THE IMPACT OF JOLLY PHONICS IN IMPROVING READING (PRONUNCIATION) SKILLS AMONG THE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BRACK ALSHATY

Rabya Abolkhasem Alakhdary[1] ✉ ⓘD

[1] The Inspector of English Language Subject, Educational Inspection Office, Brack Alshaty Educational Monitoring, Libya

A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates the use of Jolly Phonics in teaching pupils in public primary schools in Brack Alshati, Libya. In order to fulfill the aim of this paper, it considered a sample of 20 pupils, of different ages. This sample was a target of a reading proficiency test followed by a month bespoke intensive Jolly Phonics course. The course used multisensory approach including some actions, songs, games and watching videos. At the end of the course, those pupils were tested again to reflect upon their individual progress in reading (pronunciation) skills. This paper has also employed a survey, via a questionnaire containing 5 (Yes/ No questions) and one descriptive question, of 18 English language teachers in 10 public primary schools in Brack Alshati, Libya. The survey results have indicated that teaching letters only with memorizing one word, concentrating on teaching how to form the letter more than pronouncing the sound and memorizing the vocabularies instead of trying to pronounce them. Furthermore, it was also found that only 44% of teachers know and use Jolly Phonics strategy.

Keywords:- : Curriculum, foreign language, Jolly Phonics, methodology, synthetic

فاعلية برنامج (جولي فونكس) في تحسين مهارات القراءة (النطق) لدى تلاميذ المدارس الابتدائية في براك الشاطئ

ربيعة أبوالقاسم الأخضري [1] * ✉ ⓘD

مفتش مادة اللغة الإنجليزية، مكتب التفتيش التربوي، مراقبة التربية والتعليم براك الشاطئ، ليبيا.

الملخص

تستقصي الورقة فعالية استخدام طريقة "جولي فونكس" في تعليم الطلاب في المدارس الابتدائية العامة في براك الشاطئ، ليبيا. ولتحقيق هدف الورقة، تم دراسة عينة من 20 طالبًا بأعمار مختلفة. خضعت هذه العينة لاختبار كفاءة قراءة (قبلي)، تلاه دورة مكثفة لمدة شهر باستخدام طريقة "جولي فونكس". اعتمدت الدورة على نهج متعدد الحواس، والأغاني، والألعاب، ومشاهدة الفيديوهات. وفي نهاية الدورة، تم إجراء اختبار بعدي لتقييم تقدم القراءة(النطق). كما تضمنت الدراسة استبيانًا طُبّق على 18 مدرس لغة إنجليزية في 10 مدارس ابتدائية عامة في براك الشاطئ، وتضمن الاستبيان 5 أسئلة بنظام (نعم/لا) وسؤال وصفي. أشارت نتائج الاستبيان إلى أن تعليم الحروف فقط مع حفظ كلمة واحدة والتركيز على تعليم كيفية تشكيل الحروف أكثر من نطق الصوت وحفظ المفردات بدلاً من محاولة نطقها. علاوة على ذلك، تبين أن 44% فقط من المعلمين يعرفون ويستخدمون استراتيجية "جولي فونكس".

الكلمات المفتاحية : المنهج الدراسي، اللغة الأجنبية، جولي فونكس، المنهجية، النطق التركيبي.

Introduction

Teaching English in Libya with a new curriculum has been taught at least for ten years now. It started from the first grade to the twelfth grade, that means the students have been studying English for 12 years. On the other hand, the proficiency of English reading is very poor and almost the same in public schools of many different areas in Libya. Most students who graduated from such schools could not even read a simple word. Based on the plan of this new curriculum, students are expected to graduate with the gain of at least B1 or B2 level. Poor proficiency of reading is caused by many reasons and affects one ofthe important component of English learning, with respect to teaching the sounds and pronunciation from first grade. The first three levels of English for the Libyan curriculum designed by Garnet adopts a strategy of teaching sounds (phonetics) called Jolly Phonics. This strategy, if taught in the right way in classrooms, can solve many issues and shortcomings in teaching of the English reading system.

