CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING SYNTHETIC PHONICS TO EFL STUDENTS

EFEKTIVITA VÝUKY SYNTETICKÉ METODY ČTENÍ A PSANÍ V ANGLICKÉM JAZYCE U EFL STUDENTŮ

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Declaration

I hereby assure that I worked on this diploma thesis independently. I did not use any different than the mentioned sources. The sources I used have been included in the reference list and the information has been fully acknowledged in the text.

I agree that the diploma thesis will be used for other academic purposes and stored in the library of the Faculty of Education at Charles University.

Prague, December 2016 _____

Lucie Urbanová

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The effectiveness of teaching synthetic phonics to EFL students

Abstract

The diploma considers the effectiveness of systematic and explicit Synthetic Phonics teaching methods in the EFL learning environment. The theoretical section examines foreign language methodology – the field of reading acquisition in young learners, especially English language pronunciation. It studies how systematic explicit Phonics approach can help in learning how to read and pronounce words correctly. It explores the similarities and differences between teaching Synthetic and Analytic Phonics, and compares them. Furthermore it discusses whether synthetic phonics is useful not only for native English speakers, but also for EFL students.

The practical part focuses on testing two groups of children who have different experiences of phonics. The data were collected in Prague and the Hradec Králové region. There were 62 students tested out of whom 33 were in a control group and 29 were taught using a systematic Phonics approach. A specially designed test consisting of two different activities was applied. It tested word reading, non-word pronouncing and sight word recognition. The aim of the research was to find out whether explicit Synthetic Phonics teaching instruction helps not only native English speakers, but also EFL learners in reading and pronouncing words correctly. The data analysis revealed that non-native speakers of English may benefit from learning how to read using Synthetic Phonics as well as students who have English as their mother tongue.

Key words:

synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, phonemes, graphemes, pronunciation and articulation, spelling, reading, writing

Efektivita výuky syntetické metody čtení a psaní v anglickém jazyce u EFL studentů

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce se zabývá efektivitou systematické explicitní výuky syntetické metody čtení a psaní v anglickém jazyce u EFL studentů. Teoretická část zkoumá metodologii cizích jazyků – osvojování si čtenářských dovedností dětí, zvláště pak výslovnost angličtiny. Práce se zaměřuje na to, jak systematická explicitní metoda výuky Phonics pomáhá při učení se čtení a správného vyslovování. Dále zkoumá shodnosti a rozdíly mezi analytickou a syntetickou metodou výuky a tyto dva přístupy porovnává. Práce projednává, zda je přístup syntetické metody přínosný nejen pro rodilé mluvčí anglického jazyka, ale také pro EFL žáky.

Praktická část se zaměřuje na testování dvou skupin dětí, které mají se syntetickou metodou výuky rozdílné zkušenosti. Data byla sebrána v regionech Praha a Hradec Králové. Testováno bylo 62 studentů, z nichž 33 tvořilo kontrolní skupinu žáků, zbylých 29 pak bylo vyučováno metodou Phonics. Test, který prověřoval čtení existujících slov, výslovnost smyšlených výrazů a slova, která pravidlům Phonics nepodléhají, byl specielně vytvořen pro testování EFL studentů a tvořily jej dvě různé aktivity. Cílem výzkumu bylo zjistit, zda explicitní výuka Phonics pomáhá při čtení a výslovnosti nejen rodilým mluvčím anglického jazyka, ale také EFL studentům. Analýza dat ukázala, že výuka Phonics může být přínosná jak pro rodilé mluvčí, tak i EFL studenty.

Klíčová slova:

syntetická metoda výuky čtení a psaní, analytická metoda výuky čtení a psaní, fonémy, grafémy, výslovnost a artikulace, hláskování, čtení, psaní

The list of abbreviations

AP	Analytic Phonics
B	boy(s)
C.G.	control group
CV	consonant-vowel (structure)
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
G	girl(s)
JP	Jolly Phonics
L1	first language or mother tongue
L2	second language
Ph.G.	Phonics group
RP	Received Pronunciation
SP	Synthetic Phonics

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1 Introduction

3.000 students drop out of high school every day in America. The vast majority of them are kept away from continuing their studies because they lack reading and writing skills and are not able to keep up with their school classes. Data from grades 4-12 are also alarming with over 8 million students struggling with reading and writing tasks (Jay & Strong 2008). As the numbers show, the statistics in America are staggering. Even children whose mother tongue is English experience reading difficulties and yet for students learning English as a foreign language, there is suddenly a new language code that they have to somehow accept and learn. To better understand EFL learners, we should put ourselves in their shoes, even though it may seem difficult, since most of us have already studied and comprehended English to a certain level of proficiency and thus may not be able to see the obstacles children encounter. Trying to remember the times when we started to learn English may help us to further understand young learners. The author remembers English lessons in her primary school being mostly student and workbook based, with no emphasis on speaking and lots of drill exercises. Despite this she enjoyed English lessons, being fascinated by knowing (even if a little) two language codes where she could say "one word in two different ways and still it meant the same thing". She remembers that there was no sign of phonics instruction explaining that there are certain rules in English pronunciation. Secondary school lessons were of a similar basis. English lessons at pedagogical Lyceum in Litomyšl were, however, different with emphasis placed on clear pronunciation and presenting some basic, yet essential pronunciation rules explicitly. This was, compared to primary and secondary English classes, a completely different approach. University studies with English Phonetics and Phonology courses offered her a deep insight into how English language "really" sounds and that even though it is a very complex language, there really are some strict rules and letter-sound relationships. Despite information about the critical age when teenagers (14) or even very young learners (7) stop being able to hear and obtain a high quality level of pronunciation (Birdsong 1999), she fortunately experienced that clear pronunciation can also be learnt as an adult. She started being interested in pronunciation further when she spent two summers in England as an au-pair in a mixed-marriage family. The family was based in London and

spoke RP English. When she travelled with the family for holiday to India, she understood that clear pronunciation really is an essential component of learning English. The native-like model of speaking is, however, not necessary. We should aim for speakers to be intelligible (Jenkins 2000). During her studies at the University of Derby in England, she had a school placement at Hilton Primary School and asked for the possibility to observe Phonics lessons. It was during a university lecture in Derby when one of the English speaking students was at the white board about to write GEOGRAPHY. She, however, turned to the class and asked for help not knowing correct spelling. This appeared alarming to us and we began to question what particular language problems native students may encounter. More importantly, we wanted to find how non-native students attempt to learn English and if the phonics method could also be an effective teaching method.

Research was carried out in Prague and the Hradec Králové region with children having different Phonics teaching experiences. Students with no Phonics experience and students undergoing the Phonics teaching method were chosen because the subjects were believed to reach different reading scores. There were thirty-three children in the control group and twenty-nine students in the Phonics group taking part in the reading test which was designed by the researcher. Graphemes and phonemes of English language system that Czech learners in particular may find difficult to pronounce and the sounds can therefore lead to mispronouncing were considered. The emphasis was placed on discovering whether the Synthetic Phonics method of teaching native speaking children to read can also be beneficial to EFL students.

The Theoretical section offers an insight into Jolly Phonics research that was done on EFL students worldwide. It also presents the results of other Synthetic Phonics research in Spain, Germany and India, where there was a combination of two methods used. L1 learners as well as L2 learners were considered. Both Phonics teaching approaches will be analysed and their advantages and disadvantages evaluated. Brain research findings illustrating how the brain processes reading are also considered. Synthetic Phonics together with the Analytic Approach will be contrasted and different brain processes described. Last but not least, reading, one of the essential language skills, will be defined.

2 Reading and writing within primary schooling

Teaching children reading and writing skills is not just about the teacher presenting letters of the alphabet and students memorizing them. Both reading and writing are complex cognitive processes and can be very time consuming. They are constructive processes and depend on one another. Reading and writing skills therefore cannot be taught separately. It is natural to learn both reading and writing together because they both frequently occur together in everyday life. Reading and writing are developed simultaneously and the whole process of acquiring the knowledge can be very time-consuming (Sannahan, 1993). The views and opinions on teaching reading and writing skills have changed through time. However, nowadays, cross-cultural evidence and research suggests that in today's society, reading and writing should be learnt together, viewed together and used together. Only then it can be understood and appreciated fully (Sweet, 2011).

And how is reading seen through the eyes of today's society? According to Richard Anderson and the Commission on reading (1988: 389) 'reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school, and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success inevitably will be lost.' Furthermore reading can be defined as a process where meaning is constructed from written texts (Blanton 2002).

2.1 Reading process

Reading skill is a receptive skill, however it used to be seen as a passive skill. Nowadays however, it is classed as contextualized process which is interactive and constructive (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2006). The whole reading process includes two processes which are bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up process includes skills such as pronunciation, spelling, word recognition or even grammatical structures of the whole sentences. We talk about the linguistic process when we understand the system of a language. This process goes from letters and words moving towards meaning and structures of other syntactic features such as sentences or phrases. Contrary to this there is a top-down process that has some knowledge of different types of texts or topics. These two processes can either complement one another or can have a hierarchic order,

where according to Hinkel the bottom-up processes should come first followed by the top-down (Hinkel 2006).

There are more types of reading depending on a particular reading task and a readers' language competences. One of the most important is skimming (getting the main gist) or scanning (searching for the main information). There is also intensive (detailed) reading or reading for pleasure called extensive reading. In reading we aim not only to understand plain words, but also to understand and identify the message of written texts (Williams 1999).

2.2 Skilled reading

There is a long process before young learners are capable of constructing meaning from written texts. Syllable, sentences, words, texts and letter-sound correspondences are involved in the whole process. Before students are able to recognise text types, identify the main points and locate key information in the whole texts, there is a lot to be mastered. Sentence knowledge requires word order or punctuation to be mastered and identifying verbs and the relations of the other words to the verb. When we think of the language on a word level children need to understand that words can actually be broken into morphemes or syllables or that the meaning of new words can be guessed from contexts. They can also learn that words can be recognized by sight which builds the so called sight vocabulary. However, this is not where the whole process ends. We can go even deeper where words are broken into syllables (spoken) and morphemes (written) parts of the language. Children can use the ability to spot the same parts of words in an unknown vocabulary and they can use an analogy to work out a word. Last but not least there are letter-sound (grapheme-phoneme) correspondences where learners learn to relate letter shapes to sounds, blend sounds to syllables and break them down again. This phase is not the end. It is actually the beginning where Phonics comes to operation (Cameron 2001). (See also Appendix I)

2.3 Reading skills – learning goals and objectives

Reading can have many goals depending on the level of each individual. Students learn to be able to retell the story or the main idea of the story and identify the main characters. They study basic punctuation, participate in group discussions and

learn to read independently for short periods of time. They also start with reading simple then more difficult texts for about 10-15 minutes. Books read aloud to them need to be connected to their experiences. Children are also encouraged to join in stories, poems or songs that they know and are familiar with. In terms of telling their own stories (e.g. with help of picture sequences or illustrations) students need to be able to make meaningful predictions. They should be able to notice their own errors and later correct themselves when they make a mistake. Students have to be able to follow written directions and they should know how and where to find the information they need. As children build their vocabulary by reading, later on reading should become more fluent and students should be able to summarize a story plot identifying different genders such as fiction and nonfiction etc. However, how and where does the actual reading start? We need to go back and think of individual letters and sounds. Apart from building sight vocabulary, young learners need to be able to identify lower and upper case letters. They need to understand the connection between letters and their sounds along with knowing letter names. Children learn how to read words using consonant blends and they study how to identify compound words in texts. Beginner readers work with simple pattern books that use picture, meaning or phonics cues (Learning Goals and Objectives n.d.).

2.4 Reading Instructions

Reading for understanding, learning and interest are the ultimate goals of reading instruction. Especially in the early grades after we know that students have foundational skills such as fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness and phonics, the focus is on moving to meaning. Do these goals differ for EFL learners? In terms of broad goals they are the same with all students. However, an additional goal with non-native speakers exists and it is to simultaneously build oral language skills, as this is even more essential with L2 learners than with native speakers. It has been shown that explicit skill instruction is effective with EFL learners at the beginning stages of learning how to decode English texts, because English language learners can use similar word patterns as an aid when they try to decode unknown words. It has also been proven that many EFL learners (when they are given systematic instruction on phonics) acquire these skills and knowledge at the same rate as speakers of just one language (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn 2007).

2.5 Reading – many ways, one goal?

Technically, it is probably not so difficult to come up with a definition of reading. However, what can be challenging is how to bring theory to practise. If it can be done, in what way and what method is the most effective? Educators, linguists, teachers, parents and politicians are all actively involved in debates over different reading approaches. They try to conclude which method is the best for teaching young children how to read. However, so far it has seemed impossible even for professionals, to specify the best method with reading wars among professionals raging for decades (Kim 2008). People's opinions to different approaches change over time. So which system should we use?

There has been a lot of research done on how to teach literacy effectively and in what time frame the goals can actually be met. In many other issues, as well as in terms of literacy, "there's more than one way to skin a cat". We can say that in most cases it is true. There are multiple ways to accomplish something and usually more than one solution to a problem. In terms of teaching reading there are several approaches which have been debated and researched thoroughly. However, it is necessary to add that the above mentioned idiom also means that the final result will be the same even if an issue is approached in different ways. This is not always the case with reading. The instruction can significantly affect the results. Last but not least, the manner of instruction is as important as what is instructed (Reading Horizons 2016-a). In the following chapter we will discuss different reading approaches in terms of reading acquisition.

3 Approaches to teaching reading

As it was mentioned earlier there can be various possibilities for how a problem can be approached and dealt with and reading is not an exception. However, is it known which of them is best? Several methods will be examined and evaluated. These methods are: Analogy-based phonics, Embedded phonics, Phonics through spelling, Onset-rime phonics instruction, Analytic phonics and last but not least Synthetic phonics. The programmes can vary a lot but the distinctions between the approaches are not absolute. Moreover some programmes even combine different approaches (Armbruster et al. 2001-a). In the overview below we specify each programme and explain briefly their characteristics:

- **Synthetic phonics**: This method teaches young learners how to convert individual letter or letter combinations into sounds. It then presents how to blend the sounds together so that recognisable words are formed.
- **Analytic phonics**: Students focus on analysing letter-sound relationship in words they learnt previously. In this approach letter sounds are taught and pronounced in isolation after the actual reading has begun.
- **Analogy-based phonics**: Children work with so called "word families" comparing similar parts of words. They learn to use parts of word families they already know to figure out and identify words they do not know yet.
- **Embedded phonics**: Letter-sound relationships are presented to pupils during the reading of connected text. This approach is not systematic or explicit since young learners encounter different letter-sound correspondences as they read.
- **Phonics through spelling**: This phonics programme teaches students to segment words into individual phonemes. Words are then made by writing letters for phonemes.
- **Onset-rime phonics instruction**: Children are shown how to identify the beginning sound of the letter or letters in a word before the first vowel (the onset) and the sound of the remaining part of the word (the rime).

(Carnine et al. 2014)

To be more specific and to understand each approach in terms of practical implementation, the following section will present some example words, the way in which they are introduced to children and how students learn them.

- **Synthetic phonics**: Children first learn the sounds [k], [æ] and [t] that are represented by C, A and T letters. When they master this skill, they blend the sounds together and form a word CAT. They also learn how to reverse the process by segmenting a word CAT into its individual sounds.
- **Analytic phonics**: Students are taught to recognise and say the word CAT first. When they master it by sight, they need to learn how to break the word into the smaller units recognising individual sounds, which means that children first learn to read by sight and then understand letter sounds and correct spelling of words.
- **Analogy-based phonics**: Young learners apply this strategy when the words share similar parts in their spellings. As an example word we can use CAT again, by analogy to words such as SAT, RAT, PAT, BAT, FAT, MAT or HAT. This approach teaches pupils a set of keys they can use in reading words they do not know.
- **Embedded phonics**: There are no specific examples of embedded phonics approaches, but they include some basal reading or literature-based programmes where sight word reading is emphasised over phonetic decoding.
- **Phonics through spelling**: Children create a word in print by segmenting spoken words into phonemes and writing letters that represent those sounds. E.g. a word CAT can be sounded out as [k], [æ] and [t] and then written phonetically.

