

Teachers' Factors as Determinant of Pre-Primary School Children Reading Skills in Ekiti State

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ABSTRACT

The level of preschool children reading skills is declining gradually and this could affect both reading fluency and comprehension of preschool children. There may be a connection between this phenomenon and the country's falling education. This study therefore examined Teachers' factors as determinant of reading skills in pre-primary schools in Ijero local government area of Ekiti State. The study was anchored on the recognition of early childhood education as the foundation of lifelong learning, particularly in language and literacy development. A survey research design was adopted, and the population comprised all pre-primary school teachers in the study area. A sample of one hundred (100) teachers drawn from ten pre-primary schools was selected using simple random sampling. Two research instruments Teachers' Personality Questionnaire (TPQ) and Teachers' Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by experts in early childhood education and measurement and evaluation, and their reliability coefficients were established using Cronbach's alpha. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Findings revealed that teachers' personality traits such as patience, enthusiasm, and positive attitude significantly influence pupils' reading skills. The study also found that teachers' leadership roles, including motivation, provision of reading materials, and encouragement of independent reading, play a crucial role in enhancing reading fluency and comprehension among pre-primary pupils. The study concludes that effective reading skill acquisition at the pre-primary level depends largely on teachers who possess sound personality attributes and strong leadership qualities. Based on the findings, the study recommended that teachers with sound leadership skills should teach in preschools, Government should encourage the professional teachers especially in preschools through incentives and worthwhile allowance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The basic literacy competencies that must be developed in the pre-primary school levels are important prerequisites for acquiring literacy skills in primary and other levels of education, although many children are admitted to primary school without the literacy skills required for success in class. Observation reveals that student of various levels in schools have poor practice reading behaviours and is not actively involved in reading exercises, as they can hardly read unless required to do so by an assignment or exam.

Policies have been implemented in an effort to improve early childhood education in general, existing problems in the Ekiti state education system, including a lack of instructional materials, inadequately trained literacy teachers, and instructional inconsistencies in the classroom, contribute to a degradation of outcomes in early reading skills in the state. Studies have also revealed the effectiveness of teaching styles such as the use of pictorial teaching in improving primary level comprehension of reading skills [1] but not at the level of pre-primary education in the state. The global recognition of the necessity for comprehensive child development is widespread. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child acknowledges every child's entitlement to a level of living sufficient for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. This indicates that preschool educators must deliver sufficient and suitable care to children, as developmental defects arising during this phase are challenging to rectify. The pre-primary level serves as the cornerstone of the educational framework; therefore, a robust and reliable foundation in language is necessary [2]. Language is a crucial tool for education that must be effectively taught at all levels of the educational system, particularly during early infancy. The research by [1] explicitly asserts that educators must evaluate the efficacy of the distribution system employed. Consequently, interaction between teachers and learners is essential for facilitating

effective learning. The contact between the educator and the student leads to the development and enhancement of reading skills.

Research from around the world shows that many nations are becoming increasingly concerned about students' lack of basic reading skills, which is impeding their capacity to meet academic objectives in both early schooling and subsequently at the tertiary level [3]. For example, as of 2020, almost 20% of 10-year-olds in the United States of America (USA) could not read and understand a simple sentence. Approximately 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income nations in Sub-Saharan Africa encountered a comparable problem. By the conclusion of primary education, 74% of school-age children in Kenya failed to achieve the minimum reading proficiency, illustrating this tendency [4]. The elevated incidence of low literacy has been ascribed to various variables, including apprehensions regarding instructor disposition. Could the feature of teacher leadership be the reason certain students struggle with reading, resulting in inadequate reading skill development and diminished overall educational achievement? A significant percentage of students in Ekiti State progress through school without achieving reading proficiency, a troubling circumstance given the pivotal importance of literacy in achieving sustainable development goals, as posited by [5]. The correlation between reading proficiency and sustainable growth is justifiable, as research indicates that students with deficiencies in English reading skills tend to experience overall academic challenges [5]. Initial literacy experiences are directly correlated with subsequent reading abilities [6]. This study aims to elucidate the impact of teacher personality and leadership attributes on the acquisition of reading skills among pre-primary learners in Ekiti State.

