

PERSPECTIVE ON READING AND WRITING: STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF READERS IN POST MILLENNIUM NIGERIA

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Abstract

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. It is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and sharing information and ideas. Like all languages, it is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude and language community which is culturally and socially situated. To this end, this paper addresses the strategies for supporting the development of readers as well as providing helping feedback to language learners.

Introduction

Reading is probably one of the most researched topics in education and the primary focus of instruction at the elementary levels. There are many theories of reading and different reading programmes (Chall, 1967; Pearson, 1984; Singer & Ruddell, 1976). The topic of reading is of great social importance because it pertains to the issues of literacy and intelligence. According to Nunan (1991), reading is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalent in the quest for making sense of the text. He referred to this process as the 'bottom-up' view of reading.

Block (1992), opined that there is now no more debate on "whether reading is a bottom-up, language based process or a top-down, knowledge-based process". It is also no more problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both L1 and L2 readers. But, that modern research has gone even further to define the control readers execute on their ability to understand a text.

Based on the foregoing, it is evidently clear that reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to derive

meaning. Therefore, as educators we need to have an understanding of the theories behind reading comprehension as well as a working knowledge of some important strategies that can be used in the classroom to increase reading comprehension. To this end, this paper addresses the strategies for supporting the development of readers as well as providing helping feedback to language learners.

Strategies for Supporting the Development of Readers

Katims (1997) stated that learning strategies are techniques or routines that enable students to learn to solve problems and complete tasks independently. In other words, a strategy is an individual's approach to a task. Language instructors are often frustrated by the fact that students do not automatically transfer the strategies they use when reading in their native language to reading in a language they are learning. Instead, they seem to think reading means starting at the beginning and going word by word, stopping to look every unknown vocabulary item, until they reach the end. When they do this, students are

relying exclusively on their linguistic knowledge, bottom-up strategy.

One of the most important functions of the language instructor, then, is to help students move past this idea and use top-bottom strategies as they do in their native language. According to Brown (2007), strategies that can help students read more quickly and affectively included: previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, guessing from context and paraphrasing.

Instructors can help students learn when and how to use reading strategies in several ways. By modeling the strategies aloud, talking through the processes of previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, and paraphrasing. This shows students how the strategies work and how much they can know about a text before they begin to read word by word.

- By allowing time in class for group and individual previewing and predictive activities as preparation for in-class or out-of-class reading. Allocating class time to these activities indicates their importance and value.

- By using vocabulary items. This helps students learn to guess meaning from context.

- By encouraging students to talk about what strategies they think will help them approach a reading assignment, and then talking about reading about what strategies they actually used. This helps students develop flexibility in their choice of strategies.

When language learners use reading strategies, they find that they can control the reading experience, and they gain confidence in their ability to read the language.

Reading to Learn

Reading is an essential part of language instruction at every level because it

supports learning in multiple ways. - Reading to learn the language

- Reading for content information
- Reading for cultural knowledge and awareness

When reading to learn, students need to follow four basic steps:

1. Figure out the purpose for reading
2. Attend to the parts of the text that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest.
3. Select strategies that are appropriate to the reading task and use them flexibly and interactively.
4. Check comprehension while reading and where the reading task

Teaching for Understanding with Introductory Texts

Introductory texts often serve as the first exposure to subjects. If a solid foundation is not created through mastery of the general principles of study field, the entire structure may be weakened. Hence, the introductory course has been the subject of extensive ongoing examination.

English language learners have great difficulty jumping into new texts without any background support. Students should know at least something about the topic before reading. Some topics may be unfamiliar to students. Students need to know at least 90 to 95% of the words they read if they are going to comprehend the text. Therefore, it is important to use several strategies to build background knowledge that leads to better reading comprehension.

Pre-reading Strategies to Increase Comprehension

1. Do motivating activities

guided reading is an effective tool to achieve higher level comprehension and learning objectives.

2. Build text-specific knowledge
 3. Pre-teach vocabulary
 4. Pre-teach concepts
- Remediation: Use primarily guided reading in the remediation stage. The guidance is critical to extinguish
5. Predicting and direction setting
 6. Suggest comprehension strategies

Selecting and using appropriate Materials Daily reading is critical. Students should read a minimum of 20 – 30 minutes every day. In general, the student should read appropriate level material. Obviously, ‘appropriate’ is a relative term and the students reading level will change and advance as the students grow older and as their skills advance. The level of material also varies depending if they are reading alone or reading out loud with feedback. To determine if a book is level appropriate for a child or to select text that matches a student’s reading level you need to consider several interacting factors. The general guidelines to consider include the following three factors:

1. Students Age or Stage of Reading Development

- Beginning Reading Level: Primarily guided reading. It is important to use decodable text in the reading/learning stages.
- Intermediate Level: Use a combination of independent reading to practice known skills and guided reading to help the student develop new and advanced skills. Practice with independent reading is important to improve proficiency and build fluency. Guided

reading is important in learning how to handle multi syllable words, expand vocabulary and develop comprehension skills.

