UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.19 (4);
January-June, 2025 https://unijerps.org
2023 Impact Factor: **6.834;** 2022 ***Impact Factor***: 5.156; ***2021 Impact Factor: 5.641;***
2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *Indexing and Impact Factor URL: http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363*

EFFECT OF PHONICS AND WHOLE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' ACHIEVEMENT IN WORD RECOGNITION AND READING COMPREHENSION IN ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate effects of phonies and whole language strategies on primary 1 pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The study adopted quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent design. The sample of 103 pupils was obtained from the population of 5,769 primary 1 pupils in the study area and used for the study. Experimental groups 1 and 2 were exposed to phonics and whole language strategies respectively. Data were collected using Word Recognition Achievement Test (WRAT) with the reliability coefficient of 0.84 and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT) with the reliability coefficient of 0.70. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the six research questions. Six hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The following findings were made: There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State (p=0.785-0.05). There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy (p=0.662>0.05). There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy (p=0.970>0.05). There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy (p=0781>0.05). There was significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy in favour of female pupils (p=0.042 <0.05). Although there were no significant mean differences between the word recognition and reading comprehension scores of pupils exposed to phonics and whole language strategies, pupils benefited maximally from the strategies as their post-test scores were significantly higher than their pre-test scores. It was recommended among other things that the Ministry of Education through Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and teaching professional bodies should organise conferences and seminars on phonics and whole language strategies to acquaint primary

school teachers with the knowledge and skills of using the strategies in teaching and that primary school teachers should pay adequate attention to pupils' gender in the course of utilising phonics and whole language strategies for teaching reading comprehension in other to enable both male and female pupils benefit equally and maximally from the strategies.

Keywords: Phonics, Whole Language, Word Recognition, Reading Comprehension, Achievement

Introduction

Communication it as essential and necessary aspect of life. This is because social beings need interaction and exchange of information for survival and development. In every human society, language is the medium through which communication takes place (Udosen, Ekanem & Ido, 2019) Language is a veritable tool for knowledge impartation and its basic role is communication, Communication is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds and written symbols combined into words and sentences (Asoulin, 2016).

In Nigeria, communication takes place in English language and indigenous languages. Although English language is used in Nigeria as a second language, it has gained more attention in the educational system than indigenous languages. This is because English language is creed in Nigeria as the medium of instruction from the upper primary to higher levels of education. English language is also a core subject in the Nigerian educational curriculum (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) Apart from the educational roles assigned to English language in Nigeria, it is widely used as language of trade, the media, law, official communication and international diplomacy, among others. This implies that English language has become a service language across many aspects of life in Nigeria, Teachers of the language are therefore, expected to teach the language to produce recipients who can be judged to be competent users of the language (Udosen, Ekanem & Ido, 2019). To achieve this, teachers need to adopt strategies that are effective in teaching the skills of English language, namely, listening, speaking reading and writing. Efficient use of language involves the acquisition and learning of these basic skills (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) Perhaps, reading is very important in the context of language teaching, language learning, and language use because of the role in plays in academic and career progression.

Reading is characterized by the transition of symbols or letters into words and sentences that make meaning. It is a process in which a reader actively searches for meaning in a written text. It involves word recognition, the decoding of marks on the page and comprehension; that is construction of meaning from words and sentences. Reading is a complex cognitive and linguistic process. It is a meaning-making, meaning construction process involving the use of text information and the reader's background experience to arrive as the authors intended meaning (Oyetunde, 2019). Reading is the understanding of text or message. This means

that reading is a process which is completed only when comprehension is attained (Eze & Ekwueme, 2019)

Reading involves recognition of words which is decoding of graphic symbols by the reader and interpretation of such symbols to make meaning. The goal of reading is that the child should be functionally literate and should be able to communicate effectively via print. This goal cannot be achieved without the necessary fundamental word recognition skills. A successful rending programme in the primary school is reflected in the extent to which pupils have mastered word recognition and can engage spontaneously and voluntarily in reading various types of materials (Muodumogu, 2013; Ehui, 2019).

Reading is a literacy skill alongside writing, arithmetic and use of information communication technology. The importance of reading is inestimable. It is a literacy skill which imbues the recipient with critical thinking and problem-solving skills and the right attitudes and values to become relevant and actively engaged in today's fast-paced technological world (Muodumogu. 2019). Reading enhances one's ability to evaluate information, raise and answer questions based on available textual information, thinking and experience (Richek et al, 2017). Reading also builds one's self-esteem, opens doors to personal excitement and career opportunities, enhances one's sense of power and security, provides employment and prevents crime (Muodumogu, 2019). According to Amadi and Offlorma (2019a), reading is a bench mark, for intellectual ability as well as the key to educational achievement.

