

The Efficacy Of The Phonics Method Vis A Vis The Drilling Method For Teaching Spelling In The Pakistani Context

Sajda Jabeen¹, Dr. Amer Akhtar², Dr. Hashim Khan³

¹Lecturer, Department of English Capital University of Science and Technology, Islamabad.

CUST, Sihala Road, Islamabad., Email: sajda.jabeen@cust.edu.pk

²Associate Professor, Department of English Foundation University, Islamabad New Lalazaar, Rawalpindi,

Email: amerakhtar@fui.edu.pk

³Assistant Professor, Department of English Capital University of Science and Technology, Islamabad. CUST,

Sihala Road, Islamabad., Email: hashim.khan@cust.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The research The Efficacy of the Phonics Method vis a vis the Drilling Method for Teaching Spelling in the Pakistani Context looks at the two methods used - the drilling method and phonics method - to learn spellings of words in English language from two different schools. The research takes the International Phonetic Alphabet chart as a standard to check the second graders' ability to link the spellings of words against how they are pronounced, and using quantitative analysis for checking the spelling tests conducted. The test results from both schools, when compared, showed that there was not much of a difference between the results, therefore, showing that both, phonics and drilling, are producing below average spellers. It also contradicts the claim of the phonics proponents that it is a better way of teaching spellings. The conclusion sums up the results and also points out some guidelines for making the choice between the phonics and the drilling methods in addition to indicating how the future researchers may carry out their research in the related field.

Key Terms: Teaching English, Phonics Method, Spelling, Reading, Learning Pronunciation

1. Introduction

Spelling, and spelling correctly has always been troublesome for students given the opaque nature of the English alphabetic principles (Reaves, Dahle-Huff & Waller. 2022). The sentiment is not new but it has been under investigation, because the 26 letters do not represent the 44 sounds, as given by the International Phonetic Alphabet, of the English language and this discrepancy makes it difficult to spell and pronounce words as done by the native speakers of English. (Rao. 2018) Countries where English is not the native/first language, teachers use different methodologies to do so and phonics is one of the methods which became vogue in the last thirty years or so in the western world. The Pakistani

institutions are not far behind in following and adopting whatever trend the western institutions start. There is a reverence for anything foreign, based on the perception that if the people in the west are doing it, it must be the right thing to do. Similar is the case with the perception that the children learning spellings through phonics are better than the ones learning through traditional, old-school rote learning methods i.e., the drilling method. There are many disadvantages to rote learning and the old, traditional methods, for example, lack of creativity, but sometimes there are positive outcomes too, for example, learning spellings of words which are otherwise difficult to learn due to the inconsistency in the spellings of words of English language as

opposed to their pronunciation. Phonics is similarly a fad borrowed from the West, which has its positive aspects, the greatest of which is that the children become confident and self-reliant, but there is a downside of the whole process too, namely the ability to spell accurately which has been adversely affected.

2. Literature Review

Charles M. Richardson states that ‘...phonics – sometimes regarded as a method – is really a body of knowledge which needs to be acquired in order to read and spell our alphabetic language accurately.’ (Richardson. 1997: 2) and comments on letter-sounding teaching as tedious and dull delaying real reading. It might have started off as being dull and tedious with all the rules and how to sound the letters and form words, but now the teaching of phonics is being carried out in most fun and innovative of ways incorporating coloured audio-visual aids, music and sing along songs. However, its role in improving spelling has been under constant debate (Torgerson, Brooks & Hall. 2006: 8), despite the fact that grasping spelling can help students excel in their writing skills. (Esposito, Herbert & Summer. 2022)

Sue Vermes defined synthetic phonics and its use in the beginning of the 20th century to teach students to read by sounding the letters out and then blending. (Vermes, n.d.) Carroll et. al (2023) talk about their journey about how they tried to implement Structured Word Inquiry pedagogical approach to teach reading, writing and spellings to students of primary school, and conclude that the approach to combine morphology, phonology and etymology had a very positive result. This approach is a relatively new concept and needs a funding, as the researchers had, and a sound knowledge of these three subject matters, to conduct the study over a longer period of time. Jeffrey S. Bowers and Peter N. Bowers also insist that the instruction for learning of spelling should target all cognitive skills to comprehend the logic behind the English spelling system. (Bowers & Bowers, 2017)

