

Understanding Primary School Teachers' Remediation Strategies in Assisting Pupils with Reading (Phonic) Difficulties

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Abstract: Reading difficulty is a major concern for basic school teachers in Ghana, as the majority of pupils in primary schools cannot read and subsequently, produce abysmal performance in the English Language subject. This research conducted a qualitative inquiry into exploring the approaches used by teachers to remediate phonics difficulties among struggling readers at Unipra South Cluster of Schools at Winneba. Grade 4 English Language teachers were sampled to participate in the study. An unstructured interview was conducted to collect data with the help of an interview guide. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis approach. The study found that the grade 4 teachers predominantly used the jolly phonics and rhyming methods in remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers. It was further revealed that materials used during instruction were flashcards, manila cards, chalkboards and textbooks. The study recommended that Ghana Education Service should design professional development programmes to equip teachers with effective strategies for reading instruction.

Keywords: Assessment, Phonics, Reading, Struggling Readers, English Language, Teachers, Ghana

1. Introduction

In most nations, including Ghana, where English is used as an official language, one's ability to read English text is crucial to the nation as well as the individual (Yeboah, 2014), as this determines the person's ability to meaningfully contribute to national discourses. In the Ghanaian educational system, for instance, English is used both as a medium and subject of instruction. Almost every written information in Ghana, irrespective of the location and function, is in English (Nyarko, Kugbey, Kofi, Cole, & Impraim, 2018). In this regard, it has become expedient that pupils attain mastery of reading right from the beginning of their education, as this enables them, in addition to accessing information, to learn on their own (Cimmiyotti, 2013). Reading is needed for many developmental achievements such as attention, language,

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memory, and motivation. Children who cannot read proficiently stand the risk of academic, behavioural, social, and emotional challenges (Hamilton, 2012).

Helping pupils to acquire mastery of reading, as noted by Washington-Nortey (2013) requires that pupils get lots of opportunities to build spoken language by talking and listening, learn about prints, books, sounds of spoken language, identify the letters of the alphabet, and listen to books read aloud. Studies have shown that learning to read is not a simple task and can be a struggle for many children: when reading becomes a challenge for pupils, their interest in the English Language subject reduces (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013; Naafan, 2018). A study conducted by Naafan (2018) reported that there is a declining interest in reading among school pupils in many parts of the world. In the United States, for instance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (as cited in Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews, 2019) indicated that 33% of fourth-graders and 24% of eighth-graders in the nation's largest urban areas could not read at the basic level, and were unable to demonstrate even partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills in reading (Hempenstall & Buckingham, 2016). Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, and Scammaca (2008) also reported that one out of every four pupils in fourth grade through form three was found to be a struggling reader, and less than one-third of public-school form two students were found to read at or below their grade level.

Several pieces of literature have established the link between reading proficiency and academic achievement (see Cromley, 2009; Cullinan, 2000; Ercikan et al., 2015; Nyarko et al., 2018). Cullinan, for example, found that pupils who are proficient in reading do perform well academically as compared to those with less proficiency in reading. Ercikan also revealed in their research that students proficient in reading were found to perform excellently on science and mathematics subjects. These observations, perhaps, explain the low performance of pupils in the English Language at the basic and senior high school levels since reading difficulty has been identified to be common among the student population in Ghana (Effah & Osei-Owusu, 2014). According to Fiester (2010), the expectation that by the end of the third grade, a pupil should be able to read proficiently is mostly not achieved. As a result, Reutzel and Cooter (2013) argued that society becomes heavily burdened when pupils are not made to acquire the ability to read well. It is in this light that the teachers in the basic schools have been given the responsibility of adopting approaches to help all pupils to attain proficiency in reading. The onus has been on the teachers because they are directly responsible for creating and applying various techniques and strategies that would lead their pupils to acquire the reading ability and comprehend textual information.

