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DEVELOPING ORACY SKILLS THROUGH THE TEACHING OF READING AND WRITING FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The paper discusses how the oral aspect of language learning can be developed and improved upon through the teaching of reading and writing. The materials used for this study were gathered from articles, e-books and websites related materials. The descriptive approach has been used to highlight the issues. The paper contends that there is a relationship between oral, reading and writing skills that enhances oracy skills through a wide range of reading and writing activities. Therefore, if the oracy skill is developed, other language skills will be enhanced. The paper further argues that through developing oracy skills, the learner's confidence is consolidated in the ability to listen, comprehend, express one self and ignite ideas that would be printed out in writing. The paper concludes that, the oral aspect of the language learning skills can be enhanced in the teaching of reading and writing through activities like listening, speaking, discussing, re-telling, reading and writing about a variety of ideas and thoughts for language development.

Keywords: Oracy skills, reading, writing

Introduction

Over the years, there has been a neglect on teaching oracy skills which comprises listening and speaking.

The assumption is that learners will learn the skills spontaneously as they learn the literacy aspect of the language which are reading and writing. It is worthy of note that oracy skills are the basis where young children come in contact with it by listening to adults and imitating the sounds, tones and rhythms they make (Berk, 2012). Consequently, researches have indicated that children who interact with a rich variety of linguistic elements distinguished themselves from their counterpart in terms of spoken language (Leung & Pikulski, 1990).

Though, the teaching of the four language skills is interrelated, attention has to be given to the way oracy skills are being taught. It is expected that language teachers should devote ample time and activities such that when one language skill is taught, the other skills are enhanced.

This paper reveals how oral dimension in language can be developed and improved through the teaching of reading and writing. Learners should be told about the relationship between oral, reading and writing skills. The teacher should expose learners to a wide range of reading and writing activities which will also help in developing oracy skills. Activities like listening to one another as they read, talk about what is read, reading and writing in a repeated circle. This will further consolidate the learners' confidence in listening ability, comprehension, self expression and provoke ideas that would be printed out in writing.

Concept of Oracy

The term oracy refers to the skills associated with speaking and listening. Oracy as a word was coined by Andrew Wilkinson an educator and researcher, and his team at the School of Birmingham University in 1965 to draw attention to the neglect of oral skills in education. Prior to this period, listening and speaking skills were given less attention and in some cases totally neglected, while more focus was on developing reading and writing skills which were referred to as literacy skills. Yet, oracy is as important as literacy. They are interrelated. According to Wilkinson (1970), "oracy and literacy move in and out of one another". That is, in a bid to teach one skill, the others are enhanced. Ability to read begins with adequate oral language foundation (Oyetunde, 2009). In fact, oral language competence enables learners/beginners to read and write in a target language in a meaningful way.

Oracy is also defined by Wilkinson (1970) as the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated (p. 74).

In a nutshell, oracy can be considered as an act of self expression that springs from self thought communicated with fluency and accuracy.

The Importance of Teaching Oracy

The importance of oracy cannot be over-emphasized due to the role it plays in the lives of learners.

Teaching oracy helps learners to:

- Communication their thoughts and ideas clearly, that is, ideas that spring from thoughts and experiences aid interactions with the environment through books, peers, teachers, pictures, etc.
- Build confidence in the learner to express himself/herself orally by engaging in exercises like debates, retelling stories, discussions, answering and asking questions.
- Develop critical thinking in the learner. This is encouraged by asking students thought provoking questions, discussion topics, etc. It helps them to reason, formulate ideas, pose hypotheses, and exchange ideas.
- Serve as a springboard for developing reading and writing skills. This is the ability to read other people's thoughts and ideas and to also communicate such in writing.
- Improve communicative accuracy in speech and writing. This implies that frequent engagement of language learners in oral and written exercises such as dialogue, role playing discussion, idea generation exercises make their communication accurate.

How to Develop Oracy Skills through Reading

Reading is the ability to obtain information from print, that is, the ability to make sense of the content of what is read (Oyetunde, 2009). This definition emphasizes information acquisition as the prime of reading.

To Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt and Kami (2003), reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought, consisting of two related processes: word recognition which refers to perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language and comprehension which is making sense of words, sentences in connected text.

Researches have shown that as one endeavours to develop one of the language skills, the others are also developed spontaneously. The activities that take place in reading is mostly talking about pictures, reading a given passage and expressing one's ideas regarding a text as others listen, ask and answer questions

(Karweit & WASik, 1996). By this, one deduce the fact that not only one skill is developed but a couple of skills. For example as a learner reads aloud, oracy skill is also developed by both listening and speaking.

Due to the interrelatedness of the language skills, oral dimensions or skills can be developed through the teaching of reading. Take for example, what obtains in a reading class at the basic level is having the learners talk about pictures, involve in active participation in reading, retell a story and discuss favourite actors and actions from the passage. This way, the confidence of expression which is one of oracy skills is developed.

In a related development, Hardma in Miller and Menzies (2017) posit that talk is the most powerful tool of communication in the classroom and that it is fundamentally central to the act of teaching and learning, so, it is with the reading class. Talk determines whether or not a learner comprehends what he or she has read by responding to either literal or inferential questions about a task. This makes it mandatory that the language teacher employs severally, reading activities and strategies that will enhance reading skills as these will also develop proficiency in oracy skills. Some of these reading skills as identified by Adams (1990) include:

reading skills as identified by Adams (1990) include:

- * reading aloud fluently and clearly;
- * reading and understanding various texts;
- * respond appropriately to what has been read;
- * reading and understanding subject vocabulary;
- * handling information from various sources with confidence;
- * understanding the purpose and viewpoint of an author and reading in order to discuss and write.

To achieve these skills in learners, studies have shown that second language learners in English need a strong basis to achieve proficiency in the language (Cumming, 1999). This makes it pertinent that the language teacher develops in the children's early years, instruction in phonemic awareness as this has been proven to improve both reading and oracy skills (Marshall, 2015). This phonemic principle will indicate the

distinct sounds of the letters, one from another, in a drill or puzzle which is fundamental and an established predictor for both reading and speaking proficiency.

Furthermore, learners are guided to blend two or more sounds to associate meaning with prints. At this juncture, word recognition process becomes more automatic, paving ways for learners to give attention to higher level process of comprehension, comparing their everyday experiences with those from the text thereby becoming more exposed to a variety of print experiences, self expression and confidence (Morrow, 1990). When learners are able to read and comprehend, reading becomes rewarding and enjoyable such that learners can retell, share ideas, discuss the text, compare and contrast their own experiences with those in the text, they will improve on their fluency and accuracy which is often the hallmark of reading.

This is why the language teacher owes it as a duty to engage the learners in reading strategies that will develop their reading proficiency as well as enhance their oral dimension. These strategies according to Pearson (2016) are:

- * identifying the topic
- * predicting and guessing
- * reading for general understanding
- * reading for specific understanding
- * reading for detail and interpreting or making inferences.

Developing Oracy through Reading at Higher Level

At this level, activities that would help learners improve their reading proficiency as identified by George (2014) include:

- * reading comprehension
- * interpretation
- * vocabulary development
- * determining the purpose of the author's writing
- * asking and answering higher level questions.

Similarly, Enighe, Makse, Akubo and Owolabi (2015) enumerated the following reading activities that can as well enhance fluency oracy to include:

- * Activating prior knowledge by allowing students make prediction about a passage using picture clues.
- * Making inferences – this is done by answering questions orally after reading a text or listening to a story to ascertain the learners' level of understanding.
- * Using knowledge of text structures – this activity demands that students re-generate the setting or plot of an already read text for the purpose of consolidation and over learning.
- * Visualizing – this activity entails that students create impressions about what they have read and other members of the class or group interpret the meaning of the impression.
- * Generating and answering questions – these skills evoke critical and analytic thinking in the learners as well as the power of self expression, fluency and confidence in oral dimensions.

