

Exploring the Efficacy of Multimodal Educational Materials in Developing Comprehensive Language Skills in Children: A Focus on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

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Abstract: *This work explores the efficacy of multimodal educational materials that could enhance the language skills of children. Language skills play a vital role in academic achievement and in supporting a child's language development acquisition. Language skills enable children to interact with others and develop social abilities. Given the predictive value of early language skills for academic attainment and their connection to social interaction, they have been suggested to be an indication to the enhancement of children's language skills, being it listening, speaking, reading and writing. Parents, teachers and caregivers should always ensure the timely cum appropriate utilization and exposure of these educational materials to children as they are consequential to language skills efficiency.*

Keywords: Multimodal, educational materials, children, language skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing.

INTRODUCTION

English language learners need a lot of opportunities to engage in social interactions with other children, but they also need support from adults as they develop the language skills necessary to negotiate those interactions (Ballantyne et al., 2008). English language learners can begin to develop these essential and foundational skills in preschool, even before they develop strong English language skills.

Language skills are communication skills that help you convey your ideas without uncertainty or ambiguity. In essence, language skills enable people to convey their ideas to others with clarity and precision. It begins with sounds and gestures and, gradually, words and sentences. It supports your child's ability to communicate, understand and express their feelings and also serves as the foundation for reading, speaking, listening and writing skills in children as they progress through their early years. A significant feature of language skill acquisition that is worthy of note is that not only do you learn to speak well, but you also learn to listen attentively. Writing clearly with brevity is another skill that is considered crucial in a professional setting. Reading helps you make sense of vast amounts of data and information.

Early childhood education can play an essential role in preparing young English learners for later success in school. Children who have the opportunity to develop basic foundational skills in language and literacy in preschool enter kindergarten ready to learn to read and write (Ballantyne, Sanderman & McLaughlin, 2008). Research has shown that alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness are early literacy skills that contribute significantly to later reading achievement (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

In this regard, a child who has developed early literacy skills in his or her first language will find it more expedient to develop those same skills in English. The good news, however, is that recent research has shown that high-quality early childhood education programs can have a significant impact on children's later academic achievement (Barnett, 2008).

Interestingly, attaining proficiency in the four language skills is not an isolated process; each language process enhances learners' ability to use others. Listening to other people use language enhances learners' ability to speak. In contrast, reading helps students develop skills for communicating through writing. Reading also enables students to develop a sense for the structure of the language and grammar and increases their vocabulary. Eventually, writing helps in developing phonic knowledge and enhances reading fluency, because young children always associate written language with oral language they have mastered. The discussion of the four language skills in the following sections does not mean that they are isolated.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Educational Materials

For many people, the term "educational materials" evokes images of large-print classroom textbooks with small type, outdated information, and content that covers the breadth but not the depth of a subject. But in reality, educational resources encompass much more than that.

Educational materials refer to a subset of the books, games, internet, and software publishing industries that focus on providing materials for specific market segments. For instance, Price Waterhouse Coopers characterizes the educational materials sector as divided into digital and non-digital sectors (Cola et al., 2009).

In other words, educational materials, as applied here, include all materials used within the classrooms and supplemental materials such as library books, pamphlets, magazines, study prints, pictures, projectable materials, maps, and electronically recorded materials. Educational materials are materials that communicate information, graphic images, or sound and are utilized in teaching, instruction, or research. This article, therefore, examines the various educational materials that could enhance children's language skills.

Listening

Listening is a significantly neglected language skill, particularly in Nigerian public schools. Quite often, students are taught speaking, reading, and writing, while listening is left out. It seems to be assumed that if one does not have a learning deficiency, one automatically has the ability to listen from the day one is born and therefore does not need to be taught listening skills. This is unfortunate because, unless one listens to the contents of a message and understands it, no communication takes place but "noise" (Idyu, 2016).

Listening is not just hearing what the other party in the conversation has to say. "Listening means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told to us," said poet Alice Duer Miller.

Effective listening skills involve the ability to actively understand the information provided by the speaker and display interest in the discussed topic. It can also include providing the speaker with feedback, such as asking pertinent questions, so that the speaker knows the message is being understood.

