From Page To Understanding: Teaching Reading Through Literature

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Abstract

Effective learning is a crucial driver of both individual advancement and societal development, and it is closely associated with the mastery of reading which is considered a core language skill. To maximise, learners' reading potential, teachers are expected to adopt flexible, proactive, and learner-centred instructional strategies that respond to diverse classroom needs. Developing reading instruction that supports gradual and meaningful acquisition is therefore essential in promoting improved academic performance and lifelong literacy. In recent years, researchers and educators have emphasised the importance of innovative approaches that move beyond traditional, teacher-dominated methods and actively engage students in the learning process. One such approach is literature-based reading instruction, which remains widely underutilised despite its demonstrated effectiveness. The instructional method exposes students to authentic literary texts and highlights features such as the author's style, language patterns, literary devices, vocabulary choices, and characterisation. Through this exposure, students develop a deeper understanding of language while strengthening comprehension and critical thinking skills. The teacher plays a central and strategic role in implementing this approach by selecting appropriate literary texts that align learners' interest, reading levels, and curricular requirements. Consideration of text complexity is equally important, as it ensures that literary materials are challenging, yet possible. By thoughtfully curating texts and creating supportive learning environments, teachers can foster meaningful engagement with reading, enhance skill development, and cultivate positive reading habits among learners. This paper is advocates for and practically examines the fundamental phases of literature-based reading instruction.

Keywords: Reading instruction, learner-centred strategies, literature-based instruction, literary text, skill development

1.0 Introduction

Language, comprising four primary skills – including reading – is rich in elements, styles, and registers that find meaningful application in literature. Collectively, literature and language have historically played complementary roles in human intellectual and cultural advancement. This relationship aligns with utilitarianism, which posits that an action or a phenomenon is morally justifiable when it benefits the greatest number of people. Accordingly, neither progressive individuals nor society can disregard these culturally grounded elements. Their mutual indispensability is evident in two ways: they are interdependent, and they offer both individual and collective benefits. The relationship between them is symbiotic, such that either one, without the other, provides limited value. Aesthetically, their interconnectedness is visible, as the inherent beauty of one is revealed through the functions of the other.

Literature relies fundamentally on language for its existence and relevance. Ideas derived from society – the raw material of literary production – are encoded and expressed through language. These ideas, once processed, are returned to the society in spoken or written forms and subsequently decoded through reading and listening. It is, therefore, accurate to assert that language acquisition must precede literary appreciation. For example, a child, who has not yet acquired linguistic structures cannot engage meaningfully with literature. Similarly, an adult who lacks proficiency in a second language, such as English, cannot effectively study literature, written in that language. Murphy (1972) illustrates this point, noting that interference from learners' first language can impede their ability to comprehend the unfamiliar forms, rhythms, ideas and patterns of English literature. Ultimately, literature can be learnt, appreciated, and applied only through the communicative functions language provides. The effective use of language supports semantic interpretation, enabling shared meanings. Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2012) observe that linguistic communication depends on the conventional meanings associated with words and sentences.

From an aesthetic perspective, literature exhibits artistic qualities, particularly in poetic forms. Literature represents the deliberate articulation of content in a pleasing meaningful manner with language as its vehicle. According to Enyia (2013), the aesthetic quality of a literary work resides in its stylistic delivery. Supporting this notion, Onuekwusi (as cited in Enyia, 2013) defines literature as imaginative and artistically crafted use of words, either oral or written, that explores human existence while providing entertainment, information, education and excitement.

Language provides the expressive resources through which literature adorns itself. For instance, Chinua Achebe's <u>Things Fall Apart</u> and <u>Arrow of God</u> demonstrate how carefully selected diction vividly portrays aspects Igbo cultural tradition, thereby reinforcing the aesthetic value of literature. Literary elements such as metaphor, simile, imagery, proverbs and paradox are actualised only through language use. Similarly in the poetry of Niyi Osundare, these devices are intentionally and skilfully employed; the rich imagery in 'Memory Street' for example, is achieved through sophisticated linguistic manipulation.

Language's invaluable contribution to literature can also be understood through a utilitarian lens. Language makes literature to be very useful to society. How? The answer to this is not far-fetched. Members of the society access literature through linguistic skills such as reading. Literature functions as a mirror of societal events, preserve cultural values, reduces stress, broadens perspectives, and promotes both education and entertainment. It also contributes to language preservation and expresses collective responses to shared experiences.