During the first years of school, teaching to read and write is one of the essential objectives of the primary education teachers. Literacy is considered a basic lesson for the future learning; even it can be said that it is the foundation for the rest of knowledge. Thus, the correct acquisition of literacy will affect the academic success and the communicative abilities of learners and it must; therefore, be considered a vital aspect of the educational process.

Lately, acquiring a second language has also become an important knowledge, which schools must provide. Globalization is contributing largely to make English the most important and predominant language of the world as it has become a lingua franca. It is everyday more and more used in almost all the fields of knowledge and human development areas. This factor has made learning English necessary to communicate with the rest of the world and schools are expected to make children competent in using this language.

The age at which children are now beginning to learn English is earlier than it used to be. In the past, students began to study a foreign language when they were almost teenagers, but now English is introduced even to little kids. The type of pupils has changed: these learners are not able to understand grammar rules or exercises because they cannot read nor write yet. As literacy is one of the most important aspects to be learned in those years, to promote a global and comprehensive education, English teaching must overlap with literacy teaching during the primary stage.

1. The importance of teaching English for early stages

As Dunn states quoting Pluck rose, "no other time in life does the human being display such enthusiasm for learning, for living, for finding out" (1983, p. 1). This helps to show why Early Childhood is the crucial stage to start learning English, since children at this age are "sponges" as they have a natural ability to learn by being surrounded at every moment by new experiences, every second is a new experience. and they live every day looking for new experiences to discover, experiment and learn. This is where the opportune moment is to be able to internalize knowledge in the mother tongue and the foreign language, and lay the necessary foundations for subsequent progress.

Krashen announces a fundamental difference in learning a language in his "Theory of Second Language Acquisition" by differentiating between "learning" a language and "acquiring it," "language students have two distinct ways of developing skills and knowledge in a second language" (Krashen 1988, p. 18). The main idea focuses on why English teaching should begin in the early childhood stage. Taking Krashen's own terminology as a reference, "language acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are

concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding" (1981, p. 1). This could be considered a first phase in "learning" the language, since here it is internalized and there is a concern to obtain an understanding through natural communication of the language. As it is the first phase, it can be said that teaching English during the first years of the educational system, in that first stage, students begin earlier in the phases of learning the language, promoting faster development and thus allowing a way to become competent and build knowledge and skills in this foreign language. So, the chance of starting teaching English from early stages is better and more beneficial for acquiring the language.

2. How to teach early stages

First primary stage concentrating on literary teaching (learning how to read and write and acquiring the lexical knowledge of second language). For achieving that, there are many methods that can be used.

According to Jermy Harmer, learners "often learn indirectly rather than directly, that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught. Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with. They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp. They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them."

There are many methods to teach literacy for children and we can classify the literacy methods into four categories, depending on the kind of information processing strategies and the orientation of the intervention: Synthetic methods, analytic or global methods, mixed methods and the constructivist methodology.

- Synthetic methods

Synthetic methods focus on developing bottom-up processes of teaching and learning. These methods start with the teaching of simple units like phonemes and graphemes, to progressively focus on the more complex units like words, sentences and texts. Carmena et al. (2002) explained that the teaching is sequenced: The learning starts from the recognition of graphic units and practice voicing out the letters and letters groups. By blending these units, connections are made, creating higher units until words and texts are formed. The method also focuses on the grapheme-phoneme correspondence. The key skills in this method are correct oral production, quick grapheme recognition and a good command of the grapheme-phoneme correspondences (bottom-up skills), leaving comprehension for later stages. Examples of synthetic methods are Jolly Phonics, Yo Yo Phonics, Letters and Sounds, Phonics International, Read and Write Inc, among others.