Rhona Johnston and Joyce Watson (2006) conducted a seven-year longitudinal study wherein they worked with 304 children in 13 primary 1 classes in Clackmannanshire, to check the effects of phonics on reading and spelling attainment in Scotland. They studied if the children made progress in their reading and recalling of spellings after being taught by the synthetic phonics approach, compared with the analytic phonics approach carried out by the class teachers. Furthermore, they wanted to examine if training the students on how to hear sounds in spoken words, without any visual aid for those sounds in print or letter form, can be an effective part of the school curriculum. The students taught through phonics is expected to write them down by concentrating on the sounds they hear, but the old-school method expects the students to write them down because the words have been memorised by them through repetition. They reported that the tests were conducted by researchers who had no hand in the programmes by which the students were taught, by dictating the word list in class and ‘each word is read out singly and then again in a sentence.’ (Johnston & Watson. 2006: 5). They concluded that the students were 7 months ahead of their chronological age in spelling and that the teaching was responsible for the improved reading and spelling abilities.

The current study adopted Watson’s model and the instructions were based on individual words so that the students would not feel overwhelmed by the extra effort of listening to the whole sentences to ascertain what word they are supposed to spell. The researchers assumed that the teaching was carried out by the teachers according to the phonics teaching method. The Rose Inquiry Phonics Paper in 2006, which was inspired by the above-mentioned research, stated that after the research done in Scotland, there was a ‘recommendation by England’s Education Committee that there should be a government enquiry into the teaching of reading (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005).’ (Wyse & Styles. 2007)

Many studies followed to prove the efficacy of the Phonics method in teaching reading to students and in some cases spellings as well. (Vita et. al. 2019; Staurt, 1999: 590) and some even suggesting that the teachers need to learn more about the development of spellings and the writing system. (Stuart. 1999; Treiman. 2018) The at-risk students were given phonics instruction to improve their reading ability to conclude that the teachers need to focus on activities which involve letter-sound production instead of only letter-sound recognition. (Møller, Mortensen & Elbro. 2021)

In the 1990s, in the USA, many new magazines began referring to ‘reading wars’ (Shanahan & August, 2006), to shed light on the debates being held on how to teach children how to read better. This war resulted in the formation of the National Reading Panel under President Bill Clinton and the U.S. Congress. They researched the different methods available for teaching reading to children and formulated a report on how best to achieve the results and it was all done so that no organisation could influence their decision. The report states,

“According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003), far too many American children cannot read well enough to do their schoolwork, and it is doubtful they will eventually receive full economic, social and civic benefits of society.” (Shanahan & August, 2006)

Failing to be competent readers and writers would always be a handicap for such individuals and we see every day how the inability to communicate in English makes cohabiting and competing with the foreign world extremely difficult for Pakistanis all over the world, hence proving the significance of this study.

Andrew Davis, giving his views on the teaching of phonics, states,

“I am not attacking the employment of phonics in teaching early readers. I am opposing the universal imposition of a

very specific method that involves dealing with decoding text outside the context of real reading contexts. This does not mean that no teacher should ever encourage pupils, for instance, to ‘sound out’ simple words... I am, however, defending the view that decisions about whether and when to work on decoding should be offered, should be left to teachers.” (Davis, 2014)

The researchers agree with Davis on this because the schools in Pakistan simply provide the teachers with the curriculum and some even give guidelines as to how it is to be taught. No room is left for the teacher to improvise the method if something is not working, or the students’ abilities are not being positively enhanced because of it. There is no allowance for the individual learning and comprehension abilities of the students. They are simply expected to read and spell according to the deadlines which are set by the school management.

Carole J. Torgerson, Greg Brooks and Jill Hall conducted a systematic review of an experimental research on the use of phonics instruction in the teaching of reading and spelling which was commissioned by the Universities of York and Sheffield. This review was based on evidence from randomized controlled trials (RCTs). This review concluded that systematic phonics instruction was effective in producing positive results in reading. (Torgerson, Brooks & Hall. 2006) but they also commented that the spellings were weak despite being taught with phonics. The teachers of the schools chosen for this project also corroborated that the students have a higher rate of reading accuracy when they have been taught through phonics teaching.

The need to validate the teaching methods to improve reading in English in a country where the first language is English puts even more of a demand on countries where it is not. Pakistan is one such country where English is taught as a second or a foreign language.