Reading is a receptive skill that enables learners to comprehend vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure [7]. Reading, as an intellectual pursuit, is engaged in by literate societies to acquire information and enhance knowledge. This

activity is significant in an individual's life as it fosters a keen interest in the pursuit of further information. Reading necessitates the capacity to retain principal concepts and specific details, to connect the text to the reader's existing knowledge, and to identify and construct rhetorical frameworks that structure the material presented in the text [8]. Reading is the capacity to convert the visual depiction of language into comprehension. [9] view reading as an active, constructive, meaning-making process and as a critical tool that leads to academic excellence with the influence of knowledgeable adult most especially teachers. The Rand Reading Study Group (2002) asserts that reading constitutes a comprehensive system for extracting meaning from print, necessitating the following components: the cultivation and sustenance of reading motivation, the formulation of effective active strategies to interpret meaning from text, adequate background knowledge and vocabulary to enhance reading comprehension, the capacity to decode unfamiliar words, and the proficiency to read fluently.

Reading abilities are increasingly regarded as crucial for influencing performance in other subjects, such as science and the humanities at the primary level, as well as for academic success at later stages [7]. These reading competencies encompass comprehension, fluency, and speed. Comprehension is a process wherein readers derive meaning by engaging with text, integrating past knowledge and experience, textual information, and the reader's perspective towards the text [10]. Reading comprehension is a multifaceted endeavor reliant on various instinctive and planned cognitive processes.

Fluency is the capacity to read aloud with expression, reflecting comprehension of the author's intent. Reading fluency is characterized by the automatization of decoding and the simultaneous ability to decode and comprehend text [11]. Richard [12] asserted that reading speed refers to the rate at which an individual reads written text (whether printed or electronic) within a

designated time frame. Reading speed is often measured by the quantity of words read per minute. The ability to read diverse texts will allow learners to modify their reading pace and style according to the objective and to derive both implicit and explicit meanings from the text [13]. The capacity to read swiftly and with appropriate expression is essential for understanding.

The educator is a crucial element in the efficient management of any educational institution. Regardless of the quantity of resources allocated to a nation's education system, without adequately educated and motivated educators, such resources will yield no positive outcomes. [3] emphasizes the significance of teachers in delivering a meaningful education at all levels, asserting that no educational institution can surpass the quality of its educators. This statement underscores the necessity of teacher efficacy in educational institutions. Teachers' responsibilities in the classroom encompass establishing the classroom atmosphere, fostering a supportive environment, and mentoring and developing pupils. Educators develop lesson plans and deliver instruction to the whole class, individual students, or small groups, monitor student progress, communicate findings to parents, design assessments, establish and uphold classroom regulations, collaborate with school administration, and prepare students for standardized examinations. A teacher not only imparts knowledge but also inspires and motivates pupils to achieve their fullest potential.

The personality of a teacher encompasses their intrinsic attributes, as seen by their expression of values, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. There are other qualities of a good teacher which include: caring, fair and respectful, having positive attitude towards the teaching profession, participating in social interactions with pupils, sincerity and practicing reflective teaching. Building awareness regarding the importance of values is the first step in teaching which may motivate pupils and aid learning.

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers work collaboratively with other faculty, staff, and community members to improve teaching practices that enrich the learning environment and lead to higher achieving in classrooms [14]. Teacher leadership is set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach pupils but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning. Mobilizing and energizing does not occur because of the role of the leader as boss but rather because the individual is informed and persuasive. Therefore, an important characteristic of a teacher leader is expertise and skill in engaging others in complex work.

