

Examining early childhood educators' pedagogical knowledge in the teaching of language and literacy at the early grade



Research article



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Wasila Mahamud

Department of Languages, Tumu College of Education, Ghana

Email: kpayala29@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1970-7933>

Abstract

The study examined early childhood educators' pedagogical knowledge in the teaching of language and literacy at the early grade. The research design that was used for the study was the descriptive survey. The target population was limited to early childhood educators. The mixed-method approach was used for the study. The sample was drawn using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The total sample for the study was 164 early childhood educators. The self-developed questionnaire, interview guides and observation checklist were used for data collection. Data were analysed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 20. The descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data, including means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data were analysed using themes. The study revealed that the teachers demonstrated adequate knowledge of the assessment techniques in assessing their learners. They agreed informal assessment through observation and portfolios are best in assessing the kindergartener whereas summative is use for the primary one to three learners as stipulated in the curriculum. The study recommends that teachers need to set goals and measure s' progress toward independent writing based on each individual learner's growth in writing empowered teachers to instruct students in a classroom with varying student writing abilities.

Keywords: early grade, pedagogical knowledge, phonic method, phonemic awareness, shared reading, vocabulary development



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Public Interest Statement

In relation to Pedagogical Content Knowledge, it is important to underscore that even though language mastery is an important qualification, it is not enough for an effective English language teacher. It is essential for a teacher of English to demonstrate pedagogical competence and have a wide range of skills such as lesson planning, materials development, classroom management, instructional organization, presentation of the subject matter, and assessment, which can be called on to meet the needs of the students (Cesur, 2012; Cunningham & O'Donnell, 2015; Scarlett, 2009). It is therefore important to explore knowledge and methods for teaching foundation skills to lower grade children that may offer more desirable outcomes literacy than the current curriculum has been able to achieve. The starting point is lower grade classes, the weight of which relies on early childhood educators to provide. Empirical evidence on whether or not early childhood teachers in Sissala East possess these key attributes aside language mastery is yet to be established.

Introduction

Language and literacy development begins at birth. In the first three years of life, children learn to communicate by observing adults in listening, understanding, and expressing their needs. They interact with and respond to their environment through play and socialization. Within their environments, homes, and childcare/schools, language and literacy development ensues. Because this development occurs mainly through social interaction, it makes the quality of those interactions imperative. Learning to read and write is critical to an individual's development cycles and to the benefit of the larger society. The National Reading Panel, (2008) indicated that many scholars, educators and parents have supported the idea that children's failure to read can have long term implications for their academic success and beyond. Ferrandino and Tirozzi (2004), assert that under-developed literacy skills are the number one reason why students lag behind and why they fail to graduate from high school.

Children's success in the future depends on the opportunities provided in the first few years of life (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). The opportunities and experiences occur at home and in school. Ramey and Ramey (2004) have the perception that children depend on responsive enabling environment that supports their development through appropriate practices. Literacy development is one such component of an individual's development which is dependent on the type of environment that nurtures, provides experiences and opportunities for children. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) asserts that emergent literacy development constitutes the literacy skills that are developed by learners before they enter into the mainstream. Children develop these skills based on the concept of print, oral language development, experimental writing, alphabetic principle, comprehension, vocabulary and through facilitation by them. One may therefore assert that it is through an extensive knowledge base of multiple instructional strategies and an in-depth understanding of learners needs that teachers can create an appropriate balance of instructional strategies that can address the varied needs of learners (International Reading Association Position Statement, 1998).

Literature Review

Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)

Shulman (1987) as cited in Kulsum (2017), stated that pedagogical content involves the teaching of principles and strategies that are applied in the classroom management and organisation. It deals with methods of teaching and effective strategies when it comes to assessing and evaluating learners understanding (Muskrat and Koehler, 2006). PK has contributed significantly to the teaching of English as researchers in the field have applied the concept. Faisal (2016), in a study, explained that pedagogical knowledge is the knowledge teachers have on strategies and the best practices they require to present subject matter to the learner. Furthermore, pedagogical knowledge includes teacher's knowledge of students learning, assessment and education purposes. This implies that effective teaching does not only mean adequate knowledge in subject matter but the integration of knowledge in the learning process and classroom organisation and management. Early childhood educators need to apply these principles to develop holistically in learners all the skills in the language.

