

EFFECT OF LETTER FORMATION TEACHING TECHNIQUE IN JOLLY PHONICS INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL ON BASIC ONE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN READING SKILLS IN NORTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of letter formation teaching technique in jolly phonics instructional model on basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills in north-west, Nigeria. The study was guided by one objective and its corresponding research question and hypothesis. The study employed a quasi-experimental research design with pre-test, treatment and post-test. The population of the study comprised 12,512,000 basic one learners in public primary schools in north-west, Nigeria. 129 basic one learners from two intact classes were selected as sample. Two schools were selected as experimental and control groups respectively. The experimental group was taught reading skills using letter formation teaching technique while, the control group was taught the same content using the sight word technique. Basic One Learners' Academic Performance Test (BOLAPT) was used as the instrument for data collection. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.872. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while, independent sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that, basic one learners taught reading skills using letter formation teaching technique performed significantly better than those taught using sight word technique. The study concluded that letter formation technique enhances basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills than the sight word technique. The study recommended that teachers at the basic education level should utilize the letter formation technique in teaching reading skills.

Keywords: Letter Formation, Teaching Technique, Academic Performance, Reading Skills.

Introduction

It is an established truism that basic education level is the stage at which proper foundation is established for the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Learners at the basic education level spend time on recognition of objects within and around their environment. At the early basic school stage, the learner is not only expected to recognize these objects but should be able to read the names of the objects at home and classroom (Rose & Christiana, 2018). The need for learners at the basic education level to have acquired skills in mastering the letters of the alphabet with accurate pronunciations, word formation, reading and writing are paramount to a solid foundation of learning not only in the language, but also all other fields of study.

There are a number of models and techniques used to render instruction at basic one education level, one of which is jolly phonics instructional model. The term jolly means 'fun' and phonics refers to letter sounds of the alphabets. Jolly phonics simply means learning alphabets through play and sounds. Jolly phonics instructional model is a systematic and sequential phonics program designed to teach children to read and write (Ogbemudia & Alasa, 2023). Jolly phonics is a fun and child centered approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics. With funny actions in the pronunciation of each of the 42 letter sounds, this multi-sensory method is very motivating for learners and teachers who wish to see their learners' improvement in fluency and the overall academic achievement. The sounds are taught in a certain special order (/s/, /a/,/t/,/p/,/i/,/n/) and not alphabetically.

Jolly phonics instructional model appeals to the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing which form the cornerstone in language mastery and fluency (Eshiet, 2023). In Jolly phonics instructional model, learners are trained to pronounce and read letters of the alphabets in a more practical way reflecting the peculiarities of each sound (/a/,/b/,/t/,/d/,/k/,/g/) rather than the traditional means of teaching the letter alphabets termed as 'sight-word' technique. In the traditional sight-word technique, instruction is rendered by reading letter names inform of "a,b,c,d,e" and relating the letters with an object such as: 'a' for apple; 'b' for ball; 'c' for cup; 'd' for dog and 'e' for egg, respectively. Contrary to the sight-word technique used in the traditional classrooms for teaching letters of alphabet, jolly phonics instructional model employ letter formation technique among others (Eshiet, 2023).

This instructional model is usually supplemented by a number of teaching techniques in instructional delivery for stimulating attention, motivating active participation and enhancing excellence in pronunciation, reading and writing. The need to improve literacy coupled with the desire to promote quality of teaching and learning in Nigeria's basic education level, has called for a pragmatic approach to adoption and utilization of contemporary instructional strategies that could help in translation and application of learning experiences. One of such instructional technique is letter formation which aimed at improving learners' skills in the acquisition of appropriate skills in reading.

Letter formation instructional technique involves teaching learners how to read letters of alphabets accurately while associating them with their corresponding sounds. It emphasizes multisensory learning, ensuring learners engage with the process visually, kinesthetically, and auditory to reinforce understanding and precision in reading and writing (Lloyd, 2021). As learners practice writing letters of alphabets, they simultaneously pronounce the associated sounds. This simultaneous action strengthens the connection between phonemes and graphemes, fostering early literacy skills (Brown, 2019). In this process, consistent practice is encouraged to help learner gain confidence and fluency in reading writing. Activities like reading on whiteboards or worksheets reinforces proper formation (Lloyd, 2021). On the other hand, teachers provide immediate feedback to guide a learner in correcting pronunciation

mistakes and mastering letter formation strategies. Hence, positive reinforcement plays a crucial role in this process (Clark, 2020).

