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SUPPORTING YOUNG L2 ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH WORD RECOGNITION: DESIGN OF EARLY READING MATERIALS

Abstract

This theoretical article presents a case for a new approach to the teaching of word recognition in English as a foreign language to young learners in Polish early years education, arguing that there is a need for greater attention to explicit instruction in alphabetic principles, selected phonics and decoding skills. Research in first language (L1) English and foreign language (L2) development of word recognition skills is outlined. Differences between the orthographies of Polish and English are highlighted. Approaches used in L1 early reading instruction are contrasted with those commonly applied in L2 settings. The need for more explicit instruction is rationalized on the basis of a brief description of impressions from 20 hours of classroom observation. The second part of the paper presents some principles for the design of materials to introduce alphabetic principles of English and elements of phonics to support word recognition, with examples. The ability to recognize words rapidly and with ease is a key skill, which, unless mastered early, could potentially have a negative impact on the whole of a child's language education.

Keywords: word recognition, decoding, early EFL reading, phonics, materials design

Słowa kluczowe: rozpoznawanie wyrazów, dekodowanie, wczesne czytanie w języku angielskim jako J2, kody fonologiczne/ metoda fonetyczna (phonics), projektowanie materiałów dydaktycznych

1. Introduction

This article aims to bring a new perspective to thinking on the early stages of teaching to read in English as a foreign language for teachers and teacher educators in Poland. It is acknowledged, on the basis of a very large body of research (e.g. Caravolas, Lervåg, Mikulajová, Defior, Seidlová-Málková, Hulme, 2019), that learning to read in English is a slow and demanding process for the child who has English as their first language, because of the specific characteristics of the orthography. Yet there appears to be an unstated assumption in Polish education that if a child can read words in Polish then, as if automatically, they will be able to read words in English. I propose a short overview of the literature to support the idea that a substantial number of children learning English in school need more explicit instruction in how to read words in English. This is then followed by a proposal of principles for the design of materials for EFL learners in early years classes which could be used to assist them in early reading in English. The article focuses exclusively on the initial stages of learning to read in English for typically developing children and does not deal with specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Research in first language English (L1) reading around the world shows that comprehension of a written text is not possible until basic lower order skills, such as word recognition, are firmly in place (Cain, Oakhill, Bryant, 2004) and that it is the understanding of words which is the “foundation of the reading process” (Gough, 1984: 225).

2. Development of reading in L1 English

In their L1, before the child encounters written text, they have built up an aural (words they respond to when they hear them) and oral vocabulary (words they can say), which usually contains more words that can be recognized than the number that can be produced. This initial vocabulary resource at about the age of 3 has been found to predict the child’s reading ability in later years (Snowling, Melby-Lervåg, 2016), and has also been found to be related to the socio-economic status of the household, and the level of education of the parents or caregivers (Chiu, McBride-Chang, Lin, 2012). In some home environments the child’s first exposure to written text is through being read to by an adult or older sibling. Sitting alongside the reader so they can see what is being read, the child is encouraged to engage with the story by looking at the pictures, and to interact by pointing or responding to what can be seen. This process of being read aloud to socializes the child into the

culture of reading, and exposes them to prose (or verse), which in turn helps develop their sense of rhythm and phonemic awareness and builds a feeling for the grammar of the language. These early “reading” experiences potentially have affective connections for the child, promoting a positive attitude to books and reading. Being read to as a child has been found to be associated with higher reading scores and greater enjoyment of reading at age 15 (OECD, 2012).

When a child first is taught to read in L1 English, the process begins at word level, usually with words that are already familiar to the child from their aural vocabulary. Thus the initial stages of reading are a process of recognition of how a known word is represented in written form. This “orthographic mapping process” (Ehri, 2014: 5) is when the child learns how sounds are connected to letters, how the combination of letters forms a word, and how that word, or part of a word, is pronounced. In this way, the concept, word, spelling, meaning and pronunciation are bonded together in the memory. That is to say, the graphic form of the word, its meaning and its phonology are firmly connected together in the mental lexicon. Looking at a word will then (gradually over time) automatically and involuntarily trigger access to its pronunciation and meaning (Ziegler, 2018).

