

TEACHING LITERACY SKILLS AMONG KINDERGARTENERS: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USED BY KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN AWUTU-SENYA DISTRICT, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the instructional strategies teachers use in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners within the Awutu-Senya District. The study adopted a mixed-method approach and a convergent research design. Census was used to select 150 participants for the quantitative phase and the purposive sampling technique was utilized in selecting 10 respondents for the qualitative phase of the study. A structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were the data collection instruments used. Descriptive statistics was employed in analyzing the quantitative data using SPSS version 25.0 whilst the qualitative data was analysed thematically. The study revealed that though the kindergarten curriculum and resource pack provided by the Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has outlined effective literacy skill instructional strategies to be used in teaching kindergarteners, teachers did not use these strategies. Reasons for not using the strategies included limited knowledge on how to teach with the strategies, inadequate instructional materials, and classroom with large number of learners. It was recommended that Headteachers, Awutu-Senya District Early Childhood Education coordinators should utilize the Professional Community Learning, and other district and school-based in-service avenues to provide teachers with training on how to teach with these strategies. Also, it was recommended that the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service must fasten the process of approving and printing textbooks and should make them easily accessible to kindergarten teachers to enable them to implement the appropriate strategies in the classrooms.

Keywords: literacy skills, literacy development, reading and writing, instructional strategies, kindergarten

Introduction

The early educational stages of all children are of considerable significance. These years determine a child's survival and success in life, as well as their learning and holistic development. According to Opong Frimpong (2019), the early childhood period is crucial, having an endearing future in the individual's life. It is during the early years that children develop the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills needed to succeed in life as well as acquire language. Forming the basis for future learning and labour market success, the early years of learners become a critical period of human capital accumulation as skills such as problem-solving, numeracy, creativity, and literacy are developed (Naudeau, Kataoka, Valerio, et al., 2011).

The importance of literacy development cannot be downplayed as it is a determining factor to future success. It is an essential skill which helps individuals to function well in their disciplines of life. It is therefore a necessity for literacy to be developed among children at the earliest possible time as the ability

of a learner to read and write proficiently makes it possible for them to excel in all subject areas across the educational ladder.

Literacy skills could be perceived as the ability to understand and use written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007). Literacy skills are necessary parts of an individual's educational experience. Reading and writing instruction is vital to the firm formation of literacy among early learners. It is developed as learners progress through higher learning, and finally as they surface as proficient and knowledgeable adults.

A key to ensuring that children succeed in school depends on using appropriate strategies to avail pupils with critical foundation skills related to literacy (reading and writing) (Abreh & Wilmot, 2018). Without these necessary literacy skills, many children will struggle to keep up with the prescribed curriculum, but end up widening the gap in their learning achievement (UNESCO, 2014). This implies that a learner with difficulty in literacy will be in a difficult position to perform well in other subject areas. However, literacy skills are not achieved in a vacuum. To help learners become proficient in literacy skills, teachers need to focus on how to choose and use the most appropriate instructional strategies for their learners.

According to Heilporn, G., Lakhali, S., & Béliste, M. (2022), instructional strategies include activities that help create the classroom environment for good-quality learning to occur. These activities should consider instructional goals as well as the content of the curriculum. Instructional strategies as stated by Nwachukon (2005) are decisions about organizing people, materials, and ideas to provide learning. Instructional strategies determine the approach a teacher may take to achieve learning objectives. According to Saskatchewan Education (2009), instructional strategies are the most specific category of teaching behaviours. They are necessary for procedural purposes and for structuring appropriate learning experiences for learners. Some of these instructional strategies include demonstration, discussion and inquiry.

Improving literacy skills is a priority and anational strategy in most countries in the world (Quinn, 2011). As said by Mumpuniarti (2017), many countries introduce various educational plans and pedagogical practices to improve literacy skills. The introduction of the new kindergarten curriculum and the provision of resource pack by the Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, laid much emphasis on the instruction of literacy skills among early learners. In these documents, play-based learning, jolly phonics, shared reading, paired reading, and Think-Pair-share are captured as child-centered approaches appropriate for teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners.

