

Maximizing Primary School Pupils' Success in Reading Comprehension Through Differentiated Instructional Strategy

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Abstract

Pupils tend to comprehend little and lose focus of classroom instruction when their teachers fail to use instructional strategies that match their learning styles. Differentiated instructional strategy can alleviate or eliminate this disengagement because it is a way to modify instruction to meet pupil's individual need. In this paper, the author discussed the concept of differentiated instructional strategy, its principles and method and specifically pointed out how differentiated instructional strategy can be used to facilitate the teaching of reading comprehension in primary school. The conclusion of this paper is that, application of differentiated learning in classroom will in no small measure improve learning skill of pupils. On a final note, the paper recommended, among others, that the strategy should be adopted in the teaching and learning of primary school subjects especially reading comprehension.

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, Reading comprehension, Primary school pupils, pupils' success

Introduction

Sonia Sotomayor, quoted by Seclinger (2018) and Aleburu (2020) said 'until we get equality in education, we won't have equal society'. Thus, the quest for equal and equitable instructional access for all pupils, irrespective of their background variables, has become a matter of discussion at various fora in recent time. Hardly does a week go by, without equal instructional access and related matters expressed on the Nigeria mass-media such as radio, television, newspapers and internet. Specialists in special education, government and non-governmental organization are also speaking out in support of equal and equitable instructional access for everyone.

Lending credence to equal access to education, UNESCO (2017) highlighted ten targets to achieve the education 2030 agenda, the first two targets and goals are relevant to the discourse of this paper, they are:

- i. Universal primary and secondary education. It is envisaged by the UN that by 2030, nations of the world should ensure that all boys and girls complete free, quality and equitable primary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- ii. By 2030, all girls and boys should have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary.

The 2030 agenda, according to UNESCO, refers to global movement to ensure access to basic education for all. The main responsibility for implementing the agenda lies with government, non-governmental organization and stakeholders in Education.

Beyond Equality – Equity

As good as campaigning for equality instructional access for primary school pupils is gaining ground, Tomlinson (2010), questions the rationale for using the same instructional strategy for all pupils in the classroom-emphasizing that one strategy may not suit the classroom situation. Rather, teachers have to vary, modify and differentiate their strategies to reflect an inclusive classroom. Every learner has unique characteristics and as a result, individual attention has to be given to every child. Obanya (2020) observed that the concept of individual difference is recognized in African societies as seen in Yoruba saying ‘*ti a ba fi omo we omo....*’ (implying that you do not lump children together in terms of expected characteristics).

In addition, dealing with early childhood places great emphasis on individual differences, since it is the stage in which careful observation, responsive care, systematic grooming and regular monitoring are necessary. Individual difference, according to Obanya (2020), is evident in children of same biological trait, and that the critical factors responsible for differences can be: Physical, sensual, social, linguistic, emotional, formal learning, economic, family structure, birth position, or prior exposure. Moreover, specific environment could confer advantages in certain areas of child development which may distinguish him from other children. Given this scenario, instructional strategy should cater for individual differences among the learners so that every child will be maximally benefitted.



Source:(<http://https:onlineking.edu/news/equality-vs-equity>)

What is Differentiation in the classroom?

Differentiated instruction is a strategy in which teachers acknowledge, respect, accommodate and build upon a wide array of students' differences to facilitate optimal growth for all (Tomlinson, 2010). It recognises the spectrum of differences among students and enables the teacher to attend to the specific learning style of each student, by adjusting what they teach and how they teach it, hence differentiation is a way to modify instruction to meet students' individual needs. Teachers may differentiate process, content, resources, or the learning environment. A flexible grouping and on-going assessment can make differentiation one of the most successful instructional strategies. Differentiation is a teaching approach that modifies instructor to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers can differentiate in various ways, such as through the process of instruction, the content being taught, the resources used, or the learning environment. By providing flexible grouping and on-going assessment, teachers can make differentiation one of the most successful instructional strategies. The goal of differentiation is to ensure that all students are challenged and engaged in their learning, regardless of their skill level or learning style. With differentiation, teachers can tailor their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students and help them achieve academic success.

Differentiation is all about creating a personalized learning experience for each student. By adapting instruction to meet individual needs, teachers can create a more engaging and effective learning experience for their students which can include activities that cater to different learning styles, such as visual aids for visual learners or hands-on activities for kinaesthetic learners.

Differentiation can also involve adjusting the level of difficulty of assignments or providing extra support for struggling students. Ultimately, the goal of differentiation is to create a positive and inclusive learning experience that helps each student reach their full potential.

One may consider differentiation, as a way to teach or even a philosophy that's designed to meet the needs of the whole class. It is not a package or collection of worksheets. It motivates teacher to understand their pupils so they can help each student to enhance learning. Carol Ann Tomlinson (2010) explains differentiation as a means of providing students with many options for gaining knowledge. Carol Ann Tomlinson believes that Differentiation is an instructional strategy to help educators teach while keeping students as well as content in mind. Differentiation ensures that learning and teaching work for every student, which really should be a teacher's main purpose of teaching. Differentiating teaching means that the teacher would observe and identify the similarities and differences among students and use this knowledge to teach students.

