

Acquisition of Requisite Competencies in Developing Reading Ability among Early Graders: Instructional Strategies and Approaches

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Abstract

This paper discusses the need for explicit instruction to enable the acquisition of requisite competencies in order to develop reading ability among children or early graders. The paper argues that developing reading ability is a progressive process that should be initiated by learners being involved in activities that enhance their phonological awareness. The teacher should know when to introduce decodable texts to learners to inspire comprehension and appreciation of texts. There is need to use the balanced or eclectic approach to reading instruction for learners to get the best of the phonic and the whole language approaches to reading.

Key Words: Requisite Competencies, Reading Ability, Instructional Strategies, Reading Activities, Reading Approaches, Early Graders

1.0 Introduction

Reading is a service skill, once learners acquire it effectively, they are able to learn through interpretation. Research reveals that a number of the pupils fail to acquire basic skills in literacy hence lack grade one competencies mostly in second languages even if such languages are used for official communication or are the medium of instruction. It is an indicator of lack of acquisition of requisite competencies in developing reading ability among Early Childhood Development learners. Acquisition of literacy among early graders in this paper means developing reading ability among the learners. Unlike the acquisition of listening and speaking skills, reading ability is developed through explicit instruction (Ehri, & Roberts 2006). The child's speaking vocabulary is a predictor of reading success (Rowe, (2005). It is complex when the target language is a second language and learners have diminished vocabulary. Focus ought to be on early learning to ensure acquisition of requisite competencies before joining grade one, hence need for improved pedagogy. The paper discusses instructional strategies and approaches that can be used to facilitate the acquisition of requisite competencies in developing reading ability among children or learners at the early stages of schooling. The paper therefore sought to answer the questions:

- * What strategies are used in Developing Reading Ability Among Early Graders?
- * Which Instructional Approaches are used to facilitate the strategies?

2.1 Language Skills

Language is fundamentally a *skill*; (*the ability to do something well*), it is not a content-based discipline such as, psychology, curriculum studies, Business, or Mathematics. It has four main sub skills divided into two: Productive Skills (active skills) and Receptive Skills (passive skills). Productive skills are Speaking and writing because while using them, the user *actively* produces sounds in speaking and symbols in writing (Isaac, & Charles, 2013). Listening and Reading are referred to as receptive skills because the user is passive and receives information through listening or reading respectively as summarized in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Language Skills

| Language Skills | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Receptive Skills</i> | <i>Productive Skills</i> |
| * Listening | * Speaking |
| * Reading | * Writing |

Language Educators have researched on how language acquisition and learning take place. This paper is focusing on how children develop reading ability. There are several theories that explain how reading skills are acquired as discussed in the next section.

2.2 Theories of Developing Reading Ability

Language Educators and researchers have always been interested in the development of the four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Theories of language acquisition and language learning have been extensively studied by Linguists and Applied Linguists to inform language teaching. The scope of this paper is on the development of reading ability among early graders. There are three main theories which explain the nature of learning to read.

2.2.1 Bottom Up Processing Theory

The first one is Bottom Up Processing Theory. It emphasizes on the printed form of a text, that learning to read is based on habit formation through drilling, repetition, and error correction. Research shows that the main approach associated with this theory is phonics. Reading is viewed as a linear progression by which readers interpret a text word by word, connecting the words into phrases then sentences. (Justice, & Sofka,(2010).Emphasizes on repetition and drills using the sounds that make up words beginning with the smallest sound units, followed by letter blends or combinations, words, phrases, then sentences. Early graders acquire a set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills that successively build toward comprehension (Ehri, & Roberts, (2006). At the initial stage, understanding is not a priority as focus is not on semantics but on reading; sounding words. *Figure one* presents the order in which the reading sub skills are developed according to the theory.

