

EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT ON THE LITERACY OUTCOMES: A META-ANALYSIS OF TEACHING WRITING SKILL

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Abstract

Physical classroom environment plays a fundamental role in the academic success or failure of students and serves as a means to build the necessary basic skills for literacy development among students in a deliberate and intensive way. Physical classroom environment includes: a broad range of educational facilities, including: reading and writing materials, various types of equipment, physical settings, and instructional components. Many students come to classroom with exposure to literacy. Students who already have an exposure to early literacy can get benefit from teachers' instructions in a better way. Student having no exposure to literacy may face difficulties to interact with the literacy contents. The purpose of this paper was to study the effects of classroom physical settings on the literacy outcomes at early grades. Paper explores findings of previous studies. Moreover, paper aimed to study the imperative basic facilities to facilitate the learners in development of literacy skills. Findings of the study conducted on physical class room environment revealed that availability of basic facilities in the classroom plays a vital role to promote the literacy skills of early grade students.

Key words: Literacy, physical classroom environment, learners, class room facilities

1 Introduction

Ability of students to listen, understand, read, write, understand and process information is a necessary part of student's educational experience and finally they emerge as educated adults. Results of the study of NICHD, 2000 revealed that students who have no exposure to literacy during early childhood or have no opportunity to get benefit from parents are not better prepared to learn literacy skills e.g phonic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Many students come to classroom without exposure to literacy. Results of the study of (Higgins, Boone and Lovitt, 2002) revealed that poor readers faced difficulty to learn reading writing skills, 88% students who were poor readers at first grade were poor readers at 4th grade. (NICHD, 2002).

During past thirty years many studies have been conducted on reading skills, fewer studies have specifically focused on the pre-writing, writing skills and independent text construction skills of students at early grades (Badger and White 2000;Panofsky et al.,2005;Freebody, 2007). Studies conducted on writing have focused on two approaches; genre approach and process writing approach. Process writing approach focused on linguistic learning skills, e.g. planning, drafting and editing, while development of linguistic knowledge, leaning of text structure and learning of grammar have less emphasized (Department of Education and Training, 2010). Effective strategies to promote literacy skills among early grade students include: goals and models for writing and a wide range of writing activities e.g sentence combining, summarizing, usage of word processors and collaborative writing (Graham and Perin, 2007). Teaching of literacy is a

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complex and sophisticated practice, there is no single effective strategy to teach reading and writing and no single method will suffice to fulfill the diversified literacy learning needs of students. Teachers may select range of practices according to the literacy learning needs of students. (Department of Education and Training, 2010). Beginning teachers consider classroom management as a greatest challenge and ever present concern. Results of meta-analysis of past 50 year studies revealed that classroom management is most important factor, even than student's app (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Veenman, 1984; Jones & Jones, 2004).

Knowledge of Alphabets is considered a symbol of literacy. The primary objective of pre-school and early school education is to facilitate the students to develop reading and writing skills. A little agreement exists among educationists about how to develop alphabet knowledge effectively to early learners (Piasta and Wagner, 2010).

2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper include:

1. To study the physical classroom environment on literacy outcomes at early grades education.
2. To examine the effects of physical classroom environment on the literacy outcomes.
3. To suggest valuable recommendations to set up literacy rich class room environment for second grade students.

3 Components of Physical Classroom

Teaching of reading and writing skills is fundamental and challenging. Many researchers are agreed upon that literacy classroom should have an attractive environment, inviting readers to learn literacy skills. Books should be displayed so that students can see pictures on the covers. Reading, writing and drawing centers are the major components of physical classroom environment. These three major components are discussed below:

4 Reading Center

Well managed reading centers stimulate children's interests in acquisition of reading skills. Teachers should arrange the students' furniture in accessible manner. Comfortable furniture will motivate students to spend more time looking and reading books either alone or with peers. Many researchers have pointed out following about reading centers:

- Comfortable, soft, child-sized, rocking, bag chairs, or small foam sofas.
- Stuffed animals may be provided to early learners to read with a friend.
- Small table with two or more child-sized chairs may be placed in the classroom.
- Books should be displayed with covers facing outward in bookshelves to invite the interest of learners towards books titles.
- Bins, boxes and crates may be placed for books keeping
- Reading books on weather, animals and general knowledge may be placed for vocabulary development about rain or clouds.
- Similarly pictures books about animals, weather and general knowledge should be a part of reading centers.
- Weather displaying devices may be installed to display daily temperature.
- Various toys should be kept with labels, signs or pictures on toy containers or shelves.

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- Literacy teachers ought to prepare and display various models at reading centers.
- Teachers ought to ensure that the classroom has a listening center with a supply of books, cassettes, and CDs matched with learner's interest and values.
- Children are encouraged to write and publish their own individual books.
- Tape recorders, head-sets, CD players, and recorded books should be a part of classroom
- Felt board, magnetic board, flannel story pieces board and magnetic story pieces will facilitate learners to acquire reading writing skills.