In the opinion of Cox (2008), pedagogical knowledge highlights a teacher's knowledge of the general pedagogical practices for encouraging learners, interacting with them, organising and presenting new ideas and observing good classroom management. (Gutbonton 2000, Mullock, 2006 as cited in Cesur, 2012), identify six domains of pedagogical knowledge that early childhood educators who teach language and literacy should have. They include: knowledge of handling language items in a way children can learn them; knowledge of learners' characteristics; knowledge of the goals in teaching; Knowledge of methods and techniques of teaching; knowledge of establish good social interaction relation between teacher and learner; knowledge about assessment procedures. In order to support learners' lifelong performance in literacy, early childhood educators do not only need to have content knowledge, they also need pedagogical skills to transfer all the knowledge into practice (Poulson, et al., 2001; Rautzel & Clark, 2001). Early childhood educators need to focus attention on pedagogical skills; what they do in class, what method, techniques, approaches and materials they use in their classrooms for the purposes of this study, PK is described as methods of teaching, instructional strategies, and assessment.

Brown (2001) described method as general set of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives. He added it's the overall plan for systematic presentation of language based upon a selected approach. Technique is any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or tasks used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives. According to Raban et al. (2011), instructional strategies are techniques teachers use to help students become independent, strategic learners. These strategies become learning strategies when students independently select the appropriate ones and use them effectively to accomplish tasks or meet goals. Instructional strategies can motivate students and help them focus attention; organize information for understanding and remembering'.

Lower class teachers often do not use a single strategy but a combination of them in lesson delivery towards achieving learners' goal. Several approaches and methods have been developed over the years to support students learning. But research has shown that poor development of literacy skills in Ghana are as a result of bad or ineffective teaching methods and techniques. (Daily Graphic, 18th September, 2018). Moomen (2006) in a study reported that teaching is ineffective and

has placed learners in a passive role. This in effect limits learners and makes them memorize concepts and recite them back to the teacher when assessed.

Methods of teaching

Early grade teachers have the responsibility of making decisions about the methods and approaches they need to use in their classrooms. There are several methods effective for teaching language. Early childhood educators in Sissala East Municipal need to choose the best and most appropriate methods for their classes. As to whether any of these methods can be described as best is only achievable if the early grade teachers are able to determine the teaching situation needs of learners, materials available and teaching procedures to be used. It is based on these they can create the best method in teaching. All the same, the early teachers should have in-depth knowledge about teaching methods and techniques about which of them they should use at what time. Following is an explanation of approaches or methods used for teaching reading. Early childhood teachers should have an understanding of these approaches and be able to use them appropriately.

The phonic method

Adams (1990) in a study on effective methodologies and techniques in teaching reading to beginners particularly those in the lower grade has argued for the adoption of the phonic method. Joubert et al. (2008, p. 89) further noted, the “phonic method connects the visual and auditory where meaning and syntax of the word” is considered. A vowel followed by a consonant to form a word is learn, for example, c + a + t. The word can be sounded as c a t = cat. A sentence can be composed: The cat sat on a mat. Sounding of the word can be taught by associating with writing letters on-air, on the sand and with an illustration using pictures or flashcards. The DBE (2011) concurs and describes this method as effective, where comprehension and fluency are put into practice. Different words are learnt as per the prescription for each grade. Hugo and Lenyai (2013) link this method to the code emphasis model where mechanical skills of reading are emphasised before comprehension. Closely related to the phonics method is the alphabetic principle.

