

WHAT MATTERS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE EARLY YEARS: EXPLORING TEACHER'S VIABLE STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND LITERACY SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

A literacy-rich environment – full of print, word walls, books, and reading materials – not only helps academic progress, but also encourages and supports speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a variety of genuine ways – through print and digital media. Meaning and uses of literacy in the home, school and community are also numerous and diverse. The case study aimed to investigate some viable strategies for promoting children's language development and literacy. The case study was conducted in a primary school situated in Scotland, United Kingdom. One primary school teacher participated in the study. In this case study, the teacher was comprehensively interviewed using face-to-face semi-structured interview. The thematic analysis enabled the researchers to identify, analyse and report on themes that emerged from the qualitative interview data. Analysis of the interview data indicated that there are three main themes concerning feasible approaches in facilitating children's language development and literacy: signs/labels, visual timetable, and reading scheme. Given the burgeoning ability of primary school children, practical implications are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Literacy Skills of Children/Supporting Children's Literacy Skills

According to UNESCO (2021), literacy is broadly defined as the capacity to read and write by demonstrating comprehension of a brief basic statement about daily life. There are many types of texts that are suitable for young children, including spoken, written, and visual texts. Literacy is not limited to text; meaning is conveyed in a variety of ways. Parents should investigate a variety of rich literacy practices and representational materials that may be utilised at home to support and enhance young children's literacy development. All of these options enhance children's language and literacy abilities and enable even higher expectations to be placed on interactions with printed books.

Many language instructors seem to rely heavily on printed materials. Seeing print teaches young children to recognise the variety of shapes it takes. Printed texts are critical in assisting children in developing and/or expanding their print awareness. Children's book reading sessions are one potentially important resource for vocabulary development. Book reading sessions were shown to be more lexically varied, and therefore to have substantial correlational and causal effects on children's vocabulary growth (Logan, J. et al., 2019).

What Have Previous Studies Said About Children's Language And Literacy Development?

Technology-enhanced multimodal literacy activities can make literacy more relevant to young children (Kress, 2003; Mayer, 2005; Tschirner, 2010; Flewitt, Messer & Kucirkova; 2014).

According to Taylor and Leung (2020), literacy is multimodal for young children. This is due to the interaction of visual images, numbers, and signs with textual texts in preschool and kindergarten. Murray (2021) claimed that the global objective of strengthening the basis of literacy skills has begun to have an impact on young children. Despite several attempts by international non-

governmental organisations and national governments, global literacy objectives have not been fulfilled.

According to previous research, there are a variety of strategies that may be utilised to enhance children's language and literacy skills. In some studies, for example, children who were exposed to diverse reading materials or media and studying in an environment that included active parental engagement demonstrated a superior comprehension of components of phonology, letter knowledge, and vocabulary (Gibbons, 2009; Westlund, 2009). A similar research conducted by Ziolkowski and Goldstein (2008) on children with delayed language development found that with adequate help, the students may improve their communication skills and demonstrate language skills equivalent to their classmates.

Furthermore, according to Honig (2007), support from teachers and caregivers is important in influencing children's oral development. Because the social context is so important in the development of children's language skills, teachers and parents must be mindful of establishing a proper setting and atmosphere for children's learning. Brodin and Renblad (2019) and Sommer (2012) stated that social play, such as storytelling and reading aloud, is essential to aid children's literacy development.

CASE STUDY

The study is a qualitative case study. The case study contained qualitative data - the observations, teacher semi-structured interviews and field notes. The case study was conducted in a primary school located in one of 32 council areas of Scotland. Quotations from the data are presented in the chapter to evidence the teachers' feedback and response.

Procedures of Data Gathering

Certificate of Good Conduct

Before applying for the enhanced disclosure certificate, a Certificate of Good Conduct was requested and granted by the Malaysian High Commission in London.

Enhanced Disclosure

Young children were involved in this investigation (primary school children). As a result, the Enhanced Disclosure was first requested and then obtained in February 2013. An email with a replica of the enhanced disclosure certificate was received.

Universities Research Ethics

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) evaluated and approved the research design, suggesting that there were no ethical issues concerning the study's consequences for the participants.

Application to a City Council

A request to conduct research in the city was sent to the Local Authority's Education Department (designated as A Local Authority's Education Department). A project description was supplied, which included the nature of the research and intervention, the study's targeted subjects, the nature of the videos and additional materials for the intervention children, and, most importantly, the procedures. The local authorities then distributed the application to all of the state-run schools. Within three months of submitting the application, the Local Authority's Education Department notified the researcher that one Head Teacher from a primary school had responded and consented to engage in the study project and one Primary 1 teacher had agreed to participate in the study. Approval then was successfully obtained by the Local Authority's Education Department to conduct the research at one primary school.

