

TEACHERS' USE OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION IN TEACHING READING TO YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the views of the English primary school teachers about phonics instruction and their in-class practices of phonics instruction in teaching reading. A questionnaire, class observations and interviews were used to collect data, with a sample of 27 teachers from seven primary schools in a city in Central Vietnam. The data were analyzed, synthesized and interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings showed that most of the teachers recognized the important role of phonics instruction in teaching reading to young English learners. However, teachers' knowledge of phonics was a questionable matter as many of them were conflicted when talking about aspects of phonics. In classroom practice, phonics instruction was hardly employed by the observed teachers due to many reasons including teachers' lack of skills and knowledge of phonics, large size classes and limited teaching time, teachers' doubt of teaching methods' effects, and heavily implemented curriculum.

Keywords: Phonics instruction, teaching reading, young English learners

1. Introduction

Learning to read is a complex task for beginners. The question of how best to teach beginning reading skills may be the most politicized topic in the field of education (Stahl, Osborn & Lehr, 1990). Learners must coordinate many cognitive processes to read accurately and fluently, including recognizing words, constructing the meanings of sentences and text, and retaining the information read in memory (National Reading Panel, 2000). Adams (1990) claimed that the two predominant indicators of success in early reading are alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness (PA), and that children with PA skill grasp the alphabet principle with ease. Approximately 84% of English words are phonetically regular (Blevins, 2006). Therefore, teaching the most common sound-spelling relationships in English is extremely useful for readers.

In the situation of Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) issued Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT dated on December 26, 2018 on the promulgation of the new general education curriculum which introduced English as an optional subject for grades 1 and 2, and a compulsory subject for grades 3, 4 and 5 in primary schools. Accordingly, English education starting at an early age is no longer a choice, but a target that the whole educational system heads to. Developing PA is one of the important aims set by MoET in the English curriculum at primary school level. Specifically, primary school students should have knowledge of English vowels and consonants, and understand the correspondence between sounds and letters in order to spell, read, and write in English correctly (MoET, 2018). In order to achieve the goals mentioned, primary school teachers, who are directly in charge of the

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quality of teaching and learning, play an important role. To discover how phonics instruction is perceived and applied in the context of English teaching and learning at primary schools in Vietnam, this study was conducted with two research questions:

1. What perception do English teachers at some primary schools in Hue city, Vietnam hold about phonics instruction?
2. What are the teachers' in-class practices of using phonics instruction in teaching reading to young English learners?

2. Literature review

2.1. Young language learners

Young language learners (YLLs) are those who are learning a foreign or second language. In terms of age, young learners are between the ages of approximately five and twelve, which are the most vital years in a child's development (Cameron, 2001; McKay, 2006). Although there is a big difference between what children of five can do and what children of ten can do, it is possible to point out certain characteristics of young children which teachers should be aware of and take into account in teaching (Scott & Ytreberg, 2004). In the book "Teaching English to children", Scott and Ytreberg (2004) list general characteristics of YLLs, including being enthusiastic and positive learners, learning through playing, having short attention and concentration span, understanding through hands, eyes and ears, through spoken words and physical world, through the rules they know and familiar situations, and being able to work with and learn from others.

Since children are on the stage of developing their cognitive, physical, emotional, and linguistic aspects, understanding their characteristics and development is of utmost importance to primary school teachers in successfully teaching YLLs.

2.2. Teaching reading to YLLs

By the age of six, most first language readers are ready to read because they already become familiar with grammatical structures of their first language, and they have nearly 7,000 words stored in their heads (Farrell, 2009). However, the situation is different for YLLs. These children do not have such word banks to draw on when learning to read in a second language. Riley (2006) shares the same view that YLLs own a relatively weaker knowledge of the language structures of English, or they have less familiarity with its patterns, vocabulary, sentence structures and grammar. Therefore, teachers of YLLs probably need to teach vocabulary and discourse structures to their students from the very beginning of their reading classes.

