

CAUSES OF BASIC THREE PUPILS' INABILITY TO READ SIMPLE SENTENCES CORRECTLY AT ST ANTHONY PRIMARY SCHOOL, MORSE

Edmond Kwame Amable Tawiah¹

¹Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi Christian University.

Corresponding Author-Email: eamable87@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the causes of Morse St Anthony Primary School Basic Three pupils' inability to read simple sentences correctly. The purpose was to find out the root causes of pupils' inability to read simple sentences correctly and also to help them overcome such problem using the phonic approach. Findings from the study showed that most children did not get the concept of letter and word recognition at the pre-school stage.

The research instruments used were test, observation, interview as well as event recording were adopted for data collection. Data was analysed using tables, bar charts and frequency tables. Two (2) weeks were used for the data collection. The data collected at the pre-reading stage revealed that the child had challenges when reading. The population involved all Basic Three pupils of Morse St Anthony Primary School. The sample size was two pupils from the basic level. Tables were used to analysed the results of the pre and the post-test. The results proved that the use of the phonic approach is the appropriate one that can help pupils with poor reading habits to overcome the problem.

It was recommended that for effective teaching, individual children must be attended to. The present large class enrolment does not permit individual attention since not all children are motivated at the same rate, working with a limited number of children at a time will offer the teacher the opportunity to attend to individual and offer them organised and purposeful teaching programmes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning to read is a dynamic process that represents the most important period of literacy experiences and the integration of multiple skills and processes. Learning to read and understand in many schools globally and Ghana in particular, has been a major concern for which the Kwahu West Municipality is not an exception. A large number of both children and adults cannot read at all and even those who can read somehow cannot read well.

Research findings indicate that a large number of school-going age children cannot read (Boison, 2005). The finding is supported by reports from the West African Examinations Council (2000), which indicate that most of the children who write the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (B.E.C.E) in Ghana do not pass because they cannot read and understand the demands of the questions and pupils of Morse St Anthony Primary School in the Kwahu West Municipality are not exempted. Achieving educational success and excellence for all requires an understanding of why and how to teach reading.

Ideally, reading plays a very important role in life. It is one of the factors that make a person literate. Without reading skills, ideas cannot be tapped easily. It also forms a very important aspect of language development. There is the need for pupils to develop good reading habits in order to acquire the ability to communicate effectively with people around them. Reading broadens one's knowledge, refreshes the mind and helps in language acquisition.

'We learn to read at the early stages of life and later read to learn,' Boison (2008). The ability to read is a fundamental process which is basic to education and the acquisition of many out of school learning experiences such as reading letters from friends and relatives, road signs, labels on commodities, prescriptions on medicines, newspapers, magazines, journal and the like. The skills and knowledge of reading are very vital for pupils' success in almost endeavours. The inability of pupils with moderate to mild reading difficulty to decode and read simple letters and words is a great worry to themselves, their teachers as well as their parents. This is because it hinders the child's progress in school and in life as a whole and also slows down the teaching and learning process.

Some pupils struggle with reading, but they do not have a diagnosed disability such as learning disability. These pupils may just lag behind their peers a bit, requiring more time to learn certain things. They may require more specialized reading instruction than what has been provided, or the pupils may have previously received poor reading instruction.

Whatever the case, these pupils depend on caring and insightful schools, teachers and parents to provide them the reading help they need. With regard to this, the researcher deemed it necessary to use the Phonics method or phonic to help pupils who have reading difficulties since this instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of

letter sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling. Every year when the West African Examinations Council examinations results are publicized, there seem to be some kind of improvement. Whether the improvement is significant or not depends on individual subjects and the results from the previous year. Regardless of the progress, the level of English Language continues to be interrogated. One of the main reasons for this is because pupils lack the ability to read fluently and comprehend in English apart from their lack of proficiency in the language itself. Reading is the channel through which information could be obtained. A child who is suspected to have moderate to mild reading difficulty at Morse St Anthony Primary School has difficulties in reading as a result of phonemic awareness. The consequence will be that the child will not be able to be independent in the school particularly at large. This poses a great challenge to both teachers and parents.

Due to the child's reading difficulties and poor general academic performance, the parents shirk their responsibilities and therefore are reluctant to provide his basic school needs. It is in this light that the researcher has decided to embark on the study.

The study seeks to find:

1. How the phonic method can be used to develop reading skills in children with moderate to mild reading difficulty.
2. The causes of reading problems in children with moderate to mild reading difficulty.
3. The extent to which phonics will help to develop reading skills for children with moderate to mild reading difficulty.
4. The relevance of the phonic approach in teaching reading to individuals with moderate to mild reading difficulty.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Meaning of Reading

In order to read, one must follow a sequence of characters arranged in a particular spatial order. For example, English flows from left to right, Hebrew from right to left, and Chinese from top to bottom. The reader must know the pattern and use it consistently.

Ordinarily, the reader sees the symbols on a page, transmitting the image from the eye to the brain, but reading also can be accomplished by touch, as in the Braille system, a printing method designed for the blind that involves raised or punched dots. Reading is a complex process made up of several interlocking skills and process (Juel & Minden -Cupp, 2000). These skills and strategies are employed before, during and after reading. Reading is a process by which the reader makes personal connections with a text to construct meaning. Reading and responding to a text are integral parts of language learning. Effective readers employ a wide repertoire of meaning -making (comprehension) strategies that they can deploy independently with a range of texts. Effective readers understand and remember what they read. They can summarize and discuss the content and demonstrate their comprehension of the text. They can analyse and evaluate what they have read. Effective readers recognize words quickly and efficiently. They demonstrate high word recognition. They possess strong fluency skills. They read with good expression, intonation, pitch and phrasing (Boison, 2008). According to National Reading Panel (2000), reading refers to activities as varied as a first graders struggling with simple sentences in a storybook, a cook's following of directions from a receipt book, or a scholar attempting to understand the meanings of a poem.

Reading exposes people to the accumulated wisdom of human civilization. Advanced readers bring to the text their experiences, abilities and interests, the text, in turn, allows them to expand those experiences and abilities and to find new interests. To reach maturity in reading, an individual goes through a series of stages, from readiness to adult reading ability. Boison (2008) citing Godman (1976), states that reading is a complex process by which a reader reconstructs to some degree, a message encoded by a writer in graphic language.

