Review

Jolly phonics instructional strategy: A panacea to reading difficulty in childhood education

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The quest for effective teaching of reading in pre-primary and primary schools have been a major concern for teachers of reading. This stemmed from the fact that the conventional method of teaching reading over the years such as whole method and alphabet method have not been able to address this issue on the effective teaching of reading. Therefore, this paper examined the efficacy of an instructional method of teaching reading called Jolly Phonics Instructional Strategy as a tool in the hand of teachers who teach reading in our pre-primary and primary schools.

Key words: Jolly phonics, reading, panacea, childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is fundamental in human learning. Ability to read is very crucial in the life of a school child because it forms a strong foundation for future academic achievement. As early as the middle years in the primary schools, the child spends much of his/her time reading in order to obtain meaningful information from printed texts. Pupils’ ability to reed helped them permeate all the school subjects in social sciences, humanities and science which enable them to acquire meaningful knowledge and become useful to themselves, family and the society at large (Onuigbo and Eze, 2009).

A good reader will automatically become a good writer as a result of vest 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 the individual can read with understanding and be able to apply knowledge gained to solve life problems (Ekpo, 1999).

Reading skills dictate performances in other discipline hence a good reader has a better opportunity for greater achievement. Ajibola (2006) posits that a reading habit is cultivated by individuals who are ready to give all to it. The skills acquire in reading can promote the acquisition of language skills like listening, speaking and writing. Reading activity is characterized by the translation of symbols, or letters, into words and sentences that make meaning to the individuals to evaluate it and use it for one’s needs. In order to read, one must follow a sequence of character arranged in a particular spatial order. For instance, English flows right to left and Hebrews from right to left. The reader must follow the pattern and use it consistently to make reading meaningful (Ecarta Premium, 2009).

In recognition of the importance of literacy skills, the National policy on education (2004) emphasized on the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy into the pupils. Hence, reading is a process through which a child’s cognitive development can be enhanced and a child becomes aware of events or happening outside his immediate environment through reading (Ikoh, 2004).

Reading transforms pupils into articulated citizens. Reading means conquering poverty, hunger and diseases and it cuts across various subjects.

Reading yields benefit in the lives of pupils, it develops critical thinking skills in pupils and enhances their ability to comprehend various concepts with immense ease. It also improves pupils vocabulary, command on the
language and communication skills thereby improving their writing skills. It helps people to know more about their environment by reading story books, newspapers and magazines which enable them to have wealth of experiences.

Our age is essentially an age of communication. Despite the phenomenal advances in communication made possible by electronics, printed page still remains supreme all over the world. Without it no higher education or interchange of serious professional knowledge is possible. Reading is therefore a prime necessity. It is essential to the existence of our complex system of social arrangement. Extensive reading is therefore required for the purpose of self-education for the development of general knowledge and for creation (Gbenedio, 1986).

On the whole, the goal of reading instruction in primary school includes:

i. To help pupils master English alphabets
ii. To help pupils master letter sounds
iii. To help pupils get new information
iv. To enrich pupils with life experiences
v. To expose pupils to information outside their immediate environment
vi. To help pupils acquire new skills thereby improving on their old skills.

The instructional strategy employed by a teacher in the teaching–learning process is of great importance to the pupils' readability level. This is because it helps the pupils to have a good understanding of the subject matter being taught by the teacher and it also motivates the pupils to learn and be actively involved in the learning process. Hence, in teaching, reading there are different instructional methods or strategies that could be employed such as

1. Jolly phonics instructional strategy and
2. Conventional methods – such as
   i. Whole method (look and say method)
   ii. Alphabet method.

A GENERAL BACKGROUND OF JOLLY PHONICS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY FOR TEACHING READING

The term Jolly means ‘fun’ and phonics refers to letter sounds use for reading. Jolly phonics means reading through play. Jolly phonics instructional strategy is a systematic and sequential phonics programme designed to teach children to read. Children are not just thought alphabet sounds but they learn the forty-two (42) sounds of the English Language which are produced from the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. In this instructional strategy children are taken through the stages of blending and segmenting of words to develop reading and writing skills (Ehir, Nunes, and Willows, 2001).