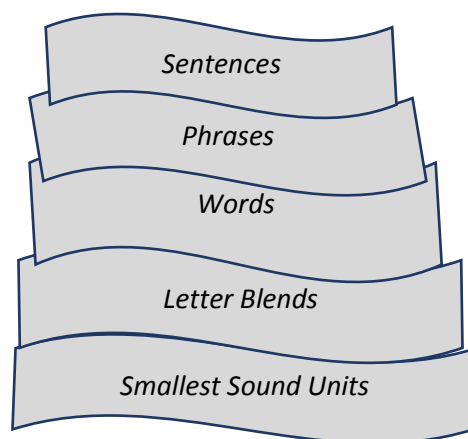


Figure 1: Bottom Up Hierarchical Order of Reading Sub-Skills

2.2.2 The Cognitive Theory (Top-Down Theory)

Psycholinguists explain how language develop within the learner's mind, hence the name, cognitive theory. It expounds on the mind's innate capacity for learning. It states that humans acquire their First Language due to inborn ability to do so. It also informs the acquisition of Second Languages and Foreign Languages. The theory encourages Meaningful learning which occurs when *new information* is presented in *a relevant environment or context*. It ought to be related to what the *learner already knows* to facilitate integration into one's existing cognitive structure (Ehri, & Roberts 2006). This is in line with the theories of learning which states that the order of content delivery should be from known to unknown. Reading being a language skill that calls for the articulation of words or sounding phonemes, it is important for learners to acquire:

- ✧ the ability to quickly *identify letters of the alphabet* by name, sound, or a word that begins with the letter,
- ✧ Knowledge of *The Alphabetic Principle* (letters in text represent the phonemes in speech) and
- ✧ *Word Recognition Skills*. This is the foundation on which reading skill is built.

Based on the arguments of the theory, Language Educators propose Teaching methods and activities that strongly consider experience and knowledge of the learner. Reading is a process of connecting information in the text with the knowledge the reader brings to the act of reading. It is a discourse between the reader and the text which involves an active cognitive process, the reader's *background knowledge* plays a key role in the creation of meaning.

Rote learning; memorizing lists of isolated words, texts or rules in a new language, makes the information to be temporary and subject to loss (Ehri et.al 2001).

2.2.3 The Metacognitive View

Meta-Cognition refers to the control executed by readers on their trial to understand a text. It involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Tactical readers sample the text, make propositions, confirm or reject them, and make new propositions while reading. They also engage many activities along the process of reading, whose phases can be divided into three: before reading, while reading, and after reading. (Lyon & Moore, 2003). The activities the readers involve before reading are: identify the purpose of the reading and identify the form or type of the text. In the second phase (while reading), they think about the general character and features of the form or type of the text—such as trying to locate a *topic sentence* and follow *supporting details* toward a conclusion, project the author's purpose for writing the text, choose, scan, or read in detail, make continuous predictions about what will occur next based on information obtained earlier, prior knowledge, and conclusions obtained within the previous stages. Finally, *after reading* they attempt to *summarize, conclude, or make inference* of what was read. This theory is applicable to experienced learners but not early graders who should acquire requisite competencies in developing reading ability (Rose, 2006).

2.3 Reading Instruction Approaches

2.3.1 Whole Language

A learner in a Whole Language classroom is provided with simple, predictable and repetitive text to facilitate comprehension. The goal of the Whole Language approach is, comprehension and appreciation, **not reading precision and accuracy**. Learners are allowed to insert and substitute words as long as the story makes sense, and is understanding the main idea of the story. The main target of the teacher is to promote a love for the act of reading authentic texts and keep the process of reading instruction natural (Rose, 2006). Advocates of this approach believe that reading is "top-down", that the meaning of the text depends on the background knowledge of the reader who forms hypotheses and makes predictions. The reader samples the text occasionally to confirm the predictions.

2.3.2 The Phonics Approach

The philosophy underlying the Phonics approach is quite different from the one of the Whole Language approach. Phonics advocates argue that in order to develop reading skills, a significant number of children require *explicit instruction* in the rules of printed text.