Arguably, literacy skills are successfully taught with the aid of practical and child-centered strategies appropriate and effective in teaching literacy skills (Ministry of Education, 2018). Similarly, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019) stipulate that, learner-centred pedagogies which include approaches, methods, and appropriate teaching strategies ensures that every learner benefits from the teaching and learning process, hence they should be used in teaching children all forms of literacy. Some of these literacy skill teaching strategies are presented.

Play-based learning

Learning to read and write, according to Pickett (2002), is a prerequisite for success in school. This is because reading and writing make up the majority of school activities. When reading is the primary means of accessing information, learners who are not proficient in literacy skills are basically excluded from other aspects of education. When it comes to writing, learners who are not comfortable with print are more likely to fail. Researchers and early childhood educators have long recognized the importance of play in young children's learning and development (Pickett, 2002). Children's encouragement and interest in learning and development seem to be enhanced by play experiences such as spontaneous play, dramatic play, and adult-led play (Norling, & Lillvist, 2016). Literacy-related play experiences in preschool provide preschool children with unique opportunities to improve their language and emergent literacy skills

(Nitecki & Chung, 2013; Saracho, 2004). Nitecki and Chung (2013) argue that play, the activity that fosters creativity and problem-solving skills, should be central to any kind of teaching in the preschool classroom. From the first day of a child's life, language and literacy are built and continues through a lifetime. Thus, literacy-rich play setting helps young children develop early literacy skills and play allows children to improve their literacy skills in a fun way (Mielonen, 2009).

Jolly phonics

Jolly Phonics is a fun, comprehensive curriculum that teaches learners how to improve their literacy skills. Jolly Phonics is one of the most important teaching methods for improving children's early reading and literacy skills (Ariati, Padmadewi, & Suarnajaya, 2018). According to Lloyd (2010), with Jolly Phonics, children are first taught the sounds in English, blending and reading skills, and at the same time are taught to write by identifying the sounds in words. Furthermore, Jolly Phonics uses a multisensory approach in which knowledge is conveyed by sight, sound, and kinesthetic means, which is ideal for the characteristics of young children (Farokhbakht & Nejadansari, 2015). The Jolly Phonics curriculum teaches children using the synthetic phonics system of five fundamental skills namely: learning the letter sounds (where children are taught how to sound the letters); letter formation (teachers guiding pupils in writing the letters); blending for reading (merging phonemes to pronounce a word); identifying the sounds in words for writing (phonological awareness); and tricky words/irregular words (having regular and irregular sounds). It is important to acknowledge that all these skills assist pupils to develop a strong knowledge base in literacy.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is a type of reading with children that helps them to progress from the emergent stage of reading to conventional text reading (McGill-Franzen, 2006). It involves an adult or other expert reader reading a story to one or more children. Teachers can use shared reading to help children between the ages of three to six to develop their literacy skills by providing them with reading opportunities that foster literacy development at the early stages (Honchell, 2012). Through the use of expanded text, children in a group can share the reading of a story with a teacher (Parkes, 2000). Mooney (2004) claims that children learn to read by seeing and hearing it in their daily lives, similar to how they learn to talk. A shared reading session can be performed in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of the learners and the teacher's teaching objectives. The teacher can give learners an opportunity to practice and immediate feedback provided as required (Swartz, Shook & Klein (2002).

Reading Aloud

Read aloud is an educational activity in which teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). To achieve a fluent and pleasant delivery, the reader uses a variety of pitch, sound, rhythm, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments. Reading stories aloud helps children to improve their understanding of print, story structure, and other text elements, as well as providing them with a wealth of knowledge about the processes and functions of written language (Rog, 2001). Preschoolers' school days are incomplete without reading aloud to them. It's one way to simulate how words on a page are transformed into spoken language, along with all of the timing, phrasing, intonation, and emphasis that speakers employ (Young, Lagrone & McCauley, 2020). Reading aloud as a teaching technique should be used in every class, particularly in classrooms with learners who have reading difficulties (Razinski & Padak, 2000). Reading aloud helps learners to become more familiar with literacy, aids learners in interpreting and comprehending the text by allowing them to share thoughts that are unlikely to come naturally to the reader (Wood & Salvetti, 2001) and increases learners' incentive to read while also providing the requisite skills for effective reading and writing acquisition (Kale, M., & Demir, S. 2023)

