Effects of Synthetic Phonics and Whole Language Methods of Teaching Reading on Iranian Elementary EFL Learners' Spelling and Pronunciation

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Abstract

There has been a fierce controversy for decades over which approach is more effective in order to achieve the best reading instruction and there is no clear answer until today. This study mainly compared the effectiveness of Whole Language, phonics, and balanced approach to develop the EFL learners' reading in the light of spelling and pronunciation development over time. Thirty Iranian elementary EFL learners were selected from an English Language Institute in Isfahan, Iran. The participants were randomly divided into three different instructional groups, Whole Language group, phonics group, and balanced group (phonics group integrated with Whole Language group), with 10 students in each group. The students in the Whole Language group were exposed only to Whole Language method with the book *Family and Friends (Starter)*, while those who were in the phonics group only received phonics instruction with the book *Let's Go Phonics 1*. The students in the balanced group were taught through both phonics and Whole Language methods with the books *Let's Go Phonics 1* and *Family and Friends (Starter)*. All three classes were held twice a week for 12 weeks and each class lasted 1 hour. A series of tests were designed by the researchers used to assess the participants' word pronunciation and spelling. A series of ANOVA tests were also carried out to compare pretest and posttest scores of three instructional groups in reading spelling and pronunciation. Meanwhile, two weeks after the immediate posttest, the students were tested again in reading spelling and pronunciation. The findings suggested that for the three groups of Whole Language, phonics, and balanced methods, there were improvements on both pronunciation and spelling from pretest to immediate posttest and delayed posttest. There were also no significant differences among them on the immediate posttest, but for the delayed posttest, both phonics and balanced methods were seen to be more effective than the Whole Language method, with the slight differences between phonics and balanced groups. To sum up, this study lends its support to the synthetic phonics integrated and balanced judiciously with Whole Language approach, neither phonics nor Whole Language can be considered strong enough programs to stand alone.

Key words: Reading skill, Whole Language approach, phonics approach, balanced approach, spelling, pronunciation.

1. Introduction

The term 'literacy' or 'being literate' has been defined differently. According to the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS, 2008), "most children learn to talk fairly easily. In contrast, learning to read and write is a laborious process. It is the ability to read and write which makes a person 'literate', with varying degrees of fluency" (p. 32). For Blake and Hanley (1995), "the attribute of literacy is generally recognized as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. It refers to the ability to read and write to an appropriate level of fluency" (p.89).

According to Tsiadimos (2015), in the U.K., in 1998 the National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching offered a definition of Literacy through the identification of a list of basic skills that literate children should have. He mentioned that, literate children:

- should have an understanding of the sounds and orthography of a language that will enable them to read and write accurately;
- should be fluent readers of a range of texts of different genres of fiction and poetry as well as of non-fiction texts;
- should be able to use a combined knowledge of different reading cues (phonic, graphic, syntactic and contextual) in order to monitor and self-correct their reading;
- read and write fluently so that comprehension is not impeded;
- and finally, they should be interested in reading books, and ready to justify their personal preferences as far as reading is concerned.

'Whole Language' is a method of teaching reading based on Constructivism. In other words, it is "based on the idea that children learn by connecting new knowledge to previously learned knowledge" (Reyhner, 2003, p. 11). According to Stahl and Kuhn (1995), "Whole Language is not a 'method' or a collection of activities, but a philosophy that underlies all the teacher's instructional decisions" (p. 7). Grace (2007) defined Whole Language as "an umbrella term used to identify classrooms that engage students in effective, meaningful, and organized learning experiences" (p. 1).

According to Watson (1989), Whole Language is an approach to teaching language in which "…all the systems of language-semantics, syntax, and graphophemics (call it phonics if you must) -are maintained and supported by pragmatics (language in natural use)" (p.133). Whole Language can result in "instilling a love of literature, problem-solving and critical thinking, collaboration, authenticity, personalized learning and much more" (Krashen, 2002, p. 4). Whole Language is an approach that teaches reading as a holistic activity and whole texts are used as well as songs, poems, signs, and labels (Morrison & Mosser, 1993). Observations indicated that in Whole Language classrooms, teaching in vowel letter-sound correspondences occurs infrequently (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

Phonics is a way of instruction which teaches learners correspondences between graphemes in written language and phonemes in spoken language and how to use these correspondences to read and spell words (Ehri, 2003). Phonics instruction is systematic when "all the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught and they are covered in a clearly defined sequence including short and long vowels as well as vowel and consonant digraphs such as oi, ea, sh, th, and blends of letter-sounds that form larger subunits in words such as onsets and rimes" (Ehri, 2003, p. 3).

According to Bald (2007), systematic teaching of phonics refers to the way of connecting the sounds of spoken English with letters or groups of letters (e.g., that the phoneme /k/ can be represented by c, k, ck, ch, or q spellings) and the way of blending the sounds of letters together to produce approximate pronunciations of unknown words (the sounds /p/, /e/, /n/ can be blended to pen). Phonics is systematically taught in different ways like synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, analogy phonics, onset-rime phonics, and phonics through spelling. This study has focused on synthetic phonics in contrast to Whole Language approach.

Synthetic phonics program uses "a part-to-whole approach that teaches children to convert graphemes into phonemes (e.g., to pronounce each letter in stop, /s/-/t/-/a/-/p/, and then to blend the phonemes into a recognizable word)" (Ehri, 2003, p. 4). It also refers to an approach during which Children are taught how to break up words, or decode them, into individual sounds, and then blend all the way through the word; for example, In the word cat, children learn to identify three individual phonemes using the synthetic phonics method: /c/ /a/ /t/ that can be blended back together to produce a word. The 'synthetic' part of this particular phonics instruction derives from the process of synthesizing or blending sounds to create words.

