

Effectiveness of Some Reading Activities towards Improving the Reading Abilities of Primary School Pupils in Nigeria

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Abstract: The study sought to determine if the utilization of three reading activities in a remediation class for experimental (E) group of primary five (5) pupils who were deficient in reading would improve their reading abilities over their counterparts in the control (C) group taught the remedial lessons through the traditional teacher-centered approach. It also investigated if sex would be a significant factor in determining the performance of the treatment and control groups. Two research questions and two null hypothesis guided the study. The subjects were made up of 38 reading-deficient primary five (5) pupils randomly assigned to the two treatment groups. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made and validated reading assessment checklist, the inter-rater reliability coefficient of which yielded an index of 0.82 using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients. The C and E group teachers received orientations on the approaches to adopt to carry out their task. Steps were taken to establish equivalence of the instructional conditions of the two groups, the only difference being the experimental treatment which consisted of the use of 3 activities: *Reading chart activity, Paired reading and Command card game*. After the remedial treatment experiment which lasted for three weeks of compact activities, the E and C subjects were tested with their class-appropriate reader. Results established the significant superiority of the experimental group over the control. Sex was not found to be a significant factor as no difference existed between the male and female pupils in the E and C groups

Keywords: Effectiveness, Reading-activities, Reading-abilities

1. Introduction

Reading is about the most important skill in the educational/academic career of a primary school learner. It is the ability to recognize and associate meaning to words in sentences in order to discern the idea contained in the written communication. Phonics and fluency go hand in hand such that you cannot really have one without the other.

Phonics deals with beginning readers understanding the correspondence between letters and sounds. Fluent readers often rely on their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to decode words. Fluency means, being able to decode text and read with accuracy, speed and proper expression [1]. Fluency is the ability to read a text correctly,

smoothly and quickly with full expression and good comprehension. It means reading a text as talking to someone by paying attention to the punctuation marks, accent and tonal, abstaining from reoccurrence and word repetition, without spelling and unnecessary postures and by paying attention to the semantic units. [2, 3, 4]

Any written communication in form of a sentence, paragraph, letter, story, or report makes sense, only to the extent that one is able to read it. Today, almost everything we hear on radio and television is first written and then read to the hearing of the listening audience. For learners in schools, all subject matters of all school subjects exist in textbooks- in hard or soft copies and the learner is able to distill meaning if he/she is able to read. Ability to read properly depends on the learner's acquisition of appropriate reading skills including phonics, fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. [5] Studies have shown that reading motivation is a predictor of reading performance. Thus if one is positively motivated to read, one's reading performance improves [6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. Furthermore, undermining motivations explain unique variance in reading comprehension [11, 12, 13, 14].

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Our basic assumptions are:

- i. That when pupils are proficient in reading, they will carry over the skill to other school subjects and in-fact all other aspects of life that involve reading;
- ii. That teachers with creativity can initiate useful activities which pupils should engage in so as to bring about improved reading ability and
- iii. That it is possible for all pupils to be actively involved in reading activities at the same time.

The study sought to determine if the utilization of some reading activities in a remediation class for primary 5 pupils who are deficient in reading would improve their

reading abilities. More specifically, it sought to find out:

- i. If primary five pupils who are deficient in reading would improve their reading skill when they are exposed to three reading activities over their counterparts who were taught using the conventional teacher – centered method; and
- ii. If there will be a difference in the reading abilities of male versus female pupils in the control group taught using the conventional teacher-centered approach and their counter parts in the experimental group, taught using the three reading activities.

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What will be the reading abilities of reading-deficient pupils taught remedial reading by the teacher centered approach and those taught through guided activities?
- ii. What will be the reading abilities of male and female reading-deficient pupils taught remedial reading through teacher-centered approach and those taught through guided activities.

The following hypotheses were generated to guide the study:

- i. There will be no significant different in the reading abilities of reading-deficient pupils taught remedial reading through the teacher-centered approach and those taught through guided activities.
- ii. There is no statistically significant interaction effect of methods and gender on pupils' achievement in reading abilities of reading-deficient pupils.