5 Writing and Drawing Center

Just like reading centre, literacy teachers ought to ensure following at classroom writing centers:

- Child-sized chairs, table, small plastic tote boxes.
- Non-metal or plastic baskets, boxes to store completed writings.
- Variety of paper e.g. lined, unlined, colored, white, paper stapled together as a book, note pads, notebooks and envelopes should be a part of classroom writing centre.
- Lists of the children's names should be displayed at the writing centre.
- Chalkboards and chalk or white boards and board markers should be provided to the early learners to promote their writing skills.
- Letters, alphabets should be displayed at the magnetic board
- Letter blocks of various colours should be provided to the early learners
- Alphabet charts, pictures of animals, stamps and ink pads should be a part of writing centers.
- Writing tools e.g. colour pencils, colour markers, colour chalks, magic slates, and magnetic boards.
- Regular and chubby/big pencils should be provided to the early learners.
- Letter stamps, ink pads, acetate sheets and wipe-off pens and cloths will facilitate the learners to learn writing skills.
- Laminated poster board pieces, letter, digits and design stencils should be provided to facilitate the learners at early grades.
- Stapler glue, paste, scissors, pencil sharpener and tape should be provided to the learners at writing centers.
- Old magazines, simple story books, pictures, and postcards should be a part of literacy classroom.
- Rulers, templates, magna doodle
- Assortment of paint brushes (different sizes)
- Adaptive grips and extended handles for brushes
- Sponges and sponge shapes
- Scissors (including decorative edged scissors and adapted scissors)

6 Evidence on the Classroom Design and Layout

The physical environment of the classroom is also crucial to developing literacy growth for children. "Studies suggested that the physical arrangement of the classroom can promote time with books" (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman & Roskos, 1997 in IRA & NAEYC, 1998, 4). Studies also indicate that the written language used for labels and signs in the natural environment enhance reading strategies for students (McGee, Lomax, & Head, 1988; Neuman & Roskos, 1993 in IRA & NAEYC, 1998). These signs and labels also referred to as environmental print, help

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students to make connections between information they know and the new information given to them in the form of writing. Finally, literacy-rich environments allow students to see the connection literacy has to the real world. Following points need due consideration:

- Meeting Spaces...
- Large Group Areas
- Small Group Areas
- Quiet Areas for individuals
- Comfortable Spots to Read
- The classroom arrangement encourages conversations
- Easy access and clearly labeled
- Books The Heart of the classroom.
- Students have a space to keep their own reading material
- Organized
- Wall Space Print Rich
- Shared/ Interactive Writing
- Charts should be Displayed in the room
- Student Generated Resources should be displayed

Many teachers, especially beginning teachers, cite classroom management as an ever-present concern (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Veenman, 1984; Jones & Jones, 2004). A meta-analysis of the past 50 years of classroom research identified classroom management as the most important factor, even above student aptitude, affecting student learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). But contrary to popular belief, classroom management is not a gift bestowed upon some teachers. While it's true that some teachers adapt to classroom management techniques easily, making it look to their colleagues like they possess some innate talent, classroom management is a skill—a skill that can be taught like any other, and, most importantly, a skill that like any other must be practiced to achieve proficiency. Although much has been written about classroom management, teachers have not been taught comprehensive, practical methods of improving classroom management, and little emphasis has been placed on “helping teachers understand the issues in effective classroom management and the relationship among various strategies” (Jones & Jones, 2004, p. 1). Many teachers try classroom management ideas and strategies.

7 Discussion

Reflective practice is an emerging approach of Teacher's Professional Development. It refers critical analysis of own teaching practices to see the contradictions between underlying beliefs and practices to become responsible teacher. Reflective teachers consciously think about their own practices to become a professional teacher. Purpose of the paper was to explore the perceptions of prospective teachers and school teachers about challenges involved in reflective practices. Paper focused on four major challenges, how teachers can be provided different opportunities to involve in reflective practices. How to build rules for involvement of teachers in reflective practices, how they can be provided time to reflect on their practices and how they can take colleagues input to see their practices through a different lens and learn through interpersonal relationships. Study based on descriptive survey method. Data was collected from 120 teachers (60 school teachers and 60 prospective teachers). Majority of respondents agreed that they have no time to involve in reflective practices. Prospective teachers and school teachers were having insufficient knowledge

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about reflective practices. Majority of the respondents agreed that they can criticize their own practices through reflective practices. Respondents agreed that they need training to involve in reflective practices. Teachers should formulate a set of guidelines to follow to involve in reflective practices. They should decide about meeting schedules, duration of meetings, and discussion agenda about practices and decide who will be their group leader. They may choose a different group leader for different sessions of reflective practice. Deployment of different leaders for different meetings may be helpful to escape from inferiority and superiority complexes.

8 Conclusion

The literacy-rich classroom serves as a means to build the basic skills necessary for literacy development by demonstrating to students and utility of language in an intentional, purposeful, and intensive way. While many students come to school with exposure to literacy in their everyday lives, students who may not have access or exposure benefit from the instruction and intensity provided by teachers and staff in this setting. Given the support of this environment, students are better prepared to work on other literacy skills including phonics awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

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