



“School of Humanities”

“The Teaching of English as a Foreign/International
Language”

Postgraduate Dissertation

“Synthetic Phonics and the Development of early Reading Skills in
the Greek State School”

“Vassiliki Ntouva”

Supervisor: Dr Kosmas Vlachos

Patras, Greece, May 2023

Theses / Dissertations remain the intellectual property of students (“authors/creators”), but in the context of open access policy they grant to the HOU a non-exclusive license to use the right of reproduction, customisation, public lending, presentation to an audience and digital dissemination thereof internationally, in electronic form and by any means for teaching and research purposes, for no fee and throughout the duration of intellectual property rights. Free access to the full text for studying and reading does not in any way mean that the author/creator shall allocate his/her intellectual property rights, nor shall he/she allow the reproduction, republication, copy, storage, sale, commercial use, transmission, distribution, publication, execution, downloading, uploading, translating, modifying in any way, of any part or summary of the dissertation, without the explicit prior written consent of the author/creator. Creators retain all their moral and property rights.



“Synthetic Phonics and the Development of early Reading Skills in the Greek State School”

“Vassiliki Ntouva”

Supervising Committee

Supervisor:
Kosmas Vlachos
Hellenic Open University

Co-Supervisor:
Anastasia Georgountzou
Hellenic Open University

Patras, Greece, May, 2023

*I would like to express my gratitude for my family whose support and encouragement has
been invaluable throughout this study.
I also wish to thank my supervisors for their guidance.*

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to evaluate a synthetic phonics approach to teaching English to young learners and its contribution to better literacy at the Greek primary school. The synthetic phonics approach focuses on teaching young learners phoneme-grapheme correspondences followed by the ability to decode and blend words when reading. The synthetic phonics programme that is used is Jolly Phonics, a commercial programme that teaches letter sounds in an entertaining way and is designed specifically for young learners.

The synthetic phonics approach is considered to be essential in teaching reading to young learners in many countries that have English as a first language. Nevertheless, contradicting views exist as much as there are favorable ones. The existing literature reveals that research is divided into researchers that believe in the use of phonics in the process of acquiring the reading skill and those that oppose it, those that favor synthetic phonics and those that support other phonics methods while there are some researchers that propose a combination of methods.

In order to explore whether the synthetic phonics approach is helpful at all in an environment where English is taught as a second language, I will focus on a specific case of two classes at two different Greek primary schools , the one using synthetic phonics while the other using the methodology of the standard curriculum of the country. My purpose is to see if the learners of the second grade of the school that are taught English through the synthetic phonics method can perform better at reading skills.

The results point to the fact, that synthetic phonics and in particular the Jolly Phonics programme, was useful in teaching children how to decode, blend words as a first step, a strategy in their reading acquisition effort. However, the evidence also revealed that a big challenge for learners was to be able to recall the correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they correlate to. Finally, I came to the conclusion that the processes young learners go through during their learning is complex. In addition, while a synthetic phonics approach is quite helpful as a first step into the world of reading comprehension, a combination of more than one approaches could be even more preferable and useful in developing reading skills for the young ESL learners that struggle to succeed in reading.

Key words: jolly phonics, reading skill, teaching, L2

‘Η Συνθετική Φωνητική και η ανάπτυξη των δεξιοτήτων ανάγνωσης στο Ελληνικό Δημόσιο Σχολείο’. Ντούβα Βασιλική

Περίληψη

Στόχος της παρούσας διατριβής είναι να αξιολογήσει μια προσέγγιση συνθετικής φωνητικής στη διδασκαλία της αγγλικής γλώσσας σε νεαρούς μαθητές και τη συμβολή της στον καλύτερο αλφαριθμητισμό στο ελληνικό δημοτικό σχολείο. Η προσέγγιση της συνθετικής φωνητικής εστιάζει στη διδασκαλία αντιστοιχιών φωνήματος-γραφήματος σε νεαρούς μαθητές, ακολουθούμενη από την ικανότητα αποκωδικοποίησης και ανάμειξης λέξεων κατά την ανάγνωση. Το πρόγραμμα συνθετικής φωνητικής που χρησιμοποιείται είναι το Jolly Phonics, ένα εμπορικό πρόγραμμα που διδάσκει ήχους γραμμάτων με διασκεδαστικό τρόπο και έχει σχεδιαστεί ειδικά για μικρούς μαθητές.

Η προσέγγιση της συνθετικής φωνητικής θεωρείται απαραίτητη για τη διδασκαλία της ανάγνωσης σε νεαρούς μαθητές σε πολλές χώρες που έχουν τα αγγλικά ως πρώτη γλώσσα. Ωστόσο, υπάρχουν τόσο αντικρουόμενες απόψεις όσο και ευνοϊκές. Η υπάρχουσα βιβλιογραφία αποκαλύπτει ότι η έρευνα χωρίζεται σε ερευνητές που πιστεύουν στη χρήση της φωνητικής στη διαδικασία απόκτησης της ικανότητας ανάγνωσης και σε αυτούς που την αντιτίθενται. Συνεπώς, υπάρχουν αυτοί που ευνοούν τη συνθετική φωνητική και σε αυτοί που υποστηρίζουν άλλες μεθόδους φωνητικής. Ενώ τέλος, υπάρχουν ορισμένοι ερευνητές που προτείνουν συνδυασμό μεθόδων.

Προκειμένου να καταλάβω εάν η προσέγγιση της συνθετικής φωνητικής είναι χρήσιμη σε ένα περιβάλλον όπου τα αγγλικά διδάσκονται ως δεύτερη γλώσσα, θα επικεντρωθώ σε μια συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση δύο διαφορετικών τάξεων σε δύο διαφορετικά ελληνικά δημοτικά σχολεία, αυτό που χρησιμοποιεί συνθετική φωνητική και το άλλο που χρησιμοποιεί τη μεθοδολογία του προγράμματος σπουδών της χώρας. Σκοπός μου είναι να δω αν οι μαθητές της Β' τάξης του σχολείου που διδάσκονται Αγγλικά με τη μέθοδο της συνθετικής φωνητικής μπορούν να αποδώσουν καλύτερα στις δεξιότητες ανάγνωσης.

Τα αποτελέσματα αποδεικνύουν το γεγονός ότι η συνθετική φωνητική και ειδικότερα το πρόγραμμα Jolly phonics, ήταν χρήσιμη στη διδασκαλία των παιδιών ώστε να μαθουν να αποκωδικοποιούν, να αναμειγνύουν λέξεις σαν πρώτο βήμα στην προσπάθεια απόκτησης της ανάγνωσης. Ωστόσο, τα δεδομένα αποκάλυψαν επίσης ότι μια μεγάλη πρόκληση για

τους μαθητές ήταν να μπορέσουν να ανακαλέσουν την αντιστοιχία μεταξύ φωνημάτων και γραφημάτων. Το συμπέρασμα που προέκυψε είναι ότι οι ανάγκες των νεαρών μαθητών είναι πολύπλοκες. Μια προσέγγιση συνθετικής φωνητικής είναι αρκετά χρήσιμη ως ένα πρώτο βήμα στον κόσμο της κατανόησης κειμένου. Ωστόσο, ένας συνδυασμός περισσότερων της μιας προσεγγίσεων θα μπορούσε να είναι ακόμη πιο ουσιαστικός και χρήσιμος στην ανάπτυξη δεξιοτήτων ανάγνωσης για τους νεαρούς μαθητές που μαθαίνουν τα αγγλικά ως δεύτερη γλώσσα και που αγωνίζονται να επιτύχουν στην ανάγνωση.

Λεξεις-Κλειδια : Jolly Phonics, δεξιότητα ανάγνωσης, διδασκαλία, δεύτερη γλώσσα

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
Περίληψη.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures... ..	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Literature Review.....	3
1.1 Importance of Reading.....	3
1.1.1 Reading Skills.....	3
1.2 Reading Methods.....	4
1.2.1 The Phonics Method.....	4
1.2.2 The Whole-word Method.....	6
1.2.3 The Language Experience Method.....	8
1.3 Synthetic Phonics.....	10
1.3.1 The Rose Report.....	11
1.3.2 Jolly Phonics.....	12
Chapter 2 . Methodology.....	18
2.1 Learners' profiles.....	18
2.1.1 Teacher's profile.....	19
2.2 The study.....	20
2.2.1 The Research Questions.....	20
2.2.2 Hypothesis.....	20
2.2.3 Implementation of Materials.....	20
2.2.4 Assessment.....	21
2.2.5 The Burt Test.....	21
Chapter 3. Results.....	23
Chapter 4. Discussion.....	25
4.1 Discussion.....	25
4.2 Pedagogical Implications.....	26
4.3 Limitations.....	27
4.4 Recommendations for Further Research.....	28
Conclusion.....	28
References.....	31
Appendix A Jolly Phonics actions.....	35
Appendix B Jolly Phonics stories.....	36
Appendix C Jolly Phonics 'tricky words'.....	37
Appendix D The Burt Test.....	38
Appendix E Interview.....	39
Appendix F ANTS reader.....	40
Appendix G Likert scale questionnaire.....	41

List of Figures

Figure 1 : Jolly Phonics Letter Sounds.....	13
Figure 2: Sassoon Infant Typeface.....	14
Figure 3: Range of learners post test reading age.....	24

Introduction

Over the last years, the UK government has been trying to resolve the literacy underachievement issue that exists at schools. In this framework, Rose (2006) recommended a synthetic phonics approach as a cure to this problem. Accordingly, the government decided to adopt Rose's solution, hence synthetic phonics began to be taught to all children in their early stages of reading. Stephen Krashen (1988), an expert in the domain of linguistics and second language acquisition, presented five hypotheses of second language acquisition, namely the Acquisition Learning hypothesis; the Monitor hypothesis; the Affective Filter hypothesis; the Natural order hypothesis and the Input hypothesis. According to the input hypothesis, which is Krashen's belief on how second language acquisition takes place, the learner progresses along the natural order when he/she receives second language input, that is one step beyond the current stage of linguistic competence (Shutz, 2007). Since not all of the learners can be at the same level of linguistic competence at the same time, Krashen suggests that *natural communicative input* is the key to designing a syllabus, ensuring in this way that each learner will receive some 'i + 1' input that is appropriate for his/her current stage of linguistic competence (Shutz, 2007).