In recent years, there has been a controversy about the best way to teach reading. Some scholars have recommended a combination of phonics and Whole Language method, called balanced method. Balanced literacy employs the fundamentals of letter-sound correspondence, word study and decoding as well as holistic experiences in reading, writing, speaking and listening (Pressley, 2002). According to

Honig (1996), in order to develop proficient readers a balanced approach to reading instruction-one that combines the language and literature-rich activities associated with Whole Language activities with explicit teaching skills-is needed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Comprehension

Actually, the concept of reading comprehension has experienced many changes over the past decades in which emphasizes the interactive process. It has encouraged a shift from a behavioral perspective, which dominated the field from the turn of the century to the 1970s and 1980s, and considered reading as a relatively statistic activity, to a holistic or interactive approach, which began in the late 1980s, and continues to shape the current views about reading comprehension that takes into account reading as a more dynamic process.

According to Pressley (2006, p.35), "reading comprehension is about getting the meaning out the text*"*. In the same way, Goodman agrees that reading comprehension should be understood as making sense of print (Goodman, 1994; Pressley, 2006). While RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) gives a bit different yet more complete definition, "it is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004, p.502).

McDonough and Shaw (1993, p.101) commented "reading is clearly one of the most important skills". The first and most important step in the educational experience is reading comprehension (NCTE, 1999). Reading comprehension as a measure for literacy levels has gained paramount attention. Learners are expected to construct meaning from the text, build, and apply the concepts and communicate effectively (Morrow et al., 2003).

2.2. Theories of Reading

There are three basic views of the reading process: bottom up, top down, and interactive views. The following section will look at these three major trends in theories relating to reading.

2.2.1. Reading from Bottom up View

Bottom-up theories of reading have their roots in behaviorism theories of learning. Bottom-up processing is an approach for processing a text in which a reader builds up a meaning from the black marks on the page: recognizing letters and words, working out sentence structure (Nuttall, 1996). This approach was proposed by Gough (1972).

In bottom-up approach, according to Nuttall (1996, p. 17), "the reader builds up a meaning from the black marks on the page: recognizing letters and words, working out sentence structure". Letters, letter clusters, words, phrase, sentences, longer text, and finally meaning is the order of bottom-up model for achieving comprehension (Anderson, 2003).

2.2.2. Reading from Top down View

On the other hand, top-down theories of reading are rooted in constructivism theory of learning. Gestalt psychology have exerted a considerable influence over these theories: Representing a holistic view of learning, which also labeled as psycholinguistic theory. The basic tenet of Gestalt psychology is that learners respond to physical stimuli such as images, letters, or drawings, in which their reaction to these physical stimuli is based on their own knowledge and experiences.

This approach which is proposed by Goodman (1967) is precisely advocated by most researchers because it is directly related to the reader's schemata, his/her personal knowledge and experiences.

2.2.3. Reading from Interactive View

Interactive reading theories have rooted in cognitive psychology. The question of which approach is best utilized in order to achieve the best reading instruction was at the centre of a fierce controversy among researchers and educators for several decades. This ongoing great debate has led to an integrated mixed approach combining of the bottom-up and top-down theories of reading that has resulted in the interactive view of reading.

In this interactive reading, a pattern is synthesized based on information "provided simultaneously from several sources" (Rumelhart, 1980, p. 135). Beginning with Rumelhart, researchers have proposed an interactive view of reading which argues that lower-level and high-level processes work together interactively as parts of the reading process (Grabe, 1988).

2.3. Approaches to Teaching Reading

Above mentioned three different theories of reading, i.e. top-down, bottom-up, and interactive models, have led to three major approaches to teaching reading: Whole Language approach, skills instruction or phonics, and balanced approach.

2.3.1. Phonics-based Approach

Phonics uses the bottom-up model and focuses on word analysis skills. The use of phonics as a method of teaching reading was developed during the 19th century and received more extensive usage in Europe than in the United States.

Phonics refers to the relationship between sound and spelling patterns which a reader may use to decode words (Rasinski et al., 2010). Phonics instruction focuses on the sounds produced by both vowels and consonants and blending of these sounds by also paying attention to root words (Pressley, 2006).

This method of teaching beginning reading differs from the alphabetic method in that it is focused on the sound of the letters rather than the name of the letters. Actually in phonics, students are blending sounds while in the alphabetic method they are spelling words using letter names (Feitelson, 1988). This is also in contrast to some Whole-Language proponents in that words are learning initially through blending the sounds together rather than learning as wholes.

There are two main strands of the alphabetic methods which acknowledge the importance of the knowledge of sounds to learning to read; analytic phonics and synthetic phonics that will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.3.1.1. Analytic Phonics

An analytic approach to teaching phonics is based on whole words and involves drawing children's attention to, and analyzing, particular word parts. The emphasis is on initial sounds, onset/rime and word families (NICDH National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2000).

According to Wyse and Goswami (2005), English is less inconsistent with respect to larger reading units, such as rimes or syllables so they propose that children be taught those larger units rather than at phoneme to grapheme level. This approach is, in general, the Whole Language approach to phonics.

2.3.1.2. Synthetic Phonics

In contrast to analytic phonics, which teaches letter-sound relationships in the context of whole words, synthetic phonics are considered to be both explicit and systematic, teaches letter-sound relationships by articulating the sound in isolation.

This approach is generally taught when children are first introduced to reading; during this approach children learn to synthesize pronunciations for unfamiliar written words by translating letters into sounds and blending the sounds together. With this approach, before children are introduced to books, they are taught letter sounds. After the first few of these have been taught, they are shown how these sounds can be blended together to build up words (Feitelson, 1988).

