

Integration of Phonics into Elementary Reading Programs

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SIGNATURE PAGE

ABSTRACT

Understanding phonics is an important part of a young student's ability in learning how to read. The problem is that there is no set system that teachers follow in teaching phonics skills. The purpose of this study is to discover the ways that first grade teachers teach phonics to their students to help promote students success in reading.

The present study is a qualitative design using an interview protocol to collect information from teachers in elementary school classrooms, in public and private institutions. Participants formed a sample of convenience. They were recruited from suburban areas in the area north of San Francisco. The data collected was analyzed by coding themes. Results indicate teachers use three main instrumental methods to teach phonics: integration of spelling into reading, differentiated instruction based on students' learning levels, and varied methods of instruction.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Reading is an essential part of life and a major focus of elementary school teaching. The use of phonics to aid in teaching children to read is an important component of successful reading programs, however there are no set requirements for elementary school teachers in how they should teach phonics. Integrating phonics into reading programs is a successful way to teach phonics; however there are still teachers that teach phonics and reading separately and therefore their students are not as successful (Ellis, Hatcher & Hulme, 1994). When reading is connected to phonics, students learn the important skills that are not learned through phonics instruction in isolation. In addition, the integration of phonics into reading programs has shown to be more effective in teaching students to decode words (Lapp & Flood, 1997). It is important to start students in phonics instruction in elementary school because students who have phonics instruction early have a higher reading ability than those students who do not have a strong foundation in their early education (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl & Willows, 2001).

Unfortunately, with no established curricular practice for teaching phonics, teachers can either chose to integrate phonics instruction with reading or teach phonics separately. Additionally, there are many different strategies to teaching phonics that provide a variety of results. Not all students are taught reading with the integration of phonics and some struggle in decoding words. This means that students struggle in sounding out new words and blending letters together to make words. Without explicit teacher direction in connecting phonics to reading instruction, many students lack the scaffolding needed to become strong readers at an early age.

Understanding the importance of integrating phonics into reading instruction is important because it can increase the students' reading ability at early ages. Also, students who are able to use phonics skills to help decode unknown words will be stronger readers. Through interviewing teachers, the researcher describes how teachers in the field integrate phonics into reading instruction.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because integration of phonics instruction into reading programs helps enhance students reading ability in elementary school. The California Department of Education English/Language Arts framework states “kindergarten and first grade teachers must teach phonemic awareness and phonics to their students” (p. 36). The framework also states that by first grade, students should have an understanding of phonics. This study addresses the requirements set forth by the framework for teachers teaching students to read. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to discover how teachers are integrating phonics instruction as they teach their students to read.

Background Information

Researchers Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) found that a systematic approach to teaching phonics is more effective than non-systematic approaches. In addition, phonics programs that are integrated into reading instruction are beneficial to young readers and helps prevent reading difficulties. Despite this research, there has been no requirement to teach students phonics by integrating phonics with the reading program. According to Lapp and Flood (1997) students who learn phonics in isolation are less proficient in reading than those students who start early learning with decoding skills and phonics. Additionally Ellis, Hatcher, and Hulme (1994) affirm that there is a significant difference in reading skills between students

who were not instructed in phonics and reading together and those students who had instruction in both.

Research Questions

This study addresses two research questions. The research questions are:

1. What is the most effective way to teach phonics in elementary school?
2. How do teachers integrate phonics into their reading programs?

Definition of Terms

1. Phonics: Instruction in the association of speech sounds with printed symbols (Cecil, 2011)
2. Phonological Linkage Hypothesis: The link between a student's reading skills to their phonological skills (Ellis, Hatcher, & Hulme 1994)
3. Systematic Phonics: Any method following a carefully selected sequence of letter-sound relationships, organized into a logical order. (Cecil, 2011)
4. Phonemic awareness: The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words (Cecil, 2011)
5. Synthetic phonics: A method of teaching reading by training an individual to pronounce sounds associated with particular letters in isolation and then blending them together. (Cecil, 2011)

SECTION II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to discover the ways that K-2 teachers teach phonics to their students. Research indicates that integrating phonics into reading instruction leads to higher reading proficiency levels than when phonics is taught in isolation (Ellis, Hatcher & Hulme, 1994). However, teachers in the field are using a variety of ways to teach phonics. The first section discusses the California Department of Education framework for language arts (2007), specifically phonics content standards for kindergarten and first grade. The next section, “Integration of Phonics in Reading”, includes three articles that are in support of the integration of phonics into reading instruction. The final section, “Issues in Teaching Students to Read”, includes an article that presents teachers’ concerns on how best to teach students to read.