One such research was conducted in Southern Thailand wherein the researchers stated that it was necessary for learners of English to ace the reading skills more than speaking, writing or listening in a non-native English-speaking environment. (Kodae & Laohawirinyanon, 2014)

In Pakistan, a lot of emphasis has always been placed on reading and writing skills whereas listening and speaking were not faculties which were given a lot of thought or practiced in classrooms, but now things are changing with the changing times. Speaking is becoming a very important part of teaching methodologies, and communication skills are given their due importance. The fact that our exams are still based highly on the ability of the students to read and write, both in class rooms and examinations, demands that they are able to spell accurately because incorrect spellings lead to deduction of marks both in class tests and in the examinations.

Herein lies the motivation to learn if the phonics are as result oriented as its proponents claim it to be or if the good old rote learning method is the ideal way to teach children how to learn spellings of English language. The foundations are laid in the early years, thus, my research on the students of grade two from two different schools, and who have learned spelling through two different methods of teaching and learning. This research will come with its own conclusion as to which approach is better able to cater for the needs of the students in Pakistan so they grow to be useful and able citizens of this country, or if, a combination of the two methods can give better results in this regard.

3. Research Methodology

This part states the hypothesis and the research question the study aims to answer. It also sheds light on the research methods used to analyse the data. The study will employ both quantitative and qualitative analyses. It will be quantitative in the sense that the test results will be calculated simply to get the aggregate percentage of the scores, and qualitative in the

sense that the researchers' observations while the tests were being conducted will be analysed to shed light on the scores, and if what they observed was the cause for the performance of the students.

3.1 Hypothesis

Phonics teaching is not enabling learners to overcome inaccuracies in spelling. Furthermore, the drilling method produces almost the same, if not better, results as the phonics method.

3.2 Research Question

How effective for the teaching of spelling is the phonics method as compared to the traditional drilling method?

3.3 Data Collection

The data have been collected for the quantitative analysis by selecting two schools, The Bluebird School and Spring School System [the names have been changed for privacy reasons], getting their permission to conduct tests for the collection of data and then carrying out a comparative analysis of that data, that is, the test results. The current study used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The students took the tests and the results were analysed in view of the researchers' observation of how the teachers conducted the test and how they interacted with the children to get them to complete the exercises set for them. What the students did in those tests was data for the quantitative analysis and how the teachers interacted with the students to perform the test the base for the qualitative analysis, which is mostly based on the researchers' personal experience and observation.

In order to do so, it is assumed that the school teaching through phonics is well equipped with the tools and means to teach the children through proper methodology and the teachers are qualified in the field of phonics teaching to teach them through that method. It will not be a part of the scope of the research to check if the teachers have taught their students

according to the international methods of phonics teaching.

Two schools have been chosen for this research, discussion was made with their teachers about the planning and intended achievement of this research, that is, to ascertain how effective, or not, phonics teaching is in the learning of spelling. They agreed to give access to their books which were required to make the tests, and decided the day and time to conduct the tests. The researchers had the class teachers conduct the test and simply oversaw the responses the children gave and how, quick or otherwise, they were in writing down the spellings of the words dictated to them. This also gave accurate data to analyse the spellings.

3.4 Level/Grade

The students of level/grade two were chosen who had recently passed level/grade one. The students of phonics teaching, 17 in number, are aware of the phonic sounds and are old enough to take the tests that had been prepared, without much help and guidance from the teachers. The students, 18 in number, who memorised spellings though the traditional rote learning method are also in a better position to take the test because they are aware of the sounds of the English alphabet but unaware of the phonics system of sound differentiation. Students from both systems had fresh knowledge of how they were learning spellings and how they were to come up with spellings of unheard of or unfamiliar words.

3.5 Tests

The books of English and Social Studies for level one, were collected, which the students of level two had already studied/covered, from the school administrations and got the first three lessons photocopied. Three types of tests were made; the first was a set of pictures from their books and they had to write the name of the picture, for example, elephant, coach, watchman, teacher etc. The second test also had pictures but they were provided with the letters that made up that word, in a jumbled

order which they had to rearrange in the correct sequence. The last test was an oral dictation test which further had two different groups of words. First was a list of five words that was from their book, and the other list included five words that were new to them, and they had to write the spelling by listening to the pronounced word.