The alphabet method

This method, according to Joubert et al. (2008) is the method where learners read letters of the alphabet in isolation before reading the text. Early grade educators introduce the letters of the alphabet by taking them through single letters which encourage them to read from part to whole (bottom-up method). The teacher focuses on sounding of letters rather meaning. But Joubert (2008) asserts it is time-consuming. Early childhood teachers need to understand this principle so that learners are taught to identify letter-sounds and letter name and to be able to spell and identify the letters of the alphabet in words. Learners can play “I spy” games where letters can be associated with objects (Joubert et al., 2008; DBE, 2008). Beginning readers who receive explicit training in letter-sound correspondence achieved accuracy on word recognition assessment on both regular and irregular words than their counterparts who receive tuition without it. According to (DBE, 2011, p.15) “Phonemic awareness is the first stage of learning which is to decode written text” Likewise, Joubert et al. (2008) explain that phonemic awareness is when words are formed

and pronounced. Sounding of words, referred to as phonemes, is different from the writing of words, or letters referred to as graphemes. Learners are taught the concept formation as well as the terminology in the classroom. Making sense of words is a great advantage in this method.

The look and say the method

This method is based on the “Gestalt Theory”, where the whole part is learnt first, and parts of the whole follow. The sentence is formed, words broken down, mingled and are then put together to form a sentence. Sometimes sentence strips are pieced together to form a sentence (Joubert et al., 2008). Joubert et al. describe the process; thus, “The words, the sentence and the story are taught with the use of flashcards, sentence strips and story cards” (Joubert et al., 2008). Group guided reading according to Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (DBE, 2008), learners are grouped according to how the teachers assess them, which can be for reading abilities or specific needs. The teacher directs the reading process. A small group is supported as the learners read, talk, and think their way through. However, teachers may group learners in different ways, such as according to their reading levels or abilities, for instance, using graded readers. Learners use the same copies of books. The teacher may focus on one group whilst others are engaged in other reading activities. The teacher should scaffold the meaning by doing a mind map for keywords and ideas.

Peer-Assisted learning strategy (PALS)

Peer-Assisted learning strategy is one strategy that has been identified to be beneficial in improving children literacy skills (Bornfreund, 2012). PALS involves pairing high-performing readers and low-performing readers to conduct a series of activities to promote reading fluency and comprehension. PALS was developed by Douglas and Lyn Fuchs for students in grade two to six to assist classroom teachers in accommodating diverse children in the classroom (Bornfreund, 2012). Fuchs et al. (1997, as cited in McMaster et al. (2006) in an experimental field trial of twelve schools in an urban and two suburban districts showed that students in the PALS classroom significantly outperformed their counterparts in the non-PALS classroom in terms of growth in reading comprehension. This study was conducted by Fuchs et al. (1997) when they paired students and asked them to take turns with the teacher while they work on structured activities that address the difficulty that learners may be experiencing. As the students work, the teacher moves around the classroom to observe and provide the needed help. PALS was designed to augment teachers reading practices.

McMaster et al. (2006) conducted large-scale experimental research on kindergarteners, and the results indicated Kindergarten-PALS could have a substantially positive impact on the beginning reading skills of many children, and that the Kindergarten-PALS decoding activities provide an added value over phonological awareness alone. Similarly, Mathes et al. (1999, as cited in Falks, 2001) found that the students achieved dramatic gains in segmentation skills and reading when they were taught using a peer-assisted learning strategy. The researcher believes when applied by teachers in the Sissala East Municipal will go a long to improve upon children’s reading skills.

Shared reading

A study conducted by Shanahan and Lonigan (2010) through the National Early Literacy Panel project revealed that book-sharing interventions produced significant and moderate size effects on children's oral language skills and print knowledge. Shared reading would be demonstrated or modelled by an adult, either a teacher or parent. A large book, enlarged print or newspaper cuttings can be used where the whole class is involved during this reading process. The emphasis here is on how learners can predict, read titles, sound and pronounce the words, raising the voice at the beginning of the sentence, pausing after a comma and after a full stop. The learner would be expected to read and demonstrate the same approach.

Teachers are supposed to demonstrate shared reading to learners and learners are supposed to mimic what early childhood teachers do by raising voices and observing punctuations. Interesting strategies can be used during shared reading, outlined as follows: Rhyming of words as when reading the word "mean", learners can come up with rhyming words like "lean", "bean" etc. Rhythm can be done by clapping when they come to a chosen letter, e.g. "L", Lovely Lulu loves her lollies. Alliteration can be used where words start with the same letter, e.g. "Lucky Lucy". A song or puppet can be used. Word friezes, where actions are depicted, and language games where flashcards are used, can be used to develop spelling.

