

# Comparison of the Effects of Implicit and Explicit Phonics Instruction on English Achievement in Reading and Writing (Spelling) of Primary Students

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**Abstract:** *The purposes of this study were to compare the English achievement of the students by using two different teaching approaches between implicit and explicit phonics instruction in Grade 1 and Grade 2, and to compare the students' achievement in reading (read aloud), and writing (spelling) by using implicit and explicit phonics instruction. The study used a quasi-experimental design with experimental and control groups. The sample, derived by means of the Krejcie and Morganc (1970) technique and purposive sampling method, consisted of 169 Grade 1 and Grade 2 students (Grade 1 = 85, Grade 2 = 84), studying at Piboonbumpen Demonstration School at Burapha University in the second semester of academic year 2015. The sample was divided into the experimental and control groups (Experimental group = 169; Control group = 131). The experimental group was taught by using explicit phonics instruction while the control group used the implicit teaching approach. The instruments used were a lesson plan and materials for explicit phonics instruction, the Grade 1 and Grade 2 students' English Achievement Test, the reading (read aloud), and the writing (spelling) tests. Mean, standard deviation, percentage, and t-test were the students' achievement in reading statistical devices employed for the data analysis.*

*The findings indicated that the students both in Grade 1 and Grade 2 learning through explicit phonics instructions had significantly higher English achievement than those learning through implicit phonics instruction at the .05 level. In addition, the achievement of both reading and writing skills of the students learning by using explicit phonics instruction was also found significantly higher than those taught through implicit phonics instruction in both Grade 1 and Grade 2 at the .05 level.*

**Keywords:** English achievement, Quasi-experimental, Implicit phonics instruction, Explicit phonics instruction

## Background of the study

English is a global language because it is so widely spoken. It has often been referred to as a world language, even in countries where it is not the official language (Langer, 2002). It is the most commonly taught second language. There are many reasons for studying English as a second language in Thailand: to get a good job after graduation, to study abroad, to communicate with foreigners, and to get more information from English newspapers,

magazines, books, and websites. Learning English is becoming more and more important for Thai students, especially young learners.

Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that focuses on letter-sound relationships (LDA of Minnesota, 2004). During phonics instruction, children are taught letter-sound correspondences and how to use them to spell and read words. When learners have good decoding skills, they read more fluently and comprehend more of what they read. Phonics instruction works because it teaches readers the predictable patterns of sounds and symbols produced in the English language.

As classified by Ehri (2002), phonics is a method of instruction that teaches students the correspondence between graphemes in written language and phonemes in spoken language, and how to use these correspondences to read and spell words. The notes that phonics instruction is systematic when the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught and they are covered in a clearly defined sequence. Systematic phonics instruction in kindergarten and first grade results in better growth in comprehension. The ability to read the words in a text accurately and automatically is highly related to successful reading comprehension. Children from various backgrounds make greater gains in reading when they have received systematic and explicit phonics instruction in kindergarten and first grade (Shelbyed, 2012). An essential component of effective phonics lessons is that teachers provide direct and explicit instruction on each skill presented (Carnine et al., 2004). In explicit instruction, teachers clearly identify the objective of the lesson and briefly explain why learning the targeted skill is important.

Numerous studies (Devonshire et al. 2013; Duncan et al., 2013; LDA of Minnesota, 2004) have shown that phonological awareness teaching programs that include letter-name and letter-sound correspondence have a greater positive impact on reading development than interventions involving phonological awareness or sound-letter instruction alone. Training in phonemic awareness and phonics may lead to higher scores on tests of phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge, but such instruction will not improve struggling readers' ability to read (Ivey & Baker, 2004).

National Reading Panel (2000) indicated that in an explicit (synthetic) program, students would learn the associations between the letters and their sounds. This may comprise showing students the graphemes and teaching them the sounds that correspond to them.

### **Statement of the problem**

The researcher focused on the discrepancies of phonics instruction and methods within these instructional practices that influence the development of primary students' literacy skills. Focus has been drawn to the development of invented spellings, glottographic theory, and comprehension because in recent decades controversy has arisen about the best way to teach students these literacy skills. Phonics instruction will determine which type of phonics instruction is more effective in supporting primary students' acquisition of literacy skills.

