PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS OF A GROUP OF GRADE 4 LEARNERS, IN A MULTI-CULTURAL, MULTI-LINGUAL EDUCATION CONTEXT WITH ENGLISH AS LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING (ELoLT)

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
M. Communication Pathology
In the Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has never before been submitted to any tertiary or other institution for any purposes whatsoever.

This declaration unequivocally states that this is my own, original work. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source, a previous unpublished research report or any electronic media), this has been meticulously acknowledged and referenced.

I also declare that I fully understand what plagiarism is, that it is a crime punishable by law, and that I am well-informed about the University of Pretoria’s policy in this regard.

______________________
Coralié Elizabeth Vermaak
30 September 2006
ABSTRACT

TITLE: Phonological awareness skills of a group of Grade 4 learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context with English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT).

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Rationale: The importance of well developed phonological awareness and the effect of poor phonological awareness skills on reading and spelling have long been recognised. However, a dearth of research exists regarding populations in multi-cultural, multi-lingual contexts both nationally and internationally. This issue is of particular importance in the South African context where many Black learners in the school setting have no other choice than English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT).

Aim: The purpose of the study was to explore the effect of a multi-cultural, multi-lingual context on the English phonological awareness skills of a group of Black Grade 4 learners in a primary school setting in South Africa.

Method: An exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design was implemented, which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. An assessment battery consisting of formal and informal assessments was used to determine levels of development. The researcher endeavoured to find statistical correlations between the participants' phonological awareness skills on the one hand, and their phonological abilities, their expressive and receptive language abilities, and their reading and spelling abilities in ELoLT on the other.

Participants: Fifteen Black Grade 4 learners, each with a Black language as mother tongue, who attended a mainstream school where English was the language of
learning and teaching (ELoLT), participated in the study. The participants’ ages ranged between 9 years 11 months, and 10 years 11 months.

**Results:** The participants’ phonological abilities in English as LoLT showed that 47% of the participants produced the target consonants with a consonant approximation, and vowel approximations were produced by all of the participants in single words. All fifteen the participants’ expressive and receptive language abilities in English as their LoLT, were on a below-average level and their expressive language abilities were more advanced than their receptive language abilities. All the participants evidenced problems in terms of their phonological awareness skills. Based on the results obtained for reading decoding abilities, only one third of the participants could be considered to be readers of an average standard. The reading comprehension abilities of all the participants were on a lower level than those of first language speakers of Standard South African English. Furthermore, the participants’ spelling abilities in English as LoLT were not age-appropriate. Even though no significant correlation could be determined between the participants’ reading comprehension and phonological awareness skills (due to the fact that memory probably played a role in their reading comprehension), it was statistically determined that their poor phonological awareness skills could be associated with their below-average phonological, receptive and expressive language, reading decoding, and spelling abilities.

**Conclusions:** The results of this research have implications for the role of speech-language therapists in terms of collaboration, prevention, assessment, and intervention where the development of these learners’ phonological awareness skills is concerned. Clinical implications focus on the dissemination of information, therapy planning, and EAL learner support. The need for further research in this field is emphasised.

**KEY WORDS:** Phonological awareness skills, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, Black South African English (BSAE), English as Additional Language (EAL), English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT).
OPSOMMING

Rasionaal: Die belang van toereikende ontwikkeling van fonogiese bewustheidsvaardighede en die invloed wat swak fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede op lees- en spelvermoë kan hê, is reeds lank bekend, maar daar bestaan sowel nasioneaal en internasionaal 'n navorsingsleemte ten opsigte van bevolkingsgroepe in 'n multikulturele, meertalige konteks. Hierdie aangeleentheid is veral belangrik in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks waar 'n groot hoeveelheid Swart leerders in die skoolkonteks in terme van onderrigtaal geen ander keuse as Engels het nie.

Doel: Die doel van die studie was om die invloed van 'n multikulturele, meertalige konteks op die Engelse fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede van 'n groep Swart leerders in Graad 4 in 'n laerskoolkonteks in Suid-Afrika te bepaal.

Metode: 'n Eksploratiewe, beskrywende en kontekstuele navorsings-ontwerp is geïmplimenteer wat sowel die kwantitatiewe as kwalitatiewe paradigmas ingesluit het. 'n Evalueringsbattery wat vir formele én informele assessering toegelaat het, is benut om ontwikkelingsvlakke te bepaal. Die navorser het gepoog om statistiese korrelasies tussen die deelnemers se Engelse fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede aan die een kant en hul fonologiese vermoë, ekspressiewe en reseptiewe taalvermoë en hulle lees- en spelvermoë in Engels (as onderrigtaal) aan die ander kant te bepaal.

Deelnemers: Vyftien Swart leerders in Graad 4, waarvan elkeen 'n Swart taal as moedertaal het maar hul skoolopleiding in 'n hoofstroomskool waar Engels die enigste voertaal was ontvang het, het aan hierdie navorsingsprojek deelgeneem. Die ouderdomme van die deelnemers het gestrek vanaf 9 jaar 11 maande tot 10 jaar 11 maande.

Resultate: Die deelnemers se fonologiese vermoë in Engels as onderrigtaal het daarop gedui dat 47% van die deelnemers die teikenkonsonante met 'n konsonantbenadering uitgespreek het, terwyl vokaalbenaderings in enkelwoorde by al die deelnemers voorgekom het. Al vyftien die deelnemers se ekspressiewe en reseptiewe taalvermoë in Engels as onderrigtaal was ondergemiddeld, en hul ekspressiewe taalvermoë was beter ontwikkel as hul reseptiewe taalvermoë. Al die
deelnemers het fonologiese bewustheids-uitvalle vertoon. Slegs 'n derde van die deelnemers kon, op grond van die resultate van hul leesdekodering, as gemiddelde lesers beskryf word. Die leesbegrip van die deelnemers was op 'n laer vlak as dié van eerstetaalsprekers van Engels. Verder het die die resultate ten opsigte van die deelnemers se spelvermoë daarop gedui dat hul spelvermoë in Engels as onderrigtaal onderrgemiddeld is. Alhoewel daar nie 'n korrelasie tussen die deelnemers se leesbegripsvermoë en hul fonologiese bewustheids-vaardighede bepaal kon word nie (aangesien geheue in alle waarskynlikheid hierdie resultate beïnvloed het), kon dit statisties bepaal word dat die deelnemers se swak fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede in verband gebring kon word met hul ondergemiddelde fonologiese vermoë, reseptiewe en ekspressiewe taalvermoë, leesdekoderingsvermoë én spelvermoë.

**Samevatting:** Die resultate van die studie het implikasies vir die rol van die spraaktaalterapeut ten opsigte van samewerking, voorkoming, evaluering en intervensie rakende die ontwikkeling van fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede van leerders in 'n multikulturele, meertalige onderrigkonteks waar die onderrigstrategie uitkomsgebaseerd is. Kliniese implikasies van die studie fokus op verskaffing van inligting, terapiebeplanning en ondersteuning aan leerders met Engels as addisionele taal. Die behoefte vir verdere navorsing in hierdie studiegebied is beklemtoon.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** Fonologiese bewustheid, multikultureel, meertalig, Swart Suid-Afrikaanse Engels, Engels as addisionele taal, Engels as onderrigtaal.
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