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**The effectiveness of a suggested program based on  
the explicit systematic phonics instruction on  
developing word recognition skill among EFL third  
grade primary pupils**

**By**

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﴿ المجلد الثالث - العدد الرابع - أكتوبر ٢٠٢١ م ﴾

# The effectiveness of a suggested program based on the explicit systematic phonics instruction on developing word recognition skill among EFL third grade primary pupils

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## المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من فاعلية برنامج مقترح مبني على تعليمات صوتية منهجية واضحة لتطوير مهارة التعرف على الكلمات لدى ٣١ تلميذاً من الصف الثالث الابتدائي في مدرسة أنور الحرمين الابتدائية ، البداري ، أسيوط. من أجل تحقيق ذلك ، تم إعطاء ما يلي (اختبار أداء القراءة الأساسي ، بطاقات الملاحظة) للمجموعة التجريبية. اتبعت الدراسة المنهجية شبه التجريبية حيث طور الباحث الأدوات التالية لأغراض البحث. تتضمن عملية جمع البيانات تقنيات كمية ونوعية. تمت معالجة البيانات إحصائياً بالمتوسط الحسابي والانحرافات المعيارية واختبار T لحساب الفروق المتوسطة ودالاتها الإحصائية ومعادلة Eta square لحساب حجم تأثير اختبار T. تم تحليل نتيجة البحث وأظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات أداء تلاميذ المجموعة التجريبية في القياس قبل العلاج ومتوسط أدائهم بعد العلاج على اختبار قراءة الأداء لصالح الطالب. بعد قياس العلاج.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تعليمات صوتية منهجية صريحة ، التعرف على الكلمات ، مهارات القراءة الأساسية.

## Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a suggested program based on explicit systematic phonics instruction on developing word recognition skill among 31 EFL third grade primary pupils at Anwar El Haramain primary school, El Badary, Assiut. In order to fulfill this, the following (basic reading performance test, observation cards) were administered to the experimental group. The study adopted quasi-experimental methodology where the researcher developed the following instruments for research purposes. Data collection process includes both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The data were statistically processed by the arithmetic mean, standard deviations, T- Test for calculating mean differences and its statistical significance, and Eta square equation to compute the effect size of T- Test. The result of the research were analyzed and findings revealed that there was existence of statistically significant differences between the performance means of pupils in the experimental group in the measurement before treatment and their performance mean after treatment measurement on the performance reading test for the favor of the after treatment measurement.

**Keywords:** Explicit systematic phonics instruction, word recognition, Basic reading skills .

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Phonics instruction is a teaching method that teaches the relationship between sounds and the letters we use to represent them. Phonics is a long-standing teaching method that is good for teaching children to decode words. Phonics instruction typically begins by teaching children that sounds are represented by specific letters. Children then learn that combinations of letters are grouped together to make more complex groups of sounds to make words. Phonics skills are important for children to be able to read fluently. Children who master phonics learn to recognize individual sounds and how to blend them together to read words. ( Logsdon, 2018)

More recently, the phrase *explicit, systematic phonics instruction* has been associated with the National Reading Panel (NRP) report (NICHD, 2000). The term *explicit* refers to lesson delivery. If a lesson is explicit, then the teacher tells children directly what she or he is trying to teach. For example, a teacher might say, “These two letters, *ch*, make the sound /ch/.” (Mesmer & Griffith, 2005). Systematic phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use to read and spell words (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Countless research studies have been conducted on phonics instruction. Much of this research has focused on the usefulness of phonics instruction and the best ways to teach children about sound-spelling relationships. Below are ten of the top research findings regarding phonics.

1. Phonics instruction can help children to read.
2. Explicit phonics instruction is more beneficial than implicit instruction.
3. Most poor readers have weak phonics skills and a strategy imbalance.
4. Phonics knowledge has a powerful effect on decoding ability.
5. Good decoders rely less on context clues than poor readers.
6. The reading process relies on a reader's attention to each letter in a word.