In the Greek primary school, where the English language is used as a second language and especially at young levels, this natural order is somewhat blurry. Children progressing from the first two grades to the third grade are expected to have assimilated the English alphabet, even though they have not been systematically taught using it, and read small texts. Unfortunately, learners succeed in reading at this level only if they have attended classes outside school.

In this dissertation, my research was designed to put to test a popular synthetic phonics approach to teaching young learners, Jolly Phonics, and tries to see whether it can help children become better at recognizing the letters and reading and thus it can be proven a helpful step from the second to the third grade of the Greek primary school. In order to come to a conclusion, I investigated the questions of whether the learners can be more accurate and fluent readers when exposed to this method.

This dissertation has been organized into four chapters. In the first chapter there is a review of the relevant data of this study. In this part, I mention the importance of the

reading skill along with the methods that have been proposed to ameliorate it and help young learners achieve better results. I discuss the research on phonics and the adoption of the Jolly Phonics programme as a synthetic phonics approach from many governments and schools all over the world in order to address the literacy issue. The second chapter of this dissertation outlines the methodology and the tools that I used to conduct my research. Chapter three follows with the results of the research. Finally, chapter four provides answers to the research questions, presents the pedagogical implications, the limitations that I encountered along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

1.1 Importance of reading

Reading involves the understanding of a written text to extract the required information from it as efficiently as possible (Beck, 2007). Whether reading for pleasure or to find out something, whether skimming, scanning or reading extensively or intensively, in all the cases undoubtedly, the act of reading is important. Reading has been recognized as important because it's a channel for personal development, as well as for social, economic, and civic life. Reading is a basic lifelong skill to be used both at school and throughout life (Küçüköğlü, 2013) and it is a prerequisite for cultural and social activities that allows people to learn and educate themselves about other people, about history, science, and mathematics; the list here is endless (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). According to the literature regarding the benefits of reading, there is evidence that reading increases general knowledge, better understanding of other cultures and a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998 and Bruner, 1996).

1.1.1 Reading skills

From novels to poems, from letters and emails to newspapers and magazines, from articles, handbooks and recipes, to instructions, diagrams, and comic books, in order to read them and fully understand them, one must have mastered a variety of skills. These skills include, but not limited to, recognizing the script of the language, deducting the meaning and use of unknown lexical items, understanding conceptual meaning, understanding explicitly and non-explicitly stated information, distinguishing the main idea from supporting details; and many more (Grellet, 1981). Moreover, in acquiring reading skills, the nature of phonological abilities has a causal role (Wagner and Torgesen, 1987). Phonological processing refers to the use of phonological information (the sounds of one's language) in processing written and oral language. There are three kinds of phonological processing: phonological awareness, phonological recoding in lexical access, and phonetic recoding in working memory. According to research, phonological abilities play a causal role in the acquisition of reading skills. In fact, it is evidenced by the causal

role for phonological awareness in learning to read, as well as the possibility of similar causal roles for phonological recoding in lexical access and phonetic recoding in working memory (Wagner and Torgesen, 1987).

At this point it is key to highlight the fundamental differences in the developmental curves of skills related to reading (Paris, 2005). These different curves are expressed in different times of skill onset, different durations of acquisition, and different asymptotic levels of performance. There are some skills that are more restrained than others while others can be learned quickly and mastered completely. For example, reading skills, such as learning the letters of the alphabet, are restricted to small sets of knowledge that are mastered in relatively brief periods of development. In contrast, other skills, such as vocabulary, are not limited by the knowledge to be acquired or the duration of learning. Therefore, when we are observing reading skills we should also take into consideration the restraints that influence reading development and reading skills; these restraints can be conceptual, developmental, and methodological (Paris, 2005). Regarding the type and degree of restraint, it varies among the reading skills. Usually letter knowledge, phonics, and concepts of print are highly restrained, phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency are less restrained, and vocabulary and comprehension are least restrained (Paris, 2005).

1.2 Reading Methods

Being able to read is one of the most important skills that children achieve during their early years and is a necessary prerequisite for children's continuing education (McGuinness, 2005). In addition, since English is the international language of communication, having a solid foundation in English literacy is beneficial for the continuity of children's life (Ariati et al., 2018). The following section will describe three reading methods that are being used in schools to teach English. In addition, debates and opposing views about different beneficial methods for teaching young children how to read will also be presented.

1.2.1 The Phonics Method

The phonics method aims at teaching children the "skills" necessary to "decode" any words that may present themselves. It is considered to be a beneficial and successful

method for teaching young children how to read (Ginsberg, 2000). When phonics method was compared to sight-reading method (this method is described in detail in the following section 2.2) to determine which method proves to be more beneficial in giving children the necessary tools to read, it was observed that the teaching of phonics is crucial for reading development, because, unlike sight-reading, phonics offers children the ability to decode words. The study also stressed the importance of providing teachers phonics-based training and the need to increase funding for phonics programs in order to provide phonics resources to teachers and students (Ginsberg, 2000). According to published data, phonics skills provide children with a critical tool in their reading development. Reading as a skill itself involves learning how the alphabet works by using it and learning how to use the alphabet has to do with building letters into words. The decoding process is aided by a phonics method which in turn helps children to create long-term storage (Albert, 1995). Learning any skill contains four elements and similarly developing the skill of reading also contains these same 4 aspects: *development through repetition over a length of time, ability to transfer skills between similar tasks, gradual and continual improvement over time, and finally long lasting ability to use the skills once learned* (Albert, 1995). Therefore, phonics is evident to be a successful method to learn how to read as a skill, because it allows continual development and long-lasting usage. In other words, by learning to read through phonics, children learn a skill, that is, the ability to transform letters into communicative words. A similar opinion, that phonics is viewed as a skill (a skill that offers children the cues to decode unknown words) is also shared by other researchers (Juel, 1996). Here the subject of a sense of independence is also valued and credited to the phonics method. For example, the decoding skill inspires children by giving them a sense of independence since they can decode unfamiliar words on their own without extracting them from memory. This was evident by an experiment with first grade children when the number of reading errors was related to the knowledge of phonics. The experiment showed that students who had acquired phonics ability made fewer errors than the students without phonics knowledge (Juel, 1996).

A study was published recently, that used a descriptive qualitative method, to obtain data from secondary sources (previous publications on the research topic) about the strength of the phonic method on teaching how to read and the effectiveness to develop the reading skill for early childhood (Audina et al., 2022). Related publications were collected and

studied to compare the findings, opinions, and statements of different experts for the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness for the development of reading in kindergarten. The results of the study proved that children who are taught to read through the phonic method tend to be better at spelling, because in the phonic method children are used to breaking a word into the smallest phonic units (Audina et al., 2022).

Grabe (2013) in talking about the L2 learners refers to lower-level processes that are being used at any given minute by the working memory and help the comprehension of what one reads. He mentions processing operations that fluent readers seem to have mastered. Starting from automaticity and rapid processing in word recognition that require many hours of practice in reading, he goes on to syntactic parsing and lastly to the semantic proposition formation. These three processes are lower level processes that help the reader become fluent when used efficiently or slow him down if not mastered. Yet the complexities for the L2 learners are evident and there is no clear evidence on how a teacher should adapt his lesson to cope with the arising issues. The L2 reader is one who incorporates both L1 and L2 language and literacy knowledge and the L2 reader is the one that finds lower –level processes much harder to develop (Grabe, 2014). This bottom-up approach treats reading as a sequential process where young learners must first learn the basics of phonics and how to decode words.

Despite the proven benefits, strengths and effectiveness of the phonic method to teach how to read young children, there are publications against it (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022). A recent publication using a systematic qualitative meta-synthesis of 55 experimental trials that included longitudinal designs and a questionnaire survey of teachers, suggested that the approach to phonics and reading as well as teaching in England, is not sufficiently proven by previous research evidence and the authors suggested a change in the national curriculum policy (Wyse and Bradbury, 2022).

