Integrating Phonics Instruction and Whole Language Principles in an Elementary School EFL Classroom

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Abstract
This paper reports the findings of a study on the efficacy of integrating phonics instruction and whole language principles into an elementary EFL classroom. After years of heated debate between whole language advocates and those who believe in phonics, educators have finally reached an agreement that phonics is essential in the early stage of literacy instruction; instead of arguing if phonics should be taught, one should look into how phonics should be taught. This conclusion is well taken in the newly implemented Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum in Taiwan; it is stipulated in the Curriculum Guides that phonics be taught in both elementary and junior high school English classrooms. Nonetheless, phonics instruction, which grew out of the teaching of reading to children speaking English as their native language, can cause reasonable concern about its effectiveness in an EFL setting. Therefore, this empirical study investigated how phonics instruction and whole language principles were integrated in an EFL classroom in Taiwan, and the effectiveness of this approach was also examined. Field notes, videotaping, as well as quantifiable evaluation methods were used to gather data. The students' performance in the areas of phonemic awareness, vocabulary learning, and story reading were specifically examined to yield insights into the pros and cons of using such an approach to foster children's English language proficiency. Based on the findings, instructional implications are discussed.

Key Words: EFL, Whole language, phonics instruction, elementary school
INTRODUCTION
In the newly implemented Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Guidelines, it is stipulated that phonics be taught in elementary and junior high school EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes (see Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum/Curriculum Guides/English, 3-1-2-, 5-1-4, 5-2-1, 2001). Considering the importance of phonics skills for successful English literacy development, it's understandable why phonics instruction is prescribed as the method for teaching children in Taiwan the sound-symbol relationships in the English language. Nonetheless, in the Guidelines, there is no description of how phonics should be taught. This is particularly worrisome since phonics instruction can be a very baffling term and there are different beliefs about how phonics should be taught (for a detailed discussion, see Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998). How phonics should be taught by and large depends on the way reading is defined. For example, for people who believe that reading should begin with interpretations of whole texts, phonics is used only to support the reader's need to get meaning from text. Holding a different perspective, some people may believe that systematic emphasis on decoding words can lead to better reading achievement. In addition to the split among educators regarding ways to teach phonics, teachers themselves may not have sufficient knowledge of phonics (Moats, 1995). According to a survey by Huang (1999), the seventy-four high school EFL teachers whom he randomly selected from different cities in northern Taiwan had only very limited understanding about phonics instruction. Researchers believe that helping EFL teachers in Taiwan to equip themselves with phonics knowledge to be a matter of great urgency (Chen, 1999; Kuo, 2000).

Since phonics instruction is considered to be essential to the development of English literacy (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998) and conducting phonics instruction is required for English teaching in Taiwan, it is imperative to search for effective ways to teach phonics to our students. Over the years, much research has been done on children who spoke English as their first language, to identify effective approaches to teaching phonics, but it is hard to compare data across educational contexts. After all, learning English as a foreign language is much different from both learning English as a native and a second language. Whether or not the findings in first language (L1) settings are generalizable to EFL settings remains to be examined.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES
Phonics Instruction in English as L1 Literacy Classrooms
As aforementioned, there is a consensus that phonics instruction is essential to the teaching of English to children, but educators are divided in thinking how phonics
instruction should be carried out. There has been a long history of debate between the advocates of systematic instruction of decoding skills and those who favor a whole language approach (Dahl & Scharer, 2000). The arguments centered on whether reading instruction should involve a “phonics or a look-say approach” (Baumann et al., 1998, p. 584). Phonics believers emphasize the importance of an early and systematic approach to teaching children to decode words (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; 1989; 1996). They assert that teaching children to pronounce and spell words through direct instruction in sound-symbol relationships can help children become independent and successful readers. To the whole language advocates, however, phonics skills are one of the cueing systems that children use, along with syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information, during reading and writing. Its instruction should be embedded in ongoing reading and writing activities and is shaped by the teacher’s understanding of each child’s development in his or her individual language learning processes (Goodman, 1992).

This heated and prolonged debate between the proponents of phonics instruction and the whole language approach have led many to believe that the two are mutually exclusive to each other. The polarizing rhetoric used by both sides has even convinced some people that whole language teachers should never teach words in isolation and can teach phonics only when students demonstrate the need for it.