Various strategies have been used in teaching word recognition and reading in Nigerian schools including teaching the alphabetic code in which pupils are drilled in naming and reciting the letters of the alphabet, chorus reading or reciting and reading aloud (Oyetunde, 2019; Agbum & Asue. 2019). These strategies have been found to be ineffective in developing pupils reading skill (Eshiet, 2012). Some consequences of the ineffective one of strategies are that most pupils are totally illiterate at the end of school, have general negative attitude to reading, do word-by-word or slow reading and see reading as pronunciation and not meaning-getting activity. Other negative consequences are high rate of school drop-outs, poor performance in examinations and increasing Incidence of examination malpractice (Oyetunde, 2019). Primary education, generally, is not of sufficient quality to ensure that all children learn the basics (UNESCO, 2012). This ugły situation needs to be addressed by adopting effective strategies in reading instruction. This study, therefore examined whether phonics and whole language strategies could prove effective in teaching word recognition and reading comprehension among pupils.

Phonics is a strategy of teaching word recognition and reading by developing learners' phonemic awareness, the ability to hear, identify and manipulate phonemes. Phonics strategy exposes learners to correspondence between sounds and spelling patterns (graphemes) that represent them.

The goal of phonics strategy is to enable beginning readers to decode unfamiliar written words by sounding them out and blending the sound spelling patterns (Oyetunde, 2019).

There are two forms of phonics strategy namely, analytic and synthetic phonics. Analytic phonics is a strategy used to teach letter sounds after reading has already begun. Children initially learn to read some words by sight, often in the context of meaningful text. In order to teach the letter sounds, whole words sharing a common initial letter sounds are presented to children, for instance 'milk", 'man' and 'mother" Attention is drawn to the /m/ sound heard at the beginning of words. When all letter sounds have been taught in this way, attention is then drawn to letters at the end of words, then in the middle, in consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words (Johnston et al, 2011). Therefore, children learn about letter sounds in the context of whole words. At this stage, which can be at the end of the first year at school, children may also be taught to sound and blend CVC words, e.g *lcl*, *lal*, *ltl*.

Analytic phonics strategy teaches pupils the phonics relationships among words. Pupils are taught to analyse letter sound relationship and look to decode words based upon spellings and letter patterns and their sounds. For example, if the child knows "bar" "cat" and "hat" then the word "mat" will be easy to read. It involves teaching pupils through word association, rhyme, grouping words that are similar and memorising word groups (mat, cat, fat) (Johnston et al, 2011: Amadi & Offorma, (2019). Moreover, when learners come across an unfamiliar word, they are trained to break the word down into "onset" and "rime" While onset is the initial part of a word, rime is the closing section of a word (Mai, 2020). In analytic phonics, words that share the same onset or rime are taught at once to reinforce a certain grapheme (such as "ot" in pot, not and cot).

Synthetic phonics, on the other hand, is a strategy which involves teaching the main forty-two (42) English letter-sounds in isolation, while simultaneously teaching children how to blend and segment these sounds to read and write words. The letter sounds are taught alongside culturally appropriate stories, songs and actions that make learning the sounds both memorable and fun (Universal Learning Solutions, 2016) It focuses on the direct and systematic teaching of the letter sound knowledge and training of the phonological awareness skills such as blending and segmentation. Synthetic phonics develops phonemic awareness along with the corresponding letter shapes. It involves pupils rehearsing the writing of letter shapes alongside leaning the letter-sound correspondences.

Whole language strategy is sometimes known as the look and-say or sight word strategy (Maddox & Feng, 2013). When adopted in this sense in teaching beginning reading, words are introduced to children as whole units without analysis of their sub-word parts. The principle behind the strategy is that children could learn to recognize words through repeated exposure without direct attention to sub-word parts. In this sense. printed words are represented mentally

as psychologically indivisible wholes and words are recognized by virtue of the unique patterns formed by their component letters Research findings, however, show that phonics strategy improves pupils word recognition and reading abilities more than whole language strategy. Maddox and Feng (2013), Amadi (2020), Wolf (2016), and Tamara (2013) all found that phonics strategy proved more effective in developing beginning readers' word recognition and reading skills than whole language strategy. Nevertheless, in a review of findings, Holtan (2021) argues that phonics and whole language strategies could be effective in teaching word recognition and beginning reading. The foregoing shows that both phonics and whole language strategies could help pupils develop word recognition and reading comprehension skills.