2.3.2. Whole Language Approach

Whole Language implies reading instruction using the top-down model and focuses on the overall meaning. The whole word theory was originated by Cattell (1886) who reported that readers identify letters when they are in words better than words presented in isolation and that skilled readers read 4 connected words as quickly as 2 unconnected words. Before Cattell however, Mann (1838), (as cited in Kelly, 2008) had claimed that a child would sooner name 26 familiar words than name 26 letters of the alphabet. The implication of this was that readers perceived of words as wholes rather than as a combination of letters. This notion is the basic tenet of the meaning oriented methods.

The Whole Language method was discussed in the 17^{th}, 18^{th}, and early 19^{th} centuries but gained popularity only in the early 20^{th} century when it attracted the attention of educational policy makers (Beard, 1990) and has been in and out of popularity since the 1950's (Goswami, 2005).

2.3.3. Balanced Approach

The hot debate between the two approaches, Whole Language and phonics, led to an effective mixed method approach to teaching reading that use a variety of both phonics and Whole Language instruction. This mixed method approach is balanced approach which is a complete literacy curriculum blending the knowledge of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, meanwhile maintaining phonics based instruction through a word study component.

In fact, in the balanced approach a teacher is in the position of judgment to realize which strategies are best to be used in teaching reading; in other words, a teachers' conscious and intentional decisions on strategies offered to different learners will adjust according to their changing needs. Needless to say, it necessitates having a mastery over both Whole Language and skills-instruction approaches for teachers. Consequently, to some learners the teacher may be a Whole Language teacher while to others, a skills teacher (Morrow et al., 2004).

To conclude, the effect of Whole Language or phonics method on language learning and reading comprehension is controversial although different studies have been run considering the effect of these two instructions. The debate over which method is best to teach reading to students continues until today and there is no clear answer.

The researchers have noticed that pronunciation and spelling seem challenging for the elementary learners in different language institutes in Iran in which mostly use Whole Language program. Children typically find it difficult pronouncing new words, since they are more accustomed to learning individual letters that form words.

It also seems difficult for elementary EFL learners to cope with reading unfamiliar words so that they pronounce and spell them incorrectly. The researchers believe that this might be due to the lack of knowledge about the phonics. This study actually focused on discrepancies between Whole Language instruction and phonics instruction, and methods within these instructional practices that influence development of early elementary students' pronunciation and spelling skills.

According to the problem stated above, this study, thus, sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Does Whole Language method positively affect the elementary EFL learners' pronunciation and spelling abilities?
2. Does synthetic phonics method significantly affect the elementary EFL learners' pronunciation, and spelling abilities?
3. Do Whole Language and synthetic phonics method (balanced method) significantly affect the EFL elementary learners' pronunciation and spelling abilities?
4. Do the gains in pronunciation and spelling abilities increase or decrease over time after the end of the training?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The study was conducted using 30 Iranian elementary EFL learners in Asre-no institute in Isfahan, Iran. They were divided into three classes. All of the participants were female and 8 to 9 years old. None of the participants passed English courses in this institute last semester.

4.2. Instruments and Materials

The instruments and materials used to meet the objectives of the study were: books (phonics book and Whole Language book) and tests (pretest, immediate and delayed posttest).

4.2.1. Books

Phonics method used *Let's Go Phonics 1* of *Let's Go Phonics* Workbook series which are the world's favorite children's series, fully revised with brand new components. The three levels *of Let's Go Phonics* teach *the letters of the alphabet*, the sounds letters make, *the words that use these sounds*, and useful new vocabulary. The audio CD of the books provides the model phonics sounds and listening exercises. The course can be used along with Let's Go or it can be used independently for clear, fun phonics instruction.

For Whole Language method, the book *Family and Friends (Starter)* was used. This book includes graded reading and writing syllabus and guides learners from understanding and tracing letters to writing and reading simple sentences. The lessons include songs, chants, stickers and story role-playing.

4.2.2. Tests

The tests were designed by the researcher. The test consisted of two parts, 26 vocabularies for pronunciation and 26 for spelling (see Appendix A).

4.2.2.1. Pretest

For testing pronunciation of the participants a list of 26 words from the books was selected and the participants were asked to pronounce them. Students were asked to listen to the teacher and write down

the 26 words they hear. The words which were read correctly by 70 percent of the participants were omitted. For spelling test, words were divided in to two parts, each including 13 words. The first half was read aloud within 30 minutes for the students to be written. After 15 minutes break, they were supposed to write down the second part of the word list.

4.2.2.2. Immediate Posttest

A day after finishing the treatments, the immediate posttest was conducted. The same process was used to examine the participants' performance. For the posttest, the same process and questions as the pretest were used in order to determine the effect of different treatments on their pronunciation and spelling ability.

4.2.2.3. Delayed Posttest

The delayed posttest was identical to the posttest and it was administered two weeks after the posttest. The purpose of the test was to measure the degree to which the participants can retain the abilities to pronounce and spell the target words.

4.3. Procedure

In doing the treatment, the researcher followed a modified version of the treatment used by Tsiadimos (2015). For phonics approach, the participants were taught letter sounds at the beginning of words, then at the end, or in the middle. After this point, children saw printed words, heard them spoken, and then sounded and blended them. Children were also taught to segment spoken words for spelling. The children proceeded to learning to read and spell words with consonant digraphs, (e.g., sheep), initial and final consonant blends (e.g., blue, tent), vowel digraphs (e.g., cream), and split digraphs (e.g., cake). Phonics classes started with no previous teaching of the Alphabet. In introducing learners to the first sound-print mappings, *Let's Go Phonics 1* order was used (see Appendix B). The researcher started with the most common voiced and voiceless consonant pairs (e.g., /b/ and /p/, /d/ and /t/, /f/ and /v/, /m/ and /n/, and then short vowels, etc.). It is worth mentioning that alphabet letters were not presented in their real English order.