According to Topping (2014), the paired reading method is a form of assisted oral reading that allows learners to access and comprehend texts at a level slightly higher than their independent readability level while maintaining a predictable and non-intrusive error correction system. There are two major aspects to

paired reading. Initially, both the teacher and the learner read aloud at the same time. This is termed reading together. The teacher adjusts their reading speed to the learner's pace. The learner must correctly read all of the words aloud. Errors are simply corrected by the teacher providing another perfect example of how to read the error word and ensuring that the learner repeats it correctly before the pair continues to read. Reading alone, or independent reading is the second aspect. When the learner is secure enough to read a portion of text without assistance, the learner signals the teacher to be quiet with a knock, nudge, or other nonverbal signals. The instructor commends the learner for taking the initiative, and continues to do so regularly, particularly when the learner masters difficult words or self-corrects spontaneously (Topping, 2014).

Think-Pair-Share

The think-pair-share is a strategy designed to provide learners with the ability to think about a given topic and enable them to formulate individual ideas and share these ideas with other learners. This strategy is a cooperative discussion strategy to help learners work in groups (Usman, 2015). As stated by Pardeshi (2016), the thinking phase could be used during either reading or writing activities. This provides teachers with the opportunity to see whether there are problems in comprehension. Teachers can create a Read-Write-Pair-Share strategy in which learners read the assigned material, write down their thoughts about the topic before the discussions, pair up with a partner and share their ideas with a partner and/or the whole class. The use of Think-Pair-Share unites the cognitive and social aspects of learning, promoting the development of thinking and the construction of knowledge (Sari, H. P., Kristiawan, M., & Syaveny, N. 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Literacy skills are pivotal elements for the academic life of every kindergartener. Bruner (2010) calls reading and writing proficiency in the foundational stages a key milestone in a child's educational development and a sentinel indicator of future educational successes. Hence, once early literacy is founded on a shaky pedestal, it has foundational and lasting effects on later literacy and all future learning (Sibanda, 2017). UNESCO (2010) notes that all capabilities start with the fundamentals of reading and writing, which should be learned at the early years of an individual's educational journey. Despite this, too many children have not yet acquired these skills.

It is to be noted that literacy skills at the early stages are not achieved in a vacuum. Literature reveals that literacy skills development is dependent on the effective instructional strategies teachers use when teaching, and that learners perform better when literacy skills are taught in systematic, and appropriate ways (Marzano, 2003; UNESCO, 2010).

Despite the efforts at improving literacy skills, it appears that in Ghana and specifically in Awutu-Senya District, a number of kindergarten teachers commonly subject the teaching of reading and writing among kindergarteners to strategies which, are most of the times, teacher-centered and do not focus on the needs and capabilities of children (Mills-Tetty et. al, 2009). Contributing to the public discourse on development of literacy among children, a discussion on pre-tertiary educational reforms in Ghana on Citi TV's "The Point of View" which was broadcasted on Monday, 18th November, 2019 at 9:00pm, pointed out that the teaching of literacy in basic schools is questionable, taking into consideration the kind of strategies teachers were using (Citi FM, 2019).

Although, the concern pointed out on Citi TV was basically about Ghana in general, the situation appears not to be different from that of Awutu-Senya district. Observations made by the researchers appeared that some kindergarten teachers in the district taught literacy skills among kindergarteners with strategies that were more teacher-centered instead of using the recommended strategies (i.e jolly phonics, shared reading, paired reading).

Besides, there appears to be paucity of literature on the instructional practices teachers use in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners as the numerous studies have been reported from Western countries (Croninger & Valli, 2009; Graham, S. 2019; Qizi, A. K. H. 2021). The foregoing expositions encouraged

the researchers to undertake this study to examine the instructional practices teachers use in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners within Awutu-Senya District.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to;

1. establish the understanding of kindergarten teachers' within Awutu-Senya District on the relevance of instructional strategies used in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners.
2. identify the instructional strategies teachers employ in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners within Awutu-Senya District.