2. Method

A typical public school in Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria, was selected for the study. The subjects used for the study consisted of 38 pupils found to be deficient in reading ability. With the support and cooperation of the class teachers from the two streams of primary 5 classes, the pupils were identified using a checklist as the instrument as they read class-appropriate paragraphs from the class-recommended story book. The class-teacher had each class pupil read the paragraph while she recorded on the check-list the pupils performance with respect to pronunciation of words, reading meaning in sentences, observation of punctuation marks, fluency, vocabulary-mastery of meanings of words. All pupils who scored below 50% aggregate were identified as being deficient in reading ability. Of the 38 pupils identified in the two classes of primary five, 20 were males while 18 were females. The subjects were randomly assigned to the two treatment groups as follows.

Control Group	Male	Female	Total
Control	10	9	19
Experimental	10	9	19
Total	20	18	38

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- Easy identification of words/vocabulary
- Correct pronunciation
- Reading with meaning

- Correct observation of punctuation marks
- Speed and accuracy, fluency.
- At the right hand end are the total scores of the pupils, while on the left column is the list of the names of pupils to be assessed.

The instrument was trial tested on 10 primary pupils in a different school not involved in the study. The trial-testing was a very impressive exercise for the teachers as they learnt how to observe and rate the pupils. The instrument was seen to be adequate as the two teachers who served as research assistants not only understood what to look out for but also how to rate the performance of the pupils. The reliability of the instrument when computed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient yielded the value of 0.82 which the researchers considered high enough for the study.

With the permission of the head teacher who appreciated the significance of the study, the two teachers of primary 5 English languages were invited, and briefed on the purpose of the study. It was agreed that the study would be conducted within the first 3 weeks of the vacation period. Through the school head, the parents of the 38 pupils were requested to kindly release their children to participate in the remedial lessons. All the parents were happy with the schools' efforts to assist their children improve on their reading skills, so they released the pupils to participate in the study.

The two English language teachers were orientated on the expectations on them namely, how to provide the remedial support to the pupils. Applying the balloting technique to assign the two teachers. One of them worked with the control group while the other worked with the experimental group.

The teacher to handle the control group was to teach along the conventional procedure of:

Step 1: Teacher reads the passage from the class-appropriate text material.

Step 2: Teacher explains the meanings of some complex words.

Step 3: Teacher asks pupils to read the passage individually as she calls up each pupil. When the pupil makes a mistake the teacher halts the reading and corrects the error, and the reading continues until as many pupil as the lesson time could permit have taken their turns in the reading exercise. Usually less than half the class would be accommodated within the available lesson time.

Step 4: The teacher allows pupils time to ask questions about any word(s) they do not understand its/their meaning and sometimes the teacher calls on any pupil who has the answer to the question to give the answer. Pupils may ask questions on any other aspect of the reading exercise while the teacher answers them. At the end of the lesson period, the day's exercise is concluded and the pupils go home.

Step 5: The reading exercise continues in subsequent days so that those who have not had the opportunity to read to the hearing of others are made to read while the teacher corrects any mistakes. This was procedure for the 3 weeks of the remediation classes.

The Experimental Group Teachers

The teacher for the experimental group was oriented towards effective utilization of three types of activities in which all the class members would be actively involved.

Activity 1: Story Chart Reading Activity

A story is written and broken into 7 to 10 parts, each part of which is written in a chart. The charts are not numbered in the correct sequence but are placed disjointedly. The pupils are requested to read each of the charts and determine the correct sequencing

that accurately brings out the meaning of the story. Groups of 3 pupils are created and requested to carry out the task and label the charts in the sequence that tells the story accurately.

Pupils are called up to read aloud to the rest of the class observing all the punctuations, exclamation and other phonetic sounds – the stresses, the intonations required in statements, questions, commands and requests, showing ability to produce the sound of each word correctly. The teacher corrects any mistakes made by the pupils and ensures that the children master the correct thing.

One important merit of this activity is that it helps train and assess the learner in reading meaning in the text being read. If a pupil is able to arrange the charts in the correct sequence, it confirms that the child reads with understanding and comprehends the content of the materials. Working in groups facilitates mutual support among the pupils.

