**FINE-TUNING AS A MERGER BETWEEN PHONICS AND PHONOLOGY: AN “ALPHONOLOGY” APPROACH TO TEACHING EFFECTIVE READING AND PRONUNCIATION**.

**Abstract**

This study investigates causes of poor reading and pronunciation among pupils in some public and private schools in Benin City, Edo State and Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, using the “Alphonology”, which is based on the alphabetic principle and phonological conventions to analyze the sampled data designed to show poor reading and interference in L2 speakers’ speech. We analyze learners’ competence and rate of interference, the observable features of interference of L1 on L2 (and vice versa) and its effects on the phonological structure of the spoken form of the second language. We observed that when the learners observe a gap in their L2 phonological structures, they adjust the form of their L2 to sounds which are part of their L1. This often leads to inappropriate L2 performance indicating interference. We suggest that language teachers should plan classes giving specific help to language learners through the Alphonology Approach. Teachers should also identify the types of pronunciation errors and design drills through blending, diagraphs, palindromes, tongue twisters and elocution skills to improve their reading and speaking skills. This study presents a novel strategy for teaching effective reading and pronunciation of English as a second language from the kindergarten to the basic levels, and ultimately, contributes to knowledge through practical drills that would help the pupils to curtail observed forms of interference and mispronunciations.

Keywords: Alphonology, effective reading, interference, Merger approach, Phonics, Phonology

1. **Introduction**

In every multilingual environment, the transfer of certain sounds from the mother tongue to the target language or vice versa is inevitable. The absence of some sounds in a mother tongue system often results in intelligibility issues. For instance, a typical speaker of Hausa in the Northern Nigeria might make the following statement, \*“*some pulish sudents fut za fot on za pire*” meaning “some foolish students put the pot on the fire”. This is often perceived by non-native speakers of Hausa, and some Hausa linguists believe that this form of interference is mainly caused by the absence of /p/ in their Phonology. Most listeners from other climes who have not interacted with people with this kind of Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) may have intelligibility problems when those with MTI issues speak due to the transfer (drop and replacement) of some sounds.

In teaching practice, instances of MTI are also observed among students from the eastern region. For instance some Igbo speakers of English are likely to pronounce “lat” for “rat”, and “load” for “road”. One may ask: what makes these dialect speakers to pronounce the words differently? Why do they habitually pronounce such words wrongly? This phenomenon is one of the factors resulting in mother tongue interference, which frequently occurs in second language teaching and learning contexts and today still remains very topical ( Tergujeff, 2012) requiring scholarly attention.

English is taught in Nigeria at different levels as a school subject for primary and secondary levels, and as a course at the tertiary level. It is also the official language in Nigeria. However, as pointed out above, speakers of English in Nigeria come from different linguistic backgrounds. Within these backgrounds, there are a plethora of linguistic sounds observable from different languages and dialects. Some have their equivalents in English, others do not. Consequently, some students who come from the hinterlands of South South Nigeria find it hard to distinguish between the English pronunciation of the velar approximant [j] and the palato-alveolar sound [dʒ]. Thus, they are inclined to pronoun “John” as “yon”, “yes” as “jes”, or something close to that.

As Phonics instruction holds sway in most schools nowadays, some of these observable cases of interference have been corrected among pupils from schools with the Phonics programmes while pupils in schools that are not enrolled in any Phonics programme still suffer a lot from cases of interference. While [j] and [dʒ] may not affect pupils in the Benin metropolis, pupils in some schools in Benin would likely pronounce “house” as “aus”, “chair” as “share”, and so on. In general, the recordings from schools in Uyo and Benin metropolis revealed that attention has not been given to the articulation of words with silent letters. Hence, almost all the participants articulated all the silent ‘h’ in the data set.

Trifonovitch (1981) explained that a pupil is automatically placed at a disadvantage when he already has a language of his own and he is asked to learn another language. This is because the sounds he already knows will have no problem but when he encounters new sounds other than those of his own phonology, mother tongue interference is likely to occur

Given the ethno-linguistic backgrounds of Nigerian learners, the majority of nursery and primary school pupils already have different mother tongues before they are admitted into any school. According to ‘WorldAtlas’, Nigeria is reputed to have over 520 languages. Sadly, with the poor listening, speaking, writing, and reading abilities of pupils in the English language in Nigeria, educators, parents, employers are

worried and concerned about their performance and future.

