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PHONICS, THE FIRST STEP TO DEVELOP PRIMARY READING SKILLS IN THE
LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

TESIS PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE MAGÍSTER EN ENSEÑANZA APRENDIZAJE DEL
INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA(TEFL)

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Abstract

The present research deals with proposing an effective method of acquisition for young learners reading abilities in English, which may serve as a model for the acquisition of primary reading abilities in the Foreign language(EFL). The method for this quasi-experiment was Phonics, a multisensorial and systematic method. The argumentation for this method lays on the ample evidence in English as a first and second language, that youngsters who are directly taught Phonics become better at reading, spelling and comprehension. The participants were 50 students from kindergarten of a private school in Santiago de Chile. Results demonstrated the effectiveness of this method in the experimental group. Most of this group participants could develop primary readings successfully.

EFL Reading abilities – Literacy – Method – Phonics – multisensorial – systematic- young learners

Resumen

La presente investigación propone un método efectivo de adquisición de habilidades lectoras en los jóvenes aprendices de inglés, el cual puede servir de modelo para la adquisición de habilidades lectoras primarias en el idioma extranjero(EFL). El método elegido para este cuasi experimento fue Phonics- un sistema multi-sensorial y sistemático de alfabetización temprana-. La argumentación para este método yace en la numerosa evidencia en estudios de inglés como primera y segunda lengua, que dice que los niños que son directamente instruidos a través de Phonics llegan a alcanzar mejor rendimiento en lectura, ortografía, vocabulario y comprensión. Los participantes fueron 50 estudiantes del Kínder DE UN COLEGIO PRIVADO en Santiago de Chile, Los resultados demostraron la efectividad de este método en la mayoría de los integrantes del grupo experimental y el desarrollo de habilidades de lectura primarias.

Habilidades lectoras- EFL- Método- alfabetización – Phonics – rendimiento académico-multisensorial- sistematico

1. Introduction

Reading is undoubtedly the fundamental skill to success in all educational contexts. To unveil how reading process occurs in the brain has been a long road that it is finally ended through latest research outcomes.

Reading has been also a major concern for EFL teachers who need to develop this ability in their students to improve other languages abilities (listening-speaking- writing). Nowadays only 2 percent of Chilean population can speak English (BID, 2013) and many factors have been acknowledged as possible causes. One of these factors lays on the teaching of English reading abilities. To this extent, the questioning begins by finding the effective way to teach children to read in English.

Even though, reading researchers has perpetuated a war to find the magic formula for developing primary reading skills approach. Authors have decided to make peace and favor a system called Phonics. The latest Phonics approaches included an eclectic number of didactic activities. In this way, students acquire letter sounds meaningfully as well as effectively.

Accordingly, this research temps to discover if Phonics is an effective tool for young learners EFL teachers. The participants belong to kindergarten and they were divided in 2 groups. On the one hand, a group that received Phonics instruction. On the other hand, a group that received Zero Phonics instruction.

The results of the present study attempt to reflect a view on the effectiveness of Phonics method and they might possibly lead to further research.

2. Research Question

2.1 Central Research Question

2.1.1 Is the reading program Phonics an effective tool for young learners of English as a foreign language to develop primary reading abilities at an early stage?

2.2 Sub-research questions

2.2.1 Can kindergarten students of English as a foreign language in a private school produce the sound of a given letter through the methodology proposed.

2.2.2 Can they blend sounds to utter words through Phonics?

2.2.3 Can they read simple words from a short story through Phonics training?

3. Objectives

3.1 General Objective

The main aim of this study is to research into the acquisition of early reading skills through the use of Phonics kindergarten students of English as a foreign language in a private school in Santiago.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the research study proposed here are the following:

3.2.1 To detect if kindergarten students of English as a foreign language in a private school are able to produce the sound of a given letter through the methodology proposed.

3.2.2 To determine if they are able to blend sounds to utter words through Phonics.

3.2.3 To find out if they are able to read simple words from a short story through Phonics training.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1.1 Unveiling the Reading Process

This chapter attempts to explore the reading process from its genesis. Unveiling the process has been a matter of concern for different sciences that deal with human development. The questioning of how the reading process begins and works has been enormous, as it is depicted on this research. Undoubtedly, this process starts in the brain. However, it is necessary to discover what is reading for the brain. Wolf (2007) states that

“We were never born to read. Human beings invented reading only a few thousand years ago. And with this invention, we rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species”.

From this point we understand reading as a human invention through an organized arrangement that lies in the brain and benefits the human beings evolution.

Furthermore, Wolf participated as chief executive officer of Literate Nation (LN). LN is an organization in The United States of America for demanding and supporting positive educational change through the improvement of reading abilities. She established several principles of the "reading brain." The first principle explains that,

Reading is a cultural invention. The reading brain represents the semi-miraculous capacity of the brain to form new circuits for cultural inventions from older, genetically programmed, component processes that make up vision, language, cognition and emotional systems. (Wolf, 2013:1)

Given this understanding, the proper way to acquire reading skills must contain knowledge of all of these systems (visual, language, cognition and emotional systems). Linguistics and Neuroscience may be of relevant importance for foreign language Education and also other sciences. They inform us about the learning process. As a consequence, teachers can improve their teaching practices. Wolf (2013) confirms this in the following statement, "Teaching methods needs to incorporate

Knowledge about each of these systems and how they work together to produce deep reading and deep thought".

Consequently, a new question arises on how the reading brain begins to read. From the Neurolinguistics viewpoint, this process was demonstrated through brain imaging techniques. The projection reflected the occipital lobule that receives the visual stimulation. There, the visual cortex recognizes letters in what is called by Dahanne (2009) as "letterbox". This information is guided into two separated networks in the brain: meaning and pronunciation/articulation. To sum up, it seems that reading is a process that involves visual, auditory, articulatory and emotional systems. The brain assimilates this information to obtain meaning and consequently deep thought.

4.1.2 Reading, A Bottom Up and Top Down Process.

By psycholinguistics, the reading learning process has been developed through three different theories. One of the first theory is called "bottom up" approach according to Abraham(2000) "this theory emphasized the ability to decode or put into sound what is seen in a text." This theory has been defended by Gough (1972), La Berge and Samuels (1974) Shall(1996) among others. The second one is called "top down" theory. The focus here is on the readers as they interact with the text. In other words, reading for meaning is the primary objective of reading rather than mastery of letters, letters/sound relationships and words. This theory was supported by Goodman (1967); Smith(1982) and Krashen (1985). Krashen believed that the acquisition of primary reading skills is developed through the "whole language approach". Krashen (1985) claims that children learn to read most enjoyably and efficiently by exposure to interesting stories that are made comprehensible to them through pictures and discussions (top- down theory).

For many years both theories (bottom-up and top-down theory) constituted the "reading war" (Krashen, 2002). Diverse researchers as well as theorists were trying to pursuit and valid the effective way of teaching reading. This war connected to the beginning and closed the circle when some theorists valued the importance of bottom up and top down

strategies in the reading process. They defined the process as “the interactive model”. According to Abraham(2000) “the interactive model (Rumelhart, 1977; Stanovich, 1980) stressed both what is on the written page and what a reader brings to it using both top-down and bottom-up skills”. In Rumelhart’s words:

“Reading is at once perceptual and a cognitive process. It is a process which bridges and blurs these two traditional distinctions. Moreover, a skilled reader must be able to make use of sensory, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information to accomplish the task. These various sources of information appear to interact in many complex ways during the process of reading.”(Rumelhart cited by Lapp, D., & Flood, J., 1983)

The acquisition of reading abilities in the learning of English as a foreign language is undoubtedly predominant. According to Brown (2010), reading is a skill of paramount importance for foreign language development. In other words, if a learner becomes a skilled reader he will be able to write, speak as well as listen appropriately. In other words, if a learner wants to be an efficient reader he needs to be able to master bottom up strategies as well as top down strategies. As it was said, the former strategies refer to the basic or lower level skills for example, separating letters, words and phrases. The latter strategies deal with advance or higher level skills i.e. conceptually driven strategies for comprehension. Evidently, Brown advocates for the interactive model as well.