California Framework for Reading/Language Arts

The California Department of Education published a framework (2007) for reading/language arts that teachers use as their foundation for teaching reading in elementary schools in California. This review will focus in the area phonics in kindergarten and first grade.

Kindergarten and first grade teachers teach phonics to their students. By first grade, students should understand that words are made up of sounds. In addition, first grade students should have a working knowledge of phonics, that is, understand the relationship between speech and print and learn the sounds letters make in words. Students’ need phonics to in order to be successful readers.

Kindergarten students are expected to “hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of a sequence of speech sounds” this is known as phonemic awareness (California Department of Education, 2007, p. 35). At this age students are auditory learners of phonics and print is not involved in instruction. Students in kindergarten are expected to learn the fundamentals that will later help connect sounds to written symbols as well as learning to read and recognize the alphabet writing system and their phonemes. As an instructor lessons should incorporate oral activities that focus on rhyming, matching words with the beginning sounds and blending sounds into the formation of words.

Specific teaching strategies are recommended because they are effective in teaching phonemic awareness to kindergarten and first grade students. These strategies will help students with their ability to associate letters and sounds. This will help students with decoding words and word recognition, which in turn will help students with their reading:

1. Modeling phonemic awareness tasks and responses orally and following student’s production of the task.
2. Making students’ cognitive manipulations of sounds overt by using concrete representations.
3. Teaching skills explicitly and systematically.
4. Adding letter-sound correspondence instruction to phonological awareness intervention after students demonstrate early phonemic awareness.
5. Progressing from the easier phonemic awareness activities to the more difficult.
6. Focusing on segmentation or the combination of blending and segmenting.
7. Starting with larger linguistic units and proceeding to smaller linguistic units.
8. Focusing beginning instruction on the phonemic level of phonological units with short words.
9. Focusing on the initial sound, then on the final sounds, and lastly on the medial sound in words.

10. Introducing several continuous sounds first before introducing stop sounds because stop sounds are more difficult to isolate.
11. Providing brief instruction sessions.
(p. 36)

First grade teachers focus on phonics instruction. First graders should be able to match oral words with printed words and discriminate letters, words, and sentences. Instruction and practice of phonics for first-grade students should include:

- Learning to analyze words at the phoneme level
- Working with phonemes in all positions in words
- Progressing from identifying or distinguishing the positions of sounds in words to producing the sound and adding, deleting, and changing selected sounds
- Allocating a significant amount of time to blending, segmenting, and manipulating tasks
- Working with increasingly longer words
- Expanding beyond consonant-vowel-consonant words to more complex phonemic structures
- Incorporating letters into phonemic awareness activities
- Aligning the words used in phonemic awareness activities with those used in reading (p. 53).

“First-grade students who have the fundamental understanding of phonemic structure of words and can associate letters to sounds are able to decode and recognize words that help them with progression of learning to read” (p. 53).

Integration of Phonics in Reading Instruction

The following meta-analysis confirms that reading programs that integrate phonics into reading instruction have a higher success rate than programs that are solely reading based or phonics based. Researchers Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) sought to determine the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction and its role in helping students learn to read. To this end, they conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies.

Ehri et al. found that using a systematic phonics approach is more effective than a non-systematic approach, such as teaching phonics in isolation, in teaching students to

read. In addition, phonics programs that are integrated into reading instruction are beneficial to young readers and helps prevent reading difficulties. The researchers also found that students' reading performance is better when phonics instruction began earlier than first grade. Students who had systematic phonics instruction were more effective in decoding novel words than those who did not have systematic phonics instruction.

Ehri et al. conclude that systematic phonics instruction helped children to learn to read more effectively than having no phonics instruction or non-systematic phonics instruction. They also conclude that phonics instruction had a greater impact on learning to reading in the grades of kindergarten and first grade compared to students in second through sixth grades who had already learned a system of reading.

Lopp and Flood (1997) also argue that the integration of phonics is important and has a high success rate for students beginning to read. In this study the researchers observe a lesson taught by a first grade teacher. The purpose of this study was to make the case that phonics should be taught in context rather than in isolation. Lopp and Flood believe that teaching children to use the code "which is a system of symbols used to represent assigned meanings along with distinguishing words are comprised of letters and sounds" will help further students in the process of developing reading skills. Also Lopp and Flood focus their argument on the importance of integrating phonics in reading rather than teaching phonics in isolation.