Conversely, language benefits substantially from literature. The aesthetic appeal of linguistic expression is enhanced by literary devices such as figures of speech, imagery, and idiomatic constructions. Egbe (1991) argues that knowledge acquired through literature provides a foundation for learners' proficiency in English and deepens their insight into human experience – made possible through language skills such as reading.

Additionally, literature supports language in pedagogy, preservation and promotion. Effective language instruction requires selecting appropriate methodologies, and literature reciprocates by offering culturally relevant and pedagogically rich learning resources. Literary texts enrich language teaching by providing authentic materials, cultural exposure, and emotional engagement. Collie and Slater (1990) identify authenticity, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement as primary reasons integrating literature into language classrooms. Hismanoglu (2005) adds universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power, and ambiguity to the list. Thus, literature holds a significant place in second-language learning and language education broadly.

Furthermore, literature classrooms can effectively support the development of reading skills. Teachers of second and foreign languages are encouraged to adopt dynamic, learner-centred approaches such as literature-based reading instruction. During reading sessions, comprehension begins at the literal level, with learners answering factual questions about setting, characters and plot. Students then progress to inferential comprehension, interpreting deeper meanings, related to theme and authorial intent. Finally, critical

engagement emerges as students evaluate characters, ideas, and thematic concerns, sharing personal reactions from cultural and experiential standpoints (Hismanoglu, 2005). Therefore, when pedagogically utilised, literature can serve as a catalyst for developing comprehensive reading skill.

2.0 Theoretical Framework – The Theory of Utilitarianism

This study is anchored on the Theory of Utilitarianism Theory, which posits that an action is morally right if it produces the greatest good for greatest number of people. As a form of consequentialism, utilitarianism evaluates the morality of an action based on its outcomes rather than its intentions (Drives, 2022). The theory originally propounded by Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) and later refined by John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873), emphasises that *happiness or satisfaction* constitutes the ultimate goal of human action. According to Drake (2024), utilitarianism – fully articulated in the 19th Century – represents a synthesis of consequentialism and welfarism. This perspective implies that any action deemed worthy should aim to produce outcomes that enhance the overall well-being of individuals and society.

The relevance of utilitarianism to the present study lies in its emphasis on promoting the greatest benefit through deliberate ang purposeful action. The ultimate goal of teaching **reading skill through literature-based instruction** is to ensure meaningful learning and holistic student development. As an evaluative and decision-making framework, the principle of *usefulness* guides teachers in the professional selection of literary texts that resonate with students' interest, background, and cultural experiences. Such thoughtful selection enhances learners' engagement, motivation, and enjoyment. Furthermore, incorporating diverse literary materials fosters empathy, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding among students. These will enhance reading comprehension. In alignment with utilitarian principles, teachers are encouraged to complement well-chosen literary texts with a variety of instructional materials and strategies tailored to students' differing abilities, learning styles, and needs. This inclusive approach maximises learning outcomes, ensuring that the greatest number of students benefit from the instructional process**.**

3.0 Literature-based Reading Instruction

Literature-based reading instruction refers to a pedagogical approach that integrates reading and literature instructions into a unified framework. It involves the deliberate use of literary texts as primary materials for teaching reading skills, strategies, and comprehension. In this approach, literature serves as an authentic instructional resource that enhances learners' engagement, motivation, and understanding. Literary texts, being rich in language, culture, and human experiences, provide real-life contexts through which students can develop and refine essential reading skills.

4.0 Teaching of Reading Skills through Literature-based Reading Instruction

Students must be explicitly taught reading skills to become proficient readers capable of comprehension, reflection, and contribution to societal development. Scholars have identified several essential reading skills, including phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, critical thinking, and metacognition. These skills are foundational to effective reading and can be developed efficiently through literature-based instruction.

4.1 Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to recognise and manipulate individual sounds within words (Kilpatric, 2015). Teachers can foster this skill by reading aloud selected literary texts to expose students to sound patterns. Words families (e.g. fool, pool, school etc.) and rhyming can be used to illustrate phonemic similarities and differences. Teachers may also engage students in phonemic isolation (identification of individual sounds), phonemic blending (merging of sounds) and phonemic segmentation (separation of sounds). Additionally, phonemic awareness can be reinforced through games and activities, derived from literary texts – what may be termed literature-based phonemic awareness games – to make learning interactive and enjoyable.

