

READING ALOUD: AN INSTRUCTIONAL MEANS IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ERA OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

By

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Abstract

One important factor that can make a teacher's lesson successful is the effective use of media. Media refers to visual, audio, and audio-visual forms of communication and their accompanying technology. Media often overlaps with terms like teaching aids, instructional materials, educational media, communication aids, learning resources, learning media, and instructional tools. They can be categorized according to the senses they appeal to, such as visual, audio, and audio-visual media. Visual media include posters, charts, slides, pictures, books, silent films, and chalkboards. Conversely, audio media include radio, audio recordings, and the human voice. Media can teach, stimulate interest, provide instruction through diverse senses, serve as effective substitutes for direct contact with the environment, and contribute to effective education. Media also simplify learning and enhance knowledge retention. Reading aloud can naturally occur through the efforts of a live reader; it can also be mediated through voice recordings, a form of audio media. Printed books can be converted into audio format, commonly known as audiobooks. Audiobooks serve as instructional tools to enhance effective teaching and learning. Nowadays, economic hardship is preventing parents from providing reading materials for their children. The availability of texts in audio format offers relief for learners and their parents, thereby enhancing the teaching and learning process. This paper seeks to examine reading aloud as an instructional means for effective teaching and learning in the context of economic hardship by considering the relationship between economic hardship and the teaching- learning process, reading aloud and audiobooks, as well as technology and reading integration. The benefits of audiobooks in enhancing reading aloud, as well as recommendations, are also discussed. Audiobooks have significant effects on reading comprehension and motivation among learners in general, and particularly for students with special needs, with a positive impact on student achievement.

Keywords: *Reading aloud, audiobooks, economic hardship, effective teaching and learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an integral part of the teaching-learning process and literacy development for children. In schools, independent reading is a key component of a balanced literacy curriculum as it is important for building stamina, fluency, and comprehension. Experts in reading instruction agree that the best way to learn to read is to practice reading (Daniels,1998). Research in schools around the world has found that students' choice and the contexts in which students read impact the desire to read (Daniels,2011). Educators may assume that creating a peaceful environment and giving students choices would be enough to create a positive reading experience. However, other factors can impact students' experience while reading. While there are many theories suggesting reasons for a negative reading experience for students, such as lack of time for independent reading, over-instruction on reading skills, and the cost of procuring the texts for reading, it is a widely agreed-upon notion that economic hardship influences reading. A 2007 study by the National Endowment for the Arts found that families are spending less on books than in the previous twenty years, so students may not read at home if texts are limited. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) also found that when readers utilize books and other media simultaneously, such as audiobooks, television, and video games, they experience low engagement in reading. As a result, students may have negative feelings about the reading experience. For many students, independent reading may occur only during school hours. As a result, it has become the responsibility of teachers and librarians to collect, organize, and offer access to high-interest reading materials for students, one of which is audiobooks that enhance reading. With the introduction of one-to-one mobile learning in schools, students have more access to electronic resources than ever before. Because schools are dynamic environments that change as their participants change, assessing activities in classrooms is a process that naturally appeals to practitioners in the field of education. Leaders as far back as John Dewey (1910) recognized the need for and benefit of educational reform through practitioner research. In the field of education, particularly in the area of instructional best practices, action research is favorable because its purpose is to improve one's practice, while traditional research is meant to offer information that is generalized into all settings (Anderson, 2015). For this reason, an action research model is preferable to a traditional research model as it can have an immediate impact on educational experiences for teachers and students. In addition, action research is situational in that the researcher seeks to understand the context and participants of the study (Anderson, 2015). Educators working in the field with students daily are in an optimal position to examine situational factors and make the practical decisions that are necessary for student learning. For action researchers, the process of self-reflection is important (David, 2013).

There is a wealth of literature on the importance of reading, and various best practices exist that educators employ to enhance students' reading achievement. In the field of education, it is widely accepted that opportunities for independent

reading and reading aloud are essential components of a successful, balanced literacy program. As one-to-one mobile technology becomes a staple in schools, accessing audiobooks for reading is increasingly common in classrooms, providing students with a broad selection of audiobooks. Audiobooks offer students the chance to engage in both independent reading and reading aloud simultaneously. There is a great deal of information available on the growing popularity of audiobooks in schools. Hess (2014) found that the use of audiobooks in the classroom encouraged enthusiasm in students. Similarly, a study in Taiwan found that the implementation of audiobooks for learning produced feedback that was "quite positive," making audiobooks more acceptable.