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down, and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. Listening effectively gives kids a chance to see and practice effective listening skills. If there is one communication skill you should aim to master, then listening is it.

Speaking

The ability to speak a second language well is a very complex task. If there is one communication skill everyone needs but many fear, it is speaking effectively. The fear is particularly evident when speaking in front of an audience during presentations, meetings, and speeches (Jack Richards, 2002). Speaking confidently and fluently is something that children will develop during their time at school, and it will help them throughout their lives.

To Chaney (1998:3), "speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Speaking is a crucial part of language learning and teaching." It means children should be able to communicate with others to get or to share information and/or to express what they feel.

Speaking is a daily human activity for the purpose of communication made possible by one's speech organs. In other words, speaking skills are defined as the skills that allow us to communicate effectively. They give us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand. Children will learn English speaking skills as well as speaking skills in other languages in primary and secondary school.

Reading

Reading has no universally acceptable definition; it is better described than defined. Reading is both an act and an art; and involves silently or audibly deriving meaning from a written volume of words and retaining their meaning. It is a correct interpretation of written information by the mind. Reading appears to be the most challenging language skill since it involves the combined application of mechanical elements, such as eye movement, grammar, comprehension, spelling, etc., to derive meaning from written or printed materials. In other words, reading is a process of deriving information from a text, which can be a textbook, passage, Bible, newspaper, magazine, Quran, signpost, notebook, etc.

It is also described as an interaction between an author and a reader. It is an active and interactive process of constructing meaning using printed words. While reading, the reader is supposed to be actively engaged, bringing meaning to and getting meaning from the text. This entails that the meaning of what we read does not present itself automatically to the reader. The reader is supposed to bring their "previous knowledge" or "experiences" to help them understand.

Furthermore, reading is a complex cognitive process of meaning construction. This means that the brain is involved in reading. The brain has to process the information and give you the meaning. It is also a thinking process, which means the mind is involved. We read in order to understand because without understanding, there is no reading. In other words, the primary goal of reading is "comprehension." So, reading is not merely the pronunciation of words; it is about comprehension. It is basically a silent process, and reading aloud is only allowed in a few instances.

Oji and Habibu, (2011) averred that, reading is a powerful means of communication which forms a part of an individual and becomes a culture when developed. When children are properly guided, reading could be an interesting experience. A reading culture cultivated early in life helps the child to grow into an independent adult.

Reading involves interpreting written symbols mentally and also the silent or loud vocalization of written words. It entails the recognition and verbalization of symbols. Solanke (2019) opined that it is an act that can take place internally or externally; a process that involves thinking and many complex skills such as the ability to identify letters and words as well as skim for information. Usually, people only engage in regular reading if they have developed a strong love for reading. People with good reading culture are lovers of books.

Apparently, the continuous engagement in reading can become part of an individual to the extent that it becomes a culture. While a healthy reading culture facilitates personal and social development, a poor reading culture, on the other hand, may result in low self-esteem.

Similarly, Rubin (2002) observes that individuals with poor reading culture have a higher chance of anti-social behaviour. A healthy reading culture influences an individual's personal development (Igwe, 2011). While many decode the message of a text by reading aloud, others read in silence and for some persons, a combination of both is a veritable reading posture that could be harnessed for effective understanding.

Writing

Writing is usually the fourth language skill that we learn in our own language. To write clearly, it is essential to understand the basic system of a language. In English, this includes knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. "Writing" is the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation, and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form.

Accordingly, Nunan (2003) stated that, writing is both a physical and mental act. It involves discovering ideas and thinking about how to communicate them effectively, developing them into statements and paragraphs that will be comprehensible to a reader. Writing has a dual purpose - to express and impress. To White (1986:10), writing is the process of expressing ideas, information, knowledge, or experience and understanding the writing to acquire knowledge or share and learn information.

Ramelan (1992:14) also stated that writing is a representation or symbol of language. Writing is an integral and necessary skill, especially for children learning a second language, as communication is not only done orally. Writing is necessary if a person intends to study or work in a particular country. Writing also results in increased practice and use of the language.

Gleaned from the definitions above, it suffices to say that writing is an activity to express ideas, events, feelings, or thoughts in written form, which could be used as a tool to communicate effectively with other people.

MULTIMODAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS IN DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS IN CHILDREN

- Television:** When it comes to a television program, you have a visual when you are listening to the information that is given to you. So, listening to appropriate contents/programs and television shows will enable children to pay attention and listen to those programs and in turn share with their friends during play. “One motivating, engaging, and inexpensive way to help build the foundational reading skill of children is through the use of television shows and movies. This support can help boost foundational reading skills, such as phonics, word recognition and fluency” (Alice, 2023). On the other hand, The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020) recommends that we limit screen use to “video chatting along with an adult” for children under the age of 18. “For kids important and 5 years, the organization recommends that parents “limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour per weekday and 3 hours on the weekend days.” The explanation above has raised an important issue that could not be overtly overlooked. The angle that parents are a core component in guiding a child to read the right program or content on the television presupposes that, parents shape the learning process of children.
- Radio:** When you are simply listening to a radio broadcast, you have to use your imagination a little more. When it comes to a radio broadcast, then you can have your imagination roam a little more and that can be a bad thing if you don't get your information verified. So, considering how curious children are, radios enhance their language skills as they listen to the broadcast and coupled with their inquisitiveness, they get to develop this listening skill. Indeed, when listening to voices or a radio broadcast, it behooves the listener to think deep and create mental pictures that would align with the thing being described and make it possible for children to constantly try to repeat the idea by words of the mouth, their speaking skills develop as well.
- Storybooks:** Reading storybooks to your child and asking him or her to predict what will happen next is also a way of developing a child's language skills. The prediction requires your child to listen to the details to make a logical guess. Children enjoy reading storybooks over and over again. This repetition of reading experiences helps pupils to reinforce not only the learned vocabulary but also the key structures that can be found in storybooks. This leads to reading culture improvement, as well as to independent reading (Wiseman, 2010). While reading storybooks, pupils are challenged to remember keywords or predict what is coming next in the story. Pupils enjoy testing their minds, proving that they can remember or predict events in the storybook. Pupils' participation in reading storybooks positively influences their attitudes towards their reading activities, as their self-confidence increases with each participation. If a pupil decides to participate in the class and elicits a correct answer, the pupil will feel comfortable; this will go a long way in helping your child develop good language skills in listening, reading speaking as well as writing.
- Rhyme Books:** Nursery rhyme books are important for language acquisition and help with speech development. They also help children develop auditory skills such as discriminating between sounds and developing the ear for the music of words. Listening comprehension is a foundational skill that is often skipped, but obviously necessary to learn. Identifying and singing your child's favourite nursery rhyme repetitively will help them learn. The more actions you use, the easier it will be for the child to visualize the words, as well as making it easier for the child to learn the nursery rhyme. To help in your child's learning of nursery rhymes, you could try missing out words in the nursery rhyme and having your child help fill in the missing words. This will help build up both listening and speaking skills as they try to visualize those actions used during the process.
- Gestures:** Gestures, and some demonstration actions, play a unique role in learning during childhood precisely because they bridge the gap between body and mind. Gestures are produced by the body but, unlike goal-directed actions, are necessarily produced along with spoken language and must be integrated with that language. Moreover, gestures have a representational capacity that goes beyond the immediate context to promote learning and conceptual development (Eliza & Susan, 2021). Active listening not only means focusing fully on the speaker but also actively showing non-verbal signs of listening (that is, gestures). Interest can be conveyed to the speaker by using verbal and non-verbal messages such as maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, mirroring and smiling etc. By providing this 'feedback' the person speaking will usually feel more at ease and therefore communicate more easily, openly and honestly for effective teaching and learning to take place during early childhood education.
- Alphabet Board:** An alphabet board is a communication aid that allows individuals with limited speech or language abilities to spell out words and sentences using grid of letters, numbers, and individuals. Alphabet board typically has a flat surface with letters arranged in sentences and patterns, such as the QWERTY keyboard layout. Users can point to the

desired letters using their fingers or a pointer, and the communication partner can record their selections to create a message. Alphabet board can be used in various settings, including schools, hospitals and homes, and can be customized to meet individual communication needs. In the classroom, if children have difficulty speaking, an alphabet board can help them participate by spelling out answers to questions or sharing their thoughts. It helps provide digital visual schedule, gamified learning for children and also in building life and language skills in a fun and educating way through listening, speaking and writing.

