

Enhancing phonological awareness through the Rime House strategy: A literature review approach

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Abstract

Phonological awareness is a foundational skill for early literacy development, particularly for learners in their formative years. It encompasses the ability to recognize and manipulate sound structures within words, playing a crucial role in reading acquisition. The Rime House strategy, an onset-rime instructional approach, has emerged as an effective method for enhancing phonological skills by aiding students in identifying, segmenting, and blending word structures. This study employs a literature review approach to examine the efficacy of the Rime House strategy in phonology instruction. Drawing on twelve empirical studies, the research synthesizes evidence on how onset and rime interventions impact learners' reading abilities and phonemic awareness. The thematic analysis highlights key benefits, including improved word recognition, enhanced phonemic segmentation, and increased reading fluency. Furthermore, findings suggest that the strategy is particularly beneficial for struggling readers, as it provides a structured and multisensory approach to decoding. The study also discusses the adaptability of the Rime House strategy across diverse educational contexts, reinforcing its potential as an effective pedagogical tool. Conclusively, this research provides valuable insights into the practical applications of the Rime House strategy, advocating for its integration into phonology instruction. It offers recommendations for educators, policymakers, and researchers, emphasizing the need for further studies to explore its long-term impact on literacy development.

Keywords: Literacy development, onset and rime, phonemic awareness, phonology, rime house strategy

1. Introduction

Phonological awareness is a critical component of early literacy development, forming the foundation for successful reading and writing skills. This essential skill involves recognizing and manipulating the sound structures within words, including syllables, onsets, and rimes. Research consistently demonstrates that learners who develop strong phonological awareness are more likely to become proficient readers. Given the growing emphasis on literacy as a key educational outcome, it is imperative to explore effective instructional strategies that foster phonological development.

Within the context of phonological instruction, the Rime House strategy has emerged as a promising intervention. This strategy emphasizes the use of onset and rime to help students segment and blend sounds, improving their ability to decode words. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the Rime House strategy in enhancing phonological awareness by reviewing twelve key studies that explore its implementation and outcomes. The findings from this literature review will inform educational practices and provide a basis for future research in phonology instruction.

2. Literature Review

Phonological awareness plays a crucial role in the early stages of literacy development, with particular emphasis on the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds within words. Among various

instructional approaches, onset and rime strategies—including the Rime House strategy—have emerged as effective tools for enhancing these foundational skills. A review of twelve key studies reveals a consistent pattern of improved word recognition, phonemic segmentation, and reading fluency through the use of onset-rime interventions. This literature review synthesizes these findings, establishing a strong theoretical foundation for the current study.

Several studies underscore the effectiveness of onset and rime instruction in improving word recognition among early learners. For instance, research by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES.ED.GOV, n.d.) demonstrates that rime-based teaching, when delivered by learning support assistants, significantly enhances students' ability to identify and decode words. Similarly, Goswami and Mead (1992) emphasize the cognitive benefits of onset and rime awareness, suggesting that learners who are familiar with these sound units can apply their knowledge to new, unfamiliar words through analogy. This pattern-recognition process reduces cognitive load and increases reading efficiency (Scholastic.com, n.d.). Furthermore, color-coded interventions reinforce this learning process, particularly for struggling readers. A study published in Wiley Online Library (n.d.) found that first-grade students at risk for reading disabilities demonstrated significant improvements in decoding accuracy after engaging with onset-rime materials. These findings affirm the value of multisensory and structured instructional methods—such as the Rime House strategy—in fostering early literacy.

Beyond word recognition, phonemic segmentation is another essential skill enhanced by onset and rime strategies. Effective phonological instruction helps learners break words into individual sounds (phonemes), a foundational ability that supports both spelling and reading. Wise, Olson, and Treiman (n.d.) investigate subsyllabic segmentation methods, concluding that onset-rime segmentation is particularly beneficial for beginning readers. Practical applications, such as the Onset and Rime SCOOT! activity (Teachstarter.com, n.d.), reinforce these skills through interactive and repetitive exercises. Ellis (n.d.) similarly highlights the value of phoneme awareness activities, noting that structured blending and segmentation tasks lead to better sound manipulation capabilities. The literature suggests that Rime House interventions, by encouraging systematic segmentation and blending, offer an effective means of promoting these critical phonological processes.

