



INFLUENCE OF SYNTHETIC PHONICS ON EARLY READING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN PORT HARCOURT LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The ability to read fluently and understand what is read is a strong prerequisite for academic success in a country like Nigeria where English language is the lingua franca but not the mother tongue. The method of teaching the language becomes

Keywords

synthetic phonics, jolly phonics, analytical method, early reading.

important if children are expected to speak and communicate effectively. The study hence assessed the

INTRODUCTION

Having been colonized by Britain, Nigeria adopted the English language as her official language of communication or lingua Franca and also the language of instruction making effective communication in English language crucial for success in every life endeavor. Right from the colonial era, those who understood the language well enough to communicate with the masters had privileges others did not have and even till date, a good command of English language is respected anywhere anytime. Every language has two sides, the written and oral or spoken; the spoken language involves the ability to know and understand the grammar, the

influence of synthetic random sampling with jolly phonics and phonics (jolly phonics) technique was used to those taught with the on early reading among draw a sample of 298 analytical method pupils in six selected pupils who were among male pupils, primary schools in the assigned into female pupils , pupils area. The study adopted experimental and from private schools, experimental design control groups using a those from public and a research question pre-test. Mean scores schools, those from were used to answer urban areas and also the research question those from rural areas. it. Standardized jolly while independent t- In all the cases, those phonics materials were test was used to analyze taught with jolly used on the the hypotheses at 0.05 phonics read better experimental group level of significance . than those taught with while the control group Results show the analytical method. were taught using the significant differences Recommendations analytical (traditional) in early reading were made based on the method. Stratified between those taught findings.

syntax, proper spelling of words, vocabulary and content and to possess the ability to articulate thoughts, ideas and intension and to put them down in the written form (Wikipedia, 2015). The quality of the written work can be determined by the ability of the reader to receive the information, decode the intended message so that others can understand its content and intent.

Recently, there has been an emergence of people with even tertiary education who struggle to express themselves in both spoken and written English to the embarrassment of the nations educational system Some factors as Uzu (2012) noted have been found to be responsible for the dart in literacy level amongst the citizenry, some have blamed pidgin English to interfere with proper use of English words and observation also shows that people that make the effort to pronounce words properly are mocked and made fun of.

In recent times globally, literacy level declined significantly and various nations began looking at better ways to teach children how to read and write. The concern for a better method of teaching children how to read led to the development of the synthetic phonics which is a more accelerated form of

phonics. This method as Torgerson, Brooks and Hall (2006) reported teaches children letter sounds, including blending and digraphs in the first few months of school. In the United Kingdom where English language is the primary language, it was observed that after seven years of primary education, one in six 11 year olds still struggle to read. The 2011 tests for children leaving primary school also revealed that one in 10 pupils age 11 years read no better than seven year old (www.lancsngfl.ac.uk/curriculum/.../3.pdf). This happening in a place where English language is the children's mother tongue leaves the plight of children that have different mother tongues to ones imagination.

Langenberg (2015) narrated that the "National Reading Panel" (Ross panel) was set up in 1998 to assess the effectiveness of the different approaches used to teach children to read. The panel's report published in 2000 showed synthetic phonics instruction to yield better results for pupils in pre-school all the way until the end of primary school and also for pupils having reading difficulties .

In two separate studies in Scotland, pupils from public schools in Clackmannashire were randomly selected into control and experimental groups, results showed phonics instruction led the children to spell better than those taught using the alternative approaches including analytic phonics, children in the synthetic phonics group had word reading 3years and six months ahead of chronological age and their spelling was 1year and a month ahead (Johnson & Waston, 2004).Torgerson, Brook and Hall (2006) working on a similar study in the United Kingdom through the University of York and Sheffield also found synthetic phonics produced better results than all the other methods.

The 18th European Conference on Reading in 2012 commissioned "English National Foundation for Educational Research" to study the impact of the phonics screening check and a number of issue including if phonics screening check has any benefits at all. The synthetic phonics method was so effective in the United Kingdom that Mick Gibb the Minister for State for School Reform announced a partnership grant program that will enable excellent school work with others to improve synthetic phonics teaching as he noted an increase in reading 58% to 74% in 2014 (Dumbey,2013).