(Reutzel & Cooter 2013)

- **Onset-rime phonics instruction**: Every one-syllable word has an onset and a rime. Some words have the same rimes and different onsets, other have the same onsets and different rimes. Using a word CAT as an example word, this word has the same rimes and different onsets with words such as SAT, RAT, PAT, BAT, FAT, MAT or HAT. Children learn a set of onsets and rimes and then combine it together reading whole words (Reading Rockets 2015).

Even though the approaches are different, it is “phonics” or “phonics instruction” that occurs in all the methods. Therefore what “phonics” or “phonics instruction” actually means will be discussed.

3.1 Phonics instruction

Phonics and phonics instruction is about teaching children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of the written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. These relationships are presented to children so that they can apply them in practice when they use and write words. Being familiar with these rules helps early readers recognise words they already know accurately and automatically and also helps them to “decode” new words they have not learnt. Overall, the alphabetic principle contributes strongly to the ability to produce words not only in isolation, but in connected texts as well (LINCS, 2016). Publishers of programmes of beginning reading instruction and teachers of reading sometimes use different names to label and describe these relationships, these may include the following: *graphophonemic relationships,letter-sound associations,letter-sound correspondences, sound-symbol correspondence* or *sound-spellings.*

Regardless of the label, the phonics instruction goal is clear. It is designed to help students to learn and use the alphabetic principle – the knowledge that there are predictable and systematic relationships between written letters and spoken sounds (Armbruster et al. 2001-b).

3.2 Which method is the most suitable?

On the one hand, phonics instruction is something all of the methods have in common, but on the other hand, the variety among the approaches is great. There is a wide range of phonics programmes available on the market today. Those that were presented are only few examples out of many, but they are the most widely used and known. They show us that reading can be approached in a number of different ways. Some of the methods we listed differ a lot and others had similar aspects and seemed to combine more than one approach. All methods are certainly tried and tested and sooner or later each method will (or should) lead to fluent reading and reading comprehension. It is important to recognise that despite all the discussions over new reading methods, there are still two approaches (or their combination) that are essential and being used

throughout all phonics programmes. These two methods, which are believed to oppose one another, are Synthetic and Analytic phonics (Rayner et al. 2002).

Both approaches aim to teach reading skills in the best way possible. So why are they classed as “different”? To analyse it further the human brain and its functioning will be discussed. Brain functions are an inevitable part of learning to read and therefore it is something that cannot be neglected (Price et al. 1994). A deeper look into how the human brain reacts to different reading methods and how it processes reading will be discussed further in the following chapters.

4 How the brain processes reading – Synthetic vs. Analytic Phonics

A considerable amount of research has been done on how the brain processes reading when different methods of teaching reading are used. The Academic Associates Learning Centres compared the Synthetic and Analytic phonics approaches. In their work the different approaches were taken into consideration and the way reading is processed by a human brain was examined in detail (Price et al. 1994). Now we will compare both phonics methods and explain briefly how they work.

Whole word method, whole language method, look and say method or sight reading method – these are all names which can be used for the method using Analytic Phonics strategies. This approach emphasises word meaning over decoding sound parts and teaches children sight recognition of the whole word paying no attention to letter parts. It starts from the whole and shifts to the parts. In the end, the pattern of reading is rather complicated (Teach Reading Early 2010).

On the other hand when we consider Phonics method and its effects on reading, the whole process differs a lot. With Synthetic Phonics children are taught the individual sounds of the letters first. Students also learn how to segment words into their individual parts and blend them back together to create a word. They know that segmenting and blending are reversible processes. However, it is not only reading instructions that vary is is also the way our brain processes reading (Teach Reading Early 2010).

A comparison of both methods is below. Figure I is concerned with Analytic Phonics and Figure II analyses Synthetic Phonics.

In Figure I we can see what happens when information is sent to the brain. It first enters the right hemisphere, which has no connection to language and is primarily concerned with memory. The word is then recalled from memory and recognised as a picture. Then it is sent to the left hemisphere which is concerned with language. The picture is first sorted and immediately translated into language. Afterwards it is sent to the right side of brain again where it is stored as an idea or a concept. Reading can certainly be taught this way. However, it is lots of effort to do so when words are shifted from one part of brain to the other and then back again. Therefore, the confusion that arises from this method can be large. One of the reasons may be the data that is constantly shuttling from one part of the brain to the other (AALC 1997).

When we look at Figure II and compare it with Figure I, we can see the brain processing reading in a different way. After the information enters brain, it goes straight to the right side of human brain. This part deals with language, so a word can be recognised as a language immediately. The piece of language then goes to the right hemisphere where it is stored as a concept or idea. Learning to read this way avoids unnecessary information shuttling from one part of human brain to the other. This process is therefore a smooth, one-way flow of data which saves time and energy (AALC 1997). (See also Appendix II)

Picture 2: Brain processing reading

Figure I: Analytic phonics method

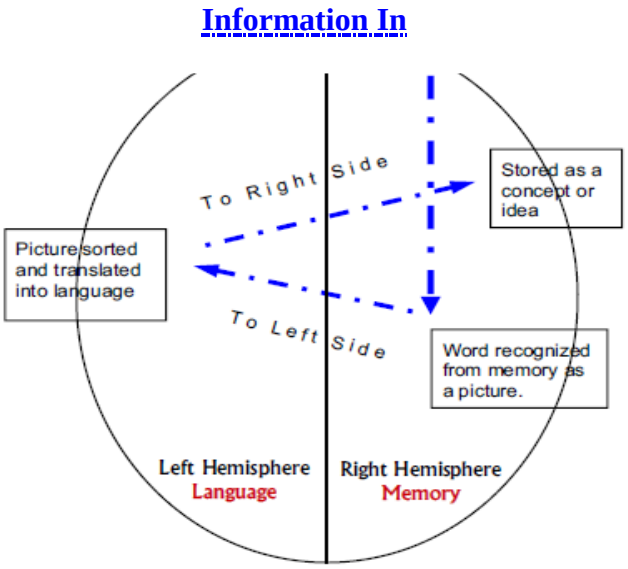
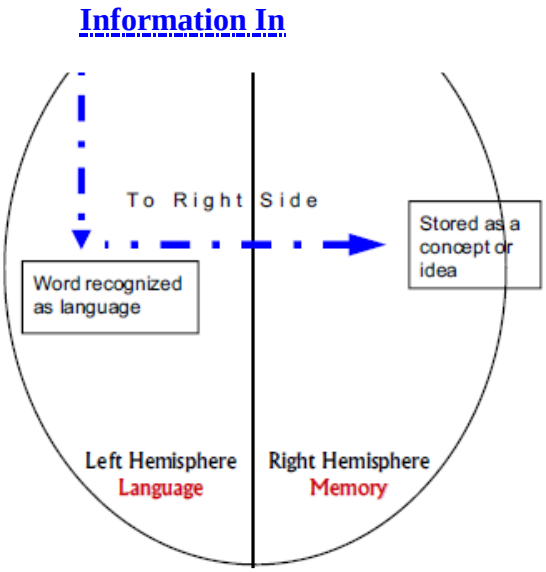


Figure II: Synthetic phonics method



Source: The Figures by Academic Associates Learning Centers, (AALC 1997).

One of the reasons is the way brain functions when it processes reading, although the merit should also be taken into consideration. If methods of teaching reading in the past are also taken into account, was Synthetic Phonics always the method of choice or were other methods considered more effective at the time? This will be discussed in the following parts of the thesis.

5 The Reading Wars

Synthetic and Analytic Phonics are two of the most prominent reading instruction methods today. Despite the fact there were periods of time when a combination of both methods (phonics and whole-word approach) were used to teach reading, the reading instruction timeline indicates that it was usually either Synthetic Phonics or Analytic Phonics being the more popular method. The reading wars are legendary, as an old disagreement over how to teach children to read seems to be an everyday issue. Whether we want it to or not, there will probably still be one phonics approach prevailing and its advocates who strongly support one side of the barricade. Even though it is the synthetic phonics teaching method that is a research based winner at the moment, we should never stop asking whether it is the best way to teach students how to read or whether there are more effective alternatives (Lemann 1997). So is it Synthetic or Analytic Phonics that is more effective? What are the similarities and differences between them? What are their pros and cons? We have already explained the specificities of each method using an example word to see how the approach works in practice. The following text will focus on the similarities and differences as well as the strengths and weaknesses of both teaching-how-to-read methods.

5.1 Synthetic vs. Analytic Phonics – differences and similarities

The differences will be examined first since there are very few similarities between these two reading approaches. A list of differences will be presented first and then the similarities if there are any.

- **The pronunciation of the sounds**: Synthetic Phonics (SP) compared to Analytic Phonics (AP) puts much more emphasise on teaching the pronunciation of all the phonemes correctly from the start. In AP it is often taught incorrectly. As an example the letter S [s] can be used. AP presents this sound as “suh”, compared with SP which makes the sound as a “sssss”. The consonant part at the end is crucial. Blending does not work properly when the pronunciation is incorrect. It is much harder to recognize the word MAT in “muh” “ah” and “tuh” instead of in [m], [æ] and [t] which are pure sounds of the letters. There is a similarity between SP and AP, as AP is also concerned with letter sounds

(especially initial letters). However, the way they are produced is different (Get Reading Right 2016).

- **The importance of each sound**: SP cares about all the sounds in the words no matter what position they are in. Each phoneme – initial, middle, or the one at the end of a word is important. AP, on the other hand, emphasises the initial sounds only. (Identifying sounds at the middle or end of words comes later.) This, however, may cause problems reading longer words, as it only works well only for short words. Moreover, concentrating on the initial sounds encourages guessing as a reading strategy. The only similarity is the concentration on the initial sounds, however the rest is different (Children's Books and Reading 2015-b; Get Reading Right 2016).
- **Position**: As has already been mentioned the ability to hear and identify phonemes in all positions in words is essential in SP compared to AP which concentrates on initial sounds, word families, onsets and rimes (Get Reading Right 2016).
- **The role of the alphabet**: SP does not introduce the letter names initially. Children first learn the 44 phonemes and the way each of them can be represented. The purpose of this is having students know that one phoneme e.g. [s] can have many spelling variations. It can either be: "ce", "ss" or "s", as in GRACE, MISS and SIT, but it is all read the same as [s]. As opposed to SP, the alphabet is central to AP. It concentrates on 26 letters and works with the corresponding sounds they have. Again, when we take GRACE, MISS and SIT, children using AP may get confused as there is only one sound that can be, it is however, applied on more than one spelling pattern (Get Reading Right 2016).
- **Spelling**: Compared to AP where spelling is presented separately, children under SP instruction are taught that the alphabetical code is reversible. Letters and sounds work together. This means that if they are able to read a word, they are also able to spell it. AP method puts similarly spelt words into so called rhyming families and they are learnt together. Here is an example of a rhyming family: TREE, FREE and THREE (Children's Books and Reading 2015-b; Get Reading Right 2016).

- **The role of guessing**: Although most don't realise there are many pronunciation and spelling rules in English. English is far more logical than most people believe. There is a strict relationship between the spoken and written form of the language. It therefore, does not need guessing to read successfully, only systematic teaching. Alternatively in AP, guessing (especially from the initial sounds) and using cues are strongly encouraged. Again these two approaches have not much, if anything in common (Gacek 2014; Children's Books and Reading 2015-b).

- **Exceptions to the rule**: AP has too many exceptions for children learning to read whereas in SP there are only minimal exceptions. These are also presented in a friendly way so that children learn them quickly and accept the rules easily. The words which do not undergo any spelling and sounding out rules are called sight words (Get Reading Right 2016). These will be discussed in more detail later.

- **Speed**: Beginning readers want to read straight away. Only then will they feel their learning has been successful. The SP method allows them to feel successful. 8 sounds over 2 weeks get children reading right away. In contrast the AP method is rather slow. There is only 1 sound presented in one week and this delays reading progress, which is unnecessary (Gacek 2014; Get Reading Right 2016).

5.2 Synthetic vs. Analytic Phonics – advantages and disadvantages

There are advantages and disadvantages to all educational methods and the same with reading approaches. There is not a "best" method which has no negatives. This is one of the reasons some professionals use a combination of two, or even more approaches that are available on the market, to find a relevant way of teaching how to read to a majority of children (Wren 2003). In the overview that follows we will concentrate on the positives (+) and negatives (–) of each method.

Synthetic Phonics:

+ This reading technique introduces sounds that are represented by a single letters and those represented by two letters at the same time. Children get used to individual letters sounding different in different words. It is therefore less

confusing for them. Using an example letter A, Students know very early that this letter has more than one "typical" sound [æ] as in CAT, because e.g. it can be found in a word RAIN too.

+ Vocabulary that is seen as irregular in AP is usually regular in SP approach.

(Children's Books and Reading 2015-a)

+ Children who know the SP reading strategy can easily pronounce long words or words they have never seen before. This method allows young readers to deal with words such as WOODPECKER or MUSHROOM as easily as they do with TAP or SUN.

+ Compared to other methods, SP makes the writing system more transparent by giving it a logical structure and pronouncing rules.

+ Students are able to read simple books in 11 or 12 weeks. In the beginning, children are less likely to get bored, because the pace at which correspondence between letters and sounds are introduced is fast. Enjoyable stories and lively actions accompany learning new sounds from the start. This promotes reading and makes the fast pace of learning manageable.

+ This approach can help children struggling with reading and having early reading problems, as it helps bringing them up to the level of their age group.

(Huata 2006; Children's Books and Reading 2015-a)

– The fast speed at which children learn to read words in isolation does not mean that they can understand the meaning. Education specialists believe that reading comprehension is the key to successful reading. They also argue that children undergoing SP reading instruction lack this ability, because learning to read does not start with beginner readers' ability to sound out words and blend them together again.

– Blending and sounding out individual sounds cannot continue forever. It is important that children also recognise whole words because it is this skill that leads to fluent reading. Reading fluency leads to comprehension and finally to appreciation of the written materials.

- Emphasising decoding practices over text comprehension can influence young readers and turn them off literature. Having students uninterested in books is the last thing teachers of reading would want.
- So called "skill and drill" lessons may become an everyday routine. Blending and segmenting can turn into an activity that is rather boring. It stops learning and playing with letters and sounds from being fun.

(Huata 2006; Lyle 2014; Children's Books and Reading 2015-a)

Analytic Phonics:

+ This approach seems to be an efficient tool helping children to develop a large sight vocabulary. It can be then used both in spelling and reading activities.
+ In particular this method is very useful for words that are not phonetically regular and where it is difficult to apply any pronunciation or spelling rules. Some examples are words like: COULD, WOULD or SHOULD. When a child encounters the rime "OULD" in one of the words, the rest of them will be learnt easily.
+ New vocabulary is not introduced separately. Children learn new vocabulary in context with the goal to increase overall understanding. This makes reading activities more meaningful.
+ Reading is interesting and made fun from the start. The AP method uses books and young learners can engage with all sort of written material.

(Huata 2006; Children's Books and Reading 2015-b)

- Discovering that there can be more than one sound to a single letter (depending on the word it is found in) can be confusing for beginner readers A common example is the letter "O" and its different pronunciation in DOG, FOOD, FOLD and SHOUT. Moreover, the system of knowing what sound each letter of the alphabet represents can later become a case of memorizing word families.
- Very often teachers do not introduce the alphabet with all letters and their sounds to children properly.

