



PHONEME- GRAPHEME CORRESPONDENCE IN READING SKILLS OF GRADE SEVEN STUDENTS: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine the reading skills of students using phoneme-grapheme correspondence reading. This study will benefit grade seven students since they are the center of the learning process. Extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study was thoroughly discussed to develop transferability, which is the qualitative parallel to external validity in postpositivist research (Mertens, 2005). All of the participants are teachers in selected public schools in Davao City. These participants are currently teaching in the school year 2022-2023 with more than five years of experience in teaching English. A total of 10 participants are considered in this study who will join the in-depth interview and focused group discussion. Seven of them will join the in-depth interview (IDI) while the remaining three will be subjected to the focus group discussion (FGD). The theory of Perfetti (1992) revealed that verbal efficacy must be developed with the aid of teachers' efficacy and determination in teaching. This theory will support to the overall confession of the participants when they revealed that students will recognize words as a single piece of language rather than using decoding skills. Supporters of whole language do not believe that words should be 'broken down' into singular sounds as they do not assist in the context or meaning of the word at the phonics level.

KEYWORDS: phoneme, grapheme, correspondence, reading skills, students.

INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken because of an immediate concern regarding phoneme- grapheme correspondence reading skills of grade seven students as a pedagogic practice in the local context, with a particular reference to the English classroom. My hypothesis is that teacher training, current classroom practices and continuous professional development have not evolved enough to maximize on the potential of this innovative pedagogy. The growing importance of English subject in education brought about a personal quest to develop student's skills in speaking and writing and eventually gain more knowledge and understanding of how phoneme and grapheme can be used effectively in English teaching and learning.

Literacy in reading has been a concern for many schools and even governments across the continent for two decades. This can be verified by many literacy initiatives, spearheaded by organizations and government agencies, namely: Closing the Gap and more recently, the National Early Language and Literacy (2021).

Since the 1800's reading wars have existed. It is a battle of two major camps on how reading should be taught, namely: whole language versus phonics. Whole language, like speaking which can be learned, is taught out of presumption, that by sounding out individual letters one segmentation is not needed; rather the whole word, once seen, can be pronounced. This way sounds register in the memory, the moment the reader sees the word. Whereas, phonics is concerned with sounding out individual letters and combined it with another letter by sounding out until all individual letters are sounded out in combination Lake (2022).



In the United States, the use of sighted words reading is problematic. Since the implementation of sighted words reading; the US reading literacy rate dropped abruptly. Experts expressed concern that phonics should be taught in school, instead of a whole word approach. While teaching, reading approaches can be varied but grapheme-phoneme correspondence should be the core of reading approach (Kim, 2021).

Almost sixty-five million people are unable to read basic sentences, fill out a job application form, or understand the instructions on their prescription labels. This is not merely a crisis of the illiterate, but also of the under literate: a whopping fifty four percent of all American adults read at or below a sixth-grade level (Lake, 2022). Moreover, it was found out that second graders and third graders are lagging behind in reading skills. The study focused on Grade six to seven levels. Likewise, from the study: the underperforming schools had become more lagging behind, especially those who do not have access to technologies.

In Germany, studies had shown at the end of elementary grade, students were found to have low reading literacy rate, specifically the disadvantaged groups. Teachers were not prepared with technologies and inaccessibility of computers are problematic as well. Like the United States, this exacerbated the “learning loss” among learners (Mullis et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, according to Programmed for International Student Assessment (PISA): Out of seventy-nine countries, the Philippines secured the lowest spot in reading proficiency even before the pandemic. It showed further that only one in five Filipinos at age fifteen achieved at least on minimum reading proficiency level. The Southeast Asia Learning Metrics (SALM), showed that only ten percent of the country’s grade five learners achieved the minimum proficiency level at the end of elementary grade (Dela Pena, 2023). This is also a challenge and maybe problematic for teachers who are expecting from elementary toward high schools.

