USE OF PHONICS METHOD ON THE TEACHING OF ORACY SKILLS TO BEGINNING READERS: IMPLICATION TO CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract
The focus of this paper was to ascertain the effect of the phonics method on the teaching of oracy skills to beginning readers. The specific objective of the study was to determine the effect of phonics method on the reading fluency and vocabulary development of beginning readers. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The sample consisted of 30 pupils drawn randomly from two primary schools where they served as control and experimental group respectively. The control group was taught using whole language method while the experimental group was taught using the previous method. The mean achievement score was used to answer the research questions while the t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the phonics method has a significant and positive influence on the reading fluency and vocabulary development of pupils. Recommendations made include that the phonics method should be integrated with the whole language methods to pupils. It was also recommended that primary school curricular be reviewed to incorporate the phonics approach when teaching pupils’ literacy.

Communication is the process by which human beings link their thoughts, feelings, ideas from one person to the other. This is very important in every setting. Language is the tool which enhances effective communication. As a result of distance, not everybody communicates directly with the other. Reading is the ability to make sense of the symbols and comment of what is written (Oyetunde, 2009: P.3). To read and comprehend appropriately, one must have a concrete background in learning to read. That is, proper reading and comprehension of text is as a result of effective beginning reading background.

Adams (2005) viewed teaching of beginning reading as teaching pupils to recognize and pronounce individual letters, their sequencing, their phonological translations and on the whole, learning to pronounce words in isolation and in context. Beginning readers are children who are learning to read. McKinney (2007) stated that the success of pupils in reading and comprehension of passages is dependent on the method teachers adopt in beginning reading classrooms to teach pupils how to read.

Different methods exist that teachers adopt in this class during teaching beginning readers and the choice of a specific method is dependent on the individual teacher and the textbook in use. Some beginning readers are taught through the sentences method in which the emphasis is on meaningful sentences. As a result, Opega (2008) and NTI (2002) stated that it is the sentence that is taught as a unit, it is a natural progression or extension from the alphabetic and “toot” and “say” methods. The major fault with the sentence as observed by Mather (2005) is that it does not train pupils for word deciphering. As a result, pupils are left with no way to figure new words as they encounter them in their readers or context texts. Some teachers adopt the alphabetic method whereby the pupils recite and learn the letters of the English alphabet serially as A, B, C, D… (NTI, 2002, McKinney, 2007). The learners learn to discriminate between the capital and small letters. Gradually, the learners are taught to combine these letters to form simple words. It has been observed by McKinney (2007), that the method emphasizes individual letters rather than meaning but meaning comes from the combination of letters from words and words are most meaningful in content. Therefore, the reading task lacks any intrinsic value. Other teachers teach beginning readers through the “toot” method. The underlying principle of this method is

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that since the graphic symbols written on paper called print are abstract representation of objects and ideas, the method emphasizes placing the words and objects or ideas they represent side by side (NTI, 2002). Pictures and objects are very useful in this method. What becomes of abstract words? Abstract words are easily left out in this approach. The child can only read graded books since the books may contain words he has not encountered before (Opega, 2008).

The phonics method is another approach teacher’s use in teaching beginning readers which is the basis of this paper. According to Onukaogu, Anua and Jegede (2003), “phonetics is a strategy that uses the connection between letters and sounds of speech, between a combination of letters and sounds of speech, between a combination of letters and their sounds”. This method operates on the principle that the sounds of speech and letters of the alphabets have a relationship. Unlike the alphabetic method, the emphasis is not on names of individual letters but on the sounds. Here, pupils learn that a spoken word is comprised of individual sounds blended together and that each of those sounds is represented by letters which are combined to make the written word. There are two types of phonics instruction, the synthetic and analytic phonics.

