ENHANCING CHILDREN'S READING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF SHARED BOOK READING AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN AWKA MERTROPOLIS

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Abstract

The study investigated the use of shared book reading in developing children's reading skills in primary schools in Awka metropolis. The design of the study was descriptive survey. Four research questions were posed to guide the study. A total of 239 teachers teaching in the 52 government approved primary schools in the area of the study constituted the population. All of 239 teachers constituted the sample for the study. Data was collected using 30 item researcher-developed questionnaire tagged Developing Children's Reading Skills Through Shared Book Reading (DCRSTSBR). The instrument was face validated by 3 experts; two in Early Childhood and one from Measurement and Evaluation all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Cronbach Alpha was used to test for reliability of the instrument. The items yielded coefficient of 0.79 and the instrument was therefore adopted for the study. Mean values were used to answer the research questions. Findings revealed that active participation in literacy, understanding that pictures can provide clues among others are the importance of shared book reading. Introducing the story by discussing the title, cover and author among others are the strategies that can enhance children's participation during shared reading. Non-availability of developmentally appropriate reading text, pupils feeling shy among others are the pupil's challenges. Some of the possible solutions to these challenges include; collecting reading books that are appropriate for the level of the pupils with consideration of pupil's interest and introducing the text by discussing the title, cover and author. Based on the findings, it was recommended that government at all levels, should support learning by providing primary schools with developmentally age-appropriate books for learning and organize workshop to educate teachers more on developing reading skills through the use of shared book reading.

Keywords: literacy, reading, shared book reading.

Introduction

The importance of literacy in education cannot be overlooked. Literacy according to Bainbridge (2019) are all the skills needed for reading and writing. They include such things as awareness of the sounds of language, awareness of print, and the relationship between letters and sounds. Other literacy skills include vocabulary, spelling and comprehension. Bainbridge (2019) is of the opinion that literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that allows one to communicate effectively and make sense of the job world. Lack of vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of life. As a child, they would not be able to succeed at school, as a young adult they would be locked out of the market, and as parents, they may not assist their children academically.

In low income and middle income countries, 43 percent of children according to Black, (2017), under the age five do not reach their developmental potential. In Kenya, one of the

best-educated countries in sub-Saharan Africa, only 30 percent of third graders can read at the second grade level (Piper. 2010), and 34 percent of preschool children are "on track" for language and numeracy development (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The lack of adequate literacy preparation is the key risk factor for poor performance in primary school worldwide (Behrman et al 2006).

Reading according to Collins and Cheek (2017), requires the use of complex thought unit in order to understand a printed message. According to Tracy (2016), reading is the only form of entertainment that is also an essential life skill that must be nurtured from a child's earliest years. According to Fosudo (2010), once children know how to read, they still need support to reach their potentials as readers. Most children have problems with reading and related language skills. The author further asserted that the poor reading skills among children is an offshoot of technological advancements that have brought about overall changes in family, social, and economic conditions. Poor reading habits occur in children when reading is not considered a relevant leisure activity as it does not form part of children's social interaction. Thus reading is considered a solitary pursuit and is not attractive compared with interactive activity on the internet (Fosudo, 2010).

Reading ability which is a major form of literacy is a vital part of one's overall development. It is the foundation for doing well at school, socializing with others, developing independence, managing money or working. In Nigeria, literacy is recognized as a basic tool for personal and national development. The National Policy on Education (2004), places the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively as one of the objectives of school education. This calls for provision of adequate resources to compliment education. These resources can take children far above technical literacy to developing reading culture which makes permanent literacy attainable.

Reading as an active process of constructing meanings of words help readers to direct information towards a goal and focuses their attention. Development of reading is essential especially for emergent readers. The role of reading in early childhood education can never be over emphasized especially in the early years. Research have shown that poor reading skills in the early years can have a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on the child (Hoff, 2013; Pace, Alper, Burchinal, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2018). Children who enter school with good reading skills have better chances at school, better chances of entering higher education and better economic success in adulthood (Blanden, 2006). In contrast, children who have poor reading skills at age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age thirty-four than

children who have normal developing reading skills at age five (Law, Rush, Schoon, & Parsons, 2009).

Children with poor reading skills receive poor grades at school, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behavior problems, seems to dislike school, and often fail to develop to their full potentials. Fosudo (2010), asserts that children with poor reading skills have a higher chance of anti-social behavior. Delinquency; school violence, bullying, hacking computer and even examination malpractices have a correlation with poor reading habits. This does not mean that those with poor reading skills display such behavior; however poor reading skills are associated with such behavioral patterns while good literacy habits help develop a steady and constructive mind.

Children can be motivated to read and thus form good reading habit through storytelling, reading together (shared book reading). Formation of reading habit through/book clubs as well as provision of conducive reading environment devoid of unwarranted noise and distractions is critical. Storytelling is a basic and enduring form of literacy expression in Nigeria cultures. The Integration of storytelling and oral literacy including shared book reading tradition should be pronounced in school curriculum especially in primary schools (Washbrook, 2010).