Shared reading is vital if teachers integrate it into their classroom instruction. It provides opportunities in children reading development in the areas of phonemic awareness, builds the concept of print, letter identification and helps in improving children comprehension skills (Lonigan et al, 2009). Wasik (2006) pointed out that shared book reading provides a context support dialogue and contributes to vocabulary development. When teachers take children through shared book reading, they expose them to new, unfamiliar words which the child may not be privileged to get in his everyday communication.

Research has shown that dialogic reading, which is an aspect of shared reading, impacts reading skills. Kimmel et al. (2015) explain dialogic reading as a teaching strategy can be planned and implemented with any picture book read out to children. With this, the teacher uses children book to model teach and assess vocabulary and grammar. In addition to reading the book, the teacher facilitates a dialogue with the children by asking them to label objects, actions and attributes of things pictured through the use of wh- question and by asking open-ended prompts.

Trehearne (2006) explains that this method of reading offers early childhood educators a systematic way to discuss storybooks as they are reread, using the 'peer' sequence and five different types of prompts. Here the peer sequence means **P**-prompt children to say something about the book-**E** evaluate children responses. **E**-expand children's responses by rephrasing and adding information **R**-repeat the initial prompt to assess children's understandings.

The language experience approach

Pressley et al. (2001), in a study found that when teachers combine whole language approach with explicit teaching and infusion of children literature, classroom management skills, positive behaviours and motivation, it leads quality teaching. The language experience approach assists the learner to read and write base on their real-life experiences where learners tell their own experiences. The learner tells their own news and could give a title for the news they write.

Learners are asked to write experiences they share which can be used as a reader learner reads to a friend. With this approach, children create a text which is common to the class and can be shared in their writing or reading chart. Learners are motivated when they read what they write because they read for get understanding. This encourages a lot of conversation between the teacher and the learners. Wray et al. (2000), found that early childhood teachers who are effective in teaching apply scaffolding through examples, modelling, demonstration and explanations and fuse different literacy activities to engage learners. Teachers who make use of various approaches and resources will guide learners improved their literacy success.

Materials and Methods

The target population for the research included all early childhood educators in the Sissala East Municipal in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The target population is the aggregate of cases, about which the researcher would like to make generalizations (Polit & Hungler, 1999). Early childhood here is defined as pupils from Kindergarten one to basic three. The accessible population of the study was, teachers in five selected circuits in the Sissala East Municipal. The five circuits were chosen mainly on two grounds: first, the researcher considers five circuits as the accessible population which comprises 180 early childhood educators (KG- 1 to class 3) out of nine (9) circuits. The purpose of investigating the early childhood teachers is that the knowledge, skills and their practices are important factors in determining how much children learn at the foundation stage, how well they prepare the children in school and for entry into upper classes.

This research employed multiple sampling techniques, which include: purposive, simple random, criterion sampling and lottery sampling techniques. The researcher selected all early childhood educators using purposive sampling. The purposive sampling was considered suitable for this research because all the teachers teach language and literacy and perform a key role in children literacy development. The 180 participants was considered because Burns and Grove (2009) state that when sampling size is large enough, it will help the researcher identify relationships that exist among variables. Cohen et al. (2007) asserts that the larger the sample size, the greater its reliability and makes a more sophisticated statistics available for the researcher to use. The simple random sampling technique was used to select five circuits out the nine circuits. Names of circuits were written on pieces of papers and put in a container. A pupil was blindfolded to pick five circuits.

For the quantitative data, a simple random sampling procedure was used to select 180 early childhood educators out 299 in the municipal. To achieve this specifically, the lottery method was adopted to obtain the sample unit for the questionnaire. The rationale for employing this technique was to give each teacher an equal chance of being selected so as to avoid biases in the sample. This was done by first collecting the list of early childhood educators teaching at lower grade from the human resource office of Ghana Education Service Municipal Directorate. Having identified the number of respondents required, the researcher only had to ensure that the number of teachers sampled from each school was representative. Therefore, each school was dealt with separately from the other. At each school, numbers were assigned to early childhood teachers on a piece of paper and placed in a basket. Each paper was picked and replaced until the required number of teachers was obtained. The researcher utilized three instruments. The first is a questionnaire which

