

Teacher-Awareness and Utilisation of Phonics in Teaching Reading at Primary Schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Ibadan Nigeria

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Abstract

Essential as the reading skill is for academic and over-all development, many pupils in Nigeria primary schools have difficulty reading in English. Literature links this with teacher use of obsolete methods and strategies among other factors. Phonics, a proven method in curbing reading difficulty globally is incorporated in Nigerian English Studies Curriculum but it is doubtful if teachers utilise this method. Previous studies have mainly been empirical. A dearth of literature on teacher awareness and utilisation of phonics therefore necessitated the present enquiry.

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Twenty-two public primary schools were randomly selected in Ibadan North Local Government and teachers of English at the lower primary schools were purposively selected. A total of 32 teachers were used for the study. Teachers Awareness Questionnaire on Phonics (TAQP), ($r = .75$) Teacher Utilisation of Phonics Rating Scale (TUPRS) ($r = .99$) were used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

Findings revealed that junior public primary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government do not possess adequate knowledge to impact pupils reading ability. Hence the need for regular teacher-in-service training and the inclusion of phonological awareness in the pre-teachers Studies Curricula.

Key words: Teacher-Awareness, Teacher-Utilisation, Phonics Method, Teaching of Reading.

Introduction

Reading has been acknowledged as central in the academic life of learners, especially because it is usually the first to be taught of the four language skills. The teaching of reading in English as a theme in Nigerian primary schools English Studies Curriculum is categorized into: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension, Vocabulary Acquisition and Concepts of Prints. These five components of reading are sequentially recommended as constituting the best way of teaching reading. (United States National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000; Duane, 2005), with phonemic awareness and phonics instruction being the two best indicators of success in reading (Adams, 1990, The NRP 2000). The curriculum therefore prioritises phonics as a segment to facilitate the teaching of reading.

Reading can be seen as involvement with a written text by individual(s). Scholars however, usually have different aspects of emphasis. Smith, (1973) and Brunan, (1989) view reading as a medium of sharing information. William, 1 (1984) and the RAND Reading Group (2002) focus on comprehension of the read text. Miligede and Blyte, (2019) center on reading as associating printed words with speech sounds. Rohani, (1992) states reading as a very individual activity done

primarily in silent. However, Gabrielatos, (2002) justifies reading as an act that could be done aloud and in group - a technique used by pupils in English language teaching classroom, particularly useful at the initial stages of reading programmes to help children match sounds with symbols of written language, raise awareness of, and provide practice in certain phonological aspects of English as well as to simplify the production of spontaneous speech and communication.

The different views on reading necessitates differentiating between *learning to read* and *reading to learn*. Learning to read involves guiding learners to get the rudimentary aspects of word production. This is usually done at the lower levels of education (kindergarten to grade 3) and consists mainly of decoding and memorizing basic words. Reading to learn however, begins from grade 4 and involves reading for information and comprehension (<https://www.educationcorner.com/learning-to-read-to-read-to-learn.html>); (Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun, and Ogundipe, 2011). Learning to read is the focus of the present study. Izuabga, Afurobi, Nwigwe and Okonkwo, (2016) concur that the letter sounds are more important at this initial stage than the letter symbols which become necessary at the writing stage.

Reading is crucial in a second/ foreign language setting because learners usually perform at a higher level in it than other skills. They can fairly understand written materials which they may not be able to discuss orally or in writing with equivalent accuracy. Equally, reading has minimal requirements (just a text and motivation); compared with speaking which requires contact with a sparring partner, or writing which needs much guidance and practice time (Pardede, 2008). Reading in English is particularly significant as a language skill, a tool subject in school for academic success and for effective global communication. (Fakeye, 2014; Ezeokoli and Fasan (2013); Ekpo, Udosen, Afangideh, Ekukinam, and Ikorok, 2012). Eshiet, 2014; Kolawole, 2009). Teaching of reading should therefore be prioritised right from the primary school in line with Harrison's (2004) stance that the moral duty to read mandates teachers' moral right to teach reading.