Reading together or shared book reading is a good way of introducing pleasure or fun in reading. Peca, Alper, Burchinal, Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (2013) opined that reading together can take place anywhere - in the classroom, library, or at home. Parents, school librarians, teachers, and children can read aloud to themselves at home, in the class or library, getting to an exciting point in the story book before stopping. The interest generated according to researchers will inspire many pupils to continue to read the story on their own. In the course of shared book reading, the passage read aloud can be discussed and a new book can be introduced to the pupils before shared reading commences. The experience of reading and hearing increases speed, facilitates comprehension, good pronunciation; develops reading and critical thinking skills. Shared book reading also puts confidence in some timid children and encourages them to develop a voluntary reading habit (Washbrook, 2010).

There are good theoretical reasons for believing that shared book reading interventions may have language-boosting effects, if delivered at a realistic rate. Research has shown that shared book reading tends to include a number of potentially language boosting behaviours which have been linked with positive language outcomes in the past. For example shared book reading tends to result in child directed speech with higher levels of lexical and syntactic

diversity than play-based interaction (Cameron-Faulker & Liven, 2018), and high levels of lexical and syntactic diversity in child-directed speech (Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2012). Shared book reading is also likely to foster high levels of joint attention, contingent talk and responsiveness, which have also been linked to positive language outcomes. (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013). It also provides ample opportunities to use techniques such as expanding, recasting and asking open-ended questions, all of which have shown to be positively related to children's oral language development as reported by Huttenlocher, Waterfall, Vasilyeva, Vevea, and Hedges (2010).

Observations over the years, have shown that the acquisition of reading skills through shared book reading has beneficial effect on all school subjects, including social studies, science, mathematics, and so on. Poor reading skill can make a child develop poor attitude toward school and can create self-esteem problems later in life (Fosoudo, 2010). A study carried out by Henry (2013) showed that early in the primary grades, children who are struggling with how to read begin to experience failure and related negative effects in interpersonal skills. These effects can include aggressions, lowered levels of personal regard, and seeking of personal validation in venues that are anti-social. Reading cannot be perfected if the learner is not properly guided to acquire the necessary skills. The different skills and methods used by teachers in teaching reading over the years have not achieved much from observations, hence the need to try out shared book reading in developing reading skills in primary school children. This is the gap this study sets out to fill.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to develop children's reading skills through the use of shared book reading among primary school pupils. Specifically, the study determined:

1. The importance of shared book reading.
2. Strategies that will enhance children's participation during shared book reading.
3. The challenges pupils face during shared book reading.
4. Possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the importance of shared book reading?
2. What are the strategies that will enhance children's participation during shared book reading?

3. What are the challenges pupils face during shared book reading?
4. What are the possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading?

Method

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the use of shared book reading in developing children's reading skills in primary schools in Awka metropolis. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Four research questions guided the study. All the 239 public primary school teachers in the 52 government approved primary schools in Awka metropolis constituted the population. All of them constituted the sample of the study. A 30- item researcher-developed instrument titled Developing Children's Reading Skills Through Shared Book-Reading (DCRSTSBR). A four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point) was used.

The instrument was face validated by 3 experts; two in Early Childhood Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach alpha statistical tool and reliability co-efficient 0.79 was obtained. Based on this, the research instrument was therefore adopted for the study. Mean were used for the data analysis. Mean responses of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed while those below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the importance of shared book reading?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Teachers on the Importance of Shared Book Reading

S/N	Importance of shared book reading include:	X	Decision
1	Active participation in literacy	2.70	Agree
2	Understanding that pictures can provide clues to text	2.68	Agree
3	Recognizing and identifying letters and sounds and connections between them	2.80	Agree
4	Increasing sight word development	2.71	Agree
5	Developing a stronger understanding of phonics	2.82	Agree
6	Recalling main ideas and details from stories	2.60	Agree
7	Developing and using new reading strategies	2.90	Agree
8	Learning to predict the events of a story	2.77	Agree
9	Developing a sense of encouragement and confidence	2.81	Agree
10	Offering valuable opportunities for children to explore the joy of reading	2.85	Agree
11	Providing struggling readers the support they need to read on their own	2.63	Agree

The result in table 1 shows that all the eleven items had the mean ratings above 2.50. This indicates that teachers agreed to all the items as the importance of shared book reading.

Research Question 2: What are the strategies that will enhance children's participation during shared book reading?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Teachers on the Strategies that will Enhance Children's Participation during Shared Book Reading.

S/N	Strategies to enhance children's participation during shared book reading include:	X	Decision
12	Introducing the story by discussing the title, cover and author	2.87	Agree
13	Asking the pupil to make predictions regarding what they think the story might be about	2.80	Agree
14	Reading the story aloud to the pupils using appropriate inflation and tone	2.54	Agree
15	Asking brief questions to determine pupil's comprehension level	2.77	Agree
16	Concluding the reading section by reserving time for reactions and comments	2.83	Agree
17	Asking pupils to relate the story to their similar experiences	2.88	Agree
18	Asking the children to retell the story in their own words	2.67	Agree
19	Allow time for independent reading	2.64	Agree
20	Making crafts related to the story shared	2.57	Agree

The result in Table 2 shows that all the ten items eliciting responses on the strategies that will enhance children's participation during shared book reading have mean scores above 2.5 points which indicate agreement. This shows that the teachers are in agreement that the items so listed are the strategies that will enhance children's participation during shared book reading.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges pupils face during shared book reading?

