

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING LANGUAGE LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Language literacy is the ability to read, writes, and communicates effectively, forming a crucial foundation for future academic success. In Nigeria, early childhood education (ECE) lays the groundwork for lifelong learning, typically spanning ages 0-5. Effective teaching strategies are essential for fostering language literacy in young learners. This paper explores strategies for enhancing language literacy in ECE, including: reading aloud, phonological awareness activities, storytelling, and language conducive environments. These strategies have implications and benefits for children's language development, including improved reading skills, enhanced vocabulary, and increased confidence. The paper recommends that educators and caregivers should incorporate these strategies into their practice, providing a supportive environment for young learners to develop essential language literacy skills. The work concludes that by adopting these strategies, Nigeria can empower its young learners with the language literacy skills necessary for future success.

Keywords: Literacy, Early Childhood, Education, Teaching Strategies

Introduction

Morrison (2012) defined Early Childhood Care education as a formal and informal training of children from age zero to age five (0-5). This preschool teaching and learning prepares the children for their primary education. It concentrates on the developmental stages of the children; cognitive, emotional, social and physical growth. This training can take place in different settings which includes: homes, preschools, daycare centers, and kindergarten or crèches as the case may be. The trainer may be a professional trained teacher, care-giver and sometimes the child's parents. Early Childhood Care Education is an important aspect of a child's life because it is crucial for lifelong learning

The ability to utilize the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing for effective communication is referred to as literacy in present (Adeniyi-Egbeola & Lawal, 2016). Literacy is the pedestal upon which lifelong learning and communication is built. Literacy is crucial for the implementation of effective strategies for fostering language development in early childhood education. Studies have revealed that lasting impact is made on the language and literacy development of children through early childhood education programmes (Sailors, et al, 2026; Harmond, 2024).

National Early Literacy Panel (2008) affirmed the significance of early literacy development, through the identification of key abilities and instructional practices that support the growth of language and literacy of young learner's language and literacy growth. Their report highlighted the importance of foundational abilities, like phonological perception, alphabet information, and language abilities, in predicting later reading success. The panel's findings underscore the need for evidence-based instructional practices, including explicit

instruction and engaging learning activities, to promote early literacy development and lay a strong foundation for future reading achievement (Wasik, 2012; Pinkett, 2020; Roberto, 2025).

Eggen and Kauchak (2012) explained teaching strategies as ways of employed by teachers or educators to facilitate learning of sets of instructions among their students. Strategies are chosen based on the students' needs, the topics, and the aims and objectives of instructions. However in Early Childhood Education, child-centered strategies such as: play away, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, active learning, student choice, and so forth (Slavin, 2012).

Importance of Literacy in Early childhood

The importance of language learning abilities cannot be overstated. Children who exhibit strong propensity for fast language acquisition gravitate towards performing better academically and have improved social and emotional outcomes. Kilpatrick (2015) emphasized that foundational skills in reading are important, stating that phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency are crucial for reading comprehension. He adds that weaknesses in these foundational skills can lead to reading difficulties. This implies that educators should prioritize explicit instruction and assessment of these skills, particularly in early childhood education, to identify and support struggling readers and prevent long-term reading challenges (Tanden, 2001; Sailors, *et. al*, 2026). They are also more likely to develop a love for reading and learning that will serve them well throughout their lives. Conversely, children who struggle with language literacy may face significant challenges in their academic careers.

Despite the importance of language literacy, many young children face challenges in developing these skills. Factors such as limited exposure to reading materials, inadequate teacher training and insufficient parental support can hinder language literacy development. Furthermore, children from different backgrounds may require additional support for developing language learning abilities in new languages (Owaseye, 2024; Sailors, *et. al.*, 2026).

In other to address these challenges, educators can implement a range of strategies to enhance language literacy skills in young children. These include creating conducive environment, using interactive reading approaches, and incorporating play-based learning activities. Teachers can also use technology, such as educational apps and digital storytelling tools, to engage children and promote language literacy skills.

By using these strategies, teachers can positively impact young children toward academic success (Mayo, 2025). To support the above, Owaseye (2024), stated that the use of appropriate teaching strategy presents facilitates easy learning with significant relevance to learning outcomes. She added that strategy can make understanding of information simple or complex. If there is no proper understanding of the information conveyed, the intention may not reach the learner. When there is no comprehension, the purpose of the teaching is defeated.

Effective language literacy instructions create lasting impacts on educational outcomes (Vukelich *et. al.*, 2014). As such, it is essential to prioritize language literacy development and the provision of requisite support and resources for the implementation of effective instructional strategies (Vukelich *et. al.*, 2014).

