The Use of Children Literature in Literacy Development in Early Childhood, Pre-Primary and Primary Education

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Abstract
The paper examines the use of children literature in literacy development in early childhood, pre-primary and primary education. Naturally, when young children are growing from birth in their families, they acquire their mother tongue effortlessly. At this stage, they are developing a certain degree and level of literacy. That is, the sociocultural relationship in their environment before going to school for formal education. These early years of children's lives are very important because their experiences and backgrounds influence their future lives and during these crucial times of their lives, they acquire the fundamental foundations for the development of literacy. From this early stage of their lives, they learn to communicate with their environment by using spoken words and this develop the necessary skills for literacy acquisition. The focal point of this paper is to break down the meaning of literacy and children literature. The paper identifies some of the various components of children literature and identify how they can enhance the acquisition of literacy at this level. To achieve the purpose of this work, it examines with pragmatic examples some component such as: Story-telling, role playing method of children literature, reading for the children, learning by imitation, picture-kit, singing songs and rhymes, gamification and how they can be used to develop literacy.
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Introduction
The term "literacy" is continually evolving according to how the society changes. Traditionally and originally, literacy is seen as the ability to read and write, speak and listen effectively. Literacy

is a progression of skills which begins with the ability to understand spoken words, decode written words and finally processing the ability to graphically symbolise words on print (Comber, 2003). Once these skills are acquired, a person is said to have attain full language literacy. Other forms of literacy are built upon these skills that form the foundation of traditional or original forms of literacy. These other forms of literacy are emergence in nature; these are digital literacies (Hall & Smith, 2019).

According to Ukume et al (2013) digital literacy is an individual's ability to find, evaluate and compose clear information through various digital platforms, digital literacy is evaluated by an individual's grammar, composition, typing skills and ability to produce writings, images audio and designs using technology. Before now, digital literacy focused on digital skills and stand alone as computer. But with the introduction of internet and the use of social medial and other devices, some of the focuses have been shifted to mobile devices.

The implication of these definitions of literacy is that the emergence or digital literacy is built upon the original or traditional literacy. This means that the first or primary literacy development especially at the early childhood, pre-primary & primary level of education is the traditional literacy or primary literacy while the emergence or digital literacy is the secondary literacy. The knowledge of the traditional literacy is the foundation that is used to acquire and develop the emergence or digital literacy. Presumably, if the acquisition of the primary or traditional literacy is faulty, the acquisition of the emergence or digital literacy will be difficult (Lawan et al, 2023).

Digital literacy is also inclusive of the acquisition of various skills ranging from sawing, carpentry, bricklaying vulcanising, automobile repairs and so on. All these skills have their own measurement in numerical values and in alphabetical order. From the foregoing, the term literacy is not just the ability to read and write but the ability to understand something. In view of this, the concern of this paper is on the acquisition and development of primary literacy which has to do with reading and writing, speaking and listening at the early childhood stage using children literature as a tool.

Children Literature

Children literature is any work of arts that is aesthetically appealing to the sense of children. According to Givalou, as cited in Ako (2013), children literature is the set of aesthetically justified text that are able to contribute to children's entertainment and their spiritual cultivation. This is to the development of the capacity for the perception of beauty in maturation of personality and the free consciousness. So, children literature is an important tool use to improve listening skills, speaking skills or oral languages, reading comprehension and writing skills which are the basic requirements for literacy development.

In other words, children's literature refers to these types of books written specifically for young readers, typically children between age 3 – 10 years old. These books are designed to engage and entertain children, most times through stories, rhymes, pictures, illustrations etc. They can be fiction or non-fiction and cover a wide range of genres to model children into reasonable adult.

Gillen & Hall (2013) apart from the important of the children literature as a tool to acquired and develop literacy, it can also play an essential role in shaping the minds and imaginations of the children into the future. This is done by exposing young children to a wide range of stories with

themes that can inspire a long-life love for reading and learning. Themes that include friendship, family, identity, self-discovery and personal growth.