In an instructed setting, on encountering a new word, the L1 young child uses a decoding strategy of sounding out individual letters (graphemes), as in /d/- /p/-/g/ followed by blending the sounds (phonemes), starting from the left with the onset and blending the sounds together, as in /d/- /p-g/, /dpg/. This process (also used in L1 Polish reading instruction, Krasowicz-Kupis, Awramiuk, 2017) allows the child to pronounce words with which they are unfamiliar, provided that the word follows regular conventions (see ‘sight’ words below). If the child has already heard this word, then the decoding process enables recognition and allows access to the representation in the lexical memory, which may already include the meaning (Ehri, 2005: 172). Reading the word several times in this slow and effortful way of sounding and blending helps the recognition of the word to gradually become automatized. This needs to be accompanied by frequent exposure to the written form of the word.

3. Differences in the orthographies of English and Polish

According to Perfetti and Dunlap (2008), the L1 mapping process of phoneme-grapheme is the reader’s default mechanism which the learner will automatically and involuntarily employ. Thus, the beginning reader in a foreign language takes the processes they have acquired through learning to

read in their L1 and applies them to the L2. Unfortunately, however, there are crucial differences between languages in terms of orthographic depth and transparency (Katz, Frost, 1992). English is an alphabetic language with a deep orthography, meaning that sound-letter relationships (grapheme-phoneme correspondences) are not regular. The same phoneme may be represented in different ways in the written language, as for example /ʃ/ which can be written in different ways, such as -ti as in station, sh- as in ship, or ci- as in delicious). The same letter combinations in English may have different pronunciations (e.g. the digraph -ou- can be /u:/ as in through, /əʊ/ as in though, or /ɔ:/ as in your). A large number of words in English cannot be decoded by sounding and blending, and must be memorized holistically, eidetically as logographic images, as “sight” or “exception” words (e.g. one, school). A further challenge in English orthography is granularity (Ziegler, Goswami, 2005), which refers to the number of letters used to represent a sound. One phoneme in English may be rendered by letter combinations or strings which differ in length, such as -ght in the final position in the word *light*, which is read as /t/, while -er in the final position in a word is often sounded as /ə/, as in teacher. By comparison, in terms of orthographic depth, Polish is “not as shallow as Italian or Finnish, but not as opaque as English or French” (Awramiuk, Krasowicz-Kupis, 2014: 5). Sound-grapheme relations “are less transparent, less regular and less coherent in written English than in Polish” (Łockiewicz, Jaskulska, 2018: 102, own translation). When it comes to consistency, Polish has a small number of pairs of sounds that are represented by more than one grapheme (e.g. ó u; ś si; ch h), in contrast to the large number in English. For the child who is an L1 speaker of Polish these differences between Polish and English mean that their expectations when beginning to read (based on their L1 experience) are 1) that most words in English can be decoded through sounding and blending 2) that most letters in a word are sounded and 3) that a letter will represent one and the same sound. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

4. Learning to read words in L1 English

Learning to read a word in English is a process which depends, first of all, on the reader’s knowledge of the system of the alphabet, that is building a database in the memory of possible spellings of different sounds (Landerl, Castles, Parilla, 2021). The letter(s)-phoneme relationship is either taught explicitly, or acquired implicitly through practice as the learner recognizes recurring patterns which appear in different words (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004). For alphabetic languages like English, research finds that explicit in-

struction in decoding is the most effective way to introduce letter-sound relationships (Verhoeven, Perfetti, 2021). Ehri (2014) advocates displaying the written form when a new word is taught, as this enhances memorization of the spelling and pronunciation. In addition, asking learners to say new words aloud when they see them in a text was found to explicitly reinforce the phonological-graphic connection. In order to read a word, therefore, the learner needs explicit knowledge of how to segment the word into letters, or letter strings, which are represented by phonemes, and to know how the letter strings are pronounced. However, as not all words can be read with the help of sounding and blending, there must also be an approach to memorization of sight words. This requires a process of orthographic mapping, where the child learns to connect the graphic form of an exception word with its pronunciation. Clearly, for this to take place successfully, the child must see and hear the word simultaneously and understand its meaning. Seeing and successfully saying a word that is understood is another way of fixing the sound-graphic-semantic relation in the lexicon. It should be stressed that the process of learning to read words automatically takes place in phases over time (Ehri, 2005) and that progress may also seem to include setbacks, as the phases are not discrete. With time and substantial practice from reading, almost all words come to be recognized and read by sight, automatically.