Two components of reading first put forward by Gough and Tunmer (1986, as cited in Riley, 2006) are 'decoding' and 'comprehension'. These components of reading are also mentioned by Jones and Deterding (2007). These authors point out that in order to become successful readers, children need to understand the broad function of reading, i.e. they must realize that the purpose of reading is to achieve meaning construction and interaction with the writer through the text, and to focus on perceiving details, which relates to their knowledge of

the language. Adams (1990) indicates that reading depends first and foremost on visual letter recognition, and the reading process relies on a reader's attention to each letter in a word.

From these views, it is understood that beginner readers must be taught how the letters of the alphabet, singly or in combination, represent sounds of spoken language and how to blend the sounds to read words, and break up the sounds in words to spell. They must learn to process all the letters in words and 'read words in and out of text' (Riley, 2006, p. 94). In other words, YLLs must acquire a sense of the correspondence between letters and sounds to become proficient readers, and these skills and knowledge must be taught in a well-defined and systematic sequence.

There are different approaches to teach reading to YLLs. Cicerchia (2020) lists the three most popular approaches including phonics approach, whole word approach, and language experience approach. Phonics approach is a way to enable beginning readers to decode written words by sounding out, or in phonics terms, blending the sound spelling patterns (Paris, 2019). In phonics approach, word recognition is taught through learning grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) associations. In whole word approach, words are taught in word families, or similar spelling patterns, and only as whole words. This approach skips the decoding process, so students do not sound out words but rather learn to say the word by recognizing its written form. Context is important and providing images can be helpful in this approach (Cicerchia, 2020). Language experience approach uses children's spoken language to develop material for reading, or use students' own writing as the reading materials (Zulkifli, Evawati & Koryati, 2020). The goal of the language experience method is to teach children to read words that are meaningful to them (Cicerchia, 2020). This approach motivates students to read on the grounds that students find the text much easier to read and understand because they use vocabulary and language patterns which are already familiar to them.

2.3. Phonics instruction

Phonics is an instructional strategy used to help children learn the sounds of a language, how they correspond to letters, and how to use this knowledge in decoding words (Jones & Deterding, 2007). For example, the word 'cat' consists of the letters <c> + <a> + <t>, and a child can be helped to read these as /k/ + /æ/ + /t/ and figure out what the word is. In its simplest sense, "phonics refers to a system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle, a system of which a central component is the teaching of correspondences between letters or groups of letters and their pronunciations" (Adams, 1990, p. 50).

Various approaches for teaching reading in a second or foreign language have been developed over the years. Phonics approach is probably the best known and widely used approach to teach reading and writing in the English language (Paris, 2019). The National Reading Panel (2000) defines phonics instruction as "a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use to read and spell words" (p. 90). Reading and spelling abilities are interrelated. In order to read an unfamiliar word, children should be aware of the phonemes in the word and be able to map the letter-sound associations so that they can figure out the approximate pronunciation in that word. For instance, to read the word *map*, learners are first taught the rules that the letter *m* stands for the sound /m/, *a* for /æ/

and *p* for /*p*/ and then blend the sounds together to sound out the word as /*mæp*/. This decoding process facilitates children to form spelling patterns and, given more exposure through practice, children are expected to internalize this knowledge in their reading (Adams, 1990).

PA is the understanding, or insight, that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds. Without this insight, phonics instruction does not make sense to children (Blevins, 2006). PA activities help students learn to distinguish individual sounds, or phonemes, within words. They need this skill in order to associate sounds with letters and manipulate sounds to blend words (during reading) or segment words (during spelling). Thus, children need solid PA training for phonics instruction to be effective (Blevins, 2006).

Phonics instruction helps children to understand the alphabetic principle. This enables children to gain a quick start in relating sounds to spellings and thereby decoding words. Phonics instruction also helps to get across the alphabetic principle (i.e. the letters of the alphabet stand for sounds) by teaching the relationships between letters and the sounds they represent (Blevins, 2006). As recognized by Chall (1996, as cited in Blevins, 2006), “systematic and early instruction in phonics leads to better reading: better accuracy of word recognition, decoding, spelling, and oral and silent reading comprehension” (p. 10).