The Whole Language Approach and its Application in EFL Classrooms

To know how whole language advocates really view phonics instruction, one should start with understanding the whole language approach. Whole language is a philosophy about teaching and learning. Dahl, Scharer, Lawson, and Grogan (1999) proclaim that a whole language classroom should: 1) be child-centered; 2) be taught in meaning-centered approaches; 3) use a variety of print sources as well as children’s literature; 4) provide a literate environment for reading and writing; 5) encourage collaborative interaction among students. Freeman and Freeman (1992) outline seven whole language principles for second language (L2) teachers: 1) lessons should be taught from whole to part; 2) lessons should be learner-centered; 3) lessons should be meaningful and purposeful; 4) lessons should include social interactions; 5) lessons should include practice in the four language skills; 6) the L1 could be used in language classrooms to build concepts and facilitate learning; and 7) teachers should show faith in learners. They believe that whole language not only works for L1 learners but for L2 learners as well.

Although the whole language approach has started out as a movement for literacy instruction and may be applicable to L2 learners, foreign language (FL) teachers and researchers are embracing it in their practices, too. For example, Lems
(1995) translates the above whole language guidelines and principles into ESL/EFL classroom practices as the following: 1) the language arts are integrated; 2) language is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; 3) students are immersed in literacy events; 4) students are surrounded by authentic print; 5) students learn by doing; 6) teachers respect and value each student’s unique background, experience, and learning style; 7) learning is a collaborative activity; 8) students take responsibility for their own learning while teachers facilitate the learning process; and 9) assessment is authentic and appropriate. Based on Lems’ (1995) idea, Schwarzer (2001) proposes eight philosophical principles needed for implementing a whole language philosophy in a foreign language class and describes a whole language foreign language class as a practical example. He indicates that a whole language foreign language class should display students’ work, provide a learning environmental rich in print materials, and use the community as a resource. Basal readers as well as literature, especially children’s and young adults’ books, should be used in the class. Furthermore, teachers should establish a schedule of activities through negotiation with students to help students deal with the open-opportunity nature of the whole-language foreign language class. Table 1 summarizes the whole language principles in L1, L2, and FL classrooms.
## Table 1
Whole Language Principles in L1 and FL Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole Language in L1 classrooms</th>
<th>Whole Language in L2 classroom</th>
<th>Whole Language in FL classrooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-centered</td>
<td>From whole to part</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-centered</td>
<td>Learner-centered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Meaningful &amp; purposeful</td>
<td>Collaboration Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Language arts curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four skills</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate environment</td>
<td>Use of L1</td>
<td>Student background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith in learners</td>
<td>Student responsibility Print-rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic print environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy events Display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn by doing student work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language as means, not an end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides outlining principles, some researchers have implemented the approach in their foreign language classrooms. Louton and Louton (1992) practiced the whole language approach in an elementary school foreign language classroom where a foreign language specialist worked with a regular classroom teacher on the same topics to create a real purpose for foreign language instruction. Redmond (1994) applied selected whole language strategies so that students could build on their prior knowledge and experience and find relevance in their learning of reading and writing skills in French. De Godev (1994) found that the whole language method of using a dialogue journal activity could help students connect oral and writing skills. Barry and Pellissier (1995) used popular music in a foreign language class based on a mix of thematic units and whole language approaches. They concluded that the approach provided the students with opportunities to understand themes from the target culture that are functional, interesting, and relevant. Adair-Hauk (1996) also reported that several foreign language teachers utilized story reading in their French as a foreign language classes and gained positive results.