According to The Free Encyclopedia (2012), the phonics method has proven to be very effective in teaching oracy skills to pupils. Comparing the phonics instruction with the other approaches to beginning reading instruction, Adams (2005) saw phonics as a very effective way of teaching children to read at the word and sentence level, more effective than the whole language methods. He further identified the effectiveness of this method in the aspects of reading fluency and vocabulary development of pupils. These are correlates of comprehension of the written text. Related, the phonics method has been observed to have a remarkable effect on these predictors of reading comprehension – reading fluency, vocabulary development, the degree to which the phonics method is not yet identified and thus forms the concern of this study.

Reading fluency is the ability to read words accurately, appropriately and quickly. Meyer and Felton (2003) in Mather (2005) defined fluency as ‘the ability to read connected text rapidly, smoothly, effortlessly and automatically with little conscious attention to the mechanism of reading such as decoding. It is in view of this that Mather (2005) stated that since phonics teaches children the letters of the alphabet, the relationship that exists between the letters and their sounds and subsequent sequence of these sounds to words and sentences, readers use these relationship to recognize words and to decode unfamiliar words as quickly as possible.

Fluent readers rely primarily on the letters in the words rather than pictures or ideas to identify familiar and unfamiliar words. The written language can be compared to code and so, the sounds that the letters make (which is the basis of phonics) and letter combinations will help pupils to pronounce words fluently and comprehend adequately as they read (Colon, 2004).

Vocabulary development is important to beginning readers in the sense that when a pupil reads a word he or she is also determining if the word makes sense based on his or her understanding of the word. Hence, comprehension of written text does not take place in a vaccum but through the meaning of words, Christensen and Bowey (2005) defined vocabulary development as “the knowledge of stored information about the meanings and pronunciations of words necessary for communication”. When children use phonics, they pay careful attention to the letters in the words because they have learned the sounds. Hence, the more children analyze, read and write the same sounds, the stronger their meaning and the faster the recognitions. Eventually, the sounds, spellings and meanings of words are bonded together in memory as a result; they do not have problems figuring the meaning of words (Butcher, 2003, McKinney,
2007, Ehri, 2004). This makes it possible for pupils to read expressively, accurately and to derive the meaning or comprehend texts appropriately.

**Statement of the Problem**

The school as a citadel of learning has to some extent, neglected its duty in making students good readers. As a result, many students fail both internal and external examinations thus, this is affecting the Nigerian educational system. This is because, most teachers view beginning reading which is the basis of literacy as a duty to be done by the students only. They do not bother about developing these skills in students so that they can read and comprehend text. It is as a result of this that the researchers deem it necessary to investigate on the phonics method and its effect on reading fluency and vocabulary development of pupils.

**Research Questions**

This research work addresses the following questions:
1. To what extent does the phonics method affect the reading fluency of pupils?
2. To what extent does the phonics method influence the vocabulary development of pupils?

**Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guide these researchers are:
1. The phonics method has no significant effect on the reading fluency of pupils.
2. The phonics method has no significant influence on the vocabulary development of pupils.

**Research Design**

The study aimed at finding the use of phonics method on the teaching of oracy skills to beginning readers. The designed used in this study was quasi-experimental research design.

**Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of all the English teachers in 46 government approved primary schools. The total number of pupils and English teachers stands at 5,983.

**Sample and Sampling**

The sample consists of 2 English language teachers that were drawn from 2 randomly selected schools. The researchers also took a probability random sampling of 30 pupils drawn from 2 schools. That is 15 pupils served as the experimental group while the other 15 pupils served as the control group.

**Method**

The quasi-experimental research design was used. In achieving this, the researchers used the post-test quasi-experimental research design. Data was collected in the research via a written test. Two schools were sampled for use where the control group and the experimental group were used respectively. The researchers used three lessons each to the groups, using the phonics method for the experimental group and the sentence method for the control group. The test which is the same for the two groups was based on the lesson on the topics taught. The test was given to determine the effect of phonics method on the experimental group in comparison with the control group which was taught using the sentence method.