One of the means through which reading proficiency can be achieved is through phonics teaching. Phonetics is a critical aspect of the English Language (Asante-Nimako, 2018). The central aim of phonics instruction is for pupils to learn and use the alphabetic principle –the understanding that there are predictable and systematic associations between written letters and spoken sounds. This principle aids largely in the child's reading ability, both in reading passages as well as in isolation (Adams, 1990; Oxford, 2001; Martínez, 2011). Thus, phonetic teaching becomes a starting point through which reading difficulties can be resolved. Supporting this, Adomah (2016) found that phonetic instruction positively affects the reading proficiency of learners. Johnston, McGeown, and Watson (2012), and Connor, Alberto, Compton, and O'Connor (2014) also concurred that the phonetic approach to teaching reading comprehension was very beneficial. Several other studies have found that skills in phonics and phonemic

awareness are high-priority skills that all children, including those with reading difficulties, must acquire, as they learn to read (Dehaene, 2009; Hamilton, 2012, National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; Soiferman, 2016).

There have been several studies conducted in connection with the adoption of the phonetic method to help struggling readers (see Ankra, Nyanta, & Opoku, 2017; Morrow, 1996; Paris, 2019). These studies, even though have shown that the use of the phonics method helps improve the reading ability of the readers, did not show how teachers apply the method. It is therefore necessary that the current study be undertaken to ascertain how the phonics method is applied by teachers to assist struggling readers. Additionally, the current study is informed by the observation made by the lead researcher through informal interaction with the headteachers and some teachers of Unipra South cluster of schools, to the effect that most of the pupils struggle to read proficiently at the various grade levels. In the course of the interaction, it was further observed that more than one-third of the pupils in the upper and lower primary in the three classes struggle with reading; hence, they were unable to read materials that were considered age-and grade-appropriate. Nonetheless, our search showed that no research has been able to establish specifically the approaches teachers in basic schools use in remediating reading difficulties among struggling readers. Meanwhile, success at all levels, to a very large extent, depends on an individual's level of proficiency as demonstrated in the various components of reading (Curriculum Research & Development Division, 2007).

The current research, therefore, investigates the strategies teachers at Unipra South cluster of schools employ in remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers. Thus, the study seeks to provide an answer to the major question "what approaches do teachers use in remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers in Unipra South cluster of schools?". The outcome of this study is significant in terms of understanding how teachers adopt the phonics method to help struggling readers. This understanding will help stakeholders in education to develop appropriate interventions and resources to assist teachers in this remediation process. To achieve the target 4.6 of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is attaining literacy and numeracy in childhood, this research presents a roadmap for discussion in accomplishing this goal.

1.1 Bottom-up Theory of Teaching Reading

The bottom-up theory of teaching reading underpinned the study. The proponents of bottom-up theory opined that reading progresses from lower unit to higher unit where children are taught to decode letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes), and then blend the sounds to form a mono-syllabic word, bi-syllabic words and poly-syllabic words into phrases, clauses, sentences and then paragraphs (Carrell & Eistenhold, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Curtis, 2004). The emphasis of the bottom-up theory, especially for a second language (L2) learner is that reading should be acquired through extensive drill and practice.

The bottom-up theory of teaching reading has been endorsed, accepted and utilized by several scholars in a different context (e.g., Chuunga, 2013; Dambacher, 2010; Hassan, 1999; Suraprajit, 2019). Hassan (1999), for example, adopted this theory as a theoretical framework within which teachers were made to apply the rudiments of the theory. Hassan found that bottom-up models provide a sound basis for the reading processes of struggling or beginning readers who are solely dependent on low-level processing. Suraprajit, however, used the theory as a theoretical review which helped in explaining the perception of

university students regarding reading strategies. The implication of the theory to the study is that children must work through and develop a series of repeated skills in letter and sound relationships as in phonics, and text knowledge in reading comprehension (Plaza & Cohen, 2003). The theory provides a framework within which teachers in basic schools should remediate phonics difficulty among struggling readers.

The rest of the paper is sectionalized into five. Following the introduction, the second section highlights the methods and materials which provides the methodology employed in conducting this study. The data presentation and analysis were discussed in the third section, the fourth section discussed the findings, and the fifth section presented the conclusion of the study. The article was climaxed with the limitations of the research and future directions.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the exploratory qualitative research design to explore how the phonics approach is used by teachers in remediating reading difficulties among struggling readers (Stebbins, 2019). This design was adopted because the issue of investigation is not well explored. This approach allowed in-depth exploration of the issue under investigation.