Reading skills among students were already problematic, nationally; let alone during lockdowns. Additionally, most students when faced with reading either English or in Filipino reading materials, most students fall under the category of “frustration” level. One writer stated “reading requires live teaching; the teacher must be at least a good reader”. Reading is composed of five big components, namely: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Labastida, 2021). Teachers from local schools are also complaining for students who reached high school but are unable to read even simple words or sentences.

In Nueva Ecija, a total four thousand fifty-six Filipino reading profiles and four thousand four hundred sixteen English reading profiles of Grade one to Grade seven students and responses from the interviews done with school heads and teachers were described using descriptive measures and analyzed using thematic analysis. Results showed that the majority of the learners were at the frustration level (Tomas, 2021).

In Davao City, students from grade four to grade six. Six-point six percent identified as nothing, ninety three percent can identify letters, sixty five percent can read words, thirty two percent can read paragraphs, twenty one percent can read story, sixteen percent can comprehend a story and only nine percent can read local materials. Based on the results of pre-assessment in literacy, the school concluded that there is a significant percentage of non-readers and frustration level while only few percentages of Instructional and Independent Level (Galman, 2021).

The phonemic base. From this phonetic reservoir are selected those distinctive sounds which form the phonemic base of a particular language system. These are, in turn, arranged in various patterns to produce meaningful utterances. The number of minimally distinctive sound features, or phonemes, which- have been selected by known language communities ranges from approximately for Hawaiian to approximately for a language community of the Northern Caucasus (Hokett, 2024). It is estimated that approximately phonemes seem to be the average number of different phonemes used in the known languages of the world.

Although some linguists consider phonemes to be abstractions, or averages, of the total number of ways in which certain distinctive sound features may be pronounced, they cannot be considered pure abstractions since their acoustical and articulatory properties are quite real (Gleason, 2019). In any case, phonemes are the basic constituents of oral language systems. Given the foregoing issue surrounding the challenges above; the author will delve more into the issue. This is to verify if similar situations exist in the locality.



This study used the phoneme grapheme mapping sheet from Grace (2021). This text aligns with Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling. Training, including teacher resources, tutorials, guidelines, and procedures. The primary goal is to help kindergarten through 6th grade students connect the sounds of spoken language to written language.

This helps to build confidence in the student through strengthening their foundational reading and writing skills. This study will also focus on the importance of literacy, structures of early phonics development, and phoneme grapheme correspondences. The studies and research to follow demonstrates the importance of early phonics development for later life success in reading, specific learning disabilities that impact reading, and a deeper dive into phoneme grapheme correspondences (Hockett, 2024).

The aim was to promote the use of phoneme-grapheme as a new pedagogic skill and to then analyze this as a potential tool for professional development. The following questions have been used to explore the research question in different ways and stages:

1. What are the challenges encountered by the English teachers in teaching phoneme-grapheme correspondence skills to Grade seven students?
2. How do they cope with those challenges with the drastic changes in teaching/learning pedagogy?
3. What are the educational insights gained by the teachers in integrating phoneme-grapheme correspondence in the reading skills of grade seven students in English classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Specific details of the research procedures were described, so future researchers can generalize the results from this study to other situations. Extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study was thoroughly discussed to develop transferability, which is the qualitative parallel to external validity in postpositivist research (Mertens, 2005). This section discussed the interview approach, explained the role of the researcher; and lastly, described the sampling method and ethical considerations.

To ensure that the same information was collected from all the participants, an interview guide was used. The interview guide included open-ended questions and topics to help structure the interview, but when needed, the interviewer also explored, probed, and asked additional questions to clarify and expand on a particular topic. The interview guide helped make interviewing several different participants more systematic and comprehensive by defining in advance the issues to be explored (Patton, 2005). The open-ended questions were framed in a way, so the participants could represent their views and perspectives in their own words and terms, in addition to taking the questions in any direction that they chose

Participants and Sampling

All of the participants are teachers in selected public schools in Davao City. These participants are currently teaching in the school year 2022-2023 with more than five years of experience in teaching English. A total of 10 participants are considered in this study who will join the in-depth interview and focused group discussion. Seven of them will join the in-depth interview (IDI) while the remaining three will be subjected to the focus group discussion (FGD). All data gathered during IDI and FGD will be recorded and transmuted to summarize the responses of the participants in an orderly manner. Below are the inclusion criteria of the participants. They served as teachers for more than five years so that they can draw comparison and contrast based on their experiences in teaching phoneme-grapheme correspondence in the junior high school.