7. Phonemic awareness is necessary for phonics instruction to be effective.
8. Phonics instruction improves spelling ability.
9. A teacher's knowledge of phonics affects his or her ability to teach phonics.
10. It is possible to overdo phonics instruction.(Blevins, 2006; 10-15)

Explicit phonics refers to the synthesis or building up of phonics skills from their smallest unit. The teacher presents the skills sequentially, using isolated, direct instructional strategies. In addition, he or she employs controlled vocabulary stories in the beginning stages of reading instruction to help build students' confidence in using the various decoding strategies. "Research shows that it is important for children to practice the phonics they have learned. It is therefore essential that the initial books that children attempt to read on their own be composed of decodable text."( Reading Program Advisory,1996; 7)

The goal of phonics is to provide students with the mappings between letters and sounds but, unlike the goal of the sight word method, phonics is not an end point. Rather, phonics merely provides a tool that enables students to "attack" the pronunciation of words that are not recognizable at a glance (Beck, Rupley , Blair & Nichols (2009). Given that letters and sounds have systematic relationships in an alphabetic language such as English, it stands to reason that those responsible for teaching initial reading would consider telling beginners directly what those relationships are. Indeed, until about 60 years ago this is what most teachers in the United States did.. (Beck and Jue, 2002).

Phonics instruction teaches that there are forty-four sounds made by the twenty-six letters of the English language. The goal of phonics instruction is to teach those sound and symbol relationships to enable children to read and write words. It is recommended that instruction:

- Be systematic, focusing on a few regular sound and spelling patterns and progressing through more complex irregular sounds and spellings.
- Should include a lot of drill and practice (but this can and should be made enjoyable rather than grueling).
- Should include immediate feedback from teachers when students need correction to keep them from learning errors.
- Should include frequent assessment to ensure children are progressing.

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- Should include words at the student's developmental level.
- Should use multisensory methods and materials.
- Should use words students will use in everyday interactions and classroom work and then progress to more unfamiliar or complex material as the child is ready for it.
- Should include frequent review of previously learned material so children will retain skills.( Logsdon, 2018)

Many high-quality studies over the last two decades in particular, including systematic reviews, have shown that classroom programs and interventions with an explicit, systematic phonics instruction component are more effective in teaching children to read than those without such a component (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl & Willows, 2001). More recently, a teaching method called systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) has garnered strong evidence in its favour (Johnston, McGeow, & Watson, 2011).

Buckingham (2018) assures that “ Systematic synthetic phonics is well-researched in school classrooms and in clinical settings. It is also supported by cognitive science research on the processes that take place in the brain when children learn to read. This research shows that reading is not like speaking: the human brain is not innately wired for reading to develop automatically with exposure to print. Making the cognitive connections between print, sound and meaning requires making physical neurological connections between three distinct areas of the brain ( Wolf, Ullman-Shade, C. & Gottwald, 2016) Some children create these neural connections relatively quickly but others require methodical, repeated and explicit teaching (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). This is particularly true for a complex language like English where the relationships between letters and sounds is not uniform in all words.

Several studies have been conducted on phonics instruction. Much of these studies has focused on the usefulness of phonics instruction and the best ways to teach children about sound spelling relationships (Blevins, 1998; 9).

Mesmer (2005; 366) clarified that The term phonics has two meanings. First, phonics describes the letters or symbols used to encode a language's spoken components. The second meaning, more closely tied to educational practice, refers to teaching learners the relationships between letters and sounds and how to use this system to recognize words. The term systematic contains two important connotations: scope and sequence. The term explicit refers to lesson delivery. If a lesson is explicit, then the teacher tells children directly what she or he is trying to teach.

The rapid and effortless word recognition is one of the main components of effective reading. A critical component for word recognition is the ability to decode words. When teaching children to accurately decode words, they must understand the alphabetic principle and know letter-sound correspondences. It is worth noting here that effective phonics instruction in the early grades is important so that difficulties with decoding do not persist for students in later grades. (Munger, 2016). Phonics is not the first step only in the literacy direction, but also to the reading comprehension; "Then If reading words requires conscious, effortful decoding, little attention is left for comprehension of a text to occur. Since reading comprehension is the ultimate goal in teaching children to read, a critical early objective is to ensure that they are able to read words with instant, automatic recognition (Garnett, 2011). On the other side " When word recognition becomes effortless and automatic, conscious effort is no longer needed to read the words, and instead it can be devoted to comprehension of the text. Accuracy and effortlessness, or fluency, in reading words serves to clear the way for successful reading comprehension." (Munger, 2016).

## 1. The problem and its context

Through the experience of the researcher as a teacher in the primary schools, she found that there was an obvious weakness in the pupils' reading skill. Pupil's inability to recognize the letter names, their shapes and their sounds was obvious. This leads to the inability in accomplishing the educational objectives of the English curriculum for the primary stage. This curriculum contains a large number of English words which are supposed to be read, written and memorized by the pupils who couldn't even master the English letters and sounds yet. These letters are considered the basis of learning any language. So it is hard asking pupils to read and write words without making sure that they have mastered the alphabetical principle skill from the beginning. It's difficult asking for accuracy and fluency without providing sufficient time for mastering the basis of the language.