Learning to read can be analysed as involving two basic processes (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998). One process involves learning to convert the letter into recognizable words. The other involves comprehending the meaning of the print. When children attain reading skills, they learn to perform both of these process so that their attention and thought are focused on the meaning of the text while word reading processes operate unobtrusively and out of awareness for the most part. Children acquire comprehension skills in the course of learning to speak. Comprehension processes that children use to understand spoken language are thought to be the same ones that they use in processing letter-sound relations in the words though decoding or analogizing creates alphabetic connections that establish the words in memory as sight words (King & Torgesen, 2000). In effect, reading can simply be defined as making meaning out of print, Braille and symbols.

Reading Difficulties

The importance of getting children off to a good start in reading cannot be overstated. Success in primary school is virtually synonymous with success in reading and those children who lack the ability to read as they move to secondary education inevitably face problems in every subject as a result. A significant number of children fail to reach the minimum standards for English at the end of primary school (Boison, 2008). From ten to fifteen percent of all children

have a reading difficulty, that is, they read significantly below their mental ability. A smaller number of these children may be found to have a learning disability. Most professionals tend to use the term reading disability to refer to a significant discrepancy in reading, irrespective of the cause. The term learning disability is used to refer to a discrepancy that is not caused by vision, hearing or motor handicaps, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or environmental disadvantage, but rather by a presumed underlying neurological difficulty (National Center for Education Statistic 2001). Two types of children with reading problems have been distinguished by researchers. First, there are children who are unexpectedly poor readers because their intelligence (an index of learning aptitude for some academic skills) is higher than their reading ability. Second, there are children whose below-average reading is not surprising given that their intelligence is also below average. Various labels such as dyslexic or learning disabled or reading disabled have been applied to children whose higher intelligent quotients are discrepant with their poor reading skill. Children lower reading scores are consistent with their lower intelligent quotient have been referred to as low achievers or garden variety poor readers (Strickland, 1998).

Reading difficulty is the inability of an individual to decode print, Braille and symbols to make meaning. It is also a difficulty that affects the skills involved in the reading and spelling of words. An individual with a reading disability demonstrates difficulties in reading skills that are unexpected in relation to age, cognitive ability, quantity and quality of instruction, and intervention. The reading difficulties are not the result of generalized developmental delay or sensory impairment (Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte & Herron 2001). Reading disability may be characterized by: difficulties in single-word reading, initial difficulties in decoding or sounding out words, difficulties in reading sight words, insufficient phonological processing, that is, the understanding that sentences comprised words, words are made up of syllables and syllables are made up of individual sounds or phoneme, expressive or receptive language difficulties and difficulties with comprehension. The processing difficulties may also be revealed in spelling and writing. Written expression disability and mathematics disability are commonly found in combination with a reading disability (National Center for Education Statistic 2001). For students with reading problems, the reading difficulties are persistent. Even though an individual's reading ability may eventually reach an acceptable performance, it often continues to be characterized by a slower reading rate.

Factors Accounting for Reading Difficulties of Children

There are several factors accounting for the reading difficulties of most children in our school setting with regard to inappropriate instructional approach. Inadequacy of vocabulary is one of the factors which contribute or account for reading difficulties of pupils. Inadequate early stimulation at home by parents as a result of poor socio-economic factors such as poverty results in poor reading. Torgesen and Mathes (200) assert that home conditions such as illiterate home condition could seriously have negative impact on the child's reading ability. The individual child who is under favourable home conditions is likely to do better in terms of reading and general academics as well. School environment could also contribute negatively to poor reading among school children. Lack of well-equipped libraries and reading specialist in schools can retard reading among pupils.

Strickland (1998) citing Moyle (1968) asserts that personal attributes like intelligence, language ability, physical and psychological factors have direct impact on reading. Lukewarm attitudes of some teacher also contribute to the reading problems of an individual. Some teachers are of the view that teaching children reading is cumbersome and tedious. Large class size, lack of reading tradition of inherent syndrome and other phenomena are responsible for most of the reading difficulties the child is exposed to (King & Torgesen, 2000).

According to Torgesen, et al (2001), children with severe communication disorders have grammatical limitations in expressive language. Reading words are the most salient features of specific reading impairment in children with learning disability. Englest, Zhao, Collings and Rooming (2005) supported this assertion and maintain that, reading or oral language disorder includes articulation substitution, omission, distortion and lisping.

Articulation Disorders

Concerning the level of speech of individuals with reading difficulty, many authors of the view that most prominent characteristic is the children's reading and language limitations which are revealed by poor articulation (Boison 2008,). The most common articulation disorders among children with reading difficulty include substitution, omission, distortion, lisping and others. **Substitution** This involves the replacement of some phonetic sound for another, for another, for instance 'red' may be pronounced as 'wed' 'vero' as 'wero.' Ocloo et al (2005) are of the view that substitution involves replacement of consonants in words. For example, 'toyota and teacher becomes 'cheacher.' Again, they agreed that children with reading difficulty have errors with the use of sounds like 'vegetables' for 'vegetables', 'yellow' for 'jellow.'

Omission

Omission of phonemes or speech sounds is another common articulation disorder impeding reading among children with moderate reading difficulty. Okyere and Adams (2003) posit that children with children reading difficulty only pronounces some parts of words and the rest are left out, for instance 'big' for 'bi', small' for 'mall.'

Also, Gadagbui (1997) identified it as deletion of speech sound(s) as single consonant clusters. She continues to explain that the sounds have less intensity and are rarely seen on lips or are those sounds which are alike in pronunciation. Children with reading difficulties have such difficulty and therefore omit some of the sounds.

In addition, Sarless and Scort (1995) agreed that these children have difficulty with phonemes and some consonants.

Distortion

Children with reading difficulties have difficulty in pronunciation of words. That is, they deviate from normal pronunciation of words. Boison (2005) identified distortion as individuals replacing a long vowel with a short one, for example 'cook' as 'cuk' 'feel' as 'fi' 'seen' as 'sin,' etc.