1.2.2 The whole word method

According to Rodgers (2001), in 1655 Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician, invented synthetic phonics. This kind of approach referred to the teaching of reading in which children were taught to take a single-syllable word apart from its constituent letters, pronounce a phoneme for each letter and blend the phonemes to form a word. Due to an

observed decline in the reading skills (Rodgers, 2001), phonics along with the whole – word method, began to be taught in the classroom. For the first three decades of the 20th century those two methods lead to an increase in reading and spelling abilities.

The whole-word method is considered to be an automatic process of reading and often is referred to as sight-reading or as the sight words approach or analytical Phonics. Children learn to say the words by recognizing their written form instead of sounding out words by decoding them. Initially known words are presented on their own, then in short sentences followed by longer ones. Once a child is exposed to a certain word many times, then will sight-read most of the vocabulary they come across and then they will sound out only the unfamiliar terms. This method mainly involves getting children to memorize lists of words. The earliest documentation of this whole-word method goes back to 1971 by Waterson's observations on her sons reading whole-word pattern which was then explained and developed even more by other researchers (Waterson, 1971, Vihman and Velleman, 2000, Vihman and Croft, 2007 and Kehoe ,2015). Applying this method to teach English, can be viewed as if English is being taught as an ideographic language such as Chinese (Besner and Coltheart, 1979, Schmitt et al., 1994). The basic element of Chinese language is a character, an ideogram - an arrangement of strokes that is ideographic; in other words, a graphic symbol that represents a concept. There are approximately 50,000 Chinese characters where almost 7,000 are generally used. English on the other hand is an alphabet-based language not ideograms; the basic element of English writing is the letter, and the English alphabet consists of 26 letters. English words are usually composed of two or more syllables consisting of a sequence of letters. Therefore, teaching English using an ideographic approach is rather confusing (Schmitt et al., 1994). However, there is data opposite to this view, and concluded that printed English is partly ideographic and partly alphabetic and consequently reading English is partly ideographic and partly alphabetic (Besner and Coltheart, 1979). Despite English being generally considered to be an alphabetically written language, some of it is written ideographically. For example, a portion of written symbols of English are ideographs (such as abbreviations), pictographs (for example some road signs, Roman numerals as the X in King's X) and syllabic (for example BAR-B-Q). Moreover, just because English is written alphabetically it can be misleading when it comes to reading; just because it is written alphabetically, it may not be read alphabetically. In fact, although linguistically

English uses an alphabetic script it doesn't necessarily indicate that readers of English treat their script as if it were alphabetic.

To complement the whole-word reading method, the Dolch word list was published, a basic sight vocabulary. The Dolch word list, named after its author Edward William Dolch, is composed of 220 words, (prepositions, adjectives and verbs) except nouns (Dolch, 1936). The need for the creation of this list rose when teachers of Grade II expressed their findings that pupils had very small or no sight vocabularies and wished to solve this problem by teaching sight words that will be of most value to these children in their reading. The initial sight vocabulary included no nouns, because as the author of the list explained, nouns cannot be of universal use because each noun is tied to special subject matter and therefore when a new subject matter is used, new nouns must be used. However, later the list was complemented by 95 nouns. Dolch admitted at that time that the list is not perfect since no list secured from frequency counts can be flawless. In addition, he clearly did not claim that this basic list of 220 words includes all the words that the elementary-school student should know by sight. Dolch stated that the student should at least know these. Once a child is able to recognize these 220 words instantly and easily, then will have a "capital" of word knowledge with which can read any script. And in case the sounding of the child is weak, then the teacher can train the sounding skill to complete the reading process (Dolch, 1936).

In an attempt to estimate a child's whole-word abilities, four measures have been designed and proposed: 1. the phonological mean length of utterance, a measure of whole-word complexity for both child and target words, 2. the proportion of whole-word proximity, a measure of the proximity between the child's word and its target form, 3. the proportion of whole-word correctness, a measure of the number of words produced correctly relative to the sample size, and 4. the proportion of whole word variability, a measure of how often a child produces words in distinct phonological shapes (Ingram, 2002).

To sum up, the foundation of the whole-word method is that if a child sees words many times they eventually store them in their memory as visual images. Hence it also supports the idea that children can learn to read if they are exposed to many books.

1.2.3 The Language Experience Method

The language experience method promotes reading and writing using personal experiences and oral language. Therefore, this method of teaching reading is built on personalized learning where the words taught are different for every child (Stahl and Miller, 1989). This method highlights the importance of children's own language productions as a bridge from oral to written language and uses children's literature, rather than basal readers, for instruction. In addition, during this reading method, non meaningful segments of language, such as individual sound-symbol relationships are not important; what is important is to concentrate on the significance of the language. In that aspect, this method does not recommend teaching words or individual sound-symbol relationships in isolation but instead to teach them as needed to help students understand particular texts. Finally, in language experience approaches, a major part of teaching material is experience charts generated by children's dictation (Stahl and Miller, 1989). Having a learner-generated textbook composed of material with familiar vocabulary and ideas of the student, teaching material becomes more meaningful and accessible than texts found in pre-prepared books. The language experience method was first studied by Wrightstone in 1951 who concluded that language experience material can be used with effective results. In fact, in his earlier publication when he measured reading achievement by standardized tests, he concluded that by the end of the third grade, children that have been taught systematically by activity-related (usually experience-oriented) methods were reading equally good to the children that have been taught exclusively with basals (Wrightstone 1944, Wrightstone 1951). Research on literacy learning has demonstrated that the processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and thinking develop simultaneously as learners become literate (Dorr, 2006). Teaching to read with the language experience method combines all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Despite this approach being focused on the interrelation of all four language processes, it is recommended to delay writing until children have mastered a corpus of sight words (Stahl and Miller 1989). In an attempt to find the ground where this method of reading can be useful, it has been observed by Dorr, that it is perfect for diverse classrooms (Dorr, 2006). Considering that nowadays the children in a classroom come from many backgrounds educationally, linguistically, and culturally, teachers are challenged to teach students with diverse backgrounds, languages, and educational experiences. The language

experience method provides the teacher with the flexibility to select the appropriate skills and strategies needed by the diverse student populations of today's diverse classrooms (Dorr, 2006).

1.3 Synthetic Phonics

Synthetic phonics is used in many countries all over the world, including the U.K, the U.S.A, India, Korea, Germany and Austria and is commonly taught before children are introduced to books or reading. Synthetic phonics teaches individual letter sounds and children are shown how to blend the sounds together to generate words and pronounce unfamiliar words (Johnston and Watson 2003). With this method, children at young age are able to convert letters to sounds and then blend the sounds to vocalize words (Machin et al., 2017). The focus of Synthetic phonics is on the correspondence between phoneme and grapheme; where students are explicitly instructed how to map sound to print (phonological encoding) and hence learn about phonemes and graphemes (Tsiadimos, 2015). According to research comparing the effectiveness of synthetic phonics teaching and an analytic phonics program, synthetic phonics program was by far the most effective (Johnston and Watson, 2003). A study on the long-term effects of synthetic phonics teaching was carried out which compared the literacy skills of 10-year-old students who had learnt to read by analytic or synthetic phonics methods as part of their early literacy programs (Johnston et al., 2012). Both groups of children had learnt to read by a phonic method from an early age of schooling, and eventually covered the same material. However, these two phonic methods do have differences which affected the results of the study. The study showed that after 6 years at school, children taught by the synthetic phonics approach read words, spelt words, and had reading comprehension skills significantly advanced of those taught by the analytic phonics method (Johnston et al., 2012). Overall, this study confirmed that the synthetic phonics approach is effective in English.

On a final note, despite published data proving the effectiveness of synthetic phonics, there will always be researchers supporting an opposing view. A recent publication argued

that no single method of teaching children to read is superior to any other (Glazzard and Stones, 2020) and highlight the existence of a policy agenda which is mandating the teaching of synthetic phonics both in schools and in initial teacher education provision in England. The authors express their worry that by limiting the teacher’s knowledge of a repertoire of strategies to encourage reading development, their capacity to support reading development in all children will be severely restricted. Finally, they point out that the synthetic phonics method does not work for all children and if it was so successful and effective, then by default there shouldn’t have been any underachievement in reading in England (Glazzard and Stones, 2020).