The Core Principle of Differentiated Instruction

Advocates of differentiated instruction believe that whatever the issue or problem a pupil might face, with the right teaching approach the pupil can and will learn. In fact, students' differences are studied as a basis for planning. Tobin (2008) noted that teachers often deal with differences inside the classroom by sending some youngster, often the so-called troublemakers and learning disabled, out of the regular classroom. However, our choice is not between sending them down the hall or doing nothing but to provide appropriate intervention such as differentiated instruction (Tobin & McInnes 2008). However, in a personal communication between the researcher and Caroline Tomlinson who introduced this strategy in 2013, she affirmed that differentiated instruction did not have a formula, algorithm or recipe; rather it was driven by some principles and guidelines. The broad principles and characteristics involved in establishing a differentiated instruction classroom are:

Principle One: Assessment is ongoing and tightly linked to instruction. Teachers constantly gather information about how their students are doing at a given point in order to plan instruction.

Implication for Education

Formative evaluation should be more stressed in assessing students than the summative one. This is because the former will give teachers immediate feedback which will help in planning subsequent instruction rather than waiting till the end of the term or session.

Principle Two: Teachers ensure respectful ‘activities’ for all students. Each student’s work should be interesting, appealing and focused on essential understandings and skills. Teacher and students should see all tasks as worthwhile and valuable.

Implication for Education

It is the responsibility of schools and educators to adjust instruction to meet the needs of the pupils they serve, rather than to expect children to adjust to a system that is inattentive to their interest and need. Also, the curriculum should be challenging, otherwise the students will not pay attention in the class when it seems to them that there is nothing to gain.

Principle 3: Flexible grouping is a hallmark of the class. Teachers design instruction to allow all students to work with a variety of peers over a period of days. Sometimes students work with peers on the same level of readiness and sometimes with different levels of readiness. Sometimes, they work with peers with similar interest, at other times, the students work with peers who learn as they do, sometimes often with class a whole.

Implication for Education

Teachers and administrators need to create room for peer tutoring, allowing students to work together that is partnering with one another. Ezeokoli & Fasan (2013) attested to the fact that flexible grouping and peer tutoring are potent in raising students’ level of achievements.

Rationale for Differentiating Instruction

Today's classrooms are typified by academic diversity Hicks (2011). Seated side by side in classrooms that still harbour a myth of "homogeneity by virtue of chronological age" are students with identified learning problems highly advanced learners; students whose first language is not English; students who underachieve for a complex array of reasons; students of broadly diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, or both; students of both genders, motivated and unmotivated students; students who fit two or three of these categories; students who fall closer to the template of grade-level expectations and norms, and students of widely varying interests and preferred modes of learning. By 2035, students of colour will be a majority in American schools, with

increasing populations of children of immigrant and migrant families expanding the presence of cultural diversity in schools. Half of all children will live in single-parent homes at some time during their school years (Sapon-Shevin, 2001).

These demographic realities are intensified by: an emphasis on detracking to promote educational equity for students who might otherwise find themselves schooled in low-expectation environments, an emphasis on mainstreaming of students with special education needs, a reduction of special programme for gifted learners (Sapon-Shevin, (2001), and (d) intent to reduce segregation of students with reading problems and to enhance literacy instruction in the regular classroom for all learners (Allington, 2003), Such evolutions leave teachers with the need to address learner variance in the regular classroom, rather than through organizational arrangements (Sylvester & Greenidge 2009; Jackson & Davis, 2000) that have often served to relieve the classroom teacher of primary responsibility for attending to the needs of students who diverge markedly from the norm. Thus, throughout the literature of the current school reform is a call for teacher to adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high-quality learning (Kapusnick & Hauslein 2001).

While heterogeneous instruction is attractive because it addresses equity of opportunity for a broad range of learners, mixed-ability classrooms are likely to fall short of their promise unless teachers address the learner variance such contexts imply. In such settings, equality of opportunity becomes a reality only when students receive instruction suited to their varied readiness levels, interests and learning preferences, thus enabling them to maximize the opportunity for growth (Kapusnick & Hauslein. 2001).

Importance of Reading Skill in the Teaching and Learning Process

Reading is very important in the school system and the success or failure of students depends on their abilities to read and understand. Students therefore have to form the habit of reading so as to perform excellently well in all subjects in the school curriculum. Recognizing this importance, Awolere and Oluyide (2012) assert that reading is the centre of school activities. That is, a teacher will read to get information on what to teach, while students will also need to read to decipher information from the notes given by the teacher.

In spite of today's high technological development, there is an increasing need to read, whether as a student or as a business executive. The business man has to read business proposals, reports,

letters, trade journals and other corporate literature, magazines and newspaper which are necessary for his effective functioning within the organization. The student or scholar virtually depends on reading to move from one level to another. Thus, irrespective of one's occupation, an effective functioning in the society depends on the ability to read. Ulocha (2012) identifies three important reasons for which people read; for school or education, reading for information and reading for relaxation.