Lisping

Lisping is another characteristic of reading problems in the pronunciation of words to children with reading difficulty. In this case, the struggling readers have difficulty in pronouncing some sounds. This is because they have problems with the vocal cavity. The arrangement of the teeth in the vocal cavity is not well formed.

Ainley & Fleming (2002) pointed out that such sounds are called inter-dental and are pronounced using the tip of the tongue against the upper front teeth as in 'table', 'ten', 'tin,' etc., since the oral cavity is affected with poor dentition, some children with reading problems tend to do lisping when reading.

Impact or Effects of Reading Difficulties on Children's Academic Achievement

Reading difficulties of most pupils cannot be underestimated considering the fact that social, academic and economic life of each individual is very important and paramount for successful living. Socially, children who have difficulties in reading are affected because their language and reading disorders. Boison (2005) posit that man evolved establishing contact with his neighbours, hence impairment in speech or reading will affect an individual. In support of this view, Strickland (1998) confirm that relationship is based on share communication, so if an individual's speech is distorted and makes it impossible to understand written words, such individual is not likely to be selected as a social partner. Adams (1990) revealed that some youth or pupils with speech and reading impairment isolate themselves from social interaction since they have problem forming interpersonal relationships. This is as a result of the difficulty they experience in understanding commands, stories, jokes and instruction given them.

Academically, most children have problems coping with academic work as a result of their speech and reading difficulties. Academic skills relate basically to reading, writing and arithmetic or numeracy (Avoke, 2005). Language as we all know is the basis or fundamentals in achieving academic success. Asamoah Gyimah & Duodu (2007) noted that children with difficulty in reading and spelling therefore need light capacity for word recognition. Their conditions make it difficult for them to use spelling and word partners to produce phonetic version of what they hear. As these children cannot read, they become confused at the sounds they hear and have less as compared with their age cohort. Snow et al (1998) developed a vocabulary growth chart which indicates a number of words expected at a given age. The authors contend that a fluent reader at age two has about two hundred and seventy-two words or vocabulary in which he can express himself. These figures cannot be compared to a child with reading problems. For them, as at that age, they have less than 50 words or vocabulary that they select their words from. In addition, they have difficulty pronouncing long words and therefore tend to repeat the words. Economically, one has to be sound to be able to cope with the economic demands of this fast- growing economic word. Economics in its simplest term is the ability of being capable of producing and to operate for profit. Torgesen et al (2003) has it that for one to be economically sound, fast dependable communication should take place, for instance, by phone where ideas are expressed very fast with immediate action taken to boost business. The individual with reading problems has serious pronunciation and communication problems and this makes it difficult for him to communicates with business counterparts' information is very crucial as far as business is concerned and as long as reading and communication are a problem.

Definitions and Explanation of the Concept Phonics

Phonics instruction has also been widely regarded as particularly beneficial to children with reading problems (Bear et al, 2008). Many studies have shown that reading disabled children have exceptional difficulty decoding words (Strickland), 1998). In fact, their level of performance falls below that of younger non-disabled readers who read at the same grade-equivalent level, indicating a serious deficit in decoding skill. Phonics instruction that teachers disabled readers to decode words should remediate this deficit and should enable these children to make progress in learning to read. The meta-analysis evaluated the contribution made by phonics instruction to growth in reading among children having difficulty learning to read. Phonics have been explained with various terms by different scholars. For instance,

Juel & Minden-Cupp (2000) states that phonics is the relationship between the letters in written words and sounds in spoken words. Torgesen et al (2001) also defined phonics as involving two elements such as the ability to put together or blend sounds represented by letters. Another school of thought suggest that phonics is the association of letters or combinations of letters with appropriate speech sounds.

Phonics also include understanding the principles that govern the use of letters in words (Encyclopaedia, 1994) from <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/254>(2010) phonics instruction is a way of teaching that stress the acquisition of letter sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling. Again, Boison (2008) is of the view that phonics is the understanding that, there is a predictable relationship between phoneme (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language). It is noteworthy that the primary focus of phonics instruction or approach is to help beginning readers understand how letters are linked to sounds (phonemes) to form letter sound correspondences and spelling patterns and to help this knowledge in reading.

Strategies to be Used in Developing Reading Skills in Children Reading Difficulty

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read quickly and skilfully. They are taught how to: recognize the sounds that each individual letter makes, identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make –such as ‘sh’ or ‘oo’ and blend these sounds together from left to right to make a word. Children can then use this knowledge to de-code new words that they hear or see. This is the first important step in learning to read. Research shows that when phonics is taught in a structured way-starting with the easiest sounds and progressing through to the most complex-it is the most effective way of teaching young children to read. It is particularly helpful for children aged five to seven. Almost all children who experience good teaching of phonics will learn the skills they need to tackle new words. They can then go on to read any kind of text fluently and confidently, and to read for enjoyment. The children who received phonics instruction across most research studies varied in two important ways that were expected to make a difference on the effect sizes produced by phonics instruction: their age or grade in school, and their reading ability (Flint, Cogne, Stiller & Hearth 2008). Kindergartners, particularly those at risk, know little about letters and sounds. Typically, they are non-readers. For them, phonics instruction begins by teaching letter shapes, letter sounds, phonemic awareness and how to apply these in simplified reading and writing tasks. Later in kindergarten or at the beginning of first grade, formal reading instruction begins with much ground to cover. Children typically start as emergent readers and by the end of first grade are to read texts independently. In systematic phonics programs, extensive instruction is provided to develop children’s knowledge of the alphabetic system and how to use this knowledge to read words in and out of text. The greatest impact of phonics instruction is expected to occur in helping first graders get off the ground in learning to read. Children who have been taught also tend to read accurately than those taught using other methods such as ‘look and say’. This includes children who find learning to read difficult, for example those who have dyslexia. Phonics instruction may be provided systematically or incidentally. The hallmark of a systematic phonics approach or program is that, sequential set of elements are taught along dimension of explicitness depending on the type of phonics methods employed. Conversely, with incidental phonics instruction, the teacher does not follow a planned sequence phonics element to guide instruction but highlights particular elements opportunistically when they appear in text (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998). It is important for teachers to understand the critical elements of reading instruction. Students who have a reading disability will require intensive direct instruction. The critical elements of reading instruction include: strategies for building meaning using the cues and conventions of language (including phonological awareness of text structures and organizational patterns, and the pragmatics of text) and reading fluency. These elements are not taught in isolation.