Research Questions

The research questions of the study were;

1. What is the understanding of kindergarten teachers about the relevance of instructional strategies used in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners?
2. What are the instructional strategies kindergarten teachers employ in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners?

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted the convergent mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researchers collected, and analyzed the data, integrated the findings, and drew inferences using both the quantitative and qualitative methods, as noted by Creswell (2014). The data was collected and analysed concurrently. The rationale for this approach was that whilst the quantitative data provided a general understanding of the research problem quantitatively, the qualitative aided by exploring participants' perspectives for clearer understanding of the responses gathered (Patten & Newhart, 2017).

Population of the Study

Participants and respondents for the study were selected from the nine (9) education circuits in the district. The district has 148 kindergarten schools, comprising 61 public kindergarten schools with 165 teachers and 87 private kindergarten schools with 143 teachers, making the total number of kindergarten teachers in the district 308. The target population for this study was all 308 kindergarten teachers. However, the accessible population included all 165 public kindergarten teachers in the Awutu-Senya District.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique used for this study was census where the researchers selected all the members of the population as the sample (Borg & Gall, 2007). Census was used as a sampling technique to select all 165 public kindergarten teachers in the Awutu-Senya district for the quantitative phase of the study. They were all selected because the number was relatively small and reasonably manageable for collecting and analyzing data (Borg & Gall, 2007).

For the qualitative phase of the study, 10 teachers were sampled using the purposive sampling strategy. As described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), purposive sampling is a technique where researchers choose subjects to be included in a study on basis of their judgement or possession of a particular characteristic needed. The researchers selected teachers who have taught at the kindergarten level for more than ten years. They were engaged in the interview session because the researchers assumed that those with that characteristic had accumulated rich experiences as far as the teaching of literacy among kindergarteners is concerned.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were employed to gather the necessary data for the study. The first was questionnaire. It was used to collect the quantitative data. The semi-structured interview guide was used afterwards to enrich and elaborate on respondents' views at the quantitative phase.

The questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data and it aided the researchers in reaching out to a large sample size. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part elicited responses on the personal data of the respondents and the second part covered questions relating to the research questions. The questionnaire contained five-point Likert-scale items ranging from five (5) to one (1) with the numeral '5' representing the highest form of agreement and the numeral '1' representing the lowest form of agreement. The categories were coded with numbers such that, Strongly Agree (SA) 5, Agree (A) 4, Neutral (N) 3, Disagree (D) 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1.

After collecting quantitative data from respondents using the questionnaire, interviews were held with sampled kindergarten teachers. The semi-structured interview guide was designed by the researchers and it had two sections; Sections A and B. Section A had questions to answer the first research question and Section B outlined questions to answer research question two.

Data Collection Procedures

In collecting the quantitative data after gaining the permission of the Awutu-Senya District Director of Education, the researchers visited the sampled schools in the district and explained the purposes of the study to them. The participants were then informed of the study's purpose and possible benefits. Questionnaires were self-administered afterward to the study's respondents. Explanations were given to teachers who asked questions for clarification. They were assured of anonymity. Respondents were given a week to complete answering questions in the questionnaire. The researchers visited the schools after the period to collect the questionnaire. This was to ensure possible return rates. One hundred and thirty-eight out of 165 questionnaires were filled out and submitted to the researchers. This represented about 84 percent of the sample size.

In conducting the interview, the interviewees were contacted to verify the appointment before engaging them. The face-to-face interview was done personally with participants. Before commencing with an interview session with a participant, the researchers asked for permission from the participant to record the conversation after introducing himself. This was followed by assuring confidentiality for every information provided and anonymity of the participant. After each session, the researchers played back the recorded audio for participants to confirm whether everything they said had been captured or not. When the transcriptions of the recordings were done, the researchers gave them to participants to go through to ascertain whether everything written was exactly as was contained in the recording.