1.3.1 Rose Report

In 2006 Jim Rose conducted an independent review of the teaching of early reading which embodies the principles of high-quality phonic work within a language-rich curriculum that can give rise to high standards of reading and writing (Rose, 2006). The Rose Report on the teaching of reading skills in primary schools identified 5 competencies which children should be able to demonstrate before they can progress to the successful acquisition of reading skills. These include *recognition of letters, the ability to sound out phonemes, the ability to hear and blend phonemes, the reading of phonically regular, and the reading of some irregular words*. It is based on the use of synthetic phonics which he presented as the most effective method to teach reading to young students. At that time a change in government strengthened this policy, and The National Strategy for Primary Schools in England advocated synthetic phonics as a means for teaching children to read and (later on) added a national program of early assessment of grapheme-phoneme knowledge (Stainthorp 2020). The implementation of the Rose Report in schools - the use of systematic synthetic phonics teaching for all children as the primary method to learn to read - revealed that there was no national program to ensure that teachers had the required professional subject knowledge to teach phonics successfully. To solve this issue, the Department for Education and Science (DfES) published Letters and Sounds (L&S), a free systematic synthetic phonics program (Stainthorp, 2020). In the first few years there was limited impact of phonics teaching on reading performance, however from 2013 there has been a steady rise in reading performance to a peak of 90% in 2014 and 2015 (Stainthorp, 2020). Nowadays Phonics teaching is embedded and having a positive effect (Stainthorp, 2020).

Even though the final Rose Report of 2006 contained a wide range of recommendations designed to improve the teaching of reading, at the time of its release there were opposing views on this method. Much attention was focused on the synthetic phonics issue and raised concerns that these recommendations could be seen as claiming that one size fits all (Clark, 2007). However, it was not the case because the 2006 Report did acknowledge past evidence that students do benefit from learning the names of the letters of the alphabet as well as the sounds, however, made no reference to this in the recommendations. Moreover, the Rose Report raised more issues because it claimed that early start on systematic phonic work is important for children who do not have the advantages of strong support for literacy at home; a claim that reading specialist do not agree upon (Clark, 2007). Moreover, Clark argued that statistically significant differences in effectiveness were not found between synthetic phonics instructions and analytic phonic instructions, hence he questioned whether the research evidence of Rose on synthetic phonics were as strong as implied in the Report.

1.3.2 Jolly Phonics

The English language has an alphabetic system that makes the language more difficult for someone to read or write in contrast to the Greek language that has a transparent alphabetic system, thus is easier to read. English is a highly inconsistent language that exhibits phonological complexity. The consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) pattern, the consonant clusters, the fact that a letter can be pronounced in many ways, the diagraphs, all these factors point to this complexity that makes the language quite challenging especially for young learners.

Considering when the best time is for children to get into English literacy, and how urgent it is, researchers on the field agree that it should start from an early age; the sooner the better (Dixon et al., 2011, Limsukhawat et al., 2016, Ariati et al., 2018, Dansadau and Kagara 2022). Nevertheless, students in preschool appear to come without a minor reading readiness and they do not know how to sound out the letters in English. To fill the gap of children’s struggle to decode words at this early age, Jolly Phonics proved to be an effective method to enhance children’s early reading and literacy skill at young age. Jolly Phonics, created by Sue Lloyd in 1987 for young students to develop their reading and literacy skills in English using synthetic phonics. It is aimed to help students understand

how letter sounds can be blended together to pronounce unfamiliar words, which later on creates sustainable reading skill. Jolly Phonics works by teaching letter sounds as opposed to the alphabet. 42 letter sounds are phonic building blocks that children use to decode the English language. When reading children recognize the letters and blend together the respective sounds, while in writing they identify the sounds and write down the corresponding letters (Jolly learning 2023). These two skills are called blending and segmenting and they are part of 5 in total skills that children master (Jolly Learning 2023). The other three skills are learning the letter sounds, learning letter formation and tricky words. On a final note, Jolly Phonics is a fun, multi-sensory and child-centered approach that helps students to improve their phonics learning skills, and to learn without memorization (Limsukhawat et al., 2016).

In 1987 the Jolly Phonics approach was founded by Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernham. As a commercial method it started selling its products five years later. Jolly phonics is an approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics. They are used in over 100 countries around the world while some of them have adopted jolly phonics as government policy.

The 42 letter sounds are taught in a fun and multi-sensory way, promising to enable students to become fluent readers. The letter sounds are divided into seven groups (Figure 1)

1. S, a, t, p, i, n
2. Ck, e, h, r, m, d
3. G, o, u, l, f, b
4. Ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. Z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. Y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. Qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

Figure 1. Letter sounds

The sounds are not taught alphabetically but in a specific, predetermined order that helps young learners build words from the start. The first group, represented by the letters *s, a, t, i, p, n* is considered to be the most helpful in building two or three letter words. The letters *b* and *d* that always confuse young learners are introduced in different sets.

This approach follows five steps. At first, students are taught the 42 letter sounds, including digraphs, or sounds in two letters. The digraphs *oo* and *th* as seen in figure 1 represent two different sounds, thus are shown twice. The sounds that have more than one way of being written are taught in one form each time. The sound *ai* in rain is taught first and afterwards the *ae* or *ay* forms. Each sound has an indicative action (Appendix A) and a relevant short story (Appendix B). One letter sound is best to be taught per day along with revision of the previous moves and sounds. The names of the letters can be introduced later so as not to confuse the children.

Secondly, the young learners through various multi-sensory methods learn how to form and write the letters. Such methods include writing in the sand, letter blocks, using play dough, forming the letters in the air or singing songs that combine letters, sound and movements. According to the jolly handbook, a student learns cursive writing as it can improve spelling. Jolly phonics uses the Sassoon Infant typeface (Figure 2) where many of the letters (d, n) have a joining tail at the end to make it easier to transfer into joined-up writing.

74 DIAA	75 DIB	76 DIC	77 DID	78 DIE	79 DIF	80 DIG	81 DIH	82 DIJ
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
83 DIZ	84 DIS	85 DIT	86 DIU	87 DIV	88 DIW	89 DIX	90 DIY	
R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	
91 DZA	92 DZB	93 DZC	94 DZD	95 DZE	96 DZF	97 DZG	98 DZH	99 DZI
Z	[\]	^	_	`	a	
100 DIB	101 DIC	102 DID	103 DIE	104 DIF	105 DIG	106 DIH	107 DIJ	108 DIK
b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	
109 DIA	110 DIB	111 DIC	112 DID	113 DIE	114 DIF	115 DIG	116 DIH	117 DIJ
j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	
118 DIT	119 DIS	120 DIT						
r	s	t						

Figure 2. Sassoon Infant Typeface

Thirdly, learners are taught how to blend the sounds together to read new words. They say each sound separately and then more quickly in order to form the word. In digraphs the children sound out the sound of the digraph and not each letter individually. Fourthly, the process learners are called to master is segmenting, that is, they need to be able to identify the sounds in any given word. This skill improves spelling. Finally, children learn words that do not follow the regular sound pattern, as in *I* or *he*. These words are called tricky words and children should learn them by heart. After the phonics the jolly phonics method

goes on with six stages of grammar, one stage per year to complete basic grammar until the age of 11.

In the relevant webpage there is a section called evidence where there are presented case studies of schools around the world that have used Jolly Phonics and have achieved worthwhile results. These case studies come from the UK, Middle East, Asia, Africa, North America and Australia and from various schools to support the success of this method. Along with the case studies I also found research conducted in these countries that pinpoint the importance of this approach to teaching reading to young learners. Dr Rhona Johnston and Joyce Watson carried out a research in Clackmannanshire, Dr Tommy Mackay in west Dunbartonshire, Dr Marlynne Grant in Bristol, Daniela Caserta in Italy, Sara Rendon in Spain, Dr Pauline Dixon and Dr Chris counihan in India, Dr Lisnawati Ruhaena in Indonesia, Professor Yusawa of Hiroshima University in Japan, and many more researchers in China, Pakistan, Thailand, Ghana, Gambia, Canada, Australia and the USA conducted research that favors the use of Jolly Phonics in young Learners.

A recent study investigated whether the Jolly Phonics method is more useful and effective than other methods of teaching the English language in Nigeria. Jolly Phonics was compared to another method of teaching how to read and learn pronunciation in two different schools with a total of 120 primary school students; one used Jolly Phonics, and the other used another method. The aim of the study was to investigate whether the students of Grade 1 of Primary school (6-7 years old) can read and pronounce words correctly and the influence that Jolly Phonics had on pronunciation. The study concluded that students achieved high results because they learned to read in a humorous and interactive way. In addition, the study proved that the Jolly Phonics is an effective method for all children, even those with learning difficulties, while students managed to acquire a solid base in writing and reading English that will help them in the following school levels, especially in Nigeria where education faces serious challenges. Finally, the study showed that Jolly Phonics is a good method to learn how to read and improve pronunciation as long as children start using it as early as possible and there is continuity (Dansadau and Kagara, 2022).