- Advanced Level: Use primarily independent silent reading. Although improper techniques and build correct skills use decodable text in early remediation stage and then move to guided oral reading to develop intermediate advanced skills.

2. The Reading Situation (Oral guided reading or independent silent reading)

- Guided reading is ideal to acquiring and developing new skills. Guided reading is particularly important in the beginning and remediation state. guided reading is also important in developing advanced skills in intermediate readers.

- Independent silent reading is ideal for practice and improving proficiency of existing skills. Independent reading is important in the intermediate and advanced reading stages.

3. Level of Book/Reading material. Determining appropriate level books for reading development

Evaluate the actual level of the words/text found in the reading material. This includes factor such as word structure, decidability, vocabulary, number of multi-syllable words, sentence length and structure, grammar and complexity. In beginning reading it is critical to select decodable text. To determine if a book is decodable, evaluate the phonemic code used in the text and compare it to your child’s code knowledge. Remember to evaluate the text carefully! Do not rely on the grade level rating printed on the book.

The following simple rules of thumb can be used to help you determine if a book is the appropriate reading level for a particular student at a certain time and situation.

Independent Level: This is material the student can read with few errors. If the student is making only a few errors on a page the material is at the independent level. This 'easy' or independent level is ideal for silent reading.

Instructional Level: The learning level material is where the students read with some errors challenges and skills building. If the student is making four or more errors per page the material is considered instructional level and should be read to an adult guided reading material. This instructional or learning level is ideal for guided reading so you can help the student develop skills.

Frustration Level: This is where the material is too hard. The student makes frequent errors in every paragraph. The reading level is really too advanced for the student. It is best to avoid frustration level material by finding another book. If frustration material must be read, it should be read as guided reading with assistance.

Modeling Reading Strategies and Practices

The Read-Aloud: A Multipurpose Teaching Strategy

To accomplish the shift from reading one book to all students to using multiple texts, the read aloud is used as a common teaching text. Reading-aloud is used to model how strategies work and also to develop the student's listening skills. Reading-aloud is important for all middle and high school learners, because it shows them what happens in the mind and it is emotional centred. For instance, when struggling readers are asked what goes on inside their minds when they read, the response is unanimous. Each time you model how

reading strategies works, it becomes an opportunity to show students what happens inside your mind when reading is enjoyable. One of the most powerful strategies for supporting the development of mental pictures and connections is visualizing. And when you include as many of the five senses as you can – seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, you enrich visualizations by building connections with past experiences and the emotions surrounding them.

Before Students Read

Reading starts before opening a text and getting students ready to read is as important for them as it is for the teacher. When students share with a partner and then with the entire class, preparation can enlarge background knowledge and introduce vocabulary. At this point, student responses let the instructors know whether they have enough background information to proceed with the reading. If not, take some time to build students' prior knowledge by using picture, photographs and video clips. The more students know about a topic, the better their recall and understanding. Moreover, increased comprehension enables students to use the facts and details in a text to analyze information and build new understandings.

During Reading

This is the time to pause and think aloud and show how you can use your senses to visualize and build comprehension. Too often, we teachers wait to build students' understanding after reading. This process should start during reading.

After Reading

This is time for reflection, which aids, recalls, and the skill of making connections, and can include discussion, writing,

drawing, etc. It's also the appropriate time for students to apply what they have learnt to other texts.

Prompting Coaching Students during Oral Reading

Oral comprehension skills, in working with both vocabulary and text, provide an important support in helping students from transition to the written word. The state-oral reading comprehension can be effective for addressing the primary goals of kindergarten and early elementary literacy. When employed correctly, it can also serve as a useful scaffold in this case, an intervention that focuses on the transitional needs of students as they move toward full engagement with the written word.

The following coaching tips can help to make this stage more productive for the young learners, and help to establish a firm base for future development of reading comprehension skills.

1. Read aloud with shared books

Engage in read-aloud sessions where students take turns reading from a story book, or other text selections. These sessions also have an excellent opportunity for a parent or teacher to read aloud to students. Building it into your session. Often we hear this referred to as interactive reading, and it provides a direct avenue for developing student understands of the concept of "word" and "letter" (Holdaway, 1979; Snow & Tabors, 1993), and syntax and style (Bus, Van & Pellegrini (1995, Feitelson, Goldstein, Iragi and Share, 1993), as well as motivation to read.