2.2 Sample

The study was targeted to grade 4 English Language teachers at the Unipra cluster of schools. Unipra AB School had two English language teachers, Unipra South Basic C School had one English language teacher and Unipra South Inclusive School had one English teacher, all teaching grade 4 learners. Only grade 4 learners were targeted because it is expected that at the end of grade 3, pupils should be able to read. The study sampled all four English Language teachers (2 teachers of Unipra AB school, one from Unipra Basic C school and one from Unipra inclusive school). The grade 4 level was chosen because children at this level had transited from the stages of learning to read to reading to learn and have received instruction in reading development and are expected to read proficiently.

2.3 Instrument

To obtain the data from the respondents, an interview guide was used. The interview items probed into the issues of phonics method in teaching pupils with reading difficulties, and how teachers of English language use this approach as a remediating strategy for helping pupils with reading difficulties. To ensure the confirmability of the instrument, the interview items were sent for member checking. Transcripts of the audio recording were sent back to the participants to ensure that what was said corresponded with the transcripts.

2.4 Procedure

Before the data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the IRB of the University of Education, Winneba, with the number 8170150014. The selected teachers were contacted and appropriate times and venues for the interviews were discussed. Unstructured interviews were then conducted. The interviews were audio-recorded. The participants were debriefed where the general and specific objectives, physical

and emotional risks associated with the study were explained. In an easy-to-understand language, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and was free to withdraw from the study if they felt so. Besides, they were not to use their names as a way of ensuring anonymity. Informed consent was sought verbally from the participants.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were analysed qualitatively using narrative themes from the interview data which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Analysis of the interview data was guided by the key themes that emerged from the data. The process started with transcribing all interviews and highlighting words and sentences that served as units for more detailed themes. In reporting the data, verbatim expressions were used with inferences from literature where necessary.

3. Results

3.1 Sample Characteristics of the Participants

Table 1 shows the sample characteristics of the participants. In the distribution, one teacher from Unipra South basic C school has taught between 1-5 years, and three teachers from Unipra South inclusive and AB schools have taught between 5-10 years. Also, three of the participants were females whereas one was male. Lastly, three of the participants were first degree holders whereas one was a master's holder.

Table 1: Sample characteristics of the study participants

Variables	Number of Respondents	Pseudonyms
Gender		
Male	1	Kay
Female	3	Mimi, Saik, Lara
Number of Years Taught		
1-5	1	Saik
5-10	3	Kay, Mimi, Lara
Education		
Master's Degree (M.Phil)	1	Lara
Bachelor's Degree (B.Ed)	3	Saik, Kay, Mimi

3.2 Approaches Teachers Use in Remediating Phonics Difficulties

The main objective of this study was to explore the approaches teachers use in remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers in the school. To address this objective, four themes emerged from the data: (1) instructional approaches, (2) teaching and learning materials, (3) assessment strategies and (4) motivation.

3.2.1 Instructional Approaches

The teachers indicated that they use jolly phonics and rhyming, which according to them are effective for

remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers. Three of the teachers indicated that, in using these strategies, they first teach struggling readers to identify the names of the letter names of the alphabet before the sounds of the letters. The teachers further indicated that they teach the vowel and consonant sounds separately. The teachers made the following comments as they expressed the approaches by which they employ the phonics method in remediating reading difficulties among their pupils:

A teacher opined:

What I normally do to help struggling readers in phonics instruction is that I, first of all, write the names of the letters of the alphabet on a marker board. Then, we go through the identification of the letters' names before the sounds. We do this in groups. In identifying the names of the letters, I pick five letters of the alphabet and then constantly pronounce them to the children. Afterwards, I take them through the sounds of the letters let's say 'a' stands for /a/, 'b' stands for /b/. If I take all of the alphabets at once it will be a difficult task, so I pick them five, five, five. Right away, I introduce jolly phonics that is where we incorporate actions in the activity and later, we identify them on the chalkboard (Excerpt from Saik)

A second teacher stated:

First of all, I start with the identification of the letter names and later the sounds. We look at the vowels, the consonants and then how to blend them. We start with two letter words, three letter words then we move on. And we have this jolly phonics approach which is also helping a lot. We do how to act the letters with our fingers. I ask them to come and stand in front of the class and then you the teacher pronounce the word and the child will do the action for it. We have been asked to do give extra tuition for such pupils so I do it sometimes early in the morning or after school (Excerpt from Kay)