This approach, emphasises reading precision. Learners are encouraged to read the words exactly as they appear and they are explicitly taught: *rules* about the way words are written and spelled and *spelling-sound relationships*. Next, they are presented with *a passage* of text that contains many words consistent with that rule; usually referred to as *decodable text*. It provides the learner with the opportunity to apply each Phonics rule on a number of different words in the context of a passage (Ehri & Nunes, 2002).

The goal of the Phonics approach is to teach learners the Phonics rules, spelling-sound relationships, and to apply this knowledge in sounding-out each word they encounter. The underlying belief is that comprehension and appreciation will be a natural consequence of accuracy (Ehri, & Roberts 2006). Proponents of this approach argue that if one is able to correctly decode a text, meaning and understanding will follow (Scott, 2009).

2.3.3 The Balanced Approach

This is the integration of two approaches, also known as the *eclectic approach*, having a balanced approach by borrowing from both the phonics and the whole language approaches to reading. The blended approach is used by Language Educators for the instruction of reading to ensure that learners are well grounded in rules about the way words are written and spelled, *spelling-sound relationships and love for reading decodable texts considering learners’ background knowledge*. Comprehension and appreciation are also emphasised (Justice, & Sofka, 2010).

Developing reading ability is a process with several stages before one reaches near competency. This paper’s focus is on the onset of the process, the initial stages, hence the discussion about how teachers can **facilitate** acquisition of requisite competencies that would enhance development of reading ability among early graders through *instructional strategies and approaches* as discussed in the next section.

3.0 Instructional strategies used in Developing Reading Ability among Early Graders

Explicit instruction is essential for children to develop reading ability as discussed above. Instructional strategies for developing reading ability among early graders should reflect their initial stages of language acquisition as children will not have acquired writing skills yet. Their speaking vocabulary will still be low and they lack adequate background knowledge of texts. Therefore, there is need to engage them in *activities or strategies* that will enable them to learn to read from the onset through the acquisition of requisite competencies as discussed in the next section.

3.1. Recognizing Rhyming Words

Explicit instruction to understand and identify rhyming words in a sentence should be done.

Learners ought to draw their attention to rhyming words as illustrated in the next section.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| JIMMY and TIMMY | GAME rhyme with NAME |
| MOST rhyme with TOAST | LAKE rhyme with MAKE |
| SNAP rhyme with NAP | MOON rhyme with SOON |
| PILL rhyme with HILL | |

| Task: | Learning | Activities |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Does LUCK rhyme with TRUCK? | Does WEST rhyme with TEST | |
| Does FINE rhyme with PINE? | Does LAKE rhyme with LIKE? | |
| Does HOSE rhyme with NOSE? | Does SMOKE rhyme with SHOOK? | |
| Does SAME rhyme with GAME? | Does BEND rhyme with | |

3.2. Differentiating Rhyme

Learners should identify the word that is not rhyming given three words as below.

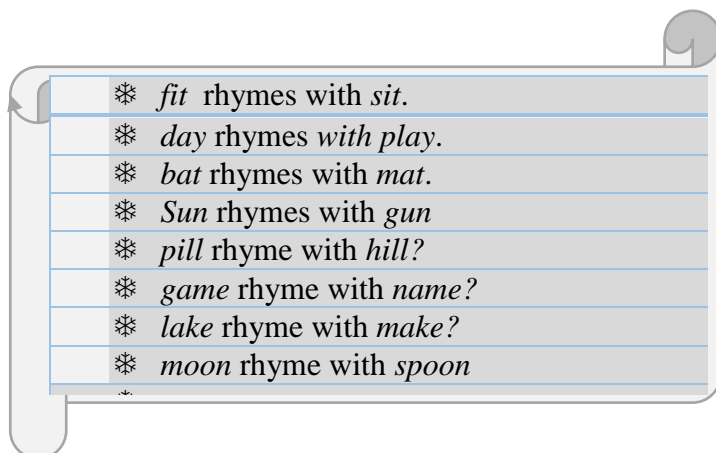
i. Joy Toy Ball
 ii. Fan Hat Cat
 iii. SunCar Pun
 iv. Let Get come

list words that **are not rhyming** in the numbers:

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.