Undoubtedly, Jolly Phonics is a rather popular and effective method to teach reading. However, researchers have pointed out the lack of materials and lack of teacher

knowledge (Ariati et al., 2018). For this purpose, a current study was carried out and intended to assist teachers on how to develop and improve children’s English literacy skill by using the Jolly Phonics method; the study also provided techniques of how to implement the Jolly Phonics method in the classroom for teaching English. The study took place in a bilingual Kindergarten in Bali and as a research design it used the descriptive qualitative method of observing, documenting, and interviewing the teacher who already had 3 years of experience in teaching through the Jolly Phonics method. The study proposed the following techniques and asked from the teacher to implement these 5 skills in Jolly Phonics: (1) *learning the letter sounds*, (2) *learning letter formation*, (3) *blending-for reading*, (4) *identifying sounds in words-for writing* and (5) *tricky words*, through variety of enjoyable techniques involving children’s sight, sound, and kinesthetic means (Ariati et al., 2018). In more detail, when learning English, the first skill that a student is asked to master is the knowledge of letter sounds. This first skill of *learning the letter sounds* was complemented by certain helpful techniques such as story reading (any sort of story from the Jolly Phonics book where the student enjoyed listening to the words and sounds in English, developing their comprehension skill), song and action (involving simultaneous singing to Jolly Phonics song along with action for the sound) and games (software games to be played in a computer by the children). For the second skill, *learning letter formation*, once the students knew the letter sound they also needed to learn the letter formation, hence the teacher shows the letter example through song or flashcard and writes it on the board. The third skill, *blending-for reading*, starts when the first six letter sounds have been taught by the teacher. This skill needs frequent practice by looking at the letters, saying the sound and hearing the words. With the aid of flashcards, the teacher plans a list of words needed to be blended by the children. By blending, the process of saying individual sounds in a word and then saying them quickly to make the word, the children learn how to blend the sounds together and read them. For the fourth skill, *identifying sounds in words-for writing*, it is necessary for the student's phonological awareness in order to learn to write. Children are expected to listen to the spoken words, identify, and write the sound in that word. A helpful technique that the teacher used was to write the word on the board, slowly rub it and ask for the students to write it on their own. This way the students were given the opportunity to write independently. Finally, *trick words* include irregular words which are difficult to spell. The teacher introduced 2-3 new tricky words per week with the aid of flashcards and the students were asked to create a

sentence with the tricky word. Another technique was a snapping game, where the teacher, again with the aid of flashcards with trick words, spread them on the floor and the students had to snap and say the word. All the above techniques were used by the teacher while teaching English literacy with Jolly Phonics and according to the teachers' data; these techniques were successfully applied and were fruitful as seen by the children's performance. Their English literacy skills were elevated, they knew most of the letter sounds, they remembered the trickiest words, and they were able to blend, read and at the same time write independently on their own. To sum up, this study contribution was mainly to inspire teachers on how to develop and enhance children's early English literacy through Jolly Phonics method and to prove that the implementation of these 5 skills in Jolly Phonics method can be a powerful way to develop and enhance children's English literacy as long as the teacher has carefully planned the teaching process according to the children's needs and abilities (Ariati et al., 2018).

In light of absence in research comparing the effectiveness of different commercially available synthetic phonics methods, in 2010 a study was carried out in England comparing two schools over one year period where one school taught Jolly Phonics and the other taught THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills) to 4 - 5 years old students (Callinan and van der Zee, 2010). The study aimed to monitor reading ability for words and non-words as well as short-term memory ability for words and phonemes. The Jolly Phonics package offered guidance for the first 9 weeks of tuition and then after teaching was determined by the teacher. The program delivered 15-minute sessions by introducing at least one new phoneme per day and children were tutored in 42 of the 44 phonemes in English and receive instructions in 46 of the most common graphemes. On the other hand, THRASS offered guidance for the first 3 years of tuition and the program used pictures in relation to 2, 3, and 4 letter graphemes. The program contained 10 stages and was delivered in 15-minute sessions each day, while children received instructions for all 44 English phonemes and 120 of the most common graphemes. During lessons teachers with the aid of flashcards helped children to identify phonemes while showing different possible spellings. Finally, the program initially used synthetic principles and then analytic strategies. To prove whether the phonics lessons indeed used the features associated with the phonics programs, a synthetic phonics program checklist was used. The results of the study showed that reading ability improved

more in the Jolly Phonics School compared to the THRASS School. In fact, the Jolly Phonics school made greater gains in both word and non-word reading tasks compared to the THRASS school. On the other hand, children’s improvements in their short-term verbal memory skills could not be linked to the method of instruction they received. Finally, this study also observed the parameter of gender. Since girls perform better in reading tasks than boys (Brooks et al., 1996); the researchers anticipated that females would score better than males on both reading and short-term memory measures. However, no effects of gender on reading ability were found (Callinan and van der Zee, 2010). The researchers explained this result with previous observations focusing on synthetic phonics tuition which proposed that the synthetic method removes the variability found in reading scores between males and females (McGuinness, 2005).

Summing up, after stressing the importance of the reading skill in the child’s second language acquisition, I went through three prevalent methods whose proponents claim that they facilitate the student’s progress and success in learning efficiently a language. The first is the phonics approach based on teaching the letter and sound connection, second the Whole-word approach or Analytic phonics, based on sight words and thirdly, the Language Experience method that is based on learner’s personal experiences.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1 Learners’ profiles

For the purposes of this dissertation, it was decided to conduct a research into two groups of EFL students. The participants were 22 students (10 boys and 12 girls) aged 7, studying English in year 2, in two primary schools in the suburbs of Heraklion in Crete, one school located by the seaside and the other in the mountains. Both of them are schools that are implementing the PEAP programme for the instruction of the English language in primary schools in Greece. In the school by the beach I find the experimental group where phonics is taught whereas the school in the mountains is the control group that is taught English based on the PEAP programme.

The Greek acronym ΠΕΑΠ (PEAP) stands for *προγραμμα εκμαθησης της Αγγλικης σε “Πρωιμη Παιδικη Ηλικια”* that is English for young Learners. About fifteen years ago experts from the Greek Universities, research associates of the RCeL (Κέντρο Έρευνας για

τη Διδασκαλία Ξένων Γλωσσών και την Αξιολόγηση Γλωσσομάθειας) and teachers from Greece and abroad cooperated in order to produce material suitable for young learners, six and seven years old, as the English language was taught at that time from the third grade and on. This project was carried out within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the Greek Ministry of Education, through the Cohesion Policy 2007-13 National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRF). The purpose of the programme as stated by Dendrinis (Dendrinis, 2013) is to develop young pupils' social literacies through English. Furthermore the programme's instructional materials aim at enhancing children's creativity, positive attitude towards languages and language learning and additionally an initial awareness of linguistic and cultural difference.

The first group, the experimental group, consists of fifteen pupils, 7 boys and 8 girls and it has been exposed to the phonics instruction since grade 1 for two hours per week continuing up to grade 2. The basic material used for their instruction was the Jolly Phonics series, which is based on the synthetic phonics approach. During this period, the students were introduced to reading texts which are designed to accompany and facilitate the synthetic phonics instruction and mostly consist of known phonemes that the students have been taught. Most of the children of this group have also been attending evening language schools in Grade 2.

The control group of seven students, four girls and three boys, has been taught the English language through the PEAP material that the Greek ministry of education has approved for the first two grades of the primary school. The children are taught to recognize and read whole words. Emphasis is given in the communicative aspect of the language and the children learn by doing and playing. Teaching the letter sounds is not part of the curriculum and it largely depends on the teacher whether they will be taught. None of the students in this group attended an evening language school or has been through private tutoring in Grade 2 or before. Taking into consideration the group dynamics of this team, I can tell that they appear more indifferent and reluctant to participate in class than the other group and their performance in the mother tongue is low as well. As an instructor I took into consideration these factors and tried to promote group work as a means to lower their anxiety and keep their attention for longer than usual. That entailed more group play, relaxation and reading books even at the playground if the weather allowed it.

In grade 3, all learners are instructed through magic book 2, the book approved by the Greek ministry of education for the third grade of the Greek primary school. The pre-unit of this book introduces the alphabet in a random order and there is no explicit reference to synthetic phonics and their instruction. The students are introduced to some of the 42 sounds and their correspondence to graphemes. Following the letters, the book presents different stories that are accompanied by songs and the students can listen or read out loud.

2.1.1 Teacher’s Profile

The teacher’s mother tongue is Greek, and she has been teaching English as a foreign language in the Greek public school for over fifteen years. She has graduated from the Department of English language and literature of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her experience in phonics comes from seminars she has attended and as far as the Jolly Phonics programme is concerned, her knowledge comes from personal research online in the program’s webpage and the relevant handbook. Concerning her relationship with the participants, although the instructor has not met any of the students before the first grade they felt quite comfortable and willing to cooperate during the whole time.

2.2 The Study

The aim of this study is to assess oral reading accuracy and fluency of Young Greek Learners exposed to phonics based instruction and in particular systematic synthetic phonics instruction. The oral reading accuracy refers to the total amount of words that the learner reads accurately.

2.2.1 The research questions

The research questions posed in this dissertation are the following:

1. To what extent are learners exposed to sequential and explicit phonics instruction more accurate readers than those that are not taught any phonics?

2. Are learners that received systematic phonics instruction able to decode quickly and easily words and sentences than those that are not taught any phonics?

2.2.2 Hypothesis

Based on the Rose Report and relevant data I formed the hypothesis that the learners that receive systematic synthetic phonics instruction from an early age will attain better reading results in both oral reading fluency and accuracy.