Statement of the Problem

Word recognition is a fundamental stage in beginning reading which helps children to develop reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension is a vital literacy skill that enhances the development of individuals and society Nevertheless, many pupils in Nigeria pass out of primary education without the ability to recognize words and to read meaningfully This amounts to pupils' poor performance in school which in tum leads to high rate of school dropout. It has been observed that the Nigerian school system produces individuals who have low self-esteem and lack self-confidence became they cannot read.

This negative trend is traced to, among other factors, teachers' failure to adopt effective strategies in teaching word recognition and reading comprehension. Thus, there is urgent need to find out strategies that are very effective in teaching word recognition and reading comprehension in other to salvage the situation. It is hoped that research-proven strategies could be used to effectively develop word recognition and reading skills in pupils in other to build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Such strategies must not only prove effective in laying a stronger reading foundation in pupils but must also enable them to perform well at subsequent levels of education and become functional members of the society Phonics and whole language strategies are proposed in this study but it is not known whether the strategies will yield the desired result.

Although literature shows that phonics and whole language strategies have been used successfully in improving pupils' word recognition and reading comprehension elsewhere, there is no evidence to prove that the strategies have been used within cultural content especially in Yola South Local Government of Adamawa State. The problem of this study, therefore, is: What would be the effect of phonics and whole language strategies on pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension in Adamawa State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of phonics and whole language strategies on pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension to Adamawa State. The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Examine the effects of phonics and whole language strategies on pupils' achievement in word recognition in Adamawa State
2. Examine the effect of phonics and whole language strategies on pupils' achievement in reading comprehension in Adamawa State.
3. Examine the difference between male and female pupils' achievement in word recognition in Adamawa State when taught using phonics strategy.
4. Examine the difference between male and female pupils' achievement in reading comprehension is Adamawa State when taught using phonics strategy.
5. Establish the difference between male and female pupils' achievement in word recognition in Adamawa State when taught using whole language strategy.
6. Examine the difference between male and female pupils' achievement in reading comprehension in Adamawa State when taught using whole language strategy.

Research Questions

The study answered the following questions;
1. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?
2. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?
3. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy in Adamawa State?
4. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy in Adamawa State?
5. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?
6. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils caught reading comprehension using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?

Statement of Hypotheses

The shady tested the following hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level:
1. There is no significant difference is the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition swing phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy is Adamawa State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mom achievement scores of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State.
3. There is to significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy in Adamawa State.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy in Adamawa State.
5. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy in Adamawa State.
6. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female

pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy in Adamawa State

Significance Of the Study

The outcome of this study will be beneficial to teachers, pupils, authors, professional language educators and researchers.

Teachers may use the findings of this study in teaching pupils' word recognition and reading comprehension skills. They might adopt either phonics or the whole language strategy or a blend of the two, in teaching pupils depending on the findings of this study.

The findings of the study might help pupils to develop a strong literacy foundation for their education and life endeavors. They may be able to write clearly and read fluently and meaningfully subsequently, such children could grow up in the culture of sound education and become functional members of the society.

Authors may use the findings of the study in writing textbooks for primary schools They may use the findings of the study to write the content and activities for teaching word recognition and reading comprehension.

Professional language educators may also find the study useful in training language pre-service teachers in teacher training institutions and in-service teachers during workshops and seminars. This will prepare teachers to effectively make use of the strategies in teaching beginning reading. Researchers may find the study useful as a basis for further research.

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978)

Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory states that social interaction precedes development and consciousness and cognition are the end products of socialization and social behavior. The theorist proposes that children learn through interactions with their surrounding culture According to the theorist, every function in the child's cultural development appears first at the social level and later, at the individual level. That is, first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra psychological). Synthetic phonics and whole word strategies engage children into meaningful interaction in class. Such interaction is bound to result to learning.

Vygotsky (1978) further states that the cognitive development of children and adolescents is enhanced when they work at their zone of proximal development (ZPD) According to him, there are two levels of attainment for ZPD. The first level is the present level of development which describes what the child is capable of doing without any help from others. The second level is the potential level of development which refers to what the child could potentially do with help from other people such as teachers and peers. The ZPD, therefore, is the distance between a child's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and or with peer collaboration and the child's ability in solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs in the zone of proximal development. Teaching beginning literacy skills using synthetic phonics and whole language strategies might create a zone of proximal development in children's

word recognition and reading comprehension. This is because the strategies provide rich interactive opportunities for pupils to participate in learning activities. As children interact with the teacher and their peers in learning sounds and words, they might eventually read independently.