- When children come across a word they do not know how it is pronounced, they may "skip" the word and never learn it.

(Huata 2006; Children's Books and Reading 2015-b; All About Learning Press 2016)

- This reading technique promotes guessing. It can either be contextual guessing when a word is guessed from context of the whole sentence, or a word guessing which uses initial sounds, rimes or onsets to figure out the meaning. This may lead to reading inaccuracies.
- With approximately one letter introduced each week this method is classed as relatively slow compared to other phonics approaches.
- Despite the fact that this method is effective with many students, a fair amount of young readers under AP teaching instruction still struggle with reading.

(Children's Books and Reading 2015-b; All About Learning Press 2016)

5.3 Balanced literacy

With the Phonics approach focusing on correspondence between individual letters and sounds and the whole language approach emphasising text comprehension and identifying words in context of literature, it seems that Synthetic Phonics and Analytic Phonics will never be reconciled. The philosophy of reading has been struggling to find the best way out of reading wars that have been raging for years. However, balanced literacy is believed to be a key to success nowadays, as it strikes a balance between phonics and whole-word approach combining both methods by using the strongest elements of each. Today teachers can make their own decision whether they will use phonics or the whole-word method. Most of them, however, use combination of these reading strategies. They teach students letter-sound correspondences using phonics, but they also put words in contexts and literature-based texts so that reading becomes meaningful and children learn how to comprehend. On the other hand Synthetic Phonics is the most recommended method at the minute (Reading Horizons 2016-b; Strickland 2016). We will investigate this reading strategy further in the following part concerned with the effects of this method on EFL students across the world.

6 Synthetic Phonics teaching and its effects on EFL students

Reading specialists in English speaking countries have been interested in if and how the Synthetic Phonics method works for decades. Large amount of research has been done on this and the results were staggering. Synthetic Phonics has been proved to work and has a positive impact on both children having no reading difficulties as well as those who struggle with reading. This was indicated in the Clackmannanshire study which examined and compared the effects of teaching Synthetic and Analytic Phonics in 8 schools (Johnston R & Watson J, 2005). Sir Jim Rose also confirmed this with his "Independent review of the teaching of early reading", also called "Rose Report". This report focuses on The National Curriculum or the National Literacy Strategy and recommends using the phonics approach systematically. It suggests that the curriculum needs to be rich and multisensory (Rose 2006). The evidence that Synthetic Phonics method works with native students has been presented however, is it the same with EFL learners whose first language is not English? This will be considered whilst having closer look at students learning English as a foreign language worldwide.

6.1 Jolly Phonics and research on EFL students worldwide

Jolly Phonics (JP) is a child-centred synthetic phonics method that aims to make learning fun. It teaches five key skills for reading and writing and it uses a multisensory approach. It teaches letter sound combinations using actions and songs. The five key skills are: *letter-sound correspondences* (not only alphabet letters, but e.g. diagraphs such as AI or SH too), *letter formation*, *blending*, *segmenting* and last but not *least tricky (sight) words*. There has been research done in countries worldwide trying to evaluate whether this method is effective with EFL students (Farokhbakht & Nejadansari 2015; Jolly Learning 2015-b) The research findings will now be examined.

JP Research I – ESL learners

This study was done on 112 children who were five years old out of whom 96 were second language learners. The students were divided into two groups. One was undergoing the phonics method and the other was taught using the whole-word method. All the children were tested prior to the research with spoken and written language being tested along with phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. Children were

post-tested once more right after the intervention in addition to one year later. Findings showed that students taught by phonics highly benefited from this method. Phoneme awareness and knowledge of phonics increased considerably and this influenced children's reading and writing abilities (Stuart 1999).

JP Research II – Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

5 schools in 3 senatorial districts of the Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria took part in this research that consisted of 168 primary-one pupils. It tested whether pupils' reading skills would improve and be enhanced by using the phonics method. The experimental group of children received JP training. This group gained 3-29 months on their reading age, which is approximately 5.3 to 5.7 years according to the Burt Reading Test. The results showed that this program has a positive effect on student's reading abilities (Ekpo et al. 2007).

JP Research III – Hyderabad, India

There has been research conducted in the low-income areas of India, namely in Hyderabad. The research was done by the University of Newcastle and it was measuring pupil's progress in Reading and Spelling tests. 20 private low-income schools took part with over 500 students. There were 241 children in the control group from 6 schools and 265 children from 14 schools who comprised the learning group. The teaching as well as testing started in 2004 and finished in 2005. Girls outperformed boys and it was evident that the number of days children spent on JP appeared to be influential too. The overall data showed clear evidence of a positive impact of this method in reading as well as in spelling (Schagen & Shamash 2007).

JP Research IV – Nigeria

Reading skill improvement of Nigerian children was measured using a mixed method approach. Children were tested through the standardised reading and spelling tests which provided quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected by interviews with teachers. The findings demonstrated that the JP instruction improves students' reading achievement and increases teachers' interest in teaching English (Eshiet 2012).

JP Research V – Cross River State, Nigeria

There was an investigation into the effects of the JP approach on basic literacy skills and its improvement. Almost 300 students from 6 schools took part in the test. The research took 8 months. The system of testing was as follows: one group students received JP session daily, the other group continued with traditional English lessons consisting of rote learning and memorisation. There was also a pre-test and post-test comparison measuring a number of basic literacy skills. The findings revealed that the JP group of students scored a much higher level on literacy assessment than those who were taught according to their normal literacy instruction (Shepherd 2013).

6.2 Synthetic Phonics and research on EFL students

The JP approach research findings have shown that this method of teaching children to read can be beneficial to students and its implementation can lead to improvements in literacy skills. However, there were also other countries involved in the research and they did not use the JP method. Using other reading programs, but still synthetic phonics based, they tried to evaluate whether the phonics reading technique really is effective on EFL students. We have chosen two countries, Colombia (L1 Spanish), Germany (L1 German) and India (L1 Kanada/Hindi) in which similar research was carried out. The tests and the result findings will be presented in the following chapters.

SP Research I – Bogota, Colombia

The research took place in Colombia, Bogota in the catholic bilingual school for girls. 85 children who were tested were first graders, most of them 7 years old. They had been studying at the school for about 3 years prior to the research and they already had some English lessons during these years. They already knew the English alphabet and the proper pronunciation of the main diagraphs. SH, WH, CH and TH. They were also able to use some vocabulary related to classroom English, household objects or farm animals. Everybody's mother tongue was Spanish (Martínez 2011). The researcher observed the classes one year prior to the research and used these main data sources: class notes and observations, surveys, students' grades and colleagues' interviews. One of the language aspects that was tested was reading comprehension in the first period of midterm and the results were following:

20 girls scored above average – average grade 93%

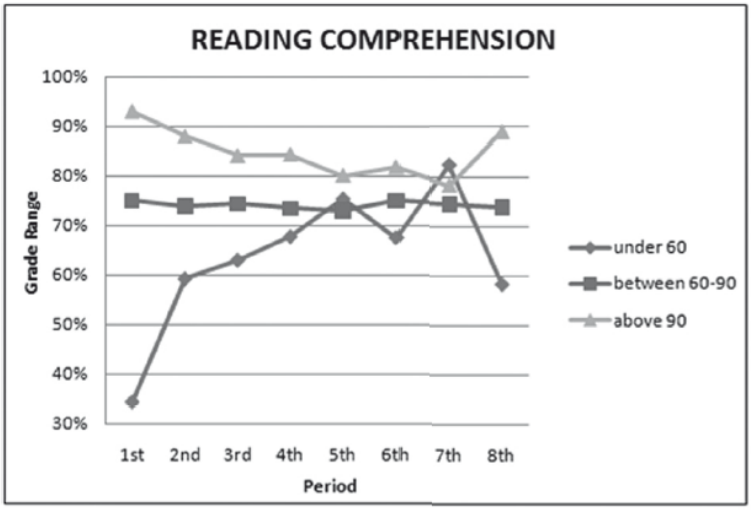
9 girls performed below average – average grade 34%

56 students were average – average grade 75%

(Martínez 2011)

To track the effects of phonics method there were seven exams set during the school year and student's results were examined. The results showed that there we no significant changes in the groups performing above or on average. However, in the group of low performing students' the results were surprising. In the beginning the students scored 34% on average, it then rose to 59% and was still rising reaching an incredible 89% on average. They even surpassed their high performing fellow students. During their final exam their scores dropped again, but there was still a significant difference compared to the results they had at the beginning of the year (Martínez 2011).

Graph 2: Average grades throughout the academic year



Source: The graph by Gist Education and Learning Research Journal, *Explicit and Differentiated Phonics Instruction as a Tool to Improve Literacy Skills for Children Learning English as a Foreign Language*, (Martínez 2011).

The findings indicate that phonics is beneficial not only with native English speakers, but it can also be broadened to EFL students. Apart from other findings and results, this action research confirmed a positive influence on an EFL learner's reading

comprehension. The research also revealed that L1 knowledge can be transferred into L2 and therefore EFL teachers should be aware of this trying to bridge the knowledge students have. Last but not least, the research found out that children's pronunciation improved when young learners were reading in English which had a positive impact on the understanding of what was read and therefore, supported text comprehension (Martínez 2011).

SP Research II – North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

The research project was conducted in North Rhine-Westphalia on second grade children, (aged 7) testing whether the phonics-based approach has any effects on phonological recoding ability and reading skills. It aimed to combine both, learner's first language and the target language. Therefore both principles German elementary reading programs and English elementary reading schemes were employed (Frisch 2009).

Even though English and German are very similar in terms of the phonological structure, the approach to how to teach children reading skills will be different in both languages. English with its letter-sound correspondences is the most inconsistent language in the world. Therefore, compared to English, the German spelling system is consistent and "easier" to read (Goswami 2005).

Research findings revealed that there is a positive effect on children's communication skills when written English is also integrated into English lessons. Written English activities in the primary EFL class can stop learners from starting to use so called "invented spelling", which is usually wrong and refers to children's own pronunciation rules usually based upon their mother tongue pronunciation rules. Part of the research also aimed to find out what methods primary school teachers use in their lessons to introduce the English writing system which is opaque and irregular. Despite the latest research findings that recommend the phonics method, and moreover German script is not introduced this way either, the results were surprising as the majority of the teachers still use whole-word methods (Frisch 2009). Finally it says students are already familiar with breaking the code in German and that it would be valuable to actively support children by systematically helping to crack the English code. Developing an adaptation of the phonics program for the German EFL learners which takes some crucial language

aspects into account was suggested. These are: learner's L1 structure and rules, English language structure and rules and difficult English sounds which may cause problems to German EFL learners (Frisch 2009).

SP Research III – Karnataka, India

10 year-old children speaking Kanada took part in the research that was carried out in Karnataka, India. Two systems of teaching reading were compared:

a) *Synthetic Phonics approach*

b) *Kanada-mediated synthetic phonics approach* (modified approach where English letter sounds were also represented by the Kanada symbols)

The modified approach was where tapping into student's pre-existing graphophonological awareness was supposed to help them with reading acquisition. The research results were surprising. Group undergoing the SP instruction method scored very well and outperformed the group with the standard non-phonics classroom method. However, the Kanada-mediated synthetic phonics group of students in their reading, spelling and graphophonological tasks, performed even better than SP group. The results were obvious after 5 weeks of instruction. Therefore, it seems to be beneficial when the metalinguistic knowledge of the mother tongue is combined with "traditional" English SP method (Nishanimut et al. 2013).

Last but not least it took into consideration one of the most important factors from which beginning readers can benefit and that is metalinguistic knowledge of learners' L1. We can see how important it is to bridge the knowledge between L1 and L2 and to use the linguistic system of students' native language to facilitate English learning. So it is concluded that a combination of two separate language systems is essential to language learners. Therefore, there has to be some differences in the variety of foreign language acquisition. Do any students learn their mother tongue faster than others or are there no differences at all? What are the nationalities (if any) which tend to acquire language easily making less errors when reading? What languages have more transparent language systems than others? These questions will be answered in the following chapter.

7 Reading development across languages

To be able to see the evidence base across languages, it is essential not to polarize and instead to be taking a step back from the "synthetic" vs. "analytic" phonics debate. Sooner or later, most students will become competent and skilled readers of their languages, but in some languages it happens faster. What could be the key factors? One appears to be spoken language and its phonological complexity and the other one is written language and its spelling consistency. This is the reason why there should be a thorough understanding of cross-language differences and similarities. Only then optimal reading strategies in different languages can be set (Goswami 2005).

We have already mentioned the phonological complexity of the language as a key factor in reading acquisition. Children acquire readings skills much faster when the structure of their mother tongue is simple, consonant-vowel (CV). Languages with such CV structures are for example Italian, Spanish or even Chinese. The second key element is the consistency of the symbol-to-sound mapping. This can either be one letter/letter cluster with only one possible way to be pronounced, e.g. Greek, Italian and Spanish. Or, in some alphabetic orthographies, one letter/letter cluster can have multiple pronunciations, e.g. Danish and English. It can also be similar with spelling (Ziegler et al. 1997).

English suffers from inconsistency in both pronunciation and spelling. This makes it an exceptionally difficult alphabetical language because it is difficult for many students to learn about letter sounds when a single letter can have multiple ways of pronunciation. Think of the letter A in CAT, WAS, SAW, MADE and CAR. One grapheme ends up having four phonemes (Goswami 2005).

7.1 Comparison of reading development across languages

"European Concerted Action on Learning Disorders as a Barrier to human Development" conducted a large-scale, careful cross-language reading comparison. Scientists from 14 European Community countries took part in the research. Together they developed a set of real words (BALL, TOY) and non-words/pseudo words (FIP, DEM). The items (an individual set for each language) were then presented to students from participating countries during their first year of learning to read. Phonics was

taught at all schools (Seymour 2003). The student's results are in the table below. The data (% correct) was obtained as a result of the large scale study of reading skills at the end of grade 1 in 14 European languages.

Table 1: Comparison of reading development – 14 European languages

Language	Familiar real words	Pseudo-words
Greek	98	92
Finnish	98	95
German	98	94
Austrian German	97	92
Italian	95	89
Spanish	95	89
Swedish	95	88
Dutch	95	82
Icelandic	94	86
Norwegian	92	91
French	79	85
Portuguese	73	77
Danish	71	54
Scottish English	34	29

Source: The table by British Journal of Psychology, Foundation literacy acquisition in European orthographies, (Seymour 2003).

The data gained through this research was striking. As we can see in the table above, children whose languages had consistent spelling systems (Greek, Finnish, German, Italian, Spanish), were close to perfect in both, non-word as well as word reading. On the other hand, English-speaking children with 29% correct non-words and 34% correct words, performed extremely poor. Further research showed that even after two years of phonics instruction, English children performed worse. When we compare Danish, Portuguese and French students with their scores lower than 80% to Greek or Finnish children, there is again a significant difference between them. However, this is compatible with reduced orthographic consistency of these languages. Finally, when we compare French, Spanish and English students, the Spanish group reaches the top results faster than French children. On the other hand, French students are better than

English readers and when German and English pupils are compared, German group scores better results. In conclusion, the research findings indicates that learning to read English is a more difficult task than learning to read in Finnish, Spanish or Italian. It can, therefore, be more complicated for these nationalities to crack the English code, because their native language system is completely different (Goswami 2005). (See also Appendix III)

8 Czech Speakers of English and their Pronunciation Problems

In this chapter we will have a closer look at the mistakes Czech native speakers make when they use English. We will not examine suprasegmental features such as word stress, intonation, elision or assimilation as they are not the main focus of our research. We shall examine segmental features – pronouncing vowel and consonant sounds.