Another teacher remarked:

In the first place, we have the jolly phonics approach. In this instruction, struggling readers are taught a lot of actions together with the letter names and sounds. As they act the actions for the letters, they also identify them on the board. This gradually helps them overcome their phonics difficulties. Later, they are taught the names of the letters of the alphabet and then the sounds. I separate the vowels from the consonant sounds. Then after knowing the names and the sounds of the letters they are taught how to blend them in forming a word (Excerpt from Lara)

A teacher said:

I write all the letter sounds on the board and rehearse it several times with them. I say and they repeat after me. So, once they can master it, then we move on to the letter names. Then I take the letters one after the other for the pupils to see the differences between the individual letters and learn the sounds in the consonants and the vowels. Later, I take them through rhyming of letter sounds where similar letters and words are selected and

pronounced. I sometimes do this by putting them in groups to discuss it among themselves. Each group is tasked to form words with the vowels and consonants letters that rhyme (Excerpt from Mimi)

From the excerpts, there were mixed opinions about how teachers remediate phonics difficulties among struggling readers. Most of the teachers emphasized introducing letter names before the sounds. Knowledge of letter names, according to these teachers provides a solid foundation in learning to read among struggling readers and beginning readers. The comments from the teachers indicate that mastery in letter names provides a solid ground for automatic reading, knowing words at sight and becoming a proficient reader. However, another teacher stressed the need to introduce letter sounds before letter names. This teacher believes that knowledge in letter sounds lead to accurately recognizing familiar words and decoding unfamiliar words, and subsequently help struggling readers to master speech sounds, unlike letter names. Again, the teachers emphasized the use of jolly phonics and rhyming as a major contributory approach to remediating phonics difficulties in struggling readers. The teachers further noted that breaking words into bits makes phonics learning easy and simple. The teachers further added that vowel sounds are taught separately from consonant sounds in every form of phonics remediation activity. For example, teachers model the activity, and learners learn from them. Throughout the remediation activity, teachers provide ample opportunity and support struggling readers in their steps to becoming independent readers. It can be said that the utility of remediating phonics has been established by how teachers approach phonics difficulties. These teachers are of the view that knowledge of the letter names is prerequisite to knowing letter sounds and as well effective for improving children`s reading.

3.2.2 Teaching and Learning Materials

The teacher participants indicated that they employ certain teaching and learning materials, including flashcards, manila cards, chalkboards and textbooks, in their phonics instruction as part of their phonics remediation activity. According to the teachers, these materials make phonics instruction very easy and simple for them as teachers and the pupils with reading difficulties. The teachers expressing the use and effectiveness of these teaching and learning materials voiced that:

One teacher said:

When we are having instruction, I use some learning materials. Although we have challenges having these materials, sometimes I do chalkboard illustrations and use flashcards, and picture reading. I show them a picture of /a/ as in 'ant' and so on, but they are inadequate (Excerpt from Lara)

A second teacher remarked:

Anytime I am teaching phonics whether letter names or sounds, I use flashcards and manila cards. I make sure I write the letters on it for those who struggle to read to see how it is written, and it is helping a lot. At times, I include some writing tools such as crayons and pencils for them to write words on manila cards and the chalkboard (Excerpt from Saik)

Another teacher stated:

Flashcards are helping a lot. I write letters on these cards. Sometimes the pupils will bring cut out materials and I will ask them to write on either the chalkboard or the marker board (Excerpt from Mimi)

It can be deduced from the excerpts from the interviews that the use of teaching and learning materials such as flashcards, manila cards and chalkboard is vital especially when the instruction is centred on remediating phonics difficulties. With the help of the manila card and a chalkboard, struggling readers see how letters and words are written, how they are pronounced. The use of these materials enhances the understanding of the struggling readers that the letters carry sounds. Also, it was revealed that since some letters are learned more easily than others, the cards are displayed on the walls in the classroom for struggling readers to use so that they will be able to recall the letters easily and accurately with ease and with less difficulty. These teaching and learning materials keep struggling readers more engaged, increase their participation in the reading activity and improve their reading skills. Lastly, considering the importance of the teaching and learning materials in learning phonics, teachers indicated that such materials were inadequate and for that matter, they always have to improvise to aid their instruction.