Table 3: Mean Responses of Teachers on the Challenges Pupils face during shared Book Reading

S/N	Challenges pupils face during shared book reading	X	Decision
21	Text may not be appropriate for all pupils	2.57	Agree
22	Some pupils may not be interested in the text or book shared	2.67	Agree
23	Pupils may depend on others to do the reading	2.65	Agree
24	Some of the pupils may feel shy thereby not participate fully in the reading	2.76	Agree
25	Non availability of books for the reading exercise	2.82	Agree

Results in table 3 show that all the items had mean ratings of above 2.50. This implies that the respondents accepted them as likely challenges pupils face during shared book reading.

Research Question 4: What are the possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading?

Table 4: Mean Responses of Teachers on the Possible Solutions Pupils face during shared Book Reading.

S/N	Possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading	X	Decision
26	Collecting books that is appropriate for the reading level of the pupils	2.76	Agree
27	Selecting books that is of interest to the pupils	2.77	Agree
28	Teachers can re-read the story and allow time for independent reading	2.53	Agree
29	Encouraging the pupils to read at their own pace, to enhance their participation	2.85	Agree
30	Providing sufficient books for the reading pleasure of pupils	2.75	Agree

Results from table 4 shows that every item listed had the mean rating of above 2.50. Again this implies that these are the possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading in primary schools.

Discussion

Findings of the study in table 1 indicated the importance of shared book reading to include active participation in literacy, understanding that pictures can provide clues, recognizing and identifying letters and sounds, increasing sight word, providing support for struggling readers, developing sense of encouragement and confidence among others. These findings collaborate with the findings of Washbrook (2010) who posited that the experience of reading and hearing increases speed, facilitates comprehension, good pronunciation; develops reading and critical thinking skills. Shared book reading puts confidence in some timid children and encourages them to develop voluntary reading habits. This implies that the importance of shared book reading is encompassing and can never be over-emphasized.

The findings in table 2 also revealed that children's participation in shared book reading can be enhanced through, introducing the text by discussing the title, cover, and author, asking pupil to make predictions regarding what they think about the text, teachers asking brief questions to determine pupil's comprehension level, and teachers reading the story aloud to the pupils using appropriate inflation among others. This finding is in line with Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine (2010) who posits that shared reading provides ample opportunities to use techniques such as expanding, recasting and asking open-ended questions, all of which have shown to be positively elated to children's oral language development. Similarly, Peca, Alper, Burchinal, Gorlinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek (2013) in their study on impact of shared book reading, Peca et al found that, in the course of shared book reading, passage read aloud can be discussed and a new book can be introduced to the pupils before its shared reading commences.

The study also found that there were ample challenges faced by pupils during shared book reading. These challenges included pupils depending solely on others to read for them, non-availability of books, some pupils may not be interested in the text shared, text may not be appropriate for pupil's level among others. This finding is in consonance with Fosudo, (2010) who posits that reading cannot be perfected if the learner is not properly guided to acquire the necessary skills. The different skills and methods used by teachers over the years have not achieved much according to Fosudo, hence there is need to assess the appropriateness of children's text, encourage text that will invoke children's interest and encourage shared book reading.

Results in table 4 revealed that all the items listed were the possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading. They include, collecting books that is appropriate for the reading level of the pupils, selecting books that are of interest to the pupils,

encouraging pupils to read at their own pace and providing sufficient book for the reading pleasure of pupils among others. This finding is in agreement with (Behrman et al, 2006), who posits that lack of adequate literacy preparation is the key risk factor for poor reading performance in primary school worldwide. This is to say when children are provided with the essentials for reading instruction like developmentally appropriate materials, reading or shared reading becomes fun thereby enriching learner's lives and increase in literacy development abilities.

Conclusion

Shared book reading is an essential technique in developing children's reading skills. Some of challenges children face in acquiring reading skills can be surmounted through an effective use of shared reading. Findings revealed that active participation in literacy, understanding that pictures provide clues, developing and using new reading strategies and providing support among others are the importance of shared book reading. Also, asking brief questions to determine pupils' comprehension level, asking pupils to retell stories in their own words and concluding the reading section by reserving time for reactions, are the strategies to enhance children's participation during shared book reading. Again, age-inappropriate text, feeling shy among others are the challenges pupils face during shared book reading. And, collecting books that is appropriate for the reading level of pupils among others are possible solutions to the challenges pupils face during shared book reading.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government at all levels, should organize workshop to educate teachers more on the strategies and challenges of developing literacy skills through the use of shared book reading. Such workshops should incorporate other issues about literacy development, so that teachers' knowledge is constantly up-dated for them to impact skills effectively to learners.
2. Both Federal, State and Local governments should support learning by providing primary schools with developmentally age-appropriate books for learning.

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