In the Whole Language class, the book *Family and Friends (Starter)* was used (see Appendix C). In this class, the alphabets were taught according to their real English orders. For every letter, only one sound was taught and presented at the beginning of 3 or 4 words. Other possible sounds of this letter were not focused on. The presented words were repeated to be memorized by the learners. In this way, since the learners were not exposed to all sounds of a letter, they were expected to guess the pronunciation of a new word when they were encountered with (see Appendix D).

In the balanced group, the alphabets were taught exactly based on the Whole Language program. As an additional stage, the spelling practice stage was implemented during which learners were made familiar with the rules of letters combination. Moreover, other sounds which were not already introduced to the learners, were taught in this stage based on phonics-based program.

One week before the classes, the pretest was given to the students in order to find out which vocabularies were familiar to the participants. Vocabularies that were familiar to 70 percent of the students were omitted from the test. After that the participants took part in three different classes for 12 weeks, two one-hour sessions each week. The immediate posttest was conducted among students one day after the last session. Two weeks later, the delayed posttest was conducted among the students in order to find out about the effectiveness of each of three ways of presenting vocabularies, in fact to understand which way has better effect on pronunciation and spelling learning and retention. Finally, students' pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest data were collected by the researcher to be scored later. Every correct answer was given one point and every incorrect answer was received zero.

5. Results

After carrying out the treatment, in order to track the changes of the learners in the three groups from pretest through immediate posttest to delayed posttest, one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted several times. The results for each group are separately presented in what follows.

5.1. Whole Language Group

Table 1. *Whole Language Group's Pronunciation Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.008	469.51	.00	.99
Immediate Posttest	22.40	4.11	10				
Delayed Posttest	15.30	6.09	10				

One-way repeated measures ANOVA was once used to compare the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest pronunciation scores of the learners in the Whole Language group. The same statistical procedure was employed afresh to compare the spelling pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest scores of the learners in this group. It is evident that the learners exposed to the whole language method improved in terms of their pronunciation considerably from pretest to immediate posttest, and then experienced a decline in their delayed posttest. Table 2 presents the results of the comparisons for the spelling scores of the learners in this group:

Table 2. *Whole Language Group's Spelling Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.03	108.89	.00	.96
Immediate Posttest	17.00	3.65	10				
Delayed Posttest	9.30	3.12	10				

In Table 2, the spelling mean scores for the pretest (M = .00), immediate posttest (M = 17.00), and delayed posttest (M = 9.30) are displayed. It is clear that the learners in the whole language group experienced a considerable improvement in terms of their spelling from pretest to immediate posttest, and then had a sharp decline in their delayed posttest.

5.2. Phonics Group

To track the changes in the pronunciation and spelling scores of the learners exposed to the phonics method, the statistical procedure used for the whole language group (i.e., one-way repeated measures ANOVA) was used anew.

Table 3. *Phonics Group's Pronunciation Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.01	275.53	.00	.98
Immediate Posttest	23.70	3.02	10				
Delayed Posttest	21.30	3.40	10				

It could be seen in Table 3 that the learners in the phonics group improved greatly with respect to their pronunciation from pretest to immediate posttest; afterwards, they underwent a decline in their delayed posttest. Table 4 displays the results of the analyses for the spelling scores of the learners in the phonics group:

Table 4. *Phonics Group's Spelling Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.03	128.19	.00	.97
Immediate Posttest	20.20	4.13	10				
Delayed Posttest	18.60	3.47	10				

The spelling mean scores for the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest are illustrated in Table 4 The learners in the phonics group evidently improved in terms of their spelling from pretest to immediate posttest, and then had a comparatively poorer performance on the delayed posttest.

5.3. Balanced Group

The statistical operations adopted for the other two groups above (i.e., one-way repeated measures ANOVA) was once again employed to compare the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest pronunciation scores of the learners in the balanced group. The results of these statistical analyses are presented in what follows.

Table 5. *Balanced Group's Pronunciation Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.01	363.25	.00	.98
Immediate Posttest	23.30	2.58	10				
Delayed Posttest	20.80	2.82	10				

Based on the mean scores profiled in Table 5, it could be understood that the learners in the balanced group could considerably improve their pronunciation from pretest to immediate posttest, and then experienced a decrease in their delayed posttest scores. Table 6 provides the results of the comparisons for the spelling scores of the learners in the balanced group:

Table 6. *Balanced Group's Spelling Mean Scores*

	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	*N*	Wilk's Lambda	*F*	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	.00	.00	10	.02	150.23	.00	.97
Immediate Posttest	20.40	3.71	10				
Delayed Posttest	18.40	3.20	10				

The spelling mean scores for the pretest (M = .00), immediate posttest (M = 20.40), and delayed posttest (M = 18.40) are demonstrated in Table 6. It is beyond question that the learners in the balanced group went through a considerable improvement with regard to their spelling from pretest to immediate posttest, and then experienced a decline in their delayed posttest.

5.4. Comparing the Three Different Groups

To compare the three different groups of whole language method, phonics method, and balanced method, one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted once on the immediate posttest scores and once on the delayed posttest scores of the learners in the three groups.