Lopp and Flood report on a reading lesson observation to illustrate the importance of phonics integration. They observed a first grade teacher named Kelly Goss who teaches at an elementary school in San Diego, California. Goss provided a good example of teaching phonics through integration.

Before Goss started reading the story to the students, she began by discussing walking her dog and then introduced her dogs' name as Clifford. This introduction of her dog leads to the discussion of thinking how students walk their own, or a neighbor's dog. After the discussion Goss introduced the book that they were going to be reading about a boy and his dog going for a walk. Goss had the students look at the pictures and make predictions before she began her read-aloud. After reading the book Goss' students discussed the book and compared their predictions to the events in the story. Goss then reread the story encouraging students to read along and listen for color words. Goss had a list of color words on the board next to her that the students helped add to using the correct color crayon. Goss explained the color words help "see" the story. (p. 696) The students helped Goss investigate the sentences in the book by breaking down each sentence by how many words were in each sentence, noting punctuation and capitalization. Goss also had students match sight words to their word wall. Goss explained the concept of rhyming words to her students and focused on the sounds of /a/. Students then helped to create a list of words that rhymed using the letter /a/ (i.e. bat, cat, fat, pat) which Goss turned into flashcards that students copied to as practice with partners. After Goss had taught her entire class she pulled groups to the read the story again and focused her instruction on comprehension, story sequence, sight and color words, awareness of letter, phonograms, and relation of sounds made in words.

Lapp and Flood (1997) observed Goss teaching a reading lesson that integrated and taught phonics in context with the story by using a variety of strategies to teach the /a/ and /at/ sounds to her students. From their observations, the researchers conclude that students who start early learning with decoding skills and phonics are stronger readers and help the student's growth in vocabulary, concepts, and general knowledge. Also students who are taught phonics

contextually when learning to read enjoy reading. Students who have difficulty with sounds segments need more instruction of phonemic awareness. Children who learn phonics in isolation are less proficient in reading than those students who start early and leave the students to rely on just being able to sound out words as their only strategy rather than using strategies of decoding and word recognition.

Another study conducted used four equal groups that had students in different circumstances for learning. The conclusion of this study was that the group who had both reading instruction along with phonics instruction together had a stronger success rate in overall reading performance.

Researchers Ellis, Hatcher, and Hulme (1994) sought to reaffirm the phonological linkage hypothesis, the link between a student's reading skills to their phonological skills, by conducting a longitudinal intervention study. The researchers conducted a 25-week study on 124 seven-year-old students who were in their third year of schooling in the United Kingdom at Cumbria Education Authority. The purpose of the study was to determine whether teaching phonics alongside reading was more effective than teaching reading instruction alone or phonics alone. The evidence links the development of reading skills in children to their underlying phonological skills. Studies have included children with specific reading difficulties along with correlational studies of normal children.

The participants in the study were 124 seven-year-old students who were experiencing difficulties in learning to read. Using the phonological linkage hypothesis participants were studied to see if an intervention of combining phonological training and reading instruction would be more effective than an intervention of just either reading instruction alone or phonological training alone. The students were divided into four groups based on sex, age, IQ,

and reading age. The groups were reading and phonological teaching (R+P), phonological teaching alone (P), reading alone (R), and the control group(C). All students in this study were assessed before starting the study, after the study ended, and reassessed nine months after the study ended to see if the students were still progressing. The students were tested in several areas including cognitive measures, reading, early word recognition, British ability scales word reading test, Neale Analysis reading ability, non-word reading test, spelling, arithmetic, phonological skills, sound blending, non-word segmentations, and sound categorization.

The groups received instruction from 23 different teachers who taught individual students for 30 to 40 minute sessions over 20 weeks. The teachers worked with students based on the group in which they were placed. The instruction for (R+P) included phonological activities that included identification, rhyming words, identification of words as units within sentences, manipulation of syllables, word sounds that the teacher monitored and scored at the end of each session and activity. Also in this group was instruction of reading that had participants re-reading books for accuracy that had been introduced to the participant the session before. The (R+P) group did linking activities that including practicing letter sounds association, writing stories and relating spelling to writing words. The instruction for (P) was the same as reading and phonological instruction with the omission of reading instruction and linking activities. The instruction for (R) was the same as reading and phonological teaching except for the omission of any explicit reference to phonology and any teaching strategies that concerned the phonological linkage activities. The control group received regular classroom teaching without any additions.