Vygotsky (1978) further holds that when children are given tasks on their own, they rarely do well as compared to when they are working in collaboration with a more knowledgeable other (MKO) The MKO could be anyone who has a better understanding or higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, peers, a younger person or even computers. The MKO in this study could be the teacher of reading who uses synthetic phonics or whole language strategies or other children who could learn to recognize words and read faster than their classmates when exposed to synthetic phonics or whole language strategies

Vygotsky's social development theory is also relevant to this study because it is part of the foundations of social constructivism social constructivism argues that the learner is much more actively involved in a joint enterprise with the teacher creating new meanings. The theory's emphasis on social interaction, zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the more knowledgeable other (MKO) are relevant to this study. Both synthetic phonics and whole language strategies engage pupils into interactive activities that result to independent teaming in each child's zone of proximal development (the period between the child's Interaction with the teacher and classmates and the time the child can recognize words and read independently). As primary 1 pupils in Yola South Local Government Area, Adamawa State are engaged in interactive activities in class, they learn from their teacher and peers who serve as their More Knowledgeable Others and are eventually able to blond sounds into words or read whole words and sentences independently

Literatures Review

Concepts of reading, teaching reading in Nigeria, phonics strategy, whole language strategy of teaching, reading, gender and pupils' achievement in reading are reviewed in this section.

Concept of Reading

The concept of reading is viewed differently by different scholars. Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) see reading as a meaning searching and meaning-getting process. It is the ability of readers to understand what they read, interpret ideas and inject meaning to printed words. Onukangu (2003) describe reading as a cognitive (thinking) process. When a reader encounters a text, he she immediately thinks about what the meaning of the text is and how the meaning can be reconstructed and extracted. Egbe and Damyan (2016) assert that reading is an activity which stimulates imagination and critical thinking. They further state that reacting requires the higher order skills such as evaluation, synthesis and analyse well as the ability to discern an author's purpose, as the quality of an argument, relate an

argument to issues beyond the author's scope and compare the claims to others claims and one's experience

Benefits of Reading

Reading is a skill that empowers everyone who learns it. Learners will be able to benefit from the store of knowledge from printed materials and contribute that knowledge to the society According to Muodumogu (2012), reading is critical to growth and development. The ability to read effectively is used as a yardstick for assessment of the level of human development in any country Effective reading also measures an individual's performance, competence and astuteness in discharging professional and leadership duties. This implies that young people should be helped to acquire literacy skills that will enable them progress in studies and later in the world of work. Li and Wilhelm as cited in Muodumogu and Agbum (2016) assert that reading assists learners reading assists learners to build vocabulary and encourage their lifelong learning and improvement in the second language to enable him/her survive in and out of school.

Reading is an important way to gain information and to improve in all areas of life Ability to read effectively, intensively and extensively leads to improvement in students' performance not only in English language but in all areas of life (Aliyu, 2010). Muodumogu and Odey (2018, p. 96) assert that 'the highest achieving students are those who devote ample leisure time to reading extensively. When learners read extensively, there is remarkable improvement not only in their academic achievement but also in their personality development.

Teaching Reading in Nigeria

Teaching enables the teacher to help the learner in the process of learning. It is an activity which is expected to facilitate learning. Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999) assert that to effectively teach reading, teachers must have good understanding of what reading is and must have clearly defined objective for every reading lesson they undertake. It must be reiterated that reading is not the ability to recite the letters of the alphabet or to pronounce the words in a text. Reading does not stop at being able to answer literal questions. This implies that meaning does not reside in the text alone but it is also a product of the contributions of both the author and the reader. According to Sinambela et al (2015), teaching reading is to develop students' ability to read the material to get information from the text, to comprehend and to react to what is written.

Effective reading instruction helps learners make sense of written language. It builds on what learners know at any given time to help them learn more Effective instruction is grounded in a professional knowledge of how to read and how to learn to read. It is best provided by knowledgeable caring teachers who organise instruction to meet the varying needs of all their students (National Council of Teachers of English, 2004). Teachers must be able to make students enjoy reading activities in the classroom.

Concept of Phonics Strategy

Phonics is one of the most popular strategies of teaching beginning reading. It focuses on the smallest or abstract units (sounds) of language. According to Oyetunde (2019) activities in phonics strategy include learning letter names and the sounds they make and blending two, three or four letters to make simple words. From whole words, children graduate to whole sentences and stories. The concept that reading is meaningful and useful is delayed until the many pieces of language are measured.

