
**TEACHING PHONICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL: ASSESSING THE ROLES IN BUILDING SELF ESTEEM AND
EXPRESSION AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN AKWA IBOM STATE.**

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed teaching phonics in primary school: the roles in building self-esteem and expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State. Phonics is being taught in many kindergartens and most first grades in order to introduce children to reading and writing. Phonics improves the accuracy of the pupils reading, but not necessarily their comprehension. The study revealed that phonics builds self-esteem at a tender age; it teaches beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups, and especially syllables. It encourages children to learn the sounds of individual letters first, then the sounds of letters in combination, and in simple terms, it greatly affects their performance. On this basis it was concluded that teaching phonics in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State is a foundational element for developing literacy skills, playing a crucial role in enhancing both self-esteem and expression among pupils. As students successfully decode words, their confidence grows, positively impacting their self-esteem. Moreover, phonics instruction empowers pupils to express themselves effectively, contributing to improved communication skills. One of the recommendations made was that there should be advocacy on the implementation of comprehensive and evidence-based phonics programs in primary schools, ensuring systematic and explicit instruction.

KEYWORDS: Phonics, Primary School, Self Esteem, Self-Expression, Primary School Pupils and Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching phonics in elementary schools is critical for developing young learners' core reading skills, influencing not only academic success but also self-esteem and expression ability. The significance of phonics instruction in early education cannot be emphasized, particularly in areas such as Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, where strong literacy foundations are critical for the holistic development of primary school students. This introduction explores the impact of teaching phonics on building self-esteem and expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State, delving into the educational landscape and referencing relevant scholarly works.

Akwa Ibom State, located in the southern region of Nigeria, places significant emphasis on education as a means of fostering individual growth and community development. The state's primary education system is the bedrock for nurturing the cognitive abilities of young learners. In this context, teaching phonics emerges as a fundamental aspect of early literacy education, aiming to equip pupils with the skills to decode and comprehend written language.

Phonics teaching equips primary school students with the tools needed to decode words, allowing them to read and comprehend texts independently. When pupils succeed at reading using phonetic procedures, their self-esteem improves. The capacity to interpret words and traverse written language



autonomously gives young students a sense of accomplishment and confidence (Ehri, 2014). This positive reinforcement aids in the development of a strong self-esteem foundation, which is essential for academic and personal success.

Phonics teaching not only prepares primary school students to read successfully, but it also improves their expressive ability. As students improve their decoding skills and knowledge of phonetic patterns, they acquire confidence in expressing themselves verbally and in writing. This increased expressive capacity is essential for successful communication, critical thinking, and academic performance (National Reading Panel, 2000). In Akwa Ibom State, where English is the medium of teaching, good phonics skills help students increase their language competency and expression. In Akwa Ibom State's educational landscape, teaching phonics in elementary schools is critical for developing literacy skills and influencing young learners' self-esteem and expression capacities. This introduction lays the groundwork for a thorough examination of the influence of phonics education on primary school students in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on the broader implications for their academic and personal development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the widespread adoption of phonics instruction in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State, there is need to comprehensively understand its impact on crucial developmental aspects such as self-esteem and expression among pupils. While phonics instruction is known to enhance reading accuracy, its influence on broader literacy skills, particularly self-esteem and expression, necessitates deeper investigation. The existing literature suggests that phonics instruction lays the foundation for literacy development by teaching the phonetic value of letters and syllables, potentially bolstering pupils' confidence and communication abilities. However, there is a gap in research assessing the specific roles of phonics in building self-esteem and fostering expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State. Thus, the current study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between phonics instruction and the development of self-esteem and expression among primary school pupils in the region. Through comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to inform educational practices and policies, advocating for evidence-based phonics programmes that systematically and explicitly address the needs of pupils in Akwa Ibom State.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- To find out the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools has contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State.
- To examine the extent to which teaching phonics in primary school has contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent has teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State?
- To what extent has teaching phonics in primary school contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State?

CONCEPT OF PHONICS

The word "Phonics" is very common and familiar to every individual around the globe. Phonics is simply defined as a method for teaching reading and writing to beginners. Phonics is used to teach the relationship between the sounds of the spoken language (phonemes), and the letters (graphemes) or groups of letters or syllables of the written language. Phonics is also known as the alphabetic principle or the alphabetic code. It can be used with any writing system that is alphabetic, such as that of English, Russian, and most other languages. Phonics can be defined as a way of teaching children how to read and write. Phonics helps children hear, identify and use different sounds that distinguish one word from another in the English language.