The results of the study were the participants who received both (R & P) instruction showed significant progress in compared to participants who received (R) and phonological

instruction alone (P). The participants in (C) were steady through the results not showing in significance. These results were the same throughout all of the testing areas. Ellis, et al.'s biggest finding was the improvement in reading skills of the students who were given the integration of phonological and reading instruction nine months after the study had ended. This showed that students who had both (R &P) instructions were more successful in reading.

The outcome of the study was the Ellis et al. were able to reaffirm that the phonological linkage theory is effective in helping boost reading skills and that phonics should be integrated with reading instruction. The issue up for debate about whether phonological instruction should coincide with the instruction of reading was also resolved due to the study showing that there was a significant difference in reading skills from those who were not instructed in phonological and reading together.

Issues in Teaching Students to Read

In the following article, the researchers discuss a variety of different findings for teaching reading and phonics instruction together. Gooch and Lambirth (2008) interviewed teachers in Kent, England to discuss reading practices and their conceptions of teaching reading. During the time of these interviews, England had just published the Rose Review that urged teachers to teach using synthetic phonics as a strategy for early reading. Gooch and Lambirth asked teachers' three main questions: How as a teacher do you define reading? What issues do you see in teaching reading? What is the relevance to children when it comes to teaching them phonics and reading?

However, the teachers in this interview were not fond of the strategy and throughout the interviews provided evidence as to why it should not be used as a teaching strategy with young children. These interviews included the agreement against using systematic phonics in helping

children to read at an early age along with not teaching children to read until they were developmentally ready. Gooch and Lambirth first discuss reading with the teachers in which their findings are that the government reading “entails children being given the skills to decode print from grapheme into phoneme by means of synthetic phonics teaching” (Gooch, 2008, p. 76). However the teacher’s challenge the government and do not agree with systematic phonics instruction. One of the teachers encourages memorization and defines reading by including memorizing a book and being able to read from memorization as reading. Another teacher defines reading as understanding the content and knowing what is being read by use of decoding letters. One teacher states, “to a certain extent it’s about decoding print but it’s only in terms of being able to make meaning” (Gooch, 2008, p. 78).

One main argument from teachers was that reading is a means to help discover what is important to the individual in a young child. A teacher believed that systematic instruction is inconvenient and that teaching reading is unplanned. Another teacher had the same views of how teaching reading is not a planned activity but rather can be taught in moments. Gooch and Lambirth (2008) acknowledge that literacy is based on culture and knowledge supporting the teachers’ ideas of children learning from their surrounding and community. Another teacher, states, “there is no research that puts systematic synthetic phonics teaching above the other ways to reading” (Gooch & Lambirth 2008, p. 82). Furthermore the teachers interviewed agreed that all three cues are needed to teach reading that include: synaptic cues, illustration cues, and grapho-phonetic cues and to be taught at the very beginning of learning to read.

Gooch and Lambirth (2008) draw a conclusion from the teachers’ interviews that young children are not ready to learn letters and sounds but to inquire learning the sounds by listening to others speak. Also those children must be able to identify sounds and words that

they know before teaching phonics and that systematic phonics is about teaching speed not reading for fun. A majority of the teachers' overall consensus was also stated by Ruth that, "there is a role for some kind of teaching of phonics; it needs to be done when the child is ready and there is a purpose, in conjunction with the context that reading is a purposeful activity" (Goouch & Lambirth 2008, p. 86). Teachers in this study believe that systematic phonics is not a strategy for learning to read and should not be taught to young children due to the child not being developmentally ready to learn letters and sounds.

Summary

The results of this review of the literature indicate that students who are taught phonics instruction alongside reading instruction are more successful in learning to develop their reading skills than those students who did not have this instruction together. Researchers Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) and Lopp and Flood (1997) concluded that the earlier phonics instruction happens the more effective it is in a student's learning process to reading. Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows showed that systematic phonics approach is more effective than non-systematic approaches such as teaching phonics without reading instruction. In addition, phonics programs that are integrated into reading instruction were beneficial to young readers and helped prevent reading difficulties. Lopp and Flood concluded that integration is effective and that students who are taught phonics contextually when learning enjoy reading.

Ellis, Hatcher, and Hulme (1994) conclude that students who received both reading and phonics instruction made significant progress in learning to read compared to students who received reading instruction in isolation. Goouch and Lambirth (2008) concluded that teachers have varying opinions how best to teach students to read.