The application of whole language principles in the teaching of foreign languages may not have been well established but the pockets of success serve as
inspiration for foreign language teachers and researchers of different countries to
experiment with its use in their classrooms (Schwarzer, 2001), including those in
Taiwan. Huang (1997) implemented a whole-language program, Fluency First, to
teach reading and writing to a group of sophomore English majors. It was found that
the students developed fluency through massive amounts of enjoyable reading and
writing along with plenty of authentic input and cooperative activities designed to
integrate all language skills. Tseng (1997) examined the possibility of actualizing the
whole language theory for young EFL learners in Taiwan based on her experience of
designing a whole language curriculum for 16 elementary school children. Chao
(1999) introduced a multiple intelligence whole language model for EFL teachers in
Taiwan. Although the number of empirical research reports on it's use and results in
Taiwan EFL classrooms is still limited, Tseng (1997) has already gone as far as
proclaiming that “…[If we deny the possibility of Whole Language, we denied the
possibilities of educational reform [in Taiwan]” (p. 539).

Phonics Instruction in a Whole Language Classroom

The whole language approach evidently is welcomed by FL teachers and has
found its way into EFL classrooms in Taiwan. Will the age-old debate between the
advocates of phonics and whole language principles be carried over to the teaching of
English as a foreign language? How should phonics be taught in an EFL classroom?
These questions seem logical to ask by foreign language educators who apply the
whole language approach in their classrooms. For EFL educators in Taiwan, this
question is especially valid, since phonics has been included as part of the national
curriculum and yet little research has been done to look into this matter.

In search for effective ways to teach phonics, Stahl et al. (1998) reviewed
phonics instruction in the U.S. since the 1960s and characterized phonics instruction
into traditional and contemporary approaches based on its chronological advancement.
They defined traditional approaches as those that were in vogue during the 1960s and
1970s whereas contemporary phonics approaches were those used frequently in the
past decade. They further outlined the principles of good phonics instruction as the
following: 1) it should develop the alphabetic principle; 2) it should develop
phonological awareness; 3) it should not teach rules, need not use worksheets, should
not dominate instruction, and does not have to be boring; 4) it provides sufficient
practice in reading words; 5) it leads to automatic word recognition; and 6) it is one
part of reading instruction. It is interesting to note that these researchers characterized
“whole language phonics instruction” as one of the “contemporary phonics
approaches” (p. 349) and emphasized that an effective literacy program should
involve elements associated with the whole language as well as direct phonics
instructional approaches.

Stahl et al. (1998) are not the only ones who find “whole language versus phonics” unnecessary. As a matter of fact, in recent years, studies have revealed the fading of the line drawn between phonics instruction and the whole language approach. Phonics instructions is being incorporated into various reading and writing activities typical of whole language classrooms. For example, Dahl et al. (1999) conducted a study analyzing phonics teaching and learning in eight whole language first grade classrooms and found foundation concepts, such as phonemic and phonological awareness, and phonemic segmentation, as well as letter-sound relationships were taught. Whole language strategies were presented in tandem with phonics skills. Another study, a survey of 1,207 elementary school teachers in the U.S., found that a majority of teachers embraced a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction blending phonics and holistic principles and practices in a compatible way (Baumann et al., 1998). In other words, recent studies on whole language found phonics as integral to the reading and writing processes. The whole language perspective recognizes the importance of phonics knowledge and the need to address strategies and skills that children use as they engage in reading and writing.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The above literature review shows that guidelines for implementing whole language teaching in L1, L2, and FL classrooms are being provided by researchers. In addition, phonics instruction is a matter of reality in L1 whole language classrooms. However, in foreign language teaching and learning settings, the implementation of whole language is still far from being well established (Schwarzer, 2001). How phonics skills are learned or taught in whole language FL classrooms has yet to be looked into. The purpose of this empirical study therefore aimed to provide teachers and researchers with the information about the efficacy of integrating phonics instruction in a whole language EFL classroom.

This study sought to answer the following two research questions:

1) How are phonics instruction and whole language principles integrated in elementary EFL classroom in Taiwan?

2) How phonics instruction in a whole language elementary EFL classroom affects the children’s development of English language skills?
RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

The study took place in an elementary school in central Taiwan and lasted for one semester. The participants were thirty-seven students of an intact class randomly selected from all of the fifth grade classes in the school. Like many other elementary schools on the island, the children of this school begin to have English classes in grade five but many may have attended private English classes before that. As to the children of this study, only ten of them had no prior English learning experience. Eight of them have had learned English for less than one year. The longest number of years some children had been studying English was four. On average, the students have had 1.1 years of English language learning.