Saskatchewan Learning English Language arts curricula focus on teaching students through an integrated process to help them understand the relationship among the elements and how they relate to the ultimate goal of reading (Flint, et al, 2008). Expressive and receptive oral language provide the foundation for these elements. These critical must be explicitly and intensively taught if students are to become proficient readers and writers. Students who are at risk for reading failure require direct teaching through a systematic format (Snow, et al 1998).

Phonics instruction is a means to an end, not the end in itself. Phonics is not meant to be the predominant component within a reading program, rather it is one of the essential features. It is critical that students see the relevance of phonics. Phonics instruction should begin with a foundational understanding of phonemic awareness and letter of the alphabet. The instruction should be linked to literature rather than to decontextualized activities with no relevance. Most students eventually develop sound-letter relationships that help them decode and spell words. Effective phonics instruction focuses students, attention on noticing the letter-sound patterns. By embedding phonics instruction in the total language arts program and by using teachable moments, teachers can assist most students to develop an understanding of the graph phonic cueing system. Bear et al (2008) contend that phonics knowledge along with syntax and vocabulary knowledge are needed to strategically decode unfamiliar words through contextual analysis. The decoding strategy is important for children to strategically voice out words.

They further recommended the use of the following strategies when identifying a word through sounds production:

- determine the vowel sound in the unknown words (that is, the syllable pattern or the vowel team pattern).
- Blend the consonant sound before the vowel sound with the vowel sound. This eliminates any phoneme distortion.
- Isolate the consonant sound after the vowel sound and blend everything together.

They continued to cite an example as to how the above four strategies can be practically used. The authors used the word 'jump' as an example by suggesting that you will first of all determine the vowel sound. The word is closed syllable (JUMP), so the vowel sound is short. Secondly, they blended the consonant before the vowel sound 'M-P', and finally blended everything together, JU +MP' and came out with the word 'JUMP'.

According to Yekple (2005) cited in Avoke (2005), strategies or methods under which pupils with reading difficulties learn are many and varied which include the following:

- a. Individual instruction (instruction based on the strengths and weakness of the pupils)
- b. Direct instruction (this incorporates methods of gaining and maintaining pupils' attention). It is done by modelling, guided practices and practice.
- c. Task analysis or breaking down learners learning activities into small teachable bits.
- d. Use of reinforcement to help pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning or reading phonics can be taught synthetically or analytically.

In synthetic approach, a child learns the sounds of the individual letters and letter combination usually before learning to read (Encyclopaedia, 1994).

Teaching Students to Read Fluently

Fluent reading refers to the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Scanlon, Vellutino, Small & Fanuele (2000) point out that 'fluency is often neglected in the classroom, (p. 11), but found that strategies that increase fluency have a positive impact on reading and particularly on reading comprehension. The most commonly used strategy to improve reading fluency is the reading rereading of familiar texts. Opportunities to read aloud, with guidance from teachers, peers or parents are also associated with the development of fluent reading. The value of daily reading aloud is also supported (Torgesen et al, 2001).

Some Benefits of Reading to Children

The importance of being able to read is widely accepted. The ability to read is associated with improved quality of life, not only for the individual, but in the case of adults, also for their families and communities. Students who learn to read within the first few grades of school have a greater chance of succeeding in and completing primary school. Reading is a tool subject and the ability to read is vital to function effectively in any literate society (snow et al, 1998). Proficiency in reading facilitates the learning of other subjects like mathematics, science, social studies and government with ease. However, children who do not understand the benefit of learning to read will not be motivated to learn.

Reading is again considered as a wheel by which many people communicate to their contemporary. This is seen in the area of reading text messages, E-mail and letters. This pre-supposes that the non-reader irrespective of his or her condition is handicapped in trying to get along in this global and technological world. Avoke (2005) also states that teaching of academic subject (such as reading) to the student would lead to general intellectual development which is necessary for job placement.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher focused on using phonic method to develop reading skills for with moderate to mild reading difficulty. The action research assisted the researcher to find solutions to the children's reading problem. Avoke (2005) citing (1990) also noted that action research is situational as it diagnosis a problem and attempts to solve it. He further noted that it is collaborative since it requires the effort of researchers and participatory because the researcher takes part in the implementation of the findings. It is self-evaluative which involves a constant evaluation of its process and medications to adjust research practice. Action research was used because it gives teachers (researcher) the skills needed to work on the problems specific to their classroom situations. Again, Avoke (2005) citing Donato (2003) assert that action research is often conducted to discover a plan for innovation or intervention and it is collaborative. The researcher therefore developed strategies and guideline to develop reading skills in children with reading problems at Morse St Anthony Primary School.

The population included Basic Three pupils in Morse St Anthony Primary School. According to Bell (2005), a research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query. Sampling and sample size are crucial issues in pieces of quantitative research, which seek to make statistically based generalizations from the study results to the wider world. To generalise in this way, it is essential that the sampling method used and the sample size are appropriate such that the results of a study, (Avoke, 2005). The purposive sampling,

which is a non-probability sampling technique was used to select stakeholders including teachers. Purposive sampling ensures that with good judgement, one can handpick element of cases in a population and develops samples which are satisfactory in relation to one's needs (Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu, 2007).

Again, Avoke (2005) citing Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002) assets that in purposive sampling, the researcher handpick the cases included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of the typicality and argued that the sample is chosen for specific purpose. The following instruments were used in gathering information for the study:

Conversational Interview: According to Bell (2005), a conversational interview is casual conversation pursuing the interest of both the researcher and the respondent. The author further argued that conversational interviews do not involve any specific type or sequence of questions. Questions emerges from the immediate context and are asked in a natural course of things or events. There is no predomination of questions, topics or wording.

The conversational interview was chosen because it was applicable to the children's condition and to expose the levels of their pronunciation and difficulties so that appropriate intervention strategies and procedures could be planned.

Work sample Analysis : The children's work samples were analysed to identify their error patterns.

