

ALL CHILDREN LEARNING

Middle East & North Africa 2013



Topical Analysis of Early Grade Reading Instruction

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Introduction to the Study

Purpose:

- To review current evidence-based scholarly research on teaching and learning Arabic in an effort to identify what content and practices are most effective in helping pupils read with comprehension and express themselves in writing.
- To review current, evidence-based ministry/donor/nongovernmental organization (NGO) research on effectively teaching and learning to read and write in Arabic.

(See research questions on handout)

Methods: Literature Review and Interviews

Key Variables in the Reading Process in Arabic

1. Diglossia
2. Vocalization
3. Phonological awareness
4. Morphology
5. Sentence Context

Diglossia: What does the evidence say?

- Listening to a daily story in MSA resulted in significantly better performance in MSA listening comprehension and oral language use (Feitelson et. Al. 1993).
- Early exposure to MSA resulted in better reading comprehension scores at the ends of grades 1 and 2 (Abu Rabia, 2000)
- Joint or book reading (between mother and child) and joint writing while the children were in kindergarten were both significant contributors to children's literacy achievements in first grade after controlling for socioeconomic factors. (Aram et. Al. 2013)

Diglossia: Implications for instruction

- Early exposure to MSA is important; word games and story reading at home and in school are excellent ways to develop MSA oral language skills in young children ;
- Exposure to MSA for young children should be done through pedagogically appropriate methods for MSA exposure, (i.e. story reading vs. grammar lessons)
- Educators should make parents aware of the importance of home-based literacy activities design assignments that call for parent-child reading or writing activities

Voweling: What does the evidence say?

- Vocalized materials provided additional phonological information to readers, which aides in word recognition, reading accuracy and comprehension

Voweling: Implications for instruction

- Purposefully transitioning pupils from voweled to unvoweled text must be thought out and managed by the teacher; struggling readers may need a longer transition period;
- Pupils must be explicitly taught skills and strategies for word identification and comprehension when text is unvoweled.

Phonological Awareness: What does the evidence say?

- “...fluency in the beginning grade levels relies on accuracy of decoding—a skill highly dependent on phonological awareness.”
(Taibah & Haynes, 2011, pp. 1036-37).

Phonological awareness: Instructional implications

- Phonological awareness must be explicitly taught from the beginning (i.e. in kindergarten or first grade and preferably in the home as well);
- Children must be explicitly taught sound/symbol correspondence (phonics) in first grade;
- Letters should most likely be taught in order of difficulty although there does not seem to be a uniform opinion on what that order is as countries we looked at all had different orders for letter introduction.

Morphological awareness: What does the evidence say?

“...Those [pupils] with good phonological and good morphological skills are more likely to show better reading comprehension levels. (Mahfoudhi, et. al, Introduction to the special issue on literacy in Arabic, 2010, pp. 509-510)

“...There is clear evidence of a relationship between morphological awareness and reading in the early stages of reading.” (Abu-Rabia, 2012, p. 486)

Morphological awareness: Instructional implications

- Word patterns in Arabic seem to be taught most frequently through grammar; other methods could be more effective (word games, wordworks etc.) to help children develop morphological knowledge they can apply in their reading
- “Word unpacking strategies” (Mahfoudhi, Everatt, & Elbeheri, Introduction to the special issue on literacy in Arabic, 2010, p. 510)

Sentence contexts: What does the evidence say?

The researchers found that “as age or level of fluency increases, readers **rely more on sentence context and less on word-final vowels** [emphasis added] to identify the meaning, grammatical function and pronunciation of words” (Taouk and Coltheart 2004 p. 51)

