

Comparative Effects of Synthetic and Analytic Phonics Methods on Basic Two Pupils' Interest in Reading in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study compared the effects of synthetic and analytic phonics methods on Basic 2 pupils' interest in reading in Education Zone A of Benue State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study adopted quasi-experimental nonrandomized, non-equivalent pre-test, post-test design. Experimental groups 1 and 2 were exposed to synthetic and analytic phonics methods respectively. The population of the study was 2,256 Lower Basic 2 pupils in the area of study. The sample of the study was 27 Basic 2 pupils obtained through purposive sampling technique. Pupils' Interest in Reading Inventory (PIRI) with reliability coefficient 0.74 was used for collection of data. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that there was significant difference between the mean interest rating scores of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method in favour of synthetic phonics method ($P=0.000<0.05$). There were no significant gender differences in pupils' interest (Synthetic Phonics Method: $P=0.402>0.05$, Analytic Phonics Method: $P=0.189>0.05$). It was recommended among other things that English Language teachers should combine synthetic and analytic phonics methods for teaching beginning reading and that teacher training institutions should include synthetic and analytic phonics methods in the pre-service and in-service training of teachers.

Keywords: Analytic, Interest, Method, Phonics, Reading

Introduction

Reading is a vital language skill that learners can hardly do without. This is because if learners are given a solid foundation in reading, it could go a long way in facilitating the learning of the three other skills of language namely; listening, speaking and writing (Elui, 2019). Reading is the hub of all academic activities, which is indispensable to pupils. Scholars define 'reading in different perspectives. According to Elui (2019), reading is the ability to interact meaningfully with words in print to identify and recognize words, pronounce them accurately, get meaning out of the text and respond to what is read. It is the ability of readers to interpret ideas and inject meaning to printed words. Aliyu (2010) defines reading as a way of building up meaning from what has been put down in written form. Reading is) thus, a form of communication during which the contents, challenges and claims made by the writer are gone over by the reader who tries to capture the substance of the written materials. According to Kozak (2011), reading is a complex interaction between the author and a reader, which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences. In other words, reading is an active and participatory process where a reader's prior knowledge of a topic is activated and used in constructing meaning with the information provided by the author. Udu (2014) defines reading as an attempt someone makes to discover the writer's mind or intent. According to the author, reading also means the ability to explain information that comes in text form. Therefore, reading requires a great deal of the reader's concentration.

The process of reading involves thinking as rightly pointed out by Taiwo (2002) that reading is a psycholinguistic process involving the interaction of language and thoughts as language is decoded and, meaning is reconstructed. Ferrer and Stalev (2016) look at the process of reading as being a creative and critical thinking skill that promotes vocabulary development, sharpens language skills and leads to greater cognitive development. Oyettuide and Moudumogu (1999) posit reading process as an abstract mental activity that occurs in the brain; and therefore, is difficult to measure. Reading plays a vital role in scholarship. Students who cannot read are likely to drop out of school (Chukwudi-Ofoedu, Amala & Igbokwe, 2011). It is not only important in education, but generally in all spheres of life for success and survival. All learners at the nursery, primary, secondary or tertiary level need the ability to read to be able to access information in all subjects. Reading plays an important role in education. The focus and objectives of education are: to develop natural talents to enhance the quality of environment, production of skilled manpower and generation of knowledge and enabling individuals to develop capacities to the highest level throughout life so that they can grow intellectually and contribute effectively to society, and finally, to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and foster their application for the benefit of economy. Reading is an essential language skill which pupils need to perform well in school and society. For children to read effectively, there is the need for their interest in reading to be high.

Interest is a state and/or disposition towards something (Renninger & Hidi, 2011). It manifests itself in several ways, including active engagement, focusing of one's attention and

learning more than one would otherwise learn. Interest is a feeling that accompanies or causes special attention to be paid to a particular topic or subject matter. In other words, it entails the level of the reader's interest in what he/she is reading.

Enabling children to perceive reading as an enjoyable pursuit is regarded as one of the important principles of teaching reading (Renninger & Hidi, 2011). However, the researchers observe that majority of Lower Basic 2 pupils in Education Zone A of Benue State, Nigeria have low interest reading as they often consider reading as a difficult task. Such pupils exhibit uncritical thinking behavior, blame others for their inadequacies and often suffer from low self-esteem. Beyond school, the doors to personal enrichment and career opportunities are closed against them (Muodumogu, 2019). They also develop a sense of powerlessness and insecurity and the tendency to turn to crime. The low interest in reading among pupils could be attributed to poor teaching methods. Udu (2004) also observes that the poor method of teaching reading in Ofle out of many factors responsible for poor interest in reading among learners. Experience has indicated that English Language teachers seem not to know what to do in order to develop pupils' interest in reading. Such a deficient reading instructional delivery cannot lead to effective fostering of pupils' interest in reading.