From Cameron’s point of view (2001), it is also accepted that

“Reading brings together visual information from written symbols, phonological information from the sounds those symbols make when spoken, and semantic information from the conventional meanings associated as sounds and symbols. All three types of information are used by fluent readers in reaching and understanding of the text, together with information about the social uses of the text as discourse.” (Cameron 2001:125)

In this paragraph, Cameron agrees that reading is a visual, auditory, social and cognitive process. In other words, she is also supporting the interactive reading theory.

4.1.3 Basic reading abilities in EFL young learners

As long as, the knowhow of the reading process, this research associates the current knowledge of the reading brain through the teaching of basic /primary reading abilities to English as a foreign language kindergarten students. Bialystok (2012) states that, "it is true that the children's brain is so well prepared to analyze, absorb, and make sense of language that learning in two languages simply comes naturally". In other words, Chilean children's brains are prepared to process another reading code by nature simply.

Regarding children psychological development Brooks (1964) referred that from 4 years old to 7 children are forming their world and establishing rules. Furthermore, Piaget (1964) explained that from 2 to 7 years old children are developing their symbolic function to understand the world. This is to say that children from 2- 7 become more aware of the world they are living in the sense of they start organizing this through symbols and certain rules. Considering these psychological theories, children's brains are able to acquire L2 basic reading skills because their development at that age is appropriate for that.

However, the development of reading skills in Chilean EFL learners has been a problematic situation. Most of Chilean schools do not develop basic reading skills because children from 4 to 7 do not have English as a foreign language subject in their government program. This absence of primary reading development in our Chilean students is observed through the last Chilean National examination (SIMCE-TOEIC BRIDGE) 2010 - 2014, which evaluated the level of reading and listening abilities, it revealed negative results. These negative outcomes reflected weaknesses in the students listening abilities and a lack of reading abilities. These weaknesses may be caused by the insufficiency of primary reading instruction (Alphabetic stage), as Birch (2002) clearly states that "the EFL readers' higher level processing deficiencies are present because of the absence of primary reading strategies" (Wallace cited by Birch, 2002). These primary strategies that are outlined as follows correspond to phonological strategies. According to Wallace, the 5 sub-processes of learning to read are: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Comprehension, Vocabulary and Fluency. In the same way, they are promoted by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000).

Makulecky (2008) has presented evidence to suggest that "effective reading is essential for success in acquiring a second language. After all, reading is the basis of instruction in all aspects of language learning." Subsequently, English as Foreign Language students (EFL onwards), require reading abilities from the very moment they start learning English. Considering the relevance of the process, the following question comes to light: what is the effective method for the acquisition of the mentioned abilities?

4.2 Exploring the method

The first point which must be explored is the acquisition of reading abilities in English as L1. As a matter of fact, the Commonwealth of Australia report on teaching reading (2005), the National Reading Panel of USA (2000) and the Department of Education in UK (2014) all recommend the use of a systematic approach called Phonics to start developing reading and also writing abilities. In other words, this is the official literacy program for young learners in those countries.

4.2.1 Definition of Phonics

For many years Phonics, has been the traditional method to build literacy blocks in English native speakers. Phonics has been constantly researched in the United Kingdom and The USA. One of the last meta-analysis on this method made by Torgerson, Brooks and Hall (2006) concluded a view on Phonics as "a literacy approach which focus on the relationships between letters and sounds" . In other words, the relation between the 44 letters phonetic sounds with the 26 alphabetic letters and their frequent sound combinations.

4.2.2. History of Phonics

Robert Emans (1968) searched the History of Phonics. His discoveries clearly show that its use started many centuries ago. As he reported:

The first attempt to teach independence in reading was probably an alphabet spelling approach which may go back to the time of the Greeks and Romans, or before. The well known New England Primer of 1690 in this country used it. In this approach children first were taught the names of letters of the alphabet. Then, as each new word was presented, they were taught to spell it. (Emans, 1968: 45:602-607)

Evidence on the use of Phonics, dates back to the 18th century in Noah Webster's American Spelling Book (Webster 1758). In Emans' words, Webster "developed a scheme of Phonics, not as a means for teaching reading, but to establish a standardized American speech which would reflect the new nation's concern for communication in a democracy". Phonics at first was intended as a code to uniform English dialect rather than to teach reading.

In the 18th century, Phonics was renewed and seen as a method for teaching reading. As Emans (1968) describes "the Phonic method of this era shifted to an emphasis on groups of letters often called word families. Reading was again reduced to a number of mechanical drills, each of which focused attention on a unit smaller than a word."

In those years, Favell Lee Mortimer, an English author of educational books for children, made a flashcard set called "Reading Disentangled" (1834) and the text "Reading without tears" (1857) to teach children to read through Phonics. During the last two centuries, Phonics has been the aim of constant study. In 1967, Jeanne Chall concluded the effectiveness of Phonics and drew a distinction between systematic and less systematic Phonics instruction. As Neuman & Dickinson (2002) explained:

"Chall's review is full of insight, but one basic finding continues to be cited to this day- Early and systematic instruction in Phonics seems to lead to better

achievement in reading than later and less systematic instruction. In addition, the results depicted on her book have been supported in nearly every review since (e.g. Adams 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Wilkinson, & Scott, 1985; Balmuth, 1982; National Reading Panel, 2000)".

Currently, the NRP (2000) as a US government body has supported substantial research on Literacy instruction to conclude in its report that: there are eight areas of the literacy instruction: phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, independent reading, computer assisted instruction, and teacher professional development. For the research purpose, the focus will be in primary areas of literacy instruction: Phonemic Awareness and Phonics. The NRP declares that,

The NRP reviewed a large corpus of studies using meta- analytic techniques. Studies were selected by a careful conscribed set of criteria; limiting review to research that was quantitative. They found that Phonics instruction produce significant effects on measures of comprehension as well as isolated words reading. They also detect that it is more effective in kindergarten and first grade. Finally, they found that there is no significance difference between different approaches to teaching Phonics. (Stahl 2002)

According to this evidence, phonics may be considered as a method for kindergarten and first grade student. This method has constantly been researched, analyzed and modified. Consequently, there are four kinds of Phonics that reveal its progression through time. In relation to the analysis made by NRP, Cooter and Neuman(2010) gathered the different approaches for teaching Phonics and outlined them. They are: Synthetic Phonics Instruction; Embedded Phonics Instruction; Analogy-Based Phonics; Analytic Phonics Instruction; and Phonics through Spelling. According to McCormack (2009) Embedded Phonics makes decoding an integral part of authentic reading experiences. However, this approach lacks of structure and the sound-symbol relationship is not the main objective. In the analytic approach, students are first taught a number of high-frequency words and then learn Phonics generalizations and rules. Another word for analytic phonics is a deductive approach. The other kind of Phonics instruction is analogy based Phonics, as it is explained by McCormack(2009) students are taught to notice patterns in words and to use the words they

know to figure out other words. An example of analogy based approach is teaching words that are consistent with words families, phonograms and rimes in printed words. Words such as cat, boat and ball. For this research purpose the selected method will be Synthetic Phonics. This instruction is one of the most effective when teachers help students to take words apart by listening to the phonemes to read and spell them, and then putting them back together. The other name for this method is “inductive” Phonics i.e. students learn the sounds represented by letter and letter common combinations.

