

**PHONIC METHOD: A STRATEGY TOWARDS ENHANCING LEARNING
RETENTION IN BASIC LITERACY PROGRAMME OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA**

OLUGBEKO, Smart O.

Department of Special Education and Curriculum Studies,

Adeyemi College of Education,

Ondo, Nigeria.

smartruvic@yahoo.com

+2348033517641

Abstract

Phonic, a method of teaching reading through the development of learners' phonemic awareness has been relegated to the background as a result of teachers' passion for the traditional method of teaching reading. Basic Literacy programme has been given priority by many developing counties, yet the number of illiterates in many of these countries, especially Nigeria, keeps increasing because of the ineffectiveness of adopted teaching strategies. This paper examined the concepts of phonic method of teaching in basic literacy programme and its effectiveness in increasing the number of literate learners in the society. The paper identified obstacle to effective use of phonic method and prescribed solutions to these problems. The paper recommended among others, the re-training of teachers in the use of phonics method of teaching for effective implementation of basic literacy programme.

Key words: literacy, phonics, learners, education, clientele, strategy,

1. Introduction

The high level of illiteracy, most especially in the developing nations, Nigeria inclusive has been attracting considerable attention from time to time, globally. A society where illiterates predominate is a society that is not developed. Sarumi (2011) noted that regardless of the fact that application of science and technology is making increasing demands on the ability of human to contribute significantly to political, social and economic progress, literacy still stands at the centre of a successful unification of all these integrated fields for national development. Literacy is the acquisition of skills for reading, writing and

global information, skills in the contexts of life-long learning (Aderinoye, 1997). The picture painted above therefore depicts that literacy is development. The importance of literacy is also emphasized by Education For All (EFA) Goal (6) which states,

“Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2002)”.

However, it is very annoying that Nigeria despite the importance being attached to literacy is still one of the E-9 nations in the world. The Global Monitoring Report on Education-For-All (EFA), 2012 rated Nigeria as one of the two countries, (Egypt) is the other having the largest numbers of illiterates in Africa. This is evident in the classification of the country among the E-9 countries. Egunyomi (2015) maintained that the E-9 nations are those with highest number of illiterates. These include; China, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia.

Towards addressing this pathetic situation a lot of interventional strategies have been devised to reduce illiteracy level in the country by successive governments, both military and civilian, alike. One of the measures is the implementation of Basic Literacy Programme. It is designed and implemented to teach the basic rudiments in acts of reading and writing.

The functional literacy programme in Nigeria was planned and implemented to equip people with the skills of literacy. However, one of the problems identified among the learners is retention difficulty. Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary, 7th Edition (2010) defined retention as ability to remember things. This easily makes the learners in functional literacy education to forget whatever they are taught. Reading is an important skill as discussed above. The beginners in the act of reading must be familiar with learning on how to read in order to make conceptual responses to the print signals. Once learners of basic education can read and understand, their minds are encouraged to make responses to other situations (Aderinoye, 1997).

Reading can be explained as a cognitive activity which deals with decoding a graphic representation of sounds. It involves recognizing and remembering shapes (symbols) and realizing that those shapes represent words we use in our spoken language. Wendy (1984) stressed that in teaching adults to read, there are some fundamentals stages of language growth which learners have to go through. These include; visual skills, auditory skills, listening skills, speaking skills and reading skills.

In Basic Education Programme, one of the ways or methods that can be used to develop reading skills is phonic method. The phonic method of teaching reading encourages the learners to work out the meaning of sounds (syllables) and to “blend” these sounds to form words. Eshiet (2015) maintained that phonic method is an approach which focuses on teaching of sound-letter correspondences. This has been found very useful, relevant and

helps to facilitate reading ability in literacy classes, most especially at Adult Basic Literacy Programme because it contributes to the retention of reading skills.

This paper therefore focused on phonic method and how it could enhance learning retention in Basic Literacy Programme in Ondo State, Nigeria.

