

Influence of using Phonics method of teaching reading and writing among pupils in Lower Basic Schools in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of using phonics method of teaching reading and writing among pupils in lower basic schools in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Four research questions were formulated for this study. The total population of the study was four hundred and nine (409) teachers in the forty-three (43) government owned basic schools. Simple random sampling techniques was used to select one hundred and eighty- three (183) teachers in the lower basic classes. From the research questions, twenty-four (24) questionnaire items were drawn. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to all respondents and the data collected were analyzed using mean score. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that inadequate teacher programmes, limited instructional resources, pupils struggling to connect phonic sounds with written letters, lack of skills in phonics on the part of parents, teachers' lack of knowledge, and lack of adequate practice on phonics skills by the pupils are some of the common causes of failure in phonics instruction. Furthermore, it was noted that phonics method of teaching influences reading and writing by making the pupils to easily decode words, build spelling accuracy, develop reading fluency, improve confidence in reading and writing, improve vocabulary development and reduce reading difficulties. Some of the strategies used in teaching of phonics in Orumba South lower basic schools includes, phonetic rhymes and music, small group interventions and the synthetic and analytic approaches.

Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of human development and societal progress, with literacy being its fundamental building block. In Nigeria, the journey toward effective literacy instruction has evolved significantly since independence, with various methodologies and approaches being adopted over time (Nweke, 2021). The importance of developing strong reading and writing skills during the foundational years of education cannot be overemphasized, as these skills form the basis for all subsequent learning experiences. The National Policy on Education (2014) explicitly emphasizes the critical nature of early literacy development, particularly in the first three years of primary education. This policy framework recognizes that the quality of literacy instruction at this early stage significantly influences a child's entire educational journey. According to Okonkwo and Eze (2020), the persistent challenges in literacy development among Nigeria primary school pupils have necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional teaching methods.

Reading and writing are fundamental skills essential for academic achievement and lifelong learning. In the context of basic education, the development of reading and writing skills forms the cornerstone for learning other subjects. For lower basic school pupils in Orumba south, Anambra state and Nigeria at large, the challenges in reading and writing proficiency have been observed as significant, often due to ineffective teaching methodologies and limited resources (Adebayo, 2018). As a response to these challenges, phonics – a method emphasizing the relationship between letters and sounds has emerged as a pedagogical approach to teaching reading and writing. The ability to read and write effectively has long been associated with better cognitive, linguistic and manipulative outcomes for learners. Reading instruction in lower basic schools is not only about decoding words but also about fostering comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking. Studies in Nigeria have shown that many pupils enter basic school with limited exposure to print-rich environment which hinders their reading development (Oyetunde & Muodumogu, 1999). Phonics, as a systematic method of teaching reading and writing, has emerged as a promising approach in addressing these literacy challenges. Nnamdi (2019) explained that phonics instruction involves teaching the systematic relationship between phonemes (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language). This method has gained considerable attention in Nigeria educational circles due to its structured approach to literacy development.

The adaptation of phonics as a teaching strategy is posited as a means to bridge this gap, given its structure and systematic approach to reading and writing instruction. Nigeria faces unique challenges in literacy education, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of teaching aids. According to Aina, Ogundele, and Olanipekun (2019), these factors contribute to poor reading outcomes among junior primary school pupils. Moreover, traditional methods such as rote memorization of words and syllables, widely used in Nigeria schools, fail to equip pupils with the phonological awareness necessary for effective reading. Phonics involves teaching children to recognize the sounds that letters represent and blending these sounds to form words. Phonics is a method of teaching reading that focuses on the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and their corresponding letters or letter combination (graphemes). This approach emphasizes the systematic teaching of letter sound relationships, which enables learners to decode words and recognize patterns in text. The phonics method is grounded in the understanding that children can learn to read by learning how to blend sounds together, which can lead to more accurate and fluent reading. By teaching children to recognize patterns and blend sounds, phonics lays the groundwork for fluent reading, comprehension and writing. Advocates of phonics argue that it provides a structured pathway for young learners to grasp the complexities of the English language, making it particularly beneficial in the early stages of reading and writing development.