8.1 Vowels

Compared to Czech that has only five vowel phonemes, English has twenty. There is also a direct link between spelling and pronunciation in Czech and therefore students may not know what English vowel sound to choose for a particular word they need to read in English. All syllables are pronounced equally with all vowels being strong. It is also very difficult for learners to differentiate between [æ], [e] and [ʌ] sounds, e.g. in pairs such as *bat* and *bet*. Last but not least, English schwa [ə] does not exist in Czech (Millin 2011).

8.2 Consonants

The morpheme TH and its pronunciation [ð] and [θ] does not occur in Czech either. Students often replace [w] with [v] sound and the other way round sometimes too. There are some problems with voicing as well, for example voiced [z] is confused with voiceless [s], e.g. as in *buzz* and *bus*. When Czech English learners pronounce phonemes such as [p], [t] or [k] at the beginning of words, they very often lack aspiration. CH letter combination causes problems too, as in Czech it is a single phoneme [x]. Children mispronounce this, especially in cases when CH is produced as [k], e.g. *Christmas*. Czech English language learners also confuse the sounds [ŋ], [g] and [k]. Most often it happens at the end of a word ending in –ing, in words such as *sing* and *sink* when G sound is lost or mispronounced as [k]. Silent letter pronunciation such as [b] in *comb* can also cause difficulties. And finally, when considering RP English, [r] only needs to be pronounced at the beginning of words and is omitted in the middle or in the end (Millin 2011).

9 Practical Part

To bridge the two main parts of this thesis and to investigate Phonics instruction not only theoretically, but also practically, we have carried out research on third grade primary school children.

We will not only focus on the actual numbers, but will also consider the mistakes children made and repeated. The pros that Phonics instruction has will be examined although we will concentrate on the cons of the reading method that could lead to some serious misunderstandings in communication.

The data was analysed for each group individually, although this will also be combined to form a conclusion on whether systematic Phonics instruction really works on EFL students and what language support may be the most effective for them.

10 The Research

Two different groups of children were tested to gain a variety of perspectives to evaluate whether systematic explicit Phonics instruction works on children learning to read or not. Diversity was sought after in the level of Phonics experience in the young language learners. The children were either exposed to Phonics method on a daily basis or had never experienced Phonics and therefore might have found our reading test difficult.

The groups of children were chosen from different schools with different experiences of Phonics instruction. Children of five primary schools in Prague suburbs, six primary schools in Hradec Králové region and also volunteers from four primary schools in Červený Kostelec formed our control group. The Phonics group of children was from a Prague primary school where systematic Phonics is being taught explicitly. The research was carried out between the middle of September 2016 and the beginning of November. (See also Appendix VII)

Details and a brief description of each group provides us with some information on the language teaching and the introduction of Phonics in a particular group.

10.1 Phonics group students

The pupils undertake explicit systematic Phonics teaching from their first grade. Their classes are partly led by native speakers and are split in two groups for their English lessons. Bilingual classes have two hours of English lessons and two hours of a workshop in English each week in their first year. The amount of English lessons and workshops is als the same in the second grade but children attend extra individual reading lessons with a native speaker who comes into their classroom. Reading sessions as well as workshops continue in the third grade with students gaining an extra English lesson per week. The children were taught how to sound out and blend sounds back together and they also know basic Phonics rules.

10.2 Control group students

There were many reasons for why our control group of students was formed not only in Prague. Firstly, it was very challenging to find school institutions which allow people to carry out the research on their students. Secondly, many teachers apply

Phonics rules deliberately to some extent so therefore the group of children cannot be classed as a control group that has no Phonics experience. Last but not least, even if teachers did not introduce Phonics in their lesson there were parents who did, or the children got to know the rules in languages courses or when attending after school activities such as language clubs. Therefore we designed two questionnaires – one for teachers and one for parents (see Appendices IVa and IVb). When we found out that either teachers of English or parents used Phonics the school or class was not included in the research.

Prague region

We communicated via e-mails with 25 schools in Prague suburbs out of which 7 institutions had very strict testing rules and there were 13 schools where Phonics were applied by English teachers. In the end 5 schools were visited with 75 third graders in total. However, 55 children already knew basic Phonics rules from their parents and 10 children agreed that they know Phonics from after school activities and language schools they attend. Students with no Phonics experience was therefore cut down to 10.

Hradec Králové region

Correspondence via e-mailing with 25 schools in Hradec Králové region was also done. Research was not able to be carried out in 9 schools due to very strict rules. 10 institutions applied Phonics rules to some extent. In the end 6 schools where visited and 102 children were available. However, 64 students already knew basic Phonics rules from their parents and 22 children claimed they knew Phonics from their after school activities. English learners with no Phonics experience was therefore only 16.

Volunteers from Červený Kostelec primary schools

We were unable to test students in all schools in Červený Kostelec. We could however, find 48 volunteers and the children were tested outside of school in their free time at the local library. In 2 out of 4 institutions Phonics were applied to some extent so only 23 students remained, of which 12 knew Phonics from their parents and 4 from language schools they attended. Therefore we could only use the test results of 7 children.

11 The Reading Test

The reading test had been designed especially for children learning English as a foreign language. Since we wanted children not to lose focus the test consisted of two different activities which although different, tested the same objectives. The exercises were linked making the task consistent. Each of the reading blocks required approximately 5 to 7 minutes. The average time needed to complete the test was therefore estimated to range between 10 to 14 minutes. There was however, no time limit and there was no influence over how much time children would need to complete the reading activities and to answer the additional questions asked by the researcher before and after the test.

11.1 Language of instruction

The language of instruction was primarily English, since the reading test was in English. The children however, needed to understand the instructions properly and there might be a wide range of language proficiency as there were children speaking fluently as well as children who barely understood the language. Therefore English was set as the instructional language first, but we made sure that everybody understood. This was done by asking children not only whether they understand what to do, but asking them to repeat the task back using their own words. This was very important, as we needed to eliminate misunderstanding which could lead to not finishing the test successfully. The amount of English used for giving instruction was estimated as ranging between 25 to 100%.

11.2 Carrying out the research and information about testing

The children were taken out of their lessons individually or they were asked to arrive at the library and the test was administered. In some cases it was possible to find a quiet place to test the children, but in most of them, we could not, as it was during school time and all the classrooms were being used. This meant that the testing had to be done in the corridors which made it difficult, especially during break times. The children were disrupted easily by the noisy surroundings, which was considered a great disadvantage. The conditions prolonged the testing time and children also lost their

focus. All these factors could influence student's performance and the results could be negatively affected.

Children's parents or their legal representatives were informed by a letter that was given to them by their class teachers. First, the letter introduced the purpose of the research and kindly asked parents and their children to take part in it. It also informed them about the voice recordings to be taken during the test. Last but not least, we declared that the research is anonymous to retain privacy of all people taking part in it.

None of the people who were asked to participate with us disagreed however, it was school rules and conditions that made things difficult. All parents or legal representatives showed their interest by agreeing with the research being carried out in their schools and classrooms and their children taking part in the test. Moreover we are happy to say that they expressed their interest in the research results too. The children did not know about the recordings being taken during their reading. However, we cannot be certain that none of the children were given the information by their parents.

The ultra compact H1 recorder (ZOOM H1) was used to record student's performances. This device offers professional-quality stereo recording in either MP3 or WAV formats. The H1's Audio-Level with its input gain prevents overload and distortion automatically and its low cut filter also eliminates low frequency noises. We found all these functions very useful later on when we analysed the data, as without such parameters we would not be able to decode and analyse more than half of the recordings and gained data. Our WAV files were 24-bit and its sampling rate was of 96 kHz.

The test started with a very brief introduction which served as a language warm up to help children "switch" into English. It also was an icebreaker as all of the children did not know the researcher and therefore they could be shy and concerned about the testing. They were asked a few questions for example their name, age, family or hobbies. As it was a dialogue, the researcher interacted with children introducing herself trying to encourage them to answer the questions. The whole activity finished with a brief conclusion including researcher's questions about children's learning English as a foreign language experience. Children were also asked whether they use English outside of their classroom (with their friends), if they attend any language schools or studios, if they spend holiday abroad (and need to use English on their own), or whether they

speak English at home with their parents due to the fact that they are or speak English. Although, we did not ask the control group children about Phonics learning experiences specifically, it was obvious that many children experienced some. Although these students were tested, we excluded their tests from the research results later.

12 The Reading Test Preparation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, an original reading test was designed that focused the on language phenomena being investigated. The test consists of two parts. Each exercise dealt with a student's ability to read and pronounce words properly. However, a variety of activities was used to entertain children, retain their interest and keep them motivated and focused. An imaginative story was used behind the whole reading test which was useful as most children were highly motivated throughout the whole testing. The first part of the test focused on reading plain words. After reading two lines, children could turn over the strip of paper and discovered a part of the puzzle. At the end of the activity they met the Alien. His name was Zush – which is a non-word. This brought them to a different world. Children needed to learn his language to be able to travel to his planet. The second exercise took children through the list of non existing words that taught them his language. In some cases pupils were asked to guess what each non-word could probably mean. Later the translation was given to them, so that they could understand the whole list of non-words. We used this moment to check student's ability to read high frequency words that served as part of the translation. When children could understand all of the words, Zush took them to his planet. The last activity was not tested, but we used it to close the test. Students were shown some pictures from alien's planet and were encouraged to build up a few short sentences about his home. They were supposed to replace high frequency words by Zush's language. (See also Appendix V).

12.1 The Sound Systems

Jolly Phonics *(http://jollylearning.co.uk/)* is one of the most famous Phonics teaching programmes which is widely spread in England and in English speaking countries. Jolly Phonics is also used all over the world and together with other Phonics programmes helps children to meet their needs when they learn English. Some phonics programmes combine the ability to read words using the Phonics method on the one side, on the other one they deal with the language aspects such as grammar or vocabulary too. We had a closer look at some phonics programmes available, not only at those concerning English to be a mother tongue. Our research, however, deals with Phonics and its impacts on EFL students. This made us search for an adequate

programme that would suit EFL learners better. Despite our efforts we were not able to find any courses or materials available for Czech students, which was unfortunate. However, we came across Fix-it Phonics teaching programme *(http://www.letterland.com/products/esl)* and decided to take into consideration the letters and sounds that were pointed out by this educational programme. We included the letters that especially Czech students tend to mispronounce. By combining ESL Fix-it Phonics letters and concentrating on the language needs of our Czech EFL students at the same time, we hope we finally met the needs of all children we tested or at least we tried to.

12.2 The Tested Sounds

The original Fix-it Phonics course consists of three levels, each of them introducing different phoneme and grapheme structures. First the letter is introduced, then some vocabulary including this letter is presented and later on, when children know enough sounds (at least the three most used) they start building up the whole words. In the table below we can see the list of the sounds that children learn in each level, sounds that are in a boldface are the sounds that we decided use in the exercises in our test. The reasons for choosing them will be clarified.

Table 1: The tested sounds according to the levels

Level 1	S, **A**, T, P, I, N, M, D, **G**, O, **C**, K, **CK**, E, **U**, **R**, H, B, F, L, **J**, **V**, **W**, **X**, **Y**, Z, **QU,** AEIOU long vowels, blends, the Alphabet
Level 2	letters A-Z, **NG**, **CH**, **SH**, **TH**, A-E, **AI**, **AY**, E-E, **EE**, **EA**, I-E, **IE**, **IGH**, **Y as I**, O-E, **OA**, **OW**, U-E, **UE**, **EW**, **OO**, **AR**, **OR**, **ER**, **IR**, **UR**
Level 3	A-Z, **OO**, **OY**, **OI**, **AW**, **AU**, **OW**, **OU**, **WH** (wheel), WH (who), **PH**, AIR, EAR (bear), EAR (hear), suffixes er/est, full/ful, ly, less, ness

The children of this age already knew how to read, and therefore it was not necessary to test all of the sounds and sound combinations that are listed above. Some letters have exactly the same pronunciations as in Czech, for instance letter S with its [s] sound. We therefore focused on the sounds, which are more problematic for EFL students in Czech, instead. We wanted to find out whether Phonics instruction helps with these in particular. In English some letters have more than one way they can be pronounced. E.g. the letter G can either be [g] or [ʤ]. In this case we included both options of its

pronunciation, even though one of them causes no problems to Czech learners, and it is [g]. It is similar with the letters V and W. In Czech they both sound the same. However, we used the letter V in our research as well.

With the list of the sounds prepared we can take a closer look at the conditions for the prepared test. It was designed specifically using a certain amount of the sounds. As many sounds and sound combinations listed above as possible were used. However, sometimes it was not possible to use just these sounds and using vowels or the rest of the consonants to build up the words we wanted to check was needed. For example (considering three sound words only):

a) **W**ET – 1/3 sounds in the word is tested and it is [w]

b) **SHEE**P – 2/3 sounds in the word are tested and they are [ʃ] and [i:]

c) **CHURCH** – 3/3 sounds in the word are tested and they are [tʃ] twice and [ɜ:(r)]

As we can see in a word CHURCH, there is [tʃ] sound not only once, but twice. We took this into a consideration and found out about the actual number of the words testes in our research. This means we counted how many times the sound was used and recorded the words it was in. We analysed Activity I that tested existing words first.

This meant that in total (exercise 1 only), there were forty-six different kinds of sounds and graphemes ([v] is not to be found in the above list) tested in the sixty words that were used. However, there were ninety-four examples of sounds and graphemes in the sixty words.

In terms of exercise 2a which dealt with testing children's ability to pronounce non existing words (non-words), we used forty-six different varieties of sounds and graphemes ([ɜ:(r)] was left out) and they were tested in forty-six words. However, we could find sixty-nine examples of the forty-five sounds and graphemes in the whole list of forty-six words

12.3 The Word Building

The words were built systematically. Not only by trying to use the tested sounds more than once, but also to try to include lesser known words. By doing this it was hoped to eliminate students' sight guessing from the context or using only the first or the last sounds to guess and read the rest. We built up a certain amount of words first from which a list of graded words was made. The shift from easier words to the more difficult ones was very important, as it helped children to spark their motivation by knowing the words and their pronunciation. Second it helped the researcher to spot the parts of the test where students started to experience problems.

12.3.1 Activity I

The first reading exercise consisted of sixty words. They were built up from one hundred and ninety-one sounds. However, the amount of the sounds we took into account was ninety-four. The words were sorted from the easier (and shorter) ones to the more challenging words. The shortest three-letter word included two sounds (e.g. f-ur), the longest seven-letter word then consisted of five sounds (p-ai-n-t-er). Most of the sounds were three-sound words (44). There was a puzzle as reward for children when they finished this activity. The complete list of the words is presented below. It was originally printed in black however, the sounds we tested are highlighted.

