

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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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.

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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 fonologiese bewustheid en die invloed wat swak fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede op lees- en spelvermoë kan hê, is reeds lank bekend, maar daar bestaan sowel nasionaal 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 geïmplimenter 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 resultate ten opsigte van die deelnemers se *spelvermoë* daarop gedui dat hul spelvermoë in Engels as onderrigtaal ondergemiddeld 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 spraak-
taalterapeut ten opsigte van samewerking, voorkoming, evaluering en intervensie
rakende die ontwikkeling van fonologiese bewustheidsvaardighede van leerders in 'n
multikulturele, meertalige onerwyskonteks 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.

Table of Contents

	Page
CHAPTER 1 -	
INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS OF LEARNERS IN THE MULTI-CULTURAL, MULTI-LINGUAL SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION CONTEXT	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1.1 Language and scholastic issues associated with phonological awareness skills.....	5
1.1.2 Problem statement and rationale for the study.....	9
1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.....	10
1.3 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS.....	11
1.4 TERMINOLOGY AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	12
1.4.1 Terminology.....	12
1.4.1.1 <i>Phonological awareness</i>	12
1.4.1.2 <i>Multi-lingual</i>	13
1.4.1.3 <i>Multi-cultural</i>	13
1.4.1.4 <i>Basic Interactive Communication Skills (BICS)</i>	13
1.4.1.5 <i>Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)</i>	13
1.4.1.6 <i>Black South African English (BSAE)</i>	14
1.4.1.7 <i>English as Additional Language (EAL)</i>	14
1.4.1.8 <i>English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT)</i>	14
1.4.2 List of abbreviations.....	14
1.5 CONCLUSION.....	15
1.6 SUMMARY.....	16
CHAPTER 2 -	
FACTORS IMPACTING UPON THE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	17
2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT.....	19

2.3	LANGUAGE RELATED ASPECTS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS.....	23
2.4	PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS.....	28
2.5	EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT.....	31
2.6	THE ROLE OF THE SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPIST.....	34
2.7	CONCLUSION.....	37
2.8	SUMMARY.....	38

CHAPTER 3 -

METHOD	39
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	39
3.2 RESEARCH AIMS	40
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	40
3.4 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	42
3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING.....	44
3.5.1 Criteria for the selection of participants.....	44
3.5.2 Sampling method.....	46
3.5.3 Selection of participants.....	46
3.5.3.1 Materials and Apparatus used for the selection of participants.....	46
3.5.3.2 Procedure for selection of Participants.....	47
3.5.3.3 Description of Participants.....	50
3.5.3.4 Description of the rating assistant and the linguist.....	52
3.6 MATERIAL AND APPARATUS.....	52
3.7 PROCEDURES.....	59
3.7.1 Pre-testing of the test battery.....	59
3.7.2 Procedures for the collection of data.....	60
3.7.3 Procedures for recording of data.....	62
3.7.4 Procedures for the analysis of data.....	62
3.7.5 Reliability and validity.....	66
3.8 SUMMARY.....	67
3.9 CONCLUSION.....	67

CHAPTER 4 -

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	68
4.1 INTRODUCTION	68
4.2 PHONOLOGICAL ABILITIES	71
4.2.1 Variations in the production of consonants	71
4.2.2 Variations in the production of vowels.....	76
4.3 RECEPTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE	80
4.3.1 Receptive language abilities of the participants	80
4.3.1.1 <i>Processing of word and sentence structure</i>	81
4.3.1.2 <i>Processing of word classes</i>	83
4.3.1.3 <i>Processing of linguistic concepts</i>	84
4.3.1.4 <i>Processing of relationships and ambiguities</i>	84
4.3.1.5 <i>Processing of oral directions</i>	85
4.3.1.6 <i>Processing of spoken paragraphs</i>	85
4.3.1.7 <i>Conclusions regarding receptive language abilities</i>	86
4.3.2 The participants' English expressive language abilities	86
4.3.2.1 <i>Producing word series</i>	87
4.3.2.2 <i>Producing model sentences</i>	88
4.3.2.3 <i>Production of formulated sentences</i>	88
4.3.3 Language abilities of the participants	88
4.4 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS	89
4.5 READING ABILITIES	93
4.5.1 Participants' reading decoding abilities.....	93
4.5.2 Participants' reading comprehension abilities.....	97
4.6 SPELLING ABILITIES	98
4.7 CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS' ABILITIES IN PHONOLOGY, LANGUAGE, READING, SPELLING, AND PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS	102
4.7.1 Correlations between phonological ability and phonological awareness skills of participants.....	104
4.7.2 Correlations between language abilities and phonological awareness skills of participants.....	104