sought early childhood educators' views on their educational background, content knowledge, and instructional strategies they use in teaching literacy. The second instrument was the interview where the research had the privilege to have a face to face interaction with participating teachers on their teaching, and the third was observation. The researcher observed teachers as they taught in the classroom in order to get empirical data about their content knowledge, knowledge of instructional strategies, knowledge of learners, and how these instructional strategies influence children's performance. The researcher used the observation tool to assist in triangulating the data and to see if the responses they provided in the interview support their classroom practices. The researcher designed the observation tool to conform to the purpose of the study.

Findings/Results

What pedagogical knowledge do early childhood educators perceive as appropriate in teaching Language and literacy at the early grade?

In teaching Language and literacy, the components of pedagogical knowledge include early childhood educators' repertoire of representations and illustrations to draw on when ideal, the ability to recognise what skills and knowledge are perquisites to teaching and understanding particular content and understanding how the subject matter connects to a learner to process information (Mark, 1990). Pedagogical knowledge deals with early childhood educators' knowledge of particular instructional strategies (Grossman). To achieve this, the researcher developed the questionnaire to find out from the early childhood educators' extent to which they agreed to the statements. The responses are presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Early childhood educators’ pedagogical knowledge

Statements	SD		D		A		SA		N	Mean	S Dev
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%			
10. I make use shared book reading methods in teaching reading skills.	1	0.6	4	2.5	77	48	80	49.4	162	3.46	0.58
11. I make use of the phonics method of teaching writing and spelling skills			4	2.5	87	54	71	43.8	162	3.41	0.542
12. I make use of appropriate methods in teaching grammar			8	5	94	58	59	36.6	161	3.32	0.564
13. I provide hands-on activities for students to learn writing ,alphabet, sounds			4	2.5	67	41	91	56.2	162	3.54	0.548
14. I create learning corners in my classroom for pupils			90	56	2	1.3	68	42.5	160	3.41	0.519
15. I make available talk wall mobiles/fliers, conversational letter cards, etc	2		7		82		65		156	3.35	0.629
16. I assess the progress of my students through observation, portfolios and anecdotal records	2	1.3	7	4.4	85	54	65	40.9	159	3.34	0.625
17. I integrate environmental print into children’s classroom routines	11	6.9	9	5.7	93	59	46	28.9	159	3.09	0.786
18. I make phonics inventory checklist for my students to point at a letter.	4	2.5	11	6.9	85	53	60	37.5	160	3.26	0.694
19. I make use of phonological and phonemes awareness checklist	4	2.6	16	10.3	100	65	35	22.6	155	3.07	0.656

Note: The mean values, Strongly agrees (SA) =3.5 - 4.0= Agree (A) = 2.5 - 3.4, Disagreed (D) = 1.5 – 2.4,

Strongly disagreed (DA) =1-1.4, Teachers N= 164

Source (field data, 2019)

The statistics from Table 1 above reveal that 157 (95.7%) participants agreed that they can make use of shared book reading methods and techniques in the teaching reading skills. With a mean score of 3.46, it means that the majority of respondents agreed they apply the appropriate methods of teaching reading. Wasik (2006) pointed out that shared book reading provides a context support dialogue and contributes to vocabulary development. When teachers take children through shared book reading, they expose them to new, unfamiliar words which the child may not be privileged to get in his everyday communication. This is also supported by Shanahan and Lonigan (2010) in a study conducted through the National Early Literacy Panel project which revealed that book-sharing interventions produced significant and moderate effects on children's oral language skills and print knowledge .

Again, 158 (97.8%) respondents agreed with the statement "I make use of the phonic method of teaching writing and listening spelling skills". This represents a mean score of 3.41. This implies that a good number of them have agreed the phonic method is appropriate in teaching lower level learners. This aligns with Adams (1990) whose study on effective methodologies and techniques in teaching reading to beginners particularly those in the lower grade argued that the phonic method is appropriate for teaching lower levels and should be adopted.