3.2.3 Assessment Strategies

All the teachers indicated that they incorporate various forms of assessment procedures in remediating difficulties in phonics among struggling readers. The teachers added that assessment forms an integral part of learning to read and becoming proficient readers. The teachers affirmed these in the following comments:

One of the teachers said:

So, when I finish then I do dictation to make sure that whatever I did they were able to understand or something like that. We do oral reading too at times or maybe word identification, and letter knowledge (Excerpt from Kay)

A second teacher added:

After I have undergone several methods in phonics instruction, I assess them. Sometimes I give them paper and pen exercises on letter naming in their exercise books and identification of letters on the board. In some cases, too we do oral text and signing of the letters while they stand in front of their peers. This is done to ensure the effectiveness of the entire phonics instruction (Excerpt from Saik)

Another teacher noted:

For the assessment, I write the words for the pupils to write their rhyming words or I mention it to them through dictation then they write. So, with that, you see whether a child is good at phonics or is not good at phonics. That is what I normally do (Excerpt from Lara)

Another teacher indicated:

In the course of the teaching, I have to assess the children for me to know that they are truly following the activity. I assess them during and after the instruction. Sometimes I give them written exercises. I call them individually and ask them to use a pointer to point at a particular letter and to tell me its sound. Sometimes too I do word identification assessments. I will ask that particular child to give me a word that I will get that sound. For example, a child can mention a word like 'cat' then I ask, where can we locate the /a/ sound? (Excerpt from Mimi)

It is apparent from the interview excerpts that, ongoing assessments are important aspects of determining how well struggling readers are progressing in overcoming phonics difficulties. The teachers indicated that assessing struggling readers in remediating phonics difficulties helps ascertain the effectiveness of the teaching strategy. Again, oral reading, paper-and-pen exercises, dictation, letter-sound identification, rhyming and signing of letters constitute some of the assessment methods used by teachers in phonics instruction. The teachers indicated that oral reading and letter-sound identification help them know how clearly and accurately struggling readers pronounce letters and words. Paper-and-pen exercises enable them to ascertain the level of mastery of the phonics activity for struggling readers. It is to be noted that the assessment strategies as used by these teachers do not only ascertain the effectiveness of their instruction but also, help them determine who needs additional assistance, the kind of assistance that would be most helpful and to decide whether or not to modify their instructional approach. Teachers must make use of a wide range of assessment strategies to accurately assess each child's current skill level and provide an easy platform for providing corrective feedback (Nugba & Quansah, 2021; Quansah, 2018).

3.2.4 Motivation

According to the teachers, struggling readers are motivated to participate fully in the entire phonics remediation activity. They explained that motivation creates a conducive environment for the various activities embedded in phonics instruction. They added that when the pupils are motivated, it arouses and stimulates their interest which tends to create a sense of warmth for a successful reading outcome. The teachers affirmed these in the following comments:

A teacher noted:

I motivate them during the phonics instruction. Sometimes I shin for them or give them some 'fans'. Anytime I do that the children are encouraged to do more and they also feel that they are also important not necessarily giving them toffees. But I give them a pencil, erase and chalk for them to be regular in school when the need arises (Excerpt from Mimi)

A second teacher added

Struggling readers need a lot of motivation so I don't forget to applaud them anytime they give out correct responses as a way of motivating them. I sometimes give them stickers, gifts so that the child will be able to be happy and do more. For the results, we paste it on the board or we appraise them by awarding them with stickers so that the child will have confidence (Excerpt from Kay)

In the view of a third teacher:

I applaud them and encourage them to do more as a form of motivation. If I have to give them money, I do so. Sometimes I have to mention their names several times, hug them, tell them interesting stories before we continue. One may not understand why a class four pupil needs to be encouraged in that way but I have to do it every day. So that is what I do to maintain their interest in the phonics instruction (Excerpt from Saik)

Another teacher contended:

Pupils who struggle to read are interesting to be with. I have managed to create a good rapport with them so that they can feel free to come around me at any time for assistance. However, there are times that they become too bored with class activities especially when they don't perform well in activities that precede phonics instruction. When that happens, I motivate and encourage them by singing songs, praising, shaking hands with them and giving them a high-five. When I do that, they become interested (Excerpt from Lara)