The administrations of both schools were told that at least one and half hour per day was needed for at least two days to administer the tests. The researchers were given the time period of the English lessons in one school and in the other they were asked to administer the test in their ICT class which they took first thing in the morning after their school assembly.

3.6 Focus of Analysis

This research only focussed on the spelling ability of students of both schools of thought, through phonics and old-school drilling method of learning. Any mistake in the spelling, even if it is a missing 'e' or an extra 'e' was considered incorrect and marked wrong. The consonant clusters, use of digraphs and diphthongs were minutely scrutinized and marked accordingly.

The pronunciation of the students while they were trying to confirm the correct name of the picture was corrected so that they had a clear idea of what they were expected to write. This aided in the accuracy of the spellings of the words they wrote.

This study did not focus on mistakes like the 'mirror image' of letters, for example, some students have the knack of writing 'b' for 'd' and 'p' for 'q'.

3.7 Delimitation

Only two schools were chosen for the collection of the data. There were three main reasons for doing so. Firstly, it had to limit the scope of the study only to the schools in the same vicinity, so that there was not a very large gap between the students' social class, and their performance in school. Secondly, many schools were apprehensive of any negative

effects this study might have on their reputation. Furthermore, most schools do not allow outsiders to teach their students. Therefore, it had to be relayed on the tests being conducted without any teaching the students by the researchers.

4. Findings and Analysis

The mistakes made by the students were studied one by one so that the problem areas were isolated and commented upon individually. In the end, a comparative analysis of both the schools has been carried out. Every spelling is marked as incorrect if it is not accurate, no matter how small a mistake.

4.1 Phonics Teaching Method

The total number of students taught through the phonics teaching method was 17. The aggregated percentage of each test is as follows:

- Naming test: 42.81%
- Jumbled letters: 79.41%
- Dictation: 16.87%

The different areas which were brought to light where most of the mistakes occurred have been discussed below.

4.1.1 Test Results

Vowels

The mistakes with the vowels have been divided into further categories.

Combinations/ Digraphs

A digraph is a combination of two letters, but which stand for one sound only. Students have missed out on a letter, for example, they have skipped 'e' from the word 'chimney' and written 'chimny' instead. The students simply depended upon the sounds that they had heard and wrote down the spellings but made a lot of mistakes. Out of 17 students 8 have spelled 'ey' in chimney as 'y', 'i', 'e' or 'ee' because for them the sounds of these letters were the same as they heard in the word being pronounced. Out of the rest of the 9 students, 4 have made other spelling mistakes, for example, they have

put an extra 'm' or missed out an 'n' from the word, thus making it incorrect. Two did not attempt to write anything for this picture, one named it as 'roof' and two just wrote what they could make out, for example, 'chimi' or 'chemy'. Thus, no one spelled this word correctly, despite the fact that they were familiar with the word and had done it in class in the previous grade.

Similarly, they made mistakes spelling the word 'heavy' by writing 'a' for the digraph 'ea', and 'e' for the digraph 'ee'. This error in the use of the digraph was seen consistently for vowels, and consonants which will be discussed later.

Substitution

The students substituted one vowel for another depending on the sound that it makes and the way it is pronounced. The words leverets, elephant, motor and caterpillar were spelled as 'leverates', 'elephent', 'moter' and 'caterpiler' respectively.

The differentiation between the sounds of the vowel 'e' and the reduced vowel 'schwa' has not at all been made and all such words have been misspelled by the students by substituting it with the vowel 'a' and vice versa. Similarly, the vowel 'a' in elephant was substituted with 'e'. For the word 'motor', the students know the sound of 'o' as in 'orange' but the 'or' in the end is substituted with 'er' because it sounds like the 'er' in 'her'.

Whereas, the digraph 'ph' in the word 'phone' which was being expected as an error, and could have been spelled incorrectly, was written correctly without substitution for the 'ph' sound with 'f'.

Missing Vowels

A few words that were encountered had vowels missing, at times in the middle and at others in the end. The words cheese, bike and caterpillar were spelled as 'chees', 'bik' and 'caterplar' respectively. It seems to me that the rule stating that the center vowel, most of the time, produces its original long sound if the word ends in an 'e', has not been taught to these

children because without that ending 'e', the words would be pronounced as 'chiz' and 'bik' like the sound in 'tick' and 'lick'. The spelling of 'caterpillar' had a missing 'i' which could be explained in terms of the child's inability to grasp the proper pronunciation.