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A review of the literature showed that there were numerous studies that assured the existence of difficulties in reading comprehension skills among learners in different stages such as Reham Sobhy (2019) , Noha Mohamed (2019), Sally Atef (2020), Hosam Mohamed (2020), Samah Mohammed (2020), Azza Mohamed (2020), Rehab Mostafa (2020), ....etc.

Most of the Egyptian studies in different stages pointed out that learners show weakness towards some reading comprehension skills, whereas the Egyptian studies that dealt with pupils` literacy skills in primary schools or those who have reading difficulties are remarkably few. Hence there is a must to solve the problem and find solution to deal with it. So the remedy must be provided from the start; the lower grades as pupils need to master the simplest skills moving forward to the most complicated ones. To care more for the root cause of the problem; teaching pupils the basic reading skills and how to read in the first place. This is the only way to reach to the ultimate goal “ reading comprehension”.

There is a number of case studies documenting an increase in reading proficiency by implementing phonics instruction as an approach to teaching reading in any effective literacy reading program and providing suitable time for that such as Ahmed Eid (2012), Nahed Mohammed (2015), Effat Mohammed (2017); Ahmed Nasrawi & Dina Al-Jamal (2017), Mai El Sayed (2018) study, Ayman Ali (2019), Gelan, G.A.(2020), ....etc

The researcher contacted many specialists, inspectors, and experts in the field of learning English. They assured that it was important to focus on learning the relationship between letters and sounds and how to use these relationships to read and write words accurately to qualify the pupils to be fluent in the advanced stages, as there is an obvious weakness in their reading ability which obstructs them from reaching the desired level in learning English.

To validate the problem, the researcher followed these steps:

1. Reviewing some previous studies related to this subject.



2. Preparing a pilot study for 33 pupils in the third grade Anwar El Haremein primary school. Administer a reading test that measures the pupils` ability to recognize words. It is observed that pupils` level in word recognition skill was remarkably low. The result was in the performance test as follows:

Basic reading skills	Pupils` percentage
Word recognition	11

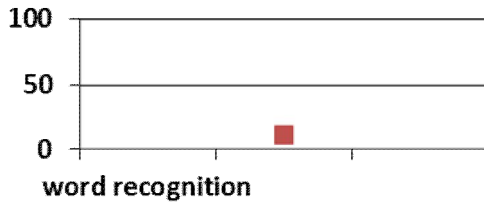


Figure (1): Basic reading skills

## 1.1 Statement of the problem

### The problem of the study can be stated as follows:

Most third grade pupils in primary stage cannot read well in the class as they cannot recognize letters and sounds at first because of the nature of the curriculum and time allowed for them. The present study is an attempt to test the effectiveness of using the explicit systematic phonics instruction in teaching reading as an attempt for improving word recognition skill for third grade pupils.

## 2. Definitions of terms

### 2.1. phonics:

Ehri (2003) defines phonics as a method of instruction that teaches students correspondences between graphemes in written language and phonemes in spoken language and how to use the correspondences to read and spell words.

Marilyn (2012) defines **phonemes** as the smallest sound in a language.

Brooks (2003) defines **grapheme** as a letter or a combination of letters used to spell a phoneme.

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Barrett (2006) clarifies that **explicit phonics** begins when we start with the simplest sound in a word and then build out from there. From patterns to syllables and then the whole word.

**In the current research phonics** is defined as a disciplined systematic method followed at class among third grade pupils to help learners to identify letter sound correspondences, decode, analyze, synthesis and recognize any words they confront.

## **Explicit systematic phonics instruction:**

Instruction in which the teacher clearly and thoroughly communicates to students how to do something. Working with young students, the teacher may use a model, lead and test approach (Van, 2006).

**For the purpose of this research,** it is defined as an organized teaching method followed in the class among third grade pupils for developing word recognition skill depending on teaching single sounds followed with diphthongs, digraphs and R- controlled words and applying this knowledge on meaningful decoded context using simple and specific steps.

## **Basic reading skills**

Includes phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, phonics, and word analysis. Essential skills include identification of individual sounds and the ability to manipulate them; identification of printed letters and sounds associated with letters; and decoding of written language.

## **word Recognition**

Gough (1984, 225) mentioned that word recognition is the foundation of the reading process. According to Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) word recognition is "the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and virtually effortlessly".