2. Phonic Method:

The concept of phonic method as a strategy to teach the beginners how to read has been found very useful in the process. Eshiet (2015) maintained that it was not a new method but was in existence even in the 19th Century and that the method is most suitably and preferable in literacy development, how to read and write. Phonic method has severally been defined. Wikipedia Encyclopedia (2013) explained that phonic method is a method for teaching reading and writing of English Language by developing learners phonemic awareness – the ability to hear, identify and manipulate phonemes-in order to teach the correspondence between these sounds and the spelling patterns (graphemes) that represent them Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 7th Edition (2010) explained phonic as a method of teaching people to read based on the sounds that the letters represent. Aderinoye (1997) stressed that with the use of the method, the letters of the alphabets are taught with each of them starting the name of an object and backed by its illustration. Learners later progress to sounds or letters to syllables, while the syllables are used to form phrases and phrases to form sentences. Eshiet (2015) simply put phonic method as sound - letter correspondences. In this sense, it involves the use of many of the senses by the learners, they see the sound, pronounce and they handle the written forms on flash cards, magnetic letters e.t.c.

Eshiet (2015) reported that several studies have shown that phonic is very appropriate to teacher and learners on how to read and write. She maintained that phonics is adopted by the United Kingdom's National Reading Panel as an effective means to make early learners to become literates. Findings as revealed by Eshiet (2015) on piloted 6 months experiment in 20 schools for low income families in India revealed the stimulation of students learning by phonics method.

Typically, in India as in Ghana, English Language is taught by a rote learning method which begins with learning the letter of the alphabet. This is followed by children memorizing whole words. Over 500 pupils, whose L₁ was Urdu were in the study featuring an intervention and a control group. The intervention group had one hour synthetic phonics instruction daily, while the control group was taught using the rote learning approach usually used by the school and had no blending or decoding content. Findings revealed that L₂ children of illiterate persons, living in slum conditions and having little access to reading materials beyond their school textbooks and minimal assistance from their parents, were

able to decode and blend English words successfully when taught by using a synthetic phonic strategy.

The impact of synthetic phonic intervention was significant in the knowledge of sounds, word blending, word reading and spelling. A greater reading skills could be achieved through the method compared to the traditional teaching method. According to Eshiet (2015),

“I find out that the major obstacle to acquire literacy skills is the inability to read properly in the language of instruction (English). The traditional rote learning “Cram and Chant” method of teaching beginners how to read has contributed much to this deficiency. Beginners are taught letters of the alphabets without teaching them the sounds of the alphabets. Any professional teacher of language knows that there are sound within the language that may not necessarily be represented in individual alphabets. Some sounds are combinations of more than one letter, so they can only be understood when taught as sounds, not just as letters. This old method has led to readers recognizing individual letters of the alphabets, but lacking the ability to combine them to read words. Thus, such readers often skip words because they lack the skills to read fluently.

It can be inferred, therefore that phonic method would help teachers and learners, alike to overcome the challenges of using the traditional letter to teach reading skills. This method has also been found to assist learners to overcome learning retention in literacy programme.

2.1 Advantages of Phonic Method in Adult Literacy Programme

The following are the prospects of using phonic method;

1. Teaching learners with phonic method makes them competent to handle unfamiliar words.
2. It promotes rapidly the learners knowledge of sounds, word blending, word reading and spelling.
3. It enhances whatever that is being taught among the learners through sound and letter correspondence.
4. It stimulates the reading and learning performance of the learners.
5. It provides learners with the skills to become an independent reader.
6. Phonic method helps to overcome the challenges of traditional method of reading letter.
7. It makes sounding of unfamiliar words easier.
8. It helps learners to learn syllable structure easier and better.

9. It helps learners to know spelling and letters formation.
10. It makes learners real and motivating e.t.c.

2.2. Disadvantages of Phonic Method in Adult Literacy Programme

Despite the prospects of using phonic method in literacy classes, it has also been criticised on the following grounds by several scholars.

1. It encourages memorization without allowing the learners to apply the phonic rules to connect meanings.
2. The method often creates wrong assumption of awareness that learners have a good knowledge or sophisticated phonemic awareness skills needed to enable the comparison of sounds within the various words e.t.c.

3. Meaning of Learning Retention

The concept “learning retention” comprises two different lexical items i.e. “learning” and “retention”. Each of these will explain the concept to be well understood by the readers of this paper. The Nigeria National Policy of Education (2013) defined learning as basically a process of adapting to and improving the environment. A major feature of learning in this regard is that it results in modification of existing behaviour patterns in a way which affects future performance or attitudes. Oyekan (1994) explained that learning is a gradual change in behaviour which ought to be frequently practiced and reinforced to prevent its extinction. In any teaching and learning setting, learning outcomes are stated; i.e. what are expected of the learners to learn that will bring a relative positive permanent changes.