2.2.3 Implementation of materials

The experimental group was taught at grade 1 and 2 through the jolly phonics method. According to the Jolly Phonics webpage and teachers that have been using it this approach is a fun and child centered approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics. It is a multi-sensory method accompanied by songs and actions for each of the 42 letter sounds along with realia that prove to be really motivating for children. The children learn over 40 of the English sounds, each sound with an accompanying picture, action, song and tune. Furthermore, apart from the stuffed toys that the program suggests, the children were given a stuffed animal or a musical instrument each time relevant to the letter that was taught. They were also asked to trace the letter they were introduced to. Apart from the program's songs there were also certain letter songs that were found on the internet to enrich the whole teaching experience.

2.2.4 Assessment

In order to measure each learner's reading accuracy and fluency the pupils were given the Revised Burt Reading Test (1974) to define the number of words they can pronounce correctly. The experimental group was also tested through the Jolly Phonics Readers that follow instruction of the letter sounds. After they were taught the letters and how they blend, they were given the gradable readers and asked to read them aloud. The gradable readers follow the tuition of each of the nine sets of letter sounds and contain words that are formed from the known letters and the relevant tricky words, which sound differently than expected. Finally, a questionnaire was given to the young learners at the end of the course based on the likert scale to measure their overall satisfaction with the phonics programme. The results were quite encouraging, as the children scored more positive answers in general than negative (Appendix G).

2.2.5 The Burt Test

The Burt reading test was introduced in 1974 by Cyril Burt, a well known British psychologist. Burt was also known for his studies in intelligence testing and the use of statistics in analyzing data from psychological experiments. The test has been revised and standardized over the years.

The test is suitable for use with children aged six years and older. It is composed of 110 words presented in groups of ten and graded in order of difficulty. The child is tested individually in a quiet and free from distractions place, reading the words from left to right until it has made ten mistakes in succession. The number of properly read words defines the reading age of the learner. The highest score is a reading age of 14.3. The Burt test is not a teaching method so the child should not be previously taught of any of the relevant words. It is also easy to administer. Along with other information the results from the test could help the teacher form an approximate estimate of the child's reading level and needs.

Apart from its usefulness for the assessment of the learners' abilities the Burt Reading Test has certain limitations. Due to the standard vocabulary it cannot be taken more than once to track the learner's progress, as the student may become familiar with the words after taking it once. Furthermore, it evaluates vocabulary despite the fact that the reading ability is not entirely based on vocabulary that the learner might not know and is somewhat dated, as in the word 'microscopical' that has been replaced with the word 'microscopic.. Thus, the test can be less accurate than when used in the 1970s, so the teacher must be flexible and treat the results with caution.

In my case, in grade 1 all learners have not been previously taught English in or outside school so their level of accuracy and fluency in English is nonexistent. Consequently, they were given the Burt test at the end of grade 2. The experimental group was also tested through the readers in year 1 and 2. For the Burt test, they were tested individually in a quiet room. The time given for the test was not stated and the learners were free to take their time. I tried to create a relaxed environment and they were told that they were allowed to make mistakes as what we were doing was to diagnose what we know and what we need to do next. The Jolly Phonics gradable readers were given in class and all the

students read aloud at their own pace. I also explained to them that they should not worry about making mistakes.

In order to decide whether Jolly Phonics has helped at all with the learners transition from the second to the third grade I interviewed the teacher who took the experimental class in the third grade. The interview was one to one and semi-structured. The teacher was asked a few questions about her own methodology and type of instruction and then questions about the learners. I asked her if she saw the learners recognizing letters, words ,and in general their overall attitude towards the English lesson. She replied that there was a small difference in performance in respect to other years that she had been teaching the third grade and comparing to children that were taught based on the Greek curriculum. The learners recognized many letters and had a positive attitude towards the English language.

Chapter 3. Results

In grade 1 the learners have had previously little if any contact with the English language. After posing in class and in both the experimental and the control group the question of whether they know English their answers were negative. I also asked them a few more words, like cinema, but they found it difficult using previous knowledge to answer what the words' meaning was. The children of the present study were not taught English in kindergarten at all. For this reason I believed it was unnecessary to administer any kind of test at the beginning and my results come from grade 2. The Burt test was administered as a post test in order to realize the learners' progress in the second language. The data from the testing exhibit the reading age scores from the post-test measurements. Figure 3 shows the post-test reading age of the young learners that belong to the experimental group. The control group got the lowest possible score as none of the children managed to go past line one of the test, that is to say correctly more than ten words consecutively or recognize

more letters. Their score was three to four words at most achieved by only one learner and the rest barely got one or two.

For the experimental group, the lowest reading age they achieved after they were taught English using Jolly Phonics for almost two years was 5 years and 7 months. The highest reading age was recorded at 7 years and 3 months. Figure 3 shows the range of the number of years of the learners in the Burt test and how much they were able to improve in their reading skills after they have been taught with the Jolly Phonics method.

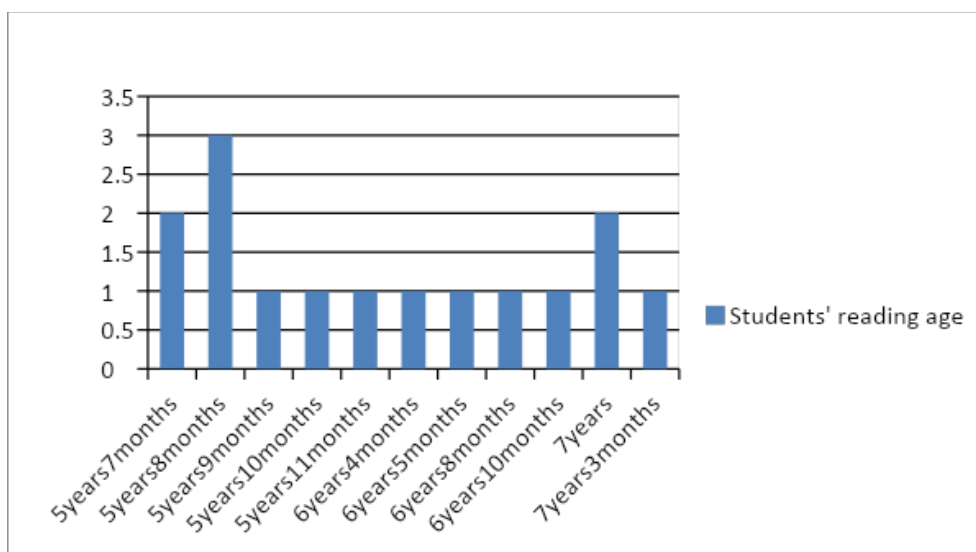


Figure 3: Range of learners' post test reading age

As far as the gradable readers are concerned, the first reader the learners were tested to was ‘ANTS’. This reader contains vocabulary formed from the first set of six letter-sounds s, a, t, p, i, n. In order to establish a non-threatening environment for the learners I told them that we would try together to read a story for fun. We sat on the floor on a carpet in a semi-circle and each learner was asked to read a page as the concept of reading the whole book would be intimidating for them. When the book would be over the learner whose turn it was to read would start from the beginning. Reading the story would test their ability to identify and blend sounds in order to form unknown vocabulary that was translated for them in Greek. All of the learners managed to read their page of the story, though four of them needed help in verifying the letter sound they saw either from the class or from me.

In order to represent the learners’ emotions and attitudes towards the instruction of the English language through the Jolly Phonics Approach, I used a four-point Likert scale. A Likert scale is a psychometric scale commonly used in research to represent people’s opinions with the use of a continuum from poor to good. I assigned each response a point value, from 1 to 4, with the use of adverbs ‘never’ to ‘always’. Learners responses were mostly positive , revealing a well-received lesson.

Chapter 4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion

In 2006, Rose in an effort to address the literacy underachievement issue in the UK proposes a synthetic phonics approach as an effective solution. The government decided to adopt the proposal and hence the approach was implemented in schools. The synthetic phonics approach highlights the importance of children’s understanding of the connection between sounds and letter symbols in order to become better readers. Since then there has been an ongoing research in favor and against the use of phonics as a successful means of instruction at a young age. Approaches like the whole –word or the language experience method stress the usefulness of sight-reading the vocabulary on the one hand or personalized vocabulary and learning for each learner on the other hand.

The research presented in this current dissertation examined the efficacy of a commercial synthetic phonics method in a child’s reading struggle, especially a learner that does not have any other kind of contact with the target language through private tutoring, the internet, friends or family; than school. I compared two groups of young learners at the second grade, one taught by the school curriculum and the other by Jolly Phonics, the synthetic phonics method. I found that learners who were taught through the synthetic phonics approach showed greater reading ability, confidence in themselves and love for the foreign language. The results indicate that, most of those children became better learners and able readers.

The data of this research seem to be in line with the hypothesis that a synthetic phonics approach can help young learners become efficient readers. The results support the claims of Rose and many researchers after him believing in the implementation of synthetic phonics in education. All data collected, that is, the questionnaires, interviews, and observations of the experimental group reveal that there is a progress in all learners in reading simple words, known and unknown, in contrast to the control group that fails to become fully engaged in the didactic process throughout the year, remember and read words or sentences.