Phonics strategy focuses on the relationship between letters and sounds. The Universal Basic Education (2010) asserts that phonics is a strategy by which children are taught individual parts or letters and their sounds that combine to form words. Phonics strategy encourages children to begin to read through auditory training, that is, training their cars to recognize the sounds with their letter shapes in written form. Phonics strategy helps children to develop ward recognition skills. Oyetunde (2019) stated that phonics strategy helps children learn the regular patterns of words. This may make reading cars. It also helps children become strong spellers because of their awareness of the symbol sound correspondences. In other words, phones strategy enables children to learn how to break a word apart and spell it through phones strategy, leaners will be able to read multi syllabic words easily and to sound out unfamiliar words in an effort to make sense of them.

Synthetic Phonics Strategy and Pupils' Achievement in Word Recognition and Reading Comprehension

There are two major types of phonics strategy, namely, analytic phonics and synthetic phonics strategies of teaching reading. Synthetic phonics strategy will be investigated in this study. The term "synthetic" refers to the process of synthesizing or blending individual sounds together. In synthetic phonics strategy children practice blending skill as soon as they know letter-sounds that blend together to make a word (Universal Learning Solutions, 2016). This approach helps children understand very early how the reading writing process works; that it requires blending together and pulling apart the sounds of the language (Konza, 2011). Common letter combinations, such as double letters, digraphs and common patterns like Ne are taught in a similar fashion, with the focus on rapidly teaching children how to blend individual or a combination of sounds together to make words

Synthetic phonics strategy is both explicit and systematic Explicit instruction is designed to focus children's attention on the precise target of instruction. This might entail holding up a large lower-case letter such as "m" directing children's attention to it and saying "This sound is /m/ Say/m/. What sound is this? This might be accompanied by an action that acts as a mnemonic (Lloyd & Wernham, 2009). When children can articulate the sound correctly in response to the presentation of the letter, a series of interactive activities follows during which the children have many opportunities to see

the letter and say the sound. building up strong neural pathways between the two so that when the letter is seen, the sound is automatically associated with it (Universal Learning Solutions, 2016). The letter-sound would then be blended with others that the child already knows to create words, using magnetic letters.

Concept of Whole Language Strategy

The idea of whole language has its basis in a range of theories of learning related to epistemologies called 'Holism'. Holism is based upon the belief that it is not possible to understand learning system as a collection of parts (Wikipedia, 2021). Holism was very much response to behaviourism which emphasised that the world could be understood by experimenting with stimuli and response. Holists condemned the reductionist perspectives that did not recognize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Whole language strategy involves teaching reading skills in the context of interesting and stimulating literature. The philosophy is that children will learn to read naturally, just as they learn to talk (Oyetunde. 2019). The term keeps changing from whole word to look and say sight word to language experience, eclectic psycholinguistics to whole language, (Maddox & Feng, 2013). When used as whole word strategy, children are taught to recognise individual words and use them in short sentences. For example, dog' could be represented perhaps with the picture but children are told to pronounce the word and are led to its spelling. After successfully pronouncing the word, children are led to practice writing the word by imitating what they see on the board. The teacher encourages children to memorise words as whole units. According to Oyetunde (2019), activities associated with whole language strategy include meaningful demonstrations of language in action, storytelling, reading aloud and independent or silent reading by children.

Language Strategy and Pupils Performance in Word Recognition and Reading Comprehension

On one end of the continuum exits the whole language strategy which claim that beginning reading instruction should focus on immersing learners in language which is housed on meaning making, rather than on decoding skills (Huang, 2014). For example, during instruction, teachers can employ the sue of story books to engage learner in active discussions in the hope that learning will be more meaningful for learners.

The underlying premise of the whole language strategy is that language is actually learned from whole to part (Morin, 2020). We first use whole utterances in familiar situations, then later we see and develop parts, and begin to experiment with their relationship to each other and to the meaning of the whole. The whole is always more than the sum of the parts and the value of any part can only be learned within the whole utterance in a real speech event (Goodman, 1986). In support of this claim, in terms of language acquisition of young children, Wray (2013). From this perspective, a whole language strategy of teaching reading is

justified, as it corresponds with how language is acquired. A whole language strategy, therefore, focuses on allowing learners to derive meaning from text, as well as the application of higher-level processing skills such as prediction, where reading is perceived as a psycholinguistic guessing game (Goodman, 1967).

Concept of Gender

The concept of gender has been explained in various ways. Canadian Institute of Health Research (2020) describe gender as the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact and they share power and resources in society. In other words, gender is neither confined to a binary male female nor is it static because there is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relation with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society. This definition does not limit gender to sex or the nature of being male or female but also emphasizes social attributes and roles ascribed to males, females and those who claim to be gender neutral as well as transgender persons. It also points out the fact that there could be chances of exchange of gender roles between males and females among groups of people.