Table 2: The words and tested sounds and graphemes

ANT	VET	FOG	CUP	SAND	CLOCK
WET	GEM	JIG	GROW	KICK	JACKET
CLICK	JAM	QUEEN	WING	SHED	CHURCH
THEN	CHRIS	TRAY	SHEEP	THROW	CHAIN
SEED	THIS	SEAL	TIE	JEEP	THUMB
NIGHT	DRY	ELBOW	CLUE	BOWL	CORK
TERM	JAR	STORM	DIRT	FUR	PAINTER
BIRTH	NURSE	SKY	PHOTO	LIGHT	BOIL
YAWN	HOOK	LOUD	WHEAT	TOY	CLOUD
YES	WHEEL	WOOD	PAUL	STRAW	SPHINX

12.3.2 Activities IIa and IIb

The second exercise dealt with non-words and their pronunciation. It discovered whether the children were able to read words that do not exist in English. They were expected to use the same rules to read them as they do with English. However, in this case, they could not rely on the possibility of guessing from the context or from the first or the last sounds in the word. There were one hundred and forty sounds in forty-six words that were tested, but only sixty-nine sounds were being researched. Again, as in the previous exercise, the most difficult words were at the end of this activity and it started with the easier words. The non-words used consisted of at least two sounds and the words had at least three letters (e.g. m-e-c). The longest word was six-letters and consisted of either five (h-u-m-b-er) or three (wh-ee-sh) sounds. The non-words used in our test are not already available ("known" from the Internet or other sources). The researcher came up with new original ones. The first word that was tested was the Alien's name, ZUSH. This was used deliberately. The first reason was to show children they were about to learn and speak a different language. Secondly, we chose letters to draw students' attention to three possibilities of letter and sounds they were going to come across in the activity.

a) **Z [z]** – pronunciation is the same in English [z] as well as in Czech [z]

b) **U [ʌ]** – pronunciation is different in English [ʌ] than in Czech [ʊ]

c) **SH [ʃ]** – unlike Czech, two (or more) letters can make one sound in English [ʃ]

(Note: we are aware of Czech letter CH [x], but as it is the only letter in the Czech alphabet, combination of two or more letters in English words could cause mispronunciation.)

In Table 3 that follows, we can see the list of the non-words that we tested. As in the previous exercise, it was originally printed in black, however, it is highlighted to show the sounds and graphemes tested.

Table 3: The non-words and tested sounds and graphemes

TAS	**GOSS**	**GISS**	**MEC**	**NUCK**
HUP	**RES**	**JEEM**	**VOS**	**WEAT**
DOX	**YUSH**	**QUEAM**	**YING**	**CHOOT**
SHOM	**THUN**	**NAIM**	**HRAY**	**FEEP**
NEAP	**RIE**	**PIGHT**	**CLY**	**LOAB**
BOWN	**PLUE**	**FEWP**	**ZOONG**	**FLAR**
JORK	**HUMBER**	**DIRS**	**MURF**	**DOY**
DOIN	**LAWM**	**SAUL**	**KLOUM**	**WHEAN**
PHISH	**NOICK**	**WHEESH**	**MAUCK**	**SPHUN**

Most of the words (41) were three-sound words. As you can see in the table above, we used two or three-letter combinations and more than one-letter per sound combinations. This was done deliberately to make the test more challenging. As we mentioned previously, some letter combinations such as CH, TH, OO, OW or EW can be pronounced in more than one way. In this reading exercise we allowed children to chose their preferable way of pronouncing the words and if the produced sound was one of the possibilities, we considered is as correct.

This part of the exercise also tested the reading of high-frequency words (Activity IIb). In such words pronunciation only sometimes uses the Phonics rules. Therefore, these words can be found to be tricky (we call them tricky, camera or sight words too). Students cannot pronounce them by using the decoding abilities presented by Phonics programmes. Sight words need to be learnt by looking at, memorizing and remembering them. We estimate some problems in this part of the test, as children whose English lessons or courses include Phonics instructions may read these words automatically relying on its rules and being unaware of the mistakes.

When students' finished one out of the four sets of non-words, they were asked whether they can understand any of the words they read and could give an English translation. Later on, they were given a "proper" translation which was a set of high-frequency words. This was inspired by Jolly Phonics Reading Levels *(http://jollylearning.co.uk/2010/11/01/tricky-words/)* and some tricky words from each reading level were selected. There are four reading levels according to the Jolly Phonics reading programme. Each group has a specific colour which we have also retained in the test. It is red, orange, green and blue – from beginners to more advanced learners.

There were only forty-five words tested in this activity, but you can find the complete list of all high-frequency words in Appendix VI.

Table 4: High-frequency word testing

I	**THE**	**HE**	**SHE**	**ME**
WE	**WAS**	**DO**	**ARE**	**ALL**
YOU	**YOUR**	**COME**	**SOME**	**HERE**
THERE	**THEY**	**GO**	**NO**	**MY**
ONE	**ONLY**	**OLD**	**LIKE**	**HAVE**
LIVE	**GIVE**	**LITTLE**	**DOWN**	**WHAT**
WHEN	**WHY**	**WHERE**	**WHO**	**WHICH**
MANY	**WERE**	**WANT**	**PUT**	**RIGHT**
TWO	**FOUR**	**GOES**	**DOES**	**THEIR**

13 The Research Findings

The following part of the thesis will show and present the research findings and information gained. Each group of subjects (control group – C.G. and Phonics group – Ph.G.) will be considered and analysed. A closer look will then be taken into the difficulties children experienced, as well as what was not problematic for them. The whole test will be discussed giving examples to show the findings. In terms of both groups, the children's overall results depending on sex will be compared. Both tested groups will then be compared and contrasted and common mistakes that appeared will be highlighted. This will help to prove or disprove our hypotheses. (See also Appendices VIIIa and VIIIb)

13.1 Non-word and sight word reading analysis

This part of the text is divided into two parts. The first part presents the most commonly mispronounced letter and letter combinations in Activity IIa which tested non-word reading. The second part researches sight word reading tested in Activity IIb.

Non-word reading

Both correct as well as incorrect pronunciation is presented in the list of letter-sound correspondences we tested. The letters or the letter combinations that occurred repeatedly and in a very high rate are seen in the graphs below.

- **A [æ]** as in *ant* – usually mispronounced as [ʌ] or [e]
- **G [ʤ]** as in *gem* – usually mispronounced only as [g]
- **C [k]** as in *cat* – usually mispronounced as [ts]
- **CK [k]** as in *kick* – usually mispronounced as [tsk]
- **U [ʌ]** as in *but* – usually mispronounced as [ʊ]
- **R [r]** as in *run* – usually mispronounced as hard [r]
- **J [ʤ]** as in *jug* – usually mispronounced as [j]
- **W [w]** as in *wet* – usually mispronounced as [v]
- **X [ks]** as in *fox* – usually not mispronounced, but was also [iks]
- **Y [j]** as in *yes* – usually mispronounced as [ɪ]

– **QU [kw]** as in *quick* – usually mispronounced as [kv] and also [kʊ]

– **NG [ŋ]** as in *king* – usually mispronounced as [ŋk] and also [nk**]**

– **CH [tʃ]** as in *chin* – usually mispronounced as [x]

– **CH [k]** as in *Chris* – usually mispronounced as [x]

– **SH [ʃ]** as in *shop* – usually mispronounced as [sh]

– **TH [θ]** as in *thin* – usually mispronounced as [t], [s], [f] and also [th]

– **TH [ð]** as in *this* **–** usually mispronounced as [d], [z], [v] and [th]

– **AI [eɪ]** as in *mail* – usually mispronounced as [aj] or [aɪ]

– **AY [eɪ]** as in *tray* – usually mispronounced as [aj] or [aɪ]

– **EE [i:]** as in *tree* – usually mispronounced as [e] or long E

– **EA [i:]** as in *eat* – usually mispronounced as [ea] or [e]

– **IE [aɪ]** as in *pie* – usually mispronounced as [ɪe]

– **IGH [aɪ]** as in *right* – usually mispronounced as [ɪk] or [ig]

– **Y as I [aɪ]** as in *fly* – usually mispronounced as [ɪ]

– **OA [əʊ]** as in *toad* – usually mispronounced as [ɔa]

– **OW [aʊ]** as in *now* – usually mispronounced as [ɒf] or even [ɒv]

– **UE [u:]** as in *blue* – usually mispronounced as [ʊe]

– **EW [ju:]** as in *stew* – usually mispronounced as [ef]

– **EW [u:]** as in *chew* – usually mispronounced as [ef] or even [ev]

– **OO [u:]** as in *moon* – usually mispronounced as [ɒ] or long O

– **OO [ʊ]** as in *book* – usually mispronounced as [ɒ] or long O

– **AR [a:(r)]** as in *car* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [ʌr] or [a:r]

– **OR [ɔ:(r)]** as in *fork* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [ɒr] or [ɔ:r]

– **ER [ə(r)]** as in *tiger* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [er] or [r]

– **ER [ɜ:(r)]** as in *term* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [er]

– **IR [ɜ:(r)]** as in *girl* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [ɪr]

– **UR [ɜ:(r)]** as in *fur* – usually mispronounced with hard [r] as [ʊr]

– **OY [ɔɪ]** as in *boy* – usually mispronounced as [ɒj]

– **OI [ɔɪ]** as in *boil* – usually mispronounced as [ɒj]

– **AW [ɔ:]** as in *yawn* – usually mispronounced as [ʌv] or even [ʌf]

– **AU [ɔ:]** as in *autumn* – usually mispronounced as [aʊ]

– **OW [aʊ]** as in *town* – usually mispronounced as [ɒv] or even [ɒf]

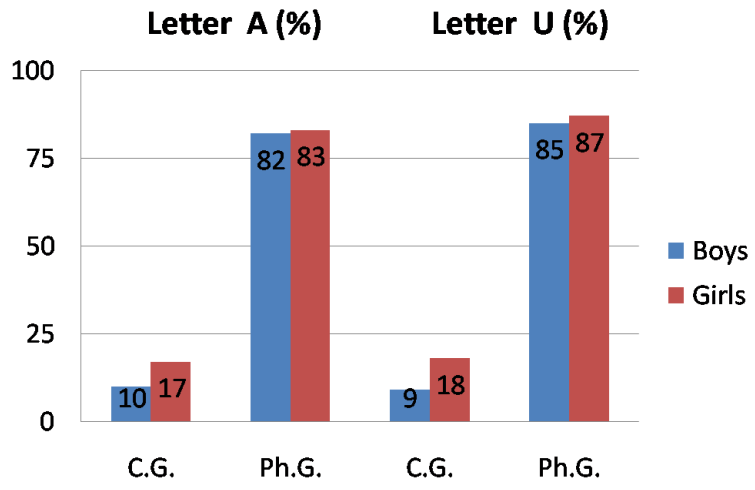
– **OU [aʊ]** as in *mouse* – usually mispronounce as [ɔʊ]

– **WH [w]** as in *whale* – usually mispronounce as [vh] or even [wh]

– **PH [f]** as in *dolphin* – usually mispronounced as [ph]

In the graphs that follow we can see the results of both the control group (C.G.) and the Phonics group (Ph.G.) compared. The results indicated in blue represent boys and the results in red represent girls. The figures show percentage of successfully read letters or letter combinations in non-word reading activity (Activity IIa).

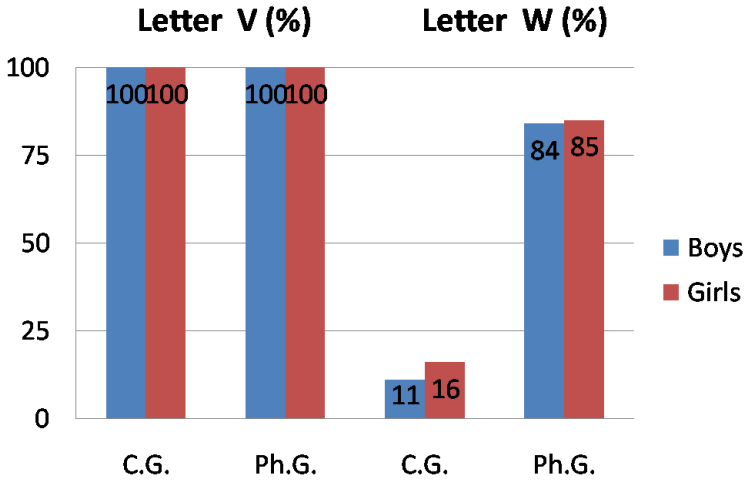
Graph I



(Source: Researcher's own data)

Graph I shows the results for letter A and letter U reading. The Phonics group children outperformed the control group students reaching up to 85% or even 87%, whereas learners with no Phonics experience were only able to read words correctly up to 18% of the time.

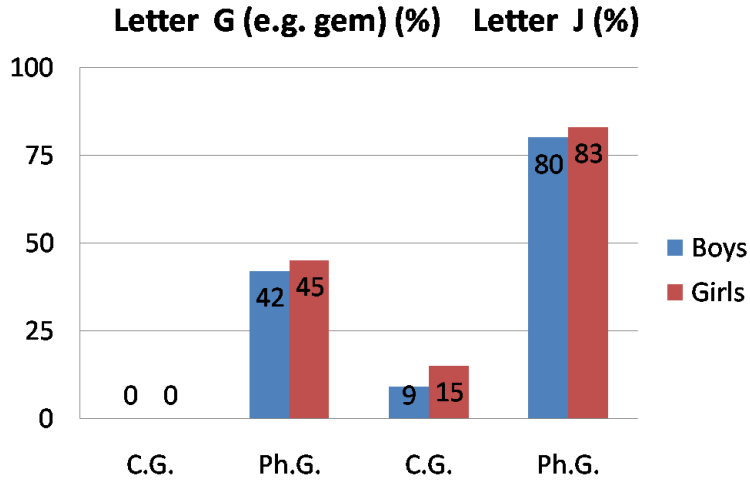
Graph II



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In case of letters V and W reading, students of both groups tested scored 100% in letter V testing, however, the results dropped significantly in terms of letter W pronouncing. The Control group children reached a maximum of 16% whereas the Phonics group students scored above 80% for both girls and boys.

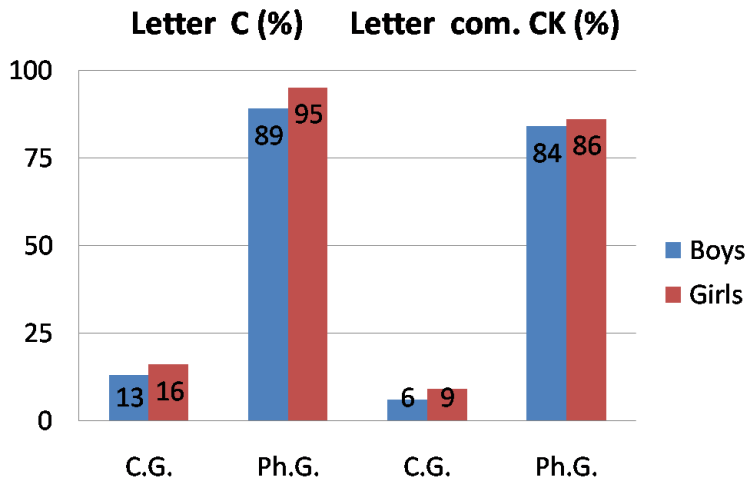
Graph III



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In terms of letter G pronunciation we tested both [g] and [ʤ] sounds. However, as we can see in the chart above, we only considered the results of [ʤ] pronunciation. We can see that children from the control group scored 0% in both sexes. The Phonics group results were better. However, compared to other letter/letter combination reading attempts with a maximum of only 42% and 45% it was significantly lower. The [ʤ] sound in terms of letter J reading resulted in better scores in both groups tested.

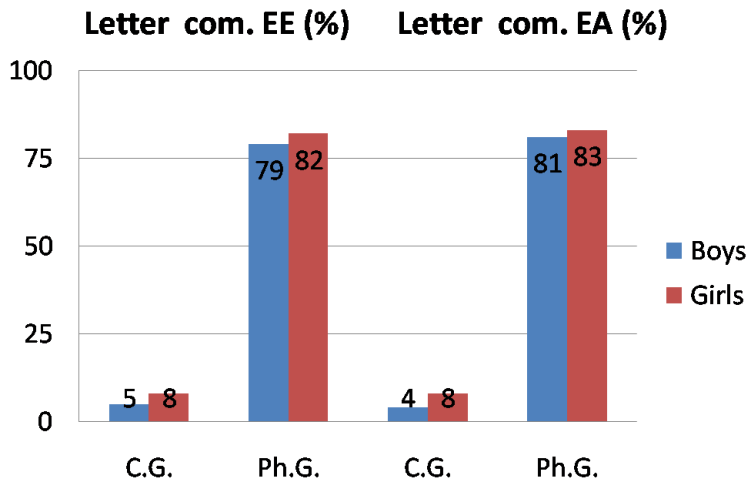
Graph IV



(Source: Researcher's own data)

This table shows the outcomes of C and CK reading. Again the Phonics group of children with the results of 89% and 95% outperformed the control group students where the results were no higher than 16%. Both groups tested scored better in C reading.