For children's interest in reading to be boosted, teachers need to use effective methods of teaching. Adelabu and Nder (2013) point out that instructional strategies used by teachers affect students' interest in reading. When appropriate strategies are used, students will be sufficiently engaged and they develop interest in the reading material. According to Darsana (2014), strategies with "interesting activities before, during and the reading" reduce boredom and stimulate learners' curiosity and interest in making. In Basic II as an elementary class in the primary school, teachers need to use interactive strategies such as analytic and synthetic phonics as second language (L2) of learners to keep them desiring to read.

Basically, phonics method is a method of teaching reading which aims to teach children to learn how to read and to love to read, instructional activities must be presented in meaningful contexts (Juel, 2000). In synthetic phonics method, children are guided to sound each letter in turn and then synthesize the sounds together in order to generate the pronunciation of the word. Thus, children construct the pronunciation for themselves. Most of the letter sound correspondences, including the consonant and vowel diagraphs, can be taught in the pace of a few months at the start of their first year at school. This means that the children can read many of the unfamiliar words they meet in text for themselves without the assistance of the teacher (Rupley & Blair, 2009), in analytic phonics, whole words are presented and pronounced by the teacher. Children's attention is only subsequently drawn to the information given by letter sound correspondences.

The synthetic phonics method is multi-sensory and is designed for young children. There is more to reading than phonics but there is also a weight of evidence than systematic synthetic phonics taught in the early years gives children key building blocks they need to understand words, attain a good standard of reading and can inspire a lifetime love of reading (Rupley & Nichols, 2009). Synthetic phonics is a method of teaching reading that involves decoding or breaking words into separate Sounds which can then be blended together to read

unknown words. Analytic phonics method teaches pupils the phonics relationships among words. Pupils are taught to analyze letter sound relationship and look to decode words based upon spellings and letter patterns and their sounds (Attah, 2019). For example, if the child knows “bat”, “cat” and “hat”, then the word “mat” will be easy to read. Analytic phonics involves teaching pupils through word association, rhyme and identifying similarities between words. Analytic phonics focus on grouping words that are similar and memorizing word groups (mat, cat, fat). Moreover when the child comes 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 refers to the closing section of a word (Dre 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, rot and cot). Ruddell (2002) asserts that in the teaching of analytic phonics, teachers compare unknown words to known words and avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation. Example “b” says “bat” not “buh.” Pupils learn to identify words by their shape, their beginning and ending letters and by the context which they are used in sentence, often with the aid of pictures. Darsana (2014) stresses that strategies with interesting activities before, during and after reading reduce boredom and stimulate learners’ curiosity and interest in reading. Attah (2019) found that phonics method enhanced pupils’ interest in reading.

Gender could affect pupils’ interest in reading. Johnston, McGeown and Watson (2012) found that girls exposed to analytic phonics performed significantly better in word recognition and reading comprehension. However, Attah (2019) found no significant difference in male and female pupils’ interest in reading when exposed to phonics method. Ofudo and Lawal (2011) also reported that gender does not have significant effect on students’ reading when exposed to reading strategies. However, Ukume (2010) whose study on the effect of recreational reading programme on SS2 students’ writing and reading interest in Makurdi Benue State revealed that male students were more interested in reading recreationally than female students.

It could be inferred scholars have advocated adoption of synthetic and analytic phonics methods as viable methods that could arouse pupils’ interest in reading. However, there is uncertainty on which of the two methods is more effective in developing pupils’ interest in reading. There are also inconsistencies on the effect of gender on pupils’ interest in reading when exposed to synthetic and analytic phonics methods. Thus, the problem of this study put in a question form is: What is the comparative effect of synthetic and analytic phonics methods on Lower Basic 2 male and female pupils’ interest in reading in Education Zone A of Benue State, Nigeria?

Research Questions

1. What is the difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method?
2. What is the difference between the mean interest scores of male and female students taught reading using synthetic phonics method?

3. What is the difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female students taught reading using analytic phonics method.

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using the analytic phonics method.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using the synthetic phonics method.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method.