**For the purpose of the research,** it is defined as the ability of third grade primary pupils to decode any CVC words they confront automatically and correctly.

### 3. Objectives of the study

#### **This study aimed at:**

1. Identifying the effectiveness of using a suggested program based on using the explicit systematic phonics instruction in developing word recognition skill among third grade primary pupils).

### 4. Question of the study

#### **The current study was an attempt to answer one main question:**

1. What is the effectiveness of using a suggested program based on the explicit systematic phonics instruction in developing word recognition skill, among third grade primary pupils).

### 5. Hypotheses of the study

To answer the question, the researcher, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre- post administrations of the reading test, favoring the post administration.

### 6. Delimitations of the study

#### **The current study was limited to:**

1. 31 third grade primary pupils at Anwar El Haremein School , El Badary, Assiut.
2. The present study was limited to word recognition skill for beginning readers in the primary stage.
3. The study adopted the systematic phonics instruction in teaching reading.

### 7. Design & Methodology

The present study adopted the quasi- experimental design; one experimental group was taught using the suggested program and pre-post administration of the reading test.

### 8. Instruments and materials of the study

The following instruments and materials were designed for research purposes:

1. A suggested program based on the explicit systematic phonics instruction. ( prepared by the researcher)
2. A pre-post reading test. (prepared by the researcher)
3. observation cards to measure their ability in identifying letters, sounds, analyzing, synthesizing, decoding and recognizing words.

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## **9. Participants**

The study includes 31 pupils in the third grade primary pupils in Anwar El Haremein primary school, El Badary, Assiut.

## **10. Procedures**

### **To answer the major question of the study:**

What is the effectiveness of using a suggested program based on an explicit systematic phonics instruction in developing word recognition skill among third grade primary pupils? The following procedures were followed:

1. Preparing the program along with the measurement tools after reviewing literature and previous studies that related to the suggested program.
2. Presenting all the tools to a jury panel for making suitable modifications.
3. Modifying the tools and the materials based on the jury's instructions and recommendations.
4. Piloting the reading test to the research group before applying the program.
5. Implementing the program by using the explicit systematic phonics instruction to the research group.
6. Post- administering the reading test on the group of the research
7. Collecting and analyzing data statistically using SPSS and excel program
8. Interpreting discussing the results, providing conclusion, recommendation and suggestion for further researchers

## **11. Research results:**

the study concluded the following results:

- The hypothesis of the research anticipated that there would be a statistically significant difference of the level of 0,01 between the mean scores of the performance of the pupils in the overall pre-post performance test in word recognition skill favoring the post implementation.

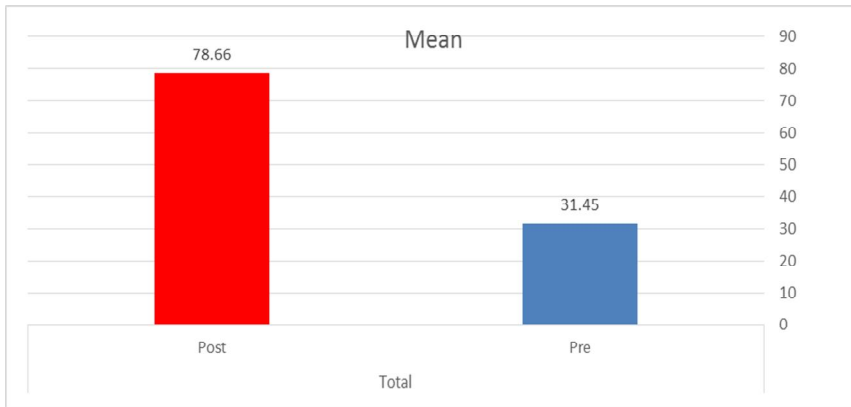
- The researcher employed paired samples T- Test via using SPSS in the current research to analyze data obtained from the experimental group on the reading performance test. The time table indicates that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the pupils concerning word recognition skills as t- value (23.57) is significant at (0.01) level. The effect size value represents a large effect as eta square value is (0.95) .This reveals the improvement of the performance of the pupils in these skills. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the suggested program was effective in developing word recognition skill among third grade primary pupils.

### Time table (1)

There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the pupils in word recognition skill concerning the post reading performance test.

Test	التطبيق	N	In	Std. Deviation	T	Sig(2- tailed)	$\eta^2$
Total	Pre	31	31.45	8.23	23.57	0.01	0.95
	Post	31	78.66	7.25			

Figure (1)



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