This paper examines the challenges of teaching effective reading and pronunciation and interference in English and suggests practical solutions through Alphonology to curb the identified problems for young learners of English. It was observed that mother tongue interference affects fluency among pupils thereby inhibiting their reading and pronunciation skills. Alabi (2007) captured three areas in which interference occurs in the speech life of a speaker, namely: phonological, lexical and grammatical. Lexical interference occurs when gaps are filled by words from the mother tongue or their meanings are transferred to the target language while grammatical interference occurs within the structure of sentences which may have been influenced by the sentence structure of the speakers’ mother tongue. In this study, attention is paid to phonological interference which is captured through Phonics. This is the commonest form of interference and the most noticeable form of it.

* 1. **Concepts in the Alphonology approach**
		1. **Alphonology**

 ‘Alphonology’ (alphabet+phonology) is a term proposed (in this paper) to represent teaching reading and writing with the alphabetic and phonological principles. In short, Alphonology means teaching reading with letters and phonetic symbols simultaneously. It is a merger between Phonics and Phonology proposed to curb mother tongue interference and improve reading among learners. It is common knowledge that the Phonics approach, which is an integral part of Alphonology, depends solely on letter sounds (the alphabet) to teach reading. Consequently, as pupils move to the basic levels in Nigerian primary schools, they are confronted with numerous phonetic symbols taught in isolation and sometimes haphazardly too. The Alphonology approach seeks to merge the two systems to aid reading. Therefore, if pupils are gradually introduced to letter sounds and their phonetic realizations they will internalize the sound systems effortlessly and this will handle possible cases of mother tongue interference. There have been arguments over the years concerning beginning reading instruction, especially at the basic level, and this debate has been consistent with a half century of dispute about what works best in developing young readers (Adams, 1994; Chall, 1967).

**1.2.3 The Tenets of Alphonology**

These are discussed in relation to two groups of learners under two main headings: the kindergarten and the basic levels.

1. **Kindergarten Level**
2. Teach phonemic awareness through:
3. Graphemes: letter and sound recognition and articulation
4. Blending letter sounds for early reading
5. Teach digraphs and blending to reinforce reading skills
6. Teach blends and blending to reduce interference
7. Teach sight words and blending to develop fluency skills
8. Teach silent letters with copious examples
9. **Basic Level**
10. Teach letter sounds and their phonetic realizations

Depending on the lesson, letters and concepts should be presented alongside their phonetic realizations. For example, the letter **<a>** has the following sounds (phonetic symbols): /æ, aː, eɪ and ə/. Each group in Table 1. should be taught as a separate lesson with copious drills like reading stories, passages and tongue twisters that contain the sound being taught. According to Luo (2014) “A tongue twister is a good help for pronunciation training. Though the tongue twister is a language game and may seem funny, yet it is a good practice for Chinese English speakers who have a problem of mispronunciation”. It should be noted that the essence of adopting tongue twisters to teach learners does not apply only to Chinese speakers of English but to all L2 learners of English around the world.

**Table 1: Phonemic Sounds of the Vowel Letters <a>**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **/æ/** | **/eɪ/** | **/aː/** | **/ə/** |
| At | ape | art | About |
| An | age | ark | Again |
| As | aid | arm | Around |
| Ant | aim | are | Aloud |
| Amp | ache | arc | Above |

Source: Etta (2013:p5)

* + 1. **Phonics**

Adams (1994) defined Phonics as “a system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle; a system of which a certain component is the teaching of the correspondence between letters or group of letters and their pronunciation”. Impressive as his definition may be, the source argues further that “Phonics is not a method of teaching pronunciation; it is a method of teaching English speakers how to read and write” (Adams: 1994). This claim does not only contradict his definition of Phonics but fails to take into account, the second language learner who grows up with distinct mother tongue phonology but ought to learn English as a second language cum lingua franca of his linguistic environment. Luo (2016) looked at the relationship between letters and sounds and posited thus, “Phonics refers to associating letters or letter groups with the sounds they represent” This, obviously, is the core of the teaching approach that relies on letters and sounds. Simply put, phonics is a method of teaching reading and writing in which the sounds of the letters of the alphabet are used to teach pronunciation. An early Phonics programme starts with teaching the sounds of the letters first before the letter names. This helps the learners to achieve phonemic awareness and the potential to read at an early stage. The Phonics approach presents a step-by-step method of teaching reading. After the letter sounds are taught, blending (combining letter sounds to form words) is introduced through digraphs and blends (consonant clusters) to teach reading.