Activity 2: Paired Reading

In this activity, pupils are paired such that a better reader joins with a less competent one so that the latter could benefit from the former. The procedure is that the teacher first explains the purpose of the activity. She reads and the class points out complex words, the meanings of which are explained by the teacher to the class. Pairs of pupils are created either by the teacher or the class pupils themselves. The pairs sitting on the right hand side of the class (X group) are called upon to read one paragraph as correctly as they can while the others take note of any errors/weaknesses and correctly rendered element or strengths in the punctuations, fluency, pronunciation, etc. At the end of the reading of the paragraph the teacher and class make comments on the quality of the reading. Next is the Y group who should read the following paragraph while the X group

observes, notes and later makes comments. The teacher serves as a moderator and guide, to confirm the correct observations by the pupils and correct their mistakes.

This exercise allows all pupils to participate in reading a piece of text material within a short period of time in the class. A good teacher is able to move round and assist each pair of pupils that needs her support.

Activity 3: The Command Card Game

The procedure is as follows: There is a pack of cards with each card containing a written command. A pupil is appointed by the class or teacher to read out the commands while the class members carry out the commands which involve reading aspects of text materials.

Some of the commands read as follows: “The pupil sitting at the middle of the front row and the one at the left end of the back row should stand up, open to page 36 of the reader and read a sentence each in alternate form while the class listens and points out any mistakes by any of the pupils”. “The 5th pupil from my left hand side, read the first three sentences on page 17 of the story book”. “The five pupils sitting on the last three rows, read aloud paragraph 2 of page 15 of our story book”. The cards contain as many commands as would involve all class members in some reading task.

Each command is carried out by pupils who are all ready to play one role or the other since it is uncertain who is going to be called up to read a portion of the text. As the commands are carried out, the teacher is ready to correct any errors committed by pupils.

The Experimental class teacher varied the sequencing of the activities each day and ensured that each pupil participated, and that the activities were fun which the whole class enjoyed.

The Control and Experimental group teachers were adequately orientated on their roles, and all the text materials to be used for the study were agreed by all. The same periods of time, 9am to 12noon, 3days in the week, were agreed to be used, with a 30 minute break interval. Incentives of meat pie and soft drinks were used to sustain the desire of the subjects to attend all the days of training which lasted for three weeks.

The remedial lessons were held for the same duration, in different classrooms and on different days of the week. Thus, while the control classes held on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays, the experimental classes held on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays. The idea was to minimize contact between the two groups so that none would influence the other, by exchange of ideas and experiences. These efforts were made to make the two groups study under similar conditions, except for the methods of instruction.

At the end of the treatment which lasted for three weeks, the two groups were tested / assessed to determine whether there was any improvement in their reading abilities as a result of the treatment. The same class-appropriate text was used to assess each of the pupils in the same way that they were assessed before the commencement of the experiment.

3. Findings

Research Question 1

Results: What are the reading ability scores of reading deficient pupils taught remedial reading lessons by the teacher-centered method and those taught by guided activities?

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant difference in the reading abilities of reading-deficient primary 5 pupils taught remedial reading by the teacher-centered method and those taught through guided activities.

Table 1. Reading Ability Scores of Reading-Deficient Primary 5 Pupils taught Remedial Lessons through the Teacher-Centered/versus those taught through Guided Activities.