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), there are two main traditional phonics instructional approaches: synthetic phonics and analytic phonics. Synthetic phonics, also referred to as explicit phonics, involves teaching explicitly a discrete sound and corresponding letter and then blending the sounds to form a target word, as illustrated in the previous example of the word *map*. This approach emphasizes systematic and sequential teaching with a clear part-to-whole process. On the other hand, analytic approach, also called implicit phonics, involves teaching phonics implicitly in a whole-to-part manner (National Reading Panel, 2000). That is, students first learn to read whole words rather than sounds in isolation. The students are then given a group of words with the same alliteration and are encouraged to detect the common sound.

2.4. Previous studies

In order to investigate the effects of whole language instruction and phonics instruction on reading fluency and spelling accuracy of children, Maddox and Feng (2013) conducted a study on 22 first-grade students. The students were randomly divided into two instructional groups. One group was instructed using whole language principles, where the children only read words in the context of a story, without any phonics instruction. The other group was instructed using explicit phonics instruction, without a story or any contextual influence. After four weeks of treatment, both groups improved in reading fluency, but the phonics group made greater gains. In spelling accuracy, the phonics group showed slight growth, while the whole language scores decreased. Overall, the phonics group demonstrated greater growth in both reading fluency and spelling accuracy. It is recommended from this research that a literacy approach should combine phonics and whole language into one curriculum, but place greater emphasis on phonics development.

In the same vein, Mamary (2012) conducted a study to investigate the differences in students' performance in reading skills between grade one students who were taught using the

integrated (synthetic phonics and whole word) method and those who were taught using the whole-word method only with 85 EFL Omani students. The results revealed that the students in the integrated method had generally performed well in early reading skills, significantly outperforming their counterparts.

Teaching literacy to children who speak English as their mother tongue is different from teaching to children learning EFL. In the context of teaching English to children in Colombia, Martínez (2011) conducted an action research with a total of 85 grade one student girls to explore the effects that explicit and differentiated phonics instruction has on young EFL students. Phonics instruction for EFL students was differentiated; specifically, the instructional time, instructional sequence and phonics vocabulary need to be adapted to meet EFL students' needs. By analyzing the grades of these students, together with the surveys and interviews of their teachers, and class observations, the findings of this study showed that explicit and differentiated phonics instruction helped students to better decode and pronounce English words, which translated into better understanding of what was being read, and hence improved the EFL students' reading comprehension and literacy skills in general.

English teachers' perception and practices of phonics instruction was investigated by Tu and Su (2011) with a questionnaire-based survey to collect data from 34 teachers. The results showed that the participated teachers shared a similar set of beliefs that phonics could be used as a basic gateway to early English literacy to promote students' decoding, encoding and reading automaticity. The teachers' phonics practices in the classroom were found to be in accordance with the phonics teaching principles. The teachers highly valued the overall effects of phonics instruction in spite of some difficulties experienced by students. This study used only a questionnaire as the data collection instrument so the findings did not reflect the teachers' actual practices of phonics instruction in their class.

In the current English teaching and learning context in Hue city, little research has been done to investigate what teachers think about phonics instruction, and how it is applied in the classroom. Therefore, this research plans to explore the perception and practices of primary school teachers in Hue city on phonics instruction using a combination of data collection instruments consisting of a questionnaire, classroom observations and interviews.

3. Methodology

This research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. To generally understand teachers' perception and practices when applying phonics instruction in teaching reading to young English learners (YELs), a questionnaire contained all closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data was used in this study. It employed a five-point Likert scale to measure the extent of the participants' agreement or frequency ranging from "1" (strongly disagree or never) to "5" (strongly agree or always). For qualitative data, nonparticipant class observations and semi-structured interviews were utilized to find more insights about the participants' individual teaching practices. During the class observations, the researcher watched and recorded the classroom activities without any involvement. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, which made it convenient for the interviewees to express their ideas.

