

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature that forms the basis of the study. It begins with the Theoretical Framework, focusing on Constructivist Learning Theory and its connection to Jolly Phonics. The chapter reviews Teachers' Perceptions and Instructional Practices and investigates how Jolly Phonics strategies influence teachers' comprehension of phonics concepts and their teaching methods.

The discussion also addresses the role of Jolly Phonics in supporting English Language Learners (ELLs), highlighting common challenges faced by early learners and the strategies educators use to address them through phonics-based instruction. The chapter situates this within the context of early English language education in The Gambia, where language diversity and resource limitations present unique instructional challenges. Finally, the chapter reviews previous studies that explore the implementation and impact of Jolly Phonics strategies, providing empirical support for the current investigation.

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Constructivist Learning Theory

This research is based on Constructivist Learning Theory, which asserts that learners actively build their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences, social interaction, and thoughtful reflection (Piaget, 1955; Vygotsky et al., 1978). Learning is seen not as passive absorption of information but as an

active process where students make meaning based on prior knowledge and engagement with new concepts.

Jolly Phonics aligns with this theory through its multi-sensory, hands-on approach to teaching phonics. Students are not merely told how sounds work; they sing, gesture, trace, and act out sounds, creating rich connections between spoken, written, and physical cues. This type of active learning fosters deeper cognitive processing, particularly for young learners acquiring a second language.

In the context of this study, which focuses on early English Language Learners (ELLs) in The Gambia, the constructivist approach is particularly relevant. Many students come to school with minimal exposure to English, and instruction rooted in rote memorization or passive listening often fails to meet their needs. Jolly Phonics, by contrast, encourages exploration, repetition, and movement, which helps early ELLs connect unfamiliar English sounds with real-world experiences and actions.

This theory also frames the investigation of teachers' perceptions, confidence, and implementation practices. If teachers understand and believe in constructivist methods, they are more likely to implement Jolly Phonics strategies effectively. Thus, the theory supports an exploration of whether teachers see Jolly Phonics as a tool that aligns with learner-centered, engaging, and inclusive practices, critical aspects of early literacy development in multilingual classrooms.

2. Context and Application of Jolly Phonics

Jolly Phonics is a widely adopted synthetic phonics program, originally developed in the UK and now used in over 100 countries to support reading

and writing skills (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010a; Cripps, 2018b; Dyslexia Guild, 2006; Jolly et al., 2000; Nafgerin & Bakar, 2023). This method is a structured, enjoyable, child-centered method aiming to help young learners achieve fluency in reading and writing. The approach revolves around linking letters to sounds to form English spelling patterns, a core component of phonemic awareness instruction.

Jolly Phonics aligns with constructivist learning principles as it supports active, hands-on engagement through its multi-sensory approach. The program encourages learners to engage with phonics through actions, songs, and games, enabling them to internalize sounds and letter formations interactively (Abdul-Aal, 2023; Nasrawi & Al-Jamal, 2017). This method fosters active participation and contextual learning, where students discover and apply phonetic concepts in meaningful ways. The five core skills of Jolly Phonics -learning letter sounds, letter formation, blending for reading, segmenting for spelling, and learning tricky words -exemplify constructivist strategies by progressively and interactively building knowledge (Carpenter, 2021).

In multilingual classrooms, effectively implementing Jolly Phonics requires adaptations to align with the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. Teachers must modify instructional strategies to bridge the differences between students' native phonological systems and English phonics (Genelza, 2022; Tantawy, 2020). In this context, teacher agency becomes vital, educators decide how to modify or supplement Jolly Phonics strategies to meet the specific needs

of their learners. This flexibility echoes constructivist ideals, which value culturally responsive, learner-centered approaches.

Additionally, bilingual or multilingual education policies that use the learners' home languages align with constructivist principles, as they promote individualised learning and address diverse student needs (Trudell, 2024).

Ultimately, understanding the context in which Jolly Phonics strategies are applied (including the linguistic, cultural, and instructional challenges) is essential for evaluating how teachers perceive and implement the approach in diverse early literacy settings.

B. Teachers' Perceptions and Instructional Practices

Teachers' perceptions play a critical role in shaping their instructional practices and the successful implementation of educational programs (Richardson, 1996). Perception refers to how individuals interpret and make sense of information based on their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Richardson, 1996). In Jolly Phonics, teachers' beliefs about the program's effectiveness, relevance, and applicability directly influence how they integrate it into their teaching practices (Counihan et al., 2022; Moodie-Reid, 2016).

