Ukaga, 2005). The importance of reading cannot be overemphasized because it is an integral part of life. Inability to read effectively constitutes a hindrance to learner's performance (Obianuju, 2011). According to Okonkwo (2008), the teacher is expected to make frantic efforts to ensure that learners acquire the reading skills. This is to say that reading ought not be taught to children by unqualified teachers.

Acquisition of Reading Skills

The reading skills acquisition is very important; consistent practice and instructional activities make the acquisition of the skill easier for the child (Njoku and Izuagba, 2001). Teaching reading skills acquisition is very tedious for the teacher because the pupils in the class are from different backgrounds. Some of the children come from illiterate parents, and they lack support from their parents. Chijioke (2010) emphasized that in African societies, few children come from literate parents and reading and writing materials are not provided for them. The child then has a big problem in the reading class because of the level of his/her parents' education. Chijioke (1998) emphasized that inexperienced teachers in our basic schools, even the experienced ones, worsen the reading problems of the child. It has been observed that some teachers think that reading begins and ends with oral/silent reading of the basal reader (class text). However, researchers are of the view that the teacher's emphasis is moved from the traditional method such as memorisation and regurgitation methods to a more effective method. This facilitates easier learning. Teaching methods are the procedures used for instruction in the classroom.

The classroom teacher should adopt a method that will not hinder learning in his/her class. No wonder the International Reading Association (IRA) Journal (2006) emphasized that the method adopted by the teacher may promote or hinder learning in the classroom. It may sharpen learners' mental activities that are the basis of social power; it may also discourage initiative and curiosity, making self-reliance and survival difficult.

In the choice of teaching method, the teacher should adopt methods that will facilitate the pupils' understanding of the lesson to acquire the skills. The teacher is aware that every learner learns in a different way. The teacher of reading should adopt a method that will enable the learners acquire the skills.

The following methods are appropriate for the teaching of reading in the basic school: language experience, play way, peer teaching, and context support (John-Nwosu, 2007). The language

experience approach is a method used to teach the child reading skill acquisition. The child's own language is used to help him/her learn to read. The language experience approach produces learner-generated texts determined by the learner's own language that are interesting to the learner because they relate directly to the Child's own experience and personal interests (Goff, 2001). This approach helps learners to build language and literacy skills. This approach helps to extend the learner's creativity in storytelling through writing and develops authorship (McGee and Richgels, 2012). The learners' experience in the context of his/her own personal language is easier to remember and understand than someone else's language and experience.

Play is an indispensable method in teaching young children. Justice (2006) reaffirms that play activities of all kinds should be encouraged among children as part of efforts to develop all-around physical, emotional and social growth. Play activities, whether supervised or not supervised, have the potential of providing the setting and stimulus for adequate development, which is a necessary prerequisite for reading readiness. Play is a method of teaching that uses recreational activities for amusement. Play positively supports children's literacy skills, and it is essential to a child's overall healthy development (Umeano, 2014).

Peer teaching is a method listed for helping children learn to read. In this method, learners who have reading difficulties are helped by able learners. The learners who are stronger in the subject read with them, and this method helps the weak ones to learn in a relaxed condition.

Context support is another teaching method. It is used for beginning readers. The choice of a book should be made with extra care. It is very important to choose books that will be of interest to the learners. It is necessary to obtain books with interesting pictures and simple and short sentences.

In addition to the already mentioned teaching methods, there are other teaching methods used to acquire the reading skills in any Language, they include among others; I do--you do-- we do approach, thumbs up thumbs down, loud reading, silent reading, guided reading, phonics, sentence reading method, think-pair-share, use of ICT, with the large number of children that struggle with reading in the basic classes in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Education Authority, the researcher is interested in finding out how teachers assist these learners to overcome their reading difficulties. The study therefore aims at finding out the method which the teachers of reading in Isiala Ngwa South LGA use to overcome children's challenges and inability to read.

The study is anchored on constructivist learning theory. This theory posits that learners don't just absorb information or knowledge like empty vessels. They construct new knowledge by relating it to what they already know or the experience they already have. Hence, reading is not just decoding letters. Learners at the Basic Education Level actively build meaning from text based on their background, language, experience or prior knowledge. In cognitive constructivism, learners move through stages and learn by interacting with the world, balancing new concepts with old schemas. While in social constructivism, learning is social. Learners learn to read best with a 'more knowledgeable other', such as the teacher, parent, or peer, who scaffolds them just beyond what

they can do alone. The constructivist theory encourages discovery learning, scaffolding, and a spiral curriculum. This study is anchored on constructivist theory as the basic education level learners do not just ‘get’ reading from drills, they need to actively make sense of print. The teacher’s role shifts from ‘transmitter’ to ‘facilitator or scaffolder’. Background knowledge, social talk, and authentic texts are not extras; they are essential for skill acquisition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study therefore is to find out the method which the teachers of reading in Isiala Ngwa South LGA use to overcome children's inability to read.

The purpose is specifically to:

1. Identify methods teachers use in teaching reading skills acquisition in Isiala Ngwa South LGA.
2. Find out the teaching methods of reading skills acquisition that is most frequently used by the teachers.
3. Find out if teachers prefer the traditional method to modern methods.

Research Questions

1. What methods do teachers use in teaching reading skills acquisition in the Basic Education Level in Isiala Ngwa South LGA?
2. Which method of teaching reading skills acquisition is most frequently used by the teachers?
3. Do teachers prefer the traditional method of teaching reading skills acquisition in Isiala Ngwa South LGA prefer to the modern method?

Statement of Problem

Many children in the basic school struggle with reading. These children move very slowly in the acquisition of reading skills in the second language. This is attributed to the unsuitable teaching method employed by the teachers of reading.