2. Use a Variety of Book Types

Keep as many books directly available to students as possible at all time. Research has indicated that the simple availability is a catalyst for developing children's literacy but their true impact depends heavily on how parents and teachers use

them. Several types of books help support our efforts to help children make the oral reading comprehension connection, and ease our early forays into helping our children learn to read and understand what they read.

3. Teach Active Listening

Listening has been referred to as the "act of understanding speech. (Harris & Hodges, 1995) Teaching students how to listen to a nice accomplishment to any read-aloud scenario, and use of strategies to promote student's ability to listening has been shown to be particularly effective for improving reading comprehension (Boodt, 1984; Sippola, 1988). Though they work together well, and both are effective, listening for meaning has actually produced better sentence recall than emphasis on accurate oral reading per se (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). One reason for this is that listening instruction focuses interest on the material being read, and interest has been shown to be more of a factor in sentence recall than readability. During instruction, work with students to take turns describing what they have heard, comparing this with other students and answering questions about the text help pave the way by presenting certain features or aspects of a story that you would like students to listen to, in advance of reading the story aloud.

Teaching the Use of a Flexible Range of Independent Strategies

The following independent strategies can be used by the teacher to support reading.

1. First Language Skills Transfer

Reading strategies can be transferred from one language to another. Supporting pupils to continue (or start) reading in the first-language can be beneficial as the reading strategies the child learns such as developing an understanding of genre or

knowledge of beginning, middle and endings and sequencing of stories can be transferred when English is learnt.

2. Reading for Pleasure

A child that is developing a personal love for literature is a child that will read more.

The amount of time spent reading significantly impacts reading progress. Once the basic strategies are mastered you will want to encourage children's personal love of books. Things to conserved include: providing access to a wide variety of relevant and exciting texts-both fiction and non-fiction, talking with the pupils about their reading, providing opportunities for them to share opinions about what they have read (not the dull 'book review') but in exciting ways such as book adverts or 'hot seating' author interviews and thirdly enlisting parents in supporting the development of daily reading times at home to build up a secure habit.

3. Experiences Bring Reading to Life

If pupils do not understand the context of the text, they will not have full grasp of the meaning although they read the text accurately. Errors in interpretation are common when learning a language and

English is full of subtle nuances, figurative language and idioms. Discussion before reading a text can illuminate new contexts, and allow pupils to see how it relates to their own experiences.

4. Talk to Contextualize Content

In order to make reading accessible, the teacher needs to analyze the text before introducing it to the pupils to identify any unusual vocabulary, hidden nuances and abstract concepts.

The teacher can then illuminate these aspects through a lively and interesting discussion prior to the pupils beginning the text. When the pupils then encounter these aspects in the text, they understand them and are able to enjoy the text at a deeper level. Drama activities can support comprehension of the text during or after reading.

Attending to specific needs of Students

Learning English as a Second Language In an ESL classroom, English Language proficiency and academic experience among students can vary greatly. In order to help every student, improve teachers have to understand every individual student's level of language proficiency and educational history. The best way to make less comprehensible to all students is to replace difficult text with simpler terms. They should not use oversimplified vocabulary because some students may find this insulting. It is important for ESL teachers to establish a more personal relationship with every student and their family. Simple actions such as pronouncing the student's name correctly and showing interest in their cultures will go a long way in giving students a more pleasant learning experience.

Regardless of what may choose as their approach to teaching, teachers should be sure to provide structure in the form of clear directions and to communicate with students individually.

In order to meet the specific needs of students learning English as a second language the teacher should:

i. Reduce the Language Load: This is by rewriting difficult texts using simpler terms or at least explain the original language simple. They can

also break up complex sentences to smaller sentences.

ii. Reduce the Cognitive Load:

One very important step teachers can take is to make every effort to reduce the “cognitive load” of the lessons they teach. The key is to choose activities and assignments that allow students to draw on their prior knowledge and life experiences.

iii. Evaluating teaching strategies and approaches:

Teacher also need to pay attention to how they run their classrooms. Some students may have difficulty coping with the styles of classroom management that the teacher has chosen.

iv. Reduce the Cultural Load:

Lightening the “cultural load” on immigrant students can make learning a more positive experience for them.

Expanding and Affirming Students’ First and Second Languages

Studies have provided dramatic new insights into how young children acquire language, and how this affects their brain development. There are many problems that can face a child whose mother tongue is different from the language of the school. He often tends to think in his mother tongue while expressing himself in the second language. This usually encourages rote learning and so impairs understanding.

