

Effect of Differentiated Phonics Instructional Strategy on Primary School Pupil's Learning Outcomes in English Literacy Skills in Ikere - Ekiti

S. ALONGE, F.T. OBADARE, O.T OBATERU
College of Education Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract. The study examined the effect of differentiated phonics instructional strategy on primary school pupils' leaning outcomes in English literacy skills in Ikere Ekiti metropolis. One hundred and twenty (120) pupils were sampled and participated in English Language achievement test. The study adopted an experimental research design. The study revealed that differentiated phonics instructional strategy has an effect on pupils literacy skills, it was therefore recommended that effective use of differentiated phonics instructional strategy should be adopted in teaching and learning of literacy skills.

Keywords: Differentiated Phonics, Instructional Strategy

1. Introduction

The importance of acquisition of English Language Skills in the economic, political, academic and social lives of Nigerians cannot be overstressed. Besides being the recognized medium of communication in the administration of government business in a country with over four hundred indigenous Languages like Nigeria. English language is the medium for teaching and learning through which learners acquire knowledge and skills at all levels of education (FGN 2004 revised). To the average Nigeria, therefore, proficiency in English language skills especially in reading and writing in today's diverse society is the key to the

world's proof of knowledge and universal culture Mgbodile, (1999) and a gateway to success in the global economy Carl, (2003). However, in spite of the vital roles that the English language plays in Nigeria, most Nigerian pupils are unable to acquire proficiency in the skills of the English Language especially reading and writing which is literacy skill. The importance of children's early literacy development cannot be overstated. Children's success in school and later in life is a great extent dependent upon their ability to read and write. One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in an increasingly literate society is the level at which the child progress in reading and writing (NAEYC, 1998). The ability to read is one determinant of student's success or failure. Students must form the habit of reading to perform well in all subjects. Some primary school pupils find it difficult to read and understand due to their attitude to it despite the facts that reading is indispensable. Some show a carefree attitude towards reading. The problem is not peculiar to primary schools, but pertains to all categories of readers. Ajibola (2006) asked a fundamental question on what books Nigerians read. His questions included whether political office holders in the country read. It is clear from the tone of the question that he feels that reading is not part of the culture of the people that control Nigerian destiny.

Reading is the recognition of printed on written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall of meanings built up through the reader's past experience Adewole (2001). (Lawal, Adebola and Adebileye 2005) described reading as a process of translating alphabetical symbols into a form of Language from which the native speaker has already derived the meaning.

There are various factors militating against the effective teaching and learning of reading in primary schools. Oyetunde and Unoh (1986) listed various impediments to negative reading habits and attitude. These include lack of materials, poor preparation of teachers, lack of interest, poor libraries or none at all, home background, and lack of adults readers as model. They concluded that teachers of English language must take responsibility for solving these problems. The foregoing, points to the fact that reading skill, which is an important literacy skill of Nigerian Students, is poor. The situation with writing skill is not anything better.

Writing is a foundational to success in academics in the work place and in global economy. In an increasingly demanding world of, literacy, the importance of ensuring students proficiency in writing cannot be over emphasized. The ability to write well, hitherto a luxury is now a dire necessity (Gallagher, 2006). Writing is a vital to students' developing literacy skills. In the light of this, teaching learners to write well should be a top priority of a worthwhile education system.

Many reasons have been advanced for learners in ability to write but teacher related factors prominent among which is the methodology appear to be the most reverberating (Rog, 2007), Boscolo&Gelati, 2007, Muodumogu&Odey 2006; Uzoegwu 2005; Obi – okoye 2004) Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) explain that teachers do not teach writing skill well at primary schools because they do not know how to teach it. Writing, as a result, is the most neglected of language skills at this important level education and this has continued to have a disastrous effect on pupils' achievement as proficiency in writing is crucial to excellent in academics and in the work place. Teachers, therefore should take the teaching of writing seriously to enable the pupils to, master the fundamentals of effective writing

The conventional method of teaching has not given students much assistance and part of the reasons for this, according to Obi- Okoye (2004) is that writing is one of the skills that are not amenable to mere memorization of a set of rules because it calls for development and application of composite skills in the writing process until teachers start teaching pupils to see writing as a process of discovering, exploring ideas and constructing frameworks with which to present ideas, there will be little or no improvement in pupils writing.

From the various concepts, definitions research referred to about reading and writing skills, there is no gain saying the fact that the foundation to effective reading and writing start by building the culture from the primary education. This therefore informed the choice of this researcher to examine the effectiveness of explicit phonics instructional strategy for teaching these skills of reading and writing at the primary school level. Effective teaching of literacy skills should establish the connection between language skills, especially the reading and writing influence each other and when writing is used as a follow – up to reading; the relations between the two skills will create a synergy.

Therefore the use of learner-centred strategy which systematically combines language skills in the teaching of literacy has been suggested such strategy is differentiated phonics instructional strategy. Differentiated phonics instruction, according to Walpole and Mckenna (2007), is an instructional approach that targets a particular group of learners' needs directly and temporarily and helps learners to accomplish challenging tasks that are just out of their reach. In this case, the group is the ESL learners at primary school who have acquired the literacy skills of Yoruba Language which is their mother tongue.

Phonics is the teaching of the relationship between letters and sounds. The fact that a letter "t" (which is really just a symbol) signifies the first letter sounds in "train" track is an example of phonics instruction. This is second nature to adults, but children need to be taught this relationship. Differentiated instruction takes place when children are taught in relation to their ability rather than from one-size-fits all points of view, and it is therefore extremely

helpful for phonics as different students learn phonics at different rates.