Jolly phonics instructional strategy is multisensory, active and designed to help children master letter sounds, discriminate sounds and blend sounds in spoken words hence they are able to read independently at an earlier then average age. The interaction premise behind jolly phonics makes it fun for kids (Bowey, 2006).

Sue and Sara (2009) stated that Jolly Phonics is a scheme which comes under Synthetic phonics method which has a suggested storyline, a picture to colour and a corresponding action. By performing an action for each sound, children are using kinesthetic auditory visual and speech to help them remember and master what they are taught. They further emphasized that jolly phonics has five basic skills for reading and writing, which include:

i. Learning the letter sounds
ii. Learning letter formation
iii. Blending (for reading)
iv. Identifying the sounds in words (for writing)
v. Tricky words.

These skills are learned in a fun and multisensory way in a jolly phonics class to help children have a good mastery of letter sounds and read fluently.

A GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONVENTIONAL METHODS OF TEACHING READING

Whole method (Look and say method)

This is an instructional method of teaching reading in which each word is taught as a whole. It is based on the recognition and pronunciation of the words without any attempt to teaching word analysis and synthesis (Ikoh, 2004). An example of a situation in which this method is used includes thus, if a teacher writes such word as ‘orange’ or ‘school’ on the chalkboard the children look at it and say it repeatedly by way of spelling until they master it. Hence, whole method of teaching reading involves memorization of the whole word.

Furthermore, Jolayemi (1997) stipulated that whole method of teaching reading involves picture word recognition, picture sentence reading and finally paragraph and passage reading with picture illustrations which are practiced repeatedly to ensure mastery. This method of teaching reading restricts children to words presented by the teacher and it subjects children mainly to memorization.

Alphabet method

This is referred to as the traditional method of teaching
reading which begins with the learning of the alphabet names and the recognition of the alphabet of the English language. It is an instructional method of teaching reading in which the children/learners combine the letters into syllables and finally into words. With this method children are gradually exposed to the learning of simple sentences which they practice repeatedly until they finally become independent readers (Obiri, 1983).

In alphabet method the children look at the word such as 'cat' and say 'see – ay- tee' spells 'cat'. This approach might work well if the spoken names of the letters were the same as the sounds of the word. Thus, the children taught using this method would have to figure out on their own that 'b' did not sound as 'bee' and 'c' did not sound as 'see'. Alphabet method of teaching reading emphasizes the recognition of words rather than the meaning the print conveys. This could make the children lose interest in reading when concentrating solely on letter recognition (Ikoh, 2008).

Base on the aforementioned discussion of Jolly Phonics Instructional Strategy and the Conventional methods of teaching reading one can vividly draw some contrast between these teaching strategies. The whole method of teaching reading has the disadvantage of instigating the children to memorize the words and sentences in an attempt to master them without a clue on how the words are formed or pronounced while the alphabet method has the disadvantage of laying emphasizes on the letter names which are not the same or which does not correspond with the sounds of the words.

However, Jolly Phonics Instructional strategy is out to fill the gap of the aforementioned conventional methods by helping the children to master the letter sounds, blend these sounds appropriately for reading in a fun way. Hence, the efficacy of Jolly Phonics instructional strategy in teaching reading cannot be ignored.

Furthermore, the fun nature of inculcating blending of sounds for reading ability in children using Jolly Phonics instructional strategy helps them (children) to increase their repertoire of words, read fluently and independently within a limited them.

THE PLACE OF TEACHER PREPARATION IN INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY EFFECTIVENESS

A teacher is a person who provides education for pupils and students. A good teacher is a candle-stick, consumes itself to light the way for others. A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. A teacher’s purpose is not to create pupils in his image but to develop pupils who can create their own image (Granai and Ali, 2013). Hence, adequate preparation should be given to teachers for quality delivery of instruction. Eliagwu (2002) affirmed that primary education is the foundation on which other educational system are built and wherever a foundation is shaky, the whole structure tends to crumble in the light of this, primary school teachers of reading should be exposed to the basic rudiments of reading instruction for effective and efficient productivity. These could be achieved when teachers are given intensive training on the effective and current instructional methods of teaching reading such as Jolly Phonics instructional strategy which will acquaint them with letter sounds, blending songs for reading, segmenting of sounds (for writing), blending songs, storytelling, picture recognition, tricky words, use of flash cards and other systematic activities for teaching reading with fun that can be incorporated into the reading lesson for variety making them competent teachers of reading.