4.2 Decoding

Decoding refers to the ability to translate written language (orthography, spelling, and grammar) into spoken language. Literature-based reading instruction provides an effective context for teaching decoding. Teachers can model fluent reading by reading literary texts aloud, with expression and accuracy. Strategies such as and reader's theatre, where students assume character roles and read and read with emotion, enhance rhythm, pronunciation, and intonation. Additional practices include listening to audio recordings, engaging in small-group reading sessions, Constructive feedback and technology integration (e.g. text-to-speech tools) can further reinforce decoding proficiency.

4.3 Fluency

Fluency encompasses the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and appropriate expression. Okeke (2017) and Oyebode (2005) define it as the capacity to read effortlessly and meaningfully, while Oyedokun (2013) describes it as reading with ease. Literature-based instruction promotes fluency through engaging, differentiated, and feedback-oriented strategies, including the following:

i.   Model Fluent Reading – The teacher demonstrates expressive, accurate, and paced reading.

ii.   Repeated Reading – Students reread selected texts multiple times to strengthen fluency.

iii.   Choral Reading – The class reads sections of the text together, promoting rhythm and cohesion.

iv.   Reader's Theatre – Students dramatise literary excerpts enhancing expressive reading.

v.   Timed Reading – Individual timed reading help track progress and build confidence.

vi.   Audio Recordings – Listening to model readings of literature texts develops auditory and visual fluency awareness.

vii.   Discussion – Analytical discussions on punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary enhance reading rhythm.

viii. Technology Integration – Digital tools such as audiobooks and reading apps support fluency development.

ix. Text Marking – Highlighting key phrases guides intonation and emphasis.

x. Feedback and Encouragement – Constructive responses and positive reinforcement build motivation self-efficacy.

4.4 Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the capacity to recognise, understand, and effectively use a range of words (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013). Literature texts expose students to diverse and contextually rich vocabulary. Teaching of vocabulary, as a reading skill, can be organised into three phases:

i.   Pre-reading – Teachers introduce challenging words, guide students to deduce meanings from context (Oyediran, 2018), connect new words to their prior knowledge (Adeyemi, 2012), and highlight contextual clues that are capable of assisting the students to infer the meanings of the words (Krashen, 2004).

ii.   During reading – Teachers pause to explain unfamiliar words and discuss unfamiliar words and discuss their contextual significance (Ogunsanwo, 2017). Vocabulary maps, as described by Nation (2001), and pronunciation drills (Hiebert, 2012) can be incorporated.

iii.   Post-reading – Students review and explore new words' origin, prefixes, and suffixes (Adeyemi, 2012), and engage in creative writing tasks to reinforce retention (Krashen, (2004).

4.5 Comprehension and Critical thinking

Comprehension entails understanding and interpreting text (Duke, Pearson, Strachan & Bilman, 2011), while critical thinking involves analysing, evaluating, and synthesising information (Ennis, 2018). These interrelated skills can be cultivated through literature-based instruction across three stages:

i.   Pre-reading – Teachers establish reading purposes, preview text structure, and connect to students' prior knowledge (Adeyemi, 2012; Krashen, 2004; Ogunsanwo, 2017).

ii.   During reading – Students make annotations, respond to open-ended questions, and participate in guided discussions that promote deep engagement (Nation, 2001; Hiebert, 2012).

iii. Post-reading – Students summarise and synthesise information (Oyediran, 2018), engage in comprehension exercises, and participate in debates or reflective discussions that foster analytical reasoning (Adeyemi, 2012; Krashen, 2004).

4.6 Metacognition

Metacognition is the awareness and regulation of one's own thinking and reading processes (Baker & Brown,1984). In literature-based instruction, metacognition can be taught as follows:

i. Pre-reading – Students set reading goals (e.g. identifying themes, relating text to personal experiences) and activate prior knowledge (Isah, Philip & Dibilang 2024).

ii. During reading – Learners are encouraged to 'think aloud', verbalising reflections and posing self-questions to monitor comprehension and author intent (Srivastava, 2024).

iii. Post-reading – Students reflect on their understanding, assess comprehension, and engage in critical discussions that enhance reflective thought (Idowu & Ogundeko, 2024; Okoza & Aluede, 2014).

5.0 Determinant Factors in the Selection of Texts for Literature-Based Reading Instruction

There are several factors to consider when selecting literary texts for reading instruction. These include students' interest and backgrounds, text complexity, diversity and representation in the text, relevance and authenticity of the text, supportive features within the text, format and visual appeal, and cultural sensitivity.

