

JOLLY PHONICS STRATEGY AND THE ESL PUPILS' READING DEVELOPMENT: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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By

Prof. Comfort M. Ekpo, Drs. Alice E Udosen, Maria E. Afangideh
Thelma U. Ekukinam, and Maria M. Ikorok

Institute of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo, Box 4256 Uniuyo P. O.
E-mail: aliudosen@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The study sought to find out the relative effects of Jolly Phonics as a fast track strategy in enhancing primary one pupil's reading skills. A pretest-posttest experimental research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 168 primary one pupils from five schools purposively selected from the three senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State. Two intact classes in each school were selected from to form the experimental and control with Jolly Phonics as the treatment for the experimental groups. One research question was formulated to guide the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The data collected were analysed using means, independent t-tests, ANCOVA and the Burt Reading Test. The results reveal that Jolly Phonics was effective in enhancing pupils reading skills. The experiment group gained from 3-29 months reading age (5.3 to 5.7) in the Burt Test. The t-test analysis shows a significant difference of 9.42 (df 166) between the posttest mean score of the experimental and control groups. There was also a significant difference of 3.40 (df 82) between the post mean scores of the experimental groups in the urban and rural schools. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made among which as the need to replicate the study in other parts of the state and country as a whole.

BACKGROUND

Reading skills dictate performances in other disciplines. One's ability to read well will determine one's performance and achievement in any academic endeavour. A good reader will automatically become a good writer as a result of vast experiences gained on formation of words, phrases, sentences and even expression of ideas. The goal of reading instruction at the primary school level is that each child should be functionally literate and be able to communicate effectively. Functional literacy means that individuals can read with understanding and be able to apply knowledge gained to solve life's problems. Omojuwa (2005) sums this up by saying that functional literacy does not only stop at learning, but ensures reading for survival even when a child's academic endeavour terminates at the primary school level.

Children's Reading Age

The primary school is the point at which proper foundation should be established for the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Children at the pre-primary level, spend time on recognition of objects within and around their environment. At the early primary school stage, the child is not only expected to recognize these objects but should be able to read the names of the objects at home, classroom, etc. Similarly, an average primary four pupil is expected to read simple written sentences using the language of instruction. This means that children who began primary one at the age of six years should read simple sentences between the ages of nine to ten years. However, some could read earlier than that because of differences in the children's reading ability. (Etuk, 2005). The Revised Burt Reading Test (1974) has set a standard for children's reading age and the amount of words a child can read at each given age.

Methods of Teaching Reading

Through guided and unguided activities and resources, the children respond and react to the immediate environment through the recognition of objects, sounds, activities, verbal and non-verbal expressions. This of course includes reading and interpretation of encoded information.

Ekpo (1999) highlights the fact that the children's home and learning environment are vital in the children's developmental process. Looking at the Nigerian educational scene where English being the second language is not frequently used in most homes reading and speaking in English becomes a serious handicap. Thus, teachers need to adopt effective strategies to enable the learners acquire reading skills.

Udosen & Ukpak (2005) stress the need for teachers to adopt effective approaches to teaching reading as most pupils come to school without the slight reading readiness for school environment. Ekpo (1999) indicates that where English is used extensively and reading materials and objects abound, children will likely display reading readiness but where the opposite is the case exist, children will not show any form of reading readiness. According to her report, Ingham (1982) in support of this fact stressed that without doubt, the socio-economic status of a family correlates highly with the degree of a child's reading success.

