

Full Length Research

Multiple fluency strategy: a panacea for improving oral reading amongst students with reading disabilities

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Abstract

Reading is a basic component of instruction for all learners including learners with special learning needs. The use of relevant and research-based strategies in curbing reading difficulties amongst learners with reading disabilities is inevitable. The thrust of this paper was to examine multiple fluency strategy for improving oral reading amongst learners with reading disabilities. The concept of reading disabilities, oral reading and students with reading disabilities and multiple fluency strategy and reading are highlighted. In addition, the procedures in using fluency strategy in oral reading are highlighted. The benefits of multiple fluency strategy in curbing reading difficulties amongst learners with reading disabilities are outlined. Finally, the paper presents a way forward in promoting the effective use of multiple fluency in improving oral reading amongst learners with reading disabilities.

Keywords: Multiple Fluency Strategy, Oral Reading and Students with Reading Disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

There are observable and reported cases of common classroom reading difficulties that manifest in contemporary Nigerian schools. For instance, there are students who can recite without recognizing the words in the text. Similarly, there are some of them who could not call words correctly from their main texts without comprehension. These difficulties and challenges students show are however, the result in which instructional methods and materials are used in teaching. Students with reading disabilities do have problems with decoding words automatically, accurately and with proper expression. Such students cannot read phrases because they were not given the opportunity to reread text repeatedly in order to become familiar with it

to enable them express the mood of the text at the rate commensurate with degree of accuracy expected of them. The poor reading rate and accuracy can be observed among such students with reading disabilities when they read aloud. During oral reading, their levels of automaticity, accuracy, phrasing, expression and understanding of punctuation are very poor as usually observed when their miscues or errors are analyzed. As a result, their overall oral reading performance is affected.

Oral reading fluency according to Speece and Ritchey (2005) is the ability to identify words accurately and quickly in a text. This definition lays more emphasis on the need for students to focus on accuracy and speed. Consequently, the focus and objective of instruction by teachers will be to concentrate on drilling students with or

without reading disabilities on reading accuracy and speed, instead of teaching them reading for meaning. The most common oral reading errors committed by students during text reading include: omission, addition, and substitution of words. In some cases hesitation and repetition of words in the text are observed. This makes their achievement in oral reading to be affected.

To ensure that students with reading disabilities read fluently during oral reading, they need practice and drill in multiple fluency skills like accuracy, rate and prosody activities through phrase reading, rereading and assisted reading. The students are taught to read using these components of MFS simultaneously. In MFS instruction, less proficient readers are aided to appropriately “chunk” or group words together in phrases when reading to give the text meaning rather than read word by word as is the case with students who have reading disabilities. Again, using MFS as reading instruction, the students are assisted meaningfully through scaffolding and role modeling while building fluency. The teacher begins the support and gradually withdraws while the student takes charge (Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, WisenBaker, Kuhn, Strauss, & Morris, 2006). However, in assisting students using this reading strategy, it is important to have good reading models to be able to read accurately, automatically and with the right expression.

The concept of Reading Disabilities

Students with reading disabilities are those who exhibit poor reading skills as manifested in their oral reading profile. These include miscues of omission, substitution, addition and hesitation in decoding words during oral reading (National Reading Panel, 2000a). Their ability to read words accurately with correct phrase and speed is very poor. This invariably leads to poor comprehension of the text. One advantage students with reading disabilities tend to benefit through this method is that they learn the mechanics of reading. That is, how to pace read, use punctuation marks where and when necessary. Similarly, it is used to prepare students for wide independent reading. This is because students are exposed to different genres through read aloud. The third advantage of modeling is that students see, hear and feel the mood, physical movements and direction of the writer’s messages (Rasinski, 2004). More so, it can be combined with different methods such as phrase reading, repeated reading and reader’s theatre, to mention a few.

