

From Sounds to Sentences: Assessing Literacy Gains Through Jolly Phonics at the Pre-Primary Level

Shruti Popat^{*1}, Lata Dewangan², Yogesh Popat³

Phonics Trainer, Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara, Chhattisgarh, India Academic Coordinator, Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara, Chhattisgarh, India Principal, Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara, Chhattisgarh, India

ABSTRACT

The early years of education are critical for language and literacy development. Phonics-based instruction, particularly the Jolly Phonics method, has gained popularity for its structured, multisensory approach to teaching early reading skills. This study investigates the effectiveness of Jolly Phonics in improving literacy outcomes among pre-primary learners. Through a quasi-experimental design involving two pre-primary sections—one using Jolly Phonics and the other following a traditional approach—the study analyzes literacy gains over a six-month period. Findings reveal significant improvements in phonemic awareness, decoding ability, and sentence formation among students exposed to Jolly Phonics. The research underscores the pedagogical value of structured phonics programs in enhancing early literacy.

KEYWORDS: Jolly Phonics, Pre-primary Education, Early Literacy, Phonemic Awareness, Reading Readiness, Multisensory Learning, Phonics Instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is foundational to a child's academic journey, with literacy development starting as early as preschool. Traditional methods of teaching reading often emphasize rote memorization and whole-word recognition. However, phonics-based methods—especially synthetic phonics—have demonstrated greater efficacy in developing decoding skills and reading fluency.

Jolly Phonics, a widely adopted synthetic phonics program, teaches children the 42 main sounds of English in a fun, engaging, and multisensory way. Through songs, stories, actions, and interactive activities, it encourages learners to connect sounds to letters and eventually blend these into words and sentences.

This research aims to evaluate the impact of Jolly Phonics on pre-primary learners' literacy development. The study poses the following research question:

Hypotheses: Does the implementation of Jolly Phonics significantly enhance phonemic awareness and early literacy skills among pre-primary learners compared to traditional methods?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have affirmed the positive influence of phonics instruction on early literacy. Ehri et al. (2001) highlighted that systematic phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. Similarly, Stuart (1999) found that children taught using synthetic phonics made faster and more sustained progress in reading. Jolly Phonics, specifically, has been credited with enhancing phonological awareness and early reading skills (Lloyd, 1998; Torgerson et al., 2006). Its multisensory approach is particularly beneficial for young learners with diverse learning styles, helping improve sound-letter recognition, blending, and segmenting skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test design involving two groups of pre-primary students: an experimental group taught with Jolly Phonics and a control group taught using traditional literacy methods.

1.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 60 students aged 4 to 5 years from a private English-medium school. Each group contained 30 students, randomly selected from different sections to minimize teacher and demographic bias.

1.3 Instruments

- **Phonemic Awareness Test** (pre and post)
- **Letter-Sound Recognition Sheet**
- **Blending and Segmenting Tasks**
- **Sentence Construction Activity**
- Teacher observation records

1.4 Procedure

Over six months, the experimental group was taught using the Jolly Phonics framework, focusing on daily sounds, blending exercises, story-based letter introductions, and kinesthetic activities. The control group followed standard classroom methods involving alphabet learning, picture-word associations, and rote reading.

4. RESULTS

The study aimed to compare literacy gains between two groups of pre-primary learners:

1. **Jolly Phonics Group (Experimental Group)** – Students taught using the Jolly Phonics method.
2. **Control Group** – Students taught using traditional literacy instruction methods.

1.5 Overview of Group Characteristics

Table 1: Overview of Group Characteristics

Group Description

Jolly Phonics Group

Control Group

30 pre-primary students (ages 4–5), taught using the full Jolly Phonics program with multisensory activities.

30 pre-primary students (same age range), taught with standard alphabetic methods (A–Z memorization, picture-word matching, basic story reading).

Both groups were demographically similar (same school, similar age, and socioeconomic background) to maintain consistency and fairness in comparison.

1.6 Skills Assessed and Results

Table 2: Overview of Results

Skill Area

Phonemic Awareness

Letter-Sound Recognition

Blending and Segmenting

Sentence Constructio

Jolly Phonics Group (Avg. Score)

85%	62%	Jolly group excelled in identifying and manipulating sounds in spoken words.
90%	70%	Children using Jolly Phonics were faster and more accurate in sound-letter mapping.
80%	58%	Jolly group was better at blending sounds into words and breaking words into sounds.
75%	55%	Jolly group showed more confidence and creativity in forming simple sentences.

Control Group (Avg. Score)

Observation

Statistical significance: T-tests conducted showed the performance differences were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ in all areas.