The use of phonics as a teaching method has been met with both support and critique. While some educators and researchers highlight its effectiveness in improving reading fluency, word recognition, and spelling, others point to the need for complementary strategies that address comprehension and creative engagement with text. Despite these debates, phonics remains a cornerstone of reading instruction in many educational systems worldwide. This method contrasts with whole-language approaches, which prioritize comprehension over phonemic awareness. Scholars such as Adeghile and Alabi (2005) have argued that phonics is particularly effective in multilingual countries like Nigeria, where pupils often learn English as a second language. By providing a systematic framework for decoding, phonics helps pupil develop foundational reading skills, which are critical for academic success. Studies have shown that explicit phonics instruction benefits not only native speakers but also learners studying English as second language (Han, 2010). However, challenges exist in implementing phonics effectively especially in contexts where learners have varying degree of literacy in their first language. For instance, the complexity of English orthography, where letters often have multiple sounds, can hinder comprehension for learners from

linguistic backgrounds with more transparent phonetics systems (Chua,2022). Moreover, cultural and language specific factors such as observed in Namibia further emphasize the need for contextually relevant phonics strategies (Lameck,2023).Several studies have highlighted the efficacy of phonics in improving reading skills in Nigeria primary schools.For instance, Ehindero (2010) conducted a study in Lagos state that demonstrated significant improvements in reading fluency and comprehension among pupils taught using phonics compared to those taught with traditional methods. Similarly, Oyetunde and Muodimogu (1999) emphasized that phonics helps in addressing the specific linguistic challenges faced by Nigerian pupils, such as the interference of indigenous languages with English pronunciation. Recent research has reinforced the significance of phonics in early childhood education. Phonics improves decoding abilities and reading strategies to cater for diverse learner needs (Hjetland et al.,2019).

In Anambra state, the implementation of phonics instruction has shown varying degrees of success. A comprehensive study by Ezeocha and Nwosu (2021) in the state revealed that schools consistently using phonics instruction reported improved literacy rates, with pupils showing enhanced ability to decode unfamiliar words and better spelling accuracy. However, the researchers also noted significant disparities in the implementation of phonics instruction across different local government areas.

Orumba South Local Government Area, the focus of this study, presents a unique case study in the implementation of phonics instruction. According to Amaechina and Obi (2023), the area has witnessed a gradual transition from traditional teaching methods to more modern approaches, including phonics instruction.

However, this transition has not been without challenges. Their study identified several factors affecting effective implementation of phonics instruction, and such include teacher preparedness. Many teachers in the area lack adequate training in phonics instruction methods. Only about 35% of basic school teachers in Orumba South had received formal training in phonics instruction. Resource availability is another issue. Many schools in the area lack essential teaching materials and resources necessary for effective phonics instruction. Again, cultural and linguistic factors play obvious part in this. The influence of local languages and dialects on the English language acquisition presents unique challenges in implementing phonics instruction.

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has recognized the importance of phonics instruction in early literacy development. According to its 2023 report, implementing systematic phonics instruction has shown improved literacy rate among basic school pupils. This has led to increased advocacy for the adoption of phonics as the primary method of teaching reading and writing in Nigeria public schools. International research has also consistently supported the effectiveness of phonics instruction. A meta-analysis by Chibueze and Associates (2023) of literacy instruction methods across developing countries showed that systematic phonics instruction resulted in improved reading comprehension, spelling accuracy, and overall academic performance among primary school pupils.

In specific context or Orumba South Local Government Area, recent educational reforms have emphasized the need for evidence-based teaching methods. Okoli (2022) noted that while some schools in the area have embraced phonics instruction with positive results, others continue to face implementation challenges ranging from inadequate teachers to lack of training, insufficient teaching resources and varying levels of parental support. The socio-economic context of Orumba South Local Government Area also plays a crucial role in the implementation of phonics instruction. According to Anambra State Educational Statistics (2023), the area has seen a steady increase in basic school enrollment, creating both opportunities and challenges for implementing new teaching methodologies. The growing population of pupils, coupled with limited resources, has made the effective implementation of phonics instruction particularly challenging.

Despite the documented benefits of phonics, its adoption in Nigerian schools remains limited due to factors such as lack of teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and resistance to change from traditional methods of teaching (Adebayo, 2018). Notwithstanding, the potential benefits of phonics instruction in improving literacy rates cannot be ignored. As Okafor and Nwankwo (2022) argued, the systematic nature of phonics instruction provides a structured approach to literacy development that can be particularly beneficial in the Nigerian educational context, where many pupils come from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

This study explored the influence of using phonics as a method of teaching reading and writing to lower basic school pupils in Orumba South Local Government Area with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice, ensuring that learners acquire wholesome literacy skills necessary for their academic success and personal growth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of using phonics as a method of teaching reading and writing on the reading and writing proficiency among lower basic school pupils in Orumba South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Determine the common causes of phonics instructional failure.
2. Ascertain why phonics instruction is vital in public primary school classrooms.
3. Find out the principles and methods of teaching phonics in lower basic schools in Orumba South.
4. Determine the measures for improving phonics instructional failure.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study is significant as it provides valuable insights into the impact of phonics as a method of teaching reading and writing and it will be of immense benefits to the educators, Curriculum developers, education policy makers, parents and guardians.