Oral Reading and Learners with Reading Disabilities

Oral reading is the ability of students to read aloud a given text smoothly and correctly. Reading orally involves being able to decode words accurately and fluently with normal speed. Oral reading fluency is the rate and accuracy with which students with reading disabilities read with expression. It is one of the five major areas of

reading; apart from phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension. In oral reading, students are expected to decode the words in the text correctly (accuracy), automatically and fast (automaticity), and appropriately use phrase with expression (prosody). To read fluently, students should be given enough rereading texts to practice quickly (Hudson, Pullen, Lane & Jorgensen, 2009). This will help them to recognize and pronounce the words in a text accurately, automatically without miscues like hesitation, addition, or substitution of words during reading. They will be able to express the mood or tone of the text by appropriately adhering to stresses and punctuations in the text.

Generally, one area that makes it possible and easy for students with reading disabilities to be identified by teachers, peer, and parents, is their inability to read fluently whether individually or in small or large groups. This is particularly where they are required to read orally. There are a number of ways which students with reading problems can be identified. Three of these are formal or informal factors. The informal include teachers’ observations, report and other school records, parents, peer observation and remarks, neighbors and even the student being identified. For instance, students with reading disabilities read slowly and with effort, laboring over unfamiliar words and spending less time reading than their proficient peers. As a result, they have less developed sight word vocabularies and read less fluently. This reading behavior can be observed and reported by teachers, parents and peers. Parents, guardians, and other siblings at home can provide useful information as to a student’s reading behavior. This is where the parents, and guardians or siblings notice or suspect reading or any academic symptoms of failure, which may need attention and bring their concern to the attention of the class teacher, counselor or management (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Persetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001)

Multiple Fluency Strategy and Reading

Fluency is essential for students with reading disabilities to accomplish tasks that involve reading in a timely fashion and is related to comprehension. However, the ability to read with fluency becomes even crucial, as demands for more critical thinking increase as such students move to higher grade levels and literacy tasks become a core component of access to curriculum across content areas like science, history and language arts (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). However, the ability to read with fluency becomes even crucial, as demands for more critical thinking increase as such students move to higher grade levels and literacy tasks become a core component of access to curriculum across content areas like science, history and language arts.

Multiple fluency strategy is a number of instructional approaches for teaching students with oral reading

disabilities to become independent confident fluent readers. It is aimed at increasing oral reading achievement of students who have developed initial word reading skills but demonstrate inadequate reading fluency skills for their grade level. These include phrase reading, assisted reading and rereading, through which students with reading disabilities are taught reading rate, accuracy, prosody and comprehension skills

Phrase Reading: Phrasing is defined as the ability to read several words together before pausing (Ellery, 2009) as opposed to word-by-word calling. This implies that good readers group words together to derive or give meaning to the text they are reading, rather than only reading and interpreting word by word. It is chunking the words into phrases. One of the characteristics of students with reading disabilities is their inability to read in phrases. Therefore, for such students to benefit from their content area school subject, they need explicit instructions and drills on phrase-reading.

Assisted Reading: Assisted reading as the name implies, refers to the support a reader gets from more advance readers such as teachers, parents, and even a peer when reading. It also involves modeling and imitation. It is expected that by listening to good models of fluent reading, students with reading disabilities will learn how a reader's voice can help text make sense (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Research in reading fluency has shown that assisted reading can have a significantly positive effect on students' fluency (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). In assisted reading an individual student reads a passage while simultaneously listening to a fluent reading of the same text.

Assisted reading is an instructional reading method for building oral reading fluency where a more proficient reader renders support to a dysfluent reader. In this type of reading strategy, the more proficient reader, whether a teacher or any trained person progressively reduces the assistance offered as the less fluent reader becomes more independent (Rasinski, 2003). There are various forms of assisted reading. These include modeled oral reading, supported oral reading, repeated reading, and performance reading. These instructional techniques are designed to assist teachers and reading clinicians in the making of proficient, fluent and confident readers. A consistent finding indicates that repeated readings produce statistically significant improvement in accuracy, comprehension, reading rate, word recognition, and oral reading expression on the practiced passage (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003).