Differentiated Phonics instruction benefits all students in the classroom and is vital for the struggling readers. Differentiating phonics instruction enables teachers to plan strategically so that they can meet the needs of both weaker and stranger students, Tyner (2004). Differentiation strategies applied to reading can be designed to help students learn a range of skills including phonics, comprehension, fluency, word predictions and story prediction.

Differentiated instruction also called differentiation, is a process through which teachers enhance learning by matching students characteristics to instruction and assessment. Differentiated instruction allows all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing entry points, learning tasks and outcomes that are tailored to students' needs (Hall, Stragman and Meyer, 2003). Differentiated instruction is not a single strategy but rather an approach to instruction that incorporates a variety of strategies.

When teacher differentiate, they do so in response to a student's readiness, interest and learning profile. Readiness refers to the skill level and background knowledge of the child, interest refers to topics that the student may want to explore or that will motivate the student. This can include interests relevant to the content area as well as outside interests of the student.

Finally, a student's learning profile includes learning style (i.e. a visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic learner). Grouping preferences (i.e. individual, small group or large group) and environmental preferences (i.e. lot of space or a quiet area to work). A teachers may differentiates based on anyone of these factors or any combination of factors (Tomlinson, 1999)

Similarly, Martin (2011) examined the effect of differentiated phonics instruction on literacy skills for EFL students and found that differentiated phonics instruction have a positive effect for EFL learners in literacy skills. However, most of these studies were conducted outside the shores of Nigeria and with EFL students as participants.

The scarcity of research works that are of Nigeria based and the fact that not much has been done to examine the effects of phonics

instruction on ESL learners are precise indicators of the urgent need of conducting more research to conclude whether differentiated phonics instruction is an important area to develop to strengthen ESL pupils' literacy skills in primary schools in Ikere Metropolis, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

Studies have shown that literacy skills which are the foundations of success in educational and career pursuits are not being properly taught in ESL classrooms especially at primary schools in Nigeria, the outcome of these are poor attitude to literacy skills and low literacy rates arising from wrong transfer of Linguistic elements from the pupils' mother tongue to the target language especially among pupils in the primary school system. Research efforts aimed at improving ESL pupils' literacy skills had examined the effects of different strategies for teaching, reading and writing,

As effective as the strategies were, they could not stem the tide of low literacy rates especially at primary schools. This is because most of the strategies adopted focused on direct teaching ignoring the phonics properties of the English Language, thus, there is the need to adopt strategies that will teach reading and writing through phonics instruction and differentiate the instruction to meet every learner's need. Such strategies are differentiated instructions.

3. Hypothesis

Based on the stated problems, the following null hypothesis will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀: There is no significant main effect of treatment on ESL pupil's achievement in literacy skills.

4. Methodology

The researchers adopted an experimental research design. The population consisted of ESL pupils in the fourth year of primary education from the selected primary schools in Ikere metropolis pupils in the fourth year were

considered for the study because this is a critical stage in primary education where English is taught as a school subject. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select four primary schools in Ikere metropolis. Two schools were randomly selected and assigned to experimental group. The sets of instrument were used for data collection. They are; Literacy Skills Achievement Test (LSAT) and Instructional Guide on Differentiated Phonics

Instructional Strategy (IGDIS). The instruments were trial-tested on a small sample of pupils drawn from two primary schools that shared similar characteristics with the target samples. The reliabilities of the three instruments were estimated using Cronbach Alpha to ensure internal consistency. The reliability coefficients obtained were TSRI = 0.88 and TEQ = 0.92. Data were analysed using Chi Square statistic.

5. Results

There is no significant effect of differentiated phonics instructional strategy on ESL pupils’ achievement in literacy skills.

O	E	o - e	o - e ²	(o - E) ² / E
1	6	1 5 . 1	0 . 9	0 . 0 5 3 6
2	4	2 2 . 5	1 . 8	0 . 1 4 6 0
6	1	0 . 6	- 4 . 6	2 1 . 1 6
8	3	7 8 . 1	- 4 . 9	2 4 . 0 1
2	8	3 1 . 1	- 3 . 1	9 . 6 1
1	1	. 9	- 0 . 9	0 . 8 1
1	2	. 8	- 1 . 8	3 . 2 4
6	1	. 4	4 . 6	2 1 . 1 6
5	9	. 9	- 4 . 9	2 4 . 0 1
7	4	0 3	0 9	2 4 1 . 8 5 2

The above table depicts that the calculated Chi Square of 24.19 was greater than Critical Chi Square of 5.99. This was significant at 95%. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, in other word, differentiated phonics instructional strategy had an effect on ESL pupils’ achievement in literacy skills.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

It was revealed from the analysis that the pupils that were taught with differentiated phonics instructional strategy performed excellently in ESL achievement test. This indicates that differentiated phonics instructional strategy had a positive relationship with the pupils learning outcome in English literacy skills in Ikere metropolis. This agreed with the submission of Martinez (2011) that differentiated phonics instruction had a positive effect on EFL learners in literacy skills.

The reason was as a result of the fact that the pupils that were exposed to differentiated phonics instructional strategy were from different educational, social and economic background.

Based on this finding, seminars and workshop should be organized where primary school teachers in Ekiti – State will be trained in differentiated phonics instructional strategy as method of teaching English Language Skills at the elementary schools.

This is expected to improve their teaching skills acquisition and eventually improve ESL pupils’ learning outcomes in literacy skills in particular and English Language in general.

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