4.2.3 How does Synthetic Phonics work?

The National Reading Panel, NRP (2000) focused on the following areas: Alphabetic, reading fluency, reading comprehension, teacher education, and computer technology. For the purpose of this research, it is important to define the first area as Alphabetic which is subdivided into Phonemic Awareness and Phonics instruction. Regarding Phonemic awareness, it is known that spoken words are made up of tiny segments of sounds, referred to as phonemes. For example, the words "go" and "she" each consists of two phonemes. Once phonemic awareness is acquired by students Phonics instruction is developed by the teacher. It consists of teaching a planned sequence of phonics elements (letters sounds), rather than highlighting elements as they happen to appear in a text i.e. Phonics is showing the language from its base: letters and sounds. Here, again, the evidence was so strong that the NRP concluded that systematic phonics instruction is appropriate for routine classroom instruction.

Birch (2002) offers another viewpoint of Phonemic awareness she considers this process as "the knowledge that words are made up of discrete sounds, along with the strategies that allow discrimination and segmentation of the sounds, is called Phonemic awareness". This author adds that discrimination of sounds may also occur when L2 learners play oral rhyming games, and learn songs and the segmentation is reflected in the subdivision of a spoken word into component sounds.

As part of the process of Phonics instruction, Grevel (2007) describes that “it is an instant code of letters inserted in the learner’s mind as a fast processor of sounds, words and

meaning. In other words; Synthetic Phonics starts from the basics and builds on them slowly and continuously. Consequently, Grevel added "the Phonics end result enables children to quickly grasp unknown words, learn their definitions, bank the knowledge and then, move to the next level". In Phonics, students learn the sounds of letters. Firstly, they may learn the sound of the B consonant /b/. Secondly, they incorporate the different short combinations between consonants and vowels. Finally, they deal with more complex patterns.

4.3 Transfer

By the research purpose, it is necessary to define the phenomenon of transfer that may probably interfere in the L2 primary reading strategies. According to Karim (2012)

“Second or foreign language learners use first language knowledge and various strategies to facilitate their learning of target language (i.e. speaking, reading and writing). This phenomenon is known as language transfer. Transfer occurs consciously as a deliberate communication strategy, where there is a gap in the learner’s Knowledge; and unconsciously either because the correct form is not known or because, although it has been learned, it has not been completely automatized”

In this sense, Karim explained that transfer works as a linguistic mechanism to bridge the gap when something is unknown by the learner or possibly known but it has not been automatized. In the same way, Phonics points to the automatic understanding of printed words. Grabe (2009) also considers that the reading involves two components: lower level and higher level processes. While the lower level process represents the more automatic linguistic process, the higher level processes include comprehension that have to deal with learner’s background and knowledge. Consequently, automatic linguistic processes guide the path to comprehension and it finally supports EFL teachers’ main aim.

Observing that one of the Phonics training objectives is to decode sounds and letters (lower level process) to make and sound words automatically. Moats, (1998) states that there is clear evidence supporting this idea as it is mentioned in her article:

“The sound-symbol unit is then read and spelled in words; those words, in turn, are couched in sentences; and the sentences, in turn, are placed in simple stories. Automatic association of symbol with sound is the outcome, the foundation of fluent reading for meaning.(Moats, 1998)”

Thus, transfer does not seem to be a problem if students are trained to use automatic associations of letters and sound.

Bialystok, McBride-Chang, & Luk (2005), in their research on Bilingualism, Language Proficiency, and Learning to Read in Two Writing Systems, claimed that,

“Decoding ability developed separately for, each language as a function of proficiency and instruction in that language and did not transfer to the other language.

Furthermore, in the discussion of Bialystok’s research results, the inclusion of Phonics to kindergarten students from a private school in Santiago seems safe in terms of Transfer. As she remarked "decoding skills in each language are based on different components, therefore, a simple transfer of ability across languages would not be expected". Taking this into consideration, the possible acquisition of basic reading skills could be probably demonstrated by this research.

Thus, this research deals with proposing an effective method for the acquisition of reading abilities in English, which may serve as a model for the acquisition of primary reading abilities of English as foreign language students.

4.4 State Of Art

Nowadays, Phonics research is scarce in the area of EFL education in Chile. There is only one published study in the Chilean Researchers in ELT Organization (RICELT) last year. According to the research findings established by Margarita Irrarrázabal (2015), a Phonics program has not been the main focus for the acquisition of primary English reading abilities due to the limited knowledge regarding the topic in our country.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

For the purpose of this research, fifty (50) kindergarten students were chosen from a private school in Santiago. The school's permission was obtained through a letter which was signed by the principal (see appendix 1). The students were arranged into two groups: an experimental group made up of 25 participants from Kindergarten A, and a control group consisting of 25 participants from Kindergarten B. The control group followed the current English program in the school where the research took place. The mentioned program consisted of 5 sessions per week which lasted about 45 minutes. On the other hand, the experimental group received training in Phonics for the same period of time following the procedures suggested by different approaches to Phonics, which are: Phonics International, Monsters Phonics, Floppy's Phonics and Jolly's phonics. This quasi-experiment lasted 6 weeks (5 weeks of Phonics instruction and 1 week of consolidation and post experiment tests)

5.2 Presentation of Training

In parallel sessions, the experimental group did different Phonics tasks while the control group was continuing with the current English program. In other words, the experimental group had an introduction to Phonics, whereas the control group did not participate in the intervention-they started the new unit straight from their class book.

5.2. Week Number 1 (4 sessions)

5.2.1.1 Experimental Group

During the first 4 sessions, students were able to recognize the following sequence of consonant and vowel sounds: s, a, t and p (see appendix 2: letter tiles). The strategies were: introduction of letter sounds, imitation of letters in the air with their fingers, action through stories at a rate of one sound a day, modeling the letter using dough, pipe cleaners, flour, chalk, clay, among others and revision of letter sounds until the children knew them well. Students connected the sound to simple words CVC (consonant/vowel/consonant). They would make air writing including words to graphemes, practicing sounds loudly and softly, and then practicing blending techniques.

5.2.1.2 The Control Group

The control group started unit 5 titled “Puppets”. The teacher introduced body parts and engaged students to make kinesthetic activities as well as completing activities from their activity book.

5.2.2 Week Number 2 (4 sessions)

5.2.2.1 Experimental Group

During the second week students were able to recognize the following letters i, m, n and d. The strategies were: recognition of letters in the alphabet, introduction of letter sounds, and action through movements at a rate of one sound a day. Then, students connected the sound. They made air writing including CVC. Additionally, they practiced the sounds loudly and softly, in a low voice, and practiced blending techniques. They also blended sound with mobile letters and played games to identify the sound. All these strategies were taken from Floppy’s Phonics and International Phonics, a multisensory program to develop literacy

systematically. The methodology here is based on the bottom up theory and language comprehension processes (see Appendix 3: Simple view of Reading). These programs teach reading abilities from the basis and also, consider reading as an auditory, visual and articulatory process. One of the main objectives here was to achieve phonemic awareness systematically through a classified morpheme- grapheme pattern. It begun from basic sounds to complex combinations.

5.2.2.2 Control group

While the experimental group was working with Phonics, the control group was able to identify body parts and practice colors. The teacher reviewed body parts and engaged students to make kinesthetic activities linking colors as well as preparing the project for the Unit.

5.2.3 Week Number 3 (4 sessions)

5.2.3.1 Experimental Group

The objective for the following sessions was to identify sounds in words and writing isolated words in the air, in sand, and with chalk. The formative strategies for this period were: identifying the following sounds : “g, o, c and k”, in words, activities involving the whole class calling out sounds, all-through given words e.g. dog, then holding up a finger for each sound and counting. They practiced the sound from a software called “Jolly Phonics” singing songs and listening to stories. Students exercised words to grapheme, spoke sounds loudly and softly, as well as blending techniques. During this week, a strategy for Monster

Phonics was added. Monster Phonics is also a multisensory program specially created for students that have special needs and EAL students (students of English as an Additional Language). For this reason, it is recommended by the United Kingdom's Department of Education (2014). In this systematic program, sounds are classified by colors and a specific monster. Consequently, it is easier for students to organize the patterns in their minds because students connect their imaginary world to the knowledge of letters sounds. Undoubtedly, to connect children's learning with their infant world is an invaluable help for EFL teachers (Puchta, 2014). If the teacher is involved and cares about children feelings, thoughts and learning, the more motivated students are about the English class.