To the educators, the findings will help teachers better understand how phonics influences pupils' reading abilities, enabling them to make informed decisions about instructional strategies. By identifying the strengths and limitations of phonics, educators can tailor their teaching methods to support diverse learning needs, enhance literacy outcomes, and foster a love for reading.

For curriculum developers, the study's outcomes can guide curriculum developers in designing reading programmes that integrate phonics effectively. By incorporating evidence-based practices, curriculum can be improved to ensure that pupils acquire essential decoding and comprehension skills in a structured and efficient manner.

To educational policy makers, this research can inform policy makers about the efficacy of phonics-based instruction, providing a basis for decisions regarding resource allocation, teacher training, and policy formulation in literacy education. A focus on phonics may address early reading challenges and help close literacy gaps in primary education.

For the parents and guardians, understanding the benefits of phonics will empower parents and guardians to support their children's reading and writing development at home. By complementing school efforts, families can play a proactive role in fostering strong reading and writing habits and skills.

Scope of the study

The scope of this work is delimited to the influence of using phonics as a method of teaching reading to lower basic school pupils in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the common causes of phonics instructional failure in lower basic school pupils?
2. To what extent is the use of phonics method of instruction vital in basic school classrooms?
3. What are the principles and methods of teaching phonics in Orumba South lower basic schools?
4. What measures can be used for improving phonics instructional failures in lower basic schools?

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. The design is one in which a group of people is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only few or items considered to be a representative of the entire population. According to Okekwe (2022), survey research is a method of sociological investigation that uses question-based or statistical survey to collect information about how people think or act. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study; a descriptive survey is an effective way to gather information about the current method of teaching phonics and its influence on reading and writing among pupils in lower basic schools in Orumba South. The findings of descriptive survey research can therefore be generalized to a large population of which the sample is supposed to represent.

Area of the study

The study was conducted in 43 government owned primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area. Orumba South is known for its economic hub for commerce, industry and education due to large number of businesses and a federal college of education located at Umunze. The local government area is made up of the following towns: Umunze, Ezira, Akpu, Agbudu, Eziagu, Ihite, Ogbunka, Owerre-Ezukala, Isulo, Nawfija, Ogboji, Umuomaku.

Population of the study

The population of the study comprises of all the 43 government owned primary school teachers in Orumba South Local Government Area, Anambra State; a total of 409 teachers. (Source: Orumba South Local Government Area Educational Authority, Anambra State.)

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The research sampled 50% of the entire population by using simple random sampling techniques. More so, the researchers randomly selected 20 government owned primary schools out of the 43 government owned primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State. All the teachers in the sampled schools were used which consisted of 183 teachers.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was grouped into two parts. Part A deals with data of the respondents. Part B has five sections based on the research questions. The questionnaire was constructed in line with Likert-scale of 4 points responses format

Validation of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was given to three experts, two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one from the School of Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze. Their criticisms and corrections helped the researchers to make the final draft of the questionnaire.

Method of Data Collection

The researchers visited the selected schools and distributed copies of the questionnaire to lower basic school teachers to elicit responses from them, and all copies of the questionnaire were collected back at the spot. This ensured a hundred percent return rate.

Method of Data Analysis

The researchers used Mean (X) in analyzing the data collected in order to determine the agreement and disagreement in each of the items. Nominal values assigned to each of the scale was as follows:

Strongly Agreed (SA) - 4 points
 Agreed (A) - 3 points
 Disagreed (D) - 2 points
 Strongly Disagreed (SD) - 1 point

To determine the cut-off point of the study, the nominal values were added up and the Mean (X) determined thus:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum fx}{N}$$

Where $\bar{X}$ = Mean rating

$\sum$ = Summation

F = Frequency of the respondents

N = Total number of respondents of each items.

The mean of nominal scale was calculated as follows

$$= \bar{X} \frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.5$$

Decision Rule

Thus, any item receiving a mean score of 2.50 or above was accepted, but any item that receives a mean score of less than 2.50 was rejected.

Discussion of findings:

Table 1 which was on research questions one.