S/N	Pupils	Pronunciation				Vocabulary				Reading with Meaning			
		Exp.		Cont.		Exp.		Cont.		Exp.		Cont.	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1	A	36	50	45	61	32	54	38	60	40	52	42	63
2	B	42	56	42	62	36	51	42	63	42	55	46	66
3	C	40	50	38	59	42	51	46	62	38	54	42	64
4	D	33	49	38	60	42	52	42	62	41	53	40	61
5	E	42	52	43	64	40	54	40	64	36	51	40	65
6	F	40	53	42	65	33	57	46	67	38	56	43	65
7	G	40	51	40	63	31	50	36	60	30	48	43	63
8	H	41	50	40	59	30	54	33	62	41	54	38	60
9	I	43	53	43	60	33	54	38	62	40	50	38	60
10	J	46	55	38	58	40	53	42	61	38	55	38	61
11	K	38	50	38	62	38	52	43	60	41	54	43	60
12	L	32	49	42	64	44	52	38	62	40	51	45	61
13	M	46	54	40	60	46	50	40	59	42	53	38	63
14	N	40	53	42	63	38	56	40	58	42	58	42	61
15	O	42	51	42	58	36	50	42	62	43	48	46	60
16	P	40	50	40	61	32	52	40	63	40	48	42	64
17	Q	44	50	46	60	40	52	46	65	38	49	38	62
18	R	43	53	43	61	42	55	40	63	38	54	41	61
19	S	44	55	-	-	38	52	-	-	46	54	-	-
20	T	42	50	-	-	32	50	-	-	42	53	-	-

S/N	Pupils	Punctuation				Fluency				Mean Scores			
		Exp.		Cont.		Exp.		Cont.		Exp.		Cont.	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1	A	44	52	42	58	40	52	42	59	38	52	33	60.2
2	B	46	53	46	65	42	53	46	62	42	53.6	44	63.6
3	C	38	50	43	62	35	49	40	62	39	50.8	42	61.8
4	D	30	48	42	60	38	50	40	61	39	50.4	40	60.8
5	E	42	56	43	65	38	53	42	63	40	53.2	41	64.2
6	F	40	50	46	68	42	54	45	65	40	54	44	64
7	G	36	49	43	64	43	48	40	60	43	49.2	43	62
8	H	38	52	43	61	42	51	41	61	38	52.2	40	60.6
9	I	36	56	46	60	38	54	43	62	38	53.4	42	60.8
10	J	40	53	43	60	36	56	40	59	40	54.4	40	59.8
11	K	40	50	44	59	34	53	32	59	38	51.8	40	60
12	L	38	50	45	63	38	49	42	62	38	50.2	42	62.4
13	M	36	54	42	59	38	54	47	64	40	53	41	61
14	N	36	54	40	61	42	55	38	61	40	55.2	40	60.8
15	O	30	49	38	61	43	50	42	62	39	49.6	40	60.6
16	P	32	48	38	61	40	49	40	62	37	50.4	41	62.4
17	Q	42	50	42	63	38	51	38	62	40	50.4	42	62.4
18	R	42	52	40	61	36	50	40	64	35	52.8	41	62
19	S	48	56		-	42	52		-	44	53.8		-
20	T	43	55		-	45	51		-	41	51.8		-

Table 2. Paired T-test Analysis of Pre and Posttest Scores of the Reading Abilities of Reading Deficient Pupils taught Remedial Reading Lessons in the Different Groups.

Pairing	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	MG	T	Df	P	Sig
Pair 1	Pronunciation Pre test	20	40.70	3.715	11	-17.626*	19	.000	P<0.05
	Pronunciation Post test	20	57.70	2.155					
	Total	20	49.20	5.78					
Pair 2	Vocabulary Pre test	20	37.25	4.745	15.3	-12.646*	19	.000	P<0.05
	Vocabulary Post test	20	52.55	2.038					
	Total	20	44.90	3.392					
Pair 3	Reading with meaning Pre test	20	39.80	2.830	12.7	-16.109*	19	.000	P<0.05
	Reading with meaning Post test	20	52.50	3.238					
	Total	20	46.15	3.034					
Pair 4	Punctuation Pre test	20	38.85	4.870	13	-14.347*	19	.000	P<0.05
	Punctuation Post test	20	51.85	2.681					
	Total	20	45.35	3.776					
Pair 5	Fluency Pre test	20	39.50	3.035	12.2	-13.795*	19	.000	P<0.05
	Punctuation Post test	20	51.70	2.250					
	Total	20	45.60	2.643					
Pair 6	Control Group Pre test	18	40.89	2.374	20.7	-46.822*	17	.000	P<0.05
	Control Group Post test	18	61.63	1.346					
	Total	18	51.26	2.035					