The teachers worsen the children's lack of reading readiness because of their incompetence in helping the pupils to master the reading skills. The consequence is that some pupils just memorize some words with no clue to how the words are formed or pronounced. At the early primary school stage, words and short sentences are forced into the children's memory through constant drill and memorizations. This method at times can be likened to a situation where a mother forces her child to swallow bitter drugs for his quick recovery. The child has no right to question the mother or to look for a more convenient means of treating his illness. The only difference between the two environments (home and the school) is probably the presence of instructors who use canes and harsh instructions to get the children to read, an approach, which lacks stimulating, interesting and exciting activities for primary school pupils. Several approaches to the teaching of reading have been pilot tested and recommended though such approaches have not received wide acceptance in Nigeria due to lack of resources and proper implementation. For instance, the Concentrated English

Language Encounter (CELE) is a whole language method based on the view of reading as an interactive process between the writer and reader. READ is a literature based whole language approach which depends heavily on trade books. Both CELE and READ approaches are analytic methods of teaching reading as each language unit such as words, phrases and sentences form, the starting point of initial reading instruction (Omojuwa, 2005).

The synthetic method is another group of teaching approaches to which most other approaches fall under. This grouping involves methods that begin with mastery of word elements such as letters, sounds and syllables. Omojuwa (2005) recommends the need for an eclectic approach whereby the unique features of each method should be drawn upon to tackle the unique problems of reading in Nigerian School System. Her conviction on this is because she sees none of the individual approaches as being strong enough for Nigerian system. Foxcroft & Chapple (2007) have listed some essential techniques to include phonics based approach, exposing children to a variety of textual materials, involving parents in supporting their children to read, and the need to place literacy at the core of every curriculum. According to them, the synthetic phonics has the greatest impact as indicated by Jolly Phonics Reading Method. This synthetic phonics method involves the teaching of Letter – sounds in isolation and the blending of letter-sounds together to form words.

Reading Problems of Children, Repercussions and Causes:

A few of our children attend private nursery schools while the majority of our children attend public primary schools which lack instructional materials and facilities that would enhance both the teacher's and pupil's reading activities. Ekpo (1999) indicates that at the early stage of the children's reading process, their reading environment should be attractively decorated with visuals to stimulate them to read and think. Modern audio-visual media should no longer be held as supplementary enrichment aspects of teaching learning events but should form part of school curriculum. In the absence of audio-visual media well-illustrated and colourful story books could

do the work of audio and visual if such materials are presented by an Instructor who has adequate knowledge of the process.

Ohiaeri, 1994 and Ekpo (1999) further identify some impediments to children's ability to read at appropriate age as follows

- (i) Use of English language for instruction at the primary school level.
- (ii) High cost of books and lack of class readers by most pupils.
- (iii) Lock stepping pupils through their class readers
- (iv) Inadequate instructional time.
- (v) Poor preparation of teachers on reading at initial teacher training institutions.
- (vi) Adoption of poor teaching methods.
- (vii) Lack of appropriate variation in the teaching approaches to reading. For instance the use of activities such as picture recognition, story telling, card games, news reading, cartoon collection, posters, flash cards, role play, story club, reading competition, leisure reading, etc. can be incorporated into reading lessons for variety to generate interest, (Edem, 2005).
- (viii) Lack of commitment on the part of the teachers due to poor job satisfaction.

Generally, researches have clearly shown that the average Nigerian Learner whether at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels cannot read and write fluently in English or in the Nigerian languages. (Tinuoye, 1991 and Omojuwa, 2005). Most children that fail to read do so not because they are incapable to learn to read but largely because of poor teaching approaches utilized. Primary school teachers in Nigeria depend mostly on the prescribed course materials recommended for the school. Most of them are incapable of supplementing or adapting these materials to suit the learners reading needs. Consequently, the learners are not provided with the right kinds of learning experiences to enable their acquisition of literacy skills that are compatible to the children's reading age. Therefore, the researchers study seeks to investigate whether pupils reading age will improve significantly if they are taught with the synthetics phonics method. Specifically, the study will address one research question and two null hypotheses as follows:

Research Question

To what extent does Jolly Phonics strategy enhance pupils reading skills?

Hypotheses

- (1) There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of pupil's reading ability in the experimental and control groups.
- (2) There is no significant difference in the posttest mean scores of pupil's reading ability in the experimental group by school location.