### **Purposes of the study**

The purposes of this study were to compare the English achievement of the students by using two different teaching approaches of implicit and explicit phonics instruction in Grade 1 and Grade 2 and to compare the students' achievement in reading (read aloud), and writing (spelling) by using implicit, explicit and phonics instruction.

## Research questions

1. How does the students' English achievement differ between implicit and explicit phonics instruction approach in Grade 1?
2. How does the students' English achievement differ between implicit and explicit phonics instruction approach in Grade 2?
3. Does the explicit phonics instruction approach improve students' reading (read aloud) skills in Grade 1?
4. Does the explicit phonics instruction approach improve students' reading (read aloud) skills in Grade 2?
5. Does the explicit phonics instruction approach improve students' writing (spelling) skills in Grade 1?
6. Does the explicit phonics instruction approach improve students' writing (spelling) skills in Grade 2?

## Significance of the study

1. Teachers will understand and appreciate the use of explicit phonics instruction teaching with Grade 1 and Grade 2 students to read and write (spelling) English.
  - Teachers and Grade 1 and Grade 2 students will receive an empirical result by using explicit phonics instruction in learning to read and write (spelling) and understand what they have read in English.
  - Grade 1 and Grade 2 students will be able to develop and improve their reading and writing (spelling) abilities of reading comprehension when they study at the next level.

## Research design

The quasi-experimental approach introduces considerably more threats to internal validity than the true experiment. Because the investigator did not randomly assign participants to groups, there were no potential threats of maturation, selection, mortality, and the interaction of selection with others. Individuals assigned to the two groups may have selection factors that go uncontrolled in the experiment. Because we compared two groups, the treatment threats may also be present. In addition, when the pre-test/post-test design was used, additional threats of history, testing, instrumentation, and regression also may occur. While the quasi-experimental design has the advantage of utilizing existing groups in educational settings, it introduces many threats.

## Population and samples

The study population consisted of 300 Grade 1 and Grade 2 students who were studying at Piboonbumpen Demonstration School in the second semester of the academic year 2015 at Burapha University, Chonburi Thailand.

Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size of this study was calculated to be one hundred and sixty-nine students. The purposive method was used for selecting the participants in this study. The sample number of a population of three hundred is one hundred and sixty-nine Grade 1 and Grade 2 of students studying in the second semester of the academic year 2015.

The researcher determined to use purposive sampling method for selecting the participants in this study with the number based on the criteria set regarding one class in each level.

## Research instruments

In this study, in the first stage the lesson plans to teach English phonics instruction in Grade 1 and Grade 2 were used for collecting data from the participants. The subject content and the lesson plans were designed to get the highest results that develop the students' ability in sounding out words and writing learning ability according to the principles and practices validated by scientifically based reading research, as defined by the National Reading Panel (Armbruster, Leher, & Osborn, 2001).

The research instruments focused on the intervention of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. According to the analysis by the National Reading Panel (NRP), studies that spend between 5 to 18 hours of teaching phonics awareness yielded very large effects on the acquisition of phonemic awareness (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001).

The second stage, the pre-test/post-test and the English Achievement Test, was set by the specifications of subject content and checked by experts. The English Achievement Test came from administrative to design the test. Therefore, the research instruments in this study was structured and outlined.

## Data collection

1. The researcher taught phonics instruction and using one method as explicit by following the lesson plans.
2. The results of the students' final exam were analyzed to compare the scores in the implicit and explicit methods of Grade 1 and Grade 2.

## Data analysis and findings

1. Analysis of efficiency of the lesson plans by using E1/E2.
2. The average scores of the Mean, and Standard Deviation, and Percentage were compared between the two methods (implicit and explicit phonics instruction).

## Conclusions, discussion and recommendations

### Conclusions

1. The achievement of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students after learning through explicit phonics instruction program was found significantly different than that of before learning at the .05 level.
2. The comparison of the English Achievement Tests of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students showed that the overall achievement of the students studying by using explicit phonics instruction was significantly higher at the .05 level than the students studying by using implicit phonics instruction. It can be concluded that explicit phonics instruction is beneficial to learning English of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students.
3. Regarding the comparison of the achievement in the Reading Part (Read aloud) of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students, the achievement in the Reading Part (Read aloud) of the students studying by using explicit phonics instruction was significant at the .05 level. It can be concluded that explicit phonics instruction can help students read and pronounce the words correctly.
4. With reference to the comparison of the achievement in the Writing Part (Spelling) of Grade 1 and Grade 2 students, the achievement in the Writing Part (Spelling) of the students studying by using explicit phonics instruction was significant at the .05 level, which was

higher than the students studying by using implicit phonics instruction. It can be summarized that the explicit phonics instruction plays an important role in students' writing ability. They can write using the alphabet and correct spelling.