5.1 The Interest and Background of the Student

The primary factor is students' interest and background. In a study by Uyun, Bahriah and Fitriani (2022), a significant positive relationship was found between students' interests and prior behaviours. This alignment fosters a more engaging and relatable reading experience, thereby enhancing students' motivation, enthusiasm, and sustained engagement in the reading process.

5.2 Text Complexity

Another crucial factor is text complexity – which goes beyond reading level to include conceptual load, vocabulary, and linguistic patterns relative to students' abilities. According to Allington, McCuiston and Billen (2015), texts that present just enough challenge contribute to reading growth. Teachers should professionally select literary texts that offer optimal level of challenge – neither too easy (leading to boredom) nor too difficult (leading to stress).

5.3 Text Diversity and Representation

The literary text chosen should offer rich perspectives, experiences, and voices. Texts that present a variety of human experience help hook students' interest and facilitate reading whilst supporting a nuanced understanding of the world. However, teachers must guide students to maintain the instructional focus (i.e., reading skill development) rather allowing the content alone to dominate.

5.4 Relevance and Authenticity

Literary texts must not only align with students' experiences but also present authentic real-life situations. Realistic literary texts stimulate genuine curiosity and enthusiasm for reading and learning.

5.5 Supportive Features in the Text

Texts should incorporate scaffolding features – such as illustrations, headings, summaries, and images – that support comprehension, build confidence, and foster positive reading experiences. Lalic-Vucetic and Seva (2021) found that illustrations in textbooks and literary texts aid understanding – but their benefits depend three factors: (a) the quality and alignment of illustration and text content, (b) the reader's ability to integrate the text and illustration meaningfully, and (c) the success of an adult mediator in linking text and the illustration during children's reading.

5.6 Format and Visual Appeal

Additionally, design features such as format, font size, and overall visual appeal should be considered. Graphical elements can influence students' willingness to read. Sentence patterns and structural features of the text can also facilitate understanding.

5.7 Cultural Sensitivity

Finally, it is essential to ensure that selected do not offend or alienate students' cultural background. According to Altugan (2015), learners' cultural backgrounds must be acknowledged because misalignment between teaching and the students' cultures can undermine motivation.

6.0 Stags in the Literature-based Reading Instruction

The teaching of reading through literature can structured into three stages:

6.1 Pre-reading Stage

In this stage, the teacher briefly activates the students' prior knowledge and links it the lesson. The teacher introduces the specific lesson goals and clearly states the reading purpose (e.g. a particular comprehension skill) is stated. These steps prepare the learners for the lesson content ahead.

6.2 During-reading Stage

All reading activities occur in this stage. The teacher applies pedagogical expertise to ensure learning takes place: students are instructed and guided as they read. The teacher monitors understanding through observation and discussion, where necessary, offers support (such as graphic organisers, visual aids or one-on-one assistance) to support the class as a whole and the struggling ones in particular.

6.3 Post-reading Stage

In this final stage, post-lesson evaluation activities are conducted. They may include students summarising, identifying main and supportive ideas, and connecting new knowledge with prior experience (summarising and synthesising). Students may also analyse and differentiate ideas from the text, and make inferences, draw conclusions (analysing and interpreting), and evaluate the text and respond to its message (evaluating and responding).

These stages can then be translated into a lesson-plan format to guid instruction.

7.0 Lesson Plan: Teaching Reading through a Literary Text

Instructional Objectives

By the end of the lesson, the learners should, at least, be able to:

1.   read the selected section of the literary text with appropriate fluency and comprehension;
2.   identify the central message, conveyed in the text;
3.   distinguish the main ideas and supporting details within specific paragraphs;
4.   demonstrate understanding of two significant actions or events in the text; and
5.   respond meaningfully to comprehension questions that reflect literal, inferential, and evaluative levels of understanding.

Entry Behaviour: (Learners' entry behaviour varies and should be to be established by the teacher through brief diagnostic questioning or a warm-up activity, designed to assess their prior knowledge of reading comprehension and familiarity with literary texts.)

Instructional Materials:

1.   Selected (recommended) literary text
2.   Chalkboard or whiteboard, with chalk and marker
3.   Learners' writing materials (notebooks, pens, pencils)

Reference: (Teacher to indicate the literary text and cite in APA 7th format. For example:)

Achebe, C. (1958). Thing fall apart. Heinemann Educational Books.

CONTENT: (To be developed by the teacher, based on the chosen text and reading level of learners. The selected passage should be rich in narrative structure, theme, and characterisation to foster comprehension and interpretation.)