The study

A purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting 2 government primary schools each in the 3 senatorial districts of the state for the Jolly Phonics pilot study in September, 2006. The selection was based on the population of the pupils (i.e. if the schools had enough pupils for both the experimental and control groups).

There was an initial 2-day train the trainer workshop for the 6 primary school teachers for the experimental groups at the University of Uyo by the Jolly phonics research team. Resources were provided by Stepping Stones Nigeria, and Jolly Learning in the United Kingdom. One of the schools in Eket Senatorial district did not participate because the administrators refused to show enough commitment and co-operation. This development made the team to work with only 5 schools.

Further, members of the research team paid visits to the schools and identified the experimental and control groups. The population comprised all primary one pupils in all government primary schools in the state. Initially, there were 108 subjects for the experimental group and 116 for the control who served as the sample, but at the time of the final testing; the number had dropped to 84 and 84 respectively.

A pre-test based on Burt Reading Test was administered to the subjects in September, 2006 by members of the research team. Burt Reading Test is a standardized reading test, structured from two letter words and graduating into three, four and more letter words.

In its administration, pupils are called individually to a quiet room to read aloud the already prepared words. The number of words a child is able to read is matched with Bust reading age. These words are matched with the pupil's Reading Age. Hence, a child who is able to read two words from the list is adjudged to be at the Reading Age of 5 years, 3 months. As the subjects read, the correct options were circled with blue and red ball point at the pre-test and post test respectively to enhance easy identification of the subject's performance..

Members of the University of Uyo team visited the pilot schools on a monthly basis for monitoring and supervision. There was a one-day refresher workshop on the 8th of May, 2007. Areas of difficulties like blending, the magic – e among other things were re-taught to the teachers. The exercise lasted for 36 weeks. At the end of the 36th week, there was a post-test still on Burt Reading Test.

Description of Materials :

1. **Finger Phonics Big Book 1 – 7:** The Finger Phonics Big Books introduce the 42 main letter sounds in English through stories, actions and pictures. The amusing and detailed pictures illustrate the stories, as well as captivating the children's imagination. The books provide plenty opportunities to teach early literacy skills for language, reading and writing. The Finger Phonics big Book 1 – 7 are large colourful books. The content of the books are as follows:

Book	1	has the sounds	s a t i p n
	2	“	c k e h r m d
	3	“	g o u l g b
	4	“	a i j o a i e e e r
	5	“	z w n g v o o o o
	6	“	y x c h s h t h t h
	7	“	q u o u o i u e e r a r

2. **Jolly Phonics Wall Frieze:** This package shows all the letter sounds of English, not just the alphabets. This Frieze has 7 sections that can be put up individually. They can be a continuous strip around the wall or a block, like a giant poster. Each illustration can also be laminated for use alone. Each section measures 245mm high, and 1.38m long.

3. **Jolly Phonics Tricky Word Wall Flowers:** This pack has illustrations of Inky Mouse's Tricky Word Hat and 72 Tricky Word Wall Flowers. They are for building a wall display as these words are taught. The Flowers are provided in a protective frame, which can be discarded. Tricky words are the irregularly spelt words which children cannot read by sounding out and blending. Tricky Word Wall Flowers help in teaching them as sight vocabulary.

4. **Jolly Phonics Alternative Spelling Poster and Alphabet Poster:** This pack shows the alternative spellings for many of the vowel sounds, with sample words and illustrations.

5. **The Alphabet Poster** shows each letter with arrows to indicate its correct formation. The letters are arranged in four quarters of a dictionary, to help when looking up words. The poster measures 840mm x 594mm.

The phonics Handbook: A handbook for teaching reading, writing and spelling. The Phonics Handbook is a step-by-step guidance prepared for the teacher, with over 100 large clear photocopiable worksheets for the children. The handbook is designed to enhance teaching in the following five basic skills:

- Learning the Letter Words
- Learning letter formation
- Blending – for reading
- Identifying the sounds in words for writing
- Tricky words – irregular words

The handbook is structured to provide a multisensory, active and particularly suitable learning experience for young children. Each process of pronouncing and reading sounds is prescribed along with pictures, flash cards, actions games and stories to illustrate the sounds. This is further supported by additional phonics information on the sound.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using means, standard deviation, Burt Reading Test, Independent t-test and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results are shown below starting with the Research question:

Research Question : To what extent does Jolly Phonics strategy enhance pupils reading skills?