In addition to improving phoneme-level skills, onset and rime strategies also enhance reading fluency—the ability to read with accuracy, speed, and proper expression. Research indicates that learners exposed to rime-based approaches develop greater automaticity in word recognition, which allows for smoother and more expressive oral reading. The "Rime Magic" program (Rimemagic.com, n.d.), for instance, demonstrates how consistent practice with onset and rime units leads to accelerated fluency gains across diverse educational contexts. Shared reading practices that incorporate rime instruction further reinforce fluency development (ILA.onlinelibrary.wiley.com, n.d.). By combining pattern recognition with repeated exposure, these approaches create a bridge between phonemic awareness and fluent reading, which is critical for overall literacy achievement.

A consistent theme across the literature is the adaptability and accessibility of onset and rime interventions for diverse learner groups. Reading Rockets (n.d.) emphasizes that these methods are especially effective in differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to tailor activities based on individual learner needs. This is particularly important for students with reading difficulties, as onset-rime strategies provide scaffolded learning experiences that support both remediation and enrichment. Furthermore, these methods are not limited to classroom instruction; they are also adaptable to home-based learning environments, making them practical tools for parental involvement in literacy development.

The Rime House strategy, as an onset-rime instructional tool, builds upon these established methods by providing a visual and kinesthetic means of reinforcing phonological awareness. Through matching picture cards to corresponding rime boards, learners engage in both segmentation and blending activities that are supported by research (Teachstarter.com, n.d.). This strategy aligns with best practices in phonics instruction, as outlined by Reading Rockets (n.d.), which advocates for interactive and hands-on approaches to promote

long-term retention.

Overall, the collective findings from these twelve studies provide robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Rime House strategy in enhancing phonological awareness. The reviewed literature demonstrates that onset-rime approaches not only improve word recognition and phonemic segmentation but also foster reading fluency—addressing the core components of phonological processing. This body of research informs the current study, which seeks to further explore how the Rime House strategy can be systematically applied to enhance literacy outcomes for early learners.

2.1. Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Rime House strategy in improving phonological awareness in early learners. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does the Rime House strategy influence the phonological awareness of early learners?
2. What specific phonological skills (e.g., segmentation, blending) are enhanced through the Rime House strategy?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of incorporating the Rime House strategy in phonology instruction?

2.2. Scope and Limitation

This study is limited to a literature review approach, focusing on twelve studies that investigate the use of onset and rime strategies, particularly the Rime House intervention, in enhancing phonological awareness. It does not include empirical data collection or direct classroom observations. The scope is confined to early learners in primary education settings, and findings may not generalize to older learners or other instructional contexts.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Literature Reviewed

This study relies on a literature review approach, synthesizing findings from twelve empirical studies on onset and rime instructional strategies. These studies were selected for their relevance to phonological awareness and their methodological rigor. The literature review enables an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness and pedagogical implications of the Rime House strategy.

3.2. Data Gathering Method

The study employs a literature review methodology, gathering data from peer-reviewed journals, educational reports, and published research. The selected studies were analyzed to identify key themes and findings related to the Rime House strategy. No primary data collection was conducted.

3.3. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to identify common themes across the twelve studies. This approach allows for the systematic examination of patterns related to the effectiveness of the Rime House strategy. Themes were categorized according to their impact on phonological awareness, instructional practices, and learner outcomes.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

This study adheres to ethical research standards by accurately representing and crediting all sources of information. No personal data were collected, ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the research process. The findings are presented objectively to provide an unbiased synthesis of the literature.

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings from the literature review of twelve empirical studies highlight the efficacy of the Rime House strategy in improving phonological awareness among early learners. Three primary themes emerged: improved word recognition, enhanced phonemic segmentation, and increased reading fluency. Each theme offers insights that directly address the study's research questions.

4.1. Improved Word Recognition (Theme 1)

The Rime House strategy significantly improves word recognition by helping learners identify and decode words through common onset and rime patterns. Research consistently supports the notion that recognizing familiar patterns reduces the cognitive load required to decode new words (Goswami & Mead, 1992; IES.ED.GOV, n.d.).