Decoding skills alone, however, are not enough to support reading of words. Tunmer and Chapman (2012a) hypothesized that vocabulary knowledge will predict future reading comprehension and will also help to improve “phonological decoding and word recognition skills” (Tunmer, Chapman, 2012b: 457). The reason for this is that successful decoding of a word can provide an exemplar in the lexical memory which can then be used as a template for decoding similar words, or parts of words, by analogy (photograph, for example, may in future help the child identify that the <ph> combination is pronounced /f/.) Braze et al. (2007) indeed found that knowledge of vocabulary strongly correlates with reading comprehension. Conversely, a limited vocabulary, especially of spoken words, constricts the child’s ability to deal with the decoding of new, or longer, more complex words, as they have fewer phonological-graphically linked models in their lexicon (Perfetti, 2007). Thus, developing the reading skills of struggling readers requires both work on vocabulary development and speaking, as well as instruction in decoding and orthographic conventions (Tunmer, Greeney, 2010). An adequate store of exemplar words and knowledge of decoding skills allows the child to begin to teach themselves (Share, 2004) as they read. In this way they build up a collection of more examples of different possible pronunciations of letter combinations and so have greater flexibility when they encounter a new word. If one variation of pronunciation seems unlikely, they

will then be able to try alternatives, until a possible match is found (Venezky, 1999). For the child who falls behind their peers in developing reading fluency the consequences may be serious. This child takes longer to decode words, reads more slowly and with greater effort and so accesses fewer words. Over time their vocabulary development slows, or stalls. As classmates' reading skills grow, the struggling child may become de-motivated, disengage and begin to avoid reading, thus compounding their difficulty (Torgesen, 2004). Early diagnosis and interventions have been found to effectively avert this process (National Reading Panel, 2000).

5. Learning to read words in L2 English

The important difference between L1 reading and the L2 reading with young learners in school settings is that the L1 child is already familiar with the first words they meet in the first texts they are asked to try to read. This is rarely the case with the child in early years foreign language classes. They are often simultaneously encountering a new word for the first time and seeing its written form. There is often no L2 aural entry in the child's lexical memory when they first encounter the new word.

In both L1 and L2 early reading, phonological awareness (PA) has been found to be positively associated with reading outcomes in young L2 readers. This applies to learners of English from different language backgrounds (Lesaux, Siegel, 2003). PA refers to the ability to distinguish, access, and remember sounds and syllables (onset, rime) in words, and to having an awareness of rhyme and number of word segments (Landerl, Castles, Parrilla, 2021). This ability is of particular importance for sounds in the L2 which do not occur in the L1.

As in L1 research, studies of L2 reading have found that skilled word recognition is fundamental for successful reading (e.g. Grant, Gottardo, Geva, 2011). Alderson et al. (2016) found rapid word recognition in both L1 (Finnish) and L2 (English EFL) was a distinguishing factor between weak and strong readers. The ability to decode, which is key in initial stages, becomes less central, however, as reading proficiency develops (Braze et al. 2007). This does not indicate that decoding is no longer required, but rather that word recognition has become fluent and automatized.

According to Koda (2007), when learning to read in the L2 it is necessary to go through a new process, whereby the child adjusts their existing L1 orthographic map to accommodate the specifics of the new language. To assist this process it is important that they are taught not only the meaning of new words, but also their orthographic form (how to read and write

them) and pronunciation (how to read them correctly) (Perfetti, 2007). However, as we shall see in the next section, common practice in the introduction of new words in early FL language classrooms is to focus exclusively on oral skills and to assume that this will, in time, lead to recognition of the written form of the word. As the number of FL lessons in early years is often very limited (e.g. 2 hours weekly in Poland) this expectation appears to be misplaced (Woore, 2022).