The alphabetic, language experience, whole word, and phonics method can be employed in teaching reading. The alphabetic (ABC) method where pupils are taught to recognize and name the letters of the alphabets (upper and lower cases) is the conventional method in Nigerian public schools. The pupils are also taught to form words by spelling out individual letters; memorize these words and then learn to recognize them by sight. Systematic or explicit phonics is however recommended as effective and best for teaching to read at a very early age under a variety of teaching conditions with different learners, including children having difficulty in reading (Chall and Popp, 1996; Burgess, 2006; Bowey, 2007; Treiman and Kessler, 2013). Phonemic awareness significantly improves children's reading more than instruction without attention to it. This is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using letters of the alphabet and when instruction is focused on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation at a time. The early reading success of children in the kindergarten and first grades indicate that phonics instruction should be implemented at these grades and age levels (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazines-18493436>; NRP, 2000).

In phonics instruction, words are broken into the smallest sound units (phonemes). Learners

are taught letters (graphemes) that represent these phonemes and how to blend them into words. They are then taught to read the letter sounds in a word, for instance s-a-t, and merge them to pronounce the word 'sat'. Beginning with single sounds, as /s/ in the word 'sat', the children are gradually taught about 42 phonic sounds, including the combination of letters called digraphs (such as ck, th, ai and ue) used to represent each sound (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01411920802268912>). The four main aspects usually taught and tested in systematic phonics are: *sounds identification in isolation*, *blending* (joining the letter sounds); *segmenting* (Identifying the sounds in words), *decoding* (manipulating sounds in word). A fifth step which may be added involves the use of *Tricky words*. This last step is usually taught when children are already familiar with a lot of sight words. (<https://wwwstudy.com/academy/lesso/using-the-phonics-approach-to-reading-instruction.html>).

Phonics method allows pupils to explore multiple senses in learning and so gives room for the development of multiple intelligence such as the linguistic, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, Intra-personal, and naturalistic Intelligence (Gardner, 1999, Izuagba, et al 2016). Kinesthetic, is employed in jolly phonics by the use of sing-alongs and dance. Storytelling is also a technique used in phonics instruction. Nonetheless, educators' recognition of learners with varying learning styles has necessitated the adoption of a 'balanced' or "integrated" approach to phonics instruction. A combination of methods, is claimed to make for the best of any reading programme (NRP Report, 2000). In essence, Phonics is complemented with other methods which emphasize the whole word to take care of the many common irregularly spelt words which are not phonetic.

In spite of the inclusion of phonics in the Nigerian English Curriculum; school teachers reports, outside school occurrences, and literature, all attest that many pupils have difficulty reading in English. - a good number of whom are unable to read or write in English at the beginning of the fourth year in school when English is stipulated to be the language of instruction (Odeniyi and Folorunso, 2017, Eshiet, 2014). Reading difficulty could sometimes graduate into learning difficulty

and results to poor academic performance and even dropping out of school (Smith, 2008, Good, Simmons and Smith, 1998) or inability to read even after primary school (CEO Universal Learning Solution (ULS) 2018). Also a recent World Bank report has it that only 25% of young Nigerian adults who have completed primary school can read for comprehension (<https://leadersipp.ng/2018/10/14/enhancing-literacy-through-jolly-phonics>). Validating this position, Kolawole, (2009) states that the problems affecting reading at the secondary school were a carry-over from the lower level of education. Similarly, recent statistics from National Commission for Mass Literacy, indicate that four in ten primary school children cannot read for comprehension (Akinfewa, 2019) in line with Odeniyi and Folorunso, (2017) whose study among primary school pupils in Abuja, revealed that just 20% of primary five pupils in public schools could read fluently. It therefore can be logically deduced, that the decline in literacy within Nigeria, has a strong link with poor reading skill.