Gender and Pupils' Performance in Word Recognition and Reading Comprehension

Gender difference is one of the factors affecting learning and students' performance. Yusuf (2004) observe that studies on the influence of gender on students' performance have not produced conclusive results. Some research findings indicated that significant differences existed between the performance of male and female students while other findings showed that gender factor had no influence on students' achievement. Santrock (2004) noted that during the elementary and secondary school years, there is significant evidence that females outperform males in reading and writing. Fergusson and Harwood (2007) as cited in Ladipo and Ogbotosho (2015) reported that the consistent poor academic achievement of males was due to the fact that males were cognitively less able than females On the other hand, variation in reading between male and female students has also been found to have implications on their academic achievement Boys differ in their reading attitude and other measures of motivation with girls typically having more positive attitudes towards reading demonstrating more positive reading self-concept and engaging more often in reading activities outside school significant. The difference in the performance was found to be pronounced in private schools.

Furthermore, Adigun, Ohihunwa, Irunokhai, Sada and Adesina (2015) found that even though male students had slightly better performance compared to female students, it was not significant. The difference in the performance was found to be pronounced in private schools. This implies that there are no

longer distinguishing cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills achievement of students in respect of gender. Females' achievement score in the administered test were slightly better compared to their male colleagues in public schools even though without significant difference.

Materials and Methods

Quasi-experimental pre-test, pro-test non-randomized design without control group was adopted for the study. This design enables the researcher to manipulate and control variables in a situation that does not permit random sampling of participants (Emaikwu 2015). Two non-equivalent groups were assigned to the two treatment conditions. The two groups were intact classes in two schools. Intact classes were used in the study because it is not possible to select participants randomly for the study. This is in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), who recommended the use of intact classes in quasi-experimental design where random sampling of participants is not possible.

Population

The population of the study was 5,769 primary 1 pupils in 80 schools in Yola South Local Government Area of Adamawa State The population comprised 2,579 female and 3,190 male pupils in the 2022/2023 academic session (Source: Yola South Local Education Authority, 2023).

Sample and Sampling

The sample of the study was 103 primary 1 pupils in two intact classes in public primary schools in Yola South Local Government Area of Adamawa State. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain two co-educational primary schools where phonics and whole language strategies were not in use. The two schools were used as the two experimental groups

Instrumentation

The instruments that were used in collecting data in this study are Word Recognition Achievement Test (WRAI), Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT) and lesson plans. The three instruments are researcher-made. The WRAT contains two sections, A and B Section A contains pupils bio-data information such as gender.

The RCAT tests pupils' ability to answer six questions based on the passage they have read. The items tested pupils comprehension at factual, inferential and critical levels. The researcher designed a marking guide for the WRAT and RCAT. Each word recognised correctly in the WRAT was awarded 1 mark to a total of 36 marks while in the RCAT, each question answered correctly was awarded 2 marks to a total of 12 marks. Twelve lesson plans prepared by the researcher were used in phonics strategy treatment. The lesson plans contained activities and teaching aids for teaching 8 sounds *1*s, a, t, I, p, n, ck and e*l* using phonics strategy. Each sound was taught in one lesson. Each lesson was presented in 8 steps, namely, story, action, show flashcard, letter formation, blending, sounding, dictation and song. Twelve researcher-made lemon plans were used in whole language intervention. These contained activities and teaching aide for teaching reading many whole language strategies. Three words were taught in each

lesson within 30 minutes. Each lesson was presented in the following steps Introducing the words matching the words with flashcards, matching the words with pictures, drawing pictures and wiring appropriate words for each picture and entering learnt words in the 'words bank'. In all the following words were taught in the whole language intervention desk, book, bed; turtle sun, pen; ink, parrot, arrow; pencil, net, cat, sack, phone; caterpillar, kitten, lime ten, hen, mat; arm, pan, ant.

Validation of Instruments

The Pupils Word Reading Achievement Test (WRAT) and the Pupils Reading Comprehension Achievement Ten (RCAT) were submitted to three experts in English Language Education and Science Education in Benue State University, Makurdi and Taraba State University, Jalingo to ascertain the face and content validity. The WRAT and the RCAT validated to ensure that the instruments have clear instructions are appropriate so the level of the pupils and are relevant to the objectives of the study. The suitability of the lesson plan in teaching beginning reading using the strategies was ascertained. The validators commented that the instruments were appropriate in measuring what they are designed to measure. However, pupils' gender and time allowed should be indicated in the instruments. Besides, the lesson plans were to be edited properly to ensure that the strategies are taught effectively.