- Analytic or global methods

These methods are associated with the top-down processing of information. Unlike synthetic methods, analytic methods normally start by focusing on complex and meaningful linguistic units such as words, sentences or texts. Progressively, the student will get to the simplest units, the letters. Their main goal is comprehension and increase reader's motivation. They are also known as global because they start from a global message with meaning; either it is a word, a sentence or a text. As Borregón (2008) points out, these methods prioritize the visual function over the auditory one, unlike synthetic methods. Moreover, they are based on the global recognition of known and high frequency words. Examples of analytic methods are the Whole Language approach or the look and-say method.

- Mixed methods

Galera (2009) indicated that mixed methods use simultaneously the resources from both analytic and

synthetic methods. They try to bring together the two perspectives of the teaching and learning process (top-down / bottom-up). Their goal is obtaining meaning rather than analyzing the mechanic reading process.

Mixed methods appeared due to the inefficacy of both analytical and synthetic methods alone. Borregón (2008) adds that these methods allow the reader to make use of their known words bank when they read high frequency words, and to use their phonological decomposition in the prosecution of unknown words. Mixed methods focus on the word recognition, understanding and discovery of grapheme-phoneme correspondences to occur in combination with each other and be fed back. This means that the combination of the two methods creates more competent and skillful readers an example of a mixed method is the Balanced Literacy Program.

- Constructivist methods

Constructivism is a school of thought about learning. Its main assumption is that for learning to take place, the knowledge must be constructed or reconstructed by the learner by actions. That means that knowledge cannot be only transmitted. That is to say, although knowledge can be facilitated, every learner reconstructs their own experience making his own learning. Piaget – with genetic epistemology theory -, Vygostky – with socio-cultural learning theory- and Ausubel – with meaningful learning theory –, among other authors, realized important contributions to this paradigm. Constructivism can also be applied to the teaching of literacy. As Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) showed that children own certain ideas or beliefs about writing systems and the relations with oral language. This means that children can read and write before they can actually do it properly. Prior knowledge and information that the student obtains from real life, is considered of vital importance in this regard. With the new information, prior knowledge is reinforced, completed or dismissed, in order to create the new knowledge. The main goal is to make the students need to communicate through reading and writing and to make them realize the usefulness of the written language.

3. Jolly Phonics

Jolly Phonics is a synthetic phonics method used to teach English literacy which was created in the United Kingdom in 1989 by Sue Lloyd and Christopher Jolly. It is a multisensory method which is based on the teaching of the correspondences between the letters and the sounds in English. Children can learn to read and write through it, using the letter sounds. Through gestures and songs, the sounds are introduced, and are taught in a specific order (not alphabetically). Jolly Phonics consists of learning the 42 sounds of the English language instead of the letters of the alphabet. The sounds are organized into seven groups, starting with those which allow forming a higher number of words (Wernham and Lloyd, 2010). Each of these seven groups consists of six sounds. Some of the sounds are formed by two letters, what is called a diagraph. Each sound is associated to a gesture and a song, which are defined in the materials and educational resources proposed by the method. The sounds are associated to the most common spelling too. By this way, they also learn the following graphemes:

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or,
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

Groups and sequence of learning of the sounds in Jolly Phonics Jolly phonics focus on developing

five basic skills for reading and writing according to Jolly Phonics website (http://jollylearning.co.uk/):

1. Learning the letter sounds (Establish the grapheme-phoneme correspondences).

Knowledge of letter sounds was the first skill needed to be mastered by children in learning English literacy through Jolly Phonics. would always be reviewed and reinforced.??? There are were some techniques used for teaching letter sound skill to children, namely story reading, songs and actions as well as games.

A. Story Reading

Story reading is practiced daily was done for the children as an introductory activity for learning letter sound. The story reading for the children is a story with rhyming or storyline from the Jolly Phonics book itself. Through story reading, the children were was not only able to enjoy the story reading by the teacher, but also listening to the words and sounds in English.

B. Song & Action

The second one is song and action in which the children are asked to sing Jolly Phonics songs, while simultaneously performing the action of the sound. For instance, the sound /s/ is represented by snake and the children need to sing and weave their hand in an 's' shape like a snake and say sssss. And as a follow up activity, the teacher should ask them to find words or things in the classroom which start with /s/ sound, like sun, ship, starfish, etc.