Causes of reading difficulty identified in literature include: learner factors such as lack of interest or low attitude to reading (Akinfenwa, 2019); family background and parental influence, (Fakeye, 2014); non-availability of reading texts (Kolawole, 2009; Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun and Ogundipe, 2011; Araromi and Olatunbosun, 2018;) as well as school related and teacher factors (Kolawole, 2009; Eshiet, 2014; Izuagba et al 2016) among others. The literature strongly points out the teacher-factor: Kolawole, (2009:388) found that a majority of teachers of reading failed to give students the necessary motivation to strengthen their interest in reading. Fakeye, (2014:281) ruled out parenting style as a factor that may affect pupils reading ability but urged teachers to concentrate on other factors. Eshiet, (2014) states that lack of requisite training for teachers and methods employed by these teachers are reasons for pupils' decline in literacy and failure in English. Likewise, Izuagba et al (2016), uphold that most Nigerian primary teaching the languages (English and/or the Mother Tongue) are usually non-specialists and so not equipped to teach initial reading. These teacher-related claims inform the focus of the present study.

On the use of phonics in teaching reading, Eshiet (2014) asserts that there are gaps to be filled in the arrangement of topics in the English language Curriculum as regards teaching *of reading* and its relationship with *the knowledge of sounds*. Eshiet, states that the curriculum appears to recognize the importance of the knowledge of sounds but laid no foundation for its learning. It also alludes to the whole-word method without any systematic plan of teaching, using the method. Hence the scholar's submission that lack of adequate guidance for teachers is an existing problem to the effective teaching of reading in line with Izuagba et al (2016). The preceding literature position necessitated investigating if teachers actually utilise phonics in classroom instruction. However, the ability to utilise phonics depends on teachers awareness of how the method works. Awareness of policies has been identified as the back bone of utilisation and productivity level of any programme (Olumorin, 2008). A teacher ignorant of teaching strategies will neither attempt to use them nor use them correctly and sufficiently (Gbadamosi, 2015). It is therefore not enough to include a method in the curriculum, but more importantly to ensure that teachers who should implement it are well grounded and guided in its usage so as to attain desired results.

Teachers of reading ought to be aware of the underlying principles that directly affect the total outcome of efforts so as not to make learning programmes ineffective as a result of lack of understanding or belief in what they are expected to do. They must also be thoroughly trained to feel comfortable with any new approach (Stahl, Duffy-Hester and Stahl, 1998). Equally, teachers who are to embark on the teaching of phonemic and phonological awareness or structural analysis of words must have the belief in the feasibility of the system impacting learning. McGuinness, (1997).

Statement of the Problem

Reading is an important skill to be learnt in English language and a pre-requisite for learning other subjects and succeeding in the global society. However, many pupils at the lower primary school have difficulty reading in English and consider it a dreadful task. Poor performance by pupils in examinations that require the test of English has also been connected with inability to read. Reading

difficulty and low literacy in pupils have been linked to teacher incompetence and use of ineffective methods in the teaching. Previous studies on overcoming reading difficulty with phonics have mostly been experimental in nature. There is however a dearth of literature on whether teachers are adequately aware and utilise the phonics in classroom teaching. This study therefore in an attempt to fill the existing gap, made enquiry into primary school teachers' awareness of phonics method and their utilisation of it in classroom teaching within Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo state.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research work.

1. Are teachers' aware of the phonics method in teaching reading?
2. What is the rating of teachers' utilisation of phonics method in teaching reading?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive **research** design since the study aimed at reporting already existing phenomena without manipulating any variable. The population for this study comprised all public school teachers of English Studies at the lower primary school level in Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State. The focus was on teachers in primary 1-3 classes in twenty-two public schools within Ibadan North Local Government, Oyo State. Forty-two teachers completed the questionnaire but only thirty-two obliged for observation during teaching in class. Hence thirty-two were used for the study. Two research instruments: Questionnaire on Teachers' Awareness of Phonics Method ($r = .75$) and Rating Scale on Teachers' Use of Phonics Method ($r = .99$) were used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviation).