Data Analysis

After retrieving the questionnaires from respondents, the researchers coded the responses and entered them into the computer using the Statistical Package for the Service Solution (SPSS) Version 25.0. In conducting data cleaning, the researchers went through the data to identify possible mistakes and they were quickly rectified. Descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages mean and standard deviation were used to analyze all the items. A reliability coefficient of 0.833 was obtained for the items in the questionnaire.

For the qualitative data analysis, the researcher employed content and thematic analysis procedures. By this, the researchers played all the audios recorded during the interview sessions to transcribe them and categorized the responses into themes. Following the categorization and coding of data into themes, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the content of the themes to answer the research questions. Each participant was identified by an alphanumeric name given by the researchers to them.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The analysis and discussion of findings of the study based on the responses in relation to the objectives of the study restated as teachers' understanding on the literacy instructional strategies employed in teaching literacy skills, and the instructional strategies used in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners. It is important to note that out of the 165 respondents who were given the questionnaire, 138 of them could return them.

Research Question 1: What is the understanding of kindergarten teachers within Awutu-Senya District on the relevance of instructional strategies used in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners?

Table 1 presents the responses on a series of statements describing teachers' understanding of literacy skills instructional strategies. The analysis reveals that very few (usually 1[0.7%]) of the respondents showed disagreement to few items in this table. The majority of them strongly agreed with the minority agreeing to the statements. For instance, 106 (76.8%) and 32(23.2%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that “literacy-related play experiences in kindergarten classrooms provide children with unique opportunities to improve their literacy skills”. Again, 119(86.2%)and 17(12.3%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the statement “using paired reading as a literacy teaching strategy among kindergarteners help learners to read with less difficulty”. However, 1(0.7%) respondent disagreed while 1(0.7%) respondent was neutral.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that 116(84.1%) and 22(15.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the statement “reading aloud is a recommendable instructional strategy for teachers to promote young children's literacy skills development.”

Insight gained from the analysis is that, teachers know and understand the relevance of most of the literacy skills instructional strategies outlined. From the data, most of the responses scored a mean above 3.0 and standard deviation below 0.5. This implies that there were minor dispersions among the responses received from kindergarten teachers and almost all of them strongly understood the relevance of the outlined strategies that are to be used in teaching children reading and writing.

Table 1: Response to Teachers’ Understanding of the Relevance of Literacy Skills Instructional Strategies

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean/Std
1. Literacy-related play experiences provide children with unique opportunities to improve their literacy skills	106 (76.8)	32 (23.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.77/0.42
2. Jolly phonics improves literacy skills of kindergarteners	111 (80.4)	27 (19.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.80/0.40
3. Teachers can use shared reading to help kindergarteners develop their literacy skills	114 (82.6)	24 (17.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.83/0.38
4. Reading aloud is a recommendable instructional strategy for teachers to promote young children's literacy skills development	116 (84.1)	22 (15.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.84/0.37
5. Think-Pair-Share is an instructional strategy used in teaching reading and writing	114 (82.6)	24 (17.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.83/0.38
6. Using whole word method in teaching literacy skills improves learners’ literacy skills development	122 (88.4)	15 (10.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	4.86/0.46
7. Using paired reading as a literacy teaching strategy among kindergarteners help learners to read with less difficulty	119 (86.2)	17 (12.3)	1 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	4.83/0.49

Source: Field data 2022

The researchers equally interviewed participants using the semi-structured interview guide. The idea was to confirm, disconfirm and or explain further the quantitative data. The sampled kindergarten teachers were asked of their views on how they understand the relevance outlined literacy instructional strategies used among kindergarteners and their relevance.

A respondent commented that;

Being into early childhood education for some years now, specifically 8 years, I will say I have come across most of these instructional practices outlined in the curriculum and other documents. I have used a couple of them and they were useful. Understanding and using them poses a lot of benefits to the learner and the teacher (TR3, Interviewed Data, 2021).