5.2.3.2 Control group

While the control group was finishing unit 5, the teacher consolidated body parts and colors. They sang the unit song and answered questions about their body and activities from their class book and activity book. Most of the activities were just auditory. No grapheme was taught by the teacher.

5.2.4 Week Number 4 (4 sessions)

5.2.4.1 Experimental Group

The consonants for these weeks were ck, e, u and r. Students were able to identify the sounds and blended them. The last sessions' strategies were carried out by the teacher. They included having the students write the letters in the air, in the sand, with their bodies and different materials. Students listened to a story and related the sounds to words from the book. They made music with the words to practice blending and segmenting, played games with balloons and table tennis balls to identify firstly the sounds and then the letters.

5.2.4.2 Control Group

The control group started Unit 6 "At the farm". Students identified farm animals and size adjectives. They completed activities from their class books and activity book.

5.2.5 Week number 5 (4 Sessions)

5.2.5.1 Experimental Group

Students could consolidate letters and sounds to identify isolated words. The teacher observed students while they worked in various activities to check if everybody was progressing. Strategies were decoding sounds in words.

5.2.5.2 Control Group

The control group identified farm animals and recognized colors and sizes. They worked in groups to play charades and started a project for Unit 5.

5.2.6. Week number 6 (post-test)

5.2.6.1 Experimental Group

During this week, students continued reviewing all the letters previously seen in the last sessions. Finally, they were supposed to read a short story aloud, identify words and blend sound as it was required for the post test (see Appendix 4)

5.2.6.2 Control Group

The control group continued working on Unit 6 “Puppets” and got ready for the post test.

5.3 Post Test Application

In order to apply the posttest it is important to consider that in spite that a minority of students in both groups (A and B) carried different special needs most of them are at the same learning level (see Appendix 5). As the experiment was not taken in a group we can contrast the information with the results obtained by the control group. For that reason, it was not taken a pre-test. Due to the school program, cognitive development approach (*laissez faire*) and school philosophy, Phonemic awareness is not directly developed in kindergarten level and in the following levels i.e primary reading skills are not taught even in their L1. The school approach for reading is the whole language approach where children learn by the acquisition of meaning instead of understanding the alphabetic system in the first level. To determine these research variables, we asked for the evaluations of participants (groups A and B) about their cognitive and social process and proved the information mentioned before (see appendix 6)

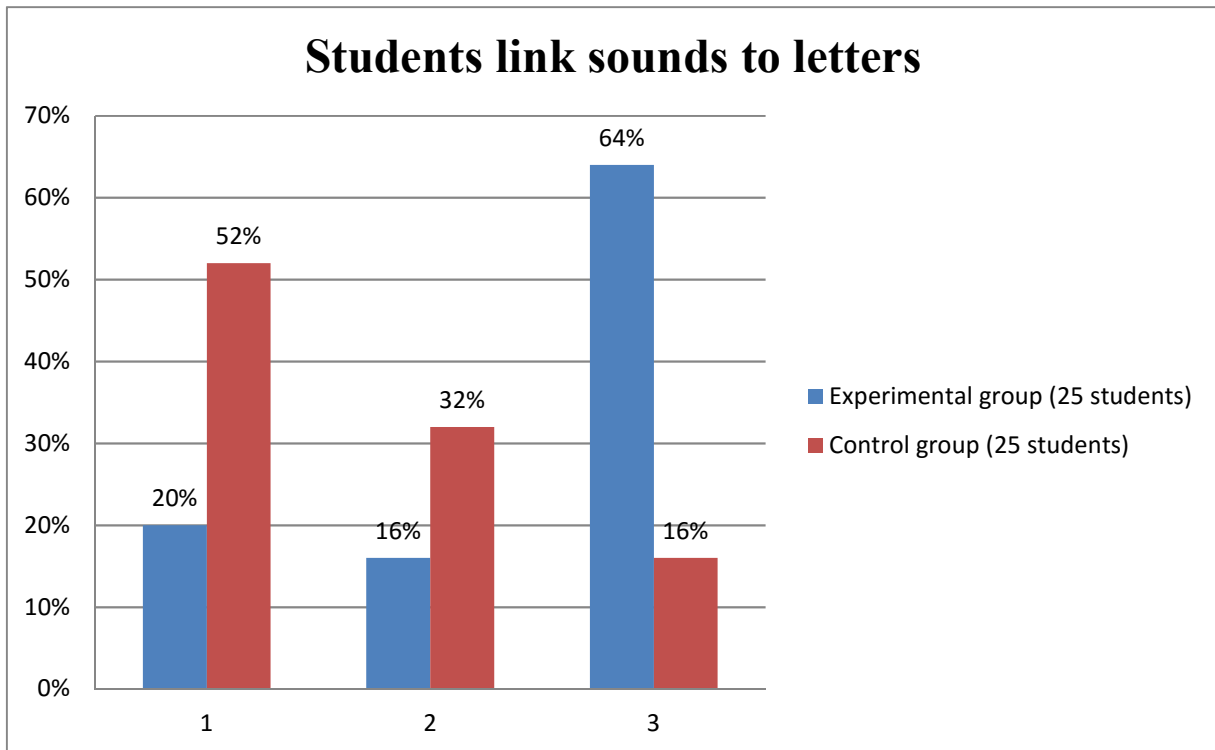
As a consequence of a quasi-experimental design, both the control and the experimental group took the final test. The final test objective was that students were able to read a short story. However, all aspects of Phonics instructions have to be analyzed, that is the reason why they must identify and produce sounds to clearly observe if this approach was consistent in terms of phonemic awareness i.e. the first step to build literacy.

6. Analysis and Discussion of The Results

The following post test procedures were considered to obtain results:

- Students had to identify the sound to the printed letters said by the teacher (Chart 1)
- They had to produce the sound of a letter, shown by the teacher(chart 2)
- They had to read a book(“Cats” and “Big mess” from Oxford Reading tree, see Appendix 7) realizing that printed is from left to right(chart 3)
- Students blended sounds to read a short story(“Cats” and “Big mess” from Oxford Reading tree)