Re-reading: Reading or otherwise known as repeated reading, refers to repeating a passage over and over again. This is believed that with constant practice, students will gain independence, and confidence as they read rapidly, fluently too. This strategy is one of the most frequently recognized approaches to improving fluency (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000). When students repeat

their reading, their amount of word recognition errors decreases, their reading speed increases, and their oral reading expression improves (O'Connor, White, & Swanson, 2007; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008; Strickland, W. D., Boon, R. T., & Mason, L. L. (2020).

Oral Reading and Learners with Reading Disabilities

Oral reading fluency which according to Speece and Ritchey (2005) is the ability to identify words accurately and quickly in a text. This definition lays more emphasis on the need for students to focus on accuracy and speed. Similarly, Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, (2001) define oral reading fluency as the ability to translate text with speed and accuracy. The authors further suggest that oral reading fluency may serve as an indicator of overall reading competence.

It can be drawn from the foregoing definitions that for students with reading disabilities to be fluent oral readers, they need to read automatically, accurately, with adequate expression and phrasing. This will enable them to construct the meaning of text. It is also needful for teachers and anyone interested in reading development and disabilities to identify and comprehend the common types of models of reading

Procedures for Developing Reading Fluency

Reading instruction that builds a child's reading fluency is considered by reading researchers to be an important but neglected element of a balanced reading program (Rasinski, 2004; Osborn, Lehr, & Hiebert, 2003; Samuels, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000a). Therefore, students need some explicit instructions in reading fluency that will activate their visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses, and makes reading a living and lively experience. To this end, some of the widely researched and recommended methods for building fluency relevant to this study are briefly examined. The procedures for developing reading fluency include but not limited to the following:

Repeated Reading: To repeat an action or an event means to redo it over again and over again. Hence, repeated reading suggests reading a given text more than once. In their study on the effects of repeated reading on students' fluency, Roundy and Roundy (2009) pose an interesting question as to whether practice always makes room for perfection. In response to the foregoing question, one would hastily say yes based on personal life's experience, other people's testimonies such as athletes, cyclist, musicians and other performing artists and actors. The National Reading Panel (2000) reports that reading a particular passage on and on can effectively improve the students overall reading

fluency and comprehension ability. This means that rereading or repeated reading can be used simultaneously with other MFS strategy in order to improve reading ability and fluency of the students. In repeated reading, students with reading disabilities are made to read a passage several times until the desired level of fluency is achieved.

Modeling Fluent Reading:One of the easiest ways students learn is through imitation. In order to read fluently, students must hear and comprehend they read. The message is conveyed is communicated through expression, intonation, and phrasing of the words. To achieve this, Rasinski (2000) suggests that students to remember how the teacher read the passage and how the teacher's expression affected their understanding. Consequently, teachers, reading specialists and even trained parents should read aloud fluently, frequently and with the desired expression. This helps to expose the students to different genres of texts from their text books and other excerpts from speeches or folktales.

One advantage students with oral reading disability tend to benefit through this method is that they learn the mechanics of reading. That is, how to pace read, use punctuation marks where and when necessary. Similarly, it is used to prepare students for wide independent reading. This is because students are exposed to different genres through read aloud. The third advantage of modeling is that students see, hear and feel the mood, physical movements and direction of the writer's messages. More so, it can be combined with different methods such as phrase reading, repeated reading and reader's theatre, to mention a few.

Reader's Theater:As the name suggests, readers' theater is a reading strategy that engages students with and without reading disabilities, through assigned parts in scripts. The reading activities are carried out as in real life situation, using similar procedures for a play-let in a theater. In this type of strategy, a story is divided into parts and assigned to students as the characters. They are then instructed to read their portions of the script orally for practice many times in the school and at home. Reader's Theatre differ from plays or other types of performances because readers read their parts aloud rather than memorize them. Reader's Theatre encourages students to interpret the text that they are reading and to read with an appropriate speed or rate rather than just simply reading fast. Strategies like Reader's Theatre and Poetry Café provide an authentic venue for students to perform a script, poem, speech or play from a book or story they have read, using minimal props (Allington, 2001; Rasinski, 2003).