Devon (2023) mentioned that phonics is the relation between how words are spelled and how specific letter groups sound. And can also be a linguistic tool used to help people learn how to speak and write any language that uses an alphabet. It is used as a method of teaching students how to quickly decode and read words in a language. By having students learn how to identify the sounds of a language early on, they can learn new words that have a logical and repeated pattern of letter more easily. Richard (2018) defines phonics as a method of teaching reading based on the sounds of letters, groups of letters, and syllables. This method of teaching reading is commonly contrasted with whole language approaches, which emphasize learning whole words in meaningful contexts. Through phonics reading, children learn to make connections between sounds and letters. When a child understands forms of letters and their sounds, the child can recognize those letters and sounds within other words.

Ann (2023) described phonics as the way of teaching children how to read by teaching them the connection between the single or grouped letters they see on the page and the sounds those letters make, when they are able to reliably match letters to sound, they learn how to blend the sounds together in a way that help them decode, the phonics method enables children to sound out words independently. Phonics is the connection between graphemes (letter symbols) and sounds. Phonics is one of the primary building blocks of reading. Without an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds, reading cannot occur. The word and its written form are agreed and must be learned in order to communicate. At the very core of phonics lies the alphabet. In order to master phonics a person must master the alphabet, letters then need to be connected to their corresponding sounds (k12 reader, 2024).

Lindsay (2023) explained that phonics as the knowledge of how spoken sounds (phonemes) can be represented by written letters (graphemes). Phonics connects the ability to hear and work with spoken words, word parts, and individual sounds to written language. Phonics are the basis of sounding out words. Phonics is important in the very early stages of reading and writing as students learn letter names, sounds, and symbols. Chen (2017), defined phonics as the method of teaching children the sounds made by individual letter or letter groups and teaching children how to merge separate sounds together to make it one word and phonics is the most effective way to teach children how to read. That without it, some children will end up having serious reading difficulties.

CONCEPT OF SELF ESTEEM

Self-esteem is an act of confidence in one's own worth, abilities, or morals. It encompasses beliefs about oneself as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame, based on people's opinions and beliefs about themselves, which can feel difficult to change. It can also refer to the positive (high self-esteem) or negative (low self-esteem) feelings that people have about themselves. Self-esteem is determined by many factors, including how well one's view their own performance and appearance and how satisfied a person is with their relationships with other individuals'.

Kendra (2023) defined self-esteem as a subjective sense of overall personal worth or value. Similar to self-respect, it describes your level of confidence in your abilities and attributes. Having healthy self-esteem can influence one's motivation, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. Self-esteem tends to be lowest in childhood and increases during adolescence as well as adulthood. Self-esteem is the overall opinion an individual has about themselves and their beliefs about their abilities and limitations. Self-esteem is shaped by one's thoughts, relationships, and experiences, including those related to culture, religion, and societal status. It contributes to feelings of worth, security, or confidence in the ability to make decisions (Weber State University, 2024).

Danie (2023) described self-esteem as how a person views themselves within the world. Oftentimes, it can be how a person measures their worth or value to the world or the people around them. Self-esteem can affect many elements of a person's life, such as self-confidence, relationships, motivation, and emotional or mental well-being. Self-esteem is developed through the ability to overcome a challenge or failure. Darlene (2019) stated that self-esteem is what a person thinks of himself or herself. When it is positive, it means that people have confidence and self-respect and are content with themselves, their abilities, who they are, and their competence. Self-esteem is relatively stable and enduring; though it can fluctuate, self-esteem makes one resilient and hopeful about life. Self-esteem affects not only what people

think but also how they feel and behave. Ahmed (2016) added that self-esteem is related to personal beliefs, skills, abilities, social relationships, and an individual's overall positive evaluation. Self-esteem involves an evaluation of oneself, followed by an emotional reaction.

CONCEPT OF SELF-EXPRESSION

Self-expression is a fundamental aspect of human nature, allowing individuals to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and identity in unique and meaningful ways. It encompasses a wide range of mediums, including art, music, fashion, writing, and even everyday communication. According to Collins Dictionary (2024), self-expression is the expression of an individual's personality, feelings, or opinions. Study (2024) defined self-expression as "how an individual chooses to display their particular personality to others."

