Status, Challenges, Andstrategies of Phonics Instruction in Thecentral Regionofchina

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Abstract: Phonics is a teaching method used to guide students to directly learn the pronunciation rules of 26 letters and letter combinations in words by emphasizing the name sounds of letters to establish the connection between letters and letter combinations with pronunciation to achieve the ability to read words when they see them and understand the words when they hear them. This method can reduce the difficulty of English learning for elementary students. To explore relationship among the status, challenges and strategies, the research made a questionnaire which was conducted in the central region of China-Henna Province, and 457 English teachers from 20 public primary schools and ten private elementary schools were randomly selected as participants. It was found that status of teachers' overall perception with efficient phonics instruction is relatively high, but challenges resulted from traditional teaching methods and the lacking of updated teaching resources led to students' inefficient learning results. A highly significant correlation has been illustrated among the three variables When Grouped According to Profile. The better the status is, the less challenges teachers encountered, the more challenges exist, the more strategies are accepted.

1. Introduction

Phonics is an English learning method that combines phonics, spelling, and reading. By learning the corresponding relationship between English letters or letter combinations and pronunciation, English learners can read when they see the words, and write when they hear the sound of the words as well as matching the sound with the corresponding letter or letter groups. Phonics is of great help to primary English learners. This learning method, starting from pronunciation by word decoding and word encoding, helps learners quickly master the pronunciation of words. On the other hand, it establishes the rules corresponding to the sound of letters in words. It finds a way for students to read independently, reducing the difficulty of primary English learning reading and spelling. By learning the phonics spelling method, students can understand the text by sound and master the pronunciation of unfamiliar words. They even can learn the semantics of the learned words to improve their reading fluency. Any form of language learning is inseparable from reading. Reading with phonics can establish the connection between vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, and even meaning, and it will undoubtedly positively impact the accuracy and fluency of reading, especially

for elementary English learners.

To find out the actual status and challenges of phonics instruction in Henan province, the researcher did a questionnaire research. Based on the questionnaire results, the author can have an overall understanding of the status of phonics teaching in China, and the questionnaire can also show the difficulties and challenges for EFL teachers in primary school. With the results, this research explores appropriate strategies for EFL teachers to assist their phonics instruction in textbooks and its teaching effect and feasibility for elementary English teaching and future researchers [1].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Phonics Instruction

Phonics is a teaching method used by children whose mother tongue is English to learn English. This teaching method guides students to directly learn the pronunciation rules of 26 letters and letter combinations in words instead of emphasizing the name sounds of letters to establish the connection between letters and letter combinations and pronunciation so that students can master English spelling rules in a relaxed atmosphere, to achieve the ability to read words when they see them and understand the words when they hear them. This method can reduce the difficulty of English learning for elementary students [2].

In foreign countries, the development and research of phonics are closely related to teaching reading. American reading instruction in the 1890s was the earliest origin of phonics teaching. At that time, phonics was mainly used in reading classes to learn letters, spell words, and memorize texts. Most English-speaking nations have used phonics extensively for elementary English teaching since the turn of the 20th century, particularly in teaching reading and writing. In order to help elementary English learners comprehend the connection between English alphabetic writing and their sound patterns, phonics has long been regarded as an effective teaching tool. After 1900, phonics became popular. By the 1970s, the teaching of phonics was relatively mature. In the late 1990s, phonics teaching was widely used in English classrooms in various states of the United States, and its importance has been continuously highlighted. The phonics method has become an important teaching method in Canada, Australia, Singapore, and other English-speaking countries, and it is one of the world's most influential English teaching methods. The content of this section will present the relevant research on phonics abroad and define the concept of phonics [3].

Compared with native learners, Chinese EFL students struggle more with reading and writing than native speakers do, although phonics helps them improve their reading abilities (Wright et al., 2016). Since vocabulary is the fundamental building block of reading, it is stated in its most recent (2011) revision that students should be able to "understand basic spelling rules and decode simple words accordingly." Furthermore, it lists how much reading and reading comprehension pupils should achieve at different grades. Therefore, students must develop their decoding ability, including script, phonemic awareness, and blending skills (Wang & Chen, 2016). Phonics plays a vital role on the road to reaching the National English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education students [4, 5].

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted in the central region of China-Hennan Province, and 457 English teachers from 20 public primary schools and ten private elementary schools were randomly selected

as participants. They are English teachers from Grade 1 to Grade6 [6].

3.2. Instruments

The primary method utilized in survey research for data collection is the questionnaire with which data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when completing the questionnaires. This is useful for large populations when interviews would be impractical [7].

3.3. Procedure

The descriptive method and quantitative method were adopted in this study to explain the relationship between the three variables. Quantitative method is mainly the analysis of the three variables in the same subject group. Characteristics were established in the questionnaire, such as status, challenges, and strategies of phonics instruction. Data were collected through an anonymous online website called Wenjuanxing (a popular website for questionnaires in China). With the approval of 20 public primary schools and ten private primary schools in Henan province, the researcher sent the questionnaire link to 30 directors of every grade majoring in English to conduct a pilot study before distributing the questionnaire, which was used to ensure the instrument's validity. To make every item understood, both English and Chinese versions were provided for choice [8].