A participant remarked on the same theme, saying that;

I understand all the strategies perfectly and most importantly I know they are much appropriate at the early childhood level. When used to teach children reading and writing, the children tend to enjoy the lesson and consciously and unconsciously they develop their reading, writing and even speaking skills (TR5, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The responses on participants’ understanding of literacy instructional strategies suggest that teachers in one way or the other have come across some of these strategies and that, they have been exposed to the method. They were able to identify the possible benefits the entire teaching and learning process stands to achieve if these strategies are employed. Their responses in the qualitative data did not differ from what was found in the quantitative. This showed consistency in what they told the researchers.

Research Question 2: What are the instructional strategies teachers employ in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners within Awutu-Senya District?

Of all the items in Table 2, respondents were using only three of them. The responses show that they were not using the rest of the strategies. The one they strongly used were look and say method (133 [96.4%]), followed by Reading aloud (58 [42.0%]) and whole word method (55 [39.9%]). Those the majority strongly disagreed as using were paired reading (104 [75.4%]); Think-Pair-Share (98 [71.0%]) and jolly phonics (80 [58.0%]).

After a non-dividing response from kindergarten teachers within the Awutu-Senya District on their strong understanding of the benefits in using most of the outlined literacy instructional strategies such as jolly phonics, paired reading, think-pair-share, shared reading, literacy-relate play experiences amongst others, teachers surprisingly indicated that they do use them when they are teaching kindergarteners. This was evident in the data presented as the statement “I use literacy-related play experiences in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners” scored a mean of 1.71 and standard deviation of 0.93, implying that most teachers disagreed with the statement and in other words saying they do not use the strategy. The statement “I employ shared reading in teaching reading among kindergarteners,” had a mean of 2.12 and standard deviation of 0.89, indicating that most teachers do not use shared reading with teaching literacy. Also, the statement “I use jolly phonics in teaching reading and writing among kindergarteners” had a mean score of 1.53 and standard deviation of 0.77. This means that the study’s respondents do not teach with jolly phonics. Finally, the statements “I employ paired reading in teaching reading skills among kindergarteners” and “Think-Pair-Share is an instructional strategy I use in teaching reading and writing” scored a mean and standard deviation of 1.28/0.55 and 1.33/0.58 respectively. The analysis reveals that respondents do not teach with paired reading and think-pair-share as well.

Table 2: Responses to instructional strategies used in teaching literacy skills

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean/Std
1.	I use literacy-related play experiences in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners	3 (2.2)	8 (5.8)	3 (2.2)	56 (40.6)	68 (49.3)	1.71/0.93

2. I employ shared reading in teaching reading among kindergarteners	14 (10.1)	8 (5.8)	11(8.0)	53 (38.4)	52 (37.7)	2.12/0.89
3. I use jolly phonics in teaching reading and writing among kindergarteners	1 (0.7)	5 (3.6)	2 (1.4)	50 (36.2)	80 (58.0)	1.53/0.77
4. Reading aloud is utilized when I am teaching reading my learners at the kindergarten level	58 (42.0)	64 (46.4)	4 (2.9)	7 (5.1)	5 (3.6)	4.18/0.98
5. I have been using look and say method to improve the literacy skills development among my learners	133 (96.4)	5 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.96/0.19
6. I use whole word method in developing literacy skills among kindergarteners	55 (39.9)	77 (55.8)	4 (2.9)	2 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	4.34/0.61
7. I employ paired reading in teaching reading skills among kindergarteners	0 (0.0)	2 (1.4)	1 (0.7)	31 (22.5)	104 (75.4)	1.28/0.55
8. Think-Pair-Share is an instructional strategy I use in teaching reading and writing	1 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.4)	37 (26.8)	98 (71.0)	1.33/0.58

Source: Field Data 2022

To confirm the responses respondents gave concerning the instructional strategies they use, the researchers, during the interview session, asked teachers the strategies they use when teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners. Their responses were in line with the quantitative outcome. A teacher commented that;

When teaching I mostly teach with read aloud, look and say, and the whole word method to teach reading and writing among my learners (Teacher 4, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Similarly, another participant stated that