Self-expression can take many forms, as it is dependent on the person. Self-expression can also be defined as any action where a person is demonstrating their inner feelings and self to the world. Positive Psychology (2024) mentioned that self-expression is the act of expressing oneself, manifesting in a diverse array of forms. Individuals may employ words, facial expressions, bodily gestures, movements, clothing, actions, and possessions to convey their authentic inner selves. Merriam-Webster (2024) defined self-expression as the expression of one's own personality—an assertion of one's individual traits. Self-expression is the process of engaging in activities that one believes exemplify their innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires (Masterclass, 2024).

Barbot and Heuser (2017) defined self-expression as "the expression of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and emotions that, when not manifested verbally in interpersonal contexts, are preferably expressed through creative activity." Vocabulary.com (2024) defined self-expression as the expression of one's individuality (usually through creative activities). Through self-expression, people can articulate their innermost feelings, share their perspectives, and connect with others on a profound level. This process not only fosters individual growth but also contributes to the rich tapestry of human culture and creativity.

EFFECT OF PHONICS ON SELF ESTEEM OF PUPILS

Phonics is being taught in many kindergartens and most first grades in order to introduce children to reading and writing. Phonics improves the accuracy of the pupils reading, but not necessarily their comprehension. It is important that pupils have self-esteem; having the confidence or boldness to make progress in all aspects of reading, including comprehension, the development of vocabulary, and spelling, which should also be taught explicitly. Here, we explored the effectiveness of the phonics approach on pupils' self-esteem.

Jill (2023) mentioned that for years, educators have been experimenting with the best way to increase self-esteem through reading fluency, especially for students in early elementary. Fluent readers must be able to use phonics skills to decode words in order to build an understanding of words, sentences, paragraphs, and eventually an entire book. Phonics is a critical component that has a positive effect on elementary education's literacy curriculum as students learn strategies to read and spell words correctly. This conversation has resurfaced as educators, administrators, educational researchers, and parents discuss how students' best learn to read and write.

Kathryn (2020) stated that 65 percent of pupils also struggle with their self-esteem in academics. In life, nobody likes to do anything they feel they are not good at doing. This same mindset occurs for someone who struggles with reading. Phonics builds that self-esteem at a tender age; it teaches beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups, and especially syllables. It encourages children to learn the sounds of individual letters first, then the sounds of letters in combination, and in simple terms, it greatly affects their performance.

Justine (2024) describes phonics as giving children or pupils the courage to figure out the alphabetic system of written English on their own and become comfortable with that system as they become readers. Certain children seem to have special difficulty remembering the order of letters prescribed by our alphabet system. But the use of phonics enables pupils to improve their level of achievement in reading and



spelling independently. However, student motivation to study phonics can impact the effectiveness of their self-esteem. Phonics is one of the cornerstones of learning to read. Phonics plays a prominent role in reading, giving pupils the ability to understand and become independent readers. Phonics instruction makes a critical contribution to children's growth in reading (Rachael, 2016).

EFFECT OF PHONICS ON SELF EXPRESSION BY PUPILS

Phonics instruction has been found to have a positive effect on students' self-expression. By learning the relationship between sounds and letters, students can improve their reading and writing skills, which in turn can enhance their ability to express themselves. A study by Ehri et al. (2001) found that phonics instruction significantly improved students' word recognition and spelling, which are essential components of self-expression. Another study by Torgesen (2005) demonstrated that phonics instruction had a positive impact on students' reading fluency and comprehension, which are closely linked to self-expression. These findings suggest that phonics instruction plays a significant role in developing students' ability to express themselves effectively.

Research has shown that a strong foundation in phonics can contribute to improved reading and writing abilities (Black, 2023). As pupils grasp the relationship between letters and sounds, they become better equipped to decode unfamiliar words, leading to increased confidence in expressing themselves through written language. This foundational understanding of phonics empowers pupils to navigate the complexities of language, allowing for greater creativity and clarity in self-expression. Furthermore, the integration of phonics in early education has been linked to enhanced oral communication skills (Ren and Ma, 2017). By mastering phonetic principles, pupils are better equipped to articulate words accurately and fluently, fostering improved spoken self-expression. This development is crucial in promoting effective communication, which is an essential component of self-expression in various contexts.