Method of Data Collection

In order to successfully answer the research questions guiding the study, the researcher used the English language teaches in each of the selected classes as research assistant. The research assistants were trained separately in three days to carry out the intervention and data collection using Word Recognition Achievement Test (WRAT) and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT) The research assistants were trained within the first week of the intervention on the procedure for administering the WRAT RCAT and using the lesson plans for the intervention,

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the pre-test and the post-test were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions The hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0:05 level of significance ANCOVA took care of the differences that existed as a result of extraneous variables in the course of the experiment (Emaikwu 2015, Denga 2019) ANCOVA was also used because continuous data were used in the study ANCOVA also ensured that data were normally distributed and had homogenous variance Moreover, ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses based on the following specific assumptions (Pallant. 2020, p.302).

Research Question One: what is the difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pupils Taught Word Recognition Using Phonics and Whole Language Strategies

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	48	9.46	2.46	22.19	3.04	12.73
Whole Language	55	9.58	1.58	22.13	2.44	12.55
Mean Difference		0.12		0.06		0.18

Table 1 show that the mean word recognition scores of pupils taught using phonics strategy was 9.48 with standard deviation of 2.54 in the pre-test and 22.19 with standard deviation of 3.04 in the post-test. The mean word recognition score of pupils taught using whole language strategy was 9.5S with standard deviation of 1.58 in the pre-test and 22.13 with standard deviation of 2.44 in the post-test. There was a mean achievement difference of 0.18 in favour of pupils taught using phonics strategy.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils caught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught wing whole language s Adamawa State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pupils Taught Reading Comprehension Using Phonics and Whole Language Strategies

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	48	1.65	0.67	0.87	0.61	2.22
Whole Language	55	1.67	0.67	3.96	0.69	2.29
Mean Difference		0.02		0.09		0.07

Table 2 show that pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy had the mean score of 1.65 with standard deviation of 0.67 in the pre-test and 3.87 with standard deviation of 0.61 in the post test. Pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy had the mean score of 1.67 with standard deviation of 0.67 in the pre-test and 3.57 with standard deviation of 0.6) in the post test. There was a mean gain difference of 0.07 in favour of pupils taught using whole language strategy.

Research Question 3: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy in Adamawa Stare?

Table 3: Mean Achievement of Male and Female Pupils Taught Word Rocognition Using Phonics Strategy

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	48	1.65	0.67	0.87	0.61	2.22

Whole Language	55	1.67	0.67	3.96	0.69	2.29
Mean Difference		0.02		0.09		0.07

Table 3 show that male pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy had the mean score of 9.52 with standard deviation of 2.85 in the pre-test and 22.10 with standard deviation of 3.13 in the post-test. Female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy had the mean score of 9.37 with standard deviation of 2.06 in the pre-test and 22.32 with standard deviation of 2.98 in the post-test. There was a mean gain difference of 0.37 in favour of female pupils

Research Question 4: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy in Adamawa State?

Table 4: Mean Achievement of Male and Female Pupils Taught Reading Comprehension Using Phonics Strategy

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	28	1.64	0.64	3.86	0.65	2.32
Whole Language	20	1.80	0.71	3.90	0.55	2.10
Mean Difference		0.06		0.04		0.22

Table 4 show that male pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy had the mean score of 1.54 with standard deviation of 0.64 in the pre-test and 3.86 with standard deviation of 0.65 in the post-test. Female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy had the mean score of 1.50 with standard deviation of 0.71 in the pre-test and 1.90 with standard deviation of 0.55 in the post-test. There was a difference of 0.22 in favour of male pupils.

Research Question 5: What is the difference is the mam achievement scores of male and female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?

Table 5: Mean Achievement of Male and Female Pupils Taught Word Recognition Using Whale Language Strategy Strategies.

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	25	9.48	1.58	22.20	2.58	12.72
Whole Language	30	9.67	1.61	22.07	2.35	12.40
Mean Difference		0.19		0.13		0.32

Table five show that male pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy had the mean score of 9.48 with standard deviation 1.58 in the pre-test and 22.20 with standard deviation of 2.58 in the post-test. Female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy had the mean score of 1.80 with standard deviation of 0.71 in the pre-test and 22.07 with standard deviation of 2.35 in the post-test. There was a mean gain difference of 0.32 in favour of male pupils.

Research Question 6: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy in Adamawa State?