A workshop/seminar organized by the Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI Plus) on modern techniques of teaching for Language teachers, in Abuja, in 2019 revealed that teachers still adopt the traditional method of teaching.

In the traditional method, the teacher dominates the class; learners are not involved in the activities of the skills of reading (Obanya, 2001). Chijioke (2010) emphasized that teachers prefer the traditional method. Therefore, this study seeks to determine the method the teachers of reading in the Basic Education Level in Isiala Ngwa South LGEA adopt in reading acquisition skills.

Methods

The study adopted a survey research design; its aim is to find out the methods the Basic Education teachers of reading in Isiala Ngwa South LGA adopt to assist learners in the acquisition of reading skills. The population is made up of 450 teachers of the Basic Education classes, while the sample size is made up of 250 teachers of the Basic Education classes who completed the questionnaire.

The data were assembled with the aid of structured questionnaire items in a four-point Likert scale. The initial draft of the instrument was given to experts in the Department of Basic and Childhood Education, Language Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation and an experienced basic school teacher for face and content validity of the items. "Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for reliability analysis and a reliability index of 0.82 was realized. The data collected were analysed using a mean score of 2.50 as the benchmark"

Research Question 1: What methods do teachers use in teaching reading skill acquisition in basic classes?

The mean responses of table 1 indicate that these traditional methods of teaching reading, which include items

(d) (f) and (g), score above the cut-off point 2.50, while the modern (a) (b) (c) and (e) methods score below 2.5.

S/N.	Question Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	Decision
	The following are methods used in teaching reading in basic classes							
a.	Language experience	21	5	128	96	250	1.80	Rejected
b.	Play way	18	8	141	83	250	1.84	Rejected
c.	Peer teaching	21	26	110	93	250	1.87	Rejected
d.	Think-Pair-Share	72	113	29	36	250	2.88	Accepted
e.	Context support	14	26	90	120	250	1.73	Rejected
f.	Loud reading	102	76	30	42	250	2.95	Accepted
g.	Silent reading	134	68	11	7	250	3.11	Accepted

Research Question 2: Which method of teaching reading skills acquisition is most frequently used by the teacher?

S/N	Question Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	Decision
	Frequently teaching reading skills acquisition with the following methods							
a.	Language experience	22	12	146	70	250	1.94	Rejected
b.	Play way	14	32	126	78	250	1.92	Rejected
c.	Peer teaching	28	16	91	125	250	3.01	Accepted
d.	Think-Pair-Share	122	57	32	39	250	1.76	Rejected
e.	Context support	17	5	130	98	250	3.30	Accepted
f.	Loud reading	126	89	26	11	250	3.11	Accepted
g.	Silent reading	140	84	14	42	250	1.86	Rejected

Responding to the most frequently used methods of teaching reading skill acquisition in table 2, it was obvious that context support with the highest mean score of 3.30 is the most frequently used teaching method of reading skill acquisition, followed by loud reading 3.11.

Research Question 3: Do teachers of reading, skill acquisition in Isiala Ngwa South LGA prefer the traditional method to the modern method?

Items in table 3 show that teachers of reading skills acquisition prefer the traditional method of teaching reading acquisition to the modern method.

S/N	Question Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	Decision
a.	Traditional method is less tasking for teaching than the modern method.	129	95	7	19	250	3.33	Accepted
b.	Modern method is time consuming.	115	89	12	34	250	3.14	Accepted

c.	Modern method is more cost effective than traditional method.	127	79	11	33	250	3.20	Accepted
d.	Lack of motivation from government to provide modern instructional reading skills materials.	201	30	6	13	250	3.67	Accepted
e.	Teachers prefer traditional method to modern method of teaching reading because they are not professionally trained to teach reading.	156	68	9	17	250	3.45	Accepted

This is because they considered traditional method less tasking, less time consuming, less cost effective beside lack of motivation from government to provide modern instructional materials such as real-life objects and in the environment, such as tables, pictures; example, teacher made instructional materials such as posters, flash cards and model games materials, etc., all these items scored above 2.5.

Discussion of Results

Results from research question 1 showed that items a, b, c and e, which are the modern methods of teaching reading acquisition, were all rejected while items d, f and g were accepted. This implies that teachers of the Basic classes in Isiala Ngwa South LGA do not make use of the modern method of teaching reading. This supports Chijioke (1998), who stressed that the teacher thinks that reading begins and ends with oral/silent reading methods.

Research question 2 was designed to find out the most frequently used teaching method of reading skills acquisition. Results revealed that loud reading is the most frequently used. This finding is in line with Okonkwo's (2008) opinion who stressed that teachers have used the loud reading method for so long.

Indications from table 3 show that teachers of reading skills prefer the traditional method of teaching reading acquisition to the modern method. Chijioke (2010) confirms this with the statement that teachers prefer the traditional method of teaching.

Recommendations

1. The government should urgently provide adequate and modern instructional materials such as flash cards, graded storybooks, word charts, audio-visual aids, and digital learning tools to support effective reading instruction in Basic Education classrooms. These resources are essential for promoting learner engagement and improving reading outcomes.
2. Government and educational stakeholders should institutionalise regular in-service training, workshops, and capacity-building programmes for teachers, with a strong focus on contemporary, evidence-based methods of teaching reading skills acquisition.
3. Teachers should deliberately shift from over-reliance on traditional methods to the consistent use of learner-centred and interactive approaches, including language experience, play-way, peer teaching, guided reading, and ICT-supported instruction, in order to enhance pupils' reading competence.
4. School administrators and curriculum planners should ensure that all teachers of reading are well-grounded in the National Reading Framework (NRF) as developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, and that its implementation is effectively monitored.
5. The government should significantly improve motivation and support systems for teachers, including the provision of teaching aids, improved working conditions, and incentives, to encourage the adoption of innovative teaching practices.

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