To answer this question, The Burt Reading Test was applied in tables 1a-e

Table I a: Burt's Reading Test Analysis of Pupils Reading in School 1

Name of School	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Before		After		Before		After	
School 1	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA
	15	Below 5 or 5	2	Below 5 or 5	15	Below 5 or 5	15	Below 5 or 5
			4	5.4				
			5	5.5				
			2	5.6				
			1	5.7				
			1	5.9				

N/B No. = Number of Pupils
RA = Reading Age

Table 1a above shows that all the pupils both in the experimental and control groups in school 1 were below or at the reading age of 5 years before the treatment. After the treatment, there was no improvement in the control group whereas the experimental group had enhanced the reading ability of 13 pupils out of the 15 pupils at the range of 5 years 4 months to 5 years 8 months. Only 2 could not make any appreciable improvement.

Table 1b: Burt's Reading Test Analysis of Pupils Reading in School 2

Name of School	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Before		After		Before		After	
School 2	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA
	20	Below 5 or 5	7	Below 5 or 5	20	Below 5 or 5	20	Below 5 or 5
			1	5.3				
			1	5.4				
			4	5.5				
			2	5.6				
			2	5.7				
			1	5.10				
			1	5.11				

For school 2, all the pupils in the two groups were reading below or about the reading age of 5. After the study, there was no improvement for the control group whereas, the treatment had favoured 13 pupils out of 20 in the experimental group at the range of 5 years 3 month to 5 years 11 months.

Table 1c: Burt's Reading Test Analysis of Pupils Reading in School 3

Name of School	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Before		After		Before		After	
School 3	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA
	14	Below 5 or 5	5	Below 5 or 5	14	Below 5 or 5	14	Below 5 or 5
			3	5.3				
			1	5.4				
			1	5.5				
			1	5.6				
			2	5.7				
			1	6.2				

In School 3, all the pupils were reading at below 5 or at 5, reading age before the treatment. After the treatment, 9 pupils out of 14 in the experimental group were reading at the range of 5 years 3 months to 6 years 2 months. The gain was between 3 to 14 months, whereas, the control group only 2 pupils out of the 14 gained 3 months Reading Age (RA)

Table 1d: Burt's Reading Test Analysis of Pupils Reading in School 4

Name of School	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Before		After		Before		After	
School 4	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA
	13	Below 5 or 5		Below 5 or 5	13	Below 5 or 5	9	Below 5 or 5
			1	5.3				
			2	5.4				
			5	5.5				
			2	5.9				
			1	6.1				
			1	6.4				
			1	6.5				

At the beginning of the study all the pupils in school 4 were below or at the reading age of 5 years. After the study, all the pupils in the experimental group had read at between 5 years 3 months to 6 years 5 months a gain of between 3 months to 17 months range while 4 pupils out of 14 in the Control group could read up to 5 years 3 months and the other 9 had no improvement.

Table 1e: Burt's Reading Test Analysis of Pupils Reading in School 5

Name of School	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Before		After		Before		After	
School 5	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA	No.	RA
	20	Below 5 or 5		Below 5 or 5	22	Below 5 or 5		Below 5 or 5
	2	5.3	1	5.3			17	5.3
			2	5.5				
			1	5.6				
			2	5.7				
			2	5.8				
			2	5.9				
			1	5.10				
			3	5.11				
			3	6.1				
			1	6.2				
			2	6.3				
			1	6.8				
			1	7.5				

The above table shows that before treatment, 20 pupils in the experimental group were below 5 or were at 5 years reading age and 2 could read at 5 years, 3 months. After the study, all the pupils had made improvements at the range of 5 years 3 months to 7years 5 months.