The excerpts from the teachers indicated that some children struggle to read due to low motivation. It was revealed that struggling readers are motivated and encouraged by their teachers in the remediation of phonics difficulties. The views of these teachers suggested that motivation is vital in becoming a proficient reader, especially among struggling readers. Teachers were found to use diverse forms of motivational strategies for motivating struggling readers. These packages included teachers applauding learners, giving the learners high-five, hugging the learners, telling them stories and rapport creation. Other tangible packages were also used by the teachers which included giving gifts such as money, stickers, chalks erasers and pens. Again, the teachers indicated that children with reading difficulties often lack self-confidence and self-esteem when they compare themselves to their classmates. Therefore, motivation helps these struggling readers in developing self-confidence towards reading. The teachers revealed that motivating these struggling readers increases their participation in reading, and helps them appreciate the rewards and benefits of overcoming their phonics difficulties.

4. Discussion

The results of this study revealed certain strategies used by teachers to help learners who find it difficult to grab phonics in school. The availability of approaches to assist struggling learners in reading phonics signals that the participants considered the educational needs of each learner when planning reading instruction in English. Analysis of interview data revealed that there are several methods the participants used to remediate phonics difficulties among struggling readers. The study revealed that teachers start phonics remediation by first introducing struggling readers to the identification and blending of letter names before they are introduced to letter sounds. The teachers believe that knowledge in letter names is an effective means for assisting learners who are learning the alphabetic principle to become proficient readers. This finding is consistent with Chuunga's (2013) research who found that phonics instruction is helpful to all children in Zambia, especially those who are learning to read when it is focused on letter names acquisition. This finding was also supported by the views of Adams (1990) that struggling readers must know letter names well before instruction in sound-symbol association begins. In the same way,

Curtis (2004) believed that names of letters may be learned early, and pupils who know them, have a greater advantage. This implies that in phonics instruction, it is appropriate to teach names of letters before learners are introduced to the sound patterns that represent them.

While some teachers focused phonics instruction on letter names, others believed that remediating phonics difficulties is effective with letter sound which is important in learning to read. Plaza and Cohen (2003) found out that, a struggling reader must first learn that letters carry sounds that are associated with each letter and letter cluster. Hence, when pupils have reliable knowledge of the sounds in letters, they understand the alphabetic principle, knowing that phonemes of language correspond to the letters they represent. This is not to argue that knowledge in letter names is more important than letter sounds relationships. However, one key question to ask is which of these approaches enables struggling readers to easily overcome phonics difficulties? Meanwhile, these two different strategies used by the teachers are somewhat connected. This is one of the reasons why the bottom-up theory of teaching reading put forward by Gough in 1985, recommended that the best way to teach struggling readers to read is by systematically and directly teaching them to decode letter names and sounds, and by blending the sounds to form two or more words. The bottom-up theory also emphasizes that there is the need for learners to read through and develop a series of repeated skills in letter and sound relationships as in phonics.

What the results mean is that teachers, to some extent, have utilised both the synthetic and analytic phonics instructional methods to help struggling readers overcome their phonics difficulties. In synthetic phonics, teachers guide struggling readers to make connections between letters of written texts (graphemes, or letter symbols) and the sounds of spoken language. In analytic phonics, teachers model how to sort (or separate) letters. The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) found that one type of the phonics approach is not superior to the other. Thus, teachers to some extent have insight in handling learners with difficulties in phonics.

Results of the study revealed that teachers who provide extra tuition to struggling students, engaging struggling readers in rhyming, and using jolly are effective in remediating phonics difficulties. The teachers explained that such practices were important in phonics instruction designed for struggling readers. Vadasy and Sanders (2010) indicated that direct group-based teachings, identifying learning patterns, question and answer sessions, rehearsals, extra tuition, among others are teaching strategies needed for effective phonics instruction. It could be deduced from these findings that teachers do all they could to enable struggling readers to develop the needed skills to overcome their phonics difficulties.