Letter formation technique serve as a range of assessment tools to help teachers monitor learners' progress and teachers assess their ability to identify and sound out phonemes, decodable text assessment. Teachers assess learners' ability to read decodable texts. Jolly Phonics has a range of benefits for learners, including improved phonics skills. Learners develop a strong understanding of phonemes and phonics skills. Improved reading skills as learners become confident and fluent readers, improved writing skills and learners develop the ability to write phonemically regular words. Increased more confidence in learners to become more confident in their ability to read and write.

Moreover, jolly phonics is a comprehensive and systematic program for teaching phonics and literacy skills. The program has a range of benefits for learners, including improved phonics skills, improved reading skills, improved writing skills, improved listening skills and confidence. The jolly phonics program has a significant relationship with learner academic performance, particularly in reading skills. Jolly phonics can impact learner academic performance positively. Jolly phonics helps learners develop phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words. This skill is essential for reading. Increased decoding skills jolly phonics teaches learners to decode words by sounding out individual phonemes. This skill helps learners to read with more accuracy and fluency unlike those teach in traditional method. For a better comprehension, learners become more confident in their reading skills. They are able to focus more on comprehension and understanding the meaning of texts. Jolly phonics helps learners develop phonemic awareness and decoding skills, which are essential for spelling and speaking.

Improved confidence in letter formation technique helps learners develop a strong foundation in reading skills which can lead to increased academic excellence. Research has shown that learners who receive instruction through letter formation tend to perform better academically than those who do not receive such instruction. In line with this assertion, a number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of letter formation technique in improving reading skills and overall academic performance (Cabel & Sonia, 2023, Adamu, 2024 & Ibrahim, 2025). Letter formation technique can help reduce the academic achievement gap of learners from different socio-economic backgrounds, as it provides a systematic and explicit approach to learning reading skills (James, 2025). Furthermore, a study by Olubinmi (2024) revealed that letter formation instructional strategy was effective in improving reading skills in learners in the early years of basic school. To sum it up, these research evidences suggests that letter formation instructional technique is highly effective for teaching reading skills and have a positive impact on basic learners' overall academic performance.

On the other hand, sight word is considered as the conventional technique used in teaching reading. It is an instructional technique that attach reading of letters of alphabets to objects. This technique could not only be boring and time consuming, but also misleading in

pronunciation of the letter sound and the objects attached to the alphabets (Kingsley, 2023). The sight word tend to make learners encored the letter symbol and sign, not the sound; and this type of instruction make it double tasking to comprehend the letter name and later to comprehend the letter sound.

An essential requirement for quality education can be reflected in academic performance of learners. Academic performance help revealed the effectiveness of instructional strategy which could be evident in the improvement in learners' acquisition of learning experiences. The notion of academic performance according to Sardiman (2022) is the realization of learning outcomes that have been achieved by learners in the process of imparting learning experiences. In a nut-shell, academic performance represents a set of strategies for the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, values and activities through tasks that are meaningful and engaging to learners. Teachers can therefore determine the extent to which learners acquire relevant curriculum content by assessing their academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

Literacy, that is, the ability to read and write is one of the major problems bedeviling the Nigeria's education system especially at the basic education level (Ibrahim, 2025). Learners at basic education level spend much of their time in objects recognition within and outside the learning environment. This technique became double tasking on the learners. It is difficult and time consuming for them to integrate, comprehend the letter symbol and letter sound. Similarly, the strategy applied in teaching at basic level resulted to a situation where many learners may not be able to form, spell, read simple word and sentence within the time frame (Awwal & Anas, 2022). It is therefore important to identify the technique that will best be used to enhance learners' words formation and reading skills which in the final analysis lead to improvement in academic performance especially on basic one learners. The problem of this study is therefore to determine the effect of letter formation instructional technique in enhancing basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by the objective, to:

1. Find out the effect of letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model on basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills against the sight-word technique in North-west, Nigeria.