### Discussion

1. According to past researches, the findings revealed that the implicit phonics was analytical phonics, moves from the whole to the smallest part. Phonemes associated with particular graphemes were not pronounced in isolation. Students analyzed words and look for the common phoneme in a set of words. Through comparison and identification, they deduced which grapheme to write or which phoneme to read. Blending and building were not usually taught, and students identify new words by their shape, beginning and ending letters, and context clues. It was in congruence with Stanovich's studies confirming that children should be explicitly taught phonemic awareness-not merely to help them sound out words, but recognize words on sight automatically (Stanovich, 1991; 1992).

In conclusion, the results showed that the Experimental group is English achievement test was improved by using explicit phonics instruction both in Grade 1 and Grade 2. It was conclusive that explicit phonics instruction was the most effective. Empowering students with these decoding strategies helped ensure reading success and gave them a solid foundation for their academic future.

2. Explicit phonics instruction might exhibit the very best instructional features. However, if it was not carried out by ability knowledge teacher, their likelihood of success is diminished. Teachers must understand how to implement a phonics instruction effectively, how to plan lessons and make sure they are carried out. They must understand what students should know and be able to do better as a result of their teaching of the National Reading Panel (2000). Swanson (1998) observed significantly larger effect sizes on reading outcomes when direct skills instruction was combined with comprehension strategy instruction than when each was administered separately to students. The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world as well as through the media and the Internet. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Learners want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment. Communicative Language Teaching or CLT was first proposed in the 1970s, and how it has influenced approaches to language teaching. Since its inception in the 1970s, CLT has serves as a major source of influence on language teaching (Richards, 2006).

In conclusion, the results show that the Experiment group was improved with with reading (read aloud) by using explicit phonics instruction both of Grade 1 and Grade 2 that most types of phonics instruction can be beneficial for students.

3. Richards (2008) suggests that speaking skills in English is priority for many second-language or foreign-language learners. Oral skills have hardly been neglected in EFL/ESL courses though how best to approach the teaching of oral skills has long been the focus of methodological debate. Teacher and textbooks make use of a variety of approaches, ranging from direct approaches focusing on specific features of oral interaction to indirect approaches that create conditions for oral interaction through group work, task work, and other strategies.

Finally, the results showed that the Experimental group was improved with with writing (spelling) by using explicit phonics instruction both of Grade 1 and Grade 2 that most types

of phonics instruction can be beneficial for students. Its indicated that the Experimental group was improved with reading (read aloud) and writing (spelling) skill both of Grade 1 and Grade 2.

## Recommendations

The findings of the present study show that the reading (sounding out) and writing (known and unknown words) achievement of the participants has increased after having the treatment. This shows that explicit phonics instruction helped the students with reading (sounding out) ability and also spelling and writing (short vowel sound, long vowel sound, blended sound, and alphabet sound). Ivey and Baker (2004) stated that phonics teaches developing readers the relationship between phonemes (sounds of oral language) and graphemes (letters that represent sounds in print). Students who learn phonics master the sound/symbol code that enables them to read and spell. Therefore, explicit phonics instruction should be introduced in English classes for beginning young learners to make a strong contribution to develop students' reading and writing ability in the later stages.

Sriprasidh (2010) said systematic or explicit phonics instruction is effective for children from various societies and economic levels. The systematically designed instruction program can be an important tool to directly develop the phonological processing necessary for proficient reading. In consequence, the systematic phonics based on instructional program helps teaching children to convert print to sound and learn specific skills as well as developing the children's neural pathway. Explicit phonics instruction can also be an effective way to help learners understand the sound structures in English and even further improve their reading proficiency. Children should be taught to use this knowledge to form a solid background and improvement of their vocabulary learning ability for reading and writing.

Further studies on the English phonics instruction could be conducted to compare different approaches of phonics instruction and levels. The researcher recommends using different methods such as two groups designed of the pre-test/post-test of the Experimental group and the pre-test/post-test of the Control group.

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