The implications and benefits of strategies for enhancing language literacy in early childhood education are numerous and significant. One of the most notable benefits is that these strategies have lasting impact on future academic success. By developing appropriate early learning skills, children are better equipped to access achieve their full potential. This, in turn, results in improved academic outcomes, a stronger foundation for lifelong learning (Tanden, 2001; Mayo, 2025; Kalogris, 2024).

Another significance of language literacy is that it could help bridge the gap between children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may not have the same level of exposure to reading materials and literacy-rich environments, which can hinder their language literacy development (Chu, 2012). By implementing effective strategies in early childhood learning, teachers provide the necessary foundation required for the learners thus providing a level playing field for success (Nisbet and Huang, 2015; Oloninisi, 2022).

In addition to academic benefits, strategies for enhancing language literacy can also have a positive impact on children's social and emotional development. When children develop strong language skills, they are better able to express their thoughts and feelings, form meaningful relationships with their peers, and navigate social situations with confidence (Yudha & Aisyah, 2025). This, in turn, can lead to improved emotional well-

being and a stronger sense of self-esteem. By supporting language literacy development, educators can help children develop the social and emotional skills they need to thrive (Mayo, 2025).

Wasik and Hindman (2023) posited that effective language literacy strategies can also support children's cognitive development. Language and literacy skills are closely linked to critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (Vukelich *et. al.*, 2014). By developing strong language literacy skills, children are better able to access and process information, think critically, and solve problems effectively. This can lead to improved cognitive outcomes and a stronger foundation for future learning (Kalogris, 2024).

The benefits of language literacy strategies also extend beyond the classroom. When children develop strong language literacy skills, they are better equipped to participate fully in society and access a wide range of opportunities in their personal and professional lives. This can lead to improved socio-economic outcomes and a more informed and engaged citizenry. By prioritizing language literacy development, educators can help children develop the skills they need to succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Surya & Aprilia, 2024).

Furthermore, the effective implementation of language literacy strategies in early childhood education requires ongoing support and professional development for educators. Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to deliver high-quality language literacy instruction and support the diverse needs of their students. By prioritizing educator support and development, policymakers and administrators can help ensure that language literacy strategies are implemented effectively and have a lasting impact on children's educational outcomes.

Moreover, the benefits of language literacy strategies can be seen in the long-term outcomes for children. Children who develop strong language literacy skills are more likely to succeed in school, pursue higher education, and secure better job opportunities. They are also more likely to be engaged citizens, participating fully in their communities and contributing to society in meaningful ways. By investing in language literacy development, policymakers and educators can help create a more educated, informed, and productive society.

Literacy strategies in early childhood

The Guardian (2025) listed different ways of boosting early childhood literacy, these includes: Read Aloud Daily, Phonemic Awareness Activities, Letter Recognition and Phonics, Print-Rich Environment, Interactive Storytelling, Name Writing and Journaling, Dramatic Play with Literacy Props, Songs and Rhymes, and One-On-One or Small Group Instruction.

The impact of the language skills on early childhood literacy cannot be over emphasized. Oloninisi (2022) opined that ability to communicate effectively in English Language hinges on the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive skills (Emmaryana, 2010; Harmond, 2024). On the other hand, listening and speaking are oral skills while reading and writing are literacy skills. The ability to read and write translates a person to literate. However, numeracy, the ability to count numbers has also been included in modern literacy (Kamil, *et. al.*, 2011; Coursehero.com, 2025).

Early Childhood Education in Nigeria begins from 0-5 years. Education at this stage is for developing the basic life skills that pupils would need to enter their school years. During this period, it is important to develop literacy which is closely related to the ability to write and read. It is believed that literacy levels predict academic achievement or school completion, vocational outcomes, mental, and physical health (Dewalt, *et. al.*, 2004; Marcus, 2006; Lincoln, *et al.*, 2008; Hernandez, 2012). Literacy skills in children develop gradually from acting an expression to communicate it orally and in writing. The literacy development is also related to other domains of development. Children learn to utter an idea through using language as a prop to get social play begun. They begin to label, describe, question, and demand when they tell each other how they feel and what they want (Irwandi, *et. al.*, 2019).

Related to this fact, the preschool years have been viewed as the critical period for developing early children's literacy. In fact, throughout early school-age years there is an increase in the size and complexity of the child's linguistic repertoire and in the use of that repertoire within the context of conversation and narration. The early school-age period is one of tremendous linguistic creativities filled with rhymes, songs, word games, and those special oaths and incantations passed along on the underground from child to child (Irwandi, *et.al.*, 2019). The early school-age years are characterized by growth in all aspects of language, although the development of

pragmatics and semantics seems to be the most prevalent (Marcus, 2006; Otto, 2010; Owens Jr, 2012). In addition, to mastering new forms, the child learns to use these and existing structures to communicate more effectively. Thus, those facts certainly require the right strategy in developing literacy for children at an early age by considering aspects of child development.