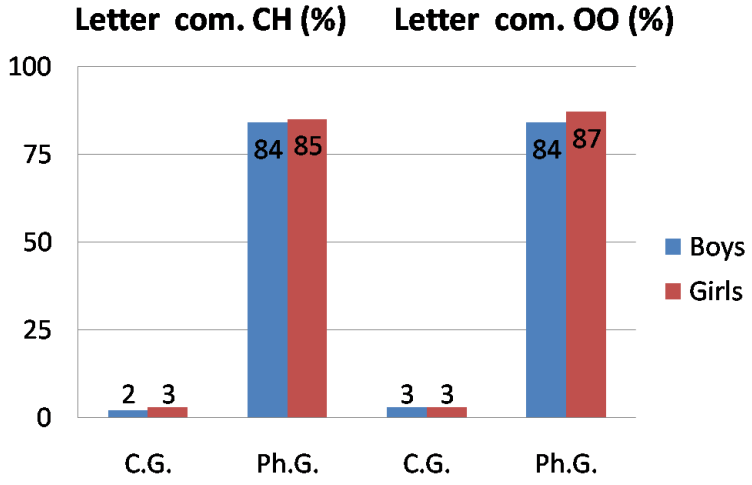
Graph V



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In terms of the [i:] sound tested the results for control group fell lower only reaching a maximum of 8%, whereas the Phonics group scored around 80% on average. This indicates that the results between the two groups were notable. However, alternatively, the results between the two letter combinations EE and EA tested were insignificant.

Graph VI

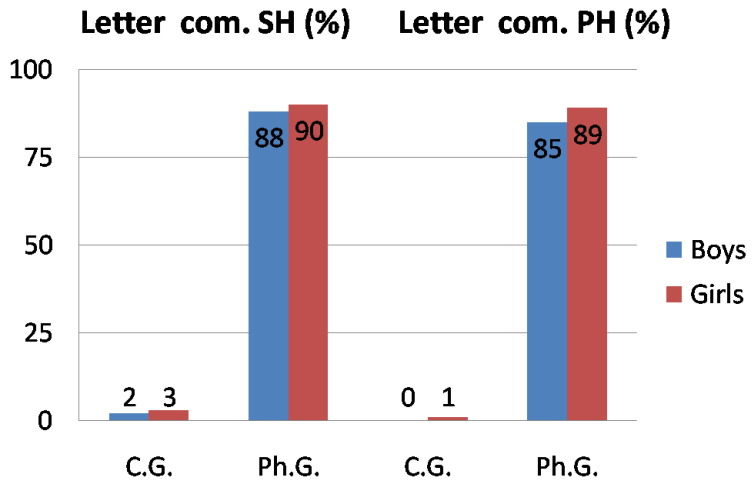


(Source: Researcher's own data)

Children were allowed to pronounce CH both as [k] and [ʧ] and OO both as [ʊ] and [u:]. The Phonics group students' results reached above 80% in both sexes and for both letter combinations. The results were also similar to other letter or letter combinations

we tested. The Control group, however, scored significantly below average with around 10%.

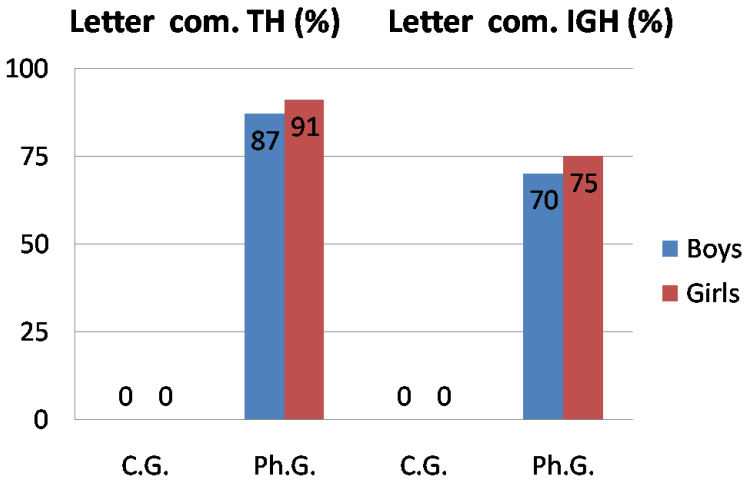
Graph VII



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In the SH and PH letter combinations again the control group of children performed notably below the average group results having 0% in the boys attempts to pronounce PH. The Phonics group, on the other hand, scored from 85% to 90% of letter combinations successfully read in the same activity.

Graph VIII



(Source: Researcher's own data)

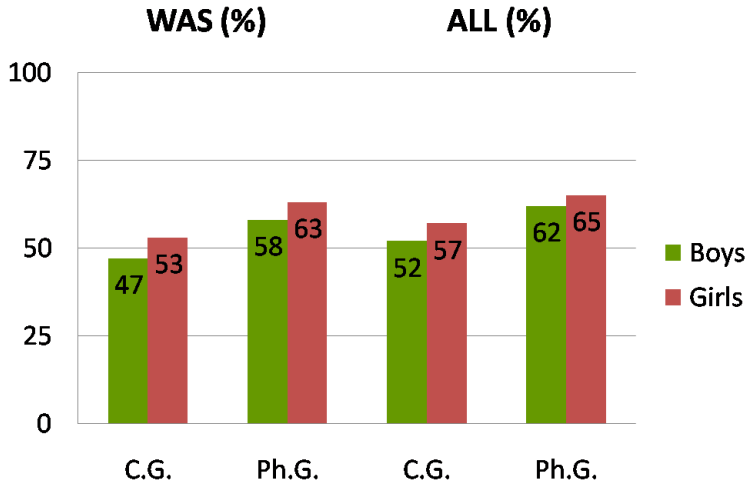
Letter combinations TH and IGH were found especially challenging by our control group students. Both sexes in both letter combinations scored 0% of successfully read

words. Even though Phonics group scored below its usual 80% on average in IGH reading, its results went above 90% in TH reading.

Sight word reading

The figures show how successful students of both tested groups were in reading sight words. The graphs show percentage of successfully read high-frequency words in Activity IIb.

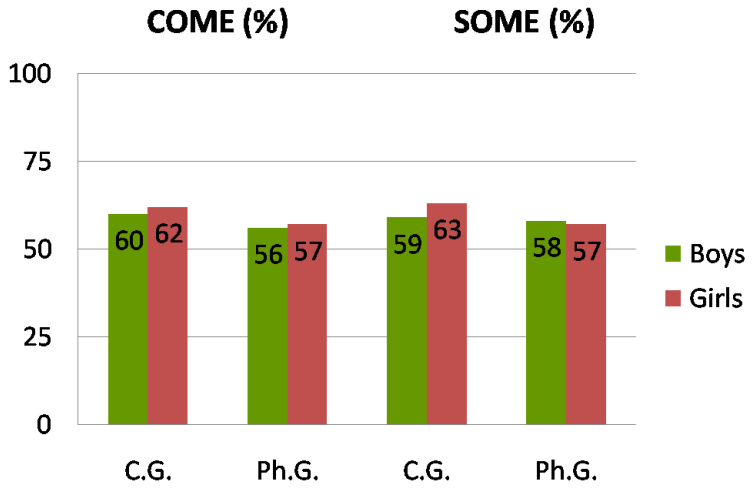
Graph 1



(Source: Researcher's own data)

The first graph indicates the results of WAS and ALL sight word reading. We can see that while the Phonics group children results notably decreased, the control group students scored better than in the previous non-word reading activity.

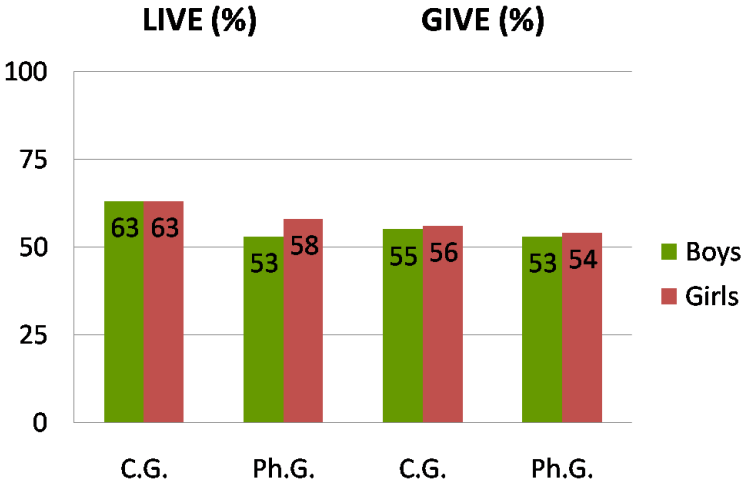
Graph 2



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In terms of reading both words (COME and SOME), the control group students outperformed their Phonics group counterparts and both sexes scored better.

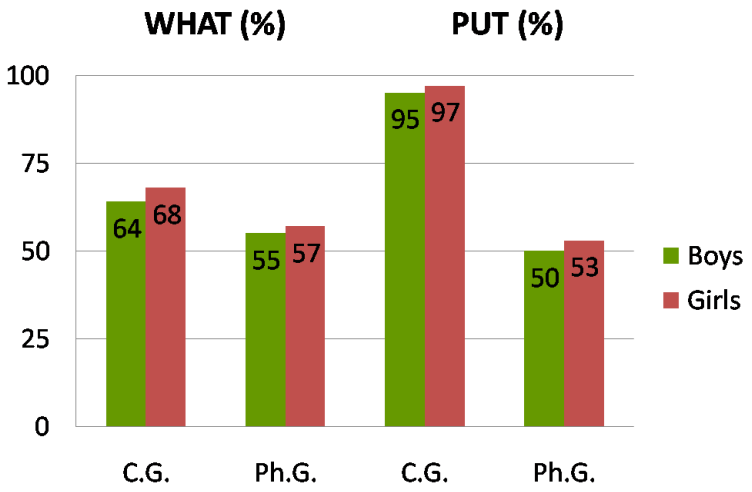
Graph 3



(Source: Researcher's own data)

Graph 3 shows the results of LIVE and GIVE testing. When we compare groups together in terms of each word separately, even though the differences are not significant, we can see that in both words it was the control group which outperformed students from Phonics group.

Graph 4



(Source: Researcher's own data)

The last figure shows the results of WHAT and PUT testing. In both cases again the control group children outperformed the Phonics group students. The results were particularly significant in the case of PUT word testing where the control group scored 95% or even 97% accuracy in reading, whereas the Phonics group reached only 50% or 53%.

14 Phonics group and Control group overall results analysis

This part of our work presents students results within each group individually, but also compares both tested groups and sexes.

14.1 Activity I outcomes

The activity tested the ability to read sixty existing words. On average fifteen of the control group boys read 30 words and the girls scored 37 successfully read words. The average for the whole group was 33.818 words. The Phonics group of children average score was 41.833 words for the same activity. It was 39 for the girls and 44 correctly read words for the boys. The girls outperformed the boys in both of the groups. The difference in Phonics group of students however, was not as significant.

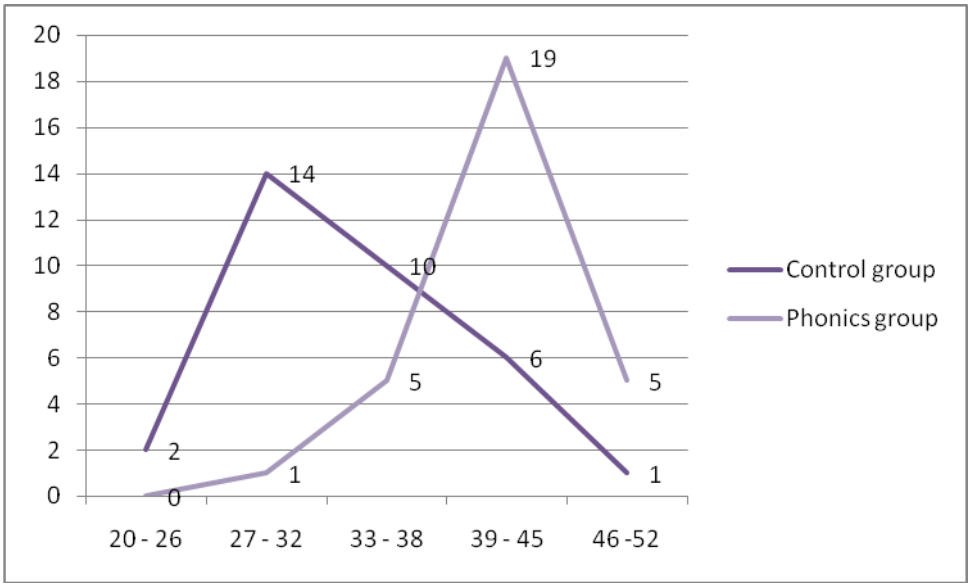
The mode for boys in the control group was 30, for the girls it was 34 and it was 30 again for the whole group. When we look at the Phonics group data, the mode for boys was 39, 44 for the girls and 44 for the whole group.

The median for boys in the control group was 30, for the girls it was 37 and 33 for all children within this group. For the Phonics group of children the median was 42.5 for the whole group, 39 for boys and 44 for girls.

22 correctly read words (a boy) was the minimum score for the control group. The maximum score was reached by a girl who scored 47. The range of variation is therefore 25.

There was a minimum score of 29 correctly read words (a boy) for the Phonics group and the maximum was reached by a girl who scored 50. The variation range is therefore 21.

Graph A



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In the graph shown above we can see figures related to the number of children and correctly pronounced words. 14 children scored within the range of 27-32 correctly read words, whereas there was only 1 Phonics group child. For the range of 39-45 correctly read words it was almost the opposite with 19 Phonics group students in this range and only 6 of the control group children. The control group results tend to increase rapidly and then drop, whereas the Phonics group of children results increased gradually and decreased at the end.

14.2 Activity IIa outcomes

This activity tested whether the children were able to read non-existing words using Phonics. Forty-six words were researched. On average fifteen of the control group boys successfully read only 6 words and girls read only 9. The average for the whole group was 7.636. The Phonics group of children scored 34.552 on average in the same activity, with 35 for girls and 34 correctly read words for boys. Again they were girls who outperformed boys within both group results. As in the previous activity, the difference in Phonics group of students was not as significant as the difference between both sexes in control group.