Some components of children literature and how they can enhance the development of literacy

Story telling with pictures as a tool to drive literacy

Comber (2003) says, children are involved with stories since their infant stages. Story telling is an excellent way to help learners develop language skills. Story books with pictures are the major materials in children literature. They are important not only in reading for pleasure but they help children in literacy development. The literally meaning of literacy development is not only decoding the words but reading with comprehension or understanding. When a teacher starts the class with letters of alphabet, children can decode the letters but cannot read with understanding of the story lines. As soon as the children are exposed to the pictures or images of what story they are reading, understanding becomes inevitable. In fact, children literature through stories is one of the best intervention strategy or pedagogy for literacy development among children. It brings with it a plethora of imagination. Story telling exposes young readers to the world of possibilities by engaging them with emotions, imaginations and adventures.

These stories can be stories of our local legends, myths, stories linked to a particular theme to teach a moral lesson, fables, religious stories and others stories to help in language acquisition. Story telling is a very old form of developing language literacy but today, we can combine it with the new technologies so that children can learn in a fun way and use modern technologies that are of great interest to them like cartoons. These can broaden their horizon and increase their level of reasonability where the end result is the development of literacy.

Role Playing Method of Children Literature as an Instructional Tool in Literacy Development

Role playing generally refers to the process of pretending to be someone or something else from your original being. It is the art of acting out a situation to learn, solve a problem or sometimes to create funs. It is basically a situation where someone act like another person in a make-up situation or story. Play is the most natural way of learning and expression for the child and therefore, almost all activities of literacy can be integrated into it. In these regards, the teacher could be teaching a fictional story with a good composition of characters and then assign roles of characters to the individual children, each of these children will begin to think in the direction of the roles assigned to them by solving the imaginative problems associated with the story. This will deepen understanding of the story. In this case, literacy development will be enhanced in children because each of them will assume the role of both listening, speaking, reading and writing according to the roles assign to them (Halliday, 2007).

Ogbor and Lamdi (2026) states that, role playing method of children literature in general enhances individual children's consciousness and organise mental structure while maintaining interest and enthusiasm for memory and learning. This is because when children are given the responsibility to play the roles of characters in a story, emotionally and mentally, they assume and maintain a higher level of majority and alertness to what they use to be. This is one of the best ways in developing literacy in children.

Reading for the Children

According to Ekpo (2021) children learn language (English) through interesting listening to literary text that correspond to patterns or language scripts they have formed before they go to school. Using listening to story as a vehicle, children can learn the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of the language. The short illustrations in the stories adapted to the children's receptive ability can help enrich the vocabulary of pre-school children and lead them to new fantastic and enjoyable situation which can encourage forms of communication.

Appleyard (1994) asserts that, reading storybooks for the children has a positive impact not only on children's early literacy and vocabulary developments but also supports other areas of development such as personal, socio-emotional and intellectual development by enabling children to learn new things about the new world. They can remember things they already know and relate their personal experiences to events or situation they encounter in books by reflecting their personal experiences and seeing others perfection to learn about their own experiences.

From time to time, it has been noticed that reading for children, particularly on the frequency of reading between parents and children, one of the important is in the acquisition of language skills. More so, it brings about the emergence of literacy skills considered necessary in the learning of the reading process.

Learning by Imitation

Imitation generally means copying someone else's style, action, behaviour, words, ways etc. learning by imitation thus implies that learners watch what others do and then copy from them. Imitation is key to life because it is through this medium, we acquire all the basic skills in life as job, culture, language traditions etc. and how they are passed down from one generation to another. According to Kaderavek et al. (2009), children acquire literacy skills by imitation. Furthermore, the source explained that, at pre-school age, children learn to read and write by what they watch adult readers doing. They externalise the corresponding behaviours and strategies such as when a child goes through the process of pretending to read everything in a familiar environment that is related to printed words or trying to write or imitating an adult and pretending to read a book which means that he or she has begun to experiment literacy by applying this knowledge. Another example could be when the child draws different lines and improvise letters. Sometimes with scribbles, sometimes with combination of letters and numbers, sometimes with random symbols. This is manifesting emergence of writing behaviours such as writing from top to bottom and from left to right or writing with different materials such as makers, pencils, crayon to indicate the difference in what words altogether. Sometimes, these things are written in the walls of our houses by our children destroying the house paints. This behaviour is a built-up to proper literacy acquisition and development.