6. Approaches to the early teaching of reading in English: L1 and EFL

In 2000 the National Reading Panel (NRP) in the USA, in an exhaustive review of research on L1 reading, found phonemic awareness and knowledge of the alphabet (letter names) to be foundation skills which reliably predict L1 English reading proficiency (Share, Jorm, Maclean, Matthews, 1984). Another skill found to help in deciphering new words is the ability to segment a word into parts, and to recognize letter strings which function as graphemes representing sounds. Meta-analysis of the available research found that programs which use different kinds of phonics instruction (the relationship between sounds and how they are written and the ability to sound words) were more effective in the teaching of reading than programs which did not explicitly introduce sound-symbol relationships. While there is still controversy over which phonics approach should be taken, the impact of the NRP report has resulted in phonics being widely implemented in L1 reading programs across the English-speaking world.

In the UK, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) reports on their website that systematic teaching of phonics “has a positive impact overall (+ 5 months) (...) and is an important component in the development of early reading skills, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds” (n.d), echoing findings from Higgins et al. (2017). England has adopted a synthetic phonics syllabus, which progressively over the period of primary education introduces sounds and ways in which they can be written, thus integrating the teaching of early reading and spelling. Texts for teaching reading are consequently arranged around spelling rules, phonics and vocabulary, building gradually from monosyllabic, easily sounded and blended words, through systematic introduction of spelling conventions, homophones and gradually longer words.

By contrast, many courses in EFL assume a “whole word” approach which promotes a “look and say” strategy (Papp, 2020). The syllabuses for course books for early instruction are arranged thematically, from a child development perspective, starting from the immediate environment

of what is familiar, the home and school. Words introduced are selected by quite other principles than their readability or representation of spelling rules. The teachers' guides recommend use of pictures or realia to support understanding, and that the child hears and repeats the new word. As a rule, no attention is paid to decoding. In early years primary English course books very few examples of tasks on phonemic awareness can be found (Kusiak-Pisowacka, 2017). The unstated assumption seems to be that once the child has learnt the process of decoding in their first language, then these fundamental skills can be transferred to decoding the L2. While this may be possible in immersion contexts, research suggests (e.g. Kovelman et al., 2015) that for learners encountering English after the age of 3, even in contexts where the community language is English, results in reading were better where there was use of phonics, than where there was a whole language approach. Woore (2022), with reference to school learners of French in the UK, reports that even after learning for 4 or 5 years many students still had fundamental problems with decoding. The suggestion appears to be that some kind of phonics instruction assists young FL learners in the process of the orthographic mapping of English on to existing knowledge. Indeed, in recent years, countries such as Taiwan have introduced phonological awareness training and elements of phonics in early foreign language curricula (Huo, Wang, 2017). Woore (2021) suggests that increased proficiency in decoding words may also have other positive effects on, for example, the learning of new words and spelling. This is echoed to some extent by Rolla San Francisco et al. (2006), who found that when young Spanish bilinguals did not receive instruction in English orthographical rules they resorted to Spanish-influenced spelling, suggesting that instruction in early reading can affect understanding of differences in orthographies. There seem to be indications, therefore, that adding training in phonics, following trends in L1 teaching of reading, might be of benefit to young foreign language learners.

7. Early EFL reading in the Polish context

The core curriculum for early years (grades 1-3) for first language Polish contains two descriptors in the targets for reading that focus on basic skills. We learn that by the end of grade 3 the child should be able to 1) read aloud texts which contain words that have been worked on in class, fluently, correctly and with expression, where the text is age-appropriate and about the real experiences of children; 2) read silently and with concentration, texts they have written themselves and printed texts (based on Journal of Laws

24.02.2017, poz.356. own translation). The curriculum targets then continue, describing comprehension skills that are expected. By contrast, in the targets for reading in a foreign language, in the Polish curriculum at the same educational stage, we find that children are expected to understand words and very simple texts of one or several sentences (for example, comic strips or stories), 1) understand the general sense of a text, particularly where it is supported with pictures or sound and 2) find given information in a text (Journal of Laws 24.02.2017, poz.356. own translation). As no mention is made in the foreign language targets of the basic skills of reading, the implication appears to be, therefore, that the child will be able to read English, as, like Polish, it is an alphabetic language. As I have described above, this is a problematic assumption.

