

STRUCTURED LITERACY APPROACH: AN EFFECTIVE READING INTERVENTION FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

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Abstract- Reading is considered as the foundational literacy skill in school education. With the reforms in our education system school education has become more inclusive and engaging for diverse learners. To cater for the literacy skills of diverse learners, an intervention that has paved its way in mastering reading skills in a systematic, explicit and cumulative manner is structured literacy approach. Structured Literacy refers exclusively to evidence-based systematic instructional approaches aligned with the science of reading. This instructional intervention model focuses on building and developing the foundational literacy skills of phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondences, syllables, morphology, syntax, and semantics using explicit, systematic instructional principles. In comparison to traditional literacy approaches, structured literacy incorporates a multimodal approach to instruction engaging multiple senses within instruction, providing learners with a strong foundation in literacy. This research paper includes a narrative review of literature on the positive outcomes of structured literacy approach for enhancing all learners reading abilities within an inclusive learning environment. The findings emphasize the potential of structured literacy approach in order to promote literacy success in academic learning and critical importance of professional development of schoolteachers to advocate for its effective provision and implementation of teaching reading in school. The 21st century education system addresses the need for literacy programs to include global viewpoints and cultural knowledge, moving toward interactive and collaborative learning environment for the educational success of diverse learners.

Keywords: Structured Literacy Approach, Effective reading, Reading intervention, Diverse learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills (UNESCO). At school, having the literacy skills to read, write, speak and listen are vital for success. Literacy skills allow learners to search for information, explore subjects in-depth and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. In the current education system due importance is given to building foundational literacy and numeracy skills among students in order to enable them to become independent learners.

Reading is a lifelong skill and is considered as one of the foundational literacy skills that allows students to use and understand written language. It is among the four primary language skills, along with speaking, writing, and listening. Reading helps in developing students' language, vocabulary skills and active engagement with the written text. It is a key component which acts as a thread in the classroom teaching learning process. Reading skills refer to the various abilities that are necessary for effective reading and comprehension of written text. These skills enable individuals to decode, interpret, and engage with text meaningfully (Snow, C. E. 2002).

Diverse learners have a wide range of skills, abilities, learning style and background. In an inclusive classroom, learners have their own strengths and weaknesses, the inefficiency to read and write accurately according to grade level acts as a barrier to their learning. To cater these learning challenges and breaking the practice of one size fits all, structured literacy has paved its way in teaching foundational literacy skills to learners keeping in mind their abilities and providing them with instructions that goes along with their learning style in an explicit, systematic and cumulative manner. It helps in identifying and addressing the reading gaps ensuring that learners develop foundational and essential reading and writing abilities.

Structured literacy is an evidence based systematic instructional approach which is aligned with the science of reading. It emphasizes explicit, systematic, diagnostic and multimodal instructions in various components of language and reading, offering a solid foundation for decoding and comprehension skills. It's scientific approach to literacy instruction provides a tool in the hand of learners to become accurate, effective decoders of language reading. It teaches the analysis and production of language at all levels including – phonemic awareness, sound symbol association, syllables, morphology, syntax and semantics in an explicit and systematic manner using multisensory approach to instructions.

The foundations of the structured literacy approach are rooted in scientific research on how children learn to read. Structured Literacy plays an important role in providing effective reading instruction to diverse learners, including those with learning disabilities, dyslexia, English language learners, developmental disabilities and learners from

various socio-cultural backgrounds. Its explicit, multisensory and systematic instructional approach addresses the specific needs of learners who struggle with reading acquisition and learning, ensuring that foundational skills are developed through a structured method of teaching. It caters to the learning style of diverse learners through highly organized method for developing literacy skills, with a strong focus on the foundational elements of reading and writing.

2. OBJECTIVE

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the Structured Literacy Approach in improving reading skills among diverse learners.
- To explore its impact on reading comprehension, phonemic awareness, and overall literacy development.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the impact of the Structured Literacy Approach on the reading skills of diverse learners?
- What is the impact of the Structured Literacy Approach on specific components of reading, comprehension phonemic awareness and overall literacy development?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A narrative review of literature was taken as the research methodology. Studies were selected based on their relevance to structured literacy approach, inclusion of pre- and post-implementation measurements, and focus on diverse learners.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Charpentier, K.A. et al. (2022) studied the impact of structured literacy approach to develop phonemic awareness and reading competence in second grade students from elementary school, with the objectives- a) To identify some characteristics of the Direct Instruction Reading and some strategies used in the English learning process b) To use the key components of the structured literacy approach in the development of certain reading competencies established in the study program of second grade. The study was conducted on 56 students total (26 students from each school) of second grade from two different elementary school of costa rica and 11 teachers from Ministry of Education. The data was collected through survey and interview (for teachers) and observation (for students). The findings of the study found that:

- Most teachers included phonemic awareness exercises in their lessons but were unfamiliar with the full didactic process for teaching phonemic awareness effectively and many did not understand how decoding relates to reading comprehension, limiting the development of students' reading skills.
- Students struggled with phoneme identification and decoding, which impacted on their reading fluency and comprehension and most relied on whole word reading without mastering phonemic skills. Although teachers recognized the potential of structured literacy, many had not fully implemented these techniques. The study highlights the need for systematic and explicit teaching methods, along with better training of teachers, so that they effectively implement the structured literacy approach and improve students' reading competence.

Addison, S.A., & Griffin, R.A (2021) provided a comprehensive exploration of structured literacy in the context of secondary education, focusing on the needs of striving readers by proposing a structured literacy framework that focuses on two key components: morphological awareness and fluency building, particularly through prosodic reading. A systematic review of literature based on theoretical framework and case based instructional strategy is taken as methodology. The study emphasizes that many striving readers reach secondary education without mastering foundational skills of reading, which hinders their reading comprehension, so these readers need explicit instruction that focuses on building blocks of reading (e.g., morphology and prosody) to improve overall comprehension. Structured literacy which works on the groundworks of systematic, explicit teaching of foundational reading skills is beneficial for supporting struggling readers who often lack critical skills by the time they reach secondary education. Structured literacy focuses on building reading proficiency through skills-based teaching and meaningful student engagement with texts. Educators can create a learning environment that supports struggling students and helps them become more proficient, confident readers by focusing on the development of morphological awareness and fluency skills. Call for action needs to be taken on the widespread adoption of structured literacy strategies in secondary education to ensure that striving readers receive the support they need to succeed academically.

Ray, J. S. (2020) explored the importance and effectiveness of structured literacy instruction for students at risk of literacy acquisition, particularly those with dyslexia and English learners using systematic review of literature and theoretical exploration. The paper highlights the complexity of learning to read, emphasizing that the brain is not naturally pre-wired for reading and writing because of which the necessary brain connections must be developed through instruction and practice. To cater for the students at risk of literacy acquisition structured literacy approach is presented as a comprehensive and systematic approach to literacy instruction highlighting its six foundational pillars

and comprehensive instructional principles. Response to Intervention (RTI) approach is discussed as a method to improve the effectiveness of structured literacy training by identifying students at risk and providing them with tiered levels of support based on their needs. Findings of the study indicated that structured literacy is a powerful approach that can benefit all students, especially those at risk of literacy difficulties. The findings suggested that by providing structured literacy instructions in classroom educators can provide the necessary support to help students develop the brain connections needed for proficient reading and writing, and due importance of continuous professional development for educators in structured literacy, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Stu-McCarthy, K. (2020) explored the effectiveness of structured literacy for all students, especially for those students who struggle with reading by focusing on the components of structured literacy and how this approach benefits over using typical literacy practices, such as balanced literacy or whole language approaches, to teach reading. The paper discusses how the phonic awareness and sound symbol association component of structured literacy approach emphasizes direct instruction and immediate feedback, which is critical for student achievement. The paper referred findings from the National Reading Panel (2000), which concluded that phonemic awareness is a key predictor of reading success in early education. Additionally, structured literacy's cumulative and diagnostic nature allows for continuous assessment and tailored instruction based on student needs. The paper concluded the broad applicability of structured literacy, that its' systematic and explicit instructions are not only benefiting for children with reading disabilities, but it will benefit all learners. The paper also highlighted the role of teachers to advocate and execute structured literacy for academic achievement of their students.

Farrall, M. L., & Ashby, J. (2019) highlights the essential role that assessments play in identifying and addressing reading difficulties in children. Structured assessments of various reading skills are essential to diagnose in order to deliver more effective intervention. In addition, phonemic awareness was recognized as a critical ability for reading success, and spelling tests offer valuable information about phonological, orthographic, and morphological understanding. Emphasizing the teaching of phonetics, syllable patterns, and spelling rules can greatly enhance reading comprehension. Case studies with detailed error analysis was used on students who demonstrated different types of reading and spelling challenges in order to identify the specific instructional needs of each student. Recommendations on using multisensory instructional methods, additionally the of educators to use structured assessments regularly to identify specific literacy challenges in individual students, such as phonemic awareness, decoding skills, or receptive language deficits and the use of diagnostic assessments in structured literacy programs to inform personalized interventions, ultimately improving reading outcomes for children with literacy challenges.