4.2 Pedagogical implications

The key question that I address in this dissertation is whether the use of synthetic phonics in class can help struggling learners in the Greek primary school become more confident in the process of learning a new language, come to like learning this new language and finally begin mastering it. The findings from my analysis suggest that learners do become more confident in learning the new language, they do seem to like it but there are different levels of mastery and reading competence, according to their data analysis.

The experiment provides a new insight into the way a teacher can bridge the inevitable cognitive gap from the second to the third grade existing in the Greek primary school reality and synthetic phonics appears to play an important role in this. Yet, the synthetic phonics method alone is not enough to provide excellent reading results for all learners and my results demonstrate that I need more than one approach in order to help my learners become fluent readers.

Recently, the English language has been introduced in the Greek kindergarten. The programme ‘teacher training for the introduction of english in preschool education (EAN) is implemented in the context of lifelong learning. The programme aims to support the introduction of the English language through specially designed educational scenarios and creative activities for preschool children. Since most commercial phonics methods have been designed to be used in kindergarten in UK or elsewhere (USA, India, and Africa), a synthetic phonics approach in combination with the existing EAN programme could be

used in the Greek primary school enabling young learners to become familiar with the new language they are learning. Children will be able to master the highly constrained skills (Paris, 2005) , the letter knowledge, the phonics and the concepts of print and will have more time to assimilate them before moving on to the primary school.

In light of these new developments in regard with the introduction of the English language in preschool, PEAP should be revised as many of its basic themes that are taught in the first grade are also taught in the kindergarten. Instead of the kindergarten, phonics could be introduced in the first grade where young learners have already had a first contact with the language and its sounds and it will be even easier for them to make the necessary connections between the phonemes and the graphemes.

4.3 Limitations

One of the most salient limitations of this work is the small number of young learners that participated in this study, giving us less reliable and valid results than that of a larger number of participants. A major limitation of this research was the time allocated for the English language for the first and second grade which is two hours per week whereas the programme suggests teaching a letter sound per day. This meant that a lot of time passed from the demonstration of the one letter sound to the other, thus many of the children forgot the sound. Revision was more than necessary. Furthermore, more time was needed to complete each stage of this method and everything from letters to blending; segmenting or tricky words took more than a year to be completed. Another issue that is more obvious in the first grade is transfer from the mother tongue. It was especially difficult for young learners and mostly confusing remembering the sounds of the letters 'p' which was confused with the Greek letter sound 'π' and 'n' which was often pronounced 'η'. Yet, with constant revision in class the proper sounds were learnt.

In addition, as they were easily losing interest half way through the original story of this programme, I replaced the original stories with stories that I invented by myself as the main character and narrated most of the story in Greek, apart from the vocabulary I needed them to know in English. This change proved successful. The children could relate better to the context of the story as it was culturally specific and the Greek language made it easier for them to follow the plot and engage in the story. The quarantine due to the corona

virus was also a major setback to children's progress. A child learns better if it is actively engaged with its environment or even better play and interacts with other children. Actively engaging with one's environment means observing things, watching faces, responding to voices, listening to sounds and mimicking them. In the corona virus era the children as well as the teachers were introduced to digital platforms as a means to continue with their teaching and learning. Despite the fact that the learners did not lose contact with the teacher or the lessons offered, they were deprived of the crucial interaction with their classmates or their teacher, which is really beneficial for young learners. In my case, they could not touch or play with the realia the lesson entailed or their classmates. As a consequence while they were responding to and followed online lessons, their working memory skills were not developed.

The final limitation that I encountered had to do with the work that had to be done at home. Parents should revise the letter sounds at home and help their children but that proved quite problematic, as many parents didn't have the time to do so or they didn't know how to do so in contrast to the parents living in England that had the knowledge and could help at home with the letter sounds.

4.4 Recommendations for further research

The current study can be seen as a first step in bridging the gap from the second grade to the third of primary school, in a meaningful and helpful way for all learners especially struggling ones. However, the results of this study should be treated with caution due to the limitation of the time and the small sampling size. For further research in this area it could prove useful to get a larger sample extending from kindergarten through second grade. New data including learners who were taught English in the kindergarten are also needed as pupils go to the primary school having a first contact with the English language at the kindergarten.

4.5 Conclusion

Discovering a discrepancy in class between learners that were able to read at a good pace and learners that were struggling just to recognize a word in print I decided to implement a phonics program in class. Taking a closer look at the bibliography, I realized it was vast and mixed. On one side there are proponents of the phonics approach to teaching reading

skills and on the other side researchers that dismiss the usefulness of phonics at a young age as a means to better reading results. On one hand there are researchers that favor synthetic phonics, that is learning the sounds of the letters first, and on the other hand researchers opting for analytic phonics, based on sight words. This 'war' seems endless; yet there are other researchers that support a combination of methods in order to help the young learners in their reading acquisition journey.

In this dissertation, I decided to experiment with teaching through a systematic synthetic phonics approach, Jolly Phonics. I tested two classes, one by using this method and the other by using the Greek state curriculum to see whether there will be any cognitive or behavioral difference at the end of the second grade. I assessed the learners with questionnaires, observation in class and with an interview with the new teacher that took over the class that was taught through Synthetic Phonics to see whether this new method was worthwhile and could help the struggling learners become more active and participate in class afterwards.

The results were encouraging. My observation showed that the learners were excited each time to meet the new toy, to know its name in English and play with it. Sometimes they even talked to the stuffed animals that for my purposes were 'real', in English. Some learners wanted to write down the words that they were pronouncing. Despite the problems that I encountered, like the language transfer or shyness of some learners, the learners managed to overcome them to a greater or lesser degree and gain from this course. The satisfaction questionnaire showed that the positive feelings were more and stronger than the negative ones. The teacher that took the experimental group at the third grade was satisfied with their performance.

Unfortunately, certain limitations arose such as the limited time available for the course and the inability of the Greek parents to help their children with the phonics of a foreign language. Then, the corona virus pandemic was an obstacle as children could not play with the toys or with each other freely. Furthermore, in regard to the data, my sampling group was small so the validity, the reliability or the triangulation of the data is imperfect. Further research is necessary, to ascertain and confirm the usefulness of synthetic phonics at school.

In this study, the effects of a synthetic phonics approach to ameliorate young learners' reading accuracy and fluency were examined. The initial hypothesis that synthetic phonics can lead to better results at reading was confirmed to a satisfactory extent. Therefore, I realize that the systematic synthetic phonics approach, in my case Jolly Phonics, has helped children to improve their reading skills and eventually become better and willing readers. Additionally, children's transition to the third grade became easier and smoother. The Jolly Phonics approach is used throughout the world in countries that have English as an official language or some others that do not have English as an official language. In all these countries it was apparent that the synthetic phonics method improved the learner's level of English.

Considering my research, I also saw that there is a difference between children that were taught through Jolly Phonics and the children that followed the standard curriculum. This systematic tuition of sounds helped Greek young learners move to the next grade better equipped to deal with the course and its requirements. Including synthetic phonics in the Greek curriculum along with the other objectives of the course could prove really helpful for learners, even more so if this happened in a more systematic base.

References

- Albert, E. (1995). Why Does Phonics Work? : Process vs. Declaration. *Viewpoints*, 1-6.
- Ariati, NPP., Padmadewi, NN., and Suarnajaya. I.W. (2018). Jolly phonics: effective strategy for enhancing children english literacy. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 42, 00032–00038. doi:10.1051/shsconf/20184200032
- Audina, N., Ma'muroh, S., and Ulfa, R.N. (2022). The Advantages of the Phonics Method for Early Childhood Reading Skills. *Journal of English Education*, 2(2), 130-137. doi: 10.30998/jedu.v2i2.6666
- Beck, M.L.B. (2007). Applied Linguistics/Learning to Read in ESL. *Literatura y Lingüística*, 18, 233-251.
- Besner, D., and Coltheart, M. (1979). Ideographic and alphabetic processing in skilled reading of English, *Neuropsychologia*, 17(5), 467–472. doi:10.1016/0028-3932(79)90053-8.
- Brooks, G., Pugh, A. and Schagen, I. (1996). Reading performance at 9. Slough: NFER Nat. Foundation for Educational Research/Open University.
- Bruner, J. (1996). The culture of education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Callinan, C., and van der Zee, E. (2010). A comparative study of two methods of synthetic phonics instruction for learning how to read: Jolly Phonics and THRASS. *European Physical Education Review*. 34. 21-31. doi:10.53841/bpsper.2010.34.1.21.
- Clark, MM. (2007). The Rose Report in context. What will be its impact on the teaching of reading? *Education Journal*, 97, 27-29.
- Clark, C., and Rumbold K. (2006). Reading for Pleasure: A Research Overview. National Literacy Trust. Buckingham Gate, London.
- Cunningham, A. E., and Stanovich, K. E. (1998). What reading does for the mind. *American Educator*, 22(1), 8-15.
- Dansadau, A.I., and Kagara, A.Z. (2022). Jolly phonics as alternative technique to acquire English language pronunciation by Hausa learners in Sokoto and Zamfara states, Nigeria.