Again, 147(94.2%) respondents agreed that they make available talk wall mobiles/fliers and conversational charts in their classroom. Considering the mean of 3.35, it implies that early childhood educators believe the use of word walls, conversation charts and posters help in developing print awareness. This is in line with the findings by Giles and Tunks (2010) who suggested that displaying Word Walls, conversational charts, bulletin boards and engaging children in conversations about print seen in everyday settings increases children's curiosity, expands their general knowledge, and improves upon their communication skills while helping them understand the alphabetic system.

In addition, 70 (43.8%) respondents agreed they create learning corners while the majority of the respondents representing 90 (56 %) disagreed that they create learning corners in their classrooms. This is evident that early childhood educators in the Sissala East Municipal are aware that learning corners are essential instructional strategies in helping their learners develop language. This contradicts Morrow (2007) who suggested that learning corners such as book corner, music centre/play centre are created in the classroom to facilitate children understanding and acquisition of literacy skills.

UNESCO (2007) in a study, indicated that accurate and informed assessment of early childhood education in a data deficient environment has a dysfunctional impact on the monitoring and measurement of the learner's progress. On this premises early childhood educators were asked to respond to the statement "I assess the progress of my students in reading, writing through observation, creating portfolios and anecdotal records". 150(94.9%) participants agreed that they use the informal assessment techniques such as observation and portfolios in assessing their learners. A mean score of 3.34, implies that the majority of the early grade teachers acknowledged that it is appropriate to use informal assessment in assessing the learners.

On the issue of guiding students to use their own spelling of new words in their writing and making phonics inventory checklist for the learners to point at a letter and tell the sound it makes,145 (80.5%) of the respondents agreed to the statements. A similar trend of responses could

be observed for the rest of the statements. The results suggest that pedagogical knowledge of teachers' teaching-learning strategies significantly enhanced the instructional process in the classroom and the use of appropriate pedagogical approaches in teaching played important roles in the teaching and learning process.

Discussion

In order to explain the results of the questionnaire, the researcher made use of interview and observation. The responses were put into themes and sub-themes for each interview question. The sub-themes are used with the aim of managing the data. While analysing the responses of participants on their pedagogical knowledge, the major themes that emerged from the results include: methods of teaching, instructional strategies of teaching and assessment procedures.

Methods and, instructional strategies of teaching

The methods and techniques they apply are summarised in the table below.

Table 2: Methods, approaches, techniques and strategies used by the early childhood educators

Part of the lesson	Methods and approaches used	Techniques used	Strategies
Lesson introduction	Direct approach	Question and answer	Pictures and sample sentences used to get pupils to know the relation between the form and meaning.
Presentation	reading aloud, syllabic method phonic method group work	Role play, discussion guided writing, model writing	Creating learning corners Multisensory activities
Lesson conclusion	Communicative approach	Question and answer. Using words to form sentences	

The results of the interview showed that early childhood educators in the Sissala East Municipal made use of varied methods, techniques and strategies for teaching.

T1 *"I use dramatization, role-play, group work, questions, controlled writing, but I mostly prefer to use group work in my lesson activities."* Erickson (2007) posits that large or small group discussion, cooperative or individual learning, role-play or individual presentations are structural processes teachers use in the classroom.

T7 *"I use play, I bring out a play, I sometimes use questioning, discussion and demonstration. During my reading lessons, I model three times and let pupils read after me. I call students to go to the board to read letters and words"*.

T2: "I use syllabic method and segmentation when teaching phonics."

In line with this T5, T3, T4, T10 indicated they use discussion method, storying-telling, songs and rhymes respectively as methods of teaching their pupils. Four respondents in the interview could actually mention that they make use of the direct and structural methods while the rest of the respondents could not mention the names of the methods they use in teaching grammar. This is due to the fact that the syllabus stipulated:

"It is important to point out that at the primary school, grammar is basically internalized. It must be seen as an integral part of listening and speaking and treated as such. The main task is to assist pupils to learn to use the listed language/grammatical items correctly and fluently. These should be introduced in meaningful situations in the context of everyday activities, modelled adequately and practised orally by every child"
(Ministry of Education, National Syllabus for English (P1-3), 2012)

The researcher followed up with a question on how writing is taught. Eight (8) participants identified that they use the phonic method in teaching, especially during phonic lessons. But the respondents could not explain how they use the synthetic phonics methods. This method is a method of teaching whereby pupils are to pronounce sounds associated with particular letters in isolation and then blend them. The respondents have indicated that the phonic method allows users of English as a second language sound out unfamiliar words, which ultimately lead to more fluency and independent reading.