In my class, for instance, I use look and say, and read aloud when teaching children writing and reading (Teacher 8, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The researchers asked participants whether they use other strategies apart from those stated in the questionnaire. Introducing new instructional strategies, participants informed the researchers about the following;

Apart from the ones you have mentioned, I will say I use guided writing, tracing to teach writing among learners in my class sometimes (Teacher 1, Interviewed Data, 2021).

aside what we have mentioned as the strategies I use to teach my children reading and writing, I sometimes create opportunities for children in my class to scribble (Teacher 3, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The researchers were interested in finding out where teachers get the strategies they teach children with. The interview data revealed the following;

I mostly get these strategies from the curriculum, and sometimes I do my own research and come up with instructional strategies to teach literacy to my learners. Besides, I sometimes consult

colleague teachers to help me come up with strategies to teach literacy (Teacher 1 Interviewed Data, 2021).

I get the strategies I use from online books, textbooks relating to literacy and at times I get some recommended to me by colleague teachers. Also, I am mostly guided by the internet, specifically YouTube and pin interest (Teacher 7, Interviewed Data, 2021).

To corroborate, contradict or expand on the responses from the quantitative data, the researchers found out why respondents use the strategies they have mentioned and why they use or do not use the identified strategies. A teacher's response was captured as

I prefer to teach with strategies that can help me reach out to the numerous number of children I have in the class. For that matter, I use read aloud, look and say, and the whole word method because they help me complete lessons on time (Teacher 4, Interviewed Data, 2021).

On similar tangent, a participant indicated that;

I use them because looking at the stipulated time given for a day's work, using a strategy I am unfamiliar with consumes a lot of time in teaching literacy. The look and say and whole word methods are mostly teacher-led and less time-consuming, and I know how to use them effectively, making them more convenient to use (Teacher 5, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Introducing another reason, a participant stated that;

Up till now, we do not have textbooks to know how to go about things so I am forced to stick to the old things I know to continue with my teaching. It is true that most of the strategies you have called out are in the curriculum, but the next thing is that, have we been provided with textbooks and teachers' guide to direct our teaching? The answer is a big no. Hence, I do what I think is the best and that is using the ones I know (Teacher 7, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Likewise, Teacher 9 spoke about this by saying;

To an extent, all our hope is now left on the curriculum and the resource pack which is even woefully inadequate. The implementation of the new curriculum definitely needs materials and resources to complement the standards. The teaching guide is supposed to give us a direction as to how to use strategies effectively, as to how to actually start and end a lesson as the new curriculum came with its own technicalities. Without this and the textbook, it makes me just comfortable to go in for techniques that assist me to help all the children and on time. I can say read aloud and whole word help me (Teacher 9, Interviewed Data, 2021).

A corollary of the content of the interview data suggest that kindergarten teachers tend to use the tracing, read aloud, look and say and whole word methods because they enable them to complete lessons on time. Teachers again revealed that these are the strategies they have much knowledge in and they see them to be convenient when teaching children reading and writing, hence opting for them. On the other hand, it was learnt that kindergarten teachers do not use strategies such as jolly phonics, literacy-related play experiences, shared reading, paired reading and the others because in as much as they know they are excellent strategies to use, they do not have adequate training on how to employ them in their instructions. This leads them to go in for other strategies like read aloud, whole word and look and say methods.

Discussion of Results

Outcome from the analysis implies that kindergarten teachers tend to use the tracing, read aloud, look and say and whole word methods in their lesson delivery because they enable them to complete their lessons

on time. Teachers revealed that though they had knowledge in almost all the strategies outlined, read aloud, look and say and whole word methods were the strategies they see to be convenient when teaching children reading and writing. Further, they indicated that unavailability of approved textbooks, teachers guide and a class with large number of learners prompt them to opt for these strategies.