Table 6: Mean Achievement of Male and Female Pupils Taught Reading Comprehension Using Whole Language Strategy

Strategies	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Phonics	25	1.64	0.64	3.76	0.61	2.12
Whole Language	30	1.70	0.70	4.13	0.73	2.43
Mean Difference		0.06		0.37		0.31

Table 6 show that male pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy had the mean score of 1.64 with standard deviation of 0.64 in the pre-test and 3.76 with standard deviation of 0. 61 in the post-test. Female pupils taught reading comprehension using whole language strategy had the mean score of 1.80 with standard deviation of 0.71 in the pre-test and 1.70 with standard deviation of 0.70 in the post-test. There was a mean gain difference of 0.31 in favour of male pupils.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed in this section. The discussion is based on the variables of the study as guided by the research questions and the hypotheses. The finding of the study shows that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State. Although pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy had higher mean gain than those taught using whole language strategy, the mean gain difference was not significant. The finding implies that both phonics and whole language are effective strategies teachers can use in teaching word recognition. Pupils exposed to both strategies improved on their word recognition skills. The finding agrees with Hayes (2016) and Nelson (2017) who found that there was no significant mean difference in the mean achievement of pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy. The finding also supports Madox and Feng (2013) and Mo-Arthur (2015) who found mean gain differences between pupils' taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in favour of the former, however, the mean gain differences were not significant. The finding, however, disagrees with Senior (2013), Akpojotor (2013), Umezinwa and Udogu (2018) and Akoko (2019) who found that pupils exposed to phonics strategy achieved significantly better in word recognition than those exposed to whole language strategy. The general trend of the empirical findings shows that phonics strategy could be more effective in teaching word recognition than whole language strategy. However, the finding of this study implies that both

strategies are useful and could be effective if the teacher utilises them carefully.

The finding of this study also reveals that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy. This means that both strategies develop pupils reading comprehension skills. This finding was possible because phonics strategy engaged pupils in decoding skills and improved their reading fluency and reading comprehension skills. On the other hand, activities in whole language strategy such as meaningful demonstration of Language in action, storytelling, reading aloud and independent or silent reading are bound to impact reading comprehension skills in the pupils. The finding is in tandem with Huang (2014), Price-Mohr and Price (2017), Akaa (2019), Agbum and Asue (2019), Amadi and Offorma (2018) and Elui (2019) who found no significant mean differences in the achievement of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate effects of phonics and whole language strategies on primary 1 pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on Vygotsky's social development and Skinner's behaviourist theories. The study adopted quati-experimental pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent design. The sample of 103 pupils was obtained from the population of 5,769 primary 1 pupils in the study area and used for the study. Experimental groups 1 and 2 were exposed to phonics and whole language strategies respectively. Data were collected using Word Recognition Achievement Test (WRAT) with the reliability coefficient of 0.84 and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT) with the reliability coefficient of 0.70. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer six research questions. Six hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The following findings were made;

1. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy and those taught using whole language strategy in Adamawa State
2. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of pupils taught reading comprehension using phonies strategy and those taught using whole language strategy.
3. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught word recognition using phonics strategy.
4. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught reading comprehension using phonics strategy.
5. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught word recognition using whole language strategy.
6. There was significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male pupils and female pupils taught reading comprehension

using whole language strategy in favour of female pupils.

7. Although there were no significant mean differences between the word recognition and reading comprehension scores of pupils exposed to phonics and whole language, strategies, pupils benefited maximally from the strategies as can be seen in the differences between their pre-test and post-test scores.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that both phonics and whole language strategies improved pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension. The two strategies do not have differential positive effects on male and female pupils' achievement in word recognition. Phonics strategy has no differential effect on male and female pupils' achievement in reading comprehension. However, whole language strategy improved reading comprehension achievement of female pupils' more than that of male pupils. Therefore, the use of phonics and whole language strategies can improve pupils' achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension when properly planned and employed in English as a second language, beginning reading classroom.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Primary school teachers should adopt the use of phonics and whole language strategies in helping male and female pupils to improve on their achievement in word recognition and reading comprehension.
2. Authors of primary education books should include phonics and whole language activities in text books to improve pupils' word recognition and reading comprehension
3. Teacher training institution include phonics and whole language strategies in the pre-service and in-service training programmes of language education teachers.
4. The Universal Banc Education Commission (UBBC), the Ministry of Education and teaching professional bodies should organize conferences and seines on phonics and whole language strategies to acquaint primary school teachers with the knowledge and skills of using the strategies in teaching
5. Researches should use the findings of the study as a basis to further explore the effect of phonics and whole language strategies on pupils' achievement in other aspects of language and other subject areas.

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