In the same vein, Ekpo (1999) highlighted the fact that children’s home and learning environment are vital in the children’s developmental process. Looking at the Nigeria Educational scene where English being the second language is not frequently used in most homes, reading and speaking English becomes a serious handicap. Thus, teachers need to adopt effective strategies to enable learners acquire good reading delete skills.

Udosen and Ukpak (2005) stressed that it is very important for teachers of reading to be given adequate training on how to adopt effective approaches to teaching reading since most pupils come to school without any slight reading readiness for school environment. Hence, adequate preparation of teachers of reading will equip them with the skill of reading readiness to develop the willingness and interest in the pupils which will help them to engage in any reading task successfully.

IMPLICATION

The implication of teacher preparation for the teaching of reading using Jolly phonics instructional strategy is that the strategy is capable of improving teachers’ ability to deliver quality reading instruction by exposing them to appropriate approaches in the teaching of reading to create variation in the teaching learning process due to the multisensory nature of Jolly phonics instructional strategy. Thus, equipping them with letter sounds, blending skills, blending songs, storytelling, flash cards, card games, story club and tricky words wall flowers which can be incorporated into their reading lessons for variety to generate interest thereby making them competent teachers of reading.

CURRICULUM CHANGE

At the beginning of any human organization or institution there are always laid down rules, policies and laws that guide the running of such system. Similarly, there are persons in such organizations and institutions who are
beneficiaries of such policies, rules and regulations. In this context, the organization represents the schools while the policies and regulations form the curriculum and the beneficiaries are the pupils.

Many scholars of curriculum development have given various definitions of curriculum. Brenam (1985) and Wornock (1978) in Okuoyibo (2009) defined curriculum as experiences, activities and programmes designed and used by schools to attain the objectives, aims and goals of education as a whole. In the same vein Wirtz (1977) described curriculum as "a guide for instructional process including content, material necessary to carry on the programme, and the methodology of getting across activity." Based on Wirtz definition of curriculum; one could vividly say that curriculum change involves a careful observation of the existing curriculum, the materials and equipment used in executing the curriculum and the teaching methodology applied in conveying the knowledge to the learners so as to change or modify it where necessary with the aim of making it more meaningful to the pupils especially those with reading problem. Considering the aforementioned definitions of curriculum it can be deduced that the central theme/focus of the curriculum is to meet the development, intellectual and academic needs of the child/pupil for whom it is designed; thereby meeting the needs and expectation of the society. The aching questions now is; does the existing English Language curricula used in primary schools and early childhood classes meet the reading need and learning styles of the pupils?

The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that primary education is education given in an institution for children aged normally six to eleven plus. They defined "Early Childhood Education as the Education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche the nursery and the kindergarten." To this effect, one of the objectives of primary and early childhood education in Nigeria as highlighted in the (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) is the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. More so, to teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, form etc through play.

The pre-primary and primary levels of education lay the foundation on which the rest of the education system is built upon. Thus, they are the keys to the success or failure of the whole system. Consequently, since the curriculum serves as a guide directing the way and manner all school activities are conducted deliberate effort should be made by curriculum planners to modify or change the existing English Language curriculum of these levels of education since it stresses on the prescribed course materials recommended for the school (Text books), completion of lessons/assignment at a given period and encourages learning through drill. Thus, such curriculum that lacks provision for adequate and appropriate teaching materials and methods will not improve pupils' reading ability. Hence, learners are to be provided with the right kind of learning experience (curriculum) to enhance their acquisition of literacy skills through play so as to make them competent readers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

The term management in this context can be referred to as "directing people and materials to work unanimously towards the achievement of the pre-determined organizational goals (Nwadiani, 1998). Thus, classroom management and control could be seen as the ability of the teacher to organize, directs, control and co-ordinate the pupils in the class to maintain silence and orderliness in the teaching learning process so as to achieve the pre-stated objectives of the lesson.