Methodology

This study adopted quasi-experimental non-randomized pre-test and post-test design. The design is deemed suitable because the participants of the research were not randomized as in true experiment (Emaikwu, 2015). The population for the study comprised 2,256 Lower Basic 2 pupils' from 780 public primary schools across the seven local government areas of Education Zone A of Benue State, Nigeria. The sample of the study was made up of 27 Lower Basic 2 pupils selected through purposive sampling technique. Only the schools that met certain selected criteria. The criteria include: Schools that have no knowledge of jolly phonics, schools having teachers of at least B.A. (Ed) holders in English Language who have spent five years on the teaching job and government approved Lower Basic schools with Lower Basic 2 classes. The justification for the use of purposive sampling technique was to ensure that schools selected have the same facilities for teaching and learning of beginning reading. This helped to remove the disparity of schools in terms of relevant facilities and adequate as a threat to validity of the study

The instruments used for the study was Pupils' Interest in Reading Inventory (PIRI). It is a researcher made instrument consisting of Sections A and B. Section A elicits the bio data of pupils, while Section B was made up of 20 items designed to obtain pupils' responses on their interest in reading. The 20 items had a rating scale of Yes (2 points) and No (1 point). Nineteen lessons were planned for each of the two phonics teaching methods to enable the researcher and research assistants teach and elicit responses from the pupils. The lesson plans contained materials and activities for research assistants (teachers) and pupils based on synthetic and analytic phonics methods. While the lesson plans on synthetic phonics method aimed at exposing pupils to blending sounds to read words, those on analytic phonics were planned to enable pupils identify sound relationship in sets of words and analyse words into sound units.

The PIRI and the lesson plans were validated by two experts in English Language Education and two experts in measurement and evaluation all in the Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi. The comments and suggestions were used to improve the

quality of the instrument and lesson plans. The reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha.

A pre-test was administered to both experimental groups to determine pupils' homogeneity before the treatment. After the pre-test, the research assistants taught Experimental Group 1 using synthetic phonics method and Experimental Group 2 using analytic phonics method. After treatment, the research assistants administered the post-PIRI to determine pupils' interest in reading when taught using synthetic and analytic phonics methods. In all the schools, the treatment procedure lasted for nine weeks. Training of research assistants was held in the first week, while the pre-test was conducted in the second week. Treatment of experimental group land experimental group 2 was carried out simultaneously in the third, to eight weeks. Post-test was administered in the nine week. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Interpretation

The data obtained from the study have been presented, analysed and interpreted in tables as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pupils' Ratings Taught Reading using Synthetic and Analytic Phonics methods

Method	N	Pre-test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Synthetic Phonics	15	1.34	0.109	1.45	0.083	0.11
Analytic Phonics	12	1.31	0.095	1.41	0.073	0.10
Difference		0.03		0.04		0.01

Table 1 reveals that the mean interest ratings of pupils taught using synthetic phonics method was 1.34 with standard deviation of 0.109 during pre-test, while the pupils had a mean interest of 1.45 with standard deviation of 0.08 during post-test. The pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method had mean interest rating of 1.31 with standard deviation of 0.095 during pre-test and mean interest ratings of 1.41 with standard deviation of 0.073 during post-test.

Research Question 2: What is the difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pupils' Ratings Taught Reading using Synthetic and Analytic Phonics methods

Method	N	Pre-test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Male	7	1.14	0.099	1.29	0.118	0.15
Female	8	1.09	0.068	1.38	0.084	0.29
Mean Difference		0.09		0.09		0.14

Table 2 shows that male pupils had the mean interest ratings score of 1.14 with standard deviation of 0.099 at pre-test and the mean score of 1.29 and standard deviation of 0.118 at post-test. Female pupils obtained the mean interest rating score of 1.09 with standard deviation of 0.068 during pre-test and the rating of 1.38 with standard deviation of 0.084 during post-test. Male pupils had the mean gain of 0.15 while female students had the mean gain of 0.29. The mean difference between the interest ratings of male and female pupils was 0.14 in favour of female students.

Research Question 3: What is the difference between the mean interest ratings scores of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pupils' Ratings Taught Reading using Synthetic and Analytic Phonics methods

Method	N	Pre-test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Male	6	1.37	0.088	1.38	0.052	0.01
Female	6	1.25	0.063	1.43	0.088	0.18
Mean Difference		0.12		0.05		0.17

Table 3 shows that male pupils obtained the mean interest rating score of 1.37 with standard deviation of 0.088 a pre-test and the mean score of 1.38 and standard deviation of 0.052 at post-test. Female pupils had the mean interest rating Score of 1.25 with standard deviation of 0.063 at pre-test and the mean score of 1.43 and standard deviation of 0.088 at post-test. Male pupils had the mean gain of 0.01 while female students had the mean gain of 0.18. The difference between the mean interest rating scores of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method was 0.17 in favour of female pupils.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method.

Table 4: ANCOVA of mea interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic and Analytic Phonics methods.

Source	Type III of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.581 ^a	2	.291	44.820	.000
Intercept	.271	1	.271	41.877	.000
Pre Interest	.00	1	.001	.142	.710
Strategy	.562	1	.562	86.748	.000
Error	.156	24	.006		
Total	42.550	27			
Corrected Total	.737	26			

a. R. Square=.789 (Adjusted R Squared=.771)

Table 4 shows that $F(1, 24) = 86.748; P=0.000 < 0.05$. Since P-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using- synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method in favour of synthetics phonics method. This means pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method gained more interest in reading than those taught using analytic phonics method.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using the synthetic phonics method.