To answer the research question 1 and hypothesis 1, the researcher computed paired sample t-statistics of mean and standard deviation of pre and posttest mean scores of

the reading abilities of reading deficient pupils taught remedial reading lessons using teacher-centered method and those taught with guided

activities in the different groups. This is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 2, revealed that the mean score for pupils exposed to use of pronunciation strategy is 40.70 while their posttest mean score is 57.70. Hence, the mean gain is 11. The pretest mean score for pupils exposed to vocabulary strategy is 37.25 while their post-test mean score is 52.55 with a mean gain of 15.3. The pre-test mean score for pupils exposed to reading with meaning is 39.80 while their post-test mean score is 52.50 with a mean gain of 12.7. The pretest mean score for pupils exposed to punctuation strategy is 38.85 while their post-test mean score is 51.85 with a mean gain of 13. The pre-test mean score for pupils exposed to fluency strategy is 39.50 while their posttest mean scores is 51.70 with a mean gain of 12.2. Furthermore, pupils in the control group had a pretest mean score of 40.89 while their posttest mean score is 61.63 with a mean gain of -46.822.

The paired t-test analysis in Table 1 shows that there is a statistical significant

difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores among the five groups exposed to remedial reading strategies. Pupils exposed to “pronunciation, vocabulary, reading with meaning, punctuation and fluency” strategies obtained: $t = -17.626$, $df 19$, $p (.000) < 0.05$; $t = -12.646$, $df 19$, $p (.000) < 0.05$; $t = -16.109$, $df 19$, $p (.000) < 0.05$; $t = -14.347$, $df 19$, $p(.000) < 0.05$; and $t = -13.795$, $df 19$, $p(.000) < 0.05$; respectively. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the reading abilities of reading deficient pupils taught remedial reading lessons using teacher-centered method and those taught with guided activities. is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Research Question 2:

What are the reading abilities of male and female reading-deficient-pupils taught remedial reading through the teacher-centered approach and those taught through guided activities?

Table 3: Reading Ability Scores of Male and Female Reading-Deficiency Pupils Taught Through the Teacher-Centered (Control) and those taught through Guided Activities (Experimental)

S/N	Control (N=20)				Experimental (N=19)			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	38.2	52	41	53.6	40	60.2	40	63.6
2.	35	50.8	42	50.4	44	61.8	42	60.5
3.	42	53.2	40	54	41	60.5	41	64.2
4.	40	49.2	36	52.2	34	62	38	64
5.	44	53.4	38	54.4	40	66.6	36	50.6
6.	38	51.8	46	50.2	37	60.8	45	62.4
7.	44	53.0	42	55.2	34	59.8	43	62.2
8.	33	49.6	36	49.4	37	60.6	36	62.4
9.	38	50.4	42	52.8	43	63.4	38	62
10.	45	53.8	40	51.8	-	-	-	-

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Interaction Effect of Methods and Gender.:

Variable	Gender	n	Pretest		Posttest		Mean gain
			\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
Guided Activities	Male	10	39.20	2.4404	51.90	1.8019	12.7
	Female	10	39.70	1.7029	52.32	1.7184	12.6
Teacher-Centered	Male	9	41.00	3.3541	62.00	1.5621	21.0
	Female	9	40.78	.8333	61.27	1.0536	20.5

Table 5. ANCOVA of the Mean Difference on Interaction Between Methods and Gender of Reading Abilities of Reading-Deficient-Pupils.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P	Sig,
Corrected Model	6451.862 ^a	2	3225.931	.003	.997	P>0.05
Intercept	49170.820	1	49170.820	1066.526	.000	P<0.05
Pretest	.277	1	.277	.006	.938	P>0.05
Methods	16465.865	1	16465.865	223.667	.000	P<0.05
Gender* Methods	184.991	1	184.991	0.970	.033	P>0.05
Error	2812.328	35	46.104			
Total	195863.000	38				
Corrected Total	2812.609	37				

Results in Table 4 show that the male pupils taught reading using guided activities had a pretest mean of 39.20 with a standard deviation of 2.4404 and a posttest mean of 51.90 with a standard deviation of 1.8019. The difference between the pretest and posttest means for the male group was 12.7. The female pupils taught reading using guided activities had a pretest mean of 39.70 with a standard deviation of 1.7029 and a posttest mean of 52.32 with a standard deviation of 1.7184. The difference between the pretest and posttest means for the male group was 12.6.