Research shows that teachers generally hold positive views of Jolly Phonics. For example, a study by Albaaly (2015) explored how teachers engaged with Jolly Phonics concepts, techniques, and classroom activities while working with young EFL learners. Although the study was conducted within the context of a training program, its findings emphasized that teachers gained a better

understanding of Jolly Phonics and expressed satisfaction with its practical application. This suggests that exposure to the program, even in training contexts, can positively influence how teachers perceive and implement Jolly Phonics strategies in their classrooms.

Moodie-Reid (2016) explored teachers' perceptions of the Jolly Phonics program's impact on literacy in Grades 1–3 in Western Jamaican schools. Interviews with eight teachers revealed that they valued Jolly Phonics for improving literacy skills, particularly among struggling learners. Teachers appreciated its structured approach and multisensory techniques, highlighting improvements in phonetic awareness, letter recognition, and oral communication skills.

Research by Ariati et al. (2018) also highlighted that while Jolly Phonics is highly effective, limited teacher knowledge or preparedness can pose implementation challenges. The authors emphasized that the success of phonics-based instruction relies not only on the materials but on teachers' confidence and their ability to adapt strategies to suit student needs.

In a study conducted in Ghana's Ningo-Prampram District, Gbetey (2024) reported that Jolly Phonics contributed to significant gains in students' literacy engagement and outcomes. Teachers in this context emphasized the importance of collaborative implementation and ongoing support. Similarly, Sanden et al. (2022) noted that although most teachers recognized the value of phonics instruction, their depth of understanding and application varied, reinforcing the need for sustained professional development.

Counihan et al. (2022) found that the use of Jolly Phonics significantly improved learners' English word-reading skills in Nigerian classrooms, especially when teachers received consistent pedagogical support. The study concluded that structured phonics strategies, when coupled with teacher adaptability and commitment, can yield meaningful outcomes in multilingual learning environments.

These findings collectively reinforce the idea that teachers' perceptions, confidence, and instructional decisions regarding Jolly Phonics strategies are central to successful implementation. Understanding how educators interpret and apply these methods, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts, can inform efforts to improve literacy instruction for early English Language Learners (ELLs).

C. Jolly Phonics Strategies and Their Influence on Pedagogical Practice

1. Overview of Jolly Phonics Strategies

Jolly Phonics is a comprehensive, multi-sensory synthetic phonics program designed to teach children how to read and write by focusing on the 42 main sounds in the English language (Gbetey, 2024). Its structured and systematic approach includes five essential components: learning letter sounds, letter formation, blending for reading, segmenting for spelling, and learning tricky words (Carpenter, 2021). These strategies help build foundational literacy skills in a way that is engaging and accessible for young learners, including those acquiring English as an additional language.

The program incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, such as songs, actions, games, and letter tracing. These interactive activities stimulate multiple senses and make learning more engaging and memorable (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010; Cripps, 2018). This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes hands-on, learner-centered instruction.

2. Core Components of Implementation

Teachers who apply Jolly Phonics strategies in their classrooms work with the following key components:

- a. **Phoneme Awareness:** Helping students identify and produce English sounds (Al Otaiba et al., 2019; Carpenter, 2021).
- b. **Blending and Segmenting:** Teaching learners to combine sounds into words and break words into individual sounds (Ariati et al., 2018).
- c. **Letter Formation:** Emphasizing correct handwriting to reinforce sound-letter connections (Cripps, 2018).
- d. **Tricky Words:** Addressing irregular words that do not follow common phonics rules (Widyana et al., 2020).
- e. **Multi-Sensory Approach:** Jolly Phonics incorporates a multi-sensory approach, engaging students through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. This approach caters to diverse learning styles and enhances student engagement.
- f. **Assessment and Feedback:** Using formative assessments to adjust instruction and monitor student progress (Flynn et al., 2021; Moodie-Reid, 2016).

These strategies offer clear instructional pathways and are designed to be flexible enough for adaptation in diverse classroom settings, particularly in multilingual environments.