Spear-Swerling, L. (2018) Structured Literacy benefits students with dyslexia and other literacy challenges emphasizing its instructional approach and sequential teaching of literacy components. Unlike typical reading practices (guided reading, balanced literacy) that relied on guessing strategies and not emphasizing on phonics and decoding skills, structured literacy provides explicit, systematic and multimodal approach in teaching those skills. This approach directly addresses the deficit areas of students with dyslexia working on their phonological, decoding and spelling skills. Researches has shown its benefits to build strong decoding skills that are an important part of fluent reading and comprehension. Also, its' structured approach to teaching higher-level literacy skills, such as sentence and text structure, helps students improve in writing and comprehension as their decoding skills strengthen. Incorporating structured literacy in general and special classrooms can improve the reading outcomes of diverse learners.

Center, Y., & Freeman, L. (1996) evaluated the effectiveness of a structured literacy program called Schoolwide Early Language and Literacy (SWELL) in improving literacy outcomes for disadvantaged and at-risk students, including those with mild intellectual disabilities, into mainstream classrooms with the objectives:- a) Assess the efficacy of the SWELL program in improving literacy outcomes for disadvantaged and at-risk children in kindergarten, b) Compare the effectiveness of the SWELL program with the Reading Recovery program in Year 1, particularly for at-risk students, c) Evaluate the short-term maintenance effects of these programs in Year 2 to determine whether initial literacy gains were sustained. In four elementary schools, the study employed a quasi-experimental approach, with two schools adopting the SWELL program (the experimental group) and two continuing with existing literacy practices (control group). Literacy outcomes were measured at the end of kindergarten, Year 1, and midway through Year 2 using various literacy tests, including reading connected text, phonemic awareness, and spelling. The findings of the research indicated that: a) At the end of kindergarten, students in SWELL schools performed better than their peers in control schools in reading connected text, but no significant differences were found in other early literacy measures; b) Students in SWELL schools performed better on several literacy tests by the end of Year 1 compared to those in control schools, however reading recovery program, which provided individualized instructions was more effective for at risk students and c) By the middle of Year 2, no significant differences were found among the groups, indicating that the initial literacy gains had leveled out. The research paper suggested :- a) integrating both whole-class structured literacy programs and individualized interventions to ensure comprehensive support to sustain literacy gains for all students, especially those at risk, b) Teachers should receive thorough in-service training in structured

literacy programs to ensure effective implementation and support for at-risk students, c) further research to replicate the study with larger samples and explore the long-term effects of structured literacy programs.

6. FINDINGS

Structured Literacy has a lot of potential to promote literacy and academic success of diverse learners. Assessment plays a crucial role in structured literacy by identifying and addressing the specific needs of diverse learners who struggle with reading. Its' key components and instructional approach provide students with the tool to become effective readers, as it directly targets their deficit areas and builds their foundation skills that acts a steppingstone in their learning process. This approach to teaching the components of reading in an explicit, systematic and sequential manner at multiple levels has proved to be more effective than other teaching methods. Structured literacy is not just beneficial for elementary students but can also build the foundational skills (e.g., decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression) of secondary students. When followed in an individualized manner, structured literacy has the potential to develop literacy acquisition and the necessary brain connections needed for proficient reading and writing for students with specific learning disabilities and developmental disorders. To cater for the learners who struggle with reading, educators play an essential role in using structured literacy approach. They can support struggling readers by using clear, step-by-step instruction that covers essential reading skills like phonics, morphemes, spelling and word structure. Incorporating multisensory approach and hands on learning, educators can facilitate and build the foundational literacy skills. By continuously updating their knowledge, skills and teaching methods, educators can create a supportive classroom environment, making reading lessons engaging and tailored to each learner's needs. Moreover, working closely with experts and parents helps ensure that students receive consistent support both at school and at home. Through these efforts, educators can help students build strong reading skills and become more confident readers.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for broad applicability of structured literacy approach in Indian classroom along with teacher training for its' effective implementation in improving students' reading competence. The systematic whole class early literacy program, based on the latest research in early literacy acquisition, supplemented by an individualised program for all students, for as long as is necessary, appears to be a better solution for the development of foundational literacy skills. This approach to teaching will make the Indian classroom more inclusive and interactive for students and will not just benefit children with special needs but will benefit all learners to become independent and efficient readers leading them towards academic success. The 21st century education is reforming and is inculcating more teaching practices that cater to the needs and abilities of the students to build their foundational literacy skills. Structured literacy can be adapted to integrate modern educational practices and technologies while maintaining its core principles moving toward an interactive and collaborative learning environment for the educational success of diverse learners.

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