Results of the study revealed that teaching and learning materials such as chalkboards, manila cards, and flashcards were used by teachers in phonics instruction (Nugba, Quansah, Ankomah, Tsey, & Ankoma-Sey, 2021). Teachers indicated that adopting sound remedial instruction for learners with phonics difficulties cannot be successful unless they incorporate instructional materials. This finding agrees with the views of Carreker et al. (2007) who concluded that struggling students required phonetically written books, flashcards and illustrations using regular words that are interesting to young children. This finding again agrees with an observation by Johnston et al. (2012), who indicated that phonics instruction is only one part of a larger, well-balanced reading program necessary for all children learning to read and must be simple, short and exciting with a lot of interesting teaching and learning materials. This is the reason why a lot of scholars such as Allington (2011) have all highlighted the crucial role of teaching and learning

materials in learning to read. These authorities believe that learning sound and their blend may be disinteresting for young children, therefore, the need to use a lot of different teaching and learning materials. Kemizano (2007) found that a variety of flashcards, picture books, shapes of objects, word and rhyme games must be used in phonics development because playing with language helps young children focus their attention on the sounds of words as well as their meaning. This suggests that teaching and learning materials must not just be used while ensuring effective phonics instruction for struggling readers but must also be interactive to keep the pupils on task.

Assessment strategies were also identified in the study to play a pivotal role in assisting learners who struggle with phonics (Nugba & Quansah, 2021; Quansah, 2018). The study revealed that teachers after phonics instruction, engage the pupils in dictation, word identification, oral reading, and give struggling readers written exercises to assess their performance. The findings agree with Adoma (2016) who used the phonics methods of teaching reading in helping pupils to read, revealed that dictation, alphabet identification, written exercise and oral reading were good assessment strategies needed in a phonics remediation activity. The findings agree with the view of Chuunga (2013) who observed that there cannot be effective reading instruction without effective assessment. Armbruster (2010) pointed out that there is a need to assess the strength and needs of learners through exercise, letter identification; using information gathered to inform instructional decisions and monitoring learners' reading through assessment. Armbruster (2010) added that organising instruction based on learners' group needs; recording how learners are responding to assessment and teaching; and the teacher reflecting on instructional practices are also part of assessment methods used in phonics instructions. It has been established that assessment of a struggling reader's letter knowledge indicates what letters and sounds he/she knows and what letters and sounds need to be practised.

Analysis of teachers' approaches in phonics instruction revealed that motivation is important in the learning of phonics. The finding of the present study revealed that the methods teachers used to motivate struggling readers were both intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic packages included teachers applauding learners, giving the learners high-five, hugging the learners, telling them stories, and establishing cordial relationships with the pupils. The extrinsic method was by giving gifts such as money, stickers, chalks erasers and pens. This finding supports the assertion by Chuunga (2013) that effective reading instruction requires motivation. Also, Chuunga's study revealed that motivational practices such as giving gifts to struggling readers and praising learners make learners active and participate fully in phonics activities. These motivational practices were similar to those practices identified by teachers used in the study. This implies that motivation makes phonics learning easy and simple.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

It is concluded that teachers used varied methods of remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers. This notwithstanding, it was obvious that teachers were aware of the reading challenges that confront their pupils, and devised strategies to remediate the reading difficulties among the struggling readers. In the quest of discharging their responsibility as teachers, the study showed that they are confronted with certain challenges, which include inadequate teaching resources and requisite teaching approaches. These challenges tend to hinder the process of remediating phonics difficulties among struggling readers, and negatively affect the effectiveness of the strategies.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the school's administration provides adequate teaching and learning materials to the teachers so that remediating reading difficulties among struggling readers will be more supportive and easier. Again, we would like to recommend further that, management of the school creates the opportunity for teachers responsible for developing reading skills among pupils in the basic schools to embark on professional development programmes in the form of short courses, workshops, orientations and mentoring. These professional development training programmes should aim at equipping teachers on effective teaching of phonics as one of the five basic components of reading. This sort of professional development should not be the typical one-time workshop or even a short-term series of workshops, but an engagement in an ongoing, long-term professional development environment, the kind of environment through which lasting, positive changes in teacher practices are promoted.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study interviewed grade 4 teachers who teach the English Language. Therefore, the findings from this study are limited to only grade 4 level. Also, only 4 participants were sampled and interviewed. This research should serve as a mini-study that seeks to open up the discussion on the difficulties of learners in reading, which affects their performance, and how teachers help remediate this reading challenge. Caution should be taken when generalizing the findings of this study. Based on this, it is suggested that future studies should be conducted with more participants in different schools and at different grade levels. This will add to the reliability of the findings of the current study.

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