In terms of participants, 27 Vietnamese teachers of English at seven primary schools in various areas of Hue, including Tran Quoc Toan, Thuan Thanh, Thuan Loc, Thuan Hoa, Phu Cat, Vy Da, and Truong An were involved in this study. These participants belonging to three age groups (20 – 29, 30 – 39, and 40 – 49 years old), and three working experience groups (less than 1 year, 1-5 years, and more than 5 years of teaching) might form a sample representing primary school teachers of English in the city.

For quantitative data analysis, the results from the questionnaire data were subsequently tabulated and converted to percentages and discussed together with those from the interview and class observation data. For qualitative data analysis, a summary was produced as soon as possible after each interview or observation session. The qualitative data were then analyzed by using thematic analysis and comparative analysis. After that, all the data collecting from the questionnaire, observations and interview were compared, contrasted and discussed together to answer the two research questions.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Teachers’ perception of using phonics instruction in teaching reading to YELs at some primary schools in Hue

Teachers’ perception of phonics and the importance of phonics

Phonics instruction focuses on the teaching of sound-spelling relationships. The results from the questionnaires show that nearly 20% of the participants did not agree with the statement that teaching phonics is teaching the relationship between sounds and their spellings. Conversely, a remarkable proportion of the surveyed participants (81.5%) agreed with that statement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Agreement of Recognizing Letters in Teaching and Learning Phonics

| Level of Agreement | Surveyed Participants (N=27) | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| | N | % |
| Absolutely agree | 10 | 37.04 |
| Agree | 12 | 44.44 |
| Neutral | 0 | 0.00 |
| Disagree | 3 | 11.11 |
| Absolutely disagree | 2 | 7.41 |
| Total | 27 | 100.00 |

When being asked to self-assess their knowledge of phonics, five out of six teachers shared the idea that they had enough understanding of English phonics to teach students. One teacher admitted that she had quite limited understanding of phonics. To answer the question “What is phonics instruction?” two out of the six interviewed participants claimed that “Phonics instruction is the teaching of word stress, sentence intonation and how a word is pronounced” (Interviewee 01 & Interviewee 06). The other interviewed teachers indicated that phonics was the teaching of letters and sounds, which helped students have better pronunciation.

As shown in Table 2, all of the teachers participated in the questionnaire agreed that phonics helps improve children's spelling ability in English, promote their decoding skills which are vital in the process of learning to read the English language, and increase their competence to recognize and read vocabulary. Besides, around 30% of the interviewed teachers added an idea that by learning phonics, students' English pronunciation is much improved.

Even though a large number of teachers agreed that students' reading ability can be improved effectively by learning phonics, up to 19% were not sure about this benefit of learning phonics, and more than 7% held a view of strong disagreement with this idea.

Table 2. Teachers' perception on the importance of phonics

| Statement | Absolutely agree | | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | | Absolutely disagree | |
|---|------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|---|---------------------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Phonics helps children to prompt spelling pattern of vocabulary | 6 | 22.22 | 21 | 77.78 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Phonics helps promote children's decoding skills | 10 | 37.04 | 14 | 51.85 | 3 | 11.11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Phonics helps increase the ability to recognize and read vocabulary | 8 | 29.63 | 16 | 59.26 | 3 | 11.11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Phonics helps improve students' reading ability effectively | 6 | 22.22 | 14 | 51.85 | 5 | 18.52 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7.41 |

All of the interviewed teachers chose to say "yes" to the question whether phonics is important to primary school students in general, and to their reading skills in particular. The teachers agreed that phonics helped students read more exactly, have better spelling of the words, and have better pronunciation. The result reveals a veiled perception of the teachers about the phonics concept. Almost all of the teachers thought of phonics as a means to help with students' pronunciation, not with literacy skills.