Developing Oracy through Writing

Writing which is a productive skill is the least of the four of the language skills a child acquires. It has been noted that as the child interacts with adults, he or she begins to produce sounds, attach meaning to words and acquires a substantial knowledge of the language. As he or she continues to learn, his or her fluency and automaticity in oracy is consolidated. Invariably, it is not so common with the writing skill (Gaal & Biele, 2012).

Writing as defined in its simple terms is an act of transmitting knowledge in print (Oyetunde, 2003). It is also the ability of one to communicate or express ideas in prints. The acquisition of writing is conceptualized as a developmental continuum that springs from the preceding language skills, listening speaking and reading. These are tools used to communicate ideas, thoughts and opinions. A child's regular interaction with prints and linguistic elements through listening, speaking, and reading is a great predictor that his or her writing skill will be substantial. In the same vein, a child whose writing is substantial

exhibits high sense of oracy and wide range of reading in consonance with the fact that the language skills overlap.

Learners' ability to write meaningfully does not develop naturally (NAEYC, 2012). The language teacher is solely saddled with the responsibility of carefully planning instruction in writing. Since writing is technical, a proper instruction in letter of the alphabet or phonemes is fundamental to writing skills. Learners should be taught to use the letters or phonemes to spell words correctly at the basic level. Several researches have proved that learners who are taught reading using phonics tend to be encouraged to spell words, though, not correctly, sometimes, they are motivated and will overcome the problem in later years (Clarke, 1988).

Classroom activities that allow learners use ideas from a reader and comprehend text will evoke the learners' thoughts and subsequently write what they think or feel about a passage they have read and at the same time express their ideas in class. This way, their confidence is built. Learners can be given pictures at the basic level that will guide their writing after talking or speaking about the pictures. Stories can also enhance learners' writing skills. Learners can listen or tell a story and later asks to write what they feel about the story. During this novice age, children should be encouraged to understand that writing is not only correct spelling or handwriting exercise, but that their own words and ideas are used to compose a message that can be communicated to others (Dyson, 1998). Thus, it can never be overemphasized that, a wide exposure to linguistic awareness, through print awareness, listening to stories, speaking in a group, reading and writing, allow children to enjoy the power of the association of the language skills, viz: listening, speaking, reading and writing, which researches have shown to be indices of lifelong achievements.

Developing Oracy Skills through Writing at Higher Level

At the higher level of learning, writing skills include brainstorming, organizing ideas, structuring and paragraphing. The learners at this level are encouraged to see that their work is independent of itself just like any other writing.

The language teacher therefore, should work hard to activate the learners' prior knowledge. This can be done by engaging the learners to talk about topics of their interest, argue for or against certain ideas and subsequently put down the ideas and thoughts in writing. The language teacher can split the class into groups and ask the groups to discuss on a given topic, for example 'transportation'. The different groups discuss different aspects of transportation and one of the members reports back to the whole class for further exercise and later write down what they feel is an ideal transportation, their responses are then both oral and written (Wilkinson, 1970).

However, the language teacher should always bear in mind that the type of writing and comprehension determines what activities to engage the learners in. Students should be guided to understand that when they argue for or against certain topics of interest in writing, such writings are referred to as argumentative.

Writings that express stages in developing certain art, for example, how to make a clay pot are called expository. The writings that describe events, people or places are known as descriptive. A narrative writing recounts incidences or stories. The learners should always be exposed to rich vocabulary background, correct spellings and punctuation exercises so as to come up with a meaningful and intelligible write up (Oyetunde, 1999).

Conclusion

The ability for the learners to listen attentively, speak fluently, read with understanding and write out their thoughts and ideas in a meaningful manner is vital in academic and social life. Therefore, it is clear that the oral dimension can be enhanced in the teaching of reading and writing through activities like listening, speaking, discussing, retelling, reading and writing about a variety of ideas and thoughts for language

development. When teachers expose learners to these activities during instruction in the classroom, it will surely help in developing oracy skills.

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