Sentence context: Instructional implications

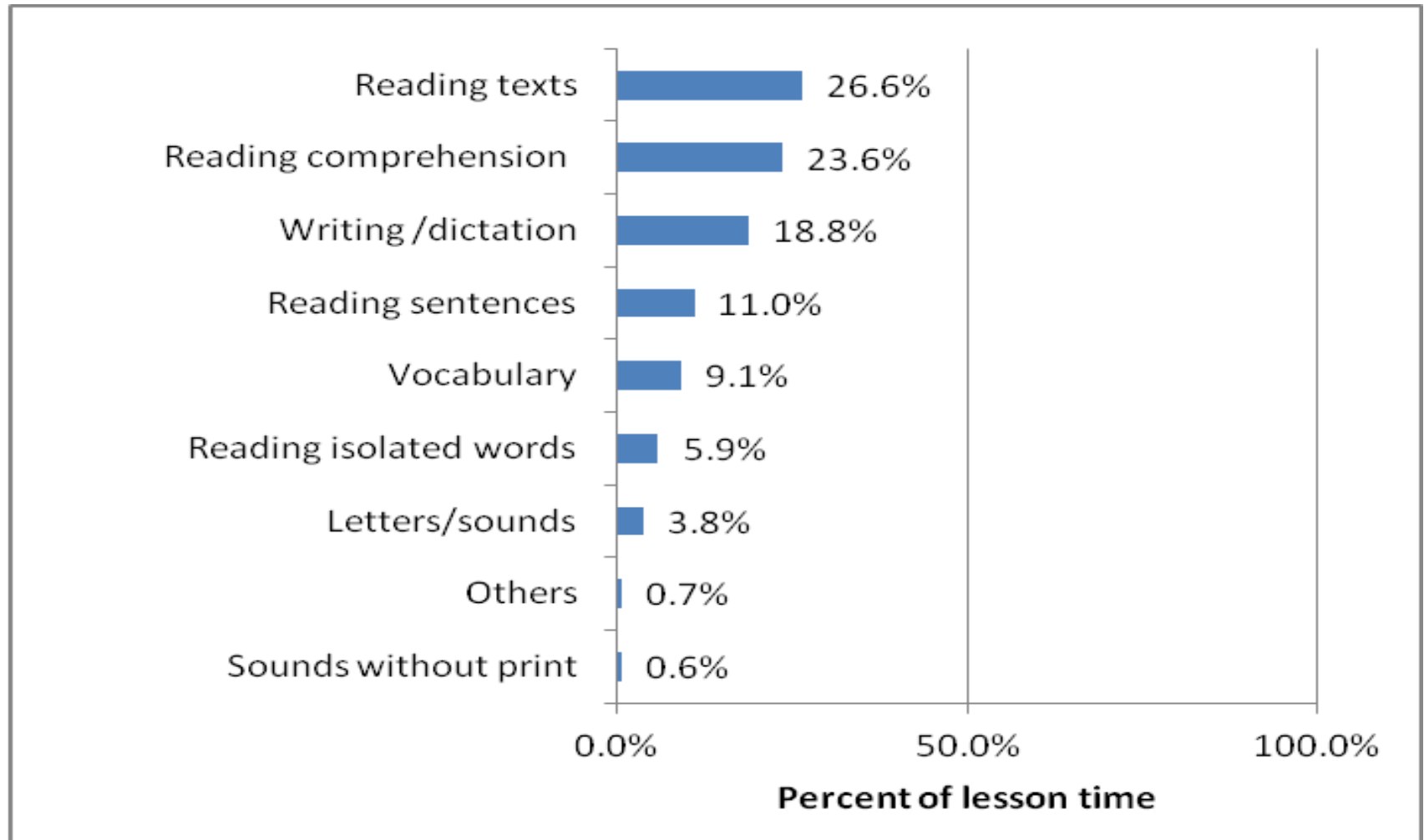
Identifying context clues must be taught explicitly; teachers can model their own thinking process as they read to help pupils develop this reading skills

How is Reading Taught in the Arabic-speaking world?

Instructional Content: Reading (Morocco)	% of class time devoted to skill
Letters/Sounds	2.3%
Reading isolated words	4.3%
Reading sentences	8.0%
Vocabulary (word meanings)	2.8%
Writing/Dictation	3.4%
Reading texts	54.4%
Reading comprehension – text	24.8%
Writing – creating texts	0.6%

Instructional Content: Reading (Jordan)	% of class time devoted to skill
Sounds without print	0.5
Letters/sounds	1.0
Reading a letter inside a word	0.7
Reading syllables inside a word	1.5
Reading isolated words	4.8
Reading sentences	7.7
Vocabulary	5.5
Dictation	5.4
Reading texts	20.3
Reading comprehension	46.6
Writing–creating texts	2.6
Other	3.4

How is Reading Taught in the Arabic-speaking world?



Other Significant Factors

- Regular Attendance
- Teacher feedback
 - Jordan: pupils whose notebooks contained written feedback had better oral reading fluency scores, reading 4.6 more words per minute than pupils whose books contained no written feedback (Ibid, p.79).
 - Iraq, pupils whose notebooks did have teacher feedback read 7.1 more wpm than pupils whose notebooks had no comments (Brombacher, et al., 2012, p. 68).

Reading as a Subject in the Curriculum

- Reading is taught as part of Arabic language instruction; it is not a separate subject
- The Arabic curriculum in the early grades generally consists of a language focus, a literature focus and a skills focus

Books and Resources

- Access to textbooks was not generally a problem in class;
- Access to non-textbook reading material was an issue
- There was a correlation between the existence of a school library and higher EGRA scores;
- Classrooms that had additional reading materials were 4X more likely to be high performing on EGRA
- Access to books in the home was also positively correlated with better ORF; higher ORF corresponded to better comprehension scores on EGRA

Conclusions and Recommendations

- More instructional time must focus on foundational skills
- Teachers must be trained to teach the component skills of reading, to manage the transition from voweled to unvoweled text and to give pupils regular feedback
- Reading aloud to early grade pupils in MSA is correlated with higher achievement in Arabic speaking schools as is independent reading time; both should be encouraged

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Early exposure to MSA is critical and MSA should be used for reading activities in the home;
- Pupils need reading materials beyond the textbook
- Parents and school leadership must ensure regular school attendance and diminishing absenteeism