It can be deduced from the study that teachers assumed that when learners are engaged in enough literacy-related play experiences and activities, their reading and writing abilities are enhanced and that play-based activities should be constantly fused into teaching. This assertion is in line with the comment made by Norling and Lillvist (2016). They contend that the interest of young learners in learning and developing essential skills is enhanced through the play experiences they are taken through by instructors. Kindergarten teachers again understand that learner-centered strategies such as jolly phonics and think-pair-share are interesting and fascinating strategies that are used to teach children reading and writing. This statement lends abundant support to the contention of Ariati, Padmadewi and Suarnajaya (2018) who state that among all teaching methods which are recommended for teachers to use to heighten the early reading and writing literacy skills of children, jolly phonics is the most important. On similar vein, teachers shared the same view when they commented that shared reading is a collaborative instructional strategy which teachers engage learners in to improve upon their reading skills. Honchell (2012) who stipulate that teachers through the use of shared reading can provide children with enough reading opportunities that will foster the literacy development of learners at the early stages confirm these findings.

The results reveal that the domineering instructional strategies teachers use in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners were teacher-centered strategies such as the look and say method and the whole-word method. Other strategies identified were read aloud and tracing. Teacher-centered instructional strategies are not appropriate and they are less effective at the foundational level as they do not allow the teacher to address individual learners' needs. The Ministry of Education (2018) indicated that effective instructors must develop and implement child-centered approaches, as learning is contingent upon the pedagogical approaches used in the classroom. Effective literacy instructional strategies have an impact on learners' achievement and allow teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches to suit the different learning needs of learners (Marzano, 2003). It equally develops learners' ability to read, write and make meanings from what they read.

The findings further revealed that teachers increasingly rely on the look and say and whole word methods because of the limited number of instructional hours available each day. These strategies are mostly used because teachers have been using them for some time and are familiar with them. Another reason for which teachers use look and say and the whole word methods is that teachers see their use to be comforting because it is a teacher-led and teacher-centered approach that does not give room for spending much time on lessons, thus finishing lessons on time. However, this goes against the development of literacy skills among kindergarteners because Maddox and Feng (2013) cautions that the whole word method does not develop a learner's reading fluency and spelling accuracy. Ministry of Education (2018) also posit that teacher-led strategies such as the whole class lecture and call-and-respond (look and say) face many criticisms because they are inappropriate at the early childhood level, due to their teacher-centred nature.

Conclusion

It is learnt from the study that literacy skills are not developed in a vacuum. For teachers to effectively assist learners in developing literacy skills at the early childhood level, they need to consciously employ instructional strategies which are appropriate and effective. These strategies must address the academic needs and interests of the learners. Hence, literacy skill development is dependent on the effectiveness of instructional strategies a teacher employ. Among the various teaching methods, the study provides much evidence to conclude that strategies such as literacy-related play experiences, shared reading, jolly phonics, think-pair-share and paired reading are practical oriented and child-centered teaching strategies.

Kindergarten teachers expressed undivided views on their understanding of the identified strategies and their relevance when they are used. They revealed that they understand that these strategies are excellent to be used at the level of young learners but limiting factors such as insufficient training, unavailability of approved text books and class with large number of learners give them no other option to teach with strategies such as look and say, read aloud, and whole word methods though these teaching strategies have been identified by the study as teacher-led strategies and inappropriate to be used in early childhood classrooms. It is therefore advocated that teachers should subject learners to child-centered and effective literacy skills instructional strategies and move away from teacher-centred strategies.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings, it is recommended that through Professional Learning Community and other school-based and district-based in-service training avenues, headteachers and the Awutu-Senya District Early Childhood Education Coordinator should provide teachers with refresher training and courses for them to continually appreciate the relevance of using child-centered strategies in teaching kindergarteners reading and writing.
2. Headteachers, Awutu-Senya District Early Childhood Education Coordinators and the District Education Directorate and Early Childhood Education Coordinators should organize workshops to provide teachers with training on how to teach with these strategies.
3. Again, unavailability of approved textbooks was cited as a factor which prevents teachers from using the approved strategies. The Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service are thereby entreated to accelerate the process of approving and printing textbooks and making them easily accessible to kindergarten teachers to enable them use the materials for effective teaching and learning activities.
4. In the course of the workshop, some of the teachers who have shown distinction in the area of some of the strategies could be used as facilitators. This can motivate them and others can also take inspiration from them.

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