1	•Certificate of Good Conduct
2	•Enhanced Disclosure
3	•Preparing Research Instrument: Interview Questions
4	•Approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
5	•Approval from the Education Department of City Council
6	•Contacting Participant
7	•Delivering briefing to Teacher
8	•Getting Teacher Consent
9	•Data Collection: Face-to-face Semi-Structured Interview

Figure 1. Procedures: Case Study

Other Ethical Considerations

Teacher Consent

Permission was received in writing from the school and the teacher that participated in this research. The study's context and the commitment needed of the school, particularly of teacher-participant, were well described. Additionally, the participant was told that he/she may withdraw from the research at any moment.

One problem that was carefully considered was how to preserve the identity of the participant while reporting the research. His/Her actions, ideas, identities, and connections are private and should not be made public. The data collecting methods were described in detail to the participant, including the process of audio or video recording of their activities. The participant was told that he/she had the right to request modifications to these processes in order to protect his/her privacy and meet his/her individual requirements.

Additionally, the teacher participant had the option of declining to participate in any session or refraining from answering any questions throughout the data collecting procedures. Any data gathered would be relevant to the research alone, and any data not pertinent to the study would be deleted.

FINDINGS

Teacher Feedback

The teacher interview yielded three (3) key themes about various possible approaches for the instructor to enhance children's language and literacy skills. They include: (i) signs/labels, (ii) visual timetable, and (iii) a reading scheme.

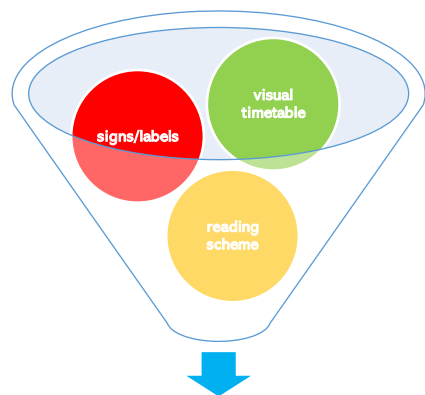


Figure 2. Promoting Children's Language and Literacy Skills

- (i) **Signs/ Labels**

Walking into the primary school classroom in Scotland, I noticed many things, such as the sinks, the bookshelves, and the wall, are labelled, either with images or text. This may appear unusual to some individuals, particularly international parents and children. Questions like "So, what's the deal with the labelling?" or "Is there any reason why five-year-olds require a "computer" sign/label to be connected to a desktop?" might arise.

It is also worth noting that signs/labels were utilised to assist children in picking up words without having to teach the children the terms, as seen in the answer below:

We're always promoting language and literacy skills in the school I mean you just need to look around the school for instance the signs. The signs are all over, the labelling we label everything so that they just pick up these words. Without having to teach them the words they know that says computer and that says door. (Teacher G)

We may broaden the discovery by considering the relevance of labelling. Labels were given in the form of text that described children's work on classroom displays. As evidenced by the following response:

When we put up displays in the classroom to display children's work we always have a piece of writing beside it. Sometimes I will write that out when the children are in class as is what we are going to write beside our picture. What will we write to tell people to come to look at our picture or whatever what will we write. (Teacher G)

With a little more effort, encouragement was given to the children to write a sign/label their picture before putting up their picture on the classroom wall. Handwritten signs/labels were favoured by Teacher G. The children could see Teacher G's writing the sign/label while she was doing it. As a result, Teacher G and the children would select what to write first. Then, Teacher G encouraged the children to copy the label, which they did and hung it up. It is now possible to observe the joy of children's own writing as signals of ownership and existence in the world.

If they had a firework picture up for instance, we have a sign. Let's say we have created this amazing firework picture or something like that. So I would probably write that with the children. I would have say 'Oh, we'll put up our picture now we are going to put up our sign. What will we write?'. And I will write it so they can see me writing it. Sometimes people do that on the computer, but it's actually nice for children to see handwritten. Things nowadays seems to be computer generated whereas in the classroom. It's nice for them to see for you to model the teacher to model nice writing and put it up or sometimes I get the children to get the sign. Once we decide what to write it out and I'll get a child to copy that and we'll put that up. So we're always promoting literacy. (Teacher G)

An activity chart, which was posted on the classroom wall, was also helpful. The children picked their activity from this chart, according to Teacher G. On the activity chart, labels such as 'painting', reading, 'computing,' and 'building' were made available. These labels were especially useful since the children learned these words by viewing the signs/labels on a regular basis without them sitting down and reading a book.

Even when they choosing the activities, they will choose from a chart on their wall that has play dough, construction. All these words they're picking up. They're not having them to read in a book. They're just picking them up by seeing them every day so just literacy is all around them in the school. (Teacher G)

The signs/labels had kept the children interested in looking about the classroom, especially as they walked from class to class. They were busy reading the signs/labels. These children generally made associations between the signs/labels and their own lives and experiences. Experiences with

signs/labels produced such fundamental literacy and language development as starting points or methods in, complications, challenges and satisfying endings.