The teacher of this study has had over ten years of experience teaching children English. She identified herself as a children’s book advocate and had been using children’s literature in her teaching. She has even given workshops at local and international conferences and seminars to demonstrate the use of children’s books and storytelling for EFL instruction. To prepare the teacher for this study, the teacher was first provided with articles and books on whole language and engaged in discussion sessions with the researcher to ensure a good understanding of the philosophy. The five criteria outlined by Dahl, Lawson, and Grogan (1999) in identifying a whole language classroom (i.e., child-centered curriculum, teaching approach, materials, classroom environment, and collaborative peer context) were especially thoroughly discussed. Furthermore, the teacher and the researcher co-designed and implemented a two-week literature-based instruction unit for a summer camp based on the criteria to ensure her thorough familiarity with the whole language principles at both the theoretical and operational levels.

To further familiarize the teacher with the phonics approach, the teacher was asked to attend phonics workshops offered by Jolly Phonics Ltd. Two Jolly Phonics teachers from Australia were invited to come to the participating school to demonstrate the use of phonics materials and exchange teaching ideas with the teacher.

Procedures

Before starting the study, the researcher and the teacher worked closely together to ensure that they reached the same kind of understanding about phonics instruction and the whole language philosophy. Many reading and discussion sessions took place before the teacher started to plan her syllabus. It was decided that the instruction of the 42 English sounds would follow the sequence outlined by the Jolly Phonics, a program that explicitly and systematically introduces letter sounds, letter formations,
blending, etc. to children. The sounds would be introduced in the way that the first few letters could be used to make many simple words so that letters could quickly be turned into words. The letters that might easily confuse the children would not be taught too closely together, such as “b” and “d.” Three sets of decodable books that focused on sounds and high frequency words would also be used.

After the semester got started, the researcher and two research assistants came to the EFL classroom to observe and conduct videotape-recording on every Tuesday morning for two class periods. To understand the children’s learning progress, the children were observed in their weekly learning of letter-sound relations in reading and formally evaluated three times, each being carried out in one-month interval. In addition, the children were asked to keep learning portfolios in which their work samples were collected. According to Dahl et al. (1999), phonics achievement usually involves testing the learners at the word or letter level and focuses on a specific aspect of phonics knowledge, whereas the whole language perspective includes decoding words in context. In consultation with their reviews, the English teacher and the researcher jointly designed the assessment activities for the children that would include decoding both in isolation and in context. The assessments focused on three areas: 1) decoding sounds in isolation (i.e., sounds in isolation, blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme blending) (see Appendix I), 2) identifying words from readers (see Appendix II), and 3) reading in a familiar context (i.e., reading of self-selected readers). What was assessed in the three time assessments corresponded with the phonics skills that were taught and books the children had read during the month. The children were tested individually to ensure the accuracy of the evaluation results.

**Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The data collection for this study included 1) video data of all the teaching sessions, 2) general field note accounts of classroom teaching and learning, 3) students’ learning portfolios, and 4) scores from formal assessments. During data collection, the researcher and research assistants served as participant-observers with relatively low involvement, their role being to watch and write about the teaching and learning in the classroom. The field notes detailed the teaching environment, instructional materials, instructional activities, and students’ responses toward the teaching and learning of phonics skills. The videotapes were used to crosscheck the information documented in the field notes. Both field notes and video data were transcribed and later analyzed in weekly discussions among the researcher and research assistants to identify whole language principles and phonics activities demonstrated in the week’s lesson. The assessment results were analyzed.
quantitatively to probe into the students’ development of phonics skills. The teacher was consulted and further confirmed the findings.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

How were phonics instruction and whole language principles integrated into an elementary EFL classroom in Taiwan?

After carefully examining the field notes and viewing the videotapes, it was found that both phonics instruction and whole language principles were carefully orchestrated in the EFL lessons. Explicit and direct instruction to sounds and letters was done in the first class period. In the second period the children had opportunities to learn sounds and words in context by reading connected texts. Whole language activities such as collaborative interaction, reading for meaning and enjoyment, easy access to prints, and use of alternative forms of assessment were identified.