The variety of roles ensures that teachers can find ways to lead that fit their talents and interests. Regardless of the roles they assume, teacher leaders shape the culture of their schools, improve student learning, and influence practice among their peers. The term teacher leadership refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. [15] said that leadership consists of actions that help the group to complete its tasks successfully and maintain effective working relationships among its members. For any group to be successful, both task-leadership actions and group maintenance-leadership actions have to be provided. Task Leadership is a type of leadership that grants a leader or supervisor an ability to coordinate and direct subordinates towards achievement of certain goals and tasks. Maintenance actions are those leadership actions taken by one or more members of a group to enhance the social relationships among group members. It is important to note that any member of a group may become a leader by taking these necessary actions also the various leadership actions may be provided by different group

members (i.e., the teacher may decide to share various aspects of leadership with class members). Therefore, it is imperative for teacher as a leader in classroom to take necessary actions that would aid the acquisition of reading skills of preschool children.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Observations indicate that a majority of pupils, particularly in pre-primary schools, encounter significant challenges in developing reading skills. This issue is exacerbated by factors such as inadequate teacher competence, ineffective leadership, poor instructional methods, outdated textbooks, familial influences, and teachers' negative attitudes towards reading. This prompted the researcher to investigate the elements related to teachers as determinants of reading skills in pre-primary schools within the Ijero local government region of Ekiti State.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent does teachers' personality affect the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils?
2. To what extent does teachers' leadership affect the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils?

2. METHODOLOGY

The research used a survey methodology. The target population for this study comprised all educators in pre-primary institutions within the Ijero-Ekiti Local Government Area, Ekiti State. A cohort of one hundred (100) respondents from pre-primary schools in the Ijero-Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State was surveyed. It comprised of both male and female pre-school teachers. Ten (10) pre-schools were selected and ten (10) pre-school teachers were chosen from each school using simple random sampling. Two questionnaires, namely the Teachers' Personality Questionnaire (TPQ) and the

Teacher’s Leadership Questionnaire, were employed to gather pertinent data for this study. The questionnaires were categorized into two sections. Section A was intended to gather data regarding the gender and teaching experience of pre-school educators. Section B of the questionnaire contained ten (10) items. Five items for the teacher's personality and five items for the teacher's leadership on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) (4), Agree (A) (3), Disagree (D) (2), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1). The instruments were constructed by the researchers, given to test construct experts, and experts in the field of early childhood education to establish the face and content validity.

Their views and recommendations were incorporated into the finalization of the instrument. The researcher conducted a pilot study with a questionnaire administered to twenty respondents external to the primary study to assess reliability. A test-retest reliability strategy was employed to enhance the devices' reliability. The collected data were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability co-efficient of TPQ=0.962, TLQ=0.846 These results showed that the instruments were reliable for the study. Data collected was analyse using frequency count and percentage.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Table 1. Percentage and frequency of the sex (The respondents)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	30	30%
Female	70	70%
Total	100	100%

Table 1 revealed that 30% of the preschool teachers were male, 70% were female. This means that the numbers of females are more than male teachers in the selected schools.

3.2 Research Question One

To what extent does teachers’ personality affect the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils?

Table 2. Preschool Teachers’ opinion on the extent teachers’ personality affects the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I am disturbed when any of the children I teach does not know how to read very well.	40	30	20	10
2.	I feel discouraged when children commit the same mistakes several times in their reading.	25	40	15	20
3.	Giving rapt attention to pupils’ reading by preschool teachers boost reading fluency of the pupils.	45	10	30	15
4.	I enjoy teaching children that know how to read quickly.	40	30	15	15
5.	I am very happy when children take to my instruction on how to read.	30	50	15	5

Table 2, a greater proportion of the respondents agreed that they were disturbed when any of the children taught did not know how to read well. Also, a greater percentage of the respondents were discouraged when commit the same mistakes several times in their reading. In the same vein, 55% agreed that giving rapt attention to pupils’ reading boost reading fluency of

the pupils. Similarly, most of the respondents agreed that they are very happy when children take to instructions on how to read which makes them enjoy teaching.

3.3 Research Question Two

To what extent does teachers’ leadership affect the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils?

The responses to the 5-10 items in the instructors' questionnaire were utilized to address the aforementioned study topic. The responses were

calculated using basic percentages for evaluation. A four-point Likert scale was employed.