C. Games

The teacher provides Jolly Phonics games, which are software games to be played through the computer by the children. Here, the games are designed interactively where the children could practice all the five skills of Jolly Phonics independently. For instance, they could learn as they play with the letter sound and the picture represented by the sound, such as 'i' for 'inky' the mouse, 's' for 'snake', etc.

2. Learning letter formation (Handwriting),

When children know the letter sound, at the same time they need to know the letter formation. Firstly, the teacher show the letter example through a song or flashcard and write it on the board. After that, the teacher shows the letter formation in the air as he/she gives instructions to be followed by children. For instance, in the letter /l/, the teacher says 'start at the top, down and cross' and it should be noted that the teacher need to do the formation in a mirroring position, so children could imitate it correctly. And as a follow up activity, the teacher ought to provide a kind of a sound sheet, consisting of a picture representing the letter sound, space for the children to trace and do the letter formation as well as some pictures where children need to determine which picture start with the letter sound being practice. At the end, the students are asked to circle the best letter they formed to boost their confidence.

3. Reading (Blending).

Blending can be started when the first six letter sounds have been taught by the teacher. The skill needs to be frequently practiced by looking at the letters, saying the sound and hearing the words. In this case, the teacher first plan lists of words needed to be blended by children, so it would be easier in teaching it. Flashcard is the main media used by the teacher, where at the first-time teacher always do a kind of review through the letter sound.

Variety of techniques are employed, such as having children in a small group and giving one flashcard for each of them to be blended. This is done in order to make them take responsibility toward themselves. Firstly, when they find any obstacles in blending the word, the teacher would fix it together with the group. Another way used by the teacher is to have a small whiteboard and some single letter flashcards.

4. Identifying the sounds in words (Phonemic awareness).

In learning to write, the children are required to have phonological awareness, where they could listen for the spoken words, identify and write the sound in that word. There are a variety of techniques used by the teacher, starting from copying and modeling, in which the teacher could slowly rub the words written on the board and ask them to try to write on their own.

5. Tricky words.

Tricky words can be defined as irregular words which are difficult to spell, but frequently happen in many texts. As Jolly Phonics plane that the teacher introduced 2-3 new tricky words per week for the children through a variety of techniques, such as flashcard activity where the teacher introduced tricky words through flashcards, and they needed to create sentences with the tricky word stated. For instance, the word 'live' where the /e/ sound is the tricky part, and is beyond the children expectation. Hence, students could not say the tricky word and create sentences like 'let's live in another place', 'I live all the time', etc. The other way is through a snapping game, where the teacher speed tricky words flashcards on the floor and children need to snap and say the word.

The research question of this study:

How does Jolly Phonics affect the reading proficiency of primary school students in Brack Ashaty, Libya?

The hypothesis of this study:

Jolly Phonics improves the reading proficiency of primary school students in Brack Ashaty, Libya. This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by providing empirical evidence on the impact of Jolly Phonics on reading skills and by suggesting implications and recommendations for curriculum design and teacher training in Libya.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The first section reviews the literature on literacy, language acquisition, and Jolly Phonics. The second section describes the methodology and procedures of the case study. The third section presents and analyzes the results and findings of the data collection which serves as the basis for recommendations.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effectiveness of Jolly Phonics in improving reading proficiency among primary school students in Brack Ashaty, Libya. The research design incorporated both an observation intervention and a survey component to address the research question comprehensively.

Research Design

The study consisted of two main components:

a) A quasi-experimental intervention using Jolly Phonics with a group of students. The participants were 20 pupils aged 7-10 years old and they have been chosen randomly from three primary public schools. Data collection by Pre-test: Assessment of students' initial reading abilities Intensive course using Jolly Phonics curriculum.

