

Effectiveness of a Phonics Instructional Guide on the PCK of Teaching Phonics among Pre-service EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Previous studies have revealed that a newly compiled phonics instructional guide was able to improve the content knowledge level of pre-service EFL teachers by 23 per cent. Based on this and to further investigate how this guide indirectly impacted the pedagogical content knowledge of these teachers, a longitude and continuous quantitative study was conducted on the same sample in the same teaching college in China. In total, 140 pre-service EFL teachers were assigned to two equivalent groups as before, namely the experimental (N=70) and control groups (N=70), who conducted a trial phonics instruction and completed self-evaluation questionnaires, respectively. The trial instruction aimed to assess their pedagogical content knowledge of teaching phonics, while the self-evaluation form aimed to investigate their self-perceived competencies and efficacy in phonics instruction. The results indicated that based on the content knowledge they already possessed, the pre-service EFL teachers in the experimental group had higher levels of pedagogical content knowledge and self-perception; in comparison, those in the control group had lower pedagogical content knowledge and self-perception levels. In other words, the linear regression results demonstrated that the content knowledge of pre-service EFL teachers is a reliable predictor of their pedagogical content knowledge and self-perception levels. These findings suggest the necessity of enhancing pre-service EFL teachers' content knowledge of phonics instruction via the guide to further improve their phonics instruction competency, which forms part of their pedagogical content knowledge.

Keywords: pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, EFL teachers, correlation, phonics

1. Introduction

In English-speaking contexts, phonics has long been considered an essential tool in the early reading process (ILA, 2020; Papp, 2020). With mastery of phonics knowledge, learners in the context of English as a second language also are predicted to be able to achieve basic reading automaticity at word level first and then at text level (Gopal & Singh, 2020). In the EFL context, studies have yielded similar results, that phonics instruction enables English learners to read and spell English independently, at least at word level (Nasir et al., 2019). In China, English is taught and learnt as a foreign language. Phonics was included in the National Curriculum for Compulsory Education in 2011. After the introduction of this curriculum in 2011, EFL learners were initially expected to master 26 letters and the corresponding sounds the letters stand for (Zhao, 2019). In 2022, this requirement remained unchanged in the latest version of the National Curriculum for Compulsory Education. Between 2011 and 2022, numerous studies were conducted to indicate the effectiveness of phonics instruction on the English learning results of EFL learners. Almost all these results were positive, regardless of the students' educational backgrounds.

However, studies have also implied the poor implementation of phonics instructions in the compulsory education phase (Zhao, 2019; Zhong, 2020). The main reason lies in the knowledge deficiency of in-service EFL teachers, as reported in several studies conducted in China. These studies specifically investigated the status of phonics implementation and found that the subject matter content knowledge of in-service EFL teachers might be an important factor in this poor implementation (Long, 2019; Yan, 2018; Zhong, 2020; Zhong & Kang, 2020). In one of these studies, Long (2019) pointed out that during the investigation process, some new EFL teachers had been unprepared to teach phonics when they were still attending the teacher training program. In other words, pre-service EFL teachers were taught the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) rather than phonics. They were not taught phonics or how to teach it, and there was no standard phonics instructional guide for them to follow. In this context, Chen et al. (2022) compiled a phonics instructional guide for pre-service EFL teachers to enable them to teach phonics. The implementation and evaluation results indicated the efficacy of this type of guide in equipping pre-service EFL teachers with the required content knowledge to teach phonics. Specifically and fundamentally, the findings revealed that the CK of the pre-service EFL teachers had been improved by 23 per cent after the intervention with the phonics instructional guide. However, as indicated by Blevins (2017) and Shulman (1987), a teacher's CK is essential in teaching but cannot guarantee teaching efficacy. Furthermore, as Shulman (1987) indicated, a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge directly affects their