The instrument used for collecting data was the Effect of Phonics Method on Students’ Achievement Test (EPMOSAT). This was constructed by the researchers. This achievement test was set based on the three lessons that was taught to both the experimental and the control groups. The three topics were derived from Premier English for Nigerian Primary Schools, Book 3, vocabulary
pronunciation and spelling of words with initial Bb, learning letters t, d and s. The achievement test was administered immediately after each of the groups had the three lessons taught to them. The test was divided into two sections – A and B. Section A was a test of vocabulary adopted from Premier English for Nigerian Primary Schools Book 3 and is made up of testing items. Section B was adopted from the same book and was test of word recognition or fluency.

The research instrument was subjected to the face and content validation by three experts in Tests and Measurement in the Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi. The experts scrutinized the items, made some modifications suitable for the study. A trial test was conducted for the purpose of ensuring the reliability of the instrument. The research instrument (EPMOSAT) was administered on 10 students from 2 schools that were not included in the study sample. The reliability index of the instrument was obtained using t-test analysis. This is because t-test is used to test the difference between means when a small sample is involved. The instrument was deemed suitable for use in conducting the research.

Results
Research Question 1: To what extent does the phonics method affect reading fluency of beginning readers?

Table 1: Mean Achievement Score of Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 1 shows the mean score for experimental and control groups. The experimental group has a mean of 8.9 while the control group has the mean of 5.1. The result shows that the phonics method affects the reading fluency of beginning readers. Thus, the mean of the experimental group is higher than the control group.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the phonics approach affect the vocabulary development of beginning readers?

Table 2: Mean Achievement Score of Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 2 show the mean score for experimental and control groups which is 8.6 and 5 respectively. The mean scores show that the experimental group is higher than that of the control group. This shows that the phonics method positively influences the vocabulary development of beginning readers.

Testing Hypotheses
Hypothesis 1: The phonics method has no significant effect on the reading fluency on beginning readers

Table 3: t-test Analysis of the Samples on the Effect of Phonics Teaching on the Beginning Readers
Data in Table 3 show that the analysis on the independent samples using t-test on critical value at 0.05 level of significance is 2.05. While the calculated value is 8.463. Since the critical value is less than the calculated value, the null hypothesis is rejected.  
**Hypothesis 2:** The phonics approach has no significant effect on the vocabulary development of beginning readers.

**Table 4:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-critical</th>
<th>Mean Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8.463</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>Ho, Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On Table 4, using the independent sample on t-test analysis, the critical t-value at 0.05 level of significance is 2.05 while the calculated value is 6.64. Therefore, since the critical value is less than the calculated value, the hypothesis is rejected.

**Discussion**

Summary for the analysis on Table 3 and 4 is that the calculated value for both tables is higher than the critical table value. Thus, the various hypotheses are rejected. Therefore, the phonics method has a significant influence on the reading fluency and vocabulary development of beginning readers.

The findings of this study are in line with the findings of Butcher (2003) who stated that the more children analyse, read and write the same words, the stronger their memory and faster their recognition of sounds and words which is the focus of the phonics method. In the same vein, the findings of the study agree with that of Christensen and Bowy (2005) who concluded in their study that children who are taught beginning reading through the phonics method are more fluent readers and they better comprehend than children who are taught literacy by the whole language methods. This justifies the fact that the experimental group in the study which was taught via the phonics method performed far better than the control group which was taught using the whole language methods.

**Conclusion**

Based on the study, it is discovered that poor performance and the downfall in the academic standard of the contemporary era is as a result of the continued use of the whole language methods to teach oracy skills to beginning readers. There is also a significant difference in the vocabulary and reading fluency of pupils taught using the phonics method and those taught using the whole language methods. In this regard, teachers should be conscious of the viability of every method they adopt in the class.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made in line with the findings of the study.

1. Teachers in the public service particularly language teachers should be trained through in-service so as to keep abreast of current methodologies of teaching beginning readers.
2. The primary school language curricular should be modified to incorporate the phonics method/approach when teaching pupils literacy.
3. Since the phonics method has a positive influence on the beginning reader’s oracy skills, it should further be integrated with the whole language methods so that pupil’s oracy skills will be developed holistically.

References