7. **Drawing Board:** This is a large flat board on which paper maybe spread for artists or designers or children to work on. Drawing is the universal language of children. Vocabulary lessons especially provide a good opportunity to use of drawing in language classes. Placing all words on the right corner of the board and kitchen objects on the left corner, and making learners match them is a useful vocabulary activity which can be conducted in language classes through the activities, helping learners remember the words and their meanings with ease (Mustafa, 2015). By asking students to comment and discuss the drawings, creates an avenue of reciprocal discussion and this further pivots discourse amongst the students increasing the overall performance of the classroom. Furthermore, drawing from previous students maybe shown as examples of how colours are used to identify different objects, how contrast works and how colours can be used to express themselves. Therefore, parents and teachers can help their children develop their language skills at home while independently holding arts craft lessons. You can help your children or pupils by inviting them to talk to you about their drawings and to identify each object in the picture by name, and also help by showing them how various materials such as glue, paint brushes and shapes can be used to create artwork; this will greatly enhance children language skills as speaking, listening and writing are achieved while using the drawing board to communicate.
8. **Photo Caption:** A caption can essentially be described as a piece of informative text accompanying a photo. Captions should tell a story, answers questions, and/or describe the actions or reaction in a photo (Jerry, 2018). Researchers have found out that the reading of photo captions or subtitles is fairly intuitive, so the use of captioned media requires little extra training or instructions for children during learning. When watching subtitled media, children will attempt to decode the text, even if they are struggling or beginning readers (Kothari, Pandey, & Chudgar, 2004). Maximizing print exposure through the use of captions, both at home and at school, can add many hours of reading practices and literacy skills development (Koskinen et al., 1993; Kothari et al., 2004). Captions can provide struggling readers with additional print exposure, improving foundational reading skills such as phonics, word recognition, and fluency, for a number of pupils during learning.
9. **Audiovisual Materials:** It is now commonplace to say that audiovisual materials, with its rich context, is a powerful instructional tool known to have a motivational, attentional, and effective impact on viewers, which in turn facilitate auditory processing (Baltova, 1994:510-1). In addition, film, television, video, and now digitized images usually expose students to larger amounts of authentic oral language input, which in the long run should improve listening comprehension in face-to-face interaction with native speakers (Heroon et al., 1995). As a number of researchers have shown, listening comprehension is an active cognitive process involving speculating and predicting rather than individual sound deciphering because incomplete acoustic input often necessitate filing in missing information (Noblitt, 1995). Early childhood educators should provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to improve their oral competence. Shared reading, audiovisual materials and dramatization are such opportunities that caregivers and teachers can use to build children's language skills as listening, reading, writing and speaking are involved using this material for learning.
10. **Journals/Magazines:** Children's magazines are a wonderful supplement to classroom instructions. Children are exposed to a wide variety of texts and lots of interactive content. From stories, poem, and action rhymes to nonfiction, craft, and puzzles. Kid magazines can offer an abundance of high-interest content to support the learning curriculum. Literacy magazines are full of content that supports growing readers in their literacy development and inspires their love of reading. Magazines bring an array of content to life for young readers as well as articles can offer a springboard for further discussion and research; and can support what students are listening in the content area. Learners are exposed to a variety of texts that encourage them to read, listen and interact with engaging content through writing thereby having a significant impact on their language development.
11. **Computer:** This is an electronic device that accepts data and processes information. We encourage children to work at the computer in pairs or small groups. This helps them learn from each other and supports their social skills. Computer as an educational material helps expand children's vocabulary and language development by introducing them to software that presents vocabulary with pictures, written words, and spoken words. It also helps children's understanding of books by exposing them to electronic books and offer children practice in learning about letters and words with a program that matches pictures to their beginning letters. Furthermore, with this device, children get to develop phonological awareness

with interactive software that plays with language. As children learn to identify use of computer-related terms such as icon, cursor and CD ROM, they gain technical vocabulary. With practice, they begin to identify the letters of the alphabet on the keyboard and on the screen. When the corresponding text is highlighted on the screen as the computer reads aloud, children make connections between speech and print, thereby developing their language skill in listening, reading, speaking as well as writing by replicating all they do during computer classes.

