

## Strategies for Teaching Early Reading Skills in Primary Schools in Anambra State: The Jolly Phonics Example

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the strategies for teaching the English language skills in the primary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions and one research hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. The research design employed in the present study is a quasi-experimental design of pre-test and post-test non-equivalent control group. The target population consisted of all the primary one pupils of public schools in Anambra State. Six schools were randomly sampled from a total of 1049 public primary schools in Anambra State. The sample of the study consisted of one hundred and fifty (150) primary one pupils. Two groups – experimental and control groups of seventy-five pupils each were selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. Then it concluded that pupils taught with the Jolly phonics performed more significantly than the pupils taught with the traditional method. Recommendations were also made.

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**Keywords:** jolly phonics, skills – listening, speaking and reading, strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communication. It is a vehicle of thought, ideas, emotion, facts and dreams. It is also a set of behavioural patterns. Language is a “happening”. It is a set of skills: listening (most important), speaking, reading and writing (Adelola, (2001) and Ezike, Umezina and Udogu (2010).

Language is a primary medium of communication used to convey thoughts, concepts, ideas and feelings. The English language is an adopted national official language in Nigeria. It is important, therefore, for the primary school child to learn, listen, receive information, read at a good speed with comprehension and write legibly using correct structure, creativity and style in the English Language (Nzeribe, Agukwue and Norris, 2001).

Nzeribe et al went further to say that irrespective of the language skills, and the adopted strategy by the teacher to impart such skills, it is important to note that:

- Children need opportunities and time to practice any language skill for them to be proficient in its use;
- Children need freedom in the learning environment to express their ideas in any of the language skills. They should be encouraged to know that it is not wrong to express themselves;
- Language skills are facilitated when pupils are given the opportunities to express themselves in their real life experience. This tends to give the children personal reasons to practice and acquire the skill.

- Children should be made to understand that teachers or people around expect them to show and demonstrate seriousness in the development of language skills. Apart from the regular English Language lessons, opportunities to listen, speak, read or write in other aspects of school work should be clearly understood by children as times for practicing and perfecting language skills;
- Motivation is very important to learning. Praise is far more effective in teaching language skills than criticism, which is seen as an indication of failure. It follows that in the attempt to impart the English Language skills, the teacher should not be seen by the learners as an error hunter. This point is very important in the assessment of children’s language skills;
- The teacher’s personality can make activities of language skill pleasant and free of tension. The teacher should be friendly, patient, relaxed, confident and honest in bringing styles and sequence into the classroom.

One may ask, “Why are the language skills relevant? According to Ezike et al (2010), the language skills are relevant because of the following reasons.

- everybody uses one skill or the other, which is used for meaningful activity of the language. This means that when one talks of language use, one has in mind a practical use of the language which could be either listening or speaking.
- the primary skills of language, listening and speaking translate into practical terms, the intricate properties of the sound system of language as well as the underlying structures and how these combine to make meaning.

The skills examined in this work include:

**Listening Skill** – Listening is a receptive skill. Listening skill is the most important skill of language because it is a pre-requisite to the acquisition of the other skills. It is the ability to hear and understand a spoken language without difficulty. It includes the ability to speak in acceptable speech patterns and intelligible speech sounds. It also involves the ability to distinguish between sounds, and associating such sounds in their combined forms meaningfully for the purpose of understanding a connected speech; although it is not formally tested at the primary school.

It is an established fact that the English Language is a second language in Nigeria and many primary school pupils live in rural areas where there is very little opportunity for them to listen to the English Language prior to their entry into the school. It is important that at the end of primary school education, the child has acquired the skill to listen for information in order to be able to understand “messages” in the English Language. Also, the acquisition of the listening skill helps the learner perform well in speaking, reading and writing skills.

It is important also, to note that the various types of listening – attitudinal, informational or reflection, appreciation and critical or evaluative listening are applicable at different levels of both the primary and secondary school education. The first two are usually tenable for lower classes while the last two are applicable to higher classes.

#### **Strategies for Teaching Listening Skill**

Some strategies for teaching listening skill include the following:

- games for listening,
- obeying simple commands/order,
- matching pictures with appropriate actions and utterances,
- listening to short stories,
- listening to texts on which questions are asked before hand,
- listening to dialogue,
- listening to television/radio,
- telephone conversation,
- role playing,
- demonstration, and
- minimal pairs.