 Phonics may seem relatively new in non-native speakers environments. But in the real sense, it dates back to 1570 when John Hart first presented the idea. Prior to his presentation, children were taught to read through the alphabet method where they recited all the letters in a word while practicing to read. Sadly, some schools still practice this method. It consumes the pupils’ time and can be boring at times.

Since the introduction of Phonics, it has spread to different countries spearheaded by various experts and enthusiasts. In 1992, the first part of Jolly Phonics was published. In Nigeria, however, this came much later. Different groups have adopted different terms for Phonics ranging from, Diction and, Elocution. The IQ Phonics series by David Etta was first published in 2013. The series presented graded textbooks with their accompanying DVDs to aid both the teachers and the learners. Today, the IQ Phonics series has expanded from the kindergarten to the basic levels with videos. The series also present new concepts that will aid learning. Phonemic dictation improves pupils’ spelling and reading skills. And pupils who listened attentively will hear all the sounds and transcribe them into meaningful words (Etta 2019).

**1.2.2.1 Phonics rules**

The rules stated below help learners to predict, identify and articulate sounds correctly. However, due to the irregularity of English spelling, the rules may not apply in all cases. Hence, there are exceptions to some of these rules. The rules are as follows:

1. Every syllable in every word has a vowel. But sometimes, /l, n/, are syllables on their own
2. <c> followed by <e, y, or i> usually have the soft sound of <s> i.e. /s/ sound.
3. <g> followed by <e, i, or y> usually has the sound of <j> i.e. /dʒ/
4. when two consonants are joined together to form a single sound, they are a consonant digraph
5. when two or more consonants are joined together but each retaining its sound, they are a consonant blend or cluster

**1.2.3 Grapheme**

A grapheme is the minimal contrastive unit in the writing system of a language. Every language has its letters. But these letters are often written in a variety of ways like the English system of upper and lower case. In each case, the grapheme is seen as an allograph of a particular letter.

So in Alphonology, graphemes may be combined into blends and digraphs to teach reading. For instance, we may combine <st, dr, gr, or br> as blends to teach reading. Similarly, <oa, ie, ph, ai or oe> are taught as digraphs with a single sound each to improve reading fluency.

**1.2.4 Digraphs**

Digraphs are two letters jointly pronounced as a single sound (Etta 2016:p29). They can be two vowels like <ie, ai, ea, oi and ae> called vowel digraphs or two consonants like <th, ch, sh, ph and gh> called consonant digraphs. Though effort is put to design orthographies in modern linguistics whereby there is letter and sound correspondence, this remains a huge concern due to the irregularity in English spelling system. Two letters may combine to give a certain single sound in one context but give you a different single sound in another environment. Consider the realizations of the digraph <ea> below:

Read /r i: d/ (present)

Read /red/ (past). As seen from the example above, beginning readers may find this and other similar cases very challenging. Therefore, digraphs should be carefully taught to help kids develop effective reading and speaking skills.

**1.2.5 Blends**

Blends are sequences of consonant letters jointly pronounced but with each letter retaining its sound. In Phonology, this is known as consonant cluster. Examples include: gr, st, str, pr, spr, etc. In Phonics, blend and blending also refers to a process of teaching reading through the combination of consonant letters and vowel letters. Thus, b+at = bat, c+.at = cat, f+at = fat, s+at = sat, r+at = rat etc; a systematic way of teaching pupils how grapheme generate blended sounds in reading.

**1.2.6 Diction**

Diction is the style of speaking or writing determined by the choice of words by a speaker or a writer. In Phonics, Diction refers to an appropriate articulation of speech sounds and the overall pronunciation of whole words, phrases and sentences observing the stress and intonation patterns. On the contrary, wrong pronunciation of words, wrong articulation of speech sounds and non-observance of intonation patterns result in poor performance.

**1.2.7** Phonemic Awareness

This is the knowledge that spoken words are made up of sequences of individual sounds and the ability to recognize and blend the sounds in the process of speech production.

**1.2.8 Alphabetic Principle**

The Alphabetic Principle refers to sound symbol relationship found in alphabetic languages such as English. When pupils recognize sounds and their graphemic realizations they also need to understand sounds and their phonetic symbols introduced gradually.