T1: "I use the phonic method. When pupils see words that they don't know, they say out each letter and then blend to be able to pronounce the word".

The teachers explained that they teach learners to recite and identify the letters of the alphabet. They then introduce the individual phonemes by highlighting the initial phonemes of familiar words.

T7: "I get them to understand "b" and what type of "b" words they get for examples names beginning with "b", objects in the class with "b" either at the initial, medial or final position".

Learners are then required to learn a variety of English words that start with the 44 graphemes of the alphabet. The words were then paired with pictures in order to facilitate understanding and deeper connections. The teachers who articulated themselves very in the use of phonic method are teachers who had special training from AFIKIDS. The number is too small to represent all teachers in the municipality. Their contribution cannot also be ignored too. However, during the observation on three phonics lessons, it was realised that there was no clear distinction made in the pronunciation of /i/ and /e/. This led to some sort of confusion as learners could not also pronounce them.

During the observation, 5 out of the 20 early childhood educators were seen using a number of multisensory activities in order to support pupils with letter identification, and these were teachers in the AFRIKIDS schools. Visual, tactile and auditory teaching methods were used to keep the pupils engaged throughout their lessons. In the AFRIKIDS schools, the early childhood educators made use of the visual sensory methods which include activities such as drawing letters on the chalkboard and identifying letters on the flashcards, cutting letters out of old empty boxes papers and old magazines. This stimulated the children, built a positive relation among the learners and provided pleasant experiences in the learners.

During some reading lesson observations, the researcher realised participants made use of modelled reading (reading aloud). Also significant was that five of the ten teacher participants identified the concurrent use of modelled reading that was teacher focused. The reading did not accompany with the use of cues, predicting events in the text read to the children. As mentioned earlier writing instructions did not include modelled writing. Another important missing strategy was use of elaboration. This contradicts Wray et al. (2004) argument that children tracing or copying from an adults writings improves the young learners writing skills. When students interactively observe someone writing who is more proficient, their knowledge of writing is constructed and learning occurs. Graves (2004) notes that students need to hear their teacher thinking aloud while they write, talking through the steps of their own writing.

A significant commonality in the participating teachers' discussion about pedagogy was the explicit use of questioning, which was identified in the interviews of six teachers. With the regard to the use of questioning, the researcher observed that questions were asked and learners were named and called to respond. In few cases questions were thrown to the entire class and all were encouraged to respond. However, some participants made use of close-ended questions which did not require the pupils to express themselves extensively. Efforts were not made to repeat questions when there was no response. Interestingly, those who were active in class were asked to answer questions.

Though the teachers indicated they use play, during the observation, T1 T2, T9 were not seen integrating play as they have revealed during the interview. This is in line with Abdulai (2014) in his study on 'The Place of Play in Ghana's Early Childhood Education which revealed that The National Curriculum on Language and Literacy for Kindergarten (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2012) has not prioritized play and therefore has not included play. The findings are also as a result of the fact that little is known about how play is used in Ghanaian early childhood educational settings (Abdulai, 2014). Many teachers could not identify and in fact were not familiar with the contemporary reading methods and activities such as, Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA) and What I Know-What I Want To Know-What I Have Learnt (KWL). So these were not incorporated into their reading lessons. During the lesson observation of T4, reading aloud was used where the teacher read the passage allowed and asked the children to read after her. But T10's interaction with the children was quite strict and authoritative. The activities used were far above learners' proficiency levels and so did not attract pupils' attention, which made the pupils not have full participation in the lesson. This somehow led to problems of classroom management. When comparing responses of interviewees to the instructional strategies they use in teaching Language and literacy, their responses depicted diverse instructions. While T7 and T9 used demonstrations and role-play, T5,

T3, T4, T 10 use discussion method, storying telling, and songs. This indicates that early childhood educators in the Sissala East Municipal do not have specific methods they use in teaching Language and literacy.