Research Question

The study answered the following question:

1. What is the effect of letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model on basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills against the sight-word technique in North-west, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

HO₁: There is no significant difference in basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills when taught using letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model and those taught using sight-word technique in North-west, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed quasi experimental research design with pre-test, treatment and post-test. Two primary schools were selected and assigned as experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught reading skills using letter formation technique while, the control group was taught the same content using the sight word technique. The population of the study comprised 12,512,000 basic one learners in public primary schools in north-west, Nigeria. 129 basic one learners from two intact classes were selected as sample. Basic One Learners' Academic Performance Test (BOLAPT) was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument contained thirty two items and was validated by experts in English language education, curriculum and instruction and educational measurement and evaluation. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.872. At the initial stage, a pre-test was administered to both groups to ascertain the entry behavior of the participants. After six weeks of treatment, a post-test was also administered. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while, independent sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question: What is the effect of letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model on basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills against the sight-word technique in north-west, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of students' performance taught reading skills using letter formation and sight word

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Diff.
Experimental	67	56.76	3.33	25.71
Control	62	31.05	3.71	

Table 1 revealed that there is a statistical difference in the mean score and standard deviation between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group has mean score of 56.76 and the standard deviation of 3.33 while the control group has mean score of 31.05 and the standard deviation of 3.71. A mean difference of 25.71 was calculated in favor of the experimental group. This finding implies that basic one learners taught reading skills using letter formation technique performed better than those taught using sight word technique.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills when taught using letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model and those taught using sight-word technique in north-west, Nigeria.

Table 2: t-test analysis of students' performance taught reading skills using letter formation technique and sight word

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t- cal	t-crit	p-value
Experimental	67	56.76	3.33	127	30.89	2.18	0.000
Control	62	31.05	3.71				

Table 2 displayed the t-test analysis of significant difference in students' performance in the experimental and control groups. Result of the analysis indicated that the P-value= 0.000 is less than the alpha 0.05. The t-calculated 30.89 is greater than the t-critical 2.18 at degree of freedom of 127. The hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills when taught using letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model and those taught using sight-word technique in north-west, Nigeria is rejected. The result revealed that the treatment using letter formation technique has effect on students' performance. $P\text{-value}=0.000 < \alpha=0.05$.

Discussion of Findings

Finding on specific objective, research question and hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills when taught using letter formation technique in jolly phonics instructional model and those taught using sight-word technique in north-west, Nigeria. The difference is in favor of the basic one learners taught using letter formation technique. $P\text{-value}=0.000 < \alpha=0.05$. This finding agreed with the findings of Mustapha (2019), Richard and Dondon (2023) that letter formation enhances learners' academic performance in reading skills. The findings of this study is also in line with that of Giovianna and Kamariah (2023) which revealed that the letter formation groups' reading proficiency score was higher after the intervention than before the technique was implemented. At the same time, the control group had the lowest score before and after the intervention. It gives students an appreciation, spirit of learning and expressive skills.

In a similar finding, Jane (2018) revealed that letter formation technique in jolly phonics is effective in helping preschool students improve their mastery of reading and writing skills in English subjects. The findings of this study also show that teaching English using the letter formation technique in jolly phonics model is practical and appropriate for the age and development of preschool children. The use of letter formation has positive implications for students, teachers, parents and guardians. Contrary to this, in sight word technique, learners rarely engage in to any meaningful learning activity that will stimulate and promote mastery and fluency in reading (Jane, 2018; Mustapha, 2019; Richard & Dondon, 2023; Giovianna & Kamariah, 2023).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that letter formation teaching technique enhances basic one learners' academic performance in reading skills than the sight word technique. Letter formation technique promotes basic one learners confidence and fluency in reading.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and the conclusion drawn, the study recommended that:

1. Teachers of English at the basic education level should employ letter formation technique in teaching reading skills as it was proved to be effective in enhancing basic one learners' reading fluency.

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