3.3. Producing Rhyme

Learners generate words that rhyme with the ones given as presented below.



Learning activities: learner to generate words that rhyme with the ones given.

Children should be able to generate at least two rhyming words to each of the items without much difficulty. At the very least, they should be able to make up even meaningless words that rhyme (e.g. if you ask the child to think of a word that rhymes with HOME, the child might say ZOME).

3.4 Isolating and Categorizing Sounds

As learners become more acquainted with sounds, they can start to identify specific sounds in words. The first step is to be able to *recognize initial sounds*, then *final sounds*, and then *medial sounds*. After they learn to isolate sounds, they can move on to *generating words* that begin or end with a specified sound. focus on continuous consonant sounds or sounds that can be extended, such as /nnnn/ or /mmmm/. Effective instruction should be done for learners to acquire the skill so that they *say the sound of the letter, not its name*, for example, they ought to say /mmm/ and not *em*.

Vowel sounds, whether long or short, can be extended as one pronounce the sounds in a word: /mmmm/ /aaaa / /nnnn/. Continuous sounds are: /f, l, m, n, r, s, z, sh /. *Stop sounds* -/b, k, d, g, h, p, t, v, w/- are more difficult because these sounds cannot be extended. To emphasize these sounds in a word, you can repeat the sound several times, for example, /t-t-t-t / /a/ /n/: *tan*. The following examples use *initial sounds*, but can also be used with *final sounds* and, eventually, *medial sounds*. Learners to identify *initial sounds* in given words:

| Word | Articulation | Initial Sound |
|-------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Map | <i>mmmmap</i> | /m/ |
| Mouse | <i>mmmmouse</i> | /m/ |
| Moon | <i>mmmmoon</i> | /m/ |

3.5. Differentiating Sounds

Learners identify words that start with a different sound.

rrrat, rrrain, mmmman. The teacher should ask; Did you hear that *rrrat* and *rrrain* start with the same sound, but *mmman* starts with a different sound?

which word **starts** with a different sound in the list given

| Word | Articulation | Word with A Different Sound |
|------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Sit | <i>Sssit</i> | Mat |
| Mat | <i>mmmat</i> | |
| Sun | <i>Sssun</i> | |

3.6. Generating Sounds

Learners generate another word that **starts** with the same sound such as:

find and *fan* start with /f/. They could also generate words that **start** with the given sounds such as: /f/, /s/, and /m/ .

| Initial Sound | Words Starting with the Sound |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| /f/ | Fan, find, fat, fit, funny |
| /s/ | Sun, sum, sat, soap |
| /m/ | Mug, mom, mat, mud |

3.7. Segmenting and Blending Syllables and Sounds

Segmenting involves breaking words into their **syllables** and their **individual sounds**. The word *cat* has three sounds, *said* as three sounds, *go* has two sounds.

The teacher should articulate the sounds slowly with a pause after each sound

For example, the word LICK, is pronounced as;

/l/ (pause) /i/ (pause) /k/. Other examples are presented below

| Word | Segmenting |
|------|------------------------------|
| Cat | /k/ (pause) /a/ (pause) /t/ |
| Man | /m/ (pause) /a/ (pause) /n/ |
| rat | /r/ (pause) /a/ (pause) /t/ |
| can | /k/ (pause) /a/ (pause) /n/ |
| hat | /h/ (pause) /a/ (pause) /t/ |
| moo | /m/ (pause) /oo/ |
| talk | /t/ (pause) /ah/ (pause) /k/ |
| rip | /r/ (pause) /i/ (pause) /p/ |

Segmenting also involves separating a sentence into its individual words.