**1.2.9 Sight Words**

This is the approach of teaching reading through sight recognition. The Phonics approach draws heavily on sound blend and combination to teach reading. However, some words cannot be read through sound combination. Hence, the sight word approach. Here, words are written out and taught as in traditional grammar where sight recognition and repetition is used to teach reading.

Sight words could be taught in the following order:

**Two-letter Sight words**

We he me my

By do of hi

**Three-letter Sight words**

The are why who

Our now how low

**Four-letter Sight words**

this that what when

they them your mine

**1.2.10 Tongue Twisters**

These are words in a particular sequence mostly in the form of alliteration (repetition of similar sounds in an utterance) that are very difficult to pronounce in rapid speech. They are a powerful tool for practicing pronunciation. Tongue twisters lead to fluency and confidence in written and spoken language. Tongue twisters are also a great way of improving one’s accent. An example is, “If Charlie chews shoes, should Charlie choose the shoes he chews? This approach to teaching reading has been very effective as pupils practice excitedly to get the words properly pronounced.

* + 1. **Phonology**

Katamba (1989) defined Phonology as “the branch of linguistics which investigates the ways in which sounds are used systematically in different languages to form words and utterances.” He added that “in order to understand phonology, one must have a grasp of the basic concepts of phonetics, the study of the inventory of all speech sounds which humans are capable of producing

So how do we merge Phonics and Phonology to form a single approach to teaching reading at all levels? Since Phonics deals primarily with letter sounds such as <a>, <b>, <k>, <d>, <e>, <f>, etc., it would be practically productive to teach letter sounds with their phonetic realizations at certain stages of learning. Phonics has proved to be a successful approach used in teaching reading in kindergarten and lower basics. In his review of the history of Phonics, Cothran (2014) states the relevance of Phonics thus:

 “One of the largest research projects ever conducted … reviewed all of the

 existing research on reading and found conclusively that early, systematic

instruction in phonics is the best way to teach children how to read. Although

 the panel’s report has not quieted all opposition to phonics, it has succeeded

in breaking the death grip of the whole-word approach on reading instruction

in the nation’s schools”.

The conclusion above gives credence to the merger of Phonics and Phonology as a useful approach to teach reading. Hence, after the kindergarten level where pupils have learnt letter sounds and can articulate them, phonetic symbols should be introduced side-by-side the letter(s) they represent. Therefore, the digraph <sh> could be taught with its phonetic symbol /ʃ/, <ch> with /tʃ/, and <ph> with /f/, with copious examples for familiarization and broad phonemic awareness. Table 2 shows the Alphonology strategy of merging the letter sound and its phonetic symbol (s).

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| **Table 2: Merging the phonic letter sounds with their phonetic symbols** |
|  Some consonant letters and their phonetic symbols  | <b> /b/ | <c> /k/, /s/, / ʃ/ | <f> /f/ | <g> /g/, /dʒ/ | <h> /h/ | <q> [kʷ] |
| <s> /s/, /z/, /**ʒ**/ | <n> /n/, /ŋ / | <d> /d/ | <j> /dʒ/  | <x> /ks/, /z/ | <y> /j/, /ɪ/, /aɪ/ |
| some vowel letters and their phonetic symbols | <a> /æ/, /eɪ/ /aː/ | <e> /e/, / ɪ/ | <i> /ɪ/ /iː/ /aɪ/ | <o> /ɔ/,/ɒ/,/əʊ/, /aʊ/ | <u> /ʊ/, /uː/, /ʌ/ |
| consonant digraphs and their phonetic symbols | <sh> / ʃ/  | <ch> / tʃ/, /k/ | <th> /θ/, /t/ | <th> /ð/ | <ng> /ŋ/ | <ph> /f/ |
| blends and their phonetic symbols | st | br | gr | pr | bl | Str |

**Aim and objective**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the causes of poor reading and pronunciation among pupils from selected schools in Uyo metropolis and Benin city with a view to introducing the “Alphonology approach” for teaching effective reading and pronunciation. Other objectives are to:

1. suggest some solutions to the identified problems to improve effective reading and pronunciation
2. create awareness of the concept of Alphonology as an approach that can inhibit mispronunciation
3. identify selected sounds that often cause mispronunciation and design drills to assist the learners
4. examine the perceptual and oral abilities of the pupils investigated on the trends in Phonics and Diction