Teaching the Alphabet: The Beginning of Literacy

Schickedanz and Collins (2013) posited that teaching the alphabet to young children is the beginning of literacy. This could be done by following a step-by-step approach of: Letter Recognition, Few Letters at a Time, Multi-Sensory Activities, Letters to Sounds, Games of Letters, Read Aloud, Writing, Reinforcement and so on.

There are 26 letters of the English Language alphabet, which can be written in upper case and lower cases as need arises (ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ and abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz). Schickedanz and Collins (2013) suggested that the capital letters should be taught first because they are easier to write and distinguish than the small letters. Rhymes and alphabetic songs could be used to enhance children's memorization of the letters. Visuals such as: flashcards, alphabet charts, alphabet Legos, books with colourful illustrations and so forth could promote recognition of alphabet. Teacher should focus on teaching a few letters per week depending on the age and class of the pupils. It is recommended that 3-5 letters should be taught, while concentrating on high frequency letters like A, B, C, M, S, and T. Pupils' personal names and objects should be included in the teaching of the letters; as in Aa for Apple, Bb for ball, Cc for Caleb, Dd for Dauda, Ee for Egg and so on.

Adeniyi-Egbeola and Lawal (2016) emphasized the importance of multi-sensory approach in language learning. It is a strategy that involves the use of more than one sense at a time. These senses could be that of sight, sound, touch, and movement. Birsh (2011) opined that seeing images, colours, written word; listening to sounds, songs, rhymes; tracing letters in sand, using textured materials, or finger-painting; doing activities involving movement would strengthen children's early literacy.

Phonological Awareness

The problem of connecting letters to sounds hinders early literacy in children. Adeniyi-Egbeola **Reading Aloud** Vocabulary is enhanced by the understanding of pronunciation. Pupil would be able to read and write correctly when they are able to say letters and their sounds (Harper, 2014). For examples, Aa as /a/ _ apple, Bb as /b/ _ bag, Cc as /k/ cat etc. Teacher should be able to instruct the learning of phonics at the early stage of literacy in order to enable pupils' associate letters, word, pictures and even real objects to sounds.

Schuele and Boudreau (2008) explained that the ability to recognize and the sound structures of spoken language is very important to early childhood literacy. This understands that speech is made up of letters, words, syllables, rhymes and individual sounds (phonemes). For examples, rhyming words like: cat, rat, sat, bat would promote early childhood reading and writing. In addition, alliteration like: silly sallysings would help to lay the foundation for young children, reading success.

The practice of reading out aloud by the teacher or caregiver to young children is one of the strategies of fostering early literacy (Trelease, 2013). This strategy would enable the children to hear the correct sounds of the targeted language and also read fluently. Mol, Bus and de Jong (2009) stated that reading aloud by the pupils would encourage them to express themselves while supporting early comprehension of texts.

International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) posited that for reading aloud to be effective in enhancing early childhood literacy, teacher must choose books and materials that are commensurate to the age and class of the pupils. Trelease (2013) also affirmed that expressive voice and gestures, while asking open-ended questions during and after reading would impact young children's literacy greatly.

Games in language literacy

Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2012) defined game as a form of play undertaken for the purpose entertaining, learning, or competition that follow rules, challenges and interaction between or among the players. In other word, games in early childhood literacy would be plays that promote reading and writing in young children.

Morrow (2012) stated that there are many different type of games that enhance literacy in early childhood, these includes:

1. Bingo game: Pupils are called out one after the other to match letters the teacher pronounces on their bingo card. This will promote letter recognition and sound awareness in children.
2. Rhyming Match-up: This game focus on phonological awareness. For example, fat, rat, sat, mat etc. Words like run, pun, fun, gun and so forth enables pupil to read and write with ease.
3. Letter Fishing: Pupils are made to sort objects or pictures for magnetic letters in a sensory bin, naming the letters and sounds. This game promotes alphabet recognition and motor skills.
4. Sorting: In this game, pupils are asked to pick out objects or pictures beginning with certain sounds. For example, if pupils are instructed to sort objects beginning with /b/ sound, they are expected to pick objects like: bag, ball, bat, balloon and so forth. It enables them to focus on phonemic awareness.
5. Matching pictures to words: Pictures of different objects are drawn on one side of the chart with the wright words scattered on the other side. Pupils are expected to draw lines to join each object to it correct spelling. This reinforces correct spelling skill from early stage, promoting literacy.