5.4.1. Immediate Posttest Results

Table 7. shows the results of descriptive statistics comparing the immediate posttest scores of the three groups on the pronunciation and spelling tests:

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics Results Comparing the Three Groups' Immediate Posttest*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pronunciation	Whole Languages	10	22.40	4.11	13.00	26.00
	Synthetic Phonics	10	23.70	3.02	17.00	26.00
	Balanced	10	23.30	2.58	18.00	26.00
	Total	30	23.13	3.23	13.00	26.00
Spelling	Whole Languages	10	17.00	3.65	10.00	21.00
	Synthetic Phonics	10	20.20	4.13	15.00	26.00
	Balanced	10	20.40	3.71	15.00	25.00
	Total	30	19.20	4.02	10.00	26.00

On the immediate posttest of pronunciation, the mean scores of the whole language (*M* = 22.40), phonics (*M* = 23.70), and balanced (*M* = 23.30) groups were not very much different from one another. Table 7 shows whether the differences among these three mean scores were statistically significant or not, but before proceeding any further, it could be noticed in Table 7 that on the spelling immediate posttest, whole language groupers obtained the mean score of 17.00, while those in the phonics group and the balanced group received 20.20 and 20.40, respectively. To find out whether the differences among these three spelling mean scores were significant or not, the ANOVA results in Table 8 had to be checked:

Table 8. *ANOVA Results Comparing the Three Groups' Immediate Posttest*

		Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*
Pronunciation	Between Groups	8.86	2	4.43	.40	.67
	Within Groups	294.60	27	10.91		
	Total	303.46	29			
Spelling	Between Groups	72.80	2	36.40	2.46	.10
	Within Groups	398.00	27	14.74		
	Total	470.80	29			

Regarding the pronunciation immediate posttest, the *p* value was greater than the significance level ($p > .05$), suggesting that the differences among the whole language group, phonics group, and

balanced group on the immediate posttest of pronunciation was not statistically significant. The same result was obtained for the immediate posttest of spelling. As a consequence, the three methods of whole language, phonics, and balanced method almost equally affected the pronunciation and spelling of the learners under investigation.

5.4.2. Delayed Posttest Results

One-way between-groups ANOVA was also run to compare the delayed posttest scores of the learners in the three groups for the pronunciation and spelling tests. The results of descriptive statistics are shown in Table 9:

Table 9. *Descriptive Statistics Results Comparing the Three Groups' Delayed Posttest*

		N	Mean	*Std.* Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pronunciation	Whole Languages	10	15.30	6.09	3.00	21.00
	Synthetic Phonics	10	21.30	3.40	14.00	26.00
	Balanced	10	20.80	2.82	16.00	24.00
	Total	30	19.13	5.02	3.00	26.00
Spelling	Whole Languages	10	9.30	3.12	3.00	12.00
	Synthetic Phonics	10	18.60	3.47	12.00	23.00
	Balanced	10	18.40	3.20	12.00	23.00
	Total	30	15.43	5.42	3.00	23.00

The mean scores of the whole language group (*M* = 15.30), phonics group (*M* = 21.30), and the balanced group (*M* = 20.80) on the delayed posttest of pronunciation are shown in Table 9. Additionally, this table presents the mean scores of these three groups on the delayed posttest of spelling (9.30, 18.60, and 18.40, respectively). To figure out whether the differences among the mean scores of the three groups (both on the pronunciation and the spelling delayed posttests) were significant or not, the ANOVA results in Table 10 had to be examined:

Table 10. *ANOVA Results Comparing the Three Groups' Delayed Posttest*

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*Sig.*

Pronunciation	Between Groups	221.66	2	110.83	5.87	.00
	Within Groups	509.80	27	18.88		
	Total	731.46	29			
Spelling	Between Groups	564.46	2	282.23	26.37	.00
	Within Groups	288.90	27	10.70		
	Total	853.36	29			

For both the pronunciation delayed posttest and the spelling delayed posttest, the *p* values were smaller than the significance level ($p < .05$), indicating that the differences among the whole language group, phonics group, and balanced group on the delayed posttests of pronunciation and spelling as well were statistically significant.

6. Discussion

The findings are discussed based on the four research questions of the study. In terms of the first research question, the findings of this study demonstrated that, the learners in Whole Language group improved significantly from the pretest of pronunciation to the immediate posttest of pronunciation. These findings are in agreement with the close analysis of the actual studies reviewed by Jeynes and Littell (2000), which shows that when tests of reading comprehension are considered, when real reading is considered as the core element of Whole Language, and when details of studies are examined closely, Whole Language does very well in method comparison studies. In fact, these studies provide evidence for the limits of phonics instruction and the efficacy of Whole Language. These findings run counter to the widely expressed Whole language advocates view which argue that when Whole Language is defined correctly, when it includes real reading, students in these classes do better on test of reading comprehension, with no difference on skills tests (Krashen, 1999).

In terms of the second research question, the findings of this study demonstrated that the learners in the phonics group showed significant improvement from the pretest of pronunciation to the immediate and delayed posttest of pronunciation. The difference between the immediate and delayed posttests of pronunciation was also statistically significance. The findings of this study are in agreement with the previous studies (e.g., Johnston and Watson, 2005), which claim that children who had been taught phonics explicitly, have been found to be good spellers and they learn unfamiliar and unpredictable words by translating them into sound.

Likewise, the findings of the present study are in contrast with Jung (1998), who pointed out that there is a limit in the effects of teaching phonics, indicating that there is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. He also insisted that phonics might not be effective when teaching abstract words at an advanced level since it focuses on the sound and printed form of words but does not take into consideration their meanings. In this vein, Lee (2004) stated that phonics might not be helpful for EFL learners who have little opportunities to be exposed to English, because phonics is originally for teaching

the relationship between sounds and letters after the native learners have been fully exposed and are familiar to the spoken language.