Jolly Phonics curriculum materials used the seventh finger point books, the stories, the activities, the songs, worksheets for blinding and TV to make learning more enjoyable. Then, provided the students with interactive online educational games to ensure their understanding of the lessons given. The duration of the course was one month for six days per week giving two sounds in a day starting with a story introducing the sound making an action for the sound like pretending to be a snake moving with S sound. Then forming the letter sound on the board or on air by their fingers, making some blending sound and segmenting with some plays like bingo, through the ball, board game and flower sounds. Last stage is listening to the song for the sound.

Reading assessment tools for pre- and post-tests used vocabulary banks from Jolly Phonics materials

for both pre- and post-tests.

Post-test: Evaluation of students' reading abilities after the intervention with maintained observation notes throughout the course.

b) A survey of English language teachers in public schools in Brack Alshati, Libya. The participants were 18 teachers from 10 public primary schools in Brack Alshati, Libya. They were chosen from the schools that were observed as an inspector. The questionnaire was created by Microsoft Forms including 5 (Yes/ No questions) and one descriptive question. Then, sent online. The data is then analyzed by Excel to show the results.

Results and Discussion

According to the observation method to investigate the students' abilities, the pre-test showed that they struggle with reading the sounds and the words including short and long vowel sounds, diphthongs and even the differentiation between b and d, b and p, when we pronounce c as s and when we pronounce it as k. All these patterns of pronunciation made the reading skills of the students very weak.

After one week of teaching by Jolly phonics curriculum, the students showed a progress in pronouncing words that contain the sounds they have taught. Some students, when they forget the particular sound, asked to make the action of the sound they immediately remembered. So that, aided by actions or body language is also an effective way of teaching and learning.

In the post test stage, the students were able to read more complex words and differentiate between b and d, p and b, c as s and c as k, pronounce short and long vowels, and read diphthongs more efficiently.

On the other hand, the survey made the study more reliable by showing the real state of unknowing the way of teaching sounds first to make better readers. The statistics showed that the average of teachers who used the traditional strategy to start teaching English letters and sounds. About 94% of teachers start with teaching letters only with memorizing one word like A Apple and there was a very high rate of using traditional ways of teaching English letters that poorly help students to read.

About 89% of them concentrate on teaching how to form the letter more than how to pronounce the sound of the letter. That also did not help students to acquire the sounds that help to start reading.

For using dictation to memorize the vocabularies instead of trying to pronounce them to help writing in an easy way, about 72% of teachers use dictation only that leads to memorization without the ability to read words.

According to the questionnaire, using educational games and active teaching with primary pupils the average is 50%. This age needs teachers to be active and use many interesting activities with kids to make learning more fun because the kids get bored easily.

The significant question was; do teachers know and use Jolly Phonics strategy or not?. The answers showed that only 44% of teachers know and use Jolly Phonics strategy.

The last question was open to give their teaching results of using Jolly Phonics in their class. They were surprised about the ability of their pupils to read and how it affects their fluency and they want all teachers to use it.

As a conclusion, Jolly Phonics improves the reading proficiency of primary school students in Brack Ashaty, Libya if it is taught in the right way.

Recommendations

First of all, all English teachers should use Jolly Phonics to teach students how to pronounce and read fluently and combine the method with some basic speaking phrases and sentences in order to make students fluent speakers.

Secondly, English teachers need to train to use Jolly Phonics effectively. Also, Faculty of Education

in Brack Ashaty, Libya should train the future teachers with Jolly Phonics method.

Limitations

Potential limitations are small sample size of teachers who answered the survey and short intervention period of the course.

Questionnaire sample

Please answer these questions for education purposes to obtain real results about the methods of teaching English in primary public schools in Brack Ashaty, Libya.

Thank you for your response.

Please answer **Yes** or **No**

1. I started teaching English with alphabets and one word like "A" apple.
2. I concentrate very much on writing the letters correctly on the line .
3. I use dictation to memorize vocabulary for first grades.
4. I use educational games and flashcards to teach children.
5. Have you ever used Jolly Phonics strategy to teach children English?
6. Answer the question below.

If you have ever used Jolly phonics, what were the result(s)?

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