A Study on Approaches for Effective Teaching of Basic Reading Skills to Children with Specific Learning Disability

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the multifaceted approaches to teaching basic reading skills, particularly focusing on approaches suited for students with specific learning disabilities. The study aims to understand and identify the most effective reading approach by examining seven different approaches: *Phonics, Guided Reading, Linguistic, Language Experience, Multi-sensory, structural literacy and* Science of Reading (SoR) Approach. Criteria have been defined to determine the effective approach. The Phonics method enhances sound-symbol recognition but may not foster reading comprehension effectively. The Guided Reading approach promotes independent reading but can be time-consuming and challenging to manage. The Linguistic method emphasizes natural language acquisition, whereas the Language Experience approach connects personal experiences to reading and writing, enhancing engagement but potentially stifling creativity. The Multisensory approach, which incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning, improves memory retention and engagement but can be costly and distracting. The Structured Literacy approach is a research-based method of literacy instruction that emphasizes explicit, systematic teaching and it requires extensive teacher training. The Science of Reading (SoR) draws from fields like cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics but its less flexible in differentiated classrooms without adaptation. The study concludes that understanding the strengths and limitations of these approaches is crucial for educators to tailor their teaching to the diverse needs of students with specific learning disabilities. Based on the established criteria, the multisensory approach is the most effective way to teach basic reading skills to children with specific learning disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." -Frederick Douglass. Reading helps to develop your mind and gives you knowledge. Research shows that reading offers benefits such as improved literacy, enhanced social skills, and better health and learning outcomes. Acquiring basic reading skills is systematically and explicitly important. Several approaches can aid in the process of learning to read. Students with reading disabilities have significant needs. It is crucial to identify the most effective approach for students with specific learning disabilities.

Objectives of the study

i. To understand the various approaches to teach reading skills to students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

ii. To determine the most suitable Approach to Teach basic Reading Skills to Students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

Criteria to determine the most suitable Approach to Teach basic Reading Skills for children with Specific Learning Disabilities.

1. Motivating: Grasping students' attention is crucial. Motivating students can help them become less distracted, more attentive in the classroom, and more likely to take initiative and persist through difficult material.

2. Retaining: Students can retain what they have learned more effectively when they can learn in multiple ways.

3. Systematic: The National Reading Panel emphasizes the "Big Five":a. Phonemic Awareness, b. Phonics, c. Fluency d. Vocabulary and. Comprehension.

4. Explicit Instruction: Explicit instruction breaks up learning into smaller parts, reducing the cognitive load, or the amount of brain resources a student needs to process information.

Different approaches to teach reading skills

There are seven different approaches to reading instruction:

1. Phonics approach

2. Guided reading approach

3. The Linguistic approach

4. The Language experience approach,

5. The Multi-sensory approach.

6. Structured literacy

7. Science of Reading (SoR) Approach

Phonics approach

This method teaches word recognition by learning grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) associations. The student learns vowels, consonants, and either blends or blending. Children learn to sound out the words they are reading by combining sounds into full words. By associating speech sounds with written letters, the student learns to recognize words they have not come across before.

Advantages of the Phonic Method in Early Childhood Reading Skills

1. Improves decoding and word recognition- Systematic phonics instruction significantly improves children's ability to decode unfamiliar words and develop automatic word recognition. National Reading Panel (2000);

2. Enhances comprehension indirectly- According to the Simple View of Reading, decoding is a prerequisite for reading comprehension. Gough & Tunmer (1986). Lays the groundwork for stronger comprehension by strengthening underlying literacy skills.

The phonics approach to teach children to read has some disadvantages, including:

1. Not sufficient on its own- Phonics improves decoding but doesn't automatically lead to comprehension if vocabulary, fluency, and background knowledge are not addressed. Snow & Sweet (2003);

2. Requires skilled, knowledgeable teachers- Teachers must have a deep understanding of phonics and reading science to implement it effectively. Moats (1999).