2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, data were elicited from fifty respondents, who are pupils, between the ages of 3-9, from both public and private schools in Uyo metropolis and Benin City. Five pupils were selected from each school at random to read carefully designed scripts which contained the commonly mispronounced sounds into a digital recorder which was later analyzed. Different transcription models like Gimson’s Transcription system and other available models on Nigerian English for more accurate representation were used. The transcription was mostly phonemic although we also resorted phonetic (impressionistic) transcription in some of the items. This random selection the respondents was to ensure a fair spread of respondents’ base to cover, at least minimally various ethnic groups in various part of the country. They were drawn from ten linguistic groups including both the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and some minority languages. Our selection of respondents from the ten linguistic groups is merely representative of different part of Nigeria. The researchers also recorded conversations among pupils during break time to compare their careful speech and their spontaneous speech to ascertain the extent of interference and these were analyzed using the Alphonology approach.

The data comprised 1,100 sentences, which were extracted from 56 minutes of recorded reading excerpts and conversations. Out of the total sample, sounds items from 865 of them were used in the analysis while the remaining 235 sentences were not analyzed due to unsupported file format. Table 2 present the socio-cultural groupings and the total number of the respondents selected for the study.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ETHIC GROUP** | **NUMBER OF RESPONDENT** |  **SEX** |
|  **MALE** |  **FEMALE** |
| HausaYorubaIgboIbibioFulaniIjawTivEbiraKanumiEsahUrhoboIgalaEsanIdomaKalabariZuruFulfudeIlwereAnnangTotal |  |  |  |

1. **Results and Discussion**

The results of the investigation are presented in this section followed by discussions and practical guides to correct observed cases of interference and pronunciation errors thereby improving effective reading.

* 1. **Interchanging Sounds and Incorrect Articulation of Words with Postalveolar Fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ Sounds**

The postalveolar fricatives /**ʃ**/ and **/ʒ**/ sounds are often interchanged by some learners of English. Table 3. presents words often mispronounced by interchanging the sounds.

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| **Table 3. Interchanging Sounds and Incorrect Articulation of Words with**  **/ʃ/ and /ʒ/ Sounds** |
|  /ʃ/ |  /ʒ/ |
| pressure /preʃə/ | leisure /leʒə/ |
| fiction /fɪkʃn/ | vision /vɪʒn/ |
| correction /kərekʃn/ | confusion /kənfu:ʒn/ |
| discussion /dɪskʌʃn/ | division /dɪvɪʒn/ |
| mention /menʃn/ | version /vɜ:ʒn/ |
| position /pəzɪʃn/ | lesion /li:ʒn/ |

The data set included words from Table above. It was observed that most readers interchanged /ʃ/ with /ʒ/ when pronouncing the word “pressure”. So they pronounced: \*/preʒɔ/ or \*/prejɔ/ instead of /preʃə /. The above case is common even among adult speakers of English in Nigeria.

It is suggested that trained Phonics experts should start teaching pupils as they are admitted into kindergarten and the basic levels. For pupils at the basic level, the letters (sh) that represent the /ʃ/ sound should be taught in tandem with the sound. And they should be encouraged to look up words, meaning and their sounds in the dictionary. When taught by a trained teacher, pupils should be encouraged to practice the sounds by reading after their teacher and articulating the sounds appropriately. Table 4 presents a rhyming strategy that can improve pupils’ fluency.

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|  **Table 4. Rhyming Words with / ʒ / Sound to Improve Fluency** |
| / ʒ/ | /ʒ/ |
| measure /meʒə/ | treasure /treʒə/ |
| vision /vɪʒn/ | television /telɪvɪʒn/ |
| division /dɪvɪʒn/ | decision /dɪsɪʒn/ |
| casual /kæʒjʊəl/ | visual /vɪʒʊəl/ |
| garage /gæra:ʒ/ | mirage /mɪra:ʒ/ |
| occasion /əkeɪʒn/ | invasion /ɪnveɪʒn/ |
| leisure /leʒə/ | Pleasure /pleʒə/ |

**3.1.1. Reading Practice**

The reading practice below features some of the sounds considered above. A careful practice will also result in efficient reading and speaking skills.

1. The King James Version is a popular Bible translation.

 2. The correction cleared the confu**s**ion.

3. There was a lot of divi**s**ion during the sharing programme.

4. If the sun shines one can get a clearer vision of the dark box

5. Did you enjoy your lei**s**ure in A**s**ia?

6. Ships don’t sail to Asia except they are fully booked.

It has been observed that the commonest cause of interference is the absence of some sounds of the target language in the speaker’s mother tongue. To assist learners to overcome interference copious drills are required for learners to get used to the affected sounds. Table 4 has sample words for a class drill.