Table 5: ANCOVA of mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics methods

Source	Type III of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.007 ^a	2	.003	.438	.655
Intercept	.008	1	.088	11.685	.005
Pre Analytic Interest	5.206E-5	1	5.206E-5	.007	.935
Sex Analytic	.006	1	.006	.756	.402
Error	.091	12	.008		
Total	18.690	15			
Corrected Total	.097	14			

a. R. Square=.068 (Adjusted R Squared=.087)

Table 5 shows that $F(1,12) = 0.756; P = 0.402 > 0.05$. Since P-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there i no significant difference between the mean interests ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method. This implies that synthetic phonics method improved both male and female pupils' interest in reading.

Research Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method.

Table 6: ANCOV of Mean Interest Ratings of Male and Female Pupils Taught Reading Using Analytic Phonics Method

Source	Type III of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.011 ^a	2	.005	1.021	.398
Intercept	.040	1	.040	7.543	.023
Pre Analytic Interest	.003	1	.003	.642	.444
Sex Analytic	.011	1	.011	.2.021	.189
Error	.048	9	.005		
Total	23.860	12			
Corrected Total	.059	11			

a. R. Square=.185 (Adjusted R Squared=.0)

Table 6 shows that $F(1, 9) = 2.021$; $P = 0.189 > 0.05$. Since P-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method. This implies that analytic phonics method equally gingered the interest in reading of both male and female pupils.

Discussion of Findings

The result showed that there is a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method and those taught using analytic phonics method. Pupils exposed to synthetic phonics method had higher interest ratings. This finding was because synthetic phonics is more child-centred than analytic phonics method. Synthetic phonics method gives pupils opportunities to blend sounds and read words with joy. It provides fun-filled activities that arouse pupils' interest in reading. Conversely, in analytic phonics method, pupils are taught to analyze letter sound relationship and look to decode words based upon spellings and letter patterns and their sounds. Thus, the multi-sensory nature of synthetic phonics method might have boosted the pupils' interest in reading more than the analytic phonics method. This finding is in tandem with Attah (2019) who found that phonics method enhanced pupils' interest in reading. Darsana (2014) also posits that strategies with interesting activities before, during and after reading reduce boredom and stimulate learners' curiosity and interest in reading.

Another finding of this study revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean interest rating scores of male and female pupils taught reading using synthetic phonics method. This finding was because synthetic phonics exposed both male and female pupils to fun-filled activities enabling them to read with joy. The finding corroborates that of Attah (2019) who found no significant difference between male and female pupils' interest in reading when exposed to phonics method. The result of this study also concurs with Ofudo and Lawal (2011) who reported that gender does not have significant effect on students' reading when exposed to reading methods.

Finding also revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of male and female pupils taught reading using analytic phonics method. This finding

emerged because both male and female pupils enjoyed learning to read using analytic phonics method. By identifying relationships in words, both male and female pupils were able to read new words and develop interest in reading. This result is in agreement with Attah (2019) who found no significant gender difference in pupils' interest in reading when taught reading using phonics method. The finding also supports that of Ofudo and Lawal (2011) that gender does not have significant effect on students' reading when exposed to reading strategies.

This finding, however, debunks Ukume (2010) whose study revealed that male SS2 students in Makurdi, Benue State were more interested in reading when they were exposed to a recreational reading programme. It also disagrees with Johnston, McGeown and Wit-son (2012) who found that girls exposed to analytic phonics performed significantly better in word recognition and reading comprehension. The dis-concordance in this finding might be as a result of differences in the location of the studies and the level of pupils who participated in the study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that synthetic phonics method increased pupils' interest in reading more than analytic phonics method. However, both methods equally improved pupils' interest in reading. It was also concluded that synthetic and analytic phonics methods improved both male and female pupils' interest in reading. Therefore, the use of both methods in teaching beginning reading can help pupils to develop interest in reading irrespective of their gender.

Recommendations

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

1. English Language teachers should combine synthetic and analytic phonics methods for more effective beginning reading instruction. Since learners have individual differences, using a variety of methods helps to meet their different needs.
2. Teacher trainers should include synthetic and analytic phonics methods in the pre-service and in-service training of teachers. This could enable teachers to effectively use the methods in improving pupils' interest in reading irrespective of their gender.
3. The Ministry of Education and teaching professional bodies should expose teachers to synthetic and analytic phonics methods through seminars, workshops and conferences. However, more emphasis needs to be paid to synthetic phonics method since it is more result-oriented than analytic phonics method.

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