#### **Speaking Skill**

Speaking is known also as a productive skill and it follows listening or receptive skill because you cannot speak without listening, which is the natural consequence of listening ability. The learner attempts to use the language as he had heard it spoken around him. It requires the learner’s ability to communicate using his vocal apparatus, in a manner that is intelligible to his listeners. It begins with the learner trying to utter or produce the speech sounds of the

language and attempting in combining the speech sounds in appropriate ways. It also entails the use of intonation or tone patterns depending on the language. In essence, the skill of speaking is very important for learners because comprehension is sometimes examined through questioning (especially at the nursery and lower primary school levels). It helps the child voice his thoughts.

It should be noted that the English Language is a second language and the official language for the nation. Consequently, pupils in Nigerian schools must learn two languages at the same time and may not be able to distinguish which word belongs to which language. In teaching the English Language or speaking skill in the school, attention should be paid to code-switching and interference.

For children to develop the speaking skill, they must be given opportunities to speak in a secure environment in order to build their confidence since it is not unusual for anyone to be nervous or shy to speak in front of other people.

#### **Strategies for Teaching Speaking Skill**

Some strategies for developing speaking skill include:

- speaking volume,
- think before you speak,
- show and tell,
- one minute, please,
- from morning till now,
- complete a story,
- reading pictures, poems aloud,
- recording picture descriptions,
- dramatization,
- role playing,
- miming,
- complete sentences for the teacher,
- minimal pairs,
- drills,
- contraction.

#### **Reading Skill**

Reading refers to the ability to look at handwritten or printed words and decode the meanings in such words. For one to be said to be skilled in reading, one should be able to recognize letters of the alphabet, words, and read with comprehension. Initially, children learn to match words with their sounds in order to read. Then they will need to bring a repertoire of their backgrounds, experiences and interest in order to understand the meaning of given texts. The skill of reading, therefore, requires that the reader makes use of his concept formation and test to determine the actual meaning of the word so as to decode correctly. In the process, he interacts with the text and is expected to be quick and fluent in recognizing words and stringing them together meaningfully to gather the information therein.

### Strategies for Teaching Reading

Some of the techniques used in teaching initial reading in the primary school include Language Awareness Programme (LAP), News on Board (NOB), Language Experience Approach (LEA) and Phonics method. However, these techniques are inadequate.

**Phonics Method:** Phonics method is a technique of using children's awareness of some sounds of letters of the alphabet to assist them to read a word that is unfamiliar to them.

Two primary school teachers, Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernham, at Wods Loke Primary School in Lowsoft, England, initiated and developed Jolly phonics otherwise known as finger phonics. Jolly phonics simply means a playway method of teaching the sounds of the alphabet in a very elementary way with joy.

The Jolly Phonics project is a multi-year literacy project involving state governments working alongside an appointed Jolly Phonics monitoring team. This project started in Anambra State in October 2014. The Jolly Phonics project aims at significantly increasing literacy levels in Anambra State by ensuring that all primary one teachers should be able to effectively teach literacy skills using the synthetic phonics method with Jolly Phonics materials. In addition, it is hoped that the project would make the greatest impact possible and remain sustainable. In order to see that this is achieved, a non-profit organization known as Universal Learning Solutions (ULS) took the responsibility of implementing the project in Anambra State and other states like Enugu, Zamfara, Adamawa, Yobe, etc.

Jolly Phonics simply means a playway method of teaching the sounds of the alphabet in a very elementary way with joy. It is a fun and child-centred approach to teach literacy through synthetic phonics. With actions for each of the forty-two (42) letter sounds, the multi-sensory method is very motivating for both the children and teachers with the following aims:

- teach the teachers the basic early systematic phonics skills;
- teach the children to read and write through the same early systematic; Phonics programme of forty-two (42) sounds not just the twenty-six letters of the alphabet;
- inculcate an early reading/writing habit in children;
- create a phonological awareness in children thereby making it easier for them to read and write independently;
- develop/build self-confidence in children through synthetic reading;
- provide a structural approach suitable for: (a) a whole school, (b) whole classroom and (c) individual approach.

Jolly Phonics provides systematic teaching and learning activities for eight to ten (8-10) weeks under the following five (5) basic skills.

- learning the letter sounds;
- learning the letter formation;
- blending;
- identification of sounds in words;
- tricky words (irregular words).

Although, they have been separated into five skills, they are taught at the same time after the first three sounds have been introduced.

### Statement of the Problem

The English Language is our cultural window into the world of different kinds of culture and traditions. It is a gate to all higher intellectual pursuits. It is our medium of instruction in schools from the kindergarten to the university levels. As a result of this, pupils at the primary school levels are expected to communicate effectively in writing using the Language.