Teachers' opinion about scope and sequence of phonics learning

Table 3 tabulates the scope in which the phonics should be taught at the elementary school level. All of the teachers deemed that single consonants and short vowels should be prioritized in phonics learning. Consonant clusters and long vowels were picked by more than half of the teachers. Digraphs and less frequent sound spellings such as y-controlled and r-controlled vowels and inflectional endings were less noted by the teachers.

Table 3. Teachers' opinion about scope of phonics learning

| Item | Surveyed participants (N=27) | |
|---|------------------------------|--------|
| | N | % |
| Single consonants (e.g. b, c, d, f, g, to z) | 27 | 100.00 |
| Short vowels (e.g. a, e, i, o, u) | 27 | 100.00 |
| Silent e (e.g. lake, cake, gate) | 12 | 44.44 |
| Consonant clusters (e.g. bl, br, cl, tr, str) | 17 | 62.96 |

| | | |
|--|----|-------|
| Long vowels (e.g. ai, ay, oa, oe) | 15 | 55.56 |
| Digraphs (e.g. ch, sh, wh, ph) | 9 | 33.33 |
| y-controlled vowels (e.g. my, by, fly) | 11 | 40.74 |
| r-controlled vowels (e.g. ar, er, ir, or) | 8 | 29.63 |
| Inflectional ending in verb (-ing, -ed) | 10 | 37.04 |
| Inflectional ending in plural form (-s, -es) | 13 | 48.15 |

Talking about the curriculum containing the teaching of phonics at primary schools, all of the interviewed teachers shared their ideas that phonics was mainly taught for grade 1 and grade 2 as students would learn more about grammar and the four English language skills from grade 3 and they normally followed the scope and sequence of teaching in their textbooks. Particularly, 26 letters and sounds were the main content that the teachers taught in terms of phonics. All of the teachers shared the same point as “I follow the textbooks’ program to teach students letters, sounds and vocabulary” (Interviewee 02).

Teachers’ opinions about types of phonics instruction used in classroom

Nearly 70% of the teachers agreed and absolutely agreed that phonics should be taught explicitly to children. No participants chose to teach implicitly (see Figure 1). The interview results are similar to the results of the questionnaire in that phonics should be taught explicitly rather than implicitly to YELs. One of the interviewed teachers shared her opinion: “Primary school students are too young to learn phonics rules implicitly.” (Interviewee 04). This result is similar to the findings of Blevins (2006) which indicate that the most effective type of instruction is explicit (direct) instruction.

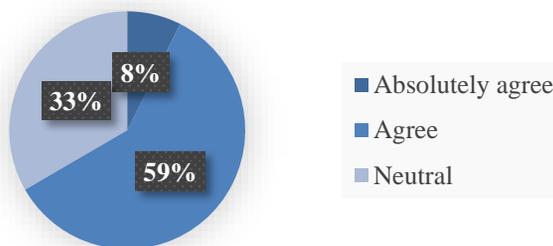


Figure 1. Agreement of using explicit phonics instruction to YLLs

4.2. Teacher’s practices of using phonics instruction in teaching reading to YELs

Teachers’ use of phonics learning activities

As shown in Table 4, regarding the phonics activities, all of the teachers reported that word family should be included in the phonics learning activities, followed by alphabetic writing and recognition, oral phoneme blending and phoneme decoding in short sentences. About one third of the participants noted discrimination, substitution and sound blending as phonics learning activities that should be used.

Table 4. Teachers' reported use of phonics learning activities

| Items | Surveyed participants (N=27) | |
|---|------------------------------|--------|
| | N | % |
| Short decodable sentence reading (e.g. -at -> A fat cat sat on a hat) | 20 | 74.07 |
| Word family | 27 | 100.00 |
| Initial and final consonant substitution | 10 | 37.04 |
| Oral phoneme blending (e.g. hat -> /h/.../æ /.../t/) | 21 | 77.78 |
| Oral sound blending (e.g. consonant blends such as br, fr, cl) | 11 | 40.74 |
| Alphabetic writing and recognition | 21 | 77.78 |
| Initial, middle and final sound discrimination | 8 | 29.63 |