Consonants

The use of consonants was a major factor in the spelling accuracy or otherwise in the tests. They are also further divided into three categories.

Digraphs

The mistakes made in this particular category were seen in the spelling of caterpillar which was spelled as 'chaterpiller' by some students. There was one error in the use of digraphs in the field of consonants. This was in spelling of the word 'caterpillar'. 11 students out of seventeen wrote only one 'l' for the digraph 'll' because the sound it makes is /l/. Out of the remaining six, only one spelled it correctly while the other five made other mistakes ranging from substituting one vowel for the other or the wrong vowel cluster/combination/digraph usage.

Missing Consonants

The missing consonants were also found in a few words. The words leverets, copies and elephant were spelled as 'leveres', 'cop' and 'elephat' by a few students.

The word 'leverets' had a missing consonant 't', making the spelling incorrect. Believably, because 't' is voiceless and was very quickly pronounced, the student simply could not differentiate it and wrote it as 'leveres'. Another missing consonant was an 's' from the end of 'copies' along with the missing digraph 'ie'. This particular error hints at the student's inability to spell further than 'cop', and abandoning the word after some pondering instead of trying to go ahead with spelling it completely.

A missing 'n' in 'elephant' does not qualify as a serious error other than the disability to grasp the /n/ sound in the pronunciation.

Substitution of the /s/ sound with /c/ and digraphs with the vowel or consonant has been a common error throughout the list of words, familiar and unfamiliar. To see if the old school method is better in achieving the desired results, their tests results were focused, which are given below.

4.2 Traditional Rote Learning System

The tests at Spring School System were analyzes where students learned spelling through old school rote learning method. The students were not given any material to revise the spellings of any of the words and it was a surprise test for them.

The students learning spelling through rote learning method have to be in a continuous habit of repeating and revising the spellings at home and at school, till the time telling the spellings becomes an unconscious part of their nature. Because they did not get any time to revise the spellings for the test, they simply wrote what felt right to them by depending on their memory.

They asked the teacher to pronounce the word which they were having problem with so they could write its spelling. The words the students were familiar with, did not warrant any special attention from the teacher, and the students did not ask about them. On the other hand, for the words they were familiar with but did not know the spelling of by heart, they needed continuous help from the teacher so that she could pronounce it for them. The students then tried to write the spelling as they heard the words being pronounced. They were relatively quiet and did not ask a lot of questions or a lot of clarifications from the teacher to solve the test. In fact, two students just attempted the tests as they knew them, and to the best of their abilities, and returned them to the teacher.

The percentage of the result of this school is as follows:

- Naming test: 40%
- Jumbled letters: 68.75%
- Dictation: 28.75%

4.2.1 Test Results

In these tests, the students following the traditional rote learning method made many mistakes which have been further segregated into two categories, vowels and consonants mistakes.

Vowels

The words that were given to these students had only one digraph in one of them which was in the word 'tooth' and students have simply written a single 't' instead of the digraph 'th'. The rest of the words were misspelled in the arrangements of the vowels along with the substitution and missing or some extra vowels. Therefore, the mistakes in the use of vowels are further divided into these three sections are given below.

Arrangements

The words 'gate', 'bowl' and 'face' were spelled as 'geat', 'bwol' and 'feas' respectively.

Other than these mistakes in the arrangement of the alphabets, the students have not made any other.

Substitution

A few students have substituted vowels in the words 'oranges' and 'comb' which have been spelled as 'orenges' and 'come'. The 'a' in 'oranges' has been substituted with an 'e' and the silent b' in 'comb' has been substituted with 'e' or in some words, altogether left or missed out.

These spelling mistakes appear to be simply for the reason that the students did not know how to work with phonics neither did they get any revision for the words which were to be given in the test.

Missing/Extra Vowels

The mistakes in the vowel category of missing and/or extra vowels occurred in the words 'painting', 'oranges', 'paste', 'plates', 'soap', 'tooth' and 'gate' which were spelled as 'pinting', 'orangs', 'past', 'plates', 'soap', 'toth' and 'gat' respectively.

In the word 'painting' the vowel 'a' is missing and a few students have missed out the 'e' in 'oranges'. In the word 'painting' two letters are missing, a vowel 'i' and a consonant 'n' and an 'o' is missing in 'tooth' along with the missing 'e' in 'paste'. There was a missing 'a' in 'soap' and an extra 'e' in the end, thus making the spelling 'sope'.