Observation

Observation basically gives an opportunity for looking at what is happening or taking place. Semi-structured observation guide was designed to gather information about the children. Avoke (2005) citing Morrison (1993) posit that observation enables the researcher to gather data on physical setting, human setting and intellectual setting. Observation provides direct information about behaviour of individuals or groups. It also provides opportunity for identifying anticipated outcomes. The researcher chose this instrument to observe the children at the natural environment and compared the findings to the conversational interview and work sample analysis she had made. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, observations, teacher made test and documentation. These instruments complemented each other (triangulate) to have reliable and valid information.

Intervention Strategies : The results of the data collection during the pre-intervention stage, the intervention strategies used and post –intervention results obtained on the management of improving the reading skills of Basic Three pupils at Morse St Anthony Primary School.

Pre-Intervention Stage : The researcher found out that children could hardly express themselves in the English Language. Due to that the researcher observed children's responses when a question was put forth in class.

Most of the children struggled to say three sentences without making errors and finally switching to local language (L1). Some even preferred not to make any attempt. Based on that the researcher conducted a test to identify children's grammar, vocabulary and reading level by providing those reading materials.

Interventions Implemented

After a critical analysis of the pupils' inability to read very well, series of phonics instructional exercise were carried out using the phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation, phoneme deletion, phoneme substitution and phoneme addition, and synthetic phonics techniques to improve the reading skills of pupils with reading difficulties. The activities were carefully selected and implemented over a five-week period. The researcher introduced vowels and consonant awareness of the letters of English alphabet to the pupils in the first week. The pupils were taught the letters of the English Alphabet. With regard to that the researcher reminded the pupils that our English alphabet has 26 letters and each **letter** has one **name** and one or more sounds.

Week One (1)

Vowels and Consonants Awareness (V.C)

Each letter has one name and one or more sounds.

The **consonants** are all the letters except /a, e, i, o, u/.

Consonants: /b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, y, z/. **Vowels:** /a, e, i, o, u/ and sometimes /y/ (which is sometimes a vowel and sometimes a consonant.)

Most **single consonants** have only one sound.

Example the "b" sound in "baby"

Exceptions: "c" has a **hard sound** "k" (as in "cat") and **soft sound** "s" when followed by **e, i, or y** (as in "cent, city fancy") "g" has a **hard sound** "g" (as in "go") and sometimes **a soft sound** "j" when followed by **e, i, or y** (as in "age, ginger, gym").

In a **consonant blend** you hear the sounds of two or three consonants blended together

Example: Single consonant rap

Consonant blend with two consonants trap

Consonant blends with three consonants **strap**

In a consonant digraph you do not hear the separate sounds of consonants, but you do hear a new sound. Most of the consonant diagraphs are a consonant followed by an “h.”

Example: **ch**- church **th** –that **ph**-phone, **sh** –shop **wh**-when **gh**-laugh

Some letters are **silent**, that is, they do not have any sound in the word.

Example: Silent consonant “**b**”- comb. Silent vowel “**e**”- date

Every word has one or more **syllables**. A syllable is a “**beat**” in the word. This symbol means the syllable is **accented**, or has the **heavy beat**.

Every syllable has a **vowel sound**. The vowels are a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y. (“y” is usually a consonant when it is the first letter in the word, as in “yes” but a vowel when it is in the middle or at the end of, as in “gym”).

Each vowel has several different sounds, depending on how it is used in the word.

A single vowel usually has the **short sound** (‘)

Example: **add, exit, it, on, up**

A single vowel may have the long **sound** (- means long)

Example: **date, me, go, uses**

A **closed syllable** ends in a consonant, and the vowel sound is **short**.

Example: **got**

An **open syllable** ends in a vowel, and the vowel sound is **long**

Example: **go**

Silent “e” as the end of the word usually makes the vowel before it **long**.

Example: **ate, Pete, ride, hope, tube.**

Often when two vowels come together, the **first one is long** and the second one is silent.

The second vowel “works on” the first vowel to make it long.

Example: **ee - tree, ai – rain, ie – pie, oa – road, ue – blue, ea – tea, ay – day, ui – suit.**

Two vowels together may give a different sound than those made by single letter. They are diagraphs if they have a single sound. They are diphthongs when two sounds slide together to make a continuous unit of sound.

Example: **oi – oil, oy – boy, ou – out.**

Other vowel sounds can be made with a **vowel followed by an ‘r’**

Example: **ar – car, or – for, er - her, ir - bird, ur – turn**

Or vowel sounds can be made with a vowel followed by a ‘w’

Example: **aw - saw, ow - cow, ew - new, ow – slow**

(‘r’ and ‘w’ are vowel helpers in the above examples).

The symbol /ə/ stands for the schwa sound, which is the sound of the unaccented short ‘u’

Any one of the vowels (a, e, i, o, u) can take the schwa sound.

Example: **about, elephant, politics, ebony and crocus**

These activities were extended to the second week due the performance of the clients.

Week Three

The Phoneme Blending and Phoneme Segmentation (P.B.S)

From the first to the third day of the third week, the researcher informed the clients about a nice reading exercise she had designed for them and encourage them to take active part in it. The researcher demonstrated the activities, phoneme is the smallest part of spoken language that makes a difference in the meaning of words. English has about 41 phonemes. A few words have only one phoneme.

Most words, however, have more than one phoneme: the word if has two phonemes (/i/ /f/): check has three phonemes (/ch/e/k/), and stop has four phonemes (/s/t/o/p/). Sometimes, one phoneme is represented by more than one letter. After that the researcher introduced the phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation to the pupils. The pupils listened to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes and then combines the phonemes to form a word. Then they write and read the word. These activities were performed by the pupils and the researcher write and read the word.

Phoneme blending

Researcher: what word is /b//i//g/?

Pupils: **/b/i/g/** is big.

Researcher: now let's write the sounds in big: **/b/**, write b, **/i/**, write i: **/g/**, write g

Researcher: (writes big on the board) Now we are going to read the word big. The researcher presented ten different words for the pupils to blend and the pupils were able the words well. When pupils combine individual phonemes to form words, they are blending the phonemes. The combine onsets and rimes to make syllables and combine syllables to make words.

Phoneme Segmentation

Pupils break a word into its separated sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it.

Researcher: how many sounds are in the word grab?

Pupils: **/g//r//a//b/**. Four sounds.