One notable effect of phonics on self-expression is observed in improved reading skills. Research indicates that phonics instruction enhances decoding abilities, enabling pupils to accurately decipher words and comprehend written texts (Sermier et al., 2019). As pupils become proficient in phonetic decoding, they are better equipped to engage with a broader range of literature, fostering a deeper understanding of language and expanding their capacity for self-expression through written communication.

Moreover, phonics plays a pivotal role in spelling and writing proficiency. By understanding the phonetic structure of words, pupils are better positioned to spell words correctly and compose coherent written expressions. This heightened competency in written language contributes significantly to pupils' self-expression, allowing them to articulate their thoughts and ideas with clarity and precision. In addition to written communication, phonics instruction positively influences oral communication skills. Pupils who receive effective phonics education often demonstrate improved pronunciation, fluency, and overall oral language proficiency. This enhancement in oral communication lays a foundation for effective verbal self-expression, enabling pupils to articulate their thoughts and ideas with confidence.

EASY METHODS OF TEACHING PHONICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THEIR USEFULNESS

A key component of early literacy instruction is the teaching of phonics, which establishes the foundation for good spelling and reading abilities. Children's phonics learning may be substantially improved by using efficient and interesting teaching strategies. Teachers may provide a dynamic learning environment that facilitates phonics acquisition and promotes the development of early reading skills in primary school pupils by putting these techniques into practice. Teachers may equip young learners with the fundamental phonological abilities necessary for success in reading by using interactive activities, multisensory teaching methods, systematic instruction, decodable texts, and digital resources (Wiley and Datta, 2019). These are some simple methods for teaching phonics in elementary school that use research-proven techniques to provide the best possible learning results.



- **Interactive Games and Activities**

Students can have fun playing cooperative games and activities that are interactive. These games provide enjoyable, practical learning opportunities. When interactive games are used in the classroom, students pick up skills beyond the academic material being covered. It aids in teaching kids the values of triumph, rivalry, and graceful loss. Children may practice problem-solving skills through competitive and participatory games, regardless of the topic matter. According to Dian (2022), instructors may encourage students' literacy development by introducing them to well-known games. Young readers can get significant benefits from learning through interactive games. Many classes find that interactive games are a helpful tool for helping young kids build their reading abilities. It's crucial to remember that while games can supplement instruction, they cannot replace it. Engaging in interactive games offers an opportunity to impart important educational principles, such as understanding and adhering to rules and asking clarifying questions. Phonics instruction through interactive games is a tried-and-true approach for kids. Playing engaging phonics games enhances the learning process. These games frequently include lively visuals, captivating audio, and incentives that spur kids to keep going (Vidhyanidi Education Society, 2023). Interactive games and exercises teaches children the alphabet and reading while also assisting them in comprehending the phonetic link between letters and sounds, or phonemes which is an entertaining and very motivating teaching strategy. The clear connection that interactive phonics games provide between each letter of the alphabet and their sound is what makes them so important (Reading egg, 2024).

- **Multi-Sensory Techniques**

Teaching methods that include many senses at once are referred to as multi-sensory approaches. Offering students many avenues for connecting with the material they are studying through the use of sight, hearing, movement, and touch. Through the use of many processing methods and improved encoding of the information into memory, multisensory approaches facilitate the learning of literacy. Reading Rocket (2024) claims that because multi-sensory teaching methods may focus children's attention on the letter sequence in printed words, phonics is a good fit for these methods. As such, including manipulatives, gestures, and speaking and auditory cues increases students' acquisition of phonics skills. An added benefit is that multisensory techniques are quite motivating and engaging to many children. Using multimodal approaches is a fantastic way to reinforce phonics learning, according to Mary (2024). Children's minds function best when various senses are used (multisensory learning). It improves comprehension of phonics. There is evidence to support the use of multisensory approaches. For the youngsters using these techniques, phonemic awareness abilities and the alphabetic principle increased dramatically. Meaningful and multisensory approaches to incorporating phonics into the school setting (Ric publishing, 2024).

- **Systematic and Sequential Instruction**

Primary school phonics training is based on systematic and sequential learning. This method guarantees that pupils gain a strong foundation in decoding abilities by emphasizing an organized and logical evolution of phonetic principles. The first step in providing systematic phonics teaching is to create a scope and sequence that are precise and well-defined. The sequence determines the order in which these phonetic components will be introduced, whereas the scope describes the precise phonetic elements to be taught (Sedita, 2020). The foundational elements of phonics are taught systematically by teaching letter-sound correspondences as the first step in a sequential learning process. It's crucial to introduce specific letters and the sounds they correspond with in this teaching technique sequentially so that children may become proficient with each phoneme before moving on to more difficult subjects. (David and Dickson, 2024). After establishing letter-sound relationships, the teacher should systematically guide students through the process of blending individual sounds into words and segmenting words into their constituent sounds. This step is crucial for developing phonemic awareness (Reading Rocket, 2024).