In a study titled “Stimulating Early Reading Through the Use of Synthetic Phonics in Primary Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Uzu (2012) found pupils taught by synthetic phonics to generally outperform those taught with analytical method and as Ekpo et al (2012) added the same was seen in pupils from urban and rural areas. Both in private and public schools, there were significant relationships between synthetic phonics and early reading which supported the findings of Lloyd(2010). Richardson (2014) noted the UK government strongly encourage schools to use synthetic phonics and even become partners to the proponent of jolly phonics to help in the production of the materials having seen the benefits. Dr. Davis (a former primary school teacher) has argued that though it is effective but should not be imposed on all pupils as he observed that it might put off those who were already reading or about to read, when made to adopt synthetic phonics. There are different forms of phonics used by different people, in 2015, Sharpiro and Solity carried out a study with two phonic types, “The Letters and Sounds”(LS) and also “The Early Reading Research”(ERR) where ten schools used the ERR method while the remaining seven schools used the LS method to see the one that is more effective in teaching reading, they found the two equally effective in improving reading in children but Johnston and Watson (2015) found in their study comparing three methods of teaching how to read, (synthetic phonics, standard analytical method and analytical method) pupils taught with synthetic phonics read and spelt seven months ahead of their chronological age. They were found to be 7 to 8 months ahead in reading and 8 to 9 months ahead in spelling than those in the other two groups, they also observed that by primary seven, the boys in the synthetic phonics group read and spelt better than the girls in their group and boys in the other groups. Also in a study by Farokhbakht and Nejadansari in 2015 on “The Effects of Adopting Synthetic Multisensory Phonics (Jolly Phonics) For Teaching Early English Literacy skills on Literacy Learning of Iranian EFL Young Learners” found Jolly phonics group to perform on reading and spelling test again demonstrating effectiveness of jolly phonics in teaching pupils how to read. Though some writers have also complained that the jolly phonics does not make pupils comprehend the meaning of words and the fact that parents were not taught with this method means they can not help their children at home.

Eshiet (2015) in Cross River State of Nigeria found that synthetic phonics can significantly enhance the ability to read among teenagers and adult non readers. They structured a program whereby these matured people were taken on 1:1 mentoring to give dignity to these older people and it was found that synthetic phonics was very effective in improving their ability to read, with all these however, some authors have also questioned the benefit of synthetic phonics or argued that other methods are equally effective in teaching children how to read. Davis (2015) reviewed some works and found that in the 1930s and 1940s as Krashen reported, the look and say approach was highly recommended. The writer believes that both methods are effective as he and his mother were taught with the two methods respectively and both of them can read well. However phonics is being criticized as being unfair as it does not allow children to read using the whole book approach though it enables children to make better progress in reading accuracy and this is true for both normally developing children and those at risk of failure.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education(2004) supports basic education for all children for the first nine years, it is believed that after these nine years of schooling, a child should be able to read and write and be able to communicate effectively in English language, but this has remained a mirage some do not achieve this even after tertiary education as. In a bid to find the most effective method of teaching children how to read and write, a team of researchers from the University of Uyo's institution of education evaluated the effectiveness of synthetic phonics as a literacy learning program. The team conducted a pilot study with a sample of 186 pupils drawn from five schools in the state. At the end of the pilot study period, the pupils were given the Burt reading test which sets a standard for the amount of words a child might identify at a given age, results showed significant improvement in the reading ability of the children in the experimental group both in schools in rural and urban areas. This has led to most of states in Nigeria now adopting synthetic phonics as the method of teaching early reading.