12. **Newspaper:** Newspapers are authentic resources of language learning. The various components of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as grammar and vocabulary are readily available in the newspaper. Dheram and Rani (2007) reviewed, that Newspapers are generally read as print media anywhere in the world. Learners are advised to read newspapers to improve their knowledge. This research undertaken underscores the significance of employing newspapers to improve the speaking, reading and writing skills of children. In the same vein, children can be allowed to express their views loudly in the class as well as the home and they can start discussions in class with other fellows under the supervision of teachers. So, in this way, discussions on the different topics regarding newspapers provide a great deal of knowledge and widen the understanding of the learners. By so doing, their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills can be improved (Shamim, Rukhsana & Muhammad, 2020). So, exposing your children to the usefulness of newspapers to build their language ability is consequential in developing sustainable language skills.
13. **Pen/ Pencil:** A pen might look small, but it is a potent tool for writing. In other words, it is a solid medium through which one expresses opinion, viewpoints, and feelings and can make them seen or noticed. Most kids have seen a pencil and known its functions, but when it comes to writing with it, they might need a little help. A pen symbolizes creation, learning, expression, and so much more. There is a reason Edward Bulwer-Lyton said, “The pen is mightier than the sword”, which is undoubtedly responsible for bringing positive changes to the world. Nations made policies, modified laws, passed revolutionary judgments, signed agreement, etc, only with the help of a pen. As children come in contact with this tool at an early stage of life, they try to make some visible usage with it as they watch adults do, especially their elderly ones. So with this, learning how to develop children’s writing ability begins to develop. To be staccato, parents and teachers are admonished to teach children the appropriate way of holding a pen or pencil in order to make them become acquainted with the writing ability and develop it properly. And it suffices to say, that a pen or pencil develops a child’s writing ability as he/she constantly sees adults use it and tries to replicate its purpose of usage frequently.
14. **Alphabet Letters:** This is a set of graphs or characters used to represent the phonemic structure of a language. The alphabets is an essential part of learning about literacy. Alphabets letters help develop children in writing and knowing specific letter-sound association. That is to say, as children develop alphabet knowledge, they learn to recognize and name upper and lowercases. Children’s early writing progresses from making marks and scribbling to drawing, and eventually to forming letters as it helps children to also build a solid foundation for a variety of tasks, from reading activities to writing activities as they are essential parts of the language skills children need to build during this formative period of their age. Therefore, relentless efforts should be in top gear when exposing this particular educational material to ensure timely and appropriate usage by children when learning.
15. **Language Laboratory:** Language laboratory is a room consisting of instructional technology tools source unit, that can disseminate audio, audio-visual and or written materials to any number of individual seats or carrels, with a wide variety of potential feed back mechanisms to the students and teachers or other learners. Hindu (2014), defines language laboratory as a room in a school, college, training institutions, universities or academy that contains special equipment to help students learn foreign languages by listening to tapes or CD's, watching videos, recording themselves, etc. All the four language learning skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) are given importance and learners are provided with ample opportunities to practice by listening to the audio programmer and watching the video clips (Bamisaye 2015). In order words, laboratories provide an interactive learning experience that makes the learning process highly engaging. Children can interact with the language through listening and speaking exercises, which helps them to develop their listening and speaking skills in a natural way.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above-listed materials are considered to be capable of developing a child's language skills. These four language skills form the pillars of effective, impactful, and strong communication. Building, refining, and perfecting these skills will help children make progress in their careers. In this research, materials in their various levels of relevance in the language development of a child are explored. These educational materials are intended primarily to help teachers promote and facilitate the learning process in early childhood education, thereby helping children become proficient in any of the language skills. Any deficiency in these language

skills can hinder a child's ability to interact fluently, freely, and meaningfully with their playmates, potentially jeopardizing their future language development. Therefore, teachers, parents, and caregivers should be aware of this and ensure the timely and appropriate utilization of the necessary multimodal educational materials to help children develop their language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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