6.1 Chart #1

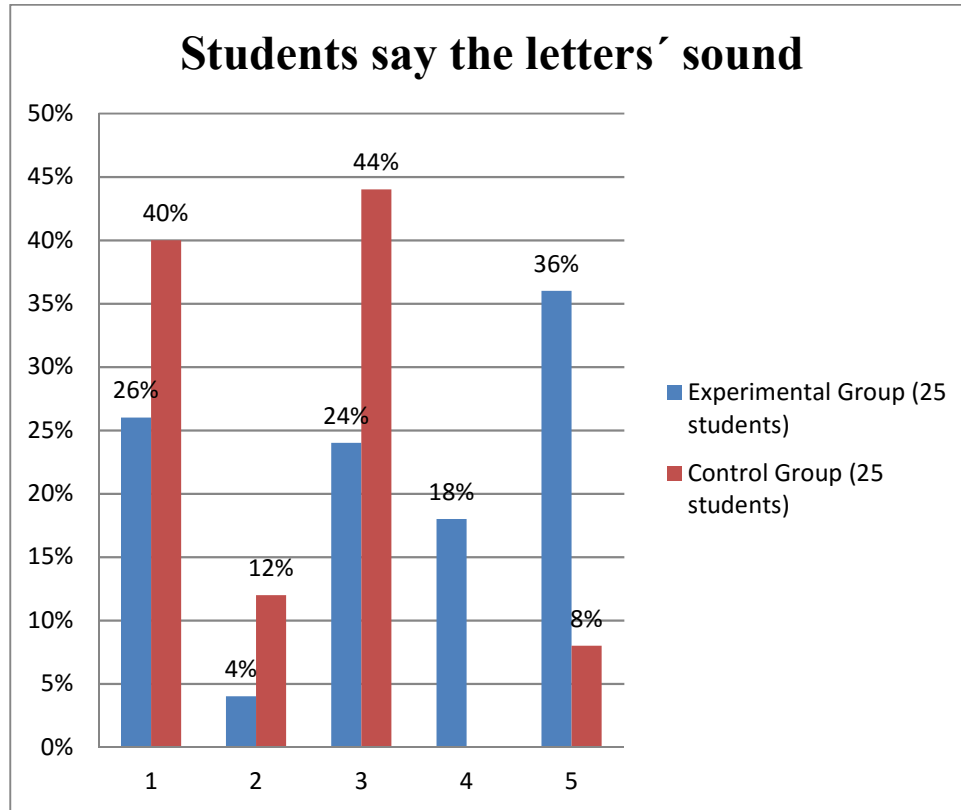


As we can observe from the Chart 1, the 52 % is equivalent to 16 students from the control group, who obtained a 1 -2 mark when linking sounds to letters. Just 32 % equivalent to 5 students from the control group obtained a 5 mark. On the contrary, students from the experimental group obtained 64 % equivalent to 19 students who could link letter to sound accurately. Most of the students clearly understood the sounds of letters in English Language even though there are some sound differences when contrasting it to their L1. As it was stated in this research previously, children's brains are well prepared to learn various languages, and this can be observed in this Chart were students from the experimental group

could acquire the sounds of the English letters. The causes of this phenomenon are also explained by the prominent neuronal development children have at this age. Consequently, they may automatically absorb any input if it is meaningful to them.

As it is also observed in this Chart, students from the control group did not get the highest percentages because they did not receive the input, that is to say, they were not trained on the Phonics System. In contrast, students who received that input could understand that letters could be linked together. In this school, teachers of 11 are not obliged to teach students to read in L1, that is why most of the students who belong to the control group did not know how to link sounds. However, a minority of them could link sounds. The reason for this may be that most of them had parents that trained them to read in L1. Also, other reasons could be that they were concerned about their academic level, they belong to families with older siblings who motivated them or they just feel fascinated by reading because they can understand the wonders of reading. The main fact here is that most of students from the experimental group could link sound to letters after they received Phonics input. As is observed, it seems possible that kindergarten students are trained to join sounds to letters.

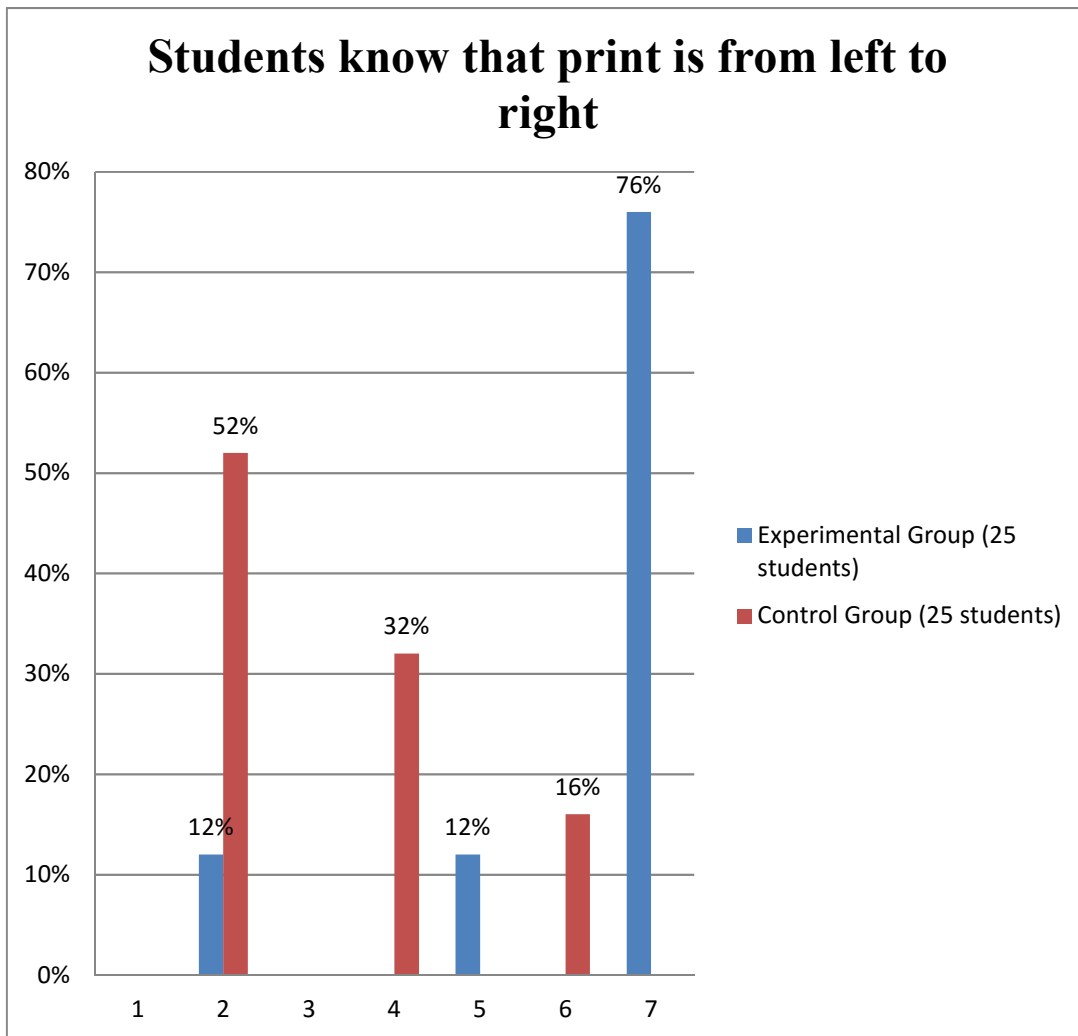
6.2 Chart # 2



Students who belong to the experimental group obtained a 36% while almost the same percentage was obtained at the lowest mark in the same group. The reason why the result reflects this it is because as young learners EFL teachers or teachers of language, children are developing language production. In other words, students at this age may recognize letters sound but it is completely different for students to produce them orally. Uttering words ability comes later and after a long systematical process that teachers or family members may also stimulate in the situation students were sick or absent of school as it was the case. At this school level (preschool), nonattendance is very usual. Accordingly, it was very difficult for

many students from experimental group to start saying the letters despite they knew the sound internally as it was proved on the previous chart.