Frequency of phonics activities used in class

In terms of the frequency of phonics activities used in the classroom, more than 90% of the surveyed teachers usually or always implicitly encouraged their students to decode new words by applying phonic rules. The second most popular activity employed by the teachers is word family sorting which was used by more than 80% of the participants. Over 70% usually instructed letter-sound relationships explicitly, segmented multi-syllable word into syllables, segmented vocabulary into smaller parts, and applied the previously taught phonic rules to guide the students to read new target words. Sound discrimination is the least frequently used (see Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of phonics activities used in class

| Item | Always | | Usually | | Sometimes | | Rarely | | Never | |
|---|--------|-------|---------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Segment vocabulary into smaller parts | 7 | 25.93 | 12 | 44.44 | 5 | 18.52 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11.11 |
| Apply the previously taught phonic rules to guide the new target words | 6 | 22.22 | 14 | 51.85 | 5 | 18.52 | 4 | 14.81 | 0 | 0 |
| Explicitly instruct letter-sound relationships | 6 | 22.22 | 14 | 51.85 | 5 | 18.52 | 4 | 14.81 | 0 | 0 |
| Implicitly encourage learners to decode new word by applying phonic rules | 6 | 22.22 | 19 | 70.37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7.41 |
| Segment multi-syllable word into syllables | 8 | 29.63 | 12 | 44.44 | 4 | 14.81 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11.11 |
| Use sound discrimination | 9 | 33.33 | 5 | 18.52 | 13 | 48.15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Use word family sorting | 5 | 18.52 | 18 | 66.67 | 4 | 14.81 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In the observed classes, the teachers spent around five minutes teaching letters and sounds using visual techniques in the lessons for grade 1 and grade 2 students. The teachers showed the pictures of letters and read aloud. Then they got the students to repeat chorally and individually. No other activities were used to practice the letters and sounds. The teaching of vocabulary was followed. The purpose of teaching vocabulary in accordance with phonics sound is not only to provide students with new words, but also to let students recognize the sounds in those words. However, the observed teachers focused on teaching students how to pronounce the words using whole-word approach (i.e. students listen to the teacher then repeat), and the meaning of the vocabulary. The teachers did not teach students the connection between the sounds they had just learned and the vocabulary.

In the lesson for grade 4 students, phonics was not taught in any parts of the lesson even though the researcher chose to attend a reading lesson. Students were taught to read new vocabulary by listening to and repeating after their teacher, without being explained the phonics rules embedded in each word. On the whole, the results from classroom observations reveal that phonics instruction was rarely used to teach both reading and vocabulary.

Talking about the phonics activities used in the class, all of the interviewed teachers shared the idea that they would let students listen and repeat the letters and sounds and for the main part of their lessons, they would teach vocabulary using whole-word approach. In the interview with the teachers about the difficulties that they had when using phonics instruction to teach reading in class, they admitted that it was complicated and time consuming for them to explain to children about phonics rules and how to apply the rules. In the same vein, a teacher added an idea about the class size as follows:

“The class size is rather large, normally we have more than 35 kids in a class. It is always a big challenge to manage and teach them. I think using phonics instruction to teach could be more effective with small size class, not with this large” (Interviewee 05).

The current situation of teaching and learning English in which students often take extra classes and the curriculum is heavily implemented was also mentioned by some teachers as a challenge for them. Specifically, a teacher revealed that:

“Almost all of my students are joining at least one English class after school, so they may know how to read some words before I teach them in the scheduled lesson. Also, other teachers and I may use different methods of teaching, using phonics instruction may not bring about any good effect if it is employed by only one teacher” (Interviewee 06).

Additionally, another teacher pointed out that “The teaching contents developed from the curriculum are rather heavy and we cannot focus on every section, so we have to choose the main points to teach. We normally concentrate on the contents which might appear in the test” (Interviewee 01).