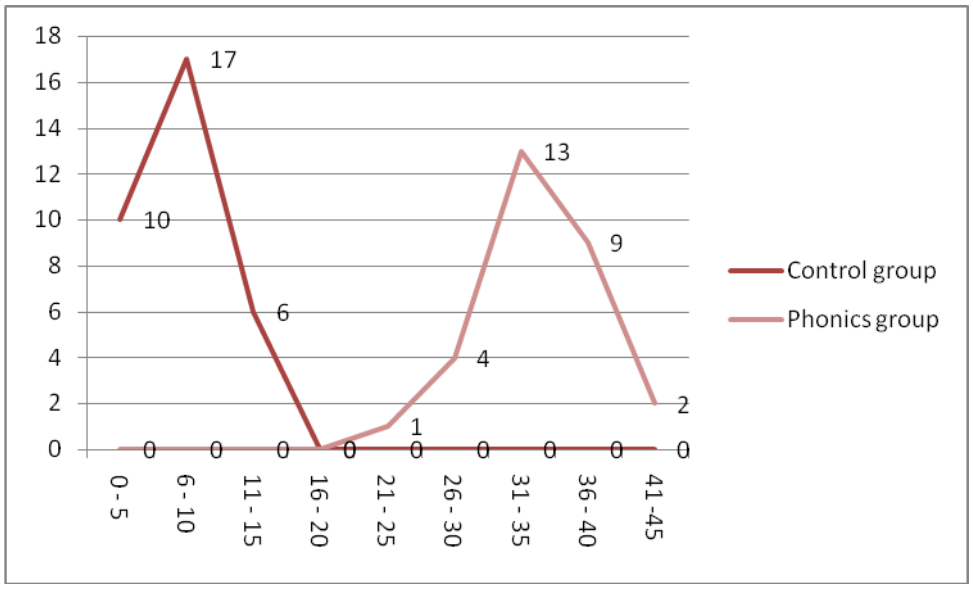
The mode for boys in the control group was 5, for girls it was 4 and 5 for the whole group. Examining the Phonics group data, the mode for boys was 34, 33 for girls and 33 again for the whole group.

The median for boys in the control group was 6, for girls it was 9 and 7 for all children within this group. However, the Phonics group of children with a median score of 34 for the whole group scored significantly better. It was 34 for boys and 45 for girls.

Even the minimum and maximum scores show obvious variability of data in both groups. A boy whose results were only 2 correctly read words was a minimum score for control group. The maximum was reached by two girls both scoring 14 correct words. Range of variation was 12.

In the Phonics group the minimum (25 words) as well as the maximum score (45 words) was achieved by girls. This gives us a range of 20 correctly pronounced words.

Graph B



(Source: Researcher's own data)

In the above graph we can see that none of the control group children read more than 15 words, (14 words respectively) correctly. Both groups had no children who could successfully read words within the range of 16-20 words. However, the Phonics group results can be seen on the higher number scale ranging from 21-45 correctly pronounced words.

In both groups we can see results rising. They first reach the maximum where the majority of children can be found and then we experience the results dropping again.

14.3 Activity IIb outcomes

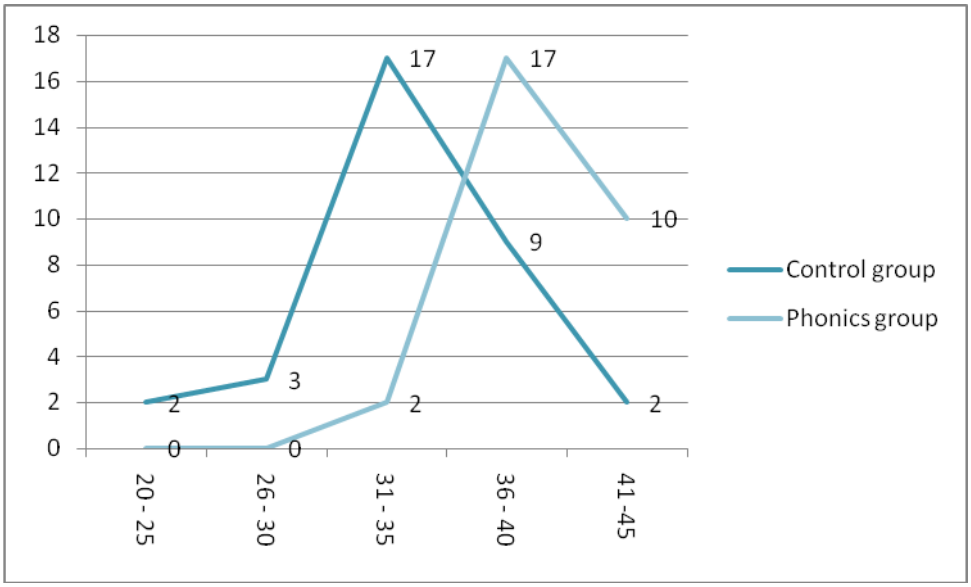
Sight word reading was tested in Activity IIb and it consisted of 45 words. On average fifteen of the control group boys were able to read 15 words and the girls scored 18 successfully read words, on average it was 34.091 for the whole group. The Phonics group of children scored 39.552 on average in the same activity. The girls read on average 40 correctly read words and the boys correctly read 39. Again they were girls who outperformed boys within both group results. In this activity the control group of children results increased significantly, whereas Phonics group of students experienced the opposite. This group scored better than our control group, but the differences between both groups were not as significant as usual.

The mode for boys in the control group was 33, for the girls it was 25 and 32 for the whole group. The Phonics group data revealed the mode for boys being only 37, and it was even lower for girls (35). The mode for the whole group was 39.

The median for boys in the control group was 33, for girls it was 35 and then 34 for all children within this group. The Phonics group of children however, with a median of 39 for the whole group scored worse than usual. It was 39 for boys and 40 for girls.

The minimum score increased in the control group where two girls reached 25 words. They were two girls again who scored maximum reading rates as well reaching up to 45 words read correctly. The variation rate was therefore 20. In the Phonics group once again two girls scored the minimum with a score of 35. There were also two girls who read all words correctly scoring 45. The rate of variation for this group was 10. There was an obvious variability of data in both groups.

Graph C



(Source: Researcher's own data)

As we can see in the graph above 17 control group children scored between 31 and 35 correctly read words. The pattern was the same in the Phonics group however, the word range was 36 to 40 words. Even though Phonics students' results are still better than those of the control group (students scores were not lower than 31), we need to take into consideration that the control group scores increased, compared to other activities, whereas those of the Phonics group in this case dropped slightly.

15 Discussion

This part of the text will compare the group results and answers will be given to the questions. Activities will be discussed as they followed in the test, groups then will be compared and contrasted if necessary.

Activity I

Is there a significant difference in results between girls of control and Phonics group?

The data analysis has shown that according to the tested criteria (C.G. girls 174 and Ph.G. girls 387) there is a significant difference between both tested groups.

Is there a significant difference in results between boys of control and Phonics group?

The data analysis has proven that according to tested criteria (C.G. boys 134 and Ph.G. boys 272) there is a significant difference between both tested groups.

Hypothesis I: ***Control group students average results in Activity I are the same as Phonics group children results on average.***

The overall outcomes have shown there *is* a significant difference between both tested groups. The Phonics group of students outperformed children of the control group.

Activity IIa and Activity IIb

As it is shown in the chapter on non-word and sight word reading analysis, the results of non-word reading are clear. C.G. students were outperformed by Ph. G. students who performed significantly better than their counterparts in the test.

Hypothesis II: ***Systematic Phonics instruction affects pronunciation negatively.***

Some Ph.G. children applied Phonics rules on high frequency words and therefore their pronunciation was not correct. This indicates that in some cases reading and pronouncing can be affected negatively by systematic Phonics instruction. The examples listed below show the most commonly mispronounced camera words in our test along with their incorrect transcription.

WAS **[wæs]**	ALL **[æl]**	COME **[kəʊm]**	SOME **[səʊm]**
ONLY **[ɒnli]**	OLD **[ɒld]**	LIVE **[laɪf]**	WHAT **[wæt]**
WANT **[wænt]**	PUT **[pʌt]**		

16 Conclusion

At the beginning of this diploma thesis the author expressed an interest in clear pronunciation and highlighted the importance of expert guidance in its teaching. By following English lessons from primary school through secondary schooling and the Lyceum course for teachers in Litomyšl, she described the contents of English lessons pointing out that there was no Phonics instruction included in her primary school English classes. During her university studies in Prague and in Derby, she began to question how pronunciation should be taught and the best way of presenting it to young learners. She visited Phonics lessons in England where the Synthetic Phonics method of teaching seemed to be effective. She therefore wanted to investigate this method further and discover how it works with young learners and whether there is any evidence that it is also successful in teaching EFL learners.

The theoretical part of the thesis therefore focused on the Synthetic Phonics method of teaching children to read. The Synthetic Phonics research carried out on EFL students in various countries worldwide was investigated. The Synthetic Phonics method and the Analytic Phonics approach are two reading techniques that are either used separately or educators have tried to combine them to achieve the best literacy results. The similarities and differences of Synthetic and Analytic Phonics as well as advantages and disadvantages have been examined. It seems that Synthetic Phonics is the most effective in many language aspects. However, even reading specialists found some aspects that are not positively affecting a child's ability to read. These are sheer pronouncing and not reading and comprehending the written materials, or applying the phonics rules to words that are irregular (sight words) and have to be learnt by sight.

Not only are Synthetic and Analytic Phonics available on the market today, there is a variety of methods that teach children to read. Some of them were discussed in addition to the two prevailing methods to identify the aspects they have in common. Reading skill is a part of literacy and should be set within primary schooling. We therefore highlighted the importance of this language skill mentioning its goals. Last but not least, data findings on how the brain processes reading and how it responds to being taught by different methods were presented. These findings indicate that some scientists favor the Synthetic Phonics approach, as it seems that the brain processes for this are much faster and more straightforward.

To conclude whether Phonics works not only with native speakers but also with children learning English as a foreign language, research was carried out.

The research was quantitative in terms of finding out how many correct words children are able to read, but it also had a qualitative element, as the quality of pronunciation was also considered.

There were sixty-two students (aged eight to nine) from 14 schools who took part. The control group having undertaken no phonics lessons at all was included along with a group of children attending Phonics lessons regularly as part of their school programme.

The findings from the research with the control group indicated that students were less able (or completely unable) to decode non-existing words. However, they scored much better in the sight word reading test where words are learnt by heart according to how they look. The phonics group, on the other hand, did not score as well in this activity, as children tended to apply Phonics rules where they are not necessary. In non-word reading, however, the Phonics group children scored significantly higher than their counterparts and found pronouncing words much easier.

In conclusion Synthetic Phonics can affect EFL learners' reading abilities both positively and negatively and teachers should be aware of these when making a decision on the most effective method for their EFL students to learn to read English.

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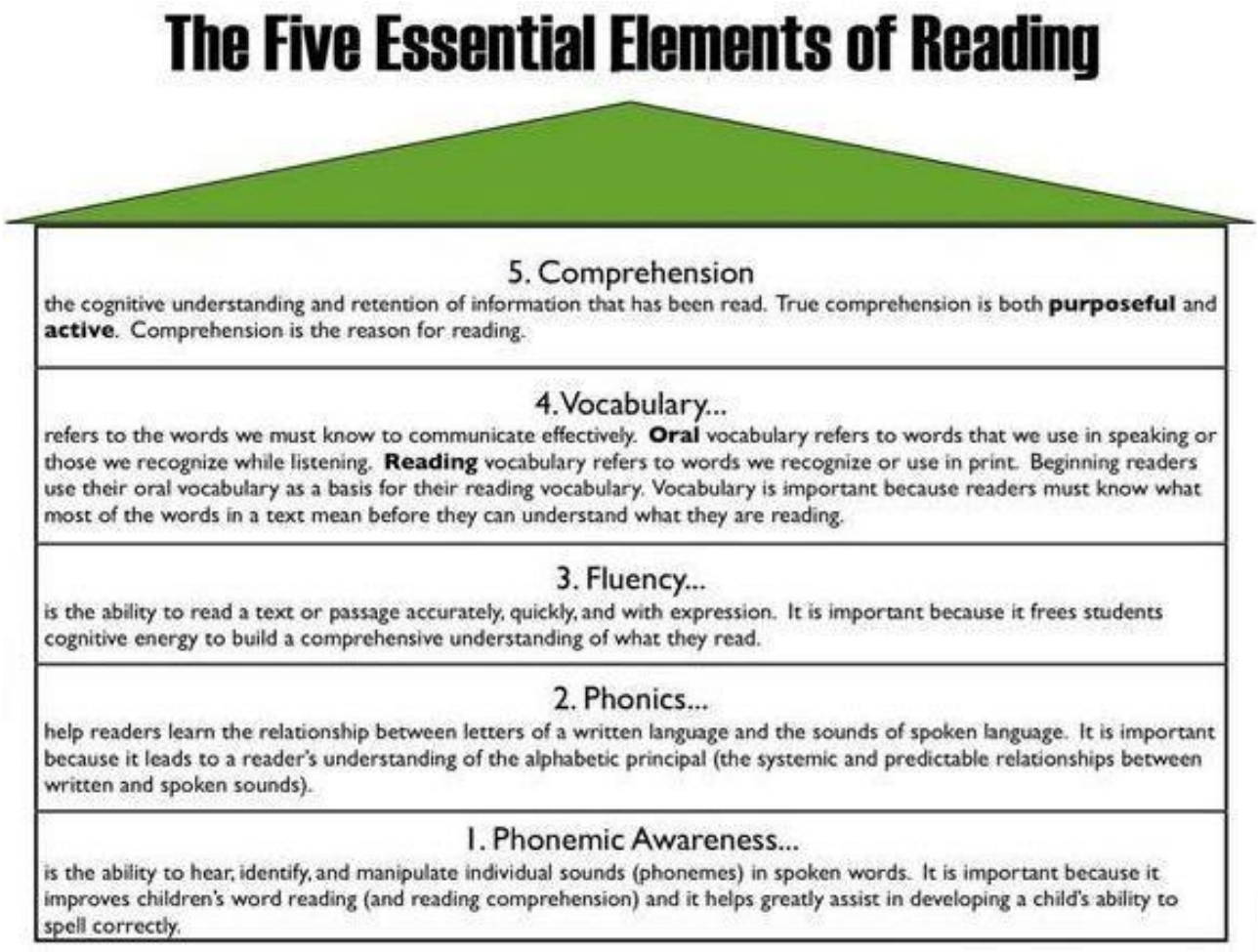
18 Appendices

Appendix I: The Five Pillars of Reading

The five pillars of reading are the essential reading elements that include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and vocabulary. When all parts are developed and taught successfully, they result in reading comprehension where students understand what are they reading about and can rationalise about written texts.

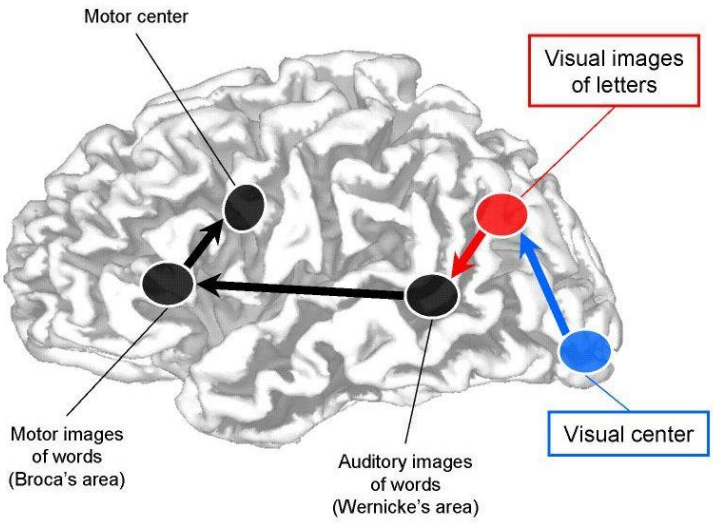
Source: The description and the picture by My teaching portfolio, *5 Essential Components of Reading*, (Jones n.d.).