Table 3. Preschool Teachers' opinion on the extent that teachers' leadership affects the reading skill of pre-primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
6	It is role of pre-school teachers to encourage children to develop their reading skills.	30	45	15	10
7	Pre-school teacher as a learning facilitator improves reading skill of pre-primary school pupils	20	50	25	5
8	Ensuring effective classroom management by pre-school teacher increase reading skills of pre-primary school pupils.	45	20	15	20
9	Pre-school teachers make reading materials available for preschool children	35	40	20	5
10	Pre-school teachers ensure independent reading for the pupils	60	30	10	-

From table 3, 75% of the respondents agreed it is teachers' role to encourage children to develop their reading skills. Majority of the respondents also agreed that pre-school teachers as a facilitator improves reading skills of pre-primary school pupils. 65% of the respondents agreed that effective classroom management by pre-school teachers increase reading skills of pre-primary school pupils.

3.4 Discussion of Findings

The results from the current study underline the significance of holistic development during childhood and the crucial function played by the teaching faculty in promoting the ability to read during the pre-primary phase. The current study has reiterated that early childhood represents the most crucial phase during which the lack of development, especially in the realm of linguistics and literacy, becomes irreparable if not attended to. The characteristics of the teachers, such as patience, zeal, empathy, and positivism, were found to play a crucial part in pupils' interest and performance in the realm of reading. If the teachers display concerns for the under-performing pupils and display delight in the improvement shown by the pupils, the emotional surroundings become conducive to the development of

motivation and involvement. This reinforces [9] that reading represents an action-oriented activity involving meaning-making, which requires the involvement and motivation provided by well-informed individuals like the teachers.

In addition, data obtained in research question one confirms that teachers' attitudes towards pupils' misconceptions in reading either support or thwart reading development. The result shows that teachers felt discouraged when pupils made consistent mistakes when reading. The implication of this observation has significant pointers to consider, for instance, since reading encompasses serious cognitive processes including comprehension, fluency, and speed in learning [10], [11], pupils should be continually encouraged to execute these processes.

The study also discovered that teachers' leadership influence pre-primary school pupils significantly when it came to learning how to read. A major number of respondents acknowledged that motivating pupils, assisting learners, managing a class effectively, as well as ensuring that pre-primary school learners get ample reading resources, enhance their competence as readers. The importance of teachers as leaders cannot

be overemphasized because it is best highlighted when teachers establish efficient learning environments where pre-primary school pupils learn to read on their own and through collaboration, as affirmed by [15], [16].

The combined effects of the personality and leadership styles of teachers emphasize the fact that good reading instruction at the pre-primary level is not only dependent on instructional practices. Teachers who are able to exhibit proper reading behaviours, strong leadership capacities, and good interpersonal relationships play an important role in influencing the reading attitudes of pupils. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge the fact that the acquisition of reading competences within pre-primary education is dependent not only on appropriate instructional practices but also on well-qualified teachers possessing sound personalities and high leadership qualities.

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instructional practices but also on well-qualified teachers possessing sound personalities and high leadership qualities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals the diversified role of teacher-related factors associated with the improvement of pre-primary children's reading skills at the Ekiti State level. The results show that teacher instruction, personality, and leadership factors are major determinants of early reading proficiency. Therefore, enhancing teacher capabilities and leadership skills can contribute to creating better surroundings that foster reading skills among young children.

Notably, conclusions reached through this study can guide policymakers and curriculum planners in improving policies concerning early childhood education. Generally, integrating teacher personality development and leadership training can help promote improvements in early literacy learning approaches. The recommendations formed through this study can act as a basis with which future changes in curriculum can be implemented with the aim of enhancing pre-primary education in Ekiti State and such settings.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To bridge these identified gaps and enhance teachers' power in pre-primary reading skills in Ekiti State, the following implementable recommendations have been made: Develop and conduct in-service programs on continued education regarding early literacy instruction (phonological awareness, read-aloud strategies, learner-centered approaches). Teachers with sound leadership skills should teach in preschools classes. Government should encourage the professional teachers especially in preschools through incentives and worthwhile allowance.

Preschool teachers who do not possess leadership skills should undergo in-service training such as seminars for effective discharge of their duties.

Preschool teachers should be encouraged to participate in pedagogically-oriented and content-oriented professional development activities to improve the quality of their teaching and consequently the performance of their pupils particularly in reading.

Organize mentorship networks where more experienced practitioners of early literacy will be matched with less experienced teachers to share practices and feedback on instruction.

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