Distinction between the Mother Tongue, the First and the Second Languages The mother tongue is the language of the home, i.e. the native language, while the first language is the language of the immediate environment or community. A language is a second language when it is chosen as the official language of a people who have other languages. In several countries of African including Nigeria, it is the official language, the language of government, education, administration and general national and international transactions.

Providing Helpful Feedback to Language Learners

Providing feedback throughout lessons is important. It is something that will become second nature with just a little bit of practice. Feedback should be used to encourage students to work hard and indicate what they need to focus on when they are having difficulty.

Correcting students’ errors is an important aspect of teaching in ESL classrooms. Although “error” is known to be a negative concept that should be avoided, it also has a positive connotation as it is considered as evidence that the learning process is taking place. Errors provide teachers with feedback to let them know the effectiveness of their teaching and to let them know whether to spend time on a specific item or go on with a new one.

The difference between Error and Mistake

Generally, the word “error” and “mistake” are considered to be synonyms, but Penny (2012) made a difference between these terms. Errors are consistent and based on “mis-learned” generalizations however; mistakes are occasional, inconsistent slips.

According to Brown (2007), “an error ... reflects the competence of the learner”. While “mistakes can be self-corrected, an error cannot be self-corrected”. Students’ errors are inevitable part of their learning process and need to be treated as a teachable moment”.

Types of Errors

According to Chomsky (1964), there are two types of errors; he calls the first, “performance error” which is the actual use of language in a concrete situation and the second “competence error” which is “the

speaker-learner's knowledge of his language.

How to correct Errors that Interfere with Comprehension

Correction helps students clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of the language. The teachers should be concerned about how to choose the right method correct students as one way may be appropriate for one student but not appropriate for another.

In a study "Teacher development through peer observation", Jack & Charles provided different correction strategies when giving feedback on form and on content.

Teachers use different methods according to the type of students, the age of the student, his level of study and the type of error.

Some of the most effective error correcting techniques are listed below:

- When hearing an error, speak the corrected statement
- Listen for errors and make a general review of them at the end of the activity segment
- Encourage peer correction
- Correct the student personally

- Using gestures to indicate that an error had been made.

Helping students choose texts that are age and proficiency appropriate: In order to meet the varying needs of students as they learn to read, we need a variety of types of texts.

Teaching children to read is both exciting and challenging. It is exciting because the gratification that comes from seeing a beginning reader pick up a book and read on his/her own is like no other experience a teacher can have.

Teaching reading is challenging because there is so much knowledge that we have gained over the decades and known how to use this knowledge becomes critical. Teaching reading is challenging because it is controversial, especially at the beginning levels of instruction. Much of the controversy about beginning reading has focused around phonics and decoding and how these jobs of reading should be taught. Teaching reading is challenging because even with all the knowledge we have, there are still many questions that we are unable to answer.

The use of different types of texts is most significant at the beginning levels of reading.

Type	Description	Major use
Wordless books	Text composed only of illustrations or photographs. No print is given	A way to help children develop a concept of themselves as readers, develop oral language and develop self expression
Predictable texts	Texts that utilize a repeated pattern of some type. May be authentic literature or created text	Used as way to introduce children to reading through shared reading and to provide practice through repeated readings
Controlled high-frequency vocabulary texts	Text written specifically for beginning reading instruction using core of high frequency	Provide practice in reading high-frequency words

	words that have been carefully introduced	
Decodable texts	Text written using words that utilize decoding skills students have been taught	Provide practice and application of phonics and structural skills that have been taught
Authentic literature	Stories and informational texts where no attempts have been made to control the words, patterns, or decoding elements used in the text. The text is in the original form written by the author	Used for practice and application of reading once students have developed beginning decoding skills. Also used for shared reading and read aloud.
Created, easy-to-read texts	Stories and informational texts that have been written to control the level of difficulty and some aspect of skill application	Used for practice and application of reading skills for students who may be experiencing difficulty in certain aspects of learning to read or need practice in applying a target skill or strategy.

Conclusion

Reading is an essential part of language instruction at every level because it supports learning in multiple ways. By modeling the strategies aloud, talking through the processes of previewing, predating, skimming, scanning, and paraphrasing, students are shown how the strategies work and how much they can know about a text before they began to read word by word.

Once the basic strategies are mastered children's personal love of books should be encouraged through the provision of access to a wide variety of relevant and exciting texts both fiction and non-fiction, talking with the pupils about their reading, providing opportunities for them to share opinions about what they have read and parents developing daily reading times at home to build up a secure habit.

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