**Instructional Routine Which Focused on Systematic Introduction of Sounds**

The children who participated in this study had two consecutive class periods of English instruction on every Tuesday morning; each period lasted for 40 minutes. In the first period, the teacher usually started her lesson by explicitly introducing English sounds and the alphabet to the children in the order that was outlined in Jolly Phonics. Usually two to four sounds were introduced in a week’s lessons. Individual sounds were first introduced one by one with the corresponding letters. The children learned each letter by its sound, not its name. Accompanying pictures, flash cards, and actions were used to help the children remember the sounds as well as the possible words the sounds would appear in. After several sounds were introduced, the teacher then used sound cards to familiarize the students with blending. Games were usually used to reinforce the students’ ability in blending sounds, segmentation, sound-to-word matching, deletion and manipulations. Besides seat work (such as phonetic bingo, tracing the letter, coloring pictures, matching sounds with letters, matching words with pictures, etc.), various types of competitive and cooperative games (such as memory games, matching games, interviewing classmates) were incorporated for the children to practice hearing and saying the sounds. Since hand puppets came with the phonics materials, the teachers also used them to make her lessons interesting.

**Reading Connected Texts**

In the second class period, the instruction involved reading contrived texts and authentic literature with repetitions of taught sounds and patterns. For the children to learn the sounds and words in meaningful context, three sets of readers were used for in-class reading as well as for take-home reading. They included Scholastic Phonics
Readers, *Scholastic My First Phonics Readers*, and *Scholastic High Frequency Readers*. Each time, after new sounds were introduced, the teacher chose one reader from the three sets for the entire class to read together. Depending on the story in the reader, the teacher designed suitable activities for the children to comprehend and appreciate the story. The commonly used activities included games, story retelling, enacting the story, role-play, discussion for comprehension and content of the story, etc. Most of the activities involved cooperative interaction among the children. For example, while enacting the story as groups, the children had to make decisions on the role each group member had to play, the lines each one had to say, and the use of suitable intonations. After enactment, the whole class then discussed and commented on the performance of the different groups. Sometimes, they even voted for the group that did the best interpretation of the story. This kind of activity not only required group cooperation but also understanding of the text. The children also made their own copies of the week’s reader. Reading texts that contained a high percentage of words with patterns taught in the phonics lessons allowed the children to apply their phonemics knowledge to tasks that aimed for comprehension. Table 2 presents titles of readers that the children read after the sounds had been taught.

### Table 2

**Sounds and Their Accompanying Readers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounds</th>
<th>First Month</th>
<th>Second Month</th>
<th>Third Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s, a, t, i, p, n, e/k, e, h, r, m, oa, ie, ee, or</td>
<td>z, w, ng, v, oo, oo*, y,</td>
<td>th*, th, sh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d, g, o, u, l, f, b, j, ai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Dad and Sam</td>
<td>I See</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Lot of Top</td>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Ted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Where is Nat?</td>
<td>Pop! Pop!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We Dig</td>
<td>Where Can Cat Run?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: bold-faced oo indicates long oo sound; bold-face th indicates unvoiced th.

**Access to Print**

The whole language classroom emphasizes a literary environment for children to learn the language naturally. To ensure that reading was part of the children’s daily life activities and the children had sufficient opportunities to enforce what was taught in the English class, a cabinet was kept in the classroom with multiple copies of readers and children’s books. The children could check out the books any time they wanted from this “classroom library” to take home. “Student librarians” were chosen to manage the checking out and return of the classroom library books.
Take-home Reading

An A4 envelope was used for each child to bring home books to read independently or with a family member. Each time a child brought home a book, s/he would record the title of the book and the time the book was checked out and returned on the recording sheet on the envelope. If the child read to a family member, the person would have to sign the envelope for the child. The children could choose any book they liked from the library and read at their own pace. This activity, however, seemed to require encouragement from the teacher. The children who have had prior experience with the English language tended to be more enthusiastic about checking out books. The children who had little or no prior exposure to English felt that the books they could read were limited due to their English language proficiency. Parents were also informed by the teacher to support this activity through letters and parent-teacher conferences.