Statement of Problem

English Language being the language of instruction in schools makes a good command of the language paramount for effective communication and success in the classroom. Teaching of the language begins with recognition and naming of the alphabets without which it will be almost impossible to

speaking the language. In Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers State, people communicate in pidgin probably due to the multi-lingual nature of the place. Pidgin English makes one believe he is speaking English Language while in actual sense the language is being bastardized making speaking according to the rules of the language difficult. If school children in this area are to learn how to read, write and communicate effectively in this language, teachers should teach children with a multisensory method that makes learning and blending the alphabets fun and enjoyable. The problem of this study therefore is to assess if jolly phonics influences early reading among primary school pupils.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the influence of jolly phonics on early reading among pupils and specifically to find out;

2. If there is any significant difference in early reading of male students taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.
3. If there is any significant difference in early reading of female pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.
4. If there is any significant difference in early reading of pupils in private schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.
5. Early reading of pupils in public schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method does not differ significantly.
6. Early reading of pupils in urban schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method does not differ significantly.
7. There is no significant difference in early reading of pupils in rural school taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Methodology

The study adopted an experimental approach whereby 298 pupils were used, 145 and 153 pupils were assigned to the experimental and control groups respectively. Six schools were drawn from the local government area in 2014. In each school, a pre-test was used to assign 25 primary one pupils into each group to make sure they are of the same ability. Jolly phonics was introduced to those in the experimental groups in the six schools while the control groups were taught using the analytical method. The jolly phonics materials used included the identification sheets, identification assessment sheet (JSIAS), the work book 1 and the Burt Reading test. The JSIAS consists of the 42 sounds of the alphabet code arranged in a way that commonly used

alphabets come first so that after three letters, the child can blend sounds to form simple three letter words. The pupils were taught the letter sounds and how to write, each letter is accompanied with a song and an associated action making it easy for the pupils to remember the letters. The pupils in the control group were taught the analytical way of recognizing the letters of the alphabet.

The Burt reading test was given to all the pupils after two months of teaching. The results are presented according to the research question and hypotheses.

Results

Research question: Does jolly phonics influence early reading among primary school pupils.

Table 1 : Mean score Presentation of Influence of Jolly Phonics on Early Reading.

	N	Mean	SD
Jolly phonics	145	60	16.24
Analytical	153	53	18.8
	153	53	18.8

Table one above shows the mean of 60 for pupils in experimental group to be higher than that of 53 for pupils in control group showing that jolly phonics positively influenced early reading among pupils.

Hypothesis one : There is no significant difference in early reading among male pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 2 : t-test Analysis of Early Reading Among Male Pupils Taught by Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with Analytical Methods

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision at P<0.05
Jolly phonics	79	65	15.21	158	5.77	1.96	significant
Analytical method	81	50	17.50				

In table 2, the calculated t-test value of 5.77 is higher than the table value of 1.96 df of 158 and 0.05 degrees of freedom indicating that synthetic phonics made a significant difference on early reading of male pupils.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in early reading of female pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 3: t-test Analysis of Early Reading of Female Pupils Taught by Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with Analytical Method.

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision at P<0.05
Jolly phonics	66	58	15.21	138	2.96	1.96	significant
Analytical method	72	50	17.50				

Table 3 shows a calculated t value of 3.21 to be higher than the table value of 1.96 at df of 151 and 0.05 degrees of freedom. This means there is a significant difference in early reading of female pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in early reading of pupils in private schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of Early Reading of Pupils in Private School Taught with Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with the Analytical Method.

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision at P<0.05
Jolly phonics	70	64	16.45	151	3.21	1.96	significant
Analytical method	83	55	17.89				

The table above shows the calculated value of 3.21 to be more than the table value of 1.96 at 151 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, showing that there is a significant difference in early reading of pupils in private schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Hypothesis 4 :There is no significant difference in early reading of pupils in public schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 5: t-test Analysis of Early Reading of Pupils in Public Schools Taught with Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with the Analytical method.

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision at P<0.05
Jolly phonics	75	58	15.78	143	2.22	1.96	significant
Analytical method	70	52	18.10				

Table 5 shows calculated t value of 2.22 to be higher than the table value of 1.96 at 143 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance hence the null hypothesis is rejected meaning there is significant difference in early reading of pupils in public schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference in early reading of pupils in urban areas taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 6 : t-test Analysis of Early Reading of Pupils in Urban Schools Taught with Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with the Analytical Method.