3.1.2. **The Merger Approach**

As mentioned in the introduction, Phonics deals with letters and their sounds but Phonology deals with phonetic symbols. A gradual introduction of the symbols along with their graphemes would ease learning and reading for the pupils. For instance, the post alveolar fricatives / ʒ / and /ʃ/ could be presented thus:

**3.1.3. Graphemes that Represent the Post alveolar Fricative /ʒ/**

 The letters below are pronounced with the /ʒ/ sound.

1. **s** – casual, invasion, leisure, measure, occasion, treasure, television, vision,
2. **g** – camouflage, garage, genre, mirage, prestige, Peugeot, regime
3. **z** – seizure
	1. **1. Interchanging the palatal sound /j/ with the palato-alveolar affricate /dʒ/**

 The phonetic symbol /j/ in the first letters in *yes, you, yellow* etc. is often confused with letter <j> which has the phonetic symbol /dʒ/ thereby used interchangeably by some pupils in the Uyo metropolis. In the data, most readers from public schools in Uyo articulated the /j/ in yesterday while others confused it with /dʒ/ and interchange with /dʒ/. Table 5 below shows the data set and the asterisked words where the initial sound /dʒ/ was replaced with /j/ by some readers for ease of articulation.

|  |
| --- |
| **Table 5: Interchanging / j / with /dʒ/** |
| / j / | /dʒ/ |
| yet /jet/ | jet /dʒet/ \*jet |
|  yoke /jəʊk/ | joke /dʒəʊ/ \*jəʊk |
| you /ju:/ | jew /dʒu:/ \*ju:/ |
| yesterday /jestədeɪ/ | jealousy /dʒeləsi/ \*jeləsi |
| young /jɒŋ/ | John /dʒɒn/ \*jɒn |

Interference is usually triggered by certain sounds in the target language which are either present or absent in the first language. Hence, while pupils within the Uyo metropolis interchanged / j / with /dʒ/, pupils in Benin City showed no occurrence of this observed pronunciation habit. However, section 3.3 reveals areas where the sounds of the speech of pupils in Benin City interfere with those of the target language.

Table 6 presents a rhyming strategy for words with / j /to improve learners’ fluency and effective reading.

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| --- |
| **Table 6: Rhyming words with / j / to improve fluency** |
| / j / | / j / |
| yes /jes/ | yesterday /jestədeɪ/ |
| ewe /ju:/ | you /ju:/ |
| new /nju:/ | mew /mju:/ |
| duty /dju:ti | beauty /bju:tɪ/ |
| few /fju:/ | feud /fju:d/ |
| yellow /jeləʊ/ | yoyo / jəʊjəʊ/ |
| yacht /jɒt/ | yawn /jɔ:n/ |

Table 7 presents a rhyming strategy for words with **/dʒ/** to improve learners’ fluency

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| --- |
|  **Table 7: Rhyming strategy for words with /dʒ/ to improve learners’ fluency** |
| Jug /dʒʌg/ | Jump /dʒʌmp/  |
| Jane /dʒeɪn/ | James /dʒeɪmz/ |
| Jack /dʒæk/ | Jand /dʒænd/ |
| Jude /dʒuːd/ | June /dʒuːn/ |
| Just /dʒʌst/ | Judge /dʒʌdʒ/ |

**3.3.2. The Merger Approach**

The single letters and digraphs below are pronounced by informants with the /**j**/ sound.

y – yam, yellow, yoke

ew – dew, ewe, few, new, stew

ea – beauty

eu – Eugene, Europe, feud

u – Unity, duty, huge, music, pupil, student

Facilitators should present frequent drills on the articulation of /j/ with the succeeding sound accompanying it. For instance, the North American English (NAmE) variety often ignores the /j/ before some vowels. This distinction should be made known to the learners. Consider the variations below:

BrE ( RP) NAmE

dew /dju:/ dew /du:/

new /nju:/ new /nu:/

stew /stju:/ stew /stu:/

To avoid pronunciation confusion in our linguistic environment which has the two (BrE and NAmE) codes competing for dominance, learners should be assisted to acquire and use the RP of the BrE code which has been in use for pedagogical purposes.