Researcher: (write big on the board.) now we are going to read the word grab: **/g/**, write, **/r/**, write r, **/a/**, write a, **/b/**, write b. The researcher presented ten different words for the pupils and the pupils were able to segment the words well. When pupils break words into their individual, phonemes. They are segmenting the words; they are also segmenting when they break words into syllables and syllables into onsets and rimes.

Phoneme Deletion, Phoneme Substitution and Phoneme Addition

The activity for the fourth week was introduced by the researcher through demonstration of a word on the flash card, e.g., Smile to pupils to observe. The researcher began the activity by removing the first phoneme (letter) from the word smile and pupils were able to recognize the word that remains.

Phoneme Deletion

The ability to recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word.

(i) Researcher: what is **hand** without the **/h/**?

Pupils: **Hand** without the **/h/** is and

(ii) Researcher: what is smile without the **/s/**?

Pupils: **Smile** without the **/s/** is mile

Phoneme Substitution

The ability to substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

(i) Researcher: the word is bug. Change **/g/to/n/**. What is the word?

Pupils: **Bun**

(ii) Researcher: the word is toy. Change **/y/to/p/**. What is the new word?

Pupils: **Top**

Phoneme addition

The ability to make a new word by adding a phoneme to existing word.

(i) Researcher: what word do you have if you add **/s/** to the beginning of park?

Pupils: **Spark**

(ii) Researcher: What word do you have if you add/m/ to the beginning of an?

Pupils: **Man**

After this, the researcher was introduced with several variations, this time four (4) other children who were more fluent readers were invited to join the exercise section to make the activity a bit challenging.

Week Five

3.14.3 Synthetic Phonics.

Synthetic phonics refers to the term synthetizing (blending) the sounds of the words after sounding out the graphemes from left to right. all the way through the word. During the fifth week, the researcher reminded the pupils about the Alphabetic Code again by identifying around 44 phonemes in English speech, but they have only 26 letters in the alphabet to represent those sounds for the writing process. The researcher further stated that English alphabetic code has many spelling alternatives as for the sounds, and various sound can be pronounced in more than one way. The researcher pointed out to the pupils that we have one, two, three or four letters that can be code for one phoneme (sound): e.g., **/s/**. S as in 'sat,' **/f/** **ph** as in 'graph,' **/igh/** as in 'night', **/ai/** **eigh** as in 'eight'.

Most phonemes (sounds) can be represented by difference graphemes (letters and letter groups). For example, the **/oa/** sound can be represented by **o, oa, ow, oe, oe, eau, ough**, and some graphemes can be coded for more than one phoneme: e.g., '**ough**' can be coded for: **/oa/** in **though**, **/u/** in **borough**, **/ou/** in **plough**, **/or/** in **thought**, long **/oo/** in **though**.

Moreover, the researcher gave them more samples to know the difference, e.g., one sound (phoneme) can be represented by one, two, three or four letters. For example, /d/ as in **d-o-g**, /sh/ as in **sh-i-p**, /igh/-t, as in **kn-igh-t**, /ough/ as in **d-ough**. One sound (phoneme) can be represented by alternative spellings. For example, the long vowel sound /oo/ can be written as **spoon**, **crew**, **move**, **soup**, **glue**, **flute**, **fruit**, and **super**. One spelling can be coded for alternative words. For example, different pronunciations of the grapheme 'ea' as in **eat**, **bread** and **break**. For example, to read the word '**hatch**' the researcher demonstrated to the pupils systematically while pupils' observed as shown below:

1. Recognized the graphemes **h a tch**.
2. Translate the graphemes to phonemes (sounds) and say them aloud (or silently)

h/a/tch/

3. Blend the phonemes to her the word '**hatch**'. Pupils practised as many times as the researcher cited as samples.

Post-intervention

A similar word list was given to children to pronounce. That way to determine whether there was an improve in the children's reading level after the intervention.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from observation before intervention.

Week one

Week	Time	Occurrences of Omission	Total	Weekly Average
17-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	/	6	
18-05-2023	8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.		7	
19-05-2023	8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.		5	5.8
20-05-2023	8:00 a.m. – 10 a.m.		5	
21-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		6	

Table 4.3

Week Two

Week	Time	Occurrences of distortion	Total	Weekly Average
24-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	/	5	
25-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		7	
26-05-2023	8:00am-10:00 a.m.		5	5.6
27-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		5	
28-05-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		6	

Week	Time	Occurrences of lisping	Total	Weekly Average
03-06-2023	8:00am -10am		6	
04-06-2023	8:00am-10am		6	
05-06-2023	8:00am-10am		5	5.6
06-06-2023	8:00am-10am		5	
07-06-2023	8:00am -10am		5	

Table 4.5

Week Four

Week	Time	Occurrences of Substitution	Total	Weekly Average
10-06-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	/	5	
11-06-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		7	
12-06-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		5	6
13-06-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		7	
14-06-2023	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.		6	

Graphical illustration of the results collected at the pre-intervention

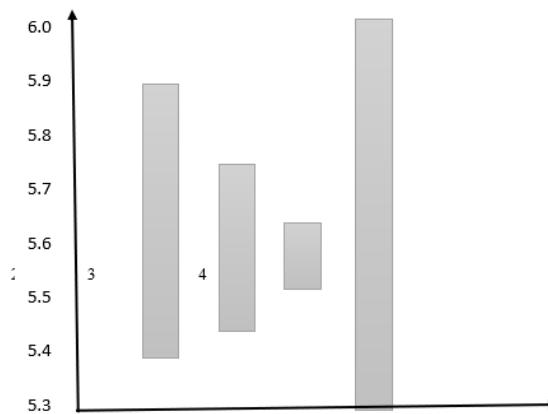


Figure 4.1 A bar chart illustration of the above data

Number of the Weeks

The above bar chart illustrates the pupils' rate of exhibiting the problems. The weekly average was plotted along the Y-axis as the numbers of weeks used for observation were plotted in the X-axis. From the illustrations, one could notice that children performance differ from week. After the researcher's observation during pre-test period, she noticed that the children's average score based on omissions was 5.8, distortion was 5.6, lisping was 5.4 and substitution was 6. These were manifested when the children could not pronounce words correctly which was recorded by the researcher using event recording method.