The findings from the questionnaire data in this study are similar to those found in Tu and Su’s (2011) study: the participated teachers highly valued the overall effects of phonics instruction, and their phonics practices were reported to be in accordance with the phonics teaching principles. However, the data from class observations and interviews indicate different findings. In the observed classes, phonics instruction was employed limitedly in the lessons for grade 1 and grade 2 students, and hardly used in the reading lesson for grade 4 students. The teachers mentioned various phonics activities used in the class in their responses to the questionnaire, yet none of the activities were employed in their observed classes. Additionally, the interviewed teachers admitted that their limited employment of phonics instruction was due to many difficulties that they encountered in the reality of teaching primary school classes.

5. Conclusion and implications

5.1. Conclusion

Most of the teachers recognized the important role of phonics instruction in teaching children in general, and in teaching reading to YELs in particular. Specifically, phonics helps

increase students' word recognition and spelling competence, and thus improve students' reading ability. The teachers also agreed that phonics should be taught early at primary school, from easy to difficult sound-spellings, and explicitly instead of implicitly. However, many teachers were unsure or conflicted when talking about aspects of phonics, and this led to the reality that they mainly taught basic letters and sounds, and did not exploit phonics instruction to enhance students' English literacy.

Regarding the teachers' in-class practice of using phonics instruction to teach reading for primary school students, encouraging learners to decode new words by applying phonic rules, sorting word family, instructing letter-sound relationships, segmenting multi-syllable word into syllables, and segmenting vocabulary into smaller parts are the most frequent activities chosen by the surveyed teachers. Nonetheless, in real classroom practice, phonics instruction was hardly employed by the observed teachers due to many reasons including teachers' lack of skills and knowledge of phonics, large size classes and limited teaching time, teachers' doubt of teaching methods' effects, and heavily implemented curriculum.

5.2. Implications

Since no single method can successfully teach all children to read, teachers should have knowledge of multiple methods of teaching reading and also be aware of students' learning styles and preferences in order to select the methods suitable for their students. Although nearly all of the teachers in this study are aware of the role and benefits of phonics instruction in teaching English reading to their students, there are plenty of difficulties for them to bring this instruction into classroom practice, given the reasons found. Therefore, it is of great necessity to provide English primary school teachers with proper training about phonics instruction, especially with a focus on the aspects of phonics and specific phonics techniques found rarely used in this study. When teachers are well equipped with knowledge of the core principles and skills of teaching phonics, they might be confident to make attempts to use this teaching method flexibly in the classroom.

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VIỆC SỬ DỤNG ĐÁNH VẦN NGỮ ÂM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRONG DẠY KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC TIẾNG ANH CHO HỌC SINH

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này điều tra nhận thức của giáo viên tiếng Anh tiểu học về đánh vần ngữ âm và việc ứng dụng ngữ âm vào dạy đọc cho học sinh. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bản câu hỏi, dự giờ lớp học, và phỏng vấn với sự tham gia của 27 giáo viên ở các trường tiểu học tại một thành phố ở miền trung Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được tổng hợp, phân tích và diễn giải về mặt định lượng và định tính. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng hầu hết giáo viên tham gia vào nghiên cứu này đều nhận thức được vai trò quan trọng của đánh vần ngữ âm đối với việc dạy đọc tiếng Anh cho học sinh tiểu học. Tuy nhiên, kiến thức ngữ âm của giáo viên là một vấn đề đáng đặt câu hỏi khi rất nhiều giáo viên không chắc chắn hoặc mâu thuẫn khi trao đổi về các khía cạnh của ngữ âm. Đánh vần ngữ âm rất ít được những giáo viên này ứng dụng trong lớp học do nhiều nguyên nhân, bao gồm hiểu biết và kỹ năng về ngữ âm chưa vững, sĩ số lớp học đông với thời lượng dạy hạn chế, nghi ngại về tác động của các phương pháp và khối lượng chương trình dạy học được triển khai nặng.

Từ khóa: Ngữ âm, dạy đọc, trẻ em học tiếng Anh