In terms of the third research question, the findings of this study showed that the balanced group EFL learners improved significantly from the pretest of pronunciation to the immediate posttest of pronunciation. Similarly, the difference between the pretest and delayed posttest of pronunciation was of statistical significance. However, the significant difference between immediate posttest and delayed posttest of pronunciation indicated that when the learners were deprived of this type of treatment, their pronunciation skills began to be pretty rusty. These findings seem to be in consonance with some previous studies such as Pressley et al. (2002), which found that the balanced approach fosters learners' phonemic awareness, acquiring alphabet rules, vocabulary recognition, and vocabulary acquirement.

The fourth research question intended to explore whether the gains in pronunciation and spelling abilities increase or decrease over time after the end of the training. Comparing the three groups the findings of this study showed, on the immediate posttest, there were no significant differences among them, but for the delayed posttest, both phonics and balanced methods were seen to be more effective that the whole language method, and the differences between phonics and balanced groups were not significant. Similar to this study, Johnston and Watson (2005) report that many years after phonics instruction had ended, children continually has benefited from the decoding skills they have already learned before. It is worth to mentioning that teaching EFL learners based on synthetic phonics specifically at the beginners' level, would expected to lead to long lasting attainments. By the same token, Reutzel and Cooter (2000) indicated that the balanced approach is not an eclectic approach but a transformative approach. They stated that transformative approaches can constantly develop and gradually become a balanced approach, seeking for better ways of teaching.

7. Conclusion and Implications

Data analysis of this study indicated some major findings. It was found that three instructional groups of Whole Language, phonics, and balanced methods revealed an increased performance on both pronunciation and spelling from pretest to immediate posttest and delayed posttest, although a decline was consistently observed from immediate posttest to delayed posttest. In addition, comparing the three groups, no statistical differences was found among them on the immediate posttest, but both phonics and balanced methods produced more effective results than the Whole Language method on the delayed posttest, and the differences between phonics and balanced groups were slight.

Although, there have been studies of phonics-based and Whole Language reading approaches, this study adds to the current research by carrying out a comparative study of phonics and Whole Language reading approaches. This study exists therefore among the very few studies which used a combination of pedagogical approaches to teaching reading. While, the findings of this study provides moderate evidence that supports the strengths of phonics-based approach and balanced approach over Whole Language approach to reading, this study provides more about the benefits and drawbacks of each approach in which simply implies that each one is unable to be considered as the only method for teaching reading as well as pronunciation and spelling in the EFL learning classrooms.

Moreover, the findings of this study, in line with that of previous research, have made a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on effective approaches to teaching reading skills, consequently, it calls on the curriculum designers to change in the policy on literacy teaching.

Since phonics-based approach to teaching reading has benefited these beginner EFL learners' reading spelling and pronunciation, it should be included in every literacy teacher's teaching and their routine practices, in a judicious balance with other holistic approaches. Therefore, teachers will need to be effectively trained in the use of the synthetic phonics, Whole Language, and balanced method to teach reading skills in their EFL classrooms, especially at the beginners' level, if there is to be a total incorporation of the synthetic phonics method, blended with other approaches, into the reading teaching/learning process.

This study by providing a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of three approaches as well as the possible variations of each approach used in this study would lead to bridge the gap between language research and classroom practice. However, this study concluded that while phonics-based and Whole Language approach have their own advantages and disadvantages, neither phonics nor Whole Language can be considered strong enough programs to stand alone. Then, this study provides no evidence in order to make a definitive conclusion about the effectiveness of the phonics-based and Whole Language approach to reading. Consequently, the debate still rages between these two approaches and must be further researched.

Actually, synthetic phonics and Whole Language approach cannot be donated the sole credit for the improvement in reading skill in general and pronunciation and spelling sub-skills in particular, therefore, further studies should focus on this new trend of literacy teaching (balanced approach) and how to combining the phonics-based approach and the whole language approach harmoniously, instead of comparing and contrasting them.

Finally, this study leaves the room empty for an additional longitudinal study to investigate the effects of these three instructional methods on not only reading skills and sub-skills, but also on the EFL learners' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards each approach in which would give a more qualitative color to the study.