To further illustrate the level of pupils at the initial stage and the extent of improvement made, descriptive statistics were used to make the picture apt.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) analysis showing Pupil Reading level before and after the treatment.

S/N	Schools	Treatment	N	Pretest mean	SD	Post test mean	SD
1.	1	Exp	15	0.13	0.35	4.91	2.85
		Control	15	0.06	0.26	13	35
2	2	Exp	20	0.10	0.31	5.10	4.38
		Control	20	0.00	0.00	0.05	.22
3.	3	Exp	14	0.00	0.00	4.64	5.60
		Control	14	0.07	0.27	.50	.76
4.	4	Exp	13	0.00	0.00	10.00	7.54
		Control	13	0.08	0.28	77	1.09
5.	5	Exp	22	0.32	0.65	15.18	8.26
		Control	22	0.00	0.00	1.36	1.87
	Total	5	168	.13 0.04	.40 .19	8.39 .60	2.49 1.20

At a glance one finds that the post mean scores of the experimental groups far outweighs those of their counterparts in the control groups. The pre mean score reveals that both groups could not read at the initial stage and did not differ much.

To determine whether the difference in the post mean scores were significant, an independent t- test analysis was employed to test the two hypotheses.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the post test means score of pupil' reading ability in the experimental and control groups.

Table 3: Independent t test analysis of the difference in post test mean scores of students exposed to Jolly Phonics and those in the traditional method.

Variables	N	x	SD	t	Sig.
Jolly Phonics	84	8.39	7.49	9.42	
Traditional Method	84	.60	1.20		

*P < .05, df = 166; critical t = 1.98

The table reveals that the t calculated is 9.42 which is greater than critical test of 1.98 with degree of freedom 166 at 0.95 alpha level. On the basis of this result, the null hypothesis I was rejected. We therefore conclude that there was a significant post test mean difference between the two groups.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the post test mean score of the pupils reading ability experimental groups by schools location.

Table 4: Independent t-text analysis of the difference in the post test mean scores of the effects of treatment in urban and rural schools.

Variables	Location of School	n	x	SD	t
Experimental	Urban	55	10.20	8.11	3.40
	Rural	29	4.78	4.31	
Control	Urban	55	.75	1.40	1.59
	Rural	29	.31	.60	
Total	Urban	110	5.52	7.52	2.82
	Rural	58	2.55	3.80	

*P < 0.05; df = 166 crit t – 1.98; df 82 = 1.99

The result in table 4 reveals that the t – cal (3.40; df 82) was greater than cri. t of 1.99. The null hypothesis 2 was therefore rejected. It was concluded that there was a significant difference in the post test mean scores of the experimental groups in the urban and rural schools.

A further analysis was done to remove the effect of entry level on the respondents as shown below:

Table 5: Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the effects of treatment on students' Reading Skills.

Source	Type III Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	2.561.547	2	1280.773	44.377	.000
Intercept	3074.166	1	3074.166	106.504	.000
Re-test	10.165	1	10.165	.352	.554
Treatment	2445.970	1	2445.970	84.740	.000
Error	4762.633	165	28.864		
Total	107,4.400	168			
Corrected Total	7324.180	167			

a. R squared = .350 (adjusted R Squared = .342).

The table shows an F – ratio of 84.740. This indicates that treatment effect was significant and that the experimental group's performance was as a result of the potentialities of Jolly Phonics.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1a, b, c, d, e indicate that the children for both experimental and control groups lacked any form of reading readiness as there is no indication of any reading ability before the treatment. The only reading ability is indicated by two children from school 5 who were at the reading age of 5 years 3 months before treatment. This agrees with Udosen & Ukpak (2005) who confirm that most pupils come to school without any slight reading readiness and as such the teachers need to adopt appropriate strategies to enable the learners acquire reading skills. Furthermore, looking at the experimental and control groups after treatment, there is a marked improvement in children's reading ability in the experimental groups where the control group still lacked a significant improvement in reading ability. For instance, out of 15 children that participated in the experimental study from school I (Table I a), all of them gained between four to nine months on their reading age. None of the children for the control groups gained anything. The highest performance from the experimental groups can be seen in school 5 (Table I e). Out of 22 children, 8 of them gained between 1 year 1 month to 2 years 5 months on their reading age. For the control groups, 17 children gained nothing on their reading age while 5 out of them gained 3