My interest in this area grew following 20 hours of observation in grade 4 in two different primary schools in Poland and with 5 different teachers. I saw that reading ability was checked by asking named students to read aloud from the course book (it should be remembered that L1 reading for all young learners starts from reading aloud, before progressing to silent reading with elements of sub-vocalization, where the child's lips move as they read, before completely silent reading is achieved; consequently, reading aloud in English echoes practices from the L1 classroom). If a pupil mispronounced a word, this was recast immediately by the teacher and the child continued. A large number of children were seen to have difficulty with reading, despite this being the fourth year of English. I did not note any examples of explanation of orthographic conventions which might aid decoding. I found that new words were introduced with a semantic (meaning) focus and no attention to form. Assessment of vocabulary in the initial stage was frequently oral, and often through the medium of translation. For example, the teacher gave a word in English (or Polish) and asked children for the translation. To assist memorization, the teacher often wrote a bilingual list on the board for children to copy. These were most often single words, out of context. There was minimal opportunity for the child to focus on the sound-symbol relationships, as the teacher read the words from the board only once or twice, often while the children were engaged in the still laborious process of copying the list into their notebooks. Short checks of vocabulary, and end of unit tests of new words, followed a similar pattern, but in written form, with children receiving a list of words in either the L1 or L2 and asked to write the equivalent in the other language. Children's test papers showed examples of difficulty with grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs), such as 'brid' (bread), and 'chiken' (chicken), arising from differences in the GPCs of Polish and English. Observation tasks conducted as part of a methodology course by teacher education students (undergraduate, 11

and postgraduate, 10), in grades 3-4 in 16 different schools, reported similar impressions (see Ellis, 2021).

The fact that single word decoding and recognition was still presenting substantial difficulty for approximately one in four of the 94 children I observed in their fourth year of learning English in school leads me to concerns for how young people such as these manage with homework (or online teaching) which is most usually based on printed material from the course book (Muszyński et al., 2015). This has prompted me to investigate possible ways to support such learners and to consider the design and implementation of materials for instruction and practice.

8. Principles for the design of materials to support early reading in English

For reasons of space, the section on materials design is intended to introduce some principles for design of materials to introduce phonics and alphabetic principles, rather than to provide an exhaustive explication. Some of the language used in this section is deliberately less academic, aiming to model the kind of explanations that can be given in English to children aged 9-10, in their third year of learning the language.

8.1. Areas for focus

The basic alphabetic principles the young child needs to grasp are that 1) some English letters are sounded differently to their Polish counterparts, despite looking the same (for example, l), 2) some letters in English function in strings that work together as a single unit which corresponds to one phoneme, but that there will be exceptions which do not follow the pattern.

Knowledge of the alphabet begins with letter naming, which has been found to be a predictor of L1 reading ability (Share et al. 1984). While singing an alphabet song is fairly common with early EFL learners, this needs to be accompanied by practice with recognizing and identifying the letters and then naming them aloud. The ability to rapidly name the vowels in English is of particular importance, as the long vowel sounds in English are the same as the letter names. Less familiar (among students in teacher education programs) seems to be the fact that letters not only have names, but also associated sounds which differ from the sounds in Polish. Sounds in English are key for letters which can be coined “enemies” (Jared, Kroll, 2001), causing confusion for Polish children because they appear identical to Polish letters,

but are sounded in a different way. With reference to vowels, the enemies are I and U, sounded in English as /ɪ/ and /ʊ/. The Polish child, unless instructed otherwise, will read 'bin' to sound like 'been' and 'but' to sound like 'boot'. This has the potential to interfere with identification and recognition of the word. Explicit attention to the differences in sound-symbol correspondences helps orthographic mapping. Problematic consonants are 'C', 'J', 'V', 'W' and 'Y', respectively sounded as /k/ as in 'cat', /dʒ/ as in 'jump', /v/ as in 'van', /w/ as in 'wet' and /j/ as in 'yak'. While learning the sounds that letters make, the child also needs to be alerted to the fact that letters can change the sounds they make depending on the word they are in, but that the child will start to understand this when they meet examples as they progress (unfortunately, this might start very quickly, for example with the word 'pencil', found in lesson two of a year one coursebook, where 'C' is sounded /s/). In short, there does not appear to be a need to adopt a full program of phonics for all letters in English, but the principle is rather to select and focus on "enemies" and explicitly draw attention to them and contrast them with Polish.