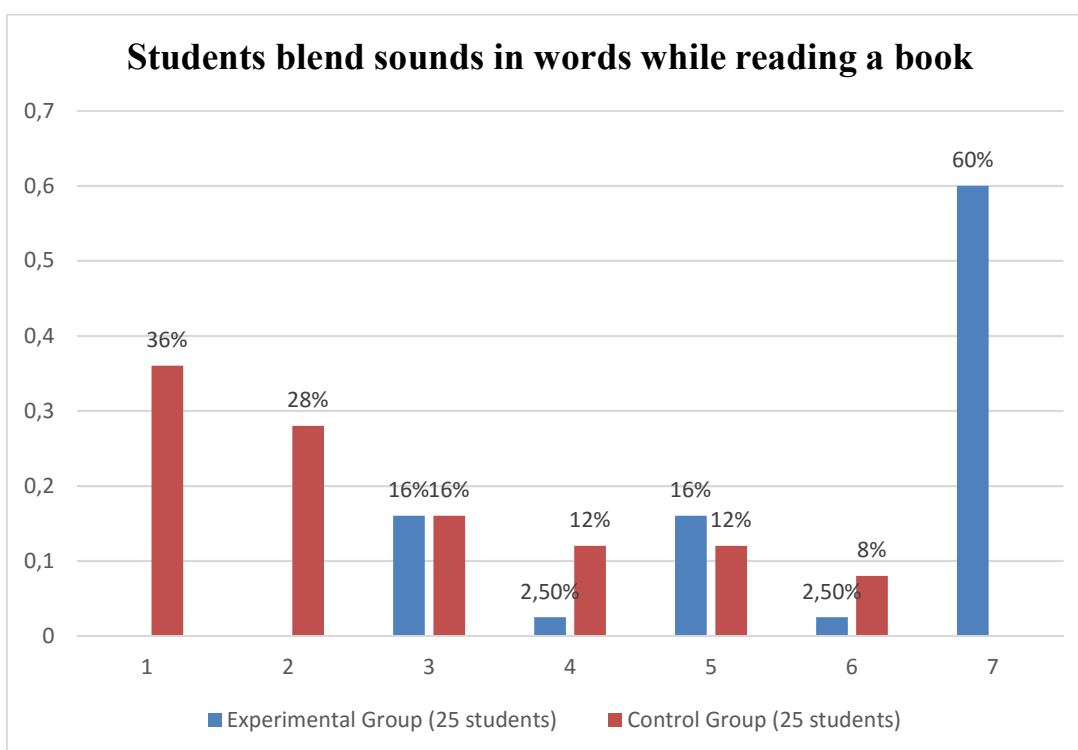
6.3 Chart # 3



Despite the high percentage 76 % on the highest mark equivalent to 19 students of the experimental group it is observed that most of students that belong to the control group could not understand that print is from left to right. For students to realize that it is suggested by Phonics programs to induct this systematically until the children became aware of this process. It also observed that a group of students from the experimental group had problems

with this but this situation could be explained because of their special needs or simply they were absent (sick leaves) when that training was given.

6.4 Chart #4



As it is observed from this chart a 60% of students equivalent to 16 students could blend sounds without error. On the contrary, most students of the control group could not blend sounds. As it is observed blending sounds is more complex for students who did not received the training to Phonics. As it was mentioned in the Methodology, blending techniques were constantly stimulated on children that belong to the experimental group and became consistent through this chart. It is important to say that most of children from the experimental group could read a book in English language.

7. Conclusions

To conclude this research, it is possibly to consider Phonics as an Effective tool in the development of primary reading skills. Through the results, it is observable that the research question was solved and the results have confidently proved that EFL kindergarten students may possibly acquire primary reading skills through Phonics. For Linguistics, acquisition is not the same as learning. The former is an unconscious process meanwhile the latter is a conscious process. Phonics instruction occurs during the acquisition period that is one of the reasons it is effective for the reading process. Through this first conclusion, it is important to mention the relevance of knowing and researching the reading process to guide our EFL teaching practices.

Currently, EFL teachers are not trained to develop primary reading skills in children due to the scarce research on this area. Thus, Phonics is not studied at university these days. It is the best time for the acquisition of Literacy in EFL students. It is time for making our students great readers and consequently people who understand the world that he is situated. It is well known that English is the international language. And we as EFL should research in order to find more effective EFL teaching practices that enrich our students' knowledge.

Furthermore, teachers of English around the world are changing paradigms in the way they favor oral skills over writing (Nunan, 1995). Phonics is the first step for reading and therefore for speaking and writing. It also stimulates self-learning for the reason that 5 years old children can read books by themselves, obviously, books that belong to their learning stage, this experience offers them a sense of autonomy and favors self-learning attitudes among others.

Phonics is also favorable in terms of vocal tract development. 5-6 years old is the best age where children should articulate all L1 letter sounds. Phonics helps students to articulate the sounds of the English language. For that reason, science shows that children who were taught by Phonics can pronounce better than someone that learned English at an older stage

It also develops listening abilities to comprehend sounds in words for future reading stages. Cameron (2001) also considers that skilled reading is a process of constructing meaning from written language. The comprehension of that meaning is developing by listening sounds. As Quevedo mentioned during the mid-ages. Reading is “listen with your eyes” (Quevedo cited by Dahaene, 2001). From this point of view, it cannot be denied that when someone is reading he may listen to the sounds of the read words to get meaning. For example, if someone cannot understand what he read, he started to read it again but this time using an oral technique such as to read loudly to find meaning through hearing. In this sense, another conclusion arises, it has been proved that reading is a visual and auditory process (multisensorial).

Moreover, there is another conclusion that should be said about basic reading stage. reading strategies have been organized as a pyramid. Language teachers should know about every aspect of this reading pyramid. And as it was observed in this research, EFL teachers are just aware of developing top down strategies instead of fostering bottom up strategies firstly (Phonics).

Many EFL researches have suggested that a curriculum that considers students’ needs satisfying their learning requirement by supporting the process of social and cognitive development. School should be an enjoyable and comfortable experience to guarantee good education. Teachers should always set the input in a pleasant and interesting atmosphere. Phonics methodology should be as fun as possible since guiding the instruction to activities connected to their children’s world makes the input more meaningful and effective. The latter statement has been thoroughly developed in the results of the present study.

As a last conclusion, a strong claim emerges from this results. Chilean researches should focus on the improvement effective young learners EFL teaching and learning as a new field to study. Stablishing a direct connection between new trends and children current needs would guide EFL to better outcomes.

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APENDIX 1: LETTER PERMISSION

Ref.: Solicitud de intervención en
aula con fines de investigación



Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación
Facultad de Historia, Geografía y Letras
Departamento de Inglés

Santiago, 11 de Agosto, 2016

Señora

Fátima Escudero

Directora de Ciclo Rilán

Colegio Almenar del Maipo

PRESENTE

Como estudiante de segundo año del Magíster en enseñanza aprendizaje del Inglés como lengua extranjera proveniente de la Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, me encuentro desarrollando mi tesis que lleva por nombre "Phonics, the first step to develop literacy in the learning of English as a foreign language with kindergarten students from a school in Santiago" (Phonics como el primer paso para desarrollar la alfabetización en el aprendizaje del Inglés como lengua extranjera)

Este proyecto tiene como finalidad determinar cómo el uso de técnicas de alfabetización temprana en Inglés mejoran los niveles de comprensión lectora y auditiva que influyen positivamente en la adquisición del idioma. Sin dejar de mencionar, el desarrollo de habilidades escritas y orales que como consecuencia genera, elevar el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes.

Por medio de la presente, y para fines del desarrollo de esta investigación, es que solicitamos a usted el permiso correspondiente firmado(adjuntado en la siguiente hoja) para realizar una intervención en el nivel de kínder durante el periodo de una unidad en el presente semestre académico; aplicando nuestros instrumentos de evaluación (pruebas y grabación de los niños leyendo su primer libro en Inglés), los que fueron debidamente revisados con nuestra tutora de tesis de la UMCE, profesora Maria Eugenia Hernández Vásquez, con antelación a ser empleados en el aula.

Agradecemos de antemano su tiempo y colaboración.

Saluda atentamente,

Gabriela Jara Márquez

Licenciada en Educación con mención en Inglés y Pedagogía en Inglés

Candidata a Magister en enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

Ref.: Aceptación de intervención en
aula con fines de investigación



Dirección de ciclo Rilán

Santiago, 12 de Agosto, 2016

Señora:

Gabriela Jara Márquez

PRESENTE

Conforme a lo siguiente, Yo Fátima Escudero en mi cargo de directora de ciclo del colegio Almenar del Maipo autorizo la realización de esta investigación durante los tiempos solicitados y con la aplicación del instrumento de evaluación propuesta.

Saluda atentamente,

Fátima Escudero
Directora de ciclo Rilán
Almenar del Maipo

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TILES

APPENDIX 3: SIMPLE VIEW OF READING

APPENDIX 4 : POSTTEST(BOOKS)

I am Mat.