Even when they move around different classes you see children when you go in to a different classroom they can't really concentrate on what they're supposed to be there for because they're all busy looking around. And they would say, 'No, this is different from my classroom. And look!'. You can see them reading. (Teacher G)

ii) Visual Timetable

Young children rapidly become aware of symbols and their meanings. Symbols are pictures that symbolise words or concepts and assist youngsters understand what words mean. Symbols are utilised in the early years to aid communication and literacy. It might be difficult for young children to recall complex spellings and the meanings of new large words at times. Children may be certain that they are using the correct term when these huge words are accompanied with symbols. Symbols assist many emergent readers bridge the gap between words and meaning. Children begin to associate symbols with meaning and understand the symbols around us meant to convey a message.

A visual timetable was another tool used by teachers in Scottish classrooms to enhance children's language and literacy skills from primary one to primary seven. Both words and symbols were used in this visual schedule. Children who can read were given words, while those who cannot read were given symbols. From primary one to primary seven, the same symbols were used in all classrooms. As a result, regardless of whether or not a child can read, he or she was included.

We have a daily timetable. It's a visual timetable as well as it has words on it. So it has symbols for children who can't read and it also has words for children who can read. And these are used from Primary 1 up to Primary 7. Same symbols are used throughout the school. So that every child's included even if he can't read but he can still follow the symbols. (Teacher G)

(ii) A Reading Scheme

Another viable option for promoting children's language development and literacy is the "Read Write Inc." reading programme, which is utilised in Scottish classrooms. Ruth Miskin established Read Write Inc. It offers a systematic approach to literacy instruction that includes phonics, writing, literacy and language skills, spelling, and intervention. This is used by schools in Scotland, and the programme matches the new Curriculum for Excellence.

Many children were aware of alphabets and/or phonics throughout their nursery experience in the early stages of literacy. Read Write Inc. had assisted these children in learning to read when they were in primary school. In the early years, each class used the same reading strategy. For this reading programme, all children switched classrooms. Teacher G informed:

Each class in early years we all have the same reading scheme. The children they move classes for Read Write Inc. on their learning to read. They all move classes. (Teacher G)

When the children were writing, they could always refer to the red words on the Read Write Inc. wall. Many children are aware of writing on the classroom wall and recognise the words.

These are the words that they're called red words the words that you can't sound out like the, you...So every class will have those on the wall...so they can see them when they're doing writing in other class. (Teacher G)

This reading method also emphasised power words in addition to red words. Children might actively participate in learning new words and create their own phrases using the power words. This can help them develop and broaden their vocabulary.

And we all have power words which are words that we promote like instead of them saying the dinosaur is big. The dinosaur is enormous. The dinosaur is gigantic. We call these power words and every teacher has them displayed in their room as well...It's really extending their vocabulary. (Teacher G)

DISCUSSION

It is critical to provide a 'literacy rich environment' in the home to assist a child's language development and literacy abilities. While some children can correctly write their names, others will scribble or pretend to write. All children should be provided with excellent opportunity to experience and experiment with many forms of early literacy. Children must be offered printed resources so they could have the opportunity to respond to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Outreach literacy programmes have the ability to teach parents the benefits of language development and literacy skills. Furthermore, because it gives community assistance to families, a collaborative community partnership may be beneficial in boosting children's reading abilities. Local public libraries, universities and colleges, recreational centres, and community centres, among others, might provide in-service and resource support to schools and communities. Family literacy evenings, library audio-visual nights, contributions, and materials or resources, for example, might all assist families in supporting their children's language and reading abilities. In addition, providing community support and implementing programmes may enhance parental participation and, as a result, their knowledge of their children's language and literacy abilities.

SUMMARY

Other possible strategies to boost children's language and literacy abilities were discovered during the teacher interview. Vygotsky's theory is validated using signs/labels, a visual schedule, and a reading scheme with the assistance of class teachers. In addition to emphasising the relevance of social-cultural settings in social interaction, Vygotsky emphasises the necessity of adult assistance in moulding children's literacy development because of interactions between them. It demonstrates that learning was facilitated by a skilled facilitator (e.g., a teacher) and specific materials and activities. Vygotsky believed that a skilful facilitator could structure children's thinking to go to the next level through scaffolding. The emergent readers can learn more when collaborating with teachers or more advanced children who have a more comprehensive range of skills and knowledge. Other studies have found that scaffolding can help children achieve their learning objectives more effectively than traditional techniques. (Nassaji & Cunnings, 2000; Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010; Zohreh & Farzaneh, 2014).

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