However, observation has been made that in basic literacy programme where people are being taught on how to read and write learning retention among the clientele is very poor. Learners found it very difficult to easily grasp the skills involved in literacy. Aderinoye (1997) noted that retention is one of the challenges in various adult literacy programme, meaning that after some few days or hours they could not recollect what they have been taught. Simply put, learning retention refers to act of retaining, act of keeping someone or something. In order for a meaningful learning to take place, ability to retain what is read is required. Therefore, in Basic Literacy Programme, synthetic phonic method could facilitate effective learning retention in the learners.

4. Basic Literacy Programme

Literacy is often perceived as lifelong learning that could be used to meet global challenges and human development. This serves as rationale for the enactment and formulation of policies and legislation in the quests to use education for development (Aderinoye, 2004). Olagunju (2008) also reiterated the relevance of literacy to society in the

area of human development, understanding of government programmes, reduction in maternal mortality, cultivation of positive attitude to government programmes and development process, concretization, rural transformation, economic empowerment, good governance and democracy, empowerment, social change, peace and peace building among others that could be achieved through the structure of adult and non-formal education, which basic literacy programme is one of its component.

As earlier said, Nigeria is among the E-9 nations i.e. nations with the highest number of citizens who are illiterates (Egunyomi, 2015). Sarumi (2011) observed that ten million illiterate youths and adults live in Nigeria and majority of them are in the norther part of the country. It was revealed further that millions of school age children are not in school, while about ten million children that completed primary six could not be mainstreamed into either Junior Secondary schools. This has negative implications and its consequences in the areas of exploitation, negative attitude, cheating, inability to modernize their vocational practice, perpetuation of illiteracy, disturbance of societal peace among others were disturbing. According to Sarumi (2011),

The only way out of this is to embark on mass literacy programme, non-formal basic literacy projects, workplace literacies, multi component literacies that have income generation, civic education, political education, health education, democracy and good governance, skills acquisition and micro-credit component. These programmes could be used to address the phenomena of high illiteracy rate and poverty, if we are to move closer to the realization of EFA and MDGs in the context of developing literacy programme in line with United Nation Literacy Decade.

It needs to be put on recorded that the high level of illiteracy in Nigeria today remains worrisome to the stakeholders in the provision of education. It is also necessary to say at this juncture that in both pre and post-colonial era in Nigeria, several programmes and policies have been implemented as interventional strategy to address this unsavory and worrisome trend. It is against this background that literacy is a pre-requisite to development, a catalyst through which individuals can be mainstreamed to actively involve and participate meaningfully in political, social and economic development. Sarumi (2011) reported that various researchers have established a close correlation and relationship between illiteracy and underdevelopment

Adeola (1998) noted that there is relationship between illiteracy and poverty, he argued that without functional literacy development remains elusive. Dairo (2014) maintained a different position to this. Hence, he opined that literacy is incapable of providing a cure for poverty in a society and that in the pre-literate society the illiterates

were very intelligent people and not necessarily poor. However, all countries in the world do not buy into the argument of Dairo, they see clearly the negative effect of illiteracy on development and that informed the huge amount of money spent towards reducing literacy in their societies. Buttressing this, Oduaran (1997) submitted that sustainable development is a copious alternative to development framework and could only be achieved through literacy education.

The mass literacy efforts towards making the nation, Nigeria a literate society worth noting also. There are avalanche of extant literature on the missionaries efforts on literacy, evening classes were established to teach their converts on how to read and write for easy propagation of their religious doctrine. The religious bodies or missionaries did a lot towards the promotion of mass literacy education in Nigeria. Even before the advent of Western education in the country, Islamic literacy centres had been established. Sarumi (2011) noted that in Nigeria literacy and numeracy education was first introduced through the Quranic schools in the 11th Century. As observed by Fafunwa (1974) that the period, between 1842 and 1882 was marked by intensive missionary activities and expansion in Nigeria. The Church Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Mission, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Qua-Iboe Mission, the Methodist Missionary Society etc firmly established themselves in the area of provision of literacy education apart from their primary responsibility of evangelization.