Table 4 also shows that the male pupils taught reading using teacher-centered approach had a pretest mean of 41.00 with a standard deviation of 3.3541 and a posttest mean of 62.00 with a standard deviation of 1.5621. The difference between the pretest and posttest means for the male group was 21.0. The female pupils taught reading using teacher-centered approach had a pretest mean of 40.78 with a standard deviation of 0.8333 and a posttest mean of 61.27 with a standard deviation of 1.0536. The difference between the pretest and posttest means for the male group was 20.5.

However, for each of the groups, the posttest means were greater than the pretest means. This is an indication that the interaction between method and gender appears not to have some effect on pupils' reading abilities. This is because the achievement of male and female pupils appears to be the same.

Hypothesis 2: There is no statistically significant interaction effect of methods and gender on pupils' achievement in reading abilities of reading-deficient-pupils.

Result in table 5 shows that an F-ratio of 0.970 with associated probability value of 0.33 was obtained for interaction between methods and gender on pupils' achievement in reading abilities. Since the associated probability value of 0.33 was greater than 0.05 set as level of significance, the null hypothesis (H03) which stated that there is no statistically significant interaction effect of methods and gender on pupils' achievement in reading abilities of reading-deficient-pupils was not rejected. Thus, inference drawn is that there was no significant interaction effect of methods and gender on posttest mean achievement of pupils in reading abilities.

4. Discussion

The results revealed that for the experimental and control groups, there is evidence that posttest scores were higher than the pretest scores across the five criteria that were tested. This implies that the remedial programmes were beneficial to all the reading-deficient learners in pronunciation, vocabulary, reading with meaning, punctuation and fluency. Furthermore, the experimental group that received remedial training using planned activities performed significantly better in the five tested areas than the control group that was taught remedial reading through the traditional teacher-centered method. A third conclusion is that the sex of learners did not influence their

performance in both the experimental and control groups.

We as teachers need to learn to devote time to support our reading-deficient pupils as the study shows that even with the use of the traditional teacher-centered method, there was evidence of improved reading on the part of all the children that participated in the study. Given the importance of reading in the academic career of students, it becomes important that a lot of research should be directed at exploring ways of assisting the reading-deficient children [30], in doing so, research findings suggest that more efforts have been invested in teaching children about comprehension skills than in investigating reading strategies of learners. [31] A balance between the two areas of emphasis is reasonable to maintain since they complement one another.

While we advocate both teaching children how to read and conducting research into issues that inhibit or promote effectiveness in reading, it must be emphasized that reading difficulties in general education classrooms are largely due to the fact that strategic reading instructional activities are grossly lacking in our schools [32] We must therefore make conscious efforts to institutionalize reading instructional activities in our schools.

It should be a cardinal goal of the school to encourage pupils right from early in life to develop the interest and capacity to engage in voluntary or recreational reading on account of its enormous gains. Those who read voluntarily and so are able to learn from a wide range of sources including newspapers, textbooks, novels and other story books, tend to make better citizens because even the benefits of democracy and the capacity to govern ourselves successfully depend on reading. [33]

Our study reveals that there was no significant differences between male and female students in the effect of remedial

reading activities on their reading abilities. The implication is that the remedial reading activities were of equivalent impact on both male and female primary school children. We therefore need to provide enriched activities to all the primary school pupils in the course of their study of reading. Activities are of great importance and cannot be equated with “teacher-talk”. When activities are provided and pupils have the opportunity to be fully engaged in them, the result is improved performance.

In conclusion we encourage teachers at the primary school level to perceive the

teaching of reading as being key to their professional mandate. In doing so, learner-centered activities have been established to be of significant importance to both teachers and learners. Teachers and the entire class need to plan suitable goal-oriented activities that will involve most, if not all class members. Such activities need to be planned with due consideration for the nature of the learners in terms of their developmental status and interest, availability of time for such activities in the timetable, and the lesson objectives.

5. References

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