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Appendix A

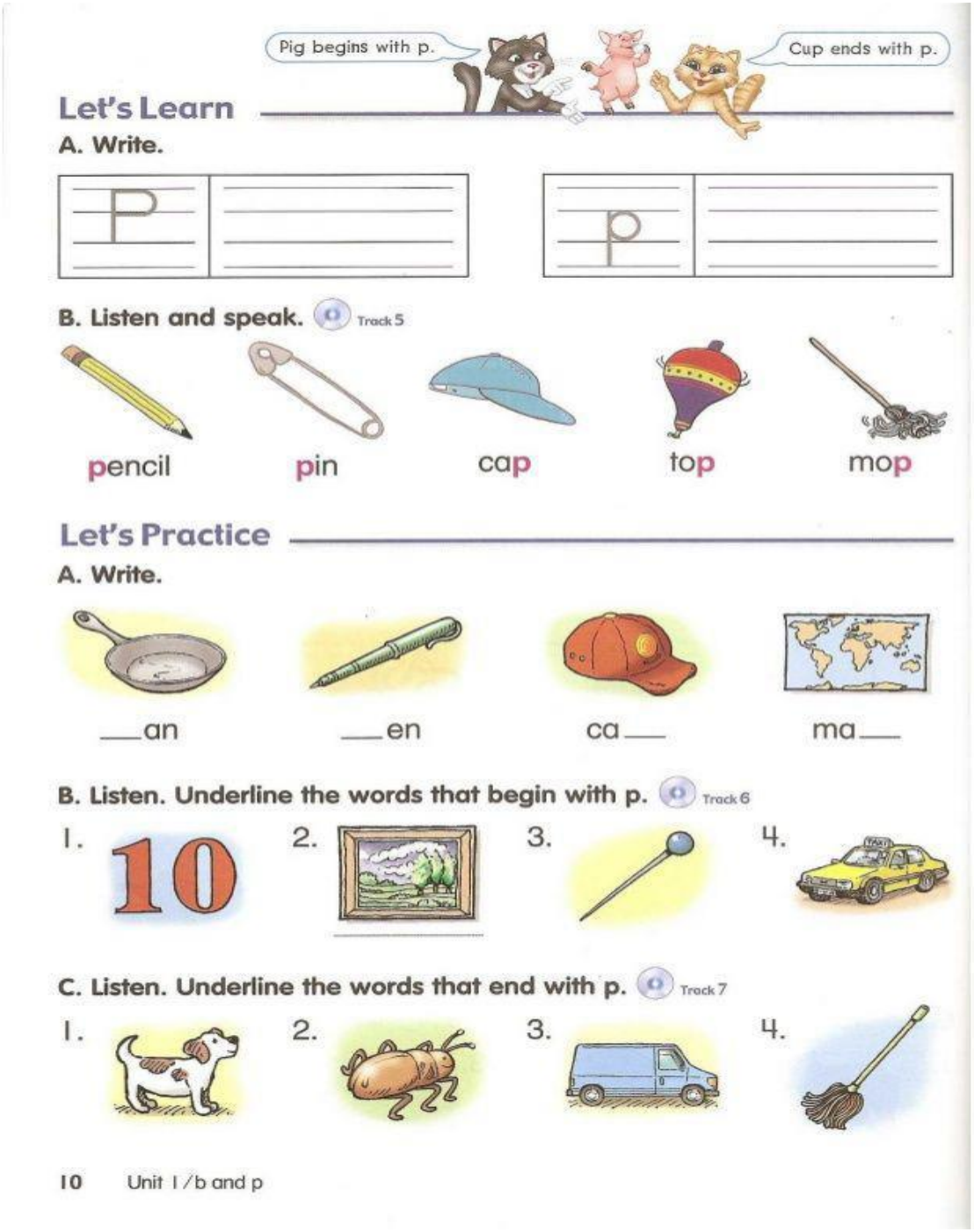
Word List Sample for Spelling and Pronunciation Test

Letters	**Beginning/Initial Position Pronunciation Test**	**Middle/End Position Spelling Test**
1. Aa	Apple	Gas
2. Bb	Blue	Cub
3.Cc	Cake	Car
4. Dd	Duck	Bed
5. Ee	Elephant	Red
6. Ff	Fish	Leaf
7. Gg	Glue	Egg
8. Hh	Hill	Hippo
9. Ii	Ink	Mix
10. Jj	Juice	Jar
11. Kk	Kangaroo	Pink
12. Ll	Lion	Tall
13. Mm	Man	Cream
14. Nn	Neck	Fin
15. Oo	Octopus	Doll
16. Pp	Plane	Sheep
17. Qq	Queen	Quit
18. Rr	Rainbow	Chair

19. Ss	Sock	Grass
20. Tt	Teacher	Paint
21. Uu	Umbrella	Hug
22. Vv	Rest	Stove
23. Ww	Wig	Web
24. Xx	Wax	Fox
25. Yy	Yellow	Yak
26. Zz	Zoo	Doze

Appendix B

Lesson Plan Sample of the *Let's Go Phonics 1* Book



Appendix C

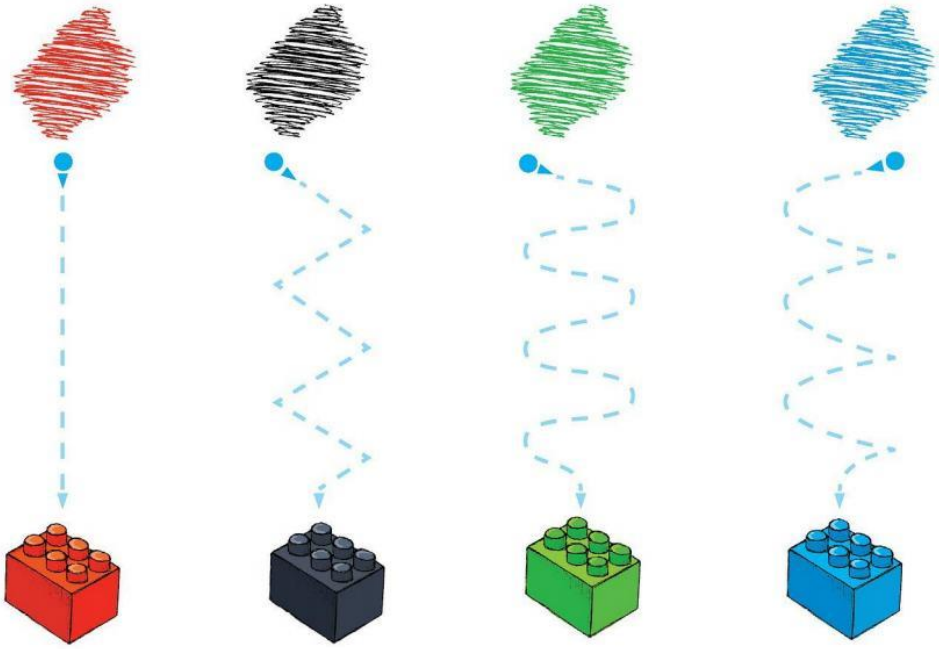
Lesson Plan Sample of the *Family and Friends (Starter)* Book