In the recent time in Nigeria, the period between 1989 and 1996 was another period of serious push towards mass literacy in the country. There was establishment of National Primary Education Commission (1993), the Nomadic Education Commission and the National Mass Education Commission (1990). All these were to ensure that high illiteracy rate was halted to a minimal level in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria also synergized and partnered with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in an attempt to promote literacy education in the country. These NGOs include, United Nation Literacy Decade (UNLD), UNESCO, World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF to mention but few. Their efforts were mostly in the following areas;

1. Creating a website as repository information concerning the need for literacy drive for human and social development.
2. Sponsoring media programmes on mass literacy.
3. Promoting the literacy needs of the disadvantage people, such as, the migrants, prisoners, nomads, refugees, physically challenged.
4. Promoting collaboration among themselves and other agencies towards the promotion of mass literacy education.
5. Provision of adequate fund that would sustain institutional programme in mass literacy campaign.
6. Training and re-training of facilitators needed for mass literacy programme.

7. Creating public awareness on the relevance of literacy to the socio-economic well-being of individuals and the society e.t.c.

Today, many states in the Federation of Nigeria are implementing literacy programme, Ondo State inclusive. The Ondo State Basic Literacy Programme is being run through the state's Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education aimed at reducing illiteracy level, among the people in the State. Ezeneri (2005) defined Basic Literacy education as a programme organized by government or religious bodies to eradicate illiteracy and to assist the disadvantaged groups to acquire skills to make them employable and to help them perform their social roles effectively. Basic literacy involves the skills of reading, writing and computing figure (i.e. numeracy). Ondo State has many centres for this programme across the state for the interested people, mainly the adults who are interested in the programme.

5. Conclusion

From all indications, phonic method has been found as a good strategy to enhance learning retention in Basic Literacy Programme.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings on the use of phonic method and its positive relationship on learning retention, the following recommendations are therefore made;

1. The use of phonic method should be encouraged in the teaching of literacy in Basic Literacy Programme.
2. Teacher education curriculum should emphasise phonics teaching method and pre-service teachers should be well grounded in the use of this method in basic literacy programmes.
3. Primers should be adequately supplied at the programme centres.
4. The facilitators should be made to undergo training and re-training on a regular basis on the method e.t.c.

References

- Adeola, O. A. (1998). *Literacy and poverty alleviation in retrospect and renewal: The state of adult education research in Africa*. Omolewa, M. A. et, al (eds), Senegal, UNESCO-BREDA.
- Aderinoye, R. A. (1997). *Literacy education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press, Ibadan.
- Aderinoye, R. A. (2004). "Adult and non-formal education and the global challenges: Issues and perspectives" Ibadan: Department of Adult Education 55th Anniversary Lecture, September.
- Dairo, V.O (2015) The effect of socio-economic factors as predictors of learners's performance in Literacy Programme, *Education Review*, 5, 2, pp 56-67
- Egunyomi, D. A. (2015). *Balancing life equation with continuing education*. An Inaugural lecture presented at University of Ibadan on the 2nd of July.
- Eshiet, O. I. (2015). Teaching reading and writing to beginners: Synthetic phonics for 2nd language teacher 73 Moulton place Newcastle upon Tyne NES3RU, U.K.
- Ezeneri, I. S. (2005). *The concept and scope of adult and non-formal education*. Paper presented at NNCAE Annual Conference, Ibadan, Nigeria. Nov. 27 – Dec. 1st
- Fafunwa, B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Uwin.
- FME (2013) National Policy on Education, Abuja, Federal Ministry of Education Printing Press.
- Oduaran, A. B. (1997). *The future of literacy, adult and non-formal education in Nigeria*. A paper commissioned by the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO and presented at a two-day consultative meeting held at Ikoyi Hotel, 4th-5th, March.

- Olagunju, D. (2008). *Relevance of adult education to national development*. Being a text of lecture presented to NAES, Ibadan, University of Ibadan.
- Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 7th Edition (2010). *Definition of retention*. London, Oxford University press.
- Oyekan, S. O. (1994). *Foundation of teacher education*. Okitipupa: Ebun-ola printer Nigeria Ltd.
- Sarumi, A. A. (2011). *Contemporary issues in historical foundations of adult education*. Ibadan: University Press, Ibadan.
- UNESCO (2000a). *Education for all: Is the world on track?* EFA Global Monitoring Reports. Paris: UNESCO
- Wendy, H. (1984). *Learning to read and write*. London: Hodder and Stoughton
- Wikipedia, *Information and communication technology* retrieved on 7th April, 2016 from <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/e-learning>.