Begin with:

- i. segmenting sentences into individual words and
- ii. segmenting words into their syllables.
- iii. segmenting a word into its **onset** and **rime**; meaning, separating the word into two parts—its initial sound (onset) and its final part (rime). In the word *tap*, /t/ is the onset and /ap/ is the rime.
segmenting individual phonemes (sounds) in a word. When segmenting sounds, pause one second between each sound, for example,
/p/ /a/ /n/.
/c/ /a/ /n/
- iv. To highlight the sounds as you segment them, extend all the sounds except stop sounds, for example, /p/ /aaa/ /nnn/.

Blending is the contrary of segmenting. It involves *merging* the individual sounds to say a whole word. For example, /mmm/ /aaa/ /t/ is blended to make *mat*.

Blending Syllables

The teacher says parts of a word. Learners say the whole word. The teachers should pause for one second between each syllable.

| Syllables | Word |
|----------------|----------------|
| oc/to/pus | <i>Octopus</i> |
| /mmm//aaa/ /p/ | Map |
| /ttt//aaa/p/ | Tap |

Blending Onset and Rime

/p/ /ig/ can be blended to *pig*.

/d/ /uck/ is *Duck*. **ips for Teaching**

Blending Phonemes

The teacher should separate the word into its Phonemes or sounds.

sounds: /r/ /a/ /n/ is *Ran*.

/r/ / ɪ / /d/ is *Ride*.

Segmenting Syllables

mon/key

Sat/ur/day.

Segmenting Onset and Rime

Hand is segmented as /h/ /and/.

Segmenting Phonemes

fish: /f/ /i/ /sh/.

cake is /k/ /a/ /k/

888888

3.8. Phonemic Substitution (Manipulating Phonemes (Sounds))

Phonemic Substitution happens when one substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word. It is synonymous with Manipulating sounds; which requires the child to replace sounds in words with other sounds to create new words. It involves: manipulating initial sounds, then final sounds, and finally, medial sounds. Manipulating sounds is more difficult hence it usually begins in mid-grade one.

i. Manipulating Initial Sounds

One can make a new word from the word *pan* if they change the /p/ at the beginning of *pan* to /m/. It becomes *man*. More illustrations are as follows.

| Word | Replace Initial Sound With | New Word |
|-------|----------------------------|----------|
| cat | /p/ | pat |
| pill | /h/ | hill |
| tin | /s/ | sin |
| man | /t/ | tan |
| liver | /r/ | river |
| car | /s/ | star |
| moo | /z/ | zoo |
| name | /g/ | game |
| lake | /t/ | take |
| pine | /f/ | fine |

ii. Manipulating Final Sounds

It involves making new words by changing the ending sound as presented.

| Word | Replace Final Sound With | New Word |
|------|--------------------------|----------|
| cat | /n/ | can |
| cat | /p/ | cap |
| boy | /t/ | toy |
| pine | /k/ | pink |
| man | /t/ | mat |
| shot | /p/ | shop |
| rap | /t/ | rat |

iii. Manipulating Medial Sounds

It involves making new words by changing the middle sound as summarised

| WORD | REPLACE MIDDLE SOUND WITH | NEW WORD |
|------|---------------------------|----------|
| sit | /e/ | set |
| pet | /i/ | pit |
| lit | /e/ | let |
| sin | /u/ | sun |
| hell | /i/ | hill |

4.0 Instructional Approaches that Facilitate Acquisition of Requisite Competencies

4.1 The Phonic Approach

The Instructional approach associated with phonological awareness strategies is the Phonic approach. It advocates for explicit instruction to facilitate acquisition of requisite competencies in developing reading ability among early graders. The Phonic approach enable learners to acquire: knowledge of sounding-out each Letter of the Alphabet, Spelling-Sound Relationships hence they begin practising reading by sounding-out each word they encounter.