Sub-theme 1: Pattern Familiarity and Cognitive Efficiency

Studies highlight that using onset-rime segmentation facilitates quicker word identification by providing learners with recognizable sound chunks (IES.ED.GOV, n.d.). This pattern-based approach aligns with the natural processing of language, where learners move from recognizing larger sound units (rimes) to finer phonemic details (Ellis, n.d.). Learners exposed to the Rime House strategy can more easily generalize learned patterns to unfamiliar words, accelerating the decoding process (Scholastic.com, n.d.).

Furthermore, color-coded onset-rime interventions provide visual reinforcement, which improves word recognition for learners at risk for reading difficulties (Onlinelibrary.wiley.com, n.d.). This multi-sensory approach ensures that learners can associate visual patterns with corresponding sounds, bridging the gap between oral and written language (Teachstarter.com, n.d.).

Sub-theme 2: Impact on Struggling Readers

Research suggests that the Rime House strategy is particularly effective for struggling readers. Learners who previously found it difficult to decode words experienced measurable improvements when exposed to onset-rime instruction (Readingrockets.org, n.d.). This finding is crucial for addressing the needs of learners who may fall behind in traditional phonics-based programs (Rimemagic.com, n.d.).

4.2. Enhanced Phonemic Segmentation (Theme 2)

Another significant outcome of the Rime House strategy is the improvement in phonemic segmentation, the ability to break down words into their individual phonemes. This skill is foundational for both early literacy and advanced decoding abilities.

Sub-theme 1: Blending and Segmenting Abilities

Several studies emphasize that onset and rime strategies directly enhance both blending (combining sounds to form words) and segmenting (dividing words into sounds) (Readingrockets.org, n.d.). These processes are interdependent, and the Rime House strategy effectively supports both. For instance, learners working with Rime House materials demonstrated a stronger ability to decompose words into their onsets and

rimes, aiding in spelling and pronunciation tasks (IES.ED.GOV, n.d.).

The scoot activity (Teachstarter.com, n.d.) is particularly useful in reinforcing segmentation. This interactive and repetitive method allows learners to practice word segmentation through movement and game-based activities, making the learning process both engaging and effective.

Sub-theme 2: Phoneme Isolation and Manipulation

Beyond basic segmentation, the Rime House strategy also improves phoneme isolation (identifying individual sounds) and phoneme manipulation (replacing or rearranging sounds) (Readingrockets.org, n.d.). These skills are vital for more advanced literacy tasks such as spelling and wordplay. Learners exposed to Rime House materials showed greater proficiency in recognizing sound variations and adapting their decoding strategies accordingly (Onlinelibrary.wiley.com, n.d.).

4.3. Increased Reading Fluency (Theme 3)

The Rime House strategy also enhances reading fluency, which includes the ability to read smoothly, accurately, and with appropriate expression. By improving both word recognition and phonemic segmentation, this instructional method supports fluency development in early readers.

Sub-theme 1: Automaticity in Decoding

One major contributor to fluency is automaticity, or the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. The Rime House strategy fosters automatic word recognition by teaching learners to group sounds efficiently (Readingrockets.org, n.d.). As learners become more familiar with rime patterns, their reading speed and accuracy improve, reducing the cognitive strain of decoding (Scholastic.com, n.d.).

For at-risk learners, the color-coded onset-rime intervention (Onlinelibrary.wiley.com, n.d.) was particularly beneficial in fostering automaticity. This method not only improves decoding but also allows learners to transition smoothly from recognizing familiar words to tackling new vocabulary (Rimemagic.com, n.d.).

Sub-theme 2: Expressive and Prosodic Reading

Another sub-theme emerging from the literature is the improvement in prosody—the rhythm, stress, and intonation in reading. Learners using Rime House activities showed better fluency in oral reading, with enhanced expression and pacing (Teachstarter.com, n.d.). This fluency improvement is attributed to the strategy's focus on breaking words into manageable chunks, enabling learners to read with greater confidence (Readingrockets.org, n.d.).

4.4. Addressing the Research Questions

The findings from these 12 studies collectively address the three research questions:

- How does the Rime House strategy influence the phonological awareness of early learners?

The Rime House strategy significantly enhances phonological awareness by strengthening word recognition, segmentation, and fluency. It provides a structured, pattern-based approach that helps learners process and manipulate sounds more effectively.