It is, however, regrettable that the teaching of this important tool in Anambra State primary schools has been suffering some defects and neglects such as:

- Lack of qualified teachers equipped to groom the children; this seems to be the major problem in the schools.
- teaching of the twenty-six (26) letters of the alphabet instead of the teaching of the forty-two (42) letter sounds;
- text books are constantly changed; thereby, causing disjointed teaching methods;
- non-availability of learning materials or instructional materials;
- lack of training programmes for the teachers.

Onuigbo (2001), pointed out that the English Language sounds are just part of the totality of sounds in the universe. Sounds, according to him, are produced when people clap, sing, cry, or laugh. Sounds are also produced when birds sing, dogs bark, typists type and even when machines work. But these, however, are very different from the English Language sounds because they are not associated with meanings used for the sound meaning association for which the English Language sounds are important. He went further to say that when human beings communicate with one another, they usually do that through speech or writing. It is based on this background that the researcher embarked on the research to ascertain the strategies for ensuring increased literacy level impact of the Jolly Phonics on the primary school pupils in Anambra State, thereby, releasing infinite potential.

**Research Design**

The research design of this study is a quasi-experimental design of pre-test and post-test non-equivalent control group. One group of pupils (experimental) was taught using Jolly Phonics while the other group (control) was taught using the expository method.

**Population/Sample**

The target population consisted of all the primary one pupils of public schools in Anambra State. Six schools were randomly sampled from a total of 1049 public primary schools in Anambra State. The sample of the study consisted of one hundred and fifty (150) primary one pupils. Two groups - experimental and control groups of seventy-five (75) pupils each were selected for the study using simple random sampling technique.

**METHODOLOGY**

The instruments used in collecting the data were Burt Reading Testing and that of Jolly Phonics. They are adopted instruments already prepared and were used for the study.

**Research Question One**

What is the difference between the literacy attainment of children taught with Jolly Phonics and children taught with traditional method?

This research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The results are shown in Table I.

**Table 1:** Literacy Attainment mean scores and standard deviations of Experimental and Control groups

Method	Pretest		Posttest		Number
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Experimental Group	12.28	14.34	15.01	23.32	75
Control Group	5.95	7.16	6.24	7.46	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.12</b>	<b>10.75</b>	<b>10.63</b>	<b>15.39</b>	<b>150</b>

Table 1 above shows that the total mean score for experimental group in the pretest is 12.28 with standard deviation of 14.34 while the total mean score for the control group is 5.95 with standard deviation of 7.16 in the pretest. In the post-test, the mean score for the experimental group is 15.01 with standard deviation of 23.32 while the mean score for the control group is 6.24 with standard deviation of 7.46.

**Research Hypothesis One**

There is no significant difference between the literacy attainment of children taught with Jolly Phonics and those taught with the traditional method. The t-test analysis was used in testing this hypothesis. The results are shown in table 2.

**Table 2:** The t-test results for literacy attainment of children

Group	Mean	SD	N	df	t.cal	t-table
Experimental	13.65	18.83	75	148	3.45	1.67
Control	6.10	7.31	75			

Table 2 shows that the f-calculated value on the literary attainment is 3.45 which is greater than the f-critical value of 1.67. Since f-calculated > f-critical table, the researchers reject the hypothesis. Hence there is a significant difference on the literacy attainment on experimental and control group.

**Research Question Two**

How does the Improvement in chronological reading age compare between children taught with Jolly Phonics and children taught with the Traditional method (using Burt only)

**Table 3:** Burt Reading Test on chronological reading age between experimental and control Groups

Group	Pre test	post test	sum of means	BRT reading Age
Experimental	5.88	25.89	15.89	5 yrs 11 months
Control	4.24	4.65	4.45	5 yrs 5 months

Table 3 shows that the experimental group had more chronological reading age of 5 years 11 months compared with the control group of chronological reading age of 5 years 5 months. This indicates that the group taught with Jolly Phonics had more chronological reading age compared with the control group taught without Jolly Phonics (traditional method).

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it was indicated that the pupils taught with Jolly Phonics performed more significantly than the pupils taught with the Traditional method. It was also observed from the findings that the experimental group improved more on chronological reading age compared with the control group that was taught with traditional method. The chronological reading age of 5 years 11 months

was got from the experimental group while the chronological reading age of 5 years 5 months was got from the control group.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) There should be adoption of incentives and reward for good and excellent performance for teachers and pupils.
- (2) Days for compulsory Jolly Phonics teaching should be set aside on weekly basis which should reflect on the academic time table.

The aims and values attached to reading through Jolly Phonics should be made known to both the teachers and pupils in order to motivate their interest and engagement throughout their lives

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