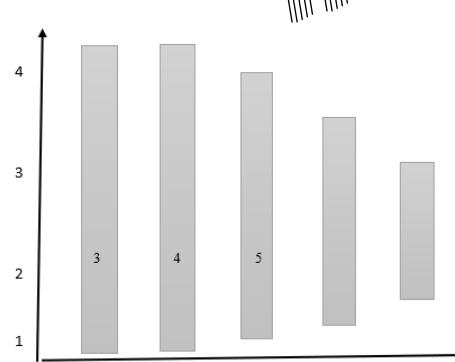
The Intervention Stage

The figure below illustrates the weekly average occurrences of the reading problems of the pupils during the teaching and learning of the vowels and consonants awareness, weekly averages of 4.0 occurrences of the reading problems were recorded for the two weeks of learning. That was followed by the phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation exercise in which, a weekly average of 3.7 occurrences was recorded.

During the fourth week, after the phoneme deletion, phoneme substitution and phoneme addition exercise for a period of one week during which a weekly average occurrence of 3.4 was recorded. Last but not least, a 2.4 weekly average occurrence was recorded during the synthetic phonics strategy. Hence, the pupils' reading difficulties were reducing appreciably during the implementation of the intervention techniques.

Table 4.7 The Strategy Learnt

No. of wk.	Time	Strategy learnt	Occurrence of reading problems	Total	weekly av.
1.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	Vowels	40	4.0	
2.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	Phoneme (B.S)	19	3.7	
3.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	Phonemes (D.S.A)	17	3.4	
4.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	Synthetic Phonics	12	2.4	



Number of the Weeks

Post-Intervention

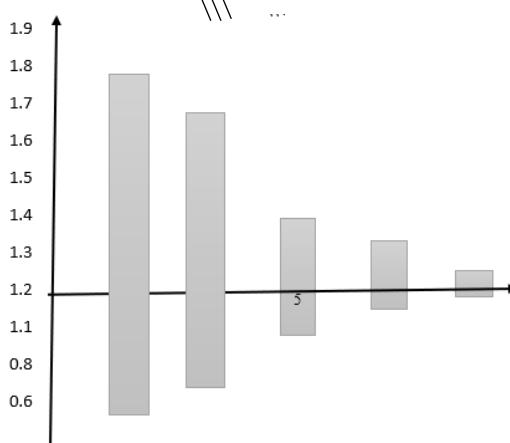
Below is the table representing the post-intervention recording.

Table 5.6: a table showing the number of occurrences of the reading problems by the pupils after the invention.

Even recording of the reading problems.

No. of wks.	Time	Occurrence of reading problems	Total	Weekly av.

1.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	9	1.8
2.	8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.	8	1.6
3.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	6	1.2
4.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	4	0.8
5.	8:00 a.m. -10:00 a.m.	3	0.6



Number of the Weeks

The above figures illustrate the tremendous reduction in the occurrences of the pupils' reading problems. A weekly average of 1.8 was recorded at the start of the post-intervention which reduced to 0.6 weekly average at the post-intervention. Follow-up was made even after the post-intervention to keep the pupils on track.

Post Intervention

During the post-intervention which was done for five weeks, the children were motivated with rewards to practise the various intervention strategies taught. Thus, the researcher prompted the children to practise the vowels and consonant awareness, the phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation, phoneme deletion, phoneme substitution and phoneme addition exercise and synthesis phonics in accordance with their learning capabilities.

The recordings of the children's reading problems at the post-intervention stage revealed a remarkable drop in occurrences of problems in their reading skills.

Research Question 1

How can the phonic approach be used to develop the reading skills in children with moderate to mild reading difficulty? The organization of the material and modality of presentation affected the learners' ability to understand and assimilate what was taught. An instructional method should focus on helping the learner develop a mental schema. Since low ability readers have difficulty adapting to the learning environment, the learning environment needs to conform to their specific learning needs.

Expository learning approaches prove to be more effective and successful learning strategies for low ability readers than discovery learning approaches (Bear et al, 2008). An expository learning instructional approach starts with an organized, systematic presentation of the knowledge rules the learner needs to acquire and apply, then uses examples to allow the learner to practice applying these rules to support the development and refinement of their mental model.

In contrast, a discovery learning approach starts with examples and is designed to make the learner "discover" or induce the knowledge rules as a process of his own individual search. However, low ability readers cannot construct the general rules from examples they need to explicit instructional guidance (Snow et al, 1998). Consequently, poor readers require an expository learning approach to help them learn to read at a proficient level.

Research Question 2

What accounts for the reading difficulties in children with moderate to mild reading difficulty?

The researcher analysed the causes of pupils' reading problems, starting from varieties of issues, many of which are not easily diagnosed or understood. Effective reading instructions is built on a foundation which recognizes that reading ability is determined by multiple factors that may not all be explained adequately.

But they all contribute to the overall success of the fluent reader. Adequate initial reading instruction requires that children use reading to obtain meaning from print, have frequent and intensive opportunities to read, are exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships,

learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and understand the structure of spoken words. Disruption of any of these developments increases the possibility that the reading will be delayed or difficult and hence the individual becomes a poor reader. Again, the researcher had special consideration that causes of children's reading problems include the difficulty that children have in processing language beyond the initial levels of comprehension. Factors include having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically; sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts; sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting; control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstanding; and continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes. Reading skill is acquired in a relatively predictable way by children who have normal or above average language skills if they have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation and provided exposure to literacy in use. They also need to have information about the nature of print through opportunities to learn letters and to recognize the internal structure of spoken words, as well as explanations about the contrasting nature of spoken and written language. Above all, some causes of people of pupils reading problems include potential stumbling blocks that are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. The first obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle. This is the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or burdensome. The second obstacle is failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. The third obstacle to reading magnifies the first two. It is the absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading.