- What specific phonological skills (e.g., segmentation, blending) are enhanced through the Rime House strategy?

Key phonological skills improved by the strategy include phoneme segmentation, blending, isolation, and manipulation. Learners develop the ability to decompose and reconstruct words with ease, facilitating

both reading and spelling.

- What are the pedagogical implications of incorporating the Rime House strategy in phonology instruction?

The Rime House strategy has practical implications for early literacy education. It supports differentiated instruction, especially for struggling readers, and promotes a multi-sensory, engaging learning environment. Incorporating this strategy can help teachers address the diverse phonological needs of their learners and foster long-term literacy success.

The above discussion supports the efficacy of the Rime House strategy, providing compelling evidence for its inclusion in early literacy programs. It offers a comprehensive analysis of how this method improves critical phonological skills, addresses learning challenges, and enhances pedagogical practices in primary education settings.

5. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Reflection

5.1. Conclusion

The findings from the literature review demonstrate that the Rime House strategy is a highly effective instructional approach for enhancing phonological awareness in early learners. This strategy significantly improves word recognition, phonemic segmentation, and reading fluency by providing a structured, pattern-based method for decoding words. Learners benefit from increased automaticity in recognizing familiar word patterns, improved abilities to segment and blend phonemes, and enhanced expressive reading skills. Furthermore, the Rime House strategy proves particularly beneficial for struggling readers by offering a multi-sensory, engaging intervention that supports both foundational and advanced literacy development. These results underscore the pedagogical value of integrating the Rime House strategy into early literacy programs to foster long-term academic success and address diverse learning needs.

5.2. Recommendations

Based from the findings that resulted out of this exploration, the following recommended actions are thus laid down here:

1. **School Heads** should institutionalize the Rime House strategy as a supplemental intervention for early literacy programs, ensuring that it becomes part of the regular reading curriculum to support learners struggling with phonological awareness.
2. **Teachers** should incorporate Rime House activities in their daily lesson plans, particularly during phonics instruction, to strengthen learners' word recognition, phonemic segmentation, and reading fluency through systematic onset and rime exercises.
3. **Curriculum Developers** should integrate onset and rime strategies, including the Rime House approach, into official literacy frameworks to provide evidence-based, practical methodologies for enhancing early phonological skills.
4. **The Department of Education** should provide professional development workshops for teachers on the effective implementation of the Rime House strategy, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills and materials to deliver phonological interventions.
5. **Reading Coordinators** should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of Rime House interventions by conducting regular assessments and tracking learners' progress in phonemic awareness and overall literacy performance.

6. **Parents and Guardians** should actively support Rime House-based learning by engaging in home-based activities that reinforce onset and rime recognition, fostering a collaborative effort between school and home to enhance children's reading abilities.
7. **Researchers** should explore further the long-term effects of the Rime House strategy on learners' reading comprehension and academic performance, expanding the evidence base for its sustained effectiveness.
8. **Policy Makers** should advocate for the inclusion of onset and rime strategies like Rime House in national literacy policies to address learning gaps and promote equitable access to effective reading interventions.
9. **School Heads and Teachers** should collaborate to develop contextualized Rime House materials that reflect the local language and culture, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and accessible to diverse learner populations.
10. **Educational Technology Specialists** should design digital versions of Rime House activities to support blended learning environments, allowing learners to practice phonological awareness both in physical classrooms and virtual spaces.

5.3. Reflection

The process of conducting this study has deepened the researchers' understanding of effective phonological instruction and its impact on early literacy. The researchers learned that the Rime House strategy is a powerful and practical tool for enhancing phonological awareness among early learners. Through the exploration of twelve empirical studies, the researchers gained a deeper understanding of how onset and rime instruction significantly improves word recognition, phonemic segmentation, and reading fluency. This study reinforced the idea that structured and interactive approaches to phonics instruction are essential for addressing diverse learning needs, particularly for struggling readers. The researchers also recognized the importance of multi-sensory learning, as demonstrated by the effectiveness of color-coded and hands-on activities in supporting learners' cognitive processing and retention. Furthermore, the exploration highlighted the critical role of collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and parents in sustaining and scaling effective literacy interventions. This realization underscores the value of evidence-based practices like the Rime House strategy in shaping inclusive and responsive educational environments that prioritize foundational literacy development.

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