3. Influence on Pedagogical Practices

Effective pedagogical practices are crucial for successful language instruction (Bruner et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023). Research indicates that active learning, differentiated instruction, and technology integration can enhance teaching quality and cater to diverse student needs. Jolly Phonics, a synthetic phonics program, has significantly influenced early childhood education by guiding teachers toward a structured, multi-sensory approach to phonics instruction. Through targeted training, Jolly Phonics empowers educators to deliver engaging and student-centered lessons, fostering effective learning environments for young learners.

Jolly Phonics emphasizes a multi-sensory approach to literacy, incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities to cater to diverse learning styles. This approach includes strategies like sound motions and letter formation, which enhance phonemic awareness and facilitate the development of foundational literacy skills. Research suggests that these methods significantly improve students' reading and writing abilities (Al Otaiba, Allor, Baker, Conner, & Stewart, 2019).

Jolly Phonics fosters a learner-centered approach to instruction (Cripps, 2018; Richard M. Visagas, Maed & Dondon B. Buensuceso, 2023; Shawaqfeh, 2024), empowering students to construct knowledge actively. By incorporating

hands-on activities, visual aids, and games, Jolly Phonics aligns with constructivist principles and promotes differentiated instruction, enabling teachers to cater to diverse learning needs.

This shift from rote memorization towards meaningful engagement empowers teachers to create more dynamic and effective phonics instruction. Integrating technology, such as interactive whiteboards and phonics apps, further enhances the learning experience, providing accessible and varied practice opportunities for students.

By developing a strong foundation in phonics, students demonstrate increased fluency in decoding and comprehension, which boosts their confidence in reading and writing. Additionally, Jolly Phonics fosters professional development among teachers, encouraging collaboration and reflective practice. Research indicates that teachers who receive comprehensive phonics training are more reflective in their practice, continually adapting and refining their instructional methods to serve their students better (Derakhshan et al., 2018; Meeks et al., 2020; Mohan et al., 2017; Olds et al., 2021; Tantawy, 2020). This collective approach enriches teaching methods and ultimately benefits student learning.

D. Supporting Early English Language Learners (EELL) Through Jolly Phonics: Challenges, Strategies, and Impact

Early English Language Learners (EELL) encounter challenges as they acclimate to a new linguistic environment. These difficulties often manifest as limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and unfamiliarity with English grammar

and syntax. To effectively support EELL, educators must implement strategies that address these challenges and facilitate language development. Structured phonics instruction, such as Jolly Phonics, offers a comprehensive solution by enhancing phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and overall literacy development.

1. Challenges Faced by Early ELL

Early ELLs may struggle with language barriers, cultural differences, limited literacy skills, and anxiety or self-consciousness, which can hinder their language acquisition (Hanus, 2016; Park & Thomas, 2012; Rhinehart et al., 2024). Additionally, EELLs often face challenges related to limited exposure to English outside the classroom and varying levels of vocabulary comprehension and language proficiency.

2. Strategies to Support ELL

To support early ELLs effectively, educators should:

- a.** Create a safe and inclusive classroom climate, utilize positive reinforcement, and encourage peer interaction to build confidence.
- b.** Enhance comprehension through visual aids and engage learners through interactive activities.
- c.** Use simple language, avoid complex sentence structures, and provide clear and concise instructions.
- d.** Utilize educational technology to provide interactive and engaging learning experiences. Integrating technology, such as the Jolly Phonics Lessons application, further enhances the constructivist approach. This application caters to diverse learning styles, offering:

- 1) **Visual Learning:** colorful images stimulate memory and comprehension.
- 2) **Auditory Learning:** Audio recordings to support auditory processing and language development.
- 3) **Kinesthetic Learning:** Interactive activities that involve physical movement and tactile exploration.

e. Encourage frequent language practice through speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.

Research has shown that structured phonics instruction, such as Jolly Phonics, can significantly benefit early ELLs by enhancing their phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and overall literacy development.

3. The Role of Jolly Phonics in Supporting Early ELL

Jolly Phonics, a proven phonics instruction method, is particularly well-suited for early ELLs due to its multi-sensory approach. By engaging multiple senses, Jolly Phonics helps EELLs overcome the challenges of phoneme recognition and pronunciation. For instance, tactile activities and action-based learning make abstract sounds more concrete, aiding memory retention and comprehension.