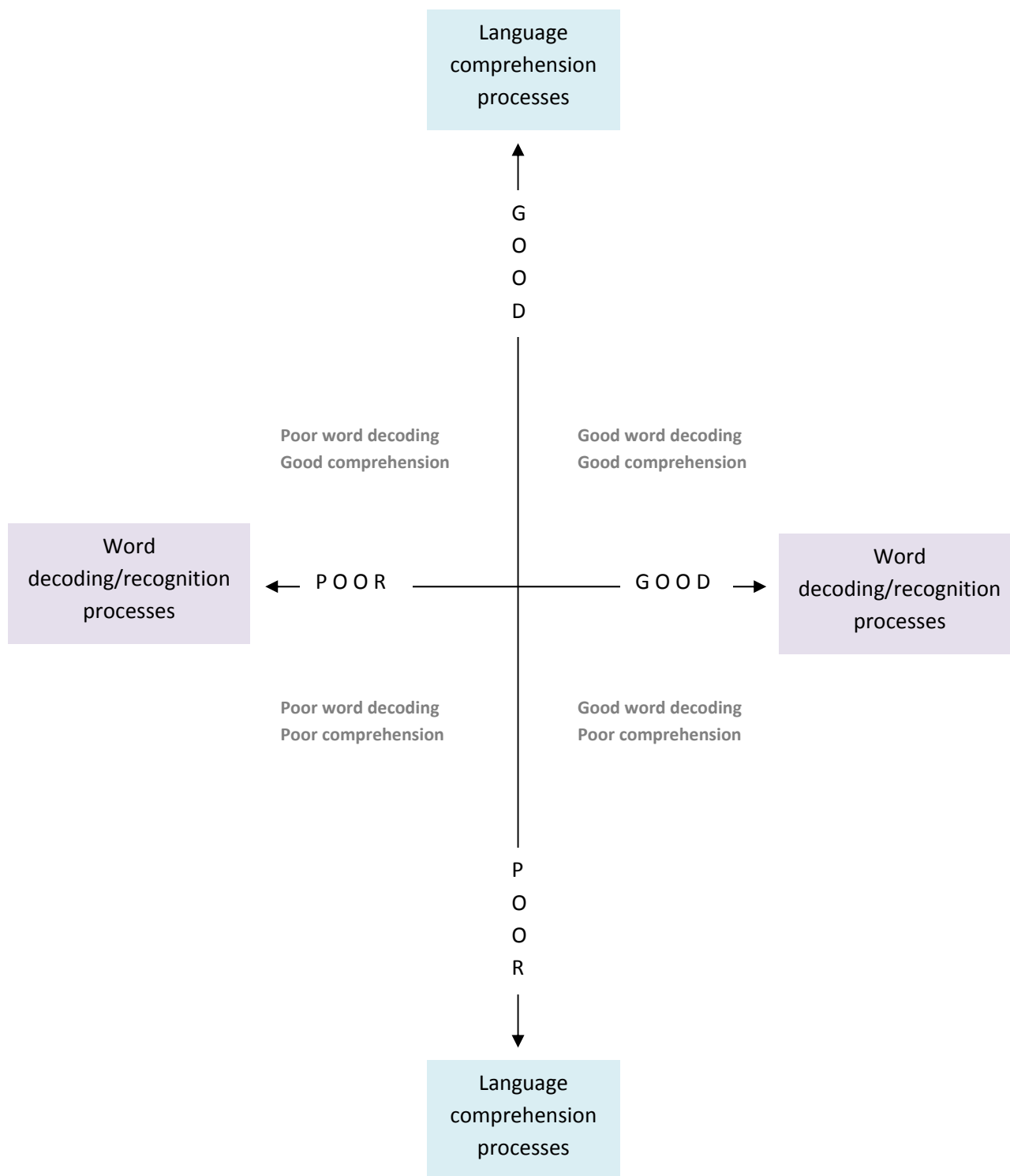
I am Kipper.

I am Mat the cat.

I am at the top.

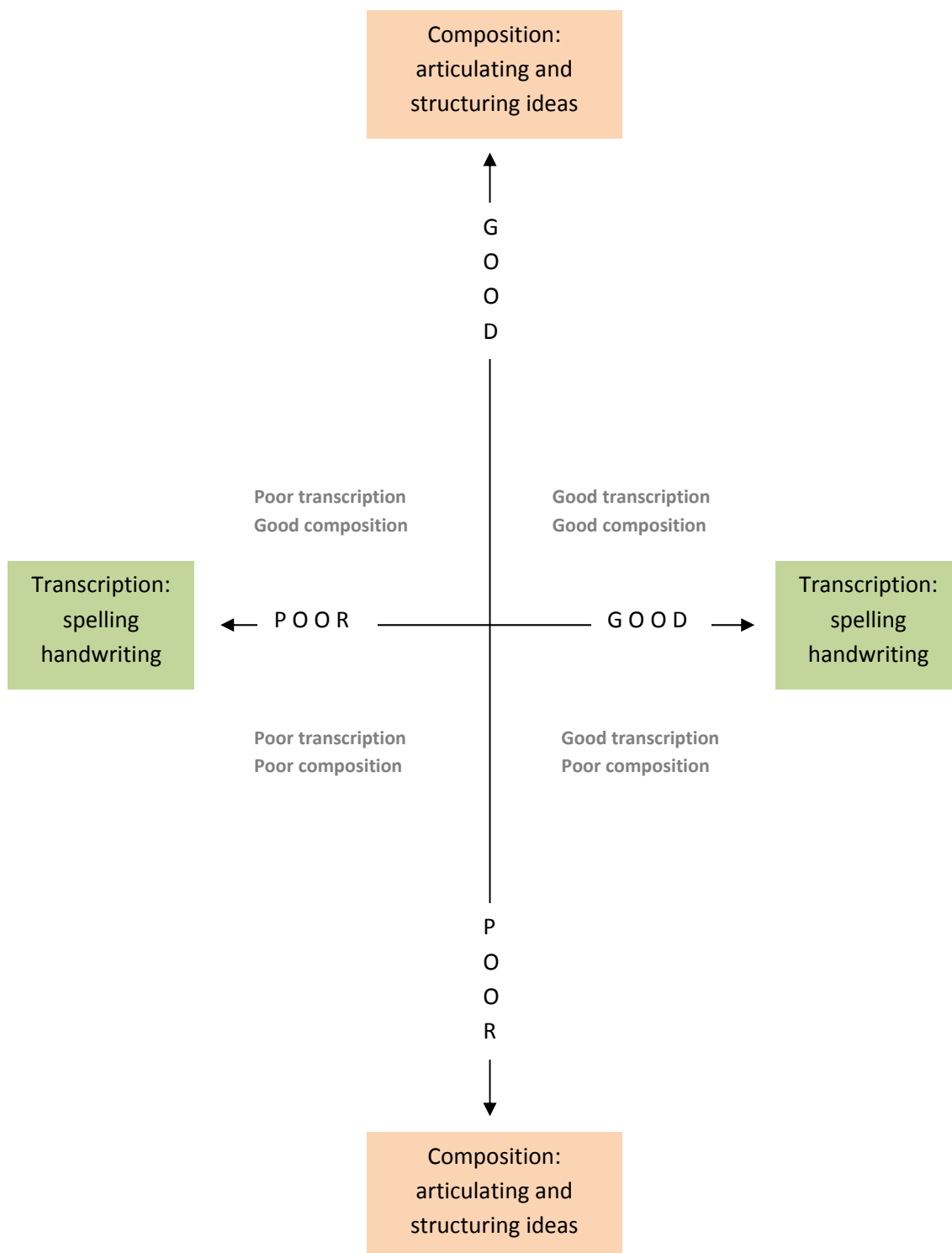


The Simple View of Reading



Simple View of Reading model: Original concept - Gough and Tunmer (1986), recommended by Jim Rose (*Final Report, March 2006*)
 Adopted by UK government (2006) as a *useful conceptual framework*: **reading = decoding x comprehension** $R = D \times C$
 Use for training; and a broad analysis of pupils' profiles for next steps planning and monitoring over time. Colour-code and date entries.
 For pupils with English as an additional or new language, plot for English and for the first language.