People read to increase and update their knowledge as Teacher and their students read every time to advance in knowledge. It is said that "a reading man is a living man". When people read, they get to know the development that has taken place on a particular subject. Every time one reads, his repertoire of knowledge on that particular thing is increased. This is why students should always read to get additional useful information on what they have been taught in the class. It enhances memory retention. The most recent development in scientific and technology advancement is obtained through reading.

Another purpose of reading is to get information that is useful on daily basis. The world is full of events and happenings. When one reads, one gets information on daily basis of what is happening. Reading gives detailed information on any event no matter when it happened. Reading is magical, challenging and eye-opening, thus giving the reader access to world that would otherwise remain closed. People get information through reading about past, present and future events. We get to know what is happening in our local government, states and the nation through information in newspapers.

The third reason for reading as cited by Ulocha (2012) is that reading could be used as a means of relaxation and recreation. At the close of work or business for the day, people are tired and the literate among them usually recreate by reading a literary text or newspaper to avoid boredom. In the same vein, Eromonsele (2009) identifies five importance of reading skills and they are:

- a. Daily life activities
- b. Progress in school
- c. Recreation
- d. Personal and social adjustment and
- e. Citizenship

Furthermore, reading comprehension increases the pleasure and effectiveness of reading. Strong reading comprehension skills help in other subjects and in the personal and professional lives. The

inevitable role of reading in the campaign for mass literacy and education for all cannot be undermined because of the simple truth that one cannot write without reading. It is a basic fact that reading is an important part of the writing process, and it is the basis of our system for monitoring the meaning we construct when we write. (Ohia & Ogunbiyi, (2020).

Applying Differentiated Instruction to Teaching Reading Comprehension in Primary Schools

In teaching reading comprehension in primary school, teachers need to continually assess and identify pupils' areas of need and strength so they can modify their teaching style and help pupils to move forward. By tailoring lesson plans to individual pupils' needs, teachers can ensure that all students receive the most effective form of learning. In applying Differentiate Instructional strategy to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension, the three areas of instruction (content, process and evaluation) could be differentiated (modified). The teacher could modify the content by preparing reading comprehension passages based on the interest of the learners, for instance, comprehension passages on different disciplines like sports, engineering, love stories etc. could be composed for pupils. Pupils will be motivated to read comprehension passage on their area of interest.

In differentiating the process (methodology), Awolere, (2016) submitted that process of teaching could be modified on terms of time allotted to different groups of learners. Proficient readers could be given ten (10) minutes to read a passage, while average and below average pupils could be given 15 minutes and 20 minutes respectively. In evaluating reading comprehension, assessment should not be limited to written test alone, hence, Pupils could be asked to draw, dramatize or even given oral answer to questions.

Every student has a preferred style of learning, and successful differentiation allows the delivery of instruction to different mediums of learning: auditory learners, visual and kinesthetic learners. The process-related strategy also considers the fact that each student demands a different amount of support from the instructor, and they may choose to work individually, in groups or pairs. During reading comprehension class, teachers may help pupils improve learning by providing support based on the individual needs of each pupil. The universal thinking framework enables teacher to design different learning journeys that achieve the same goal. Instead of generic strategies for everyone, teachers can move pupils from an introductory level to a more advanced understanding

of the content using the learning actions. Advanced learners can be stretched and challenged using the red icons that indicate higher-order thinking.

After completing a reading lesson, students should be given a chance to create a product to show content mastery. It may be in form of giving a summary of what is read, question, test or other activity depending upon their preferred learning style. Feedback is essential for improving performance. Therefore, providing feedback to pupils should be part of any teacher's daily routine. However, it takes time to give feedback. Therefore, teachers should schedule regular meetings with pupils to discuss progress and answer questions. These meetings can be scheduled once per week, once per month, or whenever needed. By scheduling regular meetings, teachers can address issues quickly and efficiently.

Collaborative learning is becoming increasingly popular among educators. Pupils working together to solve problems can improve their understanding of concepts. In addition, collaborative learning encourages students to share knowledge and resources. As a result, pupils become more confident in their abilities and develop stronger relationships with peers. To encourage collaboration, teachers can hold group discussions, host guest speakers, and organize field trips. These activities can help pupils understand complex topics and foster friendships between classmates.

Conclusion

The discussion so far has shown that differentiated instructional strategy could be effective in enhancing pupils' success and achievement in reading comprehension because it takes cognizance of pupils' differences and addresses it in the classroom. It could be concluded that pupils' poor performance in reading comprehension could be effectively tackled through the application of differential instructional strategy. In addition, conclusion can further be drawn that application of differentiated instructional strategy can compensate deficiencies whatever exists in pupils because the strategy caters for different reading ability groups in the class.

Recommendation

Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that teachers in primary schools should adopt differentiated instructional strategy for teaching and learning of reading comprehension since the strategy recognizes and caters for individual differences of the pupils. Also, experts in

differentiated instructional strategy should, as often as possible, engage in professional conversation about differentiation by agreeing to serve as mentors to teachers who are yet to be familiar with the details of the strategy. To achieve this seminars and workshops should be organized by the government to train teachers on the use of differentiated strategy.

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