Results and Discussion of Findings Research Question 1: Are teachers aware of the phonics method?

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of Phonics Methods in Ibadan North L.G.A

S/N	In using the phonics method, pupils learn to read by:	Expected Response	Response of Teachers		
			Yes	No	Not sure
1	Learning to recognize and name the letters of the alphabets first; after which, they learn to form words by spelling and combining the letters.	No	32 (100%)	-	-
2	Matching words with pictures that represent those words.	No	31 (96.9%)	1 (3.1%)	
3	Showing them the words first, making them pronounce each word and by analyzing words at the initial, middle and final positions.	Yes	27 (87.1%)	4 (12.9%)	-
4	Learning the sounds of each letter of the alphabet and then blending these sounds to form words	Yes	28 (90.3%)	3 (9.7%)	-
5	Interacting with pupils individually to find out the words they already are familiar with and using these words to teach them	No	26 (86.7%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (6.7%)
6	Looking at words written out on paper cards and saying the letters repeatedly.	No	27 (84.4%)	4 (12.5%)	1 (3.1%)
7	Using the onset and rime principle.	Yes	23 (76.7%)	3 (10.0%)	4 (13.3%)
8	Teaching pupils phonological awareness of phonemes first	Yes	25 (80.6%)	4 (12.9%)	2 (6.5%)
9	Teaching the pupils the connection between the alphabetic letters and sounds.	Yes	31 (96.9%)	1 (3.1%)	-
10	Assisting pupils identify and label the symbols of the alphabet correctly.	No	27 (90.0%)	3 (10.0%)	-
11	Teaching pupils to pay more attention to words at first than to letters.	No	24 (75.0%)	7 (21.9%)	1 (3.1%)
12	Using just words pupils are familiar to form sentences.	No	18 (56.3%)	12 (37.5%)	2 (6.2%)
13	Pupils learn faster when they look at a word and say it.	No	26 (81.3%)	3 (9.4%)	9 (9.3%)
14	It is better to teach pupils long vowels before short vowels.	No	15 (46.9%)	12 (37.6%)	5 (15.6%)
15	It is better to teach pupils vowel letter sounds before consonant letter sounds.	No	30 (93.8%)	2 (6.3%)	-

Table 1 shows the teachers' awareness of the phonics method in the teaching of reading. This is expressed by the percentages of teachers that said Yes or No to each item against the expected response to each item. The table shows that all (100%) the teachers said yes to item 1 which is against the expected response. This implies that the teachers were not aware that in using the phonics method pupils do not learn to read by learning to recognize and name the letters of the alphabets first; after which, they learn to form words by spelling and combining the letters. Majority (96.9%) of the teachers said yes to item 2 which is against the expected response. This implies that majority of the teachers were not aware that in using the phonics method pupils do not learn to read by matching words with pictures that represent those words. Majority of the teachers said yes to items 3 (87.1%) and 4 (90.3%) which is the exact expected response. This implies that the majority of the teachers were aware that in using the phonics method pupils can learn to read by showing them the words first, making them pronounce each word and by analyzing words at the initial, middle and final positions and that pupils learn to read by learning the sounds of each alphabet and then blending these sounds to form words.

Majority (86.7%) of the teachers said yes to item 5 which is against the expected response, hence, the majority of the teachers were not aware that in using the phonics method pupils do not learn to read by individual interactions with pupils to find out the words they already are familiar with and using these words to teach them. Majority (84.4%) of the teachers said yes to item 6 which is against the expected response, hence, the majority of the teachers were not aware that in using the phonics method pupils do not learn to read by

looking at words written out on paper cards and saying the letters repeatedly. Majority of the teachers said yes to item 7 (76.7%), item 8 (80.6%) and item 9 (96.9%) which is the exact expected response. This implies that the majority of the teachers were aware that in using the phonics method pupils learn to read by using the onset and rime principle, teaching pupils phonological awareness of phonemes first and by teaching the pupils the connection between the alphabetic letters and sounds.