Picture-Kits

Goodman (2005), picture kits are those types of images on prints that are appealing to the senses of children. Early language acquisition is also dependent on the ability to see pictures and understand them and then deduce meaning from them. These pictures will create a mental image of reasoning in the child and further increase their consciousness as they think about the story the pictures are depicting. Picture kits are useful resources for teaching literacy skills, especially when they are combined with other multimedia resources like phone images, television, computers etc.

Songs and Rhymes

Songs and rhymes have the same characteristics. They are musical composition with lyrics and rhythm or patterns. They are melodious sounds made by humans for entertainment, though they can be used for other purposes. Songs and rhymes can be effective tools in teaching literacy skills, particularly for young learners. This is because when learning concepts are decomposed into songs and rhymes for the learners, they can identify the same words when they are found in any context.

The following are some of the ways songs and rhymes can be used in literacy acquisition.

Phonological awareness: Singing songs and reciting rhymes can help students develop phonological awareness which is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds. For examples, singing nursery rhymes like "The wheels on the Bus" can help students identify and isolate individual sounds within words.

Decoding: Rhymes and songs can also be used to teach decoding skills. Students can listen to the rhyme and pattern of a rhyme or song and use the information to decode unknown words. For examples, if a student hears the phrase "red lorry, yellow lorry" they might be able to guess that the next line will be "Green lorry, blue lorry".

Vocabulary building: Many songs and rhymes contain rich vocabulary that can help students build their word lists. Teachers can point out new words and phrase in songs and rhymes and have student to repeat them. For examples, the song "old MacDonald had a farm" contains many animals' names that can help students learn new vocabulary and new names of animals.

Comprehension: songs and rhymes can be used to teach comprehension skills. Teachers can ask students to summarise the plot of song or rhymes or to retell it in their own words. For example, after listening to the song "twinkle, twinkle, little stars" students could describe the action of the star in their own words.

Fluency: Singing song and reciting rhymes can also help students develop fluency skills. When students sing or recite rhymes regularly, they become more comfortable with the pattern and the rhymes language. This can help them read more smoothly and accurately especially when the learner comes across the words used in the song and rhymes, they have recited before.

Using Games in Teaching Literacy

Ogbor and Iliyas (2005). They said these games can enhance literacy acquisition.
Yes and No Phonics and Word Game (Ages 4+)
Turn word lists into a "yes" or "no" game with questions such as these:
Does the word begin with the letter _____?
Does the word end in a vowel_____?
Does the word have a long "a" sound_____?
Zingo! (Ages 5+)
Match pictures to the correct words to fill your Zingo board. The first player with a complete card of picture to words wins.
Gnu! (Ages 5+)
Children are given a tile with complete letters of alphabet. Then, they use the letter tiles to create three letter words and the first to create is the winner.

Vowel Sounds Marble Game (Ages 5+)
Put a marble underneath one of three cups. Each cup should have a single vowel written on it. Take turns hiding the marble and mixing up the cups. The child guesses where the marble is located and says the vowel sound.

Fluency Target Time (Ages 6+)
Correctly read the first sentence or paragraph to advance to the second ring. If you make a mistake, stay on the outer ring. All these games can enhance literacy acquisition at this early childhood stage.

Conclusion

The concept of literacy refers to the individual ability to function effectively in various environments and communication using language in all its forms. So, children literature is a major driving tool used for the acquisition and development of literacy, hence, the children are exposed to their literature even before the literacy.

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