Economic Hardship and Teaching-Learning Process

Job and Salawu (2013) asserted that the implementation of educational programmes has been generally defective and largely ineffective and has shown disappointing outcomes. The glaring chasm between the rich and the poor is practical evidence that all Nigerian children and adults do not have equal access to education. Affirming this situation, Job and Salawu (2013) asserted that the fact that only those who can afford the cost of procuring textbooks buy them for their children is anything but a just and egalitarian system. However, hope has been restored when we begin to hear of audiobooks which can be copied by the less privileged ones for their use in the teaching-learning process. Socioeconomic background has long been recognized to have a direct impact on reading, as poverty creates unequal opportunities between children growing up in high-income homes and children growing up in low-income homes (Yin, 2014). Family income is not the only predictor of reading proficiency, but family income is a predictor of parents' behaviors with their children around print, so children from low-income backgrounds may be less likely to have interactions with reading materials while with their parents (Ndani, 2015). This impact is present even before the beginning of school, for students with as much as a fourteen-month difference in reading readiness between students from low and middle, to high socioeconomic backgrounds. Only one-third of middle school students from low-income homes show reading comprehension proficiency, and students from low-income homes enter high school with literacy skills as much as five times lower than their higher-income peers.

Reading Aloud and Audio-Books

Information about reading aloud is important to this study because audiobooks can be used to read aloud to students. In schools, it is widely agreed that teachers must incorporate reading aloud from high-interest books every day (Daniels, 1998). Research supports this notion as referenced by the 1985 report entitled *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (National Academy of Education, 1985). The report found that reading aloud to children is the most important activity to build success in reading. While reading aloud is a foundation of early literacy programmes, reading aloud tends to diminish in classrooms as students grow older and become more

independent. Documents read aloud are often "capable of mesmerizing children, adolescents, and adults and drawing them in to real engagement with the subject matter" (Daniels, 1998). Since audiobooks are produced using human voices, they provide a similar experience for students as books are read aloud in the classroom. Reading aloud exposes students to a wide variety of texts and models fluent reading, and it is a strategy used in schools as part of a balanced literacy program (Fullerton, 2017). Early language development for children occurs in the home and community before beginning school, but children continue to learn new words beyond their initial language acquisition as vocabularies for children in elementary grades grow by thousands of words each year. Children learn new words when they encounter them in verbal context. For children, being read to aloud can be a joyful experience and one that is considered a luxury, so it can help build engagement in reading. Hearing the written word read aloud also assists students in constructing meaning and examining possibilities their experiences may not provide (Laminack, 2016). Reading aloud to students can also help those who have had fewer verbal experiences in the home learn how language is used in different ways (Laminack, 2016).

Because reading for meaning requires students to build mental representations of details contained in text, reading aloud can supplement reading for students who have difficulty constructing the segmental representations (Spivey, 1985).

As an instructional tool, reading aloud in the classroom is intended to build students' motivation to read, increase background knowledge on various subjects, and develop listening and speaking vocabularies (Laminack, 2016). When books in audio formats were first introduced on tape and later in CD-ROM versions, they gained some popularity with adult listeners who had long commutes to work, but it was not until personal devices and downloadable audiobook formats became affordable and accessible that audiobooks became widely popular (Moore, 2017). The popularity of audiobooks in educational settings has increased as more schools have moved to technology models with one-to-one devices, making audiobook usage more practical.