**4.1. Findings**

The data revealed the following tendencies:

1. Mispronunciation of sounds such as /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /θ/ and /ð/. The sounds above were mispronounced by most pupils sampled. And this affects how they communicate. Effective teaching is thus hampered due to inadequate feedback from the learners who are shy of their mispronunciation. The Alphonology resolves this problem through drills designed to help the learners to master proper articulation of the sounds.
2. The recorded data also showed that the informants interchanged sounds. E.g. /ʃ/ instead of /tʃ/ in church, /dʒ/ instead of /ʒ/ in measure, /t/ instead of /θ/ in thought and /d / instead of / ð / in them. This is another instance that causes effective teaching and reading difficulty. The Alphonology approach resolves this through oral drills such as tongue twisters and reading practice of passages or conversations featuring such sounds.
3. Some informants from the Uyo schools also interchanged /dʒ/ and /j/ intermittently. For instance, they pronounced yesterday with /dʒ/ \*/dʒestədeɪ/ instead of /jestədeɪ/ and John with \*/jɒn/ instead of /dʒɒn/. The Alphonology approach adopts the rhyming strategy of words with / j / to improve effective reading and communication.
4. It was also observed that some of the informants insert /h/ where it is silent and ignore it when it ought to be pronounced as in heir, hour, honour where it is silent and ignore it in house, home, hammer where it ought to be pronounced.
5. Most of the informants recorded in all the schools articulated silent letters such as “h” in **h**onour, **h**our, “b” in dou**b**t, de**b**t and “g” gnat, gnome.
6. Listening to the recordings, informants from the public schools have a higher occurrence of interference than those from the private schools

**4.2. CONCLUSION**

We have discussed the Phonics approach and how it can be merged with the phonological approach to solve reading and effective teaching problems from kindergarten to the basic levels.

Since interference occurs when most learners transfer the linguistic features of their L1 to the linguistic system of the target language, we discussed a practical step-by-step approach where the learners learn and acquire the full sound system of the target language to prevent or bridge any possible gap between the two linguistic code systems which often give rise to interference.

The descriptive approach based on phonological conventions in analyzing the sampled data proved very effective as cases of interference were observed from the recorded data and strategies to eradicate them were discussed in section three.

We proposed that language teachers should plan classes with specific instructions that will assist language learners to acquire the sounds and articulation patterns of the target language. We also suggested that teachers should observe and identify the types of errors and design drills aimed at correcting them. For instance, teaching blends and digraphs can clear interference triggers associated with phonotactics (the way sound are arranged or ordered in every language) where /s/ and /t/ in stool might pose a challenge for some kids whose phonology does not permit initial clusters.

With growing awareness in Phonics, the Alphonology approach promises to solve a lot of pronunciation errors. It is suitable for beginning readers and may serve as a remedial training strategy for kids already in the basic levels with poor phonemic knowledge. And for continuity, learners in the upper basics and those moving to the tertiary levels need a core training on Alphonology to balance their spoken English with their mother tongue.

**4.3. Recommendations**

As seen from the findings above, the impact of Alphonology method and its positive boost to teaching reading will be greatly felt if the following recommendations are adhered to:

1. Curriculum developers should call for inputs from language experts regarding the new teaching trends which include: Phonics, Diction and the proposed Alphonology (which merges Phonics and Phonology for early learners).
2. The use of the Alphonology method should be encouraged by the government in the teaching of literacy in Basic Literacy Programmes since pupils nationwide are already benefitting from the use of Phonics books (such as *Anglo Speech* by Amos Aliyu, *Progressive Phonics* by Franca Okumo and *IQ Phonics* by David Etta) that adopt the method.

3. The teacher training education curriculum in colleges and universities should emphasize the Alphonology method and pre-service teachers should be well grounded in the use of this method in basic literacy programmes as a catch-them-young strategy.

4. Basic primers should be adequately developed by Phonics experts and made available to both public and private schools.

5. Outside the university system, the facilitators of the Alphonology method should be made to undergo training and re-training on a regular basis on this method of teaching beginning readers.

6. Diction and Phonics experts should have a regulatory body or be certified by the states ministries of education to operate upon presentation of documents and confirmation of their qualifications.

7. All language teachers at the kindergarten and basic levels should go through the Alphonology method for efficient delivery in the teaching process because the method is child centered and presents sounds and letters in a way that is easily assimilated by the learners.

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