Majority of the teachers said yes to item 10 (90%), item 11 (75%), item 12 (56.3%), item 13 (81.3%), item 14 (46.9%) and item 15 (93.8%) which is against the expected response. This implies that the majority of the teachers were not aware that in using the phonics method, pupils do not learn to read by: assisting pupils to identify and label the symbols of the alphabet correctly, teaching pupils to pay more attention to words at first then to letters, using just words pupils are familiar with to form sentences, looking at a word and saying it, teaching pupils long vowels before short vowels and by teaching pupils vowel letter sounds before consonant letter sounds. 88.3% of the teachers gave a "yes" response when they were expected to give "no". Only 11.3% of the teachers gave a got the response correctly. In conclusion therefore, a higher percent of the teachers missed the expected responses in 10 of the 15 items used. This shows that, a majority of the selected teachers were not aware of the phonics method of teaching reading in primary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area.

Research Question 2: What is the rating of teachers on the use of phonics method in teaching reading in class?

Table 2: Rating of Teachers Utilisation of phonics Method in Class in Ibadan North L.G.A

S/N	Items	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	\bar{x}	St. D.
1.	Presents lesson plan that covers phonics topic	7 (26.9%)	1 (3.8%)	4 (15.4%)	14 (53.8%)	2.96	1.31
2	Links previous lesson with the present one	10 (37.0%)	8 (29.6%)	6 (22.2%)	3 (11.1%)	2.07	1.03
3	Presents phonics in an interesting way	13 (48.1%)	9 (33.3%)	4 (14.8%)	1 (3.7%)	1.74	.859
4	Shows a mastery of phonics rules	17 (58.6%)	8 (27.6%)	3 (10.3%)	1 (3.4%)	1.58	.824
5	Clarifies pupils' misconception about the topic taught	6 (22.2%)	8 (29.6%)	12 (44.4%)	1 (3.7%)	2.29	.868
6	Has a working ability to articulate all of the phonic sounds correctly	14 (45.2%)	13 (41.9%)	3 (9.7%)	1 (3.2%)	1.70	.782
7	Has a clear understanding of how phases link with spelling patterns	15 (50.0%)	9 (30.0%)	5 (16.7%)	1 (3.3%)	1.73	.868
8	Feels confident in teaching phonics	17 (58.6%)	8 (27.6%)	3 (10.3%)	1 (3.4%)	1.58	.824
9	Makes appropriate use of the chalkboard	-	5 (16.1%)	18 (58.1%)	8 (25.8%)	3.09	.650
10	Involves learners actively in the lesson	4 (12.9%)	8 (25.8%)	14 (45.2%)	5 (16.1%)	2.64	.914
11	Communicates with pupils in correct but simple English	-	9 (21.4%)	19 (59.4%)	4 (12.5%)	2.84	.627
12	Uses correct pronunciation of words when speaking	3 (10.0%)	12 (40.0%)	14 (46.7%)	1 (3.30%)	2.43	.727
13	Exemplifies concepts taught with daily life and experiences of pupils.	11 (39.3%)	7 (25.0%)	6 (21.4%)	4 (14.3%)	2.10	1.10
14	Delivers the lesson in clear voice	-	10 (31.3%)	19 (59.4%)	3 (9.4%)	2.78	.608
15	Ensures that students carry out adequate exercises on phonics	11 (39.3%)	8 (28.6%)	7 (25.0%)	2 (7.1%)	2.00	.981
16	Provides opportunities for pupils to use phonics learnt in the classroom.	17 (65.4%)	6 (23.1%)	2 (7.7%)	1 (3.8%)	1.50	.812
17	Uses reward and reinforcement appropriately.	13 (46.4%)	3 (10.7%)	7 (25.0%)	5 (17.9%)	2.14	1.20
18	Makes use of appropriate teaching aids	26 (83.9%)	3 (9.7%)	1 (3.2%)	1 (3.2%)	1.25	.681
19	Has a good knowledge of and uses different phonics terms such as: consonant letters, vowel letters, graphemes, diphthongs, phoneme, syllables, vowel digraphs, consonant digraphs, etc.	24 (75.0%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	1.34	.700
20	Has a good understanding of phonics and phonemic awareness.	21 (67.7%)	7 (22.6%)	2 (6.5%)	1 (3.2%)	1.45	.767
Standard Mean = 2.50; Weighted Mean = 2.06							