Benefits of Multiple Fluency Strategy

The effective use of Multiple Fluency Strategy in curbing reading difficulties amongst pupils and students at all levels of education. Andzayi (2004) identifies

inability to read, insufficient sight words slow reading rate, inability to comprehend what is read, inability to infer, uncritical reading, and lack of interest in reading as common problems found among students. These are said to cut across all levels of our educational system in Nigeria. Hence, reading problems related to students are not only caused by disability conditions but students' attitude and interest to school and reading culture. It is aimed at increasing oral reading fluency of students who have developed initial word reading skills but demonstrate inadequate reading fluency for their grade level(Welsh, 2006). Multiple Fluency Strategy will help to curb reading difficulties amongst students with reading disabilities in the following ways:

1. Multiple Fluency Strategy will help students with reading disabilities to recognize and pronounce the words in a text accurately, automatically without miscues like hesitation, addition, or substitution of words during reading. They will be able to express the mood or tone of the text by appropriately adhering to stresses and punctuations in the text.
2. The phases of multiple fluency strategy such as, phrasing, assisted reading and rereading helps students improve their overall oral reading skills and proficiency in reading generally, help them in reading the different genre of text materials fluently with confidence, motivate and make them interested to further read in order to improve their reading comprehension and also improve their oral reading skills to become proficient in reading.
3. Multiple fluency strategy enables students to read automatically, accurately, with adequate expression and phrasing.
4. MFS enables students to construct the meaning of text, will help them to recognize and pronounce the words in a text accurately, automatically without miscues like hesitation, addition, or substitution of words during reading.
5. Through MFS, students will be able to express the mood or tone of the text by appropriately adhering to stresses and punctuations in the text as well as promoting fluency.
6. MFS helps to builds reading confidence in students with reading disability and enables them to learn to read aloud with expression and motivates them to read widely.
7. MFS is used for students at all levels of education and at different settings (special, inclusive and regular) and can also be applied in a wide range of subjects such as Mathematics, Arts, Science, Science lessons amongst others(Overstreet, 2014).

Therefore, students with reading disabilities who are experiencing difficulties with oral reading would benefit from interventions that have multiple components

focusing attention on increasing the rate, accuracy and prosody (phrasing and expressing) of reading.

A Way Forward in Promoting the Effective Use of Multiple Fluency in Improving Oral Reading amongst Learners with Reading Disabilities.

There appears to be increasing evidence literature that achieving fluency is necessary for effective reading ability. One of the main revelations of concern from the review is the fact that oral reading fluency was neglected over the years in reading instructional programs of most schools. This was the report of the National Reading Panel which observed that most studies examined were on the efficiency of silent reading and very few focused on oral reading fluency.

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Training and re-training of special and regular teachers: teachers require adequate training to enable them acquire competencies that are needed in teaching oral reading. Adequate preparation in teaching reading to students with reading disabilities at both elementary and secondary levels is required. This can be effectively carried out through workshops, seminars, training sections, provision of training manuals, symposiums, talk-shows etc.
2. Establishment of Reading Clinics: Teachings reading in schools are not adequate in meeting the needs of students with reading disabilities. Therefore, the establishment of reading clinics, within school settings as well as in communities is inevitable for all students, particularly students with reading disabilities.
3. Active collaboration between stakeholders: Curriculum planners and publishing houses are expected to incorporate Multiple Fluency Strategy in the school curriculum and the contents of oral reading fluency properly acknowledged and implemented. Moreso, private and government publishing institutions should publish reading materials that are relevant to students with and without reading disabilities which emphasize reading for speed, accuracy and automaticity.

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