Studies have demonstrated that early ELLs exposed to Jolly Phonics show significantly improved reading and writing skills compared to peers in programs without a structured phonics component (Upward, 2000; Yap & Lee Chin, 2020). The systematic progression of Jolly Phonics, which gradually introduces more complex sounds and blends, also enables EELLs to build upon their learning incrementally.

By incorporating Jolly Phonics into instruction, educators can provide ELLs with a solid foundation in phonics, which is crucial for their overall language development.

E. Teaching English to Young Learners in The Gambia: Context and Challenges

The Gambia, a West African nation characterized by its linguistic diversity, faces significant challenges in teaching English to young learners. Despite English being the official language for governance and education, its limited use in everyday life presents a considerable barrier to its acquisition. The prevalence of indigenous languages, such as Mandinka, Pulaar, and Wolof, among the majority of Gambians further complicates the English language learning process, particularly for young children in early childhood education who have limited exposure to the language.

A significant barrier to effective English language instruction in The Gambia is the country's persistently low literacy rates. As reported in the "Paper commissioned for the 2024 Spotlight Report on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa," a 2007 assessment using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool revealed alarmingly low reading proficiency among Grade 3 students, with half unable to read a single word and the majority struggling to read more than five words per minute. Subsequent assessments, including the 2016 EGRA and the 2020 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster

Survey (MICS), have consistently indicated that the majority of Gambian Grade 3 students lack the foundational reading skills necessary for academic success.

The 2020 MICS data further underscore this challenge, revealing that only 9% of Grade 3 students possess the expected reading skills. The imposition of English as the language of instruction further exacerbates this challenge, creating a significant language barrier for young learners. Additionally, traditional teaching methods, which prioritize rote learning of spelling, reading, and dictation, often neglect the crucial foundational skill of sound-letter correspondence.

Targeted pedagogical strategies have shown promising results in addressing these challenges. Explicit phonics instruction, tailored to individual student needs, has proven effective in fostering active engagement and enhancing teacher-student interaction, which contributes to improved literacy outcomes. A study by Olagbaju and Olaniyi (2023) investigated the effects of explicit and differentiated phonics instructional strategies on literacy skills in Gambian lower primary schools. It found a significant positive impact on writing and reading achievement.

Research consistently supports the efficacy of explicit phonics instruction, with students exposed to this approach demonstrating superior literacy scores compared to those taught through other methods (Farokhbakht & Nejadansari, 2015; Langille & Green, 2021). These approaches encourage students to establish connections between sounds and letters, a fundamental skill for developing reading and writing proficiency.

Multilingual education has also emerged as a promising approach to enhance literacy development. Recognizing the benefits of linguistic inclusivity, The Gambia has implemented the Early Literacy in National Languages (ELINL) program, which utilizes five national languages as the medium of instruction for reading. While the program has faced implementation challenges, assessments have demonstrated that students in ELINL programs outperform those taught exclusively in English in national language and English reading tasks. This positive outcome led to the integration of ELINL with other reading initiatives, such as Jolly Phonics, to form the Gambia Reads program. Despite its potential, Gambia Reads has encountered obstacles, including inconsistent support for reading instruction in national languages and English, which has hindered its full implementation in some areas.

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) is pivotal to The Gambia's educational landscape. TEYL English teachers are crucial in nurturing language proficiency and preparing the next generation for global challenges. This profile delves into the key characteristics, challenges, and opportunities these dedicated educators face. Most TEYL English teachers in The Gambia possess foundational education training, often acquired through institutions like the Gambia College School of Education. This training equips them with essential pedagogical skills and knowledge of language acquisition. Additionally, some teachers benefit from international training programs, such as those offered by the British Council, which introduce global best practices and innovative teaching methodologies.

Continuous professional development is essential for TEYL teachers to stay updated with the latest pedagogical approaches and address the evolving needs of young learners. However, several challenges hinder their professional growth. Limited resources, including teaching materials and technological tools, pose significant constraints. Large class sizes further complicate effective instruction, making it difficult to provide individualized attention to each student. Despite these challenges, teachers remain dedicated to their profession and seek opportunities for professional development through workshops, conferences, and online courses.

The Gambia's diverse cultural and linguistic landscape complicates the TEYL context. While English is the official language of instruction, many young learners primarily speak local languages such as Mandinka, Wolof, or Fula at home. TEYL teachers must navigate this linguistic diversity by incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies and using students' home languages to support language acquisition.