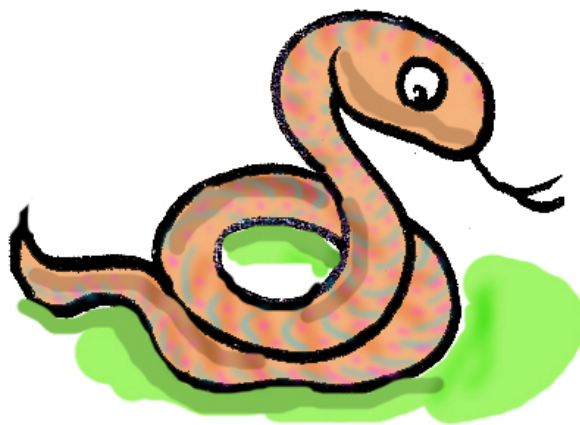
The Simple View of Writing



Simple View of Writing model: Adaptation of the SVoR model (Gough and Tunmer 1986) by Debbie Hepplewhite – for **training, analysis** and **planning**. Note: **Spelling** includes: knowledge of the alphabetic code (spelling alternatives) and encoding skill, high-frequency tricky words, spelling word banks, etymology (word origins), morphology (word structures), some spelling rules. ***‘Teach pupils to plan, revise and evaluate their writing – knowledge which is not required for reading’ (DfE National Curriculum for English, Key Stages 1 and 2 – Draft, 2012).***

S

snake



Say "/s/ snake". Finger trace the letter 's' as you say the sound /s/.

Talk briefly about the features of slithery snakes.

sun

nest

nuts

Finger track under each word and listen carefully for the /s/ sound.

Write the 's' shape in the air. Write the 's' shape whilst saying /s/.

a

apple



Say "/a/ apple". Finger trace the letter 'a' as you say the sound /a/.

Talk briefly about varieties of apples and how they compare.

ant

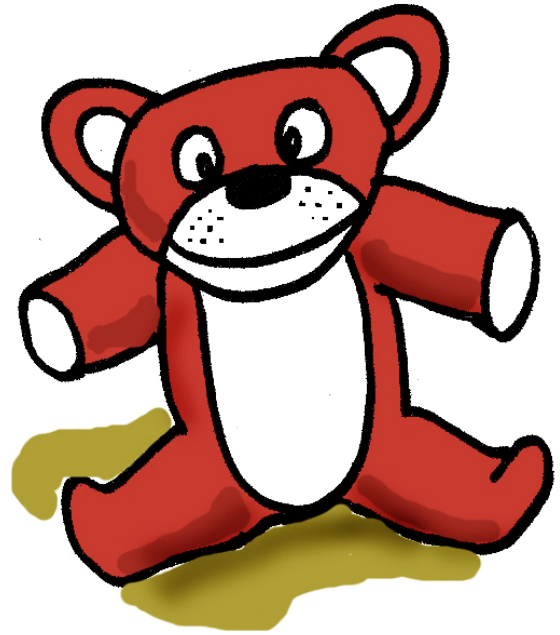
bag

man

Finger track under each word and listen carefully for the /a/ sound.

Write the 'a' shape in the air. Write the 'a' shape whilst saying /a/.

t
teddy



Say "/t/ teddy". Finger trace the letter 't' as you say the sound /t/.

Talk briefly about teddy bears. Mention some famous bears in stories.

tap

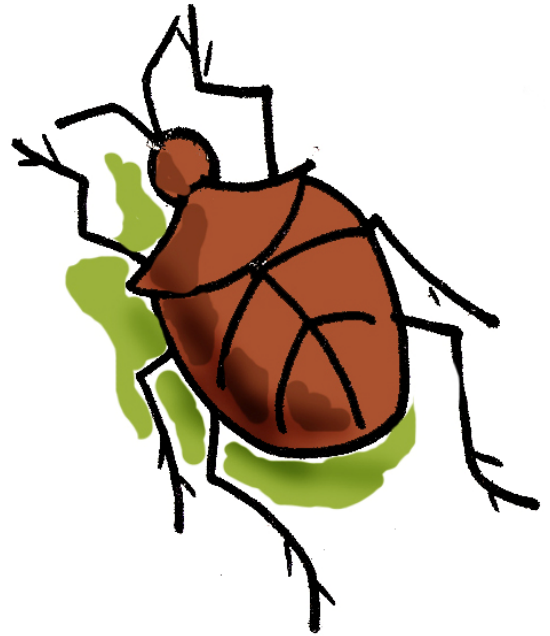
pot

tent

Finger track under each word and listen carefully for the /t/ sound.

Write the 't' shape whilst saying /t/. Model how to spell 'at' and 'sat'.

i
insect



Say "/i/ insect". Finger trace the letter 'i' as you say the sound /i/.

Teach that insects always have six legs. Name some examples.

ink

igloo

milk

Finger track under each word and listen carefully for the /i/ sound.

Write the 'i' shape whilst saying /i/. Model how to spell 'it' and 'sit'.

p
pan



Say "/p/ pan". Finger trace the letter 'p' as you say the sound /p/.

Talk briefly about pans and what they are usually made from.

p i t

s i p

t a p

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'p' whilst saying /p/. Model how to spell 'tip' and 'pat'.

n
net



Say "/n/ net". Finger trace the letter 'n' as you say the sound /n/.

Talk briefly about different types of nets.

n a p

t i n

a n t

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'n' whilst saying /n/. Model how to spell 'pin' and 'nip'.

C
cat



Say "/k/ cat". Finger trace the letter 'c' as you say the sound /k/.

Talk together about the common features of cats.

c a p

c a n

a c t

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'c' whilst saying /k/. Model how to spell 'cans' and 'cast'.

k

kit



Say "/k/ kit". Finger trace the letter 'k' as you say the sound /k/.

Talk about types of kits (e.g. sewing, cricket, first aid, toolkit).

k i n

k i s s

s k i p

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'k' whilst saying /k/. Model how to spell 'ask' and 'skin'.

-ck

duck



Say "/k/ as in duck". Finger trace the letters 'ck' and say /k/ once.

Mention that this is a drake (male). Letters 'ck' never begin a word.

s a ck

t i ck

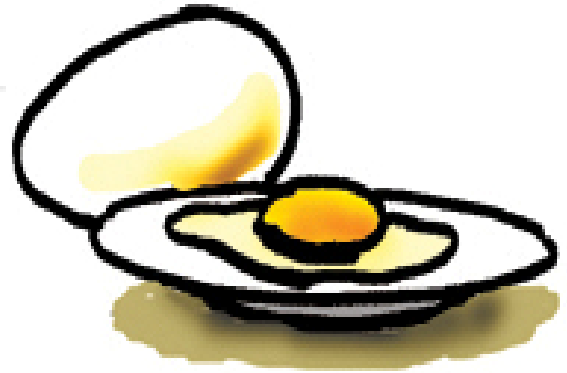
p i ck

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'ck' whilst saying /k/. Model how to spell 'kick' and 'pack'.

e

e egg



Say "/e/ egg". Finger trace the letter 'e' as you say the sound /e/.

Talk briefly about birds laying eggs and not 'baby' birds.

t e n

p e ck

p e t

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'e' whilst saying /e/. Model how to spell 'pen' and 'test'.

h

hat



Say "/h/ hat". Finger trace the letter 'h' as you say the sound /h/.

Talk briefly about why and when we sometimes wear hats.

h i p

h e n

h i t

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'h' whilst saying /h/. Model how to spell 'hats' and 'hips'.

r
rat



Say "/r/ rat". Finger trace the letter 'r' as you say the sound /r/.

Teach that rats are rodents and unwelcome 'vermin'.

r i p

r e s t

t r a p

Finger track and model how to say the sounds and blend them.

Write 'r' whilst saying /r/. Model how to spell 'rap' (music) and 'trip'.