4.1.1. knowledge of sounding-out each Letter of the Alphabet

Besides learning names of the letters of the alphabet, the phonic approach is used by learning sounds that correspond with the letters such as:

a, ba, ca, da, e, fa, ga, ha, i, ja, ka, la, ma, na, o, pa, ra, sa, ta, u, va, wa, ya, za

which is the equivalent of the letters of the alphabet: Aa, Bb, Cc, Dd, Ee, Ff, Gg, Hh, Ii, Jj, Kk, Ll, Mm, Nn, Oo, Pp, Qq, Rr, Ss, Tt, Uu, Vv, Ww, Xx, Yy, Zz.

Acquisition of knowledge in sounding-out each letter of the alphabet when reading is a predictor of reading success.

4.1.2. Spelling-Sound Relationships

Explicit instruction for learners to know spelling-sound relationships requires knowledge about the way words are written and spelled. Teachers should use strategies such as:

- ✳ Differentiating Rhyme
- ✳ producing Rhyme
- ✳ Isolating and Categorizing Sounds
- ✳ Differentiating Sounds
- ✳ Generating Sounds
- ✳ blending and Segmenting Syllables and Sounds
- ✳ Blending Syllables
- ✳ Blending Phonemes
- ✳ Segmenting Onset and Rime
- ✳ Segmenting Phonemes

The philosophy underlying the Phonics approach states that in order to learn to read, children require a great deal of explicit instruction in the rules of printed text to enable them to read the words exactly as they appear on the page. There is need to explicitly teach spelling-sound relationships. Practice being vital in learning to expedite behaviour change, learners should be presented with many words consistent with the Phonics rule to provide them with the opportunity to apply each of the mon a variety of words in the context of a passage. The objective of the language teacher at such a point is to empower the learner to acquire the reading skill of spelling-sound relationships and to apply the knowledge in sounding-out each word they encounter.

4.2 The Whole Language Approach

Language teachers could also use the Whole Language approach which advocates for the use of simple, predictable and repetitive texts by learners for comprehension, appreciation and love for reading. Beginning Learners insert and substitute words as they read but one needs to understand that the acquisition of literacy skills is a process. As long as the story still makes sense and the early grader has a clue of the message in the story, the insertion and substitution of words as they read is part of the process of learning the skill. The principle goal of this approach as discussed in the literature review is to foster a love for the act of reading authentic and connected text, and to maintain the process of reading instruction natural.

4.3 The Eclectic Approach

Language educators have different underlying philosophies concerning instructional approaches that should be used in developing reading abilities among early graders. Some advocate for a "balanced" approach – also referred to as the eclectic approach to reading instruction to get the best of each approach (Center, 2005). It involves using phonological awareness strategies to develop reading skills among learners first, then progress to the Whole Language approaches. The Phonics instruction ought to be explicit, then learners are given more chances to read simple authentic texts of their linguistic level. Lessons aligned to the eclectic approach ensure that learners benefit from the different approaches of developing literacy skills by balancing or mixing strategies from each.

5.0 Conclusion

Reading being one of the receptive skills of language, the user is passive and receives information through *listening* or *reading* hence the instructional strategies and approaches used to develop it should focus on the two ways learners acquire the skill. Early graders who may not know how to read and may be having limited vocabulary in the language if it is not their first language need explicit instruction to facilitate acquisition of the skill. The teaching of the skill should be well structured to start with phonological awareness strategies then progress to the Whole Language approach. The learner should be involved in activities such as: differentiating Rhyme, producing rhyme, isolating and categorizing sounds, differentiating sounds, generating sounds, blending and segmenting syllables and sounds, blending syllables, blending phonemes, segmenting phonemes, onset and rime. The teacher should know when to introduce decodable texts to learners to encourage comprehension and appreciation of texts. Using the eclectic approach to reading instruction facilitate learners to get the best of each approach.

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