Vocabulary Building

Vocabulary is the total number of word that a person knows and use in communication. Adeniyi- Egbeola and Lawal (2016) posited that words are made up of letters, while sentences are made up of words; while on the other hand, paragraphs are combination of sentences. This showed that vocabulary is the building blocks of communication (Nation, 2012).

Teacher must put good measures in place to promote rich vocabulary in his pupils. Since the early childhood education children are between the ages of 0-5, there are receptive to language development, teachers and caregivers need to priorities their vocabulary (Dukeet.al., 2025). Vukelichet.al., (2012) emphasized the importance of vocabulary development in early childhood, these includes: supports expressive and receptive language skills, ability to comprehend spoken words, enhances the understanding of concepts and improves pupils' social connections.

Weitzman (2024) statedthat adult-child conversation is importantin promoting vocabulary development in little children. At the early stage of language learning, little children tend to imitate adult words and gesture. Conversational turn-talk would enable children to hear and use new words in natural context. Wasik and Hindman (2023) also posited that anenabling environment should be created at home and in the school by both the parent and the teacher/care giver to enhance vocabulary development which on the other hand would impact literacy.

Storytelling

National Storytelling Network (2014) defined storytelling as the art of using words, images, sounds and gestures to narrate series of events, which most of the times involves characters, plots and settings in order toentertain or convey meaning to an audience.Parent, teacher and care-giver are to read short interesting stories to pupils, using character voices, expressions and gestures to make it like real life events. Pupils should also be encouraged to tell stories and engage in role-play to improve words knowledge and understanding (Weitzman, 2024).

Surya and Aprilia (2024) stated that storytelling plays significant role in early childhood literacy by fostering love for reading. Engaging and enjoyable storytelling experiences develop in children love for reading which enhance lifelong literacy. Frequent exposure to storytelling would improve their phonological awareness which is a good predictor of literacy success.

Conducive Environment

Early childhood literacy needs child-literacy environment to thrive. Neuman and Roskos (2007) observed that a literacy friendly environment is needed to promote language development, cognitive growth, and social-emotional learning in little children. The environment should provide the children with opportunity to explore all the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Children's early literacy environment should enable them have access to books, instructional materials, child-adult conversations, literacy games and so on to build solid literacy foundation.

Conducive environments would also enable the pupils to be able to partake in plays and games (Christie & Roskos, 2006). This would impact their literacy. For instant, writing in the sand, singing and dancing the alphabet song, role-play to short stories and so forth. Child friendly literacy environment or class as the case may

be would provide emotional support for the little children to read and write. Children would be allowed to speak, ask questions, celebrate achievement, and build social and emotional connections as they communicate.

Makin and Whitehead (2004) opined that a conducive environment would enable the pupils to learn formal school routines like sit on chairs and writing on tables. Time for doing different activities like: reading, writing, singing, playing, toileting, and so on.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implications and benefits of strategies for enhancing language literacy in early childhood education are significant and far-reaching. By prioritizing language literacy development, educators could help children develop the skills they need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. The benefits of language literacy strategies extend beyond the classroom, leading to improved socio-economic outcomes and a more informed and engaged citizenry. By supporting language literacy development, policymakers and educators can help create a brighter future for children and society as a whole.

Different methods and techniques are used by educators to facilitate teaching and learning processes. These strategies are created to make pupils' learning easier and engaging in order to achieve specific educational goals and objectives. Piasta (2016) stated that in order to enhance language literacy in early childhood, strategies that promote the building of the four basic skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing should be employed.

Every child could develop a strong foundation for literacy and reading development when he is given opportunities to engage in purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities. Effective early literacy instruction provides preschool children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy (Brown, 2014).

Suggestions

Early childhood literacy is key to adult and lifetime learning. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should put solid structure in place to promote Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. Standard crèches, kindergartens preschools should be established for early childhood education.
2. Professional teachers and care-givers should be trained to handle early childhood literacy. Early childhood literacy strategies such as phonological awareness, storytelling, games and so on needs special trainings.
3. Parents should be sensitized on the need to get involved in their children's literacy as soon as the child is born. Children can be literate in their mother tongues and as well as in other languages. For example, a Yoruba child can learn both the English and Yoruba alphabets at home.
4. Curriculum planners should include early childhood literacy as important aspect of early childhood education. Emphasis should be focused in the language skills of: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
5. Instructional materials such as; special books for little children, toys, charts, computers, radios, crayons, color pencils, slates, boards and so forth should be provided to enhance teaching and learning.
6. Conferences and workshops should be organized periodically for training and re-training of teachers, care-giver and parents in early childhood literacy.

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