- **Decodable Books**

Decodable books are essential for teaching phonics to elementary school students because they offer a methodical and regulated way for students to improve their decoding abilities. The relationship between letters and the sounds they represent is taught as part of phonics training, and decodable books are a useful tool for reinforcing this relationship. Decodable books are sequential in form and gradually increase phonic knowledge. This allows students to practice grapheme-phoneme correspondences and rapidly boosts their confidence and comprehension of linked material. Decodable readers reduce the amount of high-frequency



words that kids haven't been taught or grapheme-phoneme correspondences, in contrast to predictable or repetitive "leveled" books. Beginning decodable books contain words that are simple in structure such as VC and CVC words, and progressively introduce words with more complex structures. Providing children with opportunities to read successfully and relatively as soon as they can. It is highly motivating for beginning readers.

- **Phonics Games and Apps**

The use of phonics games and apps in elementary school curriculum has grown in popularity as an efficient way to teach phonics in the digital era. Traditional training can be supplemented by incorporating phonics-based games and apps into homework assignments or classroom activities. Students are actively involved in the dynamic learning process thanks to these interactive resources, which also make studying phonetics fun and efficient. Students may improve their phonemic awareness on an interesting and dynamic platform using phonics games and applications. These digital resources frequently have eye-catching images, captivating audio, and engaging interactive tasks to draw in young students (Sari, 2019). Phonetic ideas are intended to be reinforced in a playful manner through games and applications. Students can reinforce their mastery of phonics concepts by practicing phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondences through exercises like word construction, matching games, and interactive storytelling (Haugland, 2012). Differentiated teaching is made possible by the ability to customize phonics games and apps to the specific requirements of each student. These resources frequently come in a range of difficulty settings, according to the individual proficiency of each student and offering focused practice for both struggling and proficient students (Kabakchieva, 2018). The instant feedback offered by phonics games and apps is one of their benefits. Pupils get immediate feedback on their activities, which helps them learn from their mistakes and reinforces right replies.

METHODOLOGY

In carrying out the study, descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all primary school teachers in Akwa Ibom State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 60 teachers each from the 3 senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State and this gave a sample size of 180 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Phonics, Self Esteem and Self Expression Questionnaire (PSESEQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument.



Research Questions 1: The research question sought to find out the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributes to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State. To answer the research question percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State

EXTENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
VERY HIGH EXTENT	98	54.44**
HIGH EXTENT	57	31.66
LOW EXTENT	25	13.88*
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (54.44%) of the respondents affirmed that the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State is of “very high extent”, while the least percentage (13.88%) of the respondents stated that the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-esteem development among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State is of “low extent”.

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the extent to which teaching phonics in primary school contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State

EXTENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
VERY HIGH EXTENT	121	67.22**
HIGH EXTENT	57	31.66
LOW EXTENT	2	1.11*
TOTAL	180	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (67.22%) of the respondents affirmed that the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State is of “very high extent”, while the least percentage (1.11%) of the respondents stated that the extent to which teaching phonics in primary schools contributed to self-expression among primary school pupils in Akwa Ibom State is of “low extent”.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching phonics in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State is a foundational element for developing literacy skills, playing a crucial role in enhancing both self-esteem and expression among pupils. As students successfully decode words, their confidence grows, positively impacting their self-esteem. Moreover, phonics instruction empowers pupils to express themselves effectively, contributing to improved communication skills. The integration of phonics in primary education in Akwa Ibom not only fosters academic success but also lays the groundwork for holistic personal development, ensuring that young learners are equipped with essential skills for lifelong learning and effective communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be advocacy on the implementation of comprehensive and evidence-based phonics programs in primary schools, ensuring systematic and explicit instruction.
- Provide continuous training and professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their phonics instruction skills, ensuring effective delivery in the classroom.
- Encourage the use of multisensory teaching approaches that engage auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities, catering to diverse learning styles and reinforcing phonics concepts.

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