Overall the integration of phonics into reading instruction is an effective strategy for teaching kindergarten and first grade students to read.

SECTION III: METHODS

Research Design

This research followed a qualitative design using interview protocol. This research addressed two research questions. The first research question was “What is the most effective way to teach phonics in elementary school?” The second research question was “How do teachers integrate phonics into their reading programs?”

The researcher’s observations on teaching reading while including phonics led to the research questions. The researcher had observed that every group of students had a different way of learning to reading and used phonics as a tool to help decode unfamiliar words in reading. After reviewing the literature on the integration of phonics into reading programs the researcher found that teachers who incorporate phonics instruction alongside their reading instruction tended to have more successful readers. The literature then led to questions about integrating phonics. (See Appendix A for Interview Protocol.) After questions were formulated the researcher contacted three teachers throughout Sonoma County who worked in both public and private elementary schools and asked for their participation in the study. The researcher came about the participants by using colleagues at a private school along with acquaintances in the field. The researcher interviewed participants from three elementary school teachers who worked in both public and private first grade classrooms. The researcher analyzed the data by looking for common themes.

Participants

The participants in this study were three 1st grade teachers. Teacher one worked in a private school in Sonoma County and had three years experience in first grade and worked with a small class sizes. Teacher Two was another public school teacher in Sonoma County who had two years of experience in a first grade classroom. Teacher Three was a public school teacher in Sonoma County who has worked in first grade for twenty-five years.

Procedures

The researcher started the interview process by narrowing down the participants to first grade teachers working in one region. The first step the researcher took was to contact the participants to set up a convenient time in which to interview them. After scheduling interviews the researcher sat down individually with each participant and asked a series of questions. The questions were the same for each participant and asked in the same sequence. The interviews were about a half hour to forty five minutes each. The researcher took notes on what the participants were saying during the interview. After the interview was over the researcher transcribed the results of the interview into a word document and compared the different interviews looking for common themes.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed by the researcher was based on how each participant came about becoming a teacher. The data also included how many years each of the participants has been teaching and how many years the participants have taught first grade. The researcher then analyzed how participants integrated phonics into their reading programs and what participants thought were the most effective ways to teach phonics. The researcher analyzed the data using

thematic analysis of interviews. The researcher looked for the common themes between the interviews along with the differences between the participants.

SECTION IV: FINDINGS

Overview

In this section, three first grade elementary school teachers were interviewed from three different elementary schools in a rural county in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. These three teachers were from both private and public elementary schools and varied in years of experience. The interviewees were asked a variation of questions regarding phonics and the integration of phonics into reading programs. Through the interviews three major findings were brought forth.

Finding #1

A key finding that was a common response among the three teachers was that, integration of spelling into reading programs supported the development of phonetic concepts in students. The spelling lists are planned around phonetic concepts such as the long *o* sound. Teachers also incorporated the use of word families when it came to spelling tests so that students learn spelling concept rules. One of the teachers removed the use of spelling tests each week and made spelling tests a monthly routine in which students were not studying the exact words however studying the pattern in which was being taught. “I would say to my students, ‘I know you know how to spell the word ‘mail’, now what happens if I take away the /m/ and change the word to ‘nail’.”

Finding #2

Another key finding, a common response among the three teachers, was that teachers used differentiated instruction when it came to the different students’ learning levels. Two out of the

three teachers discussed breaking their students up into three different language arts groups where concepts taught were based on the students' needs. Teacher Two explained how "every group is working on different phonics skills at the moment but each lesson is geared to help the group with their needs." This finding was important and was shared between the other two teachers because "No child can learn when they are in over their head." Teacher Three also supported this finding by discussing the feelings of how "reading programs move really fast and too fast for those students who are just approaching therefore it is important to build a students confidence by putting them in a group with peers that are on the same level or close to it."

Finding #3

The last key finding was the use of varied instruction. Teachers used different instructional methods and tools to teach phonics such as games, chants, and songs. All teachers interviewed expressed how varied instruction is key due to the fact that students learn in a variety of different ways. Teacher One discussed this during the interview, " You have to teach to every learning style whether its audio, visual, physical, etc." Teacher Three also supported the idea of varied instruction with the advice to new teachers that " when it comes to teaching reading and phonics a teacher must have the understanding that one size doesn't fit all and teachers must recognize meaningful practice and not just worksheets...it is not always the goal to finish the worksheet but the process behind the worksheet." Also, Teacher Three found that integrating technology in student's language arts centers helped promote reinforcement in learning phonics. All teachers used decodable readers in their instruction to highlight the phonetic concepts being studied each week. The use of decodable readers during formal

instruction time with students teachers explained promoted the student's reading. Also having decodable readers along with the language art textbook was a useful tool for teaching phonics.