Consonants

In the choice of consonants, the students have again followed a similar path as the phonics trained students, and their mistakes can be divided into further categories which are given below.

Arrangements

The students did not make any consonant arrangement mistakes in this test. Most of the consonant clusters were correctly placed, for example, 'pl' in plates was as it should have been in the arrangement of alphabets for the making up of the word. It is more in line with the memorizing of the word which is assisting them in the accurate spelling rather than anything else. It was observed that they were very quick in writing down the words for which they had memorized the spelling, while they were lost for the ones which were not memorized. They tried to write the unfamiliar word by asking the teacher to pronounce it once or twice and then wrote them down according to what they could make out.

Substituting

Two students substituted the whole word 'plates' with 'colours' because the plates in the picture were of different colors. The researchers did not mark any of the two answers incorrect, provided the spellings were correct. The letter 's' was substituted with 'b' in the word 'soap' and 'c' was substituted with 's'. Other than these two mistakes, there were no substitutions of consonants seen in these tests. A few of the words were entirely incorrect for which the substitution could not be accounted for, for example, 'paictn' for 'painting'. This is more like getting it over

with, rather than doing it accurately, without giving any thought to the sounds that go into making the word sound as it is pronounced. Four students have spelled 'face' by substituting the 'c' with an 's', pointing towards the fact that the sounds learning through phonics method is not exactly the way to go about writing the spelling of words.

Missing/ Extra Consonants

A student missed out a 't' from 'painting' along with an 'i', thus spelling it 'paning'. Two students missed out the 'h' from 'tooth' and an 's' from 'paste'. In the word 'tooth', two students have added an extra 'h' and spelled it as 'thooth'.

The silent 'b' in 'comb' has been missed out by most of the students and they ended up writing the word as 'com' or 'come'. Here the ending 'e' rule does not apply because the original sound of the middle vowel 'o' is not being produced in the pronunciation of this word but it is pronounced as /c^hm/.

5. Analysis

We then analyzed the data from both the schools by comparing the test results of both. We came to the conclusion that the overall result from the tests has not shown a marked difference in the spelling abilities of the students from both the schools.

The students taught through the phonics teaching method did relatively well in the naming test and were also better in jumbled letters test as compared to the students following the old-school methods. On the other hand, they have shown poor performance in spelling the words which were dictated to them and the students from the old-school method have done relatively well in comparison. There are many factors which could be contributing to the results that the students showed.

5.1 Atmosphere

The researchers were impressed by the class atmosphere in the phonics taught school as the

students were all very outspoken and very confident in asking about the sounds the letters in the words were making. It was observed that as soon as one of the students was done with her test of jumbled letters, she simply started helping other students in completing their test, thus, the better jumbled test result of these students.

Whereas, the students of the old school method were very quiet and did their own work independently. They asked the teacher about words that seemed difficult but other than that their interaction with other students was almost nonexistent.

Peer interaction can also be said to have a positive effect, as the students of phonics teaching method were benefitting from the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom because their classmates were helping them out in writing down the correct arrangement of the letters to form the correct words, but, in the Pakistani context this is considered to be 'cheating' and not appreciated during a test. Because they are in a habit of asking for and receiving help during a class work assignment as well as a test, they are continuously depending on others to answer their queries, which in the long run will lead to mistakes in all tests in future. Or even if they do well in the tests because of the 'help', their individual learning and command on the content being tested will be hindered, and the test would not be taken to be objective or trusted to give accurate results.

In this regard the students from Spring School System were independent as compared to the Bluebird School and did not seek help from their peers nor volunteered it. At least their tests can be trusted to be true and accurate to reveal their own abilities. These students were, just like their counterparts from the phonics teaching, also helped by the teacher to pronounce words they were not familiar with.

5.2 Common Mistakes

The students from both schools encountered problems in writing down the digraphs correctly except the digraph 'ph' in 'elephant'

in phonics group and 'sh' in 'shoes' in the old-school group. This proves that these digraphs were learnt by heart by these students and were done correctly by most of the students, thus proving that memory is more in control while writing down the spelling of these words rather than the phonics rule.