months. This study corroborates with Ekpo (1999) who asserted that children exposed to favourable conditions where reading materials abound, will display reading readiness and subsequently improved reading ability while the reverse is the case where no materials exists.

As shown in Table 2 there was no marked difference in the pre-test mean scores for both experimental and control groups for all the schools selected for the study. A closer look at the table reveals that the post test means scores for the experimental groups outweighs those of their counterpart in the control groups. The significant difference in performance of the experimental group over the control group as indicated by the significant t – calculated (9.42) on table 3 can be explained by the fact that the children in the experimental groups were exposed to Jolly Phonics, a stimulating and exciting strategy that enhanced reading ability. Foxcroft & Chapple (2007) observed that the synthetic phonics based approach has the potential to impact on children's reading ability as it provides a variety of reading experiences to them. Edem (2005) further agrees that lack of variation as in the case of the traditional classroom situation does not generate interest in the children's desire to read.

Table 4 reveals that the t -cal is greater than the t -cri which further confirms that there is a significant difference in the performance of children in the urban and rural locations. The children in the urban locations performed better than children in the rural location with a standard deviation of 7.52 for the urban and 3.80 for the rural location. This result confirms the assertion by Ekpo (1999) and Ingham (1982) that the socio-economic status of a family correlates highly with the degree of a child's reading success. The attrition rate experienced in the study is another proof that children from rural areas are greatly hampered in their reading ability by poverty. Most pupils dropped out of the study because the parents could not provide adequate encouragement and material sustenance for the children's interest to be sustained in school. Foxcroft & Chapple (2007) list parents' involvement in supporting children's reading ability as an effective strategy for improved reading performances.

Summary of Findings

1. Children lack reading readiness in both the experimental and control groups, thus there was no marked difference between the pre-test results for both experimental and control groups.
2. Children in the experimental group had gained between 1 month to 2 years 7 months on their reading age because of their exposure to Jolly phonic
3. The children exposed to Jolly Phonics reading strategy performed better than the children in the traditional classroom situation as can be seen in the post-test mean scores
4. The children in the urban locations performed significantly better than their counterparts in the rural schools

Conclusion

The study sought to find out the relative effect of jolly phonics as a fast track strategy in enhancing pupil's reading skills. From the findings of the study, it is concluded that pupils can achieve high reading rate if properly taught. This, while the pupils in the control groups could not read any single word after staying one year in the school, those in the treatment group had gained so much. The study clearly shows that for children to learn how to read they must be taught using well prepared materials and games to help them do so. This is what the Jolly Phonics strategy did. Children learn through play, the sounds that letters make and combine them to form words and so on.

Also to be concluded from the study is the fact that the environment plays vital role in learning. Thus, pupils from rural areas looked etched and sickly and could not achieve as much as those in the urban areas.

Recommendations

1. Parents need to be given some re-orientation as to the need to encourage their children to read by providing reading materials at home.
2. The School management should work hand in hand with the children's home environment as this will enhance the children's readiness and performance in school.

3. Teachers need to adopt the synthetic phonics method in their approach to teaching reading and this should be done at an early stage. Once the foundation is built at an early stage, the child will become a successful reader.
4. The traditional classroom method should be discouraged through the provision of reading materials and objects that stimulate the children's interest in reading
5. Methods such as memorization and forceful drills on reading should be discouraged.
6. Individual differences in children's reading ability should be identified and addressed through variation of reading methods as was provided for in the experimental group through Jolly Phonics.

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