In summary (see table 11above) most of the teachers throughout the interview and the observation demonstrated varied teaching strategies. They identified discussion, group work, guided writing and modelled reading, syllabic method utilised in their teaching as against creating a literate-rich environment, classroom management, play, and language experience approach explored in the literature.

Assessment techniques in language and literacy

The researcher asked participants the appropriate ways of assessing their learners. The early childhood teachers gave similar assessment strategies in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. In their answers to the ninth interview question. Seven (7) early childhood educators believed that observation and pupil's achievement record (PAR), portfolio are appropriate assessment tools for assessing students. One teacher could not mention any assessment tool, and two teachers said they use oral questions. The teachers stated clearly that with reference to the Ghana Education Service curriculum, learners in the kindergarten classes are not supposed to go through a formal test.

T1: "At this stage, the assessment must be as informal as possible. Teachers must avoid subjecting children's work to formal assessment that is paper and pencil test. The training we had from AFRIKIDS has shown us how to assess them informally. So here normally we don't do examination ... At the end of the year, each teacher taking the children throughout the year is able to see the capability of each child."

From the participant's responses, it is concluded that early childhood educators in the Sissala East Municipal who benefited from a special training programme demonstrated knowledge of techniques in assessing children in the early grade whereas their counterparts have limited knowledge. Again, the observation results show that early childhood teachers do not create learning corners. Out of the 20 lessons observed 5 of them have learning corners. These are the AFRIKIDS schools which have corners stocked with the appropriate learning materials. Expectations for student behaviour were posted (classroom rules). In those same schools teachers displayed graphic organizers, flyers, conversation charts, sketches, and posters, and visual images etc. in their classrooms and used that to teach their pupils. This is in line with Giles and Tunks (2010) who suggested that displaying "word walls" and engaging children in conversations about print seen in everyday settings increase their curiosity, expand their general knowledge, and improve upon their communication skills while helping them understand the alphabetic system. However, in most of the schools visited, classrooms were absent of these materials and learning corners. The findings contradict Raban et al. (2011) reported that one of the most important ways in which lower grade teachers can promote children's literacy learning is by creating, with the children and their families, a learning environment in which literacy is purposefully used and discussed. Fu, Johnson, Lamme and Savage (2002) have argued that early grade learners have the potential of becoming

enthusiastic writers when a rich- literate environment that includes modelling and individual instruction is created literacy as in the figures 1 below.



Figure 1: A picture of a literate-rich classroom



Figure 2: A picture of a literate-rich classroom

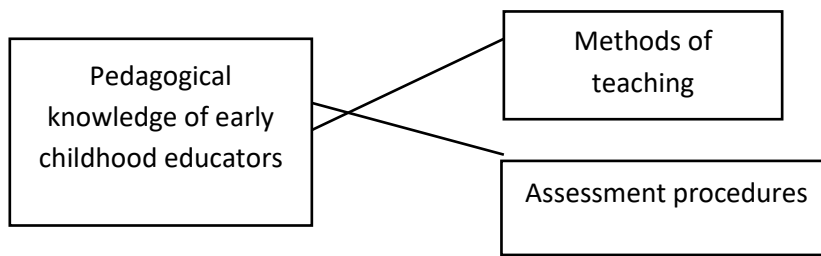


Figure 3: Summary of teachers PK

It is concluded from the findings that both the result from the questionnaire and the interview indicated that teachers in the Sissala East Municipality used for the study had adequate pedagogical knowledge. Contrary, the observation' result revealed that early childhood educators used for the study do not have adequate pedagogical knowledge desirable enough to teach language and literacy in the early grade.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that Early childhood educators demonstrated knowledge and awareness of reading techniques to assist learners in reading but could not integrate the techniques well in their lessons. As a result, learners have challenges reading simple words. Some of the early childhood educators were unable to transfer from what is learned in coursework to the classroom. It is concluded that the inability of some early childhood educators to transfer what is learnt in their coursework to the classroom posed a problem in the teaching of language and literacy at the early grade. This is due to limited time for pedagogy in teacher education programme.

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