In conclusion, TEYL English teachers in The Gambia are dedicated professionals who face numerous challenges, including limited resources, large class sizes, and diverse linguistic backgrounds. Despite these obstacles, they strive to provide quality education to their students. TEYL teachers can be empowered to significantly impact the future of English language education in The Gambia by addressing these challenges through targeted professional development, increased access to resources, and supportive policies.

F. Previous studies

Numerous studies highlight the positive impact of phonics programs, particularly Jolly Phonics, on early literacy development:

1. Widyana et al. (2020) in the *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity, and Change* demonstrated that Jolly Phonics enhanced preschoolers' pre-reading skills. Teachers effectively implemented the five core skills of Jolly Phonics: learning letter sounds, letter formation, blending for reading, identifying sounds in words, and recognizing tricky words. This study showed significant improvements in pre-reading skills and student engagement.
2. In the *Dyslexia Review*, the Dyslexia Guild, (2006) found that children learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) significantly benefited from phoneme awareness and phonics training. Jolly Phonics positively affected reading and writing development, with teachers requiring minimal training to use the program effectively. This finding underscores the accessibility of the program for both teachers and learners.
3. Ariati et al. (2018) conducted studies in Indonesia, revealing that Jolly Phonics improved English and Indonesian literacy skills. Children taught with Jolly Phonics performed better in reading, spelling, and overall literacy than those taught using conventional methods. These findings suggest that phonics-based literacy programs can positively affect multilingual learners.
4. Ariati et al. (2018) also explored the implementation of Jolly Phonics in Dyatmika Kindergarten through the *SHS Web of Conferences*, emphasizing

that the structured approach of the program helped children overcome decoding challenges. The study reiterated the importance of systematic phonics instruction in enhancing early reading abilities.

5. Stuart (1999), in *Getting Ready for Reading*, emphasized that phonological awareness training combined with explicit letter-sound instruction has a lasting positive impact on literacy. This research further supports the notion that early phonological awareness, coupled with phonics, contributes significantly to reading development.
6. Wyse & Goswami (2008) A study published in the *British Educational Research Journal* analysed various phonics instruction methods and found that synthetic phonics programs, such as Jolly Phonics, produced consistently positive outcomes in literacy acquisition. Their findings highlight the effectiveness of phonics instruction, whether contextualized or standalone.

These studies provide substantial evidence of the effectiveness of phonics instruction in fostering early literacy skills. They confirm that Jolly Phonics is a robust program for developing phonemic awareness, reading accuracy, spelling, and overall literacy in diverse educational settings. The studies suggest that phonics-based instruction, particularly Jolly Phonics, is highly effective in supporting ELLs' literacy development. By enhancing phonemic awareness and decoding abilities, Jolly Phonics provides these learners with essential tools to navigate English literacy successfully, enabling them to integrate phonics skills into broader language learning contexts. Phonics instruction, mainly through systematic synthetic phonics programs like

Jolly Phonics, has a well-established theoretical basis and proven effectiveness in early literacy development. The structured and multi-sensory approach helps learners, especially ELLs, develop crucial reading, spelling, and writing skills. The literature demonstrates that phonics programs substantially benefit young learners, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, providing them with essential tools for successful literacy acquisition. These theoretical foundations form the basis for understanding how phonics-based programs can significantly impact literacy and language acquisition in diverse educational settings.

G. Basic Assumption

The basic assumptions for this research center around the pivotal role of teachers' pedagogical practices in shaping the proficiency and literacy development of early English language learners (EELL). The Jolly Phonics program is assumed to provide a structured and effective toolset to enhance teachers' ability to deliver engaging and impactful lessons. Through professional development, such as Jolly Phonics training, teachers are expected to gain new strategies, skills, and confidence, leading to significant pedagogical changes. Moreover, it is assumed that trained teachers have the capacity and resources to implement these methodologies effectively, resulting in improved instructional quality that benefits EELL students' learning outcomes. The impact of such training is believed to be measurable through qualitative or quantitative methods. Additionally, contextual factors such as classroom environment, teacher

experience, and institutional support are presumed to influence the implementation of the training. Finally, it is assumed that the teachers participating in the study represent the broader population of educators working with EELL, ensuring the generalizability of the findings.