Audio-books Versus Live-reader

Engaging in reading conventionally would involve the availability of printed texts either by direct purchase, donation, or borrowing. Among the learners with special needs, reading of Braille format or involvement of a sighted person (Live reader) is the order of the day. Purchasing books is now becoming unbearable in economic hardship, borrowing books is becoming eradicated because of handwritten notes inside the textbooks, which cannot be erased, especially in lower classes. A sighted reader, according to Scalon (1987), cited in Adebimpe, Imam, Akinlubi, Imran, Adebayo, and Adeleke (2014), may either work for pay or as a volunteer. The paid reader will be available when needed, while a volunteer reader may not be available when needed. An average student, particularly in developing countries, might not be able to afford to engage a paid reader but will have to be content with whatever

conditions that might be given by a volunteer reader who may not be regularly available. The use of Braille format has posed a problem as a result of a lack of exposure to Braille manipulation, most especially among students with adventitious blindness. Audio-books, on the other hand, are easily accessible; only one audio-book can serve quite a large number of students at a time since they can assemble and listen to it. Audio-books as media produced for students can create an environment to provide, enrich, inform, guide, and teach subjects fully by creating an environment to learn and also develop independent study skills to solve problems and answer questions, as well as discuss different course-related topics. Adisa (2024) researched effect of audio-book and brailled media on learning outcome of pre-service teachers with visual impairment in microteaching using the 200 level pre-service teachers in Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo and the result showed that about 80% of the respondents who were exposed to learning with audio-book performed better than those exposed to Braille. Little or no training is needed by the teachers on the usage of audiobooks once they can manipulate all forms of audio recorders, such as audio tape, audio CD, MP3, among others.

Technology and Reading Integration

Reading interventions as part of school reform have been used in classrooms typically to improve word fluency and comprehension with an overarching goal of improving student achievement, but interventions today are aimed at effectively teaching diverse learners how to read for deeper understanding (Fountas, 2012). Marie Clay (2013) contributed reading intervention strategies not to improve high-stakes testing results but rather to monitor the progress of individual students. Current models in education recognize that the reading process involves four areas of learning in which students must understand messages expressed in language, conventions used in print, and visual patterns, as well as master the ability to listen to language. Listening to print resources read aloud is an important component of the first and last area of learning (Daniels, 1998). In this research study, messages expressed in language and listening to language are key components of the instruction that occurs with the target group of students.

Current best practices in reading education indicate that all children do not learn the same content at the same rate or in the same ways, but daily instructional programs in schools have not necessarily changed in ways that implement this philosophy (Fountas, 2012). While models such as the Four Blocks emphasize a self-selected reading block, it has varied in its use and effectiveness from class to class (Sigmon, 1999). Studies that track achievement in literacy indicate that the literacy problems in America are not because of a decline in literacy but a result of economic, political, and social challenges that demand more advanced skills not currently addressed in traditional classrooms (Snow, 2012). Fourth is reason, achievement data is not an emphasis of this study because it does not measure these advanced

skills. This research study utilizes technology for learning, self-direction, and self-selection of materials to improve the learning experience for students.

Factors Influencing Audiobook Usage

Factors such as academic ability, learners' interest, socio-economic background, parental influence, accessibility to technological devices, and availability of power supply, among others, can either affect negatively or positively. Academic ability will determine how the students will strive to construct their knowledge by themselves; learners' interest will induce the media selection for effective learning; socio-economic background dictates the affordance of book purchase; accessibility to technological devices and power supply will initiate the usage of audiobooks and vice versa. The effect of negative results is a drawback to the use of audiobooks.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper is to determine whether audiobooks have the potential to improve the reading experience for students. For this reason, the literature in this review is both helpful in informing as well as highlighting the impact of technology on students' experiences. The use of audiobooks has impacted motivation to read and engagement in reading. Because readers interact with audiobooks similarly to how they interact with printed materials, utilizing audiobooks for reading is accepted as a valid form of reading aloud. By listening to audiobooks, students show benefits in language proficiency, comprehension, and language rhythm, which equally enhance the effective teaching and learning process, as well as helping in overcoming crises as a result of economic hardship. Factors that determine the usage of audiobooks and the inability to judiciously use audiobooks have a significant impact on their usage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper puts forth the following recommendations for consideration by the stakeholders in the education industry:

1. There should be special funds made available to schools to provide most of the media equipment required for the system.
2. There should be uninterrupted power supply in various schools to enable access to audiobooks.
3. Provision of enough books in audio format should be made in the school libraries.
4. Technical officers in schools and the librarians should be expanded and made to undergo a series of exposures, both on the acquisition and usage of audiobooks as instructional tools for reading aloud in the era of economic hardship.

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