The successful management of early childhood or primary school classes depends to a large extend upon the quantity, quality and the devotion of the teachers who play a major role in the education processes. Thus, the most important single element in the educative process of the pupils is the teacher who is charged with the task of effecting desirable changes in the pupils in the classroom (Akpan, 2004).

In the same vein, the national policy on Education (2004) posits that "for effective teaching and learning in primary school the teacher- pupil ratio shall be 1:35. Likewise, to regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25. Consequently, in the actual application of these policy statement in our existing public primary and pre-primary schools, one could say that these guidelines are not strictly adhered to because our public primary school classes are over populated having the teacher – pupils ratio of 1:50 while our public pre-primary classes have teacher – pupils ratio 1:35. These do not create room for effective classroom management. Thus, making teaching of reading difficult for the teachers.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Instructional materials refer to those teaching – aids necessary in the teaching – learning process used by the teachers to concretize or virtualized the lesson for a better understanding of the subject matter by the pupils. This is because pupils' learn and understand better what they can see, touch, feel and interact with, which helps them to remember the subject matter easily.

Instructional materials are extremely necessary when teaching reading in pre-pre-primary and primary schools. This is because it will help to stimulate ideas, motivate the pupils to be actively involved in the reading lesson and make reading fun; which is the major focus of Jolly
Phonics instructional strategy. Reading lesson taught with such instructional materials as colorful pictures, flash cards, posters, card games, cartoon collection, coupled with actions and blending songs will be so captivating to the pupils thus making the lesson lively and comprehensive to the pupils. Broom, (1973) pointed out that the availability and creative use of instructional materials make pupils learn more and retain better what they learn. This in turn improves their academic performances.

Reading in our pre-primary and primary schools today is taught abstractly to the children. Hence, they are subjected to drilling and memorization which make the teaching – learning process boring and uninteresting to pupils resulting to poor academic performances.

RESOURCES

Resources in this context refer to those materials that can be used to help achieve an aim so as to provide the necessary information teachers and pupils need, Horby (2000). Thus, Idu, (2004) suggest that since teachers are the direct implementation agents, remarkable improvement in their condition of service should be provided such as in-services training scheme, granting of special salary as well as ensuring steady workshop/conferences to update their knowledge.

In the same vein, Ajasa and Adeniran (2009) posit that training and re-training exercises given to teachers in the form of conferences and workshops on instructional methods can effectively arouse teacher’s interest and increase good quality of their presentation of subject matter to the pupils thereby making them competent teachers of reading. This corresponds with the view of Ogbemudia and Alasa (2013) stated that adequate provision of resources in the form of stationeries are necessary in the teaching of English Language in primary schools to improve teacher’s quality of instructional delivery especially in terms of teaching reading.

CONCLUSION

The success of teaching depends greatly on the teacher and the teaching methodology he employed in the teaching – learning process. Thus, it will be most appropriate for the teachers of reading in early childhood and primary schools to adopt jolly phonics instructional strategy in teaching reading which a panacea to reading difficulty is.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations can help to instill the efficacy of the use of Jolly Phonics Instructional Strategy in the teaching of reading in childhood education.

1. Jolly Phonics Instructional Strategy should be incorporated into the English Language curriculum of pre-primary and primary school pupils and into their school time tables for effective implementation.
2. Workshops/conferences should be conducted or organized by the government for pre-primary and primary teachers teaching reading to acquaint them with the strategy so as to become competent teachers of reading.
3. Instructional materials for teaching reading should be provided by the government for the effective implementation of the strategy, and teachers should also be well motivated.
4. Jolly phonics instructional strategy should also be incorporated into the curriculum of teacher training institutions, especially, in the curriculum of teachers under taking training to teach reading in pre-primary and primary schools to enable them become competent teachers of reading in future.

REFERENCES

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