3.4. Reliability Test Result

Table 1: Reliability Test Result

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Curriculum Content	0.959	Excellent
Methods of Instruction	0.921	Excellent
Assessment	0.888	Good
Challenges of Teachers	0.908	Excellent
Challenges of Students	0.856	Good
Strategies of Teachers	0.901	Excellent
Strategies of Students	0.831	Good

George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: "_ >. 9 – Excellent, _ >. 8 - Good, _. 7 - Acceptable,_ > 6 - Questionable,_ >, 5- Poor, and_< .5- Unacceptable".

After getting the result tested to be reliable in Table 1, the researcher forwarded to conduct the formal large-scale questionnaire with the consent of all the respondents. When all the feedback was returned, a final result accessible for downloading was produced automatically. Then the researcher examined and interpreted the data in Excel form, and the significant data form was sent to the researcher center in the Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas to encode the data by SPSS.

3.5. Data Analysis

After the big data were analyzed, the researcher received the tables from the statistic center of the school. The tables were used to describe the correlation among three variables with the computer methods in terms of frequency distribution, weighted mean, and rank. All collected data were engaged in statistical analysis by the tool Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Concerning the research ethics standards, the researcher enlisted the permission of the school principals before the research was conducted. They can choose to log out of the page whenever they want to withdraw from the questionnaire. The purpose of the research was explicated to them before they were engaged in this survey. No specific names were required in the sheet in order to keep it confidential. Except for being English teachers working in primary schools, the respondents' identities were kept a secret. The director claimed his consent before the research was issued. Before the study, the participants were advised to be inform of all the instructions and procedures, the data collected, and the confidentiality of their personal information was kept with the highest safety.

4. Results

Table 2: Relationship between the Status of Phonics Instruction and Challenges of Phonics Instruction in the Central Region of China

Curriculum Content in Your Class	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Challenges of the Teacher	-.335**	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenges of the Students	-.362**	0.000	Highly Significant
Methods of Instruction in your Class			
Challenges of the Teacher	-.355**	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenges of the Students	-.330**	0.000	Highly Significant
Assessment in your Class			
Challenges of the Teacher	-.321**	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenges of the Students	-.436**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 2 shows the association between the status and challenges of phonics teaching/instruction. The computed r-values indicated a moderate indirect correlation; the resulting p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that a significant relationship exists and implies that the better the status, the lesser the challenges experienced. The data analysis indicates that phonics teaching and instruction status in China is significantly related to the challenges teachers and students face in the Central Region of China. As the quality of phonics teaching improves, the challenges experienced by both teachers and students tend to decrease.

Table 3: Relationship between the Status of Phonics Teaching/Instruction in China and Strategies of Phonics Instruction in the Central Region of China

Curriculum Content in Your Class	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Strategies of Teachers	-.376**	0.000	Highly Significant
Strategies of Students	-.447**	0.000	Highly Significant
Methods of Instruction in your Class			
Strategies of Teachers	-.375**	0.000	Highly Significant
Strategies of Students	-.459**	0.000	Highly Significant
Assessment in your Class			
Strategies of Teachers	-.341**	0.000	Highly Significant
Strategies of Students	-.412**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 3 reveals the association between the status and phonics teaching/instruction strategies. The computed r-values indicated a moderate indirect correlation; the resulting p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that a significant relationship exists and indicates the better the status, the people with low incomes, and the strategies employed. Hempen (2015) agreed on this in Synthetic Phonics and Decoding: An Essential Skill for Learning to Read. Hempen discussed the

strategies of phonics instruction. The study highlighted the need for structured and explicit phonics instruction strategies to improve the status of reading outcomes.

Table 4: Relationship between the Challenges of Phonics Instruction in the Central Region of China and Strategies of Phonics Instruction in the Central Region of China

Challenges of the Teacher	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Strategies of Teachers	.340**	0.000	Highly Significant
Strategies of Students	.369**	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenges of the Students			
Strategies of Teachers	.384**	0.000	Highly Significant
Strategies of Students	.446**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 4 presents the association between phonics teaching/instruction challenges and strategies. It shows that a significant relationship exists and shows that the more challenges encountered, the better the strategies employed. This was investigated by Zhang Baoning and Kang Yeqin (2021). Their research focused on providing EFL teachers with practical training in phonics instruction along with original English resources of books, audio, video, and chant. They find that well-prepared teachers can implement phonics strategies in their classrooms to decrease the challenges they may encounter and benefit from ongoing professional development in phonics instruction.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, age and years of experience as an English teacher can influence the strategies used for phonics instruction. The status of phonics teaching and instruction in China is significantly related to the challenges faced by teachers and students in the Central Region of China. As the quality of phonics teaching improves, the challenges experienced by both teachers and students tend to decrease.

In order to reduce the perceived shortcomings in phonics instruction. Regular teacher training and professional development workshops can be organized to keep educators up-to-date with the latest and most effective phonics teaching approaches and resources. Teachers are advised to collaborate with experienced educators and language experts to develop a comprehensive phonics curriculum and foster partnerships with language experts, linguists, and researchers specializing in phonics and language acquisition. Their insights and expertise can inform the development of effective teaching methodologies and strategies.

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