Research Instruments

Purposive criterion sampling was employed to interview secondary teachers who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information, but also meet certain criteria. The criteria for participation in the study will be thoroughly disclosed in the following paragraphs. The researcher was specifically interested in secondary teachers who experienced teaching using phoneme-grapheme correspondence as a platform in English classrooms in the secondary program for the school year 2022-2023.



The sampling method used was purposeful and also what Patton (2005) calls extreme or deviant case sampling. Deviant case sampling focuses on cases that are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way. The researcher selected a total of ten participants from selected public schools in Davao City. The researcher was interested in this sample to explore and compare the themes that developed between the participants with differing population (Cresswell, 2019).

Teachers were invited through face to face to participate in the study. If interested, teachers were asked to complete a short demographic survey and to join a scheduled meeting. Due to expense and time, qualitative researchers often use fewer participants than quantitative researchers.

Data Analysis

I familiarized all the data gathered, by reading all the participant accounts several times according to Colaizzi's (1978) framework. I also identified all statements in the accounts that are of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, I identified meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arise from a careful consideration of the significant statements. In like manner, I reflexively "bracket" the pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced (though Colaizzi recognizes that complete bracketing is never possible). Further, I clustered the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts.

Again, bracketing of pre-suppositions is crucial, especially to avoid any potential influence of existing theory. To continue, I wrote a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes. Seemingly, I condensed the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon. Finally, I returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the phoneme-grapheme correspondence in reading skills of grade seven students in Davao City. Analysis of the data revealed three main themes; *knowledge on phoneme-grapheme correspondence, provide multiple exposures, and teaching is a virtue.*

The first theme "*knowledge on phoneme-grapheme correspondence*" has four sub-themes namely; *correct pronunciation, teaching strategies, phonemic awareness and foundation for literacy development.* Meanwhile, the second theme immersed based on the interview was "*provide multiple exposures*" with the sub-themes; *use multisensory methods, teach small set of letters, active participation and point out visual features.* Finally, the third theme immersed was "*teaching is a virtue*" with the sub-themes; *teaching reading, remedial reading, teachers training, and consider strengths and weaknesses.*

Thus, when teaching grapheme-phoneme correspondences it is imperative to take a systematic approach. A systematic approach starts with a clearly planned sequence of phonic elements that builds gradually from simple to complex. Attention is paid to the teaching process, checking for student understanding, ensuring active and successful participation of all students, and allowing time for practice of newly learned knowledge and skills.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A number of recommendations for future studies emerged from the data. This study was restricted to ten junior high school classroom teachers from Davao City. The first recommendation would be to expand this study's sample size and the geographic area of the participants. Another recommendation would be to study the perspectives of participants not included in this study: middle and senior high school teachers, specials teachers, and special education teachers. In order to collect more data on the lived experiences of general education teachers, follow-up classroom observations are recommended.

Studying the phoneme-grapheme correspondence in reading skills for inclusion as described by the participants using a quantitative approach would also be beneficial. One of the findings from this study was the lack of collaboration between English teachers. Further research is recommended to explore what type of co-teaching and alternative school program models increase the collaboration between English teachers and better serve students in their English class using phoneme-grapheme.



Moreover, educators, parents and individual students assess each student's situation and discuss adjustments needed for remote learning. Some examples include using alternatives to print, such as audio or other formats in instruction, as well as pictures, flexible scheduling and deadlines, and assistive technology.

Learning in a remote setting may differ from mainstream, classroom-based environments. This includes expectations for students and course methodology. Curricula must often be adjusted. For example, homework can be simplified, allowing students to dictate rather than type, and audio materials can be provided for reading assignments during online class.

Finally, teachers training must be properly implemented. All English teachers must be given a chance to attend seminars and workshops to enhance their capabilities in teaching phoneme-grapheme correspondence to junior high school students.

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