Use of Alternative Assessment

Besides formal assessments, the children’s progress was also documented by the use of portfolios. Throughout the semester, the children selected from the work they completed to put in their portfolios. The selection was up to the children to decide, however, they were recommended to select at least one artifact from each week’s work for the sake of completeness. The children included in their portfolios the worksheets they had completed in class, the readers they created, and creative responses toward the stories they read (e.g., self-made books). They also designed the covers for their own portfolios and added artwork to personalize them. Their own photos and photos of their family members or pets were commonly used. Judging from the fancy designs, evidently the children exercised their personal taste and patience in documenting their own growth.

Findings from the Three Formal Assessments

To provide the school administrators and parents with the information about the children’s progress in their English language skills (namely grades), the children had to participate in monthly evaluations like the children of other classes in the school. However, due to the experimental nature of the instruction, the methods of assessing this group of children were specially designed. In all three formal assessments, the children had to demonstrate their abilities in phonics skills, vocabulary comprehension, and storybook reading. To ensure that each individual student had opportunities to demonstrate their language abilities, they were divided up into four groups and assessed individually by the teacher, the researcher, and two research assistants. Discussion sessions were held before each assessment to ensure that all
evaluators would use the same criteria. After each assessment was completed, the evaluators met together to go over all the students’ scores until total agreement was reached.

Although number grades were recorded according to the students’ performance, as required by the school, they were converted into categorical grades before they were given to students and parents. Table 3 shows the children’s performance on the three assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Phonics</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Story reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs improvement</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outstanding = 91-100, Excellent = 81-90, Good = 71-80, Fair = 61-70, Need improvement = below 60

From Table 3, it can be seen clearly that the children made progress in all three areas of language skills. When the first assessment was given, seventeen students (46%) performed outstandingly, three (8%) were excellent, two (5%) were good, one (3%) was fair, and fourteen (38%) of the students’ phonics skills needed improvement. The results of the second assessment showed that the children’s phonics scores had increased: twenty-one students (57%) performed outstandingly, five students (14%) performed excellently, two (5%) were good, five (14%) were fair, and only 3 (8%) still needed improvement. By the time the third assessment was completed, a majority of the students scored outstandingly (78%), none of the children was categorized as “needing improvement” anymore.

As to the children’s performance in vocabulary learning, the children also demonstrated improvements. Although some students (N=8, 22%) did not do well on
the vocabulary skills in the first and second assessments, none of them stayed in the "needing improvement" category in the third evaluation. As a matter of fact, in the third assessment, the children who performed outstandingly and excellently combined made up to 89% of the entire class.

Nonetheless, the students' storybook reading scores showed a somewhat different pattern. The students performed well on their first and second assessments but not quite so in the third evaluation. In the first and second assessments, over half of the class was rated as "outstanding" (N=21, 57% and N=23, 62% respectively); however, in the third assessment, only four (11%) students reached the "outstanding" level. The majority of students (N=20, 54%) belonged to the "excellent" category. When the third assessment was given, there were still three students scored at the "needing improvement" category.

The children's number grades of the three assessments were averaged and their standard deviations were sought (see Table 4). Evidently not only did the children's grades in all three areas improved as the learning progressed, the differences of their English language proficiencies decreased, too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>The Children's Number Grade Averages and Standard Deviations of the Three-time Formal Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story reading</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

This study examined the feasibility of integrating phonics instruction and whole language principles in an elementary school EFL classroom. By means of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the information concerning the effectiveness of such an integrated approach in fostering Taiwanese children's English language proficiency was gathered and analyzed. Through explicit and systematic phonics instruction as well as whole language practices including teaching sounds and words in meaningful contexts, providing the children with easy access to prints, and using alternative forms of assessments (Freeman & Freeman, 1992; Lems, 1995; Schwarzer, 2001), the children of this study demonstrated positive gains in their phonics skills and vocabulary recognition. This finding echoes the literature on phonics instruction.
in whole language L1 classrooms (Baumann et al., 1998; Dahl & Scharer, 2000; Dahl et al., 1999) that both phonics instruction and whole language principles can work together to help children develop language skills. This finding can be particularly meaningful to the EFL educators in Taiwan who believe in the whole language principles but are required to carry out phonics instruction.