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision atP<0.05
Jolly phonics	85	64	17	166	2.40	1.96	significant
Analytical method	83	58	15.8				

The result on table 6 again shows the calculated t value of 2.40 to be greater than the table value of 1.96 at 166 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, therefor the null hypothesis is rejected indicating a significant difference in early reading of pupils in urban schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Hypothesis 6 : There is no significant difference in early reading of pupils in rural schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Table 7: t-test Analysis of Early Reading of Pupils in Rural Schools Taught with Jolly Phonics and Those Taught with the Analytical Method.

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision atP<0.05
Jolly phonics	60	56	14	130	2.20	1.96	significant
Analytical	70	50	16.80				

Table 7 shows a calculated t value of 2.20 is higher than the table value of 1.96 at 130 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, hence the null hypothesis is rejected meaning there is a significant difference in early

reading of pupils in rural schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

Discussion.

Result on table one on the research question shows a mean score of 60 for pupils taught with jolly phonics to be higher than the mean of 53 for those taught with the analytical method. This result is in line with the findings of Farokhbakht and Nejadansari (2015) who found that pupils taught with synthetic phonics outperformed those taught with other methods in reading and spelling. This could be because the way jolly phonics is taught makes it easier for pupils to pronounce words even when they don't know the meaning. Table 2 shows a significant difference in early reading of male pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method. The finding revealed that boys taught with jolly phonics read better than those taught with the analytical method. This agrees with the findings of Johnston and Watson (2015) who reported that boys taught with jolly phonics read and spelt better than those taught with other methods and even performed better than the girls by primary seven.

Result on table 3 shows a significant difference in early reading of female pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with analytical method with those taught with jolly phonics reading better than those taught with the analytical method. This agrees with the that of Shephard (2013) who found all the pupils taught with jolly phonics to outperform all pupils taught with the analytical method.

Result on table 4 also shows significant difference in early reading of pupils in private schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method. The finding further showed that pupils in private schools taught with jolly phonics read better than those taught with the analytical method. This agrees with the findings of Uzu (2012) who also found a significant

relationship between jolly phonics and early reading in pupils in private schools.

Result of the analysis of hypothesis five shows a significant difference in early reading of pupils in public schools taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method with those in public schools taught with jolly phonics reading better than those taught with the analytical method. The result supports the findings of Uzu (2012) again who also found pupils taught with jolly phonics to perform better than those taught with the analytical method in public schools.

Tables 6 and 7 on the effect of jolly phonics on early reading of pupils in urban and rural primary schools show significant differences in early reading of pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with analytical method in both urban and rural areas. In each area pupils taught with jolly phonics read better than those taught with the analytical method. The results are in line with the findings of Ekpo et al(2000) who found those taught with jolly phonics to outperform those taught with analytical method in urban and rural areas. The results could be because of the fun way jolly phonics is taught with songs and the associated actions which make it enjoyable for the pupils.

Recommendations

1. Since synthetic phonics has been found to be effective in teaching children how to read, more countries in Africa should adopt this system to help children read early.
2. Parents should get involved since most of them did not go through this method of reading so as to be able to help their children and wards.
3. Since the reading materials are donated to Africa countries, governments should get involved and make sure all children rich or poor participate in jolly phonics
4. More teachers should be trained and encouraged to teach jolly phonics.

5. The teaching of jolly phonics should be closely monitored to make sure it is taught properly.

Conclusion

Based on the results, the following conclusions were made;

- The mean score of pupils taught with jolly phonics is higher than that of pupils taught with analytical method.
- There is a significant difference in early reading of male pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.
- A significant difference was seen in early reading of female pupils taught with jolly phonics and those taught with analytical method.
- Pupils from private schools taught with jolly phonics read better than those taught with the analytical method .
- Those from public schools taught with jolly phonics again read better than those taught with the analytical method.
- A significant difference was seen in early reading of pupils from urban areas taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.
- Again , a significant difference was seen in early reading of pupils from rural areas taught with jolly phonics and those taught with the analytical method.

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