Guided Reading Approach

In guided reading, a teacher helps a small group of students develop effective reading skills by supporting them to read a text independently. This is a research-based teaching method and the goal is to teach students to read for meaning on their own by learning strategies. Guided reading can help students apply reading skills, Use flexible problem-solving, think and act like proficient readers, become more independent, and achieve higher levels of reading competency.

Advantages of the Guided Reading Approach

1. Improved Reading Comprehension and Fluency: Research consistently shows that guided reading improves students' reading comprehension, decoding skills, and fluency by allowing teachers to provide targeted support (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Tyler, 2019).

2. Differentiated Instruction: Guided reading allows for instruction to be tailored to the specific reading level and needs of a small group of students (Ford & Opitz, 2008).

Disadvantages of Guided Reading

1. Time-Intensive and Logistically Challenging: Teachers may find it difficult to manage small-group instruction while ensuring meaningful activities for students working independently (Tyner, 2004).

2. Potential for Inconsistent Implementation: Effectiveness heavily depends on teacher expertise in assessing reading levels and conducting effective instruction (Ford & Opitz, 2008).

Linguistic method

Linguistic phonics builds on speech which helps to build focus on reading and spelling. Pupils begin by listening to words that they're used to saying every day, paying attention to noticing individual sounds and syllables. Then they are taught alphabets and letters which represent individual sounds. Pupils associate sounds and letters through problem-solving.

Advantages of linguistic phonics

1. Enhances Phonemic Awareness and Decoding Skills: Teaching the structure of language helps learners develop a strong foundation in phonemic awareness and word recognition (Ehri et al., 2001).

2. Supports English Language Learners (ELLs): Explicit instruction in language structure benefits ELLs by clarifying how English differs from their first language (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Disadvantages of the Linguistic approach

1. Can Neglect Comprehension and Meaning: A heavy focus on rules and structure may limit students' engagement with meaning-making and reading for comprehension (Goodman, 1996).

2. Less Engaging for Some Learners: The analytical and decontextualized nature of linguistic instruction can be less motivating, especially for young or struggling readers (Cambourne, 1995).

Language Experience Approach

The language experience approach (LEA) is a whole language approach that promotes reading and writing through the use of personal experiences and oral language. The text is written by a child or spoken information relayed by a child and transcribed by a teacher or parent. This approach can be done in small groups or even individually. The language experience approach uses images, whether literal images or mental images created by remembering sad memories.

Advantages of Language Experience Approach

1. Builds on Prior Knowledge and Personal Experience: This approach draws from students' lived experiences, making learning more meaningful and accessible (Stauffer, 1970).

2. Promotes Vocabulary and Oral Language Development: By encouraging students to verbalize and then read their thoughts, LEA strengthens both oral and written language (Morrow, 2005).

Disadvantage Language Experience Approach

1. Limited Exposure to Standard Written Language Structures: Student-generated texts may lack exposure to rich, complex sentence structures found in published literature (Smith & Elley, 1997).

2. May Not Address Specific Phonics or Grammar Needs: LEA is student-centered and less systematic in teaching phonics or grammar rules (Morrow, 2005).

Multi-sensory approach

A multi-sensory approach is essential because these activities involve whole-brain learning. The following are the different kinds of sensory learning that can be incorporated into teaching, 1. Visual, 2. Auditory, 3. Kinesthetic, 4. Tactile, 5. Olfactory and Gustatory.

Advantages of multi-sensory approach

1. Enhances Retention and Recall: Involving multiple senses reinforces memory pathways, improving learning retention (Birsh & Carreker, 2018).

2. Effective for Students with Learning Disabilities: Especially beneficial for students with dyslexia or language-based learning difficulties (Ritchey & Goeke, 2006). Proven to support academic growth among students with diverse learning needs.

Disadvantages of the multi-sensory approach

1. Requires Extensive Teacher Training: Effective implementation demands specialized knowledge in structured literacy and sensory integration (Moats, 2009).

2. Time-Intensive Instruction: Multisensory lessons often require more time and preparation than traditional instruction (Ritchey & Goeke, 2006).