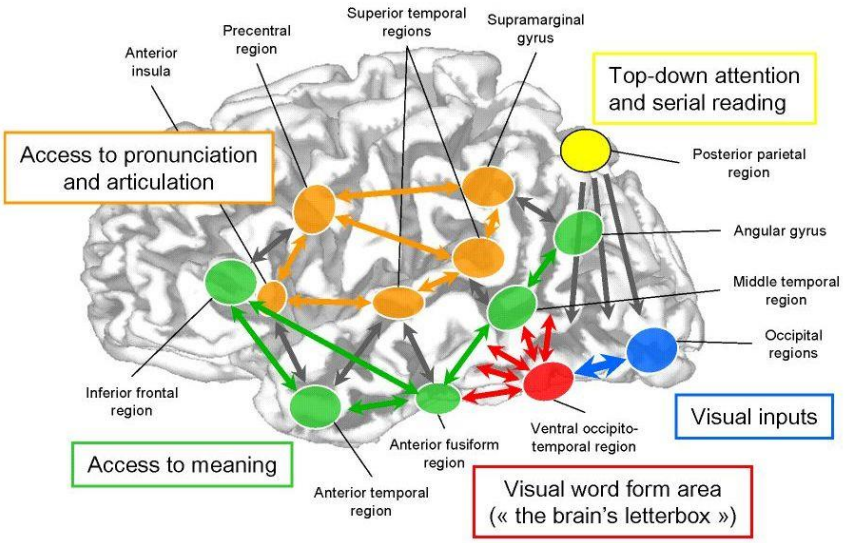
Appendix II: Models of reading

The latest research shows that the old neurological model of reading needs to be replaced by the new "bushy" one. The left occipito-temporal "letterbox" recognises the visual form of the letters. The information is then distributed to numerous regions of the brain that are spread over the left hemisphere where word meaning, sound patter and articulation are encoded. (Orange and green regions are not specific to reading. They are primarily connected to speaking.) Children learning to read need to develop efficient interconnections between the language and visual areas. It is believed that cortical connectivity is probably much more complicated and richer than in the second figure in the picture below. Source: The description and the picture by, The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention, *Reading in The Brain*, *The Brain's Letterbox,* (Dehaene 2009-a).

The old neurological model of reading
(After Déjerine, 1892; Geschwind, 1965)



A modern vision of the cortical networks for reading



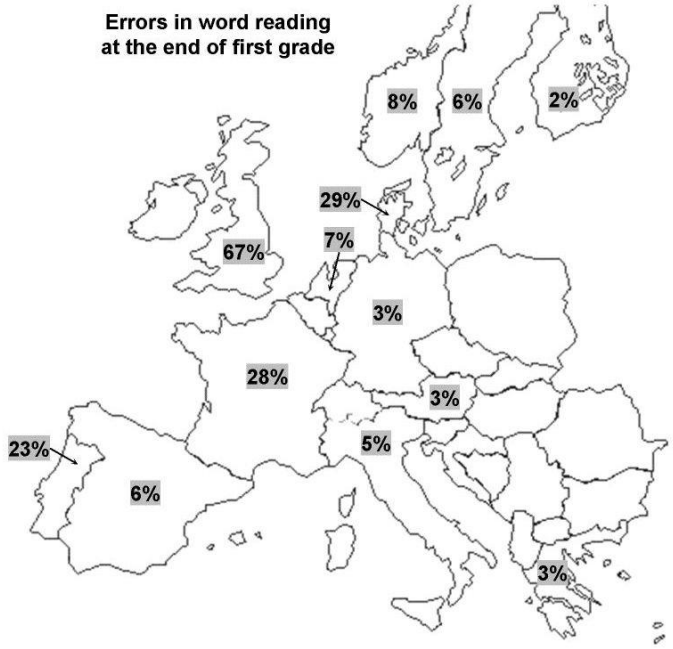
Appendix III: Learning to read – across language perspective

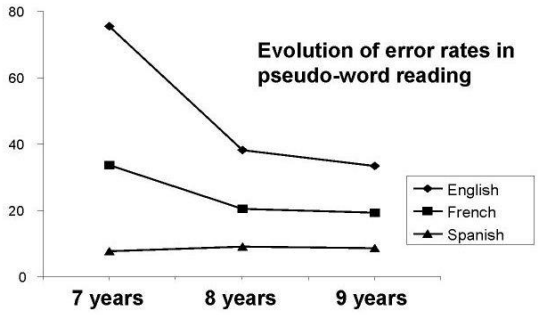
It has to be concluded that European languages are not equal when it comes to terms of reading acquisition. The research carried out in European countries shows significant differences among the languages that were tested.

The map: Languages with transparent spelling systems (Finnish, German, Greek, Austrian and Italian) were read accurately. English students, however, with their opaque language were able to read only one out of three words. We can see the percentage of errors in the map.

The graph: We can see the evolution of error rates in the pseudo-word (non-word) reading. Note: before an English child reaches the reading level of a French child, it needs one or even two additional years of schooling. Again the rule seems to be, the more transparent the spelling system of the language is, the easier reading is acquired. See the graph below.

Source: The description and the picture by, The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention, *Reading in The Brain*, *Learning to Read*, (Dehaene 2009-b).





Appendix IVa: Questionnaire I – TEACHERS

1) **Are you aware of any particular pronunciation rules in English?**

   YES NO

2) **If yes, please could you give some examples?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

3) **Do you think it is important that also students know about letter-sound correspondences in English when they learn how to read and write in this language?**

   YES NO

4) **Have you heard of synthetic or analytic phonics?**

   YES NO

5) **Do you apply phonics rules in your lessons/teach letter-sound correspondences in English to your students explicitly?**

   YES NO

6) **If yes, which sound correspondences do your students find most difficult?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

Thank you for your time and filling this questionnaire!

Appendix IVb: Questionnaire II – PARENTS

1) **Je Vaše dítě bilingvní?**

   ANO NE

2) **Učíte se doma s Vaším synem/dcerou anglicky?**

   ANO NE

3) **Dochází Vaše dítě na extra hodiny angličtiny mimo školní výuku (jazykový kurz apod.)?**

   ANO NE

4) **Dělá výslovnost anglického jazyka Vašemu dítěti problém?**

   ANO NE

5) **Slyšeli jste někdy o programu nebo výuce tzv. phonics?**

   ANO NE

6) **Domníváte se, že anglický jazyk má nějaká ustálená pravidla výslovnosti?**

   ANO NE

7) **Pokud ano, jaká pravidla (příklady vztahů mezi písmeny a jejich zvuky v anglickém jazyce) Vám jsou známa? Prosím, uveďte příklady:**

   _____

   _____

   _____

8) **Je si Váš syn/dcera vědom/a těchto vztahů mezi písmeny a jednotlivými zvuky?**

   ANO NE

Děkuji za Váš čas a vyplnění tohoto dotazníku!

Appendix V: Test Images

Activity I

Activity IIa and Activity IIb

Appendix VI: Tricky Word List

Source: The copy by Jolly Learning, *Handy Tricky Word List*, (Jolly Learning 2015-c).

The *Jolly Phonics Readers* introduce the tricky words in groups, each level building on the words learned in the previous level. Children should be taught the tricky words for each level before they are asked to read the books.

Jolly Phonics Readers Red Level

- ☐ I
- ☐ the
- ☐ he
- ☐ she
- ☐ me
- ☐ we
- ☐ be
- ☐ was
- ☐ to
- ☐ do
- ☐ of

Jolly Phonics Readers Yellow Level

- ☐ are
- ☐ all
- ☐ you
- ☐ your
- ☐ come
- ☐ some
- ☐ said
- ☐ here
- ☐ there
- ☐ they

Jolly Phonics Readers Green Level

- ☐ go
- ☐ no
- ☐ so
- ☐ my
- ☐ one
- ☐ by
- ☐ only
- ☐ old
- ☐ like
- ☐ have
- ☐ live
- ☐ give
- ☐ little
- ☐ down
- ☐ what
- ☐ when
- ☐ why
- ☐ where
- ☐ who
- ☐ which

Jolly Phonics Readers Blue Level

- ☐ any
- ☐ many
- ☐ more
- ☐ before
- ☐ other
- ☐ were
- ☐ because
- ☐ want
- ☐ saw
- ☐ put
- ☐ could
- ☐ should
- ☐ would
- ☐ right
- ☐ two
- ☐ four
- ☐ goes
- ☐ does
- ☐ made
- ☐ their

Appendix VII: The Pre-test

As a part of this research a pre-test that was done between June 2011 and February 2012 was carried out. It was conducted on the researcher's younger sister Julia, who was a first grade student at the time. During that time she received approximately 27 phonics sessions in total. We used the 44 Phoneme Chart.

Presently she is in the first grade of the lower grammar school and enjoys learning English very much. She loves English games, her reading is fluent and she is able to distinguish between British and American English accents. In terms of suprasegmental language features her intonation is sometimes almost native-like and she recognises sentence stress and word stresses in words she does not know. Although she occasionally has extra English lessons with her older sister, she has *not* received any phonics sessions in particular since the pre-test times. You can find the results of the reading test she took part below. The reading test was the same as the one we gave to children participation in our research.

ACTIVITY I – English words

Score: **58/60**

Mispronounced words: **YAWN** and **CLOUD**

ACTIVITY IIa – Non-words

Score: **42/45**

Mispronounced words: **GISS**, **MURF** and **MAUCK**

ACTIVITY IIb – High-frequency words

Score: **44/45**

Mispronounced word: **PUT**

ACTIVITY III – The story

Mispronounced words: **FARMYARD** and **GERMS**

Translations: WEAT – wheat, QUEAM – cream, THUN – thumb, NAIM – name, HRAY – hurray, CLY – fly, cry, LOAB – Loap, BOWN – brown, PLUE – plum, blue, ZOONG – zoom, HUMBER – hunger, number, DIRS – dirty, DOY – joy, die, SAUL – sail, KLOUM – clown, PHISH – fish, NOICK – oink, WHEESH – wish, SPHUN – spoon

Appendix VIIIa: The test results examples (transcribed)

Control group

ANT ʌnt	VET ✓	FOG ✓	CUP ✓	SAND sʌnt	CLOCK ✓
WET vet	GEM ʒem	JIG ʃɪg	GROW grɒf	KICK kɪck	JACKET ✓
CLICK ✓	JAM ✓	QUEEN ✓	WING vɪnk	SHED ✓	CHURCH xʊrtʃ
THEN then	CHRIS xrɪs	TRAY traɪ	SHEEP ✓	THROW trɒf	CHAIN xaɪn
SEED sed	THIS dɪs	SEAL sel	TIE ti:	JEEP ✓	THUMB ✓
NIGHT ✓	DRY dri:	ELBOW lebɔʊ	CLUE klʊe	BOWL bɒvl	CORK kɒrk
TERM term	JAR jʌr	STORM stɒrm	DIRT dɪrt	FUR fʊr	PAINTER painter
BIRTH bɪrt	NURSE nɒrse	SKY ski	PHOTO phɒtɒ	LIGHT lɪkt	BOIL ✓
YAWN jʌvn	HOOK hɒk	LOUD lɔʊd	WHEAT whet	TOY tɔi	CLOUD klɔʊd
YES ✓	WHEEL whel	WOOD wɒd	PAUL pɑʊl	STRAW straf	SPHINX spɪŋks

ZUSH: zʊʃ

TAS tʌs	GOSS ✓	GISS gɪs	MEC ✓	NUCK nʌck
HUP ✓	RES ✓	JEEM dʒem	VOS ✓	WEAT wet
DOX ✓	YUSH jʊʃ	QUEAM kwem	YING jɪnk	CHOOT xɒt
SHOM ✓	THUN thʊn	NAIM naɪm	HRAY hraɪ	FEEP fep
NEAP neap	RIE rie	PIGHT pɪkt	CLY kli	LOAB lɒab
BOWN bɒvn	PLUE plʊe	FEWP fep	ZOONG zɒnk	FLAR flar
JORK jɒrk	HUMBER hʌmber	DIRS dɪrs	MURF mʊrf	DOY ✓
DOIN ✓	LAWM lavm	SAUL sɑʊl	KLOUM klɔʊm	WHEAN vhean
PHISH phɪʃ	NOICK nɔɪck	WHEESH vheʃ	MAUCK mavck	SPHUN spʊn

I ✓	THE ✓	HE ✓	SHE ✓	ME ✓
WE ✓	WAS ✓	DO ✓	ARE ✓	ALL ✓
YOU ✓	YOUR ✓	COME ✓	SOME ✓	HERE ✓
THERE there	THEY ✓	GO ✓	NO ✓	MY ✓
ONE ✓	ONLY ✓	OLD ✓	LIKE ✓	HAVE ✓
LIVE ✓	GIVE ✓	LITTLE ✓	DOWN ✓	WHAT ✓
WHEN ✓	WHY ✓	WHERE ✓	WHO vhɒ	WHICH whɪx
MANY ✓	WERE ✓	WANT ✓	PUT ✓	RIGHT rɪkt
TWO ✓	FOUR ✓	GOES ✓	DOES ✓	THEIR theɪr

Appendix VIIIb: The test results examples (transcribed)

Phonics group

ANT ✓	VET ✓	FOG ✓	CUP ✓	SAND ✓	CLOCK ✓
WET ✓	GEM gem	JIG ✓	GROW ✓	KICK ✓	JACKET ✓
CLICK ✓	JAM ✓	QUEEN ✓	WING ✓	SHED ✓	CHURCH ✓
THEN ✓	CHRIS ✓	TRAY ✓	SHEEP ✓	THROW ✓	CHAIN ✓
SEED ✓	THIS ✓	SEAL ✓	TIE ti:	JEEP ✓	THUMB ✓
NIGHT ✓	DRY ✓	ELBOW ✓	CLUE klue	BOWL ✓	CORK ✓
TERM ✓	JAR ✓	STORM ✓	DIRT ✓	FUR fa:r	PAINTER ✓
BIRTH birθ	NURSE na:rs	SKY ✓	PHOTO ✓	LIGHT ✓	BOIL ✓
YAWN ✓	HOOK ✓	LOUD ✓	WHEAT ✓	TOY ✓	CLOUD ✓
YES ✓	WHEEL ✓	WOOD ✓	PAUL ✓	STRAW ✓	SPHINX ✓

ZUSH: ✓

TAS ✓	GOSS ✓	GISS gIS	MEC ✓	NUCK ✓
HUP ✓	RES ✓	JEEM ✓	VOS ✓	WEAT ✓
DOX ✓	YUSH ✓	QUEAM ✓	YING ✓	CHOOT ✓
SHOM ✓	THUN ✓	NAIM ✓	HRAY ✓	FEEP ✓
NEAP ✓	RIE ri:	PIGHT ✓	CLY ✓	LOAB ✓
BOWN ✓	PLUE ✓	FEWP fi:p	ZOONG ✓	FLAR ✓
JORK ✓	HUMBER ✓	DIRS dIrs	MURF ma:f	DOY ✓
DOIN ✓	LAWM ✓	SAUL saul	KLOUM ✓	WHEAN ✓
PHISH ✓	NOICK ✓	WHEESH ✓	MAUCK mark	SPHUN ✓

I ✓	THE ✓	HE ✓	SHE ✓	ME ✓
WE ✓	WAS wæs	DO ✓	ARE ✓	ALL æl
YOU ✓	YOUR ✓	COME kɜrm	SOME sɜrm	HERE ✓
THERE ✓	THEY ✓	GO ✓	NO ✓	MY ✓
ONE ✓	ONLY ✓	OLD ✓	LIKE ✓	HAVE ✓
LIVE lɑIf	GIVE gaIf	LITTLE ✓	DOWN ✓	WHAT wæt
WHEN ✓	WHY ✓	WHERE ✓	WHO ✓	WHICH ✓
MANY ✓	WERE ✓	WANT went	PUT pʌt	RIGHT ✓
TWO ✓	FOUR ✓	GOES ✓	DOES ✓	THEIR ✓