8.1.1. Principles for selection of words as examples

Words for the examples given here, (designed for primary grade 3), were taken from a corpus I composed of all words in three commonly used grade 3 EFL coursebooks approved for use in Poland by the Ministry. Frequencies were calculated and then words were sorted into categories by their graphic form and spelling conventions, (some of which are shown below), using parts of the National Curriculum in England, Key stages 1 and 2 (2013) as a guide. Words that occurred more frequently in the corpus were given priority.

The principle for practice is to use words that have already been encountered and aim to draw attention to decoding and alphabetic or spelling conventions, thus taking an analytic phonics approach.

8.1.2. Digraphs

A relatively easy introduction to the concept that two letters can work together and produce one sound is –er in the final position in a word, sounded /ə/ as in 'brother'. Consonant digraphs such as -ck are also regularly sounded as /k/ in the final position, and double consonants such as <ll>, <ff> and <ss> are always read as one sound. The digraphs <sh>, <ch>, <wh> are also straightforward and regular, while <th> has hard (voiced) and soft (unvoiced) forms, depending on position in the word, as in 'this' (hard) and 'with' (soft). An 'enemy' is for example <ir> as /ɛ/ as in 'girl'.

From observation, most challenging appear to be vowels in English that are represented by digraphs, such as <ea>. If not informed, the Polish child sounds out each of the two letters separately, which can mean that they do not recognize the word. In some words these digraph strings can be explained with a rule, for example <ea> in words such as ‘jeans’, and ‘easy’ follows the rule that the first letter of the pair is pronounced as the long vowel /i:/ and the second letter is silent. However, the child will soon encounter exception words (such as ‘bread’ where <ea> is /e/), which are sounded differently, yet still follow the ‘second letter is silent’ pattern. The principle for digraphs is to introduce the rules where possible, but consistently alert the child to the fact that they will meet exception words that do not follow the rule and have to be memorized as wholes together with their pronunciation.

8.1.3. Long vowels with final ‘E’

Many monosyllabic words that follow the pattern: consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) and end in ‘E’ (e.g. make), follow a rule where the final E “makes the letter say its name”. For example, in the word ‘bike’ the final E makes letter I say its name, so not /ɪ/ but /aɪ/, and the final ‘E’ is silent. This rule applies to ‘a-e’, ‘e-e’, ‘i-e’, ‘o-e’ and ‘u-e’ combinations in a wide range of words the child encounters in the first year of learning.

8.1.4. Diphthongs

A combination of two letters that make sounds which differ from Polish and can be confusing is –ay, sounded /ei/, as in ‘day’ and ‘play’, and <ou> as /aʊ/ as in ‘mouth’. Another confusion is that the same letter combinations the child meets as a digraph (such as <ea> in ‘easy’) also appear as a diphthong, e.g. ‘near’ and ‘dear’. The first principle is to draw attention to the contrast with Polish and secondly to stress the need to memorize how to say a word from its written form, at the same time as memorizing its meaning.

8.2. Principles for instruction and practice

Following Ehri (2014), I would advocate that from an early stage children need to be shown the written form of the English word as they hear it and learn its meaning. Initially the focus is oral and no attention needs to be drawn to the written form, but it needs to be seen. Additional opportunities for early, implicit learning are word cards pinned to features in the class-

room, such as the door, and for posters with pictures and words around the walls. More explicit attention to decoding needs to start towards the end of year 1 and certainly should be common practice by the beginning of grade 2 (the reasoning here is that currently formal L1 reading instruction does not begin until grade 1 and starting decoding instruction in EFL immediately may overload the child).

Two main principles apply to recognition of new words, frequency and quality of the encounter (Laufer, Rozovoski-Roitblat, 2015). To be memorized, new words need to be met many times, but encounters need to be rich, i.e. they simultaneously include exposure to the meaning, sound and form of the word, all of which are needed to create a quality entry in the mental lexicon (Perfetti, 2007). To be able to recognize a new word in English (“read” it), the child needs to be able to rapidly and easily decode it accurately. This involves accessing the way it is sounded from the printed letters. Meaning at this initial stage may well be primed by pictures, or by the L1, but these must be linked to the written form of the English word as well.