Lesson Two Grammar and song

1 Listen and repeat. 16

2 Listen and sing. 17

3 Trace the lines and say.



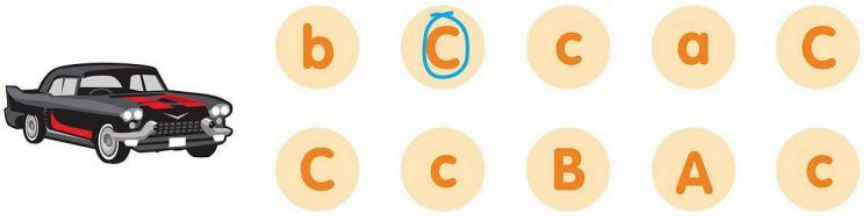
Lesson Three Sounds and letters

1 Listen, trace and point. Repeat. 18

2 Listen and chant. 19

3 Stick. Then circle and say.

4 Circle the letter *Cc*.



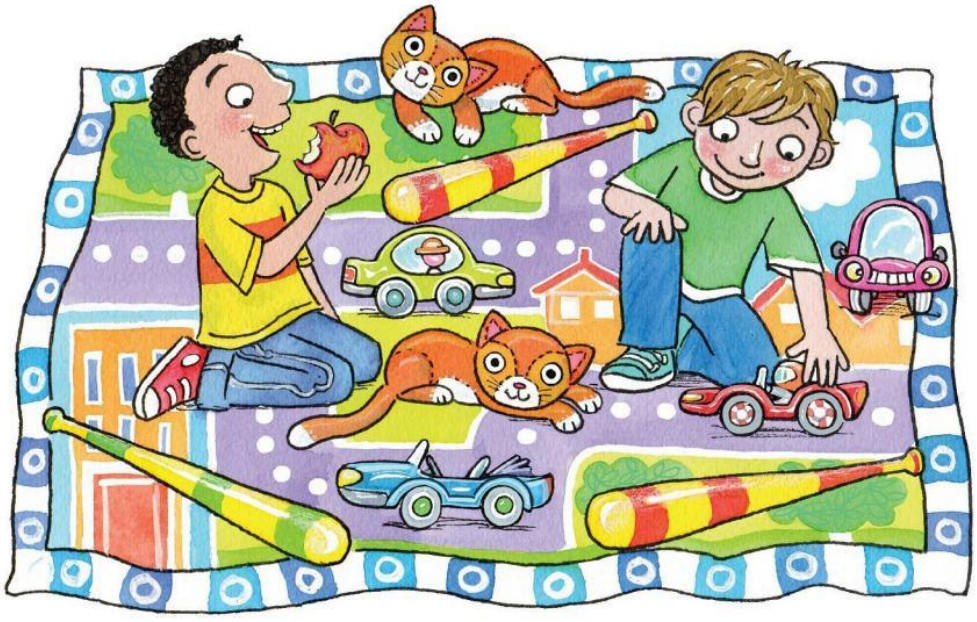
Complete the writing task on page 78 of the Workbook. page 78

Lesson Four Numbers

1 Listen, trace and repeat. 20

2 Point and sing. 21

3 Count and say.

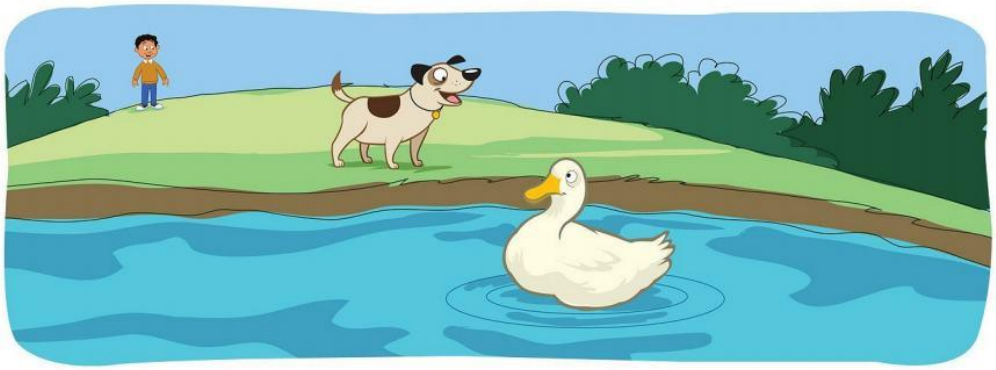


Lesson Five Sounds and letters

1 Listen, trace and point. Repeat. 22

D d

2 Listen and chant. 23



3 Stick and say.

c d c d c d c d

Complete the writing task on page 78 of the Workbook. page 78

Appendix D

Word List Sample of the *Family and Friends (Starter)* Book

Whole Language Words

Apple. Annie. Boy. Bat. Cat. Car. Dog. Dock. Egg. Elephant. Fish. Farm. Girl. Guitar. Hat. Horse. Jug. Juice. Kangaroo. Key. Lion. Lollipop. Man. Mango. Nose. Neck. Orange. Octopus. Panda. Pen.

Queen. Quilt. River. Rainbow. Sofa. Sock. Towel. Turtle. Umbrella. Up. Violin. Vase. Woman. Wall. Box. Fox. Yoghurt. Yo-yo. Zebra. Zoo.

Extra Words of Whole Language

Rosy. Tim. Billy. Hello. Goodbye. Red. Green. Blue. Black. White. Purple. Yellow. Brown. Desk. Chair. Crayon. Pencil. Notebook. Plane. Puppet. Robot. Balloon. Teddy. Mom. Dad. Brother. Sister. Grandma. Grandpa. Happy. Sad. Hungry. Thirsty. Hot. Cold. Bird. Bear. Hippo. Crocodile. Tiger. Paper. Scissors. Glue. Paint. Pupil. Teacher. Waiter. Vet. Builder. Jumper. Shirt. Jacket. Hat. Belt. Raisins. Plums. Crisps. Cakes. Milkshake. Goat. Hen. Sheep. Cow. Cream. Ice lolly. Sandwich. Banana.