Research Question 3

To what extent can phonics method help to develop reading skills for children with moderate to mild reading difficulty? The first step in phonics instruction is the identification and naming of the alphabet. Pupils then need to connect the letters with particular sounds. This is the best tool that can be used to quickly identify whether pupils have an understanding of the alphabetic principle and if they are able to print the letters. This instruction impacts the relationship between sounds and letters by systematically and comprehensively introducing the letter-sound correspondences of the English alphabetic code. This starts with mainly one spelling for each of the 42 plus sounds (phonemes) identifiable in English speech before broadening out to focus on further spelling and pronunciation variations. This speech models how to put the letter-sound correspondences introduced (the alphabetic code knowledge) to immediate use of teaching the three skills of reading. Firstly, reading/decoding – Synthesis (sound out and blend) all through the printed word to 'hear' the target word. Modify the pronunciation of the word where necessary. Secondly, spelling/encoding – Orally segment (split up) all through the spoken word to identify the single sounds (phonemes) and know which letters and letter groups (graphemes) are code for the identified sounds and thirdly, handwriting – write the lower cases, then the upper-case letters of the alphabet correctly. This approach provides regular dictation exercises from letter level to text level (as appropriate) and cumulative, decodable words, sentences and texts which match the level of alphabetic code knowledge and blending skills level, when asking the learner to read independently. The phonics instruction makes emphasis on letter sounds at first and not letter names. Learn letter names in the first instance by chanting the alphabet or singing an alphabet song. This instruction does not teach an initial sight vocabulary where learners are expected to memorize words as whole shapes. The phonics strategies do not teach or encourage guessing /predicting words from the shape, or from picture, context or initial letter cues (sometimes known as 'multi – cueing' or a 'range of reading strategies').

The greatest characteristic of this approach is that it introduces useful, common tricky words slowly and systematically stressing the blending skill once the tricky letter or; letters have been pointed out. For example, when teaching the word 'you', say the word (pointing at you). These letters (pointing at 'you'), are code for /oo/." Tricky words are small number of words, in which there are rare/unusual graphemes, or words in which not all the graphemes have yet been formally taught, which might be used in early reading material). The phonics approach regulates according to a planned and structured phonics progression but also teaches incidental phonics as the need arises. Moreover, this strategy is set within a literacy-rich environment and requires full range of further age-appropriate communication, language and literacy activities and creative opportunities.

Research Question 4

How relevant is the phonic approach in teaching reading to children with moderate to mild reading difficulty?

The systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction. This supports the idea that systematic phonics instruction is effective when delivered through tutoring, through small groups, and through teaching classes of people. The phonics instruction produces the biggest impact on growth in reading when it begins in kindergarten or basic level before children have learned to read independently. These indicate clearly that phonics instruction at kindergarten and basic level is highly

beneficial and that children at these developmental levels are quite capable of learning phonemics and phonics concepts. To be effective, phonics instruction introduced in kindergarten must be appropriately designed for learners and must begin with foundational knowledge involving letters and phonemic awareness.

The growth in word-reading skills is strongly enhanced by the phonics instruction when compared to non-phonics instruction for kindergarteners and basic level as well as for older struggling readers. Growth in reading comprehension is also boosted by systematic phonics instruction for younger pupils and reading difficulty. Phonics instruction with its emphasis on teaching letters-sound relations would be expected to improve beginning readers' ability to spell words by writing the sounds they hear. Among beginning readers, phonics instruction exerted a significant impact on reading comprehension. These dispel any belief that teaching phonics systematically to young children interferes with their ability to read and comprehend text.

In sum, the researcher acknowledged that systematic phonics instruction helped beginning readers acquire and use the alphabetic system to read and spell words in and out of text. Children who were taught phonics systematically benefited significantly more than beginners who did not receive phonics instruction in their ability to decode regularly spelled words and non-spelled words, in their ability to remember how to read regularly spelled words and in their ability to invent phonetically plausible spellings of words.

In addition, phonics instructions contributed substantially to pupils' growth in reading comprehension and somewhat less to their oral text reading skills. Studies have shown that almost all weak readers have difficulty in blending sounds from letters to make words but virtually all good readers do this well. This approach has the long-term benefit of preparing children for advanced reading when they will meet regular letter combinations in prefixes and suffixes. National Reading Panel's (2001) recommendation that phonics lesson should be discreet means that teaching needs to be specific and systematic, but not that phonics should be taught in isolation from everything else. On the contrary, children should be encouraged to see patterns and apply sounds and sound patterns in a wide range of activities, including nursery rhymes, poems, puppetry, telling and retelling stories.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to help Basic Three children of Morse St Anthony Primary School with reading difficulties to improve their reading ability. It was additionally discovered that reliance on the local dialect (L1) had affected children's English-speaking proficiency and that stunted their academic persuasions. The analysis also showed that most teachers were trained and could successfully handle the issue of the poor use of English Language among children. To achieve this, all stakeholders of education – the school, teachers, parents and students should work collaboratively. Although there was a level of some improvement made, new researchers should delve deep into this problem in order to get additional information to add to the existing stock of knowledge. It should be noted that children must be helped and motivated in order not to withdraw or recoil into their when they make mistakes. It can be deduced from the research that when the appropriate method of teaching English Language is used in teaching, it enhances children's reading. As learners differ in their understanding in the process of learning, it is important to use the best approach. It is also seen that teaching reading to children really helps them to learn other subjects because every subject deals with reading and without reading one cannot understand what he is supposed to do.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The presentation together with the findings from the main study suggests the need to adhere to, and implement the government's policy on English Language at the basic level. That is, from Basic Two onwards, the medium of instruction in schools should be English Language. The mass media must make it a duty to increase the awareness of the importance of speaking good English. The Ghana Education Service should organize in-service training and refresher courses for teachers as a whole, but specifically for English Language teachers to make them abreast of modern teaching strategies. In a nutshell, the government's economic policy for poverty reduction should be implemented and extended to improve the living standards of low-income earners in order for them to in turn, meet the financial, social and academic needs of their wards.

There is the need to make books available; this will motivate children to read. If reading is advantageous, then it is strongly recommended that enough library facilities must be available for all to assist in the development of desirable reading habits. The Ghana Education Service and the Ghana Library Board could invite other benevolent bodies to help to set up library services in the rural areas where reading could be a sort of entertainment to both young and old.

For effective teaching, individual children must be attended to. The present large class enrolment does not permit individual children must be attended to. The present large class enrolment does not permit individual attention since not all children are motivated at the same rate, working with a limited number of children at a time will offer the teacher the opportunity to attend to individuals and offer them organized and purposeful teaching programmes.

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