4.7.1.1	<i>Correlations between phonological awareness skills and receptive language abilities of participants.....</i>	104
4.7.1.2	Correlations between participants' phonological awareness skills and their expressive language abilities.....	105
4.7.3	Correlations between participants' reading abilities and phonological awareness skills.....	105
4.7.1.3	<i>Correlations between participants' reading decoding abilities and phonological awareness skills.....</i>	106
4.7.1.4	<i>Correlations between participants' reading comprehension abilities and phonological awareness skills.....</i>	106
4.7.4	Correlations between participants' spelling abilities and phonological awareness skills.....	107
4.8	SUMMARY.....	107
4.9	CONCLUSION.....	108
CHAPTER 5 -		
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
5.1.	Introduction	109
5.2	Conclusions	110
5.3	Critical evaluation of the study.....	115
5.4	Clinical implications of the results.....	121
5.5	Implications for further research.....	124
5.6	Conclusion.....	127
REFERENCES		128
APPENDICES.....		145
LIST OF TABLES.....		xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....		xii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....		xiii

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1.1 List of abbreviations	14
2.1 Percentages and corresponding numbers of mother tongue speakers of the eleven official South African languages.....	20
2.2 The two main indigenous language groups of South Africa and the individual languages constituting each group	21
2.3 Differences between the content based curriculum and the current OBE approach to education.....	31
3.1 Biographic detail of participants.....	50
3.2 Relevant information regarding the rating assistant and the consulting speech scientist.....	52
3.3 Material and apparatus used for the collection of data.....	53
3.4 Descriptions or definitions of decoding errors.....	65
4.1 Phonological variation (PV) profiles of consonants produced by the participants (n=7).....	73
4.2 Phonological variations in vowel productions produced by the participants (n = 15).....	77
4.3 Receptive language abilities of the participants in English (n=15).....	81
4.4 Participants' English expressive language abilities (n=15).....	87
4.5 Language abilities of the participants (n=15).....	89
4.6 Participants' results on the Phonological Assessment Battery (PhAB).....	90
4.7 Order of proficiency in phonological awareness skills.....	91
4.8 Participants' decoding errors.....	94
4.9 Reading decoding level of each participant (n = 15).....	95
4.10 Reading comprehension abilities	97
4.11 Spelling mistakes and analysis of the mistakes.....	99
4.12 Correlations between the participants' phonological abilities, language abilities, phonological awareness skills, reading abilities, and spelling abilities.....	103

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1.1 An overview of the development of phonological awareness skills.....	3
1.1 Issues surrounding phonological awareness skills.....	6
2.1 Outline of Chapter 2.....	19
2.2 The role of the speech language therapist as an important member of the multi-disciplinary team that focuses on phonological awareness.....	35
3.1 Receptive language abilities evaluated by the Clinical Evaluation of Language Functions.....	55
3.2 Expressive (production) ability evaluated by the Clinical Evaluation of Language Functions (CELF).....	56
3.3 Sub-tests of the Phonological Assessment Battery (PhAB).....	58
4.1 Outline of the presentation of the results	70
4.2 Phonological variations in consonant production of the participants in English (n=15).....	71

APPENDICES

APPENDIX	PAGE
A PERMISSION FROM THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ETHICS COMMITTEE.....	145
B LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TO THE SELECTED EDUCATIONAL COLLEGE.....	148
C LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TO PARENTS.....	151
D LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TO THE PARTICIPANTS.....	154
E QUESTIONNAIRE DIRECTED AT PARENTS.....	156
F PERMISSION FROM THE SELECTED EDUCATIONAL COLLEGE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THEIR INSTITUTION.....	158
G SCORE SHEET FOR PHONOLOGICAL SKILLS.....	160
H INFORMAL READING DECODING AND COMPREHENSION TEST DESIGNED BY THE RESEARCHER.....	162
I INFORMAL READING DECODING TEST DESIGNED BY THE RESEARCHER.....	166
J INFORMAL SPELLING TEST DESIGNED BY THE RESEARCHER.....	168
K INFORMAL SCORE SHEET OF RAW DATA DESIGNED BY THE RESEARCHER.....	170
L COMPLETE PHONOLOGICAL PROFILES FOR THE PARTICIPANTS WITH PHONOLOGICAL VARIATIONS.....	174
M READING DECODING LEVELS OF PARTICIPANTS.....	181
N ERRORS MADE BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SPELLING TEST.....	183
O CORRELATIONS OF THE RESULTS OF THE VARIOUS TESTS USED..	186