Table 2 shows the rating of teachers on the use of phonics, as expressed in frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The result indicates a weighted mean of 2.06 and a standard mean of 2.50. The four-point scale of poor, fair, good and excellent used in this table shows the rating of teachers on the utilisation of phonics in teaching reading was fair. Nine of the twenty items contributed to this fair use of phonics method in teaching reading because their means are lower than the weighted mean. The items are: item 18 - Makes use of appropriate teaching aids (\bar{x} = 1.25); item 19 - Has a good knowledge of and

uses different phonics terms such as: consonant letters, vowel letters, graphemes, diphthongs, phoneme, syllables, vowel digraphs, consonant digraphs, etc (\bar{x} = 1.45); item 16 - Provides opportunities for pupils to use phonics learnt in the classroom (\bar{x} = 1.58); item 8 - Feels confident in teaching phonics (\bar{x} = 1.58); item 6 - Has a working ability to articulate all of the phonic sounds correctly (\bar{x} = 1.70); item 7 - Has a clear understanding of how phases link with spelling patterns (\bar{x} = 1.73); item 3 - Presents phonics in an interesting way (\bar{x} = 1.74); and item 15 - Ensures that students carry out adequate exercises on

phonics ($\bar{x} = 2.00$). In conclusion, though the four-point scale indicates a fair rating for teachers; because the weighted mean is below the standard mean which is the threshold; teachers' utilisation of phonics is conclusively poor.

Discussion of Findings Teachers Awareness of Phonics Method in Teaching Reading

The discussion of findings in this section is based on the results obtained from the data analysed. The results show that over eighty percent of teachers' responses to the questions on phonics awareness were wrong. This is an indication that a majority of junior primary school teachers' in Ibadan North Local Government lack awareness of the phonics method. This finding corroborates that of Olasukomi 2019, whose investigation on teachers' knowledge and use of phonics method in Akinyele Local Government Area, Ibadan revealed that teachers' knowledge of phonics was low as indicated by their scores in the multiple choice questions administered during the study. This lack of awareness, refutes the training exercise by Oyo State Government authorities for teachers to begin the implementation of the phonics programme in 2017. The finding therefore calls to question the quality of training these teachers received.

The results of this study also show that teachers surveyed could not clearly differentiate the principles which underlie the phonics method from those of the conventional ABC method. This mix-up may however be attributed to the adoption of the 'integrated' or 'balanced' approach in the Nigeria curriculum. Equally obvious from the results was the teachers' inability to differentiate alphabet symbols from the sounds; and their lack of awareness of the order in which systematic phonics instruction should be taught as spelt out by Chall and Popp1(996). Few teachers even displayed outright ignorance about phonics being in the English curriculum. Teachers inconsistencies in this study may equally be linked to Eshiet (2014) argument that the English curriculum alludes to the use of both whole-word and phonics methods without a systematic way of using each included.

The findings of this study also have similarity with that of Chapman et al (2017) whose

study reported that teachers showed weak understanding of phonics and to morphological domains. Only fifty-eight percent of teachers could accurately define 'phonological awareness' and only fifty-seven percent were able to define 'phonemic awareness' Most respondents also could not indicate correctly that phonemic awareness instruction should come first or at the same time with phonics instruction to help children gain best from phonics instruction. (Tummer and Hoover, (2015). Teachers were also reported to have shown discrepancy between syllable and phoneme counting and in general, a mixed understanding of the literacy-related language structures required for effective teaching. Similarly, Cunningham et al, (2004) also reported that teachers had limited knowledge in phonemic awareness and phonics.