The study's first research question revealed critical systemic deficiencies in phonics instruction delivery. The findings indicate that there is rare organization of seminars and workshops to improve teachers' skills in phonics, coupled with limited instructional resources and lack of qualified teachers. Additionally, insufficient curriculum guidelines for implementation and inadequate practice opportunities contribute to the failure of phonics instruction in the studied context. These findings align with Adebayo's (2019) assertion that effective phonics instruction requires systematic teacher preparation, adequate resources, and clear curricular frameworks to ensure successful implementation in Nigerian primary educational settings.

Despite the implementation challenges, the study's second research question demonstrated the substantial benefits that phonics instruction can provide when properly delivered. The findings show that phonics instruction helps pupils easily decode words, making pronunciation possible while building spelling accuracy and reading fluency. Furthermore, it enhances confidence in reading and writing, promotes vocabulary development, and significantly reduces reading difficulties. These outcomes support a research by Nwosu (2020) demonstrating that systematic phonics instruction significantly improves word recognition, spelling accuracy, and overall reading fluency in Nigerian beginning readers.

The third research question revealed that effective phonics strategies such as phonetic rhymes and music, technology gadgets, small group interventions, one-on-one instruction, additional practice sessions, and both synthetic and analytic approaches are not usually employed in the studied context.

This gap between available effective strategies and actual classroom practice represents a significant missed opportunity for educational improvement. Eze and Uche (2022) emphasize that diverse instructional approaches, including synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, and technology-enhanced methods, are essential for meeting varied student learning needs in phonics instruction within the Nigerian educational context.

The study identified several measures that could facilitate improved phonics instruction, including relevant training through seminars and workshops, provision of sufficient instructional resources, development of adequate curriculum guidelines, implementation of regular assessments to monitor pupils' progress, and utilization of various instructional approaches such as small group instruction, one-on-one sessions, and technology-based instruction. Okafor and Nnamani (2018) support these interventions, noting that comprehensive teacher training, adequate resource allocation, and systematic assessment protocols are fundamental to successful phonics instruction implementation in Nigerian schools.

Recommendations

1. Educational authorities at the Local Government Area, State, and Federal levels should prioritize the establishment of comprehensive professional development programmes specifically targeting phonics instruction. These programmes should be mandatory for all teachers involved in early literacy instruction and should occur regularly rather than as one-time events.
2. School administrators should advocate for increased resource allocation toward phonics instruction materials and technology. They should also establish internal professional learning communities where teachers can share effective phonics instruction strategies and collaborate on implementation challenges.
3. Teachers should actively seek professional development opportunities related to phonics instruction and implement diverse instructional strategies including phonetic rhymes and music, small group interventions, and one-on-one instruction sessions. They should also maintain regular assessment practices to monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.
4. Policy makers should allocate dedicated funding for early literacy programs with specific emphasis on phonics instruction. They should also establish quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that phonics instruction meets established standards across all public primary schools.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the current state of phonics instruction in lower basic public schools within Orumba South LGA, Anambra State. The findings reveal a complex educational landscape characterized by significant implementation challenges alongside clear evidence of phonics instruction's potential benefits for student learning outcomes.

The research has identified critical gaps in teacher professional development, resource allocation, curriculum guidance, and instructional strategy implementation that collectively undermine the effectiveness of phonics instruction in the studied context. However, the study has also demonstrated that when properly implemented, phonics instruction can significantly enhance student reading capabilities, spelling accuracy, and overall literacy development.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate study area, suggesting that many primary schools may face similar challenges in implementing effective early literacy instruction. The recommendations provided offer a comprehensive framework for addressing identified deficiencies through coordinated efforts involving educational authorities, school administrators, teachers, and policy makers.

While the study's limitations must be acknowledged, particularly regarding geographical scope and temporal constraints, the findings provide a solid foundation for educational improvement initiatives and future research endeavors. The suggested areas for further research offer pathways for expanding understanding of effective phonics instruction implementation in Nigerian educational contexts.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the critical importance of systematic, well-supported phonics instruction in early primary education. The success of educational reform efforts will depend largely on the commitment of all stakeholders to address the identified challenges and implement the recommended solutions in a coordinated and sustained manner.

The future of literacy education in Orumba South Local Government Area, and potentially across similar educational contexts in Nigeria, depends on the willingness of educational stakeholders to invest in comprehensive phonics instruction programmes that address the full spectrum of implementation requirements identified in this study. Only through such committed action can the documented benefits of effective phonics instruction be realized for all students in the educational system.

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