With regard to sound-symbol correspondence rules, the suggestion is to provide short explicit instruction, focused on one rule (Woore, 2022), interspersed with practice that includes recognition, but also production tasks, following a “Look, show, say, now you try” pattern. For example, the final E rule can be introduced with an illustrated (e.g. on slides), worked example, eliciting from the children the sound of the vowel, and then its name. The following example is designed for children in grade 3, but could also be used for additional practice in grade 4.

Example of “Look, show, say, now you try” sequence.

Look at this word (shows ‘bike’ with picture). How do we say it? (children offer suggestions). That’s right Bike! Now look. This word has a special rule. Look at this letter (**Shows** and points to final ‘E’). What’s its name? That’s right ‘E /i:/’. When I say ‘bike’ can you hear /i:/? (repeats word). No, you can’t hear E. In this word E is special. It makes this letter (points to I) say its name. What’s the name of this letter? Can you **say** it? (if needed, prompts the alphabet song). That’s right ‘I /aɪ/’. So this special ‘E’ here (points) makes this letter (points to I) say its name. And because it’s a special letter ‘E’ doesn’t make a sound (mimes finger on lips). It’s silent (covers letter ‘E’ with hand). **Now you try**. Here’s a new word with a special ‘E’ (children apply the rule to decode the new word, teacher scaffolds, if needed).

The worked example is then followed by input flooding (Han et al. 2008), where the students have many examples which follow the same

rule or pattern. Following on with the final E example, these can be first single words, but then need to be integrated into sentences to be read aloud (e.g. I like my bike./ I ride my bike./ It's time for a bike ride!). After more examples and practice with another letter combination 'a-e', these sentences can become slightly more challenging, mixing letters, as in "We can ride to the lake!". In a further phase, sentences can include words which look the same but are exceptions, such as 'have' as in "We can have cake!/ Can I have a milkshake?" in order to reinforce the concept that not all CVC- final 'E' words follow the same rule.

8.2.1. Principles for sound-symbol recognition practice

There are many games that can be introduced to help learners fix how words are sounded in their memories. The principle is that the child needs to simultaneously see and hear the word in English. These games can be either competitive or cooperative. A competitive example would be where two children have to identify written words from an oral prompt and there is only one word that they need to grab, or touch (promoting rapid recognition). A cooperative version of a task would be where pairs work together with a mixed set of word cards to match words that sound the same (rhyme) from a set of familiar words. This task may involve the learners sounding the words aloud, and may lead them to peer teaching of rules, in this way practising decoding and developing phonological awareness. The children become agents, deciding how much reading aloud is needed, and scaffolding each other in the process, thus reducing the stress level of 'reading aloud'.

9. Conclusions

On the basis of research outlined here, there appears to be strong support for the proposal that a more explicit approach to teaching alphabetic principles and decoding is recommended in the early stages of introducing word recognition and reading in English as a foreign language. It would seem that this can be integrated within the existing program by providing short introductions to sound-symbol correspondences that are salient for the Polish learner and plentiful practice of rapid recognition of words that have been previously encountered. A further consideration is to ensure that, when focus is placed on new words, the written form of the word in English is seen at the same time as its pronunciation is given, with explicit attention paid to differences in how the letter strings are sounded and how sounds are represented. In this way the child is able to adjust their L1

orthographic map and add the L2 grapheme-phoneme correspondences to their lexicon.

The ability to read fluently in English is a key skill for the Polish child. Research shows that decoding skills predict future reading ability. At grade 8 and at grade 12 English is most commonly chosen for the mandatory foreign language paper in national examinations. At grade 8, points from the foreign language examination contribute to choice of secondary school, while points on the *matura* examination influence selection to university. Reading comprehension makes up a considerable part of both these examinations. The ability to read fluently in English can impact on a young person's future and so it is incumbent on us as educators to ensure all children have the best possible start in basic decoding skills.

There is a need for research into early reading skills in foreign languages in instructed settings (Woore, 2021), as there is much that is not yet known. Students in teacher education programs can also benefit from awareness-raising and instruction in this area, which in my experience is new for most of them. These are fruitful areas for exploration.

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