The findings of this study negates that of previous scholars from Nigeria such as (Ekpo, 2012; Eshiet, 2014; Izuabga et al, 2016; Jire-Alao, 2019) whose experimental studies all attested to teachers adequate understanding and utilisation of the phonics method after training. With significant improvement in pupils reading skills. The variance in the results may however be attributed to the fact that the former were all experimental in nature and the researchers probably spent a longer period for the training of teachers, the shortest lasting three days (Eshiet, 2014) and the longest three weeks (Izuagba, et al, 2016). Hence sufficient time of interaction and monitoring resulted to teachers' good grasp of phonics requirements.

Rating of Teachers Utilisation of Phonics Method in Teaching Reading

The result of this study revealed the rating of teachers' utilisation of phonics was conclusively poor since the weighted mean was lower than the standard mean which is the threshold. This out come confirms the position that awareness of policies is a backbone to utilisation (Olumorin, 2008). Hence a teacher who is unaware of teaching strategies cannot use them adequately (Gbadamosi, 2015). The result is also an indicator that the teachers one-day training on phonics did not translate to their being able to make use of it during instruction. For teachers to possess a satisfactory, clear and high understanding of the concepts they are to teach and the procedures on how to go about implementing them; adequate training time is important.

Furthermore, the findings show that more than half of teachers observed had a poor confidence rating in the use of the phonics. Some were reluctant to take part in the study though they attended the training. Equally, most teachers showed low mastery of phonics rule, did not display good knowledge of, nor could they use different phonics terminologies such as 'consonant letters', or 'vowel letters' during the teaching process. Few teachers were confused on when to use the alphabet letter names differently from the sounds by mixing up both while teaching. For instance, a teacher wrote the letter symbol 'i' and correctly pronounced it as /ai/ (as in ice) but then went ahead to list words having /i/ sound such as 'ink, ill, lip'; without making any distinction between the letter name (symbol) and the sound produced. A situation such as this, invariably creates some kind of confusion for learners.

Some teachers' hesitancy in using the phonics method seemed to have been borne out of the belief that the phonics method is more demanding than the conventional method which requires a brief explanation and writing on the board for pupils to copy. This disposition calls to mind the concepts of teacher knowledge, belief and confidence which portends that teachers who do not understand or believe in what they are expected to do, will incapacitate the best of learning programmes and make them unproductive (Stahl, Duffy-Hester and Stahl, 1998). Hence, the importance of teachers' knowledge of a subject and belief in the system being able to impact learning Guinness (1997).

Additionally, the findings of this study can be related to that of Chapman et al (2017) whose study reported that about half of the teachers in the survey were unable to correctly identify when to use key reliable phonics principles, though most of them indicated having integrated and having used phonics in their literacy instruction for more than 2 years. These findings contradict effective literacy instruction which has consistently shown that inclusion of systematic teaching of phonics is beneficial (Adams, 1990; NRP, 2000).

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the study, it can be logically concluded that public primary

school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government do not possess satisfactory knowledge of phonics method to effectively impact pupils reading ability. This inadequate knowledge and subsequent unsatisfactory performance by teachers is attributable to not having a sufficient grasp of phonics from a single day training programme received in the state. It can also be alluded to teachers' not updating themselves with current research findings on phonics teaching method.

Recommendations

On the premise of the findings of the study, the following are recommended: Teachers should be exposed to regular and continuous training and monitoring on the use of phonics and other language constructs all through their professional years. They should also access current research findings on English Language teaching for knowledge update. Schools should provide copies of the curriculum for teachers to have adequate content knowledge and guidance. Teachers sent for special trainings should be made to share such knowledge with other teachers in the school, especially those who are likely to take over their classes in future.

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