On the other hand, the digraphs 'll' in 'caterpillar', 'ea' in 'head', 'ea/ie' in 'peace/piece' and many others were incorrectly written by the students of both the schools. This is so because the digraph, which is a combination of two letters but produces only one phonic sound, has to be learnt and memorized by heart to be spelled accurately. The students taught through phonics attempted spelling them by simply sounding them out which is not always the way to learn the spelling of words.

Similarly, the silent 'b' in 'comb' was a mistake made by the students of old-school method because that was a word that they had not learnt or memorized and they tried to write it as it sounded. This is the common ground with almost all the mistakes made by all the students of both the schools. The words they were unfamiliar with have been spelled incorrectly and the words they were able to write correctly were mostly because they knew them by heart.

The students of both the schools did poorly in the dictation, with the familiar and unfamiliar words alike. The students from the old-school method did slightly better than the other group. This could be due to the reason that they knew the spelling and did not try to make them up to suit the pronunciation but, this analysis only accounts for a small percentage of students.

The only exception is the jumbled letters test where phonics awareness seems to have helped the students to perform a better job along with the peer-help they got. Both these factors influenced the better test results for this particular test. The remaining tests did not reveal any significant result which can cater for the mistakes made by the students. Phonics and rote learning have both been insufficient to produce an above average ability of spelling in

the students of both learning systems and schools.

6. Conclusion

The analysis showed a lot of similarities in the scores which were unexpected. Because the test results did not reveal a marked difference, it can be concluded that phonics teaching is as good as the old-school rote learning method. In fact, in the Pakistani context, old-school method is a better choice with which to guide students to become proficient spellers.

The choice between the traditional method and the phonics method is not a clear choice. Any person would find it difficult to pick one and condemn the other. Any such choice will have to take into consideration the dynamics of the English language and the context in which it is taught. One will need to look into if the English language yields itself to phonics teaching and also if the overall education system creates an environment conducive to phonics teaching.

6.1 English Language and Rules

English language, especially in our context, is an official language but is taught as a second or foreign language and in most schools, as a subject. Most of the students are taught to write before they are taught to read. In fact, reading is taught through writing, and pronunciation is not always accurate because it is not spoken in our day to day lives. All these play a role in forcing the children to learn the rules, pronunciations and spellings by heart. There are too many rules and even more exceptions which cannot be sorted out by phonics teaching alone but have to be remembered to be used accurately.

6.2 Phonics for Reading Skills

Many researches and studies show that Phonics is taught to students for good reading skills. Its most positive outcome is the good friendly environment between the teachers and students as well as peer learning which was observed in the time while taking tests. But, in Pakistan, the schools which are teaching through phonics are putting all their efforts on the ability to speak,

and written work with the help of phonics is not being emphasized nor is it the primary focus. To teach the children how to speak as well as spell well, there is need for some innovative strategies incorporated in the teaching methods along with phonics. Phonics alone is not enough to teach the children how to spell and write accurately, as the results from the tests taken prove.

6.3 Recommendations

The test scores were too close to rule in favour of either of the methods so the recommendations of the study cannot prescribe one method. The recommendations of the study are directed towards indication of the factors that should be kept in mind for selecting the appropriate method. Language teaching does not take place in a vacuum and the teachers, and more importantly the governing bodies, need to take the overall educational environment into account. If the overall environment promotes creativity, deductive thinking and attempts to make the learners independent, the phonics method may be chosen but, if the overall environment views the students as sponges passively absorbing information, the traditional method is likely to produce better results.

The tendency to implement a method that is new or is being used in the west or has produced results in some country needs to be checked. The efficiency of the method and also its practicability in the Pakistani context need to be ascertained instead of just adopting the system. Phonics may work in the USA but the Pakistani educationists need to determine for themselves how well it works and which exact skills it promotes. The results that the method can produce should be kept in mind and matched to the aims and objectives of English language teaching and learning in Pakistan.

6.4 Future Researches

Future researchers should try to find if phonics is being taught correctly or not. Action researches, where a teacher selects the students and teaches them through the chosen method

and then testing them to see if the method works or not, should be conducted.

Longitudinal research, which could see the long-term effects of phonics teaching, should be undertaken so to see how the students have managed to inculcate their studies in light of the method they were taught with. This would highlight the problems faced by the students of a level, for example, class one or two, when they reach a higher level in their education career. This would also bring to light if there are any long-term effects of the phonics teaching method in the lives of the students.

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