Procedure

Introduction (5 minutes)

The teacher revises the concept of comprehension, as a key reading skill, and introduces the selected literary text. A clear reading purpose is established (such as identifying key ideas and understanding character actions. learning comprehension as a reading skill) and the specific section to be read is stated. The teacher activates learners' prior knowledge by connecting the topic or theme of the text to their experiences or previous lessons.

Presentation

Step I:

The teacher reads a short passage aloud, modelling fluent reading and expressive delivery. Strategic pauses are made to clarify meaning, emphasise tone, or prompt brief discussion about vocabulary and context.

Step 1I:

The teacher guides learners in annotating the text as they read – marking key ideas, unfamiliar words, and expressive language features. Annotation serves as a scaffold for comprehension and interpretation.

Step III:

Learners engage in choral reading to promote collective fluency and rhythm. The teacher moves round the class, offering corrective feedback and support.

Step IV:

Learners, thereafter, read the passage silently and independently, continuing to annotate, based on comprehension cues and teacher prompts. The teacher monitors reading progress, offering individualised assistance.

Step V:

The teacher facilitates a short discussion on learners' annotations, clarifying misconceptions and reinforcing key points, observed during reading.

Step VI:

With the teacher's guidance, learners identify topic sentences and the supporting details from the text.

Step VII:

Learners dramatise or demonstrate two key actions or events from the passage, thereby translating textual comprehension into performance and expressive understanding.

Step VIII:

Learners respond to open-ended comprehension questions that assess literal recall, inferential reasoning, and evaluative judgement. The teacher moderates a short class discussion to deepen engagement with the text's meaning.

Evaluation:

1.   What is the text about?
2.   What are the main ideas presented in the paragraphs read?
3.   Identify their supporting details.
4.   Demonstrate two actions or events from the text.
5.   Discuss (debate-style): do you agree with the main character's action in the story? Why or why not? question from the reading part)

Summary and Conclusion (5 minutes)

The teacher synthesises key points from learners' responses, reiterating the importance of comprehension, textual evidences, and interpretation in reading literary texts. The lesson concludes with reinforcement of the main message and clarification of any ambiguities identified during evaluation.

Assignment

(To be determined by the teacher, for example:)

1. Write a short paragraph, summarising the message of the passage in your own words.
2. Identify two new vocabulary items from the text and use them in original sentences.

It is important to emphasise that the format, present above, serves primarily as a pedagogical guide. Among the highlighted reading skills, comprehension has been selected for instructional demonstration. However, teachers are encouraged to integrate additional instructional materials as appropriate, taking into account the lesson objectives, learners' proficiency levels, and contextual factors. The timely use of suitable resources enhances the effective acquisition of the targeted reading skills.

Furthermore, the inclusion of extension and follow-up activities – such as reading comprehension workshops, project-based reading tasks, and reading club sessions – can consolidate and reinforce students' mastery of reading skills. Teachers are also advised to design differentiated instructions that address the diverse needs of students, including struggling and advanced readers. Such differentiations promote inclusive instruction, ensuring that every learner benefits meaningfully from literature-based reading activities.

8.0 Conclusion

Language and literature are inextricably linked – two complementary facets of communication and cultural expression. Literature serves not only as a mirror of linguistic beauty but also as a viable medium for teaching reading. in increasing advocacy for innovative, learner-centred approaches to reading instruction underscores the need to employ literature as a pedagogical tool.

This paper presents literature-based reading instruction as a dynamic approach through which reading skills can be effectively taught and learnt. Foundational reading competencies – such as phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary development, comprehension, critical thinking and metacognitive awareness – can be fostered through well-structured engagement with literary texts (Krashen, 2004; Duke et al, 2011; Kilpatrick, 2015).

Nevertheless, the success of such instruction depends on the teacher's expertise, creativity, ans ability to select pedagogically appropriate texts. Effective text selection should be guided by learner-centred considerations such as students' entry behaviour, text complexity, cultural and linguistic relevance, scaffolding features, and visual supports (Allinton et al., 2015; Lalic-Vucetic & Seva, 2021). The instructional process typically unfolds across three phases – pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading – each containing carefully designed activities that support comprehension and interpretation (Collie & Slater, 1990; Hismanoglu, 2005). Ultimately, these activities should be synthesised into a coherent and well-structured lesson plan that promotes engagement, inclusivity, and deep learning through literature.

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