Summary of Findings

During the interview process there were three themes that occurred throughout the collection of responses from the participants. These themes indicated the overall ideas and opinions of the teachers interviewed. One of the themes that emerged was that teachers found spelling to be a huge role in the integration of phonics into reading. Students who were able to incorporate the phonetic patterns that were taught in a spelling lessons where able to carry the concepts over into their reading using those concepts to help decode words. The other theme that emerged was differentiated instruction that is important to teachers when leveling students into groups based on their reading levels. This was a key a factor in teaching students to read. The last theme to emerge was varied instruction which teachers found to help reach all students different learning styles.

SECTION V: DISCUSSION

There are two specific purposes to this study. One purpose was to discover the best way to teach phonics and integrate it into reading programs. A second purpose was to discover how teachers in elementary schools integrate phonics into their reading programs. The study had two research questions that are as followed: 1. What is the most effective way to teach phonics in elementary school? 2. How do teachers integrate phonics into their reading programs? The primary goal of elementary school is to teach students to become fluent readers and with the integration of phonics, this goal can be achieved. The purpose of this study was to identify the best way to implement the integration of phonics instruction into reading programs to help enhance students reading ability in elementary school.

The first research question asked, what is the most effective way to teach phonics in elementary school? The study conducted by Ellis, Hatcher, and Hulme (1994) shed light on this question. The research article stated that students who received both reading and phonics instruction made significant progress compared to students who received reading instruction alone and phonological instruction alone. A similar study conducted by Lopp and Flood (1997) stated that the integration of phonics is important and has a high success rate for students beginning to read. Both researchers Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) and Lopp and Flood (1997) concluded that the earlier phonics instruction happens the more effective it is in a student's learning process to reading as well. Although these studies shed light on the research questions they do not directly correlate to the themes and findings found during the interview process.

The second research question asked, how do teachers integrate phonics into their reading programs? After interviewing three first grade teachers the researcher was able to gain insight to this question. Teacher One states, “Integration through spelling based on a phonetic concept in a weekly spelling test is key.” Teacher’s emphasized integration of phonics in a variety of ways into reading programs; these ways included leveling students, through differentiated instruction; such as songs and poems, and the use of technology. Teacher Two stated how leveling her students in groups that are appropriate for their learning levels is also key to students success with reading and developmentally building their phonetic concepts. The second research question directly applied to applying phonics into reading programs whereas the first question applied more to what studies have shown. These research questions build off of what studies have shown to how teachers in classrooms actually teach their students with phonetic and reading instruction.

Limitations

The limitations in the study were that there was a limited amount of time in which interviews could be conducted along with a small sample size. There was a limited amount of access to participants as well due to participants’ schedules matching up to the researchers.

Implications

Practical Implications

It appears that students need to have phonics integrated into their reading programs to become stronger readers. It seems students who have strong phonics instruction become aware of the phonetic patterns and concepts that help to decode words when it comes to reading.

Research Implications

For further research in this area it is recommended that there is a longer time to conduct interviews as well as a larger sample size. To extend the research in this area also a future researcher may want to accumulate data that ranges from kindergarten through second grade teacher's perspectives as well including phonemic awareness to the study.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the integration of phonics into elementary school reading programs has shown to be a successful approach to teaching students to become independent readers. The research found that students taught phonics instruction in a blended and integrated approach were more successful in their reading programs. With a foundation built on phonics students benefit when it comes to their reading developmental skills.

About the Author

After working in a first grade classroom for the past three years and working in an elementary school environment for five years, I became interested in the process of teaching students to read. I wanted to gain a better understanding of how phonics is integrated into reading programs and how to get students to become successful readers. This led to my capstone project and the research presented.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Background Information

Male/Female:

Number of years teaching:

Number of years teaching at the current grade level:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Interview Questions

1. Describe how you got into teaching elementary school
2. Describe your background in teaching students to read.
3. Describe how phonics can be integrated into reading programs.
4. Describe how you have seen phonics integration help promote students success in learning to read.
5. Tell me how as a teacher you help teach students who are at different learning levels to read through the use of phonics.
6. Describe the most effective way to teach phonics in an elementary school.
7. What are some key findings or ideas about teaching phonics and reading for teachers who are just beginning their careers?