Another finding that is worth noting and deserves some discussion is the children’s ability to read storybooks independently. According to the scores of the three evaluations, the number of students performed at the “excellent” level dropped from 21 (57%) in the first evaluation to only 4 (11%) in the third evaluation. Does this mean that the students’ ability to read self-selected storybooks declined as a result of the instruction? After taking a close look at the books that the children picked out to read for the assessments, the researcher found that the decline in the scores might have due to children’s willingness to choose books that were challenging for them to read. In the third evaluation, instead of selecting stories with easy and short text, nearly two-thirds of the children attempted the books with longer text and more complex sentence patterns. Therefore, instead of interpreting the decline as a lack of improvement in the children’s reading proficiency, one might see it as a reflection on the increase of the children’s confidence to read more difficult text. This willingness to read challenging books even when they were being evaluated could also mean that the children, after being instructed in the approach where reading was also for fun and enjoyment, had become less grade-conscious. Anyway, overall speaking, the children still demonstrated improvement in their ability to read for in the third evaluation, most of the children did perform at satisfactory levels; twenty students (54%) were rated as excellent and seven (19%) students were rated as good in their story reading skills.

As to the generalizability of the findings of this study, caveats must be taken in suggesting that such a successful single-case study would occur with other teachers or in other classrooms. In this study, the participating teacher was able to meticulously combined explicit phonics instruction with context-rich activities in her classroom to enhance the children’s overall language proficiency and gained positive results. However, this was done through extremely close collaboration with a university researcher. The teacher devoted much time to thoroughly understand both the whole language philosophy and phonics instruction. Her willingness and ability to grow professionally were the key elements to the success of this experimental study. According to the research done by Huang (1999) and Kuo (2000), a lot of English teachers in Taiwan still need further training to understand what phonics instruction is about. Many English teachers’ familiarity with the whole language philosophy is also questionable (Tseng, 1997). Unless assistance in professional development are available to teachers to ensure their professional competence in implementing such an
integrated approach, the probability of getting the same kind of positive results might not be high.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX I

Phonics Assessment Instrument

Name: _______________ Student Number: ______

A. Sounds in isolation—read the following sounds

s t c/k p h
d g n i a

B. Consonant vowel consonant (CVC) short vowel—read the following words

bit  can  fit  jam
lid  got  in  tap
nel  hug  des  cab
tot  run  set

C. Auditory training—phoneme segmentation

map  (m-a-p)
ten  (t-e-n)
set  (s-e-t)
did  (d-i-d)
can  (c-a-n)

D. Auditory training --- Phoneme blending

s-n-a-p
r-e-d
s-a-d
p-i-g
t-o-p
APPENDIX II
Assessment Instrument for the Comprehension of Vocabulary Words in Readers

1. mop

2. mad

3. see

4. glad

5. pot
將字母拼讀與全語言理念整合應用於國小英語教學之成效

摘要

本研究探討在國小英語教室中整合字母拼讀教學與全語言活動的可行性及其對國小學生學習英語的影響及成效。九年一貫英語科課程綱要中明示，國小英語教學須實施拼讀教學，同時亦強調有意義及情境化的學習。本文於是首先討論拼讀教學與全語言理念在英語為母語的語言教室中共同存在的可能性，以作為探討該整合模式在英語為我國國小英語教室中實施的理論根據。接著，本研究以一班國小五年級英語課師生為研究對象，實施為期一年的拼讀與全語言整合式教學試驗，透過課堂觀察、錄影紀錄、共同討論、分段評量等質化及量化資料蒐集及分析，研究人員歸納整理出課堂活動進行情形及學生學習成果。結果顯示，參與本研究的老師的確能將全語言理念（如情境化閱讀、閱讀資源的提供、親子共讀、多元評量等）及有系統的拼讀教學共同整合於教學活動中。學生在字母拼讀、字義理解、閱讀自選讀本三方面的表現，也都有正面的成長。根據所得結果，本文最後除了肯定整合拼讀教學及全語言於國小英語教學中的可行性外，更呼籲加強提供我國國小英語教師專業成長的機會，以提升其對拼讀教學及全語言理念的認識，才有可能實施整合兩者教學方法。

關鍵詞：國小英語教學  全語言  字母拼讀  拼讀教學