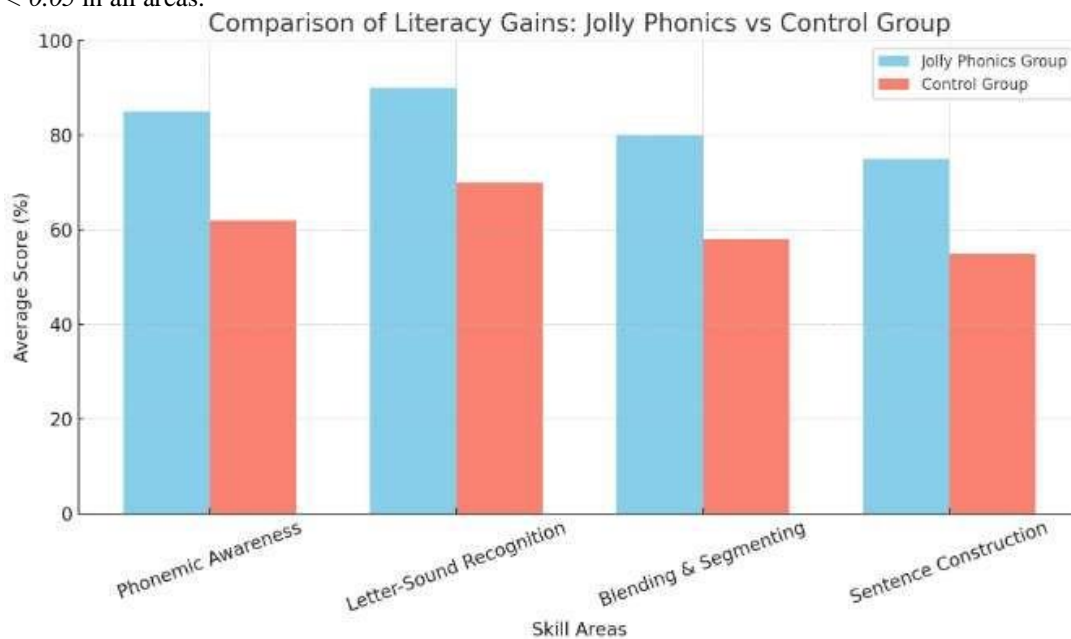


Figure 1: Comparison of Literacy Gains Jolly Phonics Vs Control Group

5. DISCUSSION

The findings support the hypothesis that Jolly Phonics enhances early literacy skills more effectively than traditional methods. The multisensory approach helps reinforce memory and cognitive association of sounds and letters. Children became more confident readers and writers, engaging more actively in literacy tasks. Teacher observations highlighted increased participation and phonemic play in classroom discussions.

While the results are promising, it is essential to recognize variables such as teacher training quality, student attendance, and home literacy environment, which could have influenced the outcomes.

a. What Happened in the Jolly Phonics Group?

- i. **Daily Sound Lessons:** Each day, children were introduced to one of the 42 sounds of English (not just 26 letters) using songs, actions, and stories.
- ii. **Blending and Segmenting:** Students were taught to blend sounds together to read words (e.g., /c/ /a/ /t/ → cat) and to segment them to spell (cat → /c/ /a/ /t/).
- iii. **Multisensory Engagement:** Children used body movements, hand signs, letter tracing, and visual props to reinforce phoneme recognition.
- iv. **Progressive Structure:** The method began with basic sounds and gradually moved to digraphs (like “sh”, “ch”) and sentence formation.

Result: The structured, playful, and interactive format kept students engaged and built strong sound-letter associations. It led to better decoding and reading fluency at a younger age.

b. What Happened in the Control Group?

- i. **Traditional Alphabet Learning:** Children were taught A to Z in order, focusing on letter names rather than sounds.
- ii. **Picture-Word Matching:** Literacy tasks focused on memorizing words with pictures (e.g., A for Apple), with minimal sound breakdown.
- iii. **Limited Phonemic Practice:** Very little explicit practice in sound blending or segmenting.
- iv. **Reading Stories:** Teachers read aloud to students, who followed along, but there was limited decoding skill-building.

Result: Students were slower to recognize phonemes and blend sounds. They relied more on memory and pictures rather than decoding written language.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

- i. **Curriculum Integration:** Schools should consider incorporating phonics-based instruction like Jolly Phonics into early literacy curricula.
- ii. **Teacher Training:** Professional development programs must prepare teachers to deliver multisensory phonics lessons effectively.
- iii. **Parental Involvement:** Encouraging phonics-based activities at home can reinforce classroom learning.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study's scope was limited to a single school with a relatively small sample size. Future research could involve a longitudinal approach, larger participant pools, and multi-regional comparisons. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of Jolly Phonics on spelling and reading comprehension at later academic stages would be valuable.

8. CONCLUSION

Jolly Phonics proves to be a powerful instructional method in fostering literacy at the pre- primary level. From phonemic awareness to sentence construction, children taught through this approach demonstrated measurable gains in early reading skills. With its structured, multisensory format, Jolly Phonics serves as an effective tool to support foundational literacy and prepare children for academic success.

Author details

*Shruti Popat is a Trained Phonics Expert working at Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara, Chhattisgarh India. He Graduated from CSVTU Bilai with B.E in Electronics and Telecommunication. she also Worked as TGT (Math) in Dream India School for one Year. Her area of interests is Child Development in Early Childhood Care and Education.

²Lata Dewangan is Trained in Pre Primary Curriculum development and Working as Academic Coordinator in Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara. Her Area of Interest is Challenges faced by tiny tots in Early age Education.

³Yogesh Popat is an Executive Alumni of IIM Visakhapatnam and He is Pursuing his Global MBA from IIM Kozhikode and University of Western Australia, Perth. He received his Bachelor of Engineering (Hons.) in

Electronics & Telecommunication in 2011 and Master of Technology (Hons.) in Electrical Engineering in 2014. He Worked as Asst. Prof. at Rungta college of Engineering and Technology, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India, As a PGT Physics at N. H. Goel World School Raipur, Chhattisgarh, As a PGT Physics and Coordinator at Taurian World School Ranchi, Jharkhand, India. He also Served as a Principal of DPES, Indore and Currently Working as Principal of Delhi World Public School, Bhatapara.

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