Structured literacy

Structured literacy is an evidence-based approach to reading instruction that emphasizes the explicit, systematic, and cumulative teaching of foundational literacy skills. Focus Areas are: Phonology, Sound-symbol association, Syllable instruction, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics.

Advantages of structured literacy

1. Evidence-Based Effectiveness. Backed by decades of research in the Science of Reading. Proven to be especially effective for students with dyslexia, language processing disorders, and general reading difficulties. Structured Literacy is supported by a robust body of research demonstrating its effectiveness.

2. Builds Strong Phonemic Awareness and Decoding Skills: Emphasizes phonological awareness, phonics, and word recognition. Helps students become confident, independent decoders of text. Develops essential phonemic awareness and decoding competencies critical for early literacy.

Disadvantages of structured literacy

1. Requires Extensive Teacher Training: Effective implementation demands specialized training in phonics, decoding, and diagnostic instruction.

2. Resource-Heavy: High-quality structured literacy programs may require specific materials, curriculum resources, and assessment tools. Schools with limited funding may face challenges adopting and sustaining these programs.

Science of Reading (SoR) Approach

The Science of Reading (SoR) encompasses a comprehensive and growing body of interdisciplinary research from fields such as education, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics. This research explains, in detail, how humans learn to read—with a particular focus on how the brain develops and processes reading skills.

Advantages of Science of Reading (SoR) Approach

1. Effective for Struggling Readers and Students with Dyslexia: Structured Literacy is especially effective for students with reading difficulties by providing systematic, explicit instruction (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

2. Emphasizes Foundational Skills: Focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding ensures students acquire essential building blocks for reading (Moats, 2020).

Disadvantages of **Science of Reading (SoR) Approach**

1. May Lack Emphasis on Meaningful Context and Engagement: Some critics argue that Structured Literacy can focus heavily on isolated skills at the expense of authentic reading experiences (Pressley, 2006).

2. Implementation Requires Extensive Teacher Knowledge and Training: Structured Literacy requires deep understanding of linguistic concepts and evidence-based practices (Moats, 2009).

Blending multiple reading approaches

The researcher blended approaches for a highly effective way to meet the diverse needs of students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), especially in reading. Each approach offers valuable tools, and when used strategically and intentionally, they can complement each other to support individualized, evidence-based instruction. In this study, the researcher majorly relied on a multisensory approach and used core points of structured literacy.

Research Study

Module: The researcher developed a comprehensive intervention module that integrates a multisensory instructional approach, systematically and explicitly designed to provide optimal support for students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). The module features sensory-rich, evidence-based activities targeting foundational literacy skills.

Pilot study: A pilot study was conducted at the researcher's school to assess the reliability and usability of the intervention module. Prior to implementation, informed consent was obtained from parents, school administrators, and participating students. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and participants were assured that all data collected would be used solely for the refinement and improvement of the module's design.

The sample was selected using a Simple Random Sampling method, informed by the outcomes of a teacher-developed pre-test designed to evaluate students' foundational literacy skills. The reliability and validity of the pre- and post-test instruments were reviewed and discussed in collaboration with other special educators at the school to ensure content appropriateness and alignment with targeted literacy skills. The intervention was delivered through a multisensory instructional module. This structured and systematic approach provided consistent, targeted instruction designed to actively engage learners through the integration of multiple sensory modalities, including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile channels. By leveraging these diverse pathways, the intervention aimed to strengthen the acquisition and retention of foundational literacy skills among students formally identified with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD).

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention module, a pre- and post-test design was employed. The assessment focused on core components of early literacy, including phonemic awareness, decoding, and reading fluency. The results indicated significant improvement in foundational reading skills, demonstrating the

module's positive impact on learners with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). Through the pilot study, validity and reliability of the module was established.

CONCLUSION

Each reading instruction method has its benefits and drawbacks. According to the defined criteria, the multisensory approach when taught systematically is the most effective method for teaching basic reading skills to children with specific learning disabilities. Overall, this study underscores the importance of targeted, research-based instruction in early literacy development. Future work may explore the long-term retention of these skills and the potential for scaling the intervention across broader student populations.

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