International Journal of Research in Education and Sustainable Development, 2(8), 16-31.

Dendrinou, B. (2013). The PEAP programme: English for Young Learners IN THE Greek Primary School. Retrieved at : <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/en/articles/programme> .

Dixon, P., Tooley, J., and Hunt, A. (2011). Synthetic phonics in low-income schools in Hyderabad, India.

Available from: <http://jolly2.s3.amazonaws.com/research/jph%20research%20Hyderabad.pdf> [Accessed 10/02/2023]

Dolch, E. W. (1936). A Basic Sight Vocabulary. *The Elementary School Journal*, 36(6), 456–460.doi:10.1086/457353

Dorr, R.E. (2006). Something Old Is New Again: Revisiting Language Experience. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(2), 138–146.

Ginsberg, A. (2000). And the War Continues... Phonics vs. Sight-Reading. *Information Analyses*, (070), Opinion Papers (120).

Glazzard, J., and Stones, S. (2020). A Rigorous Approach to the Teaching of Reading? Systematic Synthetic Phonics in Initial Teacher Education. *Front. Educ.* 5:587155.

Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge University Press.

Grabe, W. P., & Stoller, F. L. (2013). *Teaching and researching: Reading*. Routledge.

Grabe, W. (2014). Key issues in L2 reading development. In *Proceedings of the 4th CELC Symposium for English Language Teachers-Selected Papers* (pp. 8-18).

Ingram, D. (2002). The measurement of whole-word productions. *Journal of Child Language*, 29(4), –211.doi:10.1017/s0305000902005275

Jolly learning. (2023). Jolly Phonics. Available from: <https://www.jollylearning.co.uk/jolly-phonics/> [Accessed: 10/02/2023].

Johnston, RS., and Watson, J.E. (2003). Accelerating Reading and Spelling with Synthetic Phonics: A Five Year Follow Up. *Insight. Research, Economic and Corporate Strategy* Unit. 4, 1-13.

Johnston, RS., McGeown, S., and Watson, J.E. (2012). Long-term effects of synthetic versus analytic phonics teaching on the reading and spelling ability of 10. *Reading and writing*, 25(6), 1365-1384. doi: 10.1007/s11145-011-9323-x.

Juel, Connie (1996). Beginning Reading. In R. Barr, M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, and P.D. Pearson (Eds.) *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume II*. Lawrence Erlbatun Associates, 759-788. doi: 10.4324/9781315206349.

Kehoe, M. (2015). Acquisition of velars: A whole-word approach. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics*, 29(12), 873–908. doi:10.3109/02699206.2015.1062559

Krashen, Stephen D. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Prentice-Hall International, 1988.

Küçükoğlu, H. (2013). Improving Reading Skills Through Effective Reading Strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 709–714. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.113.

Loyd, S.,(1992). *The Phonics Handbook: A handbook for teaching reading, writing and spelling*. United Kingdom: Jolly Learning, Ltd.

Machin, S. McNally, S. and Viarengo, M. (2017). Changing how literacy is taught: evidence on synthetic phonics. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 10(2), 217-241. doi: 10.1257/pol.20160514.

McGuinness, D. (2005). *Language development and learning to read: The scientific study of how language development affects reading skill*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Paris, S.G. (2005). Reinterpreting the development of reading skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 40(2), 184–202. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.40.2.3

Pottelsberghe, L.(2019). *Ants: Jolly Phonics Orange Readers*. Retrieved from <https://play.google.com>

Rose, J. (2006). Independent review of the teaching of early reading final report. London: UK Department for Education and Skills. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf> [Accessed: 6/02/2023]

Schmitt, B.H., Pan, Y., and Tavassoli, N.T. (1994). Language and Consumer Memory: The Impact of Linguistic Differences between Chinese and English. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 419–431. doi:10.1086/209408.

Stahl, S. A.; Miller, P. D. (1989). Whole Language and Language Experience Approaches for Beginning Reading: A Quantitative Research Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(1), 87–116. doi: 10.3102/00346543059001087.

Stainthorp, Rhona (2020). A national intervention in teaching phonics: A case study from England. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 37 (2), 1–9. doi: 10.1017/edp.2020.14.

Tsiadimos, N.S. (2015) Oral reading fluency and phonics-based introduction to literacy for young EFL learners. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 77–93. doi:10.26262/jal.v0i30.8300

Vihman, M., and Croft, W. (2007). Phonological development: Toward a “radical” templatic phonology. *Linguistics*, 45, 683–725. doi: 10.1515/LING.2007.021.

Vihman, M., and Velleman, S. (2000). The construction of a first phonology. *Phonetica*, 57, 255–266. doi:10.1159/000028478.

Wagner, R.K., and Torgesen, J.K. (1987). The nature of phonological processing and its causal role in the acquisition of reading skills. *Psychological Bulletin*, 101(2), 192–212. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.101.2.192.

Waterson, N. (1971). Child phonology: a prosodic view. *Journal of Linguistics*, 7(2), 179–211. doi: 10.1017/S0022226700002917.

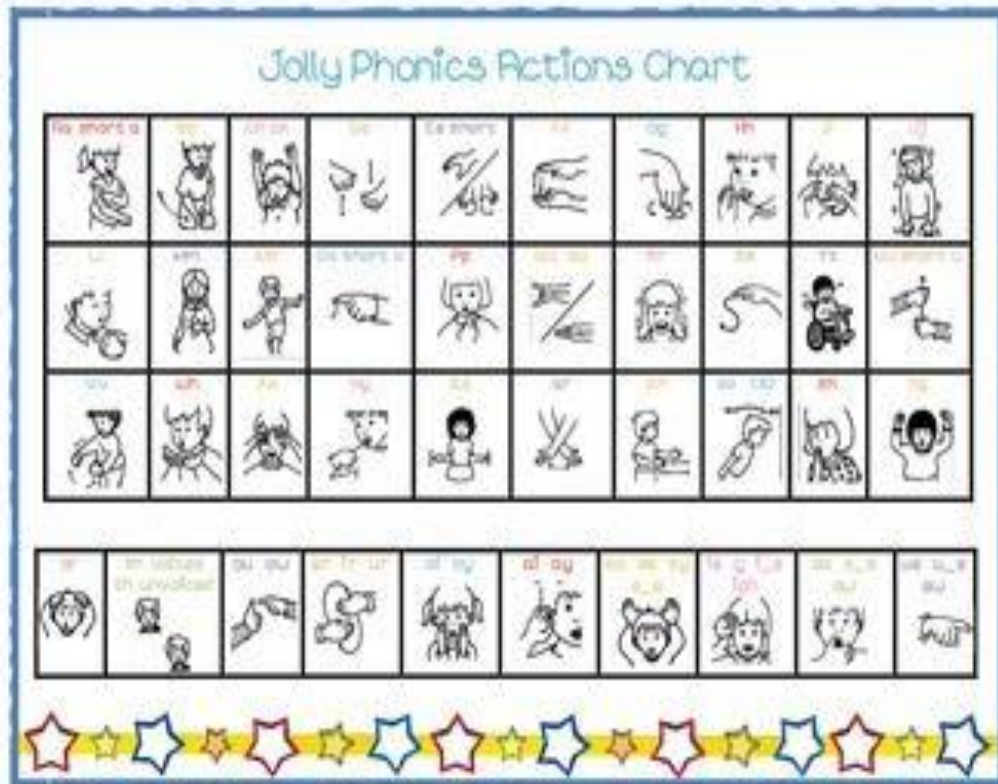
Wrightstone, J.W. (1944). Evaluation of the Experiment with the Activity Pro Gram in the New York City Elementary Schools. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 38(4), 252–257.

Wrightstone, J.W. (1951). Research Related to Experience Records and Basal Readers. *The Reading Teacher*, (5)5-6.

Wyse, D., and Bradbury, A. (2022). Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination of robust research evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for

teaching phonics and reading. *Review of Education*, 10:e3314, 1-53. doi:
10.1002/rev3.3314

Appendix A: “Jolly Phonics actions”



Youtube link of a video demonstrating the actions:

<https://youtu.be/yVvry9jpVjI>

Appendix B: “Jolly Phonics letters s,a,t stories”

GROUP 1 STORIES

S



It is a sunny morning, and Sam is taking his dog, Samson, for a walk. They like to walk down to the pond. Sam looks around as they walk along. He sees a toadstool, a red and yellow caterpillar, and a blackbird on her nest. When they get to the pond, they spend some time watching the fish swim around. After a while, Samson goes off and snuffles around in the grass. He finds a stick, which he brings back to Sam. He barks at Sam, and Sam throws the stick for Samson to fetch. Samson runs around, looking for the stick in the grass. Suddenly, Samson starts barking. “Woof, woof, woof!” Sam skips over to see what Samson has found. “Ssssss!” In front of Samson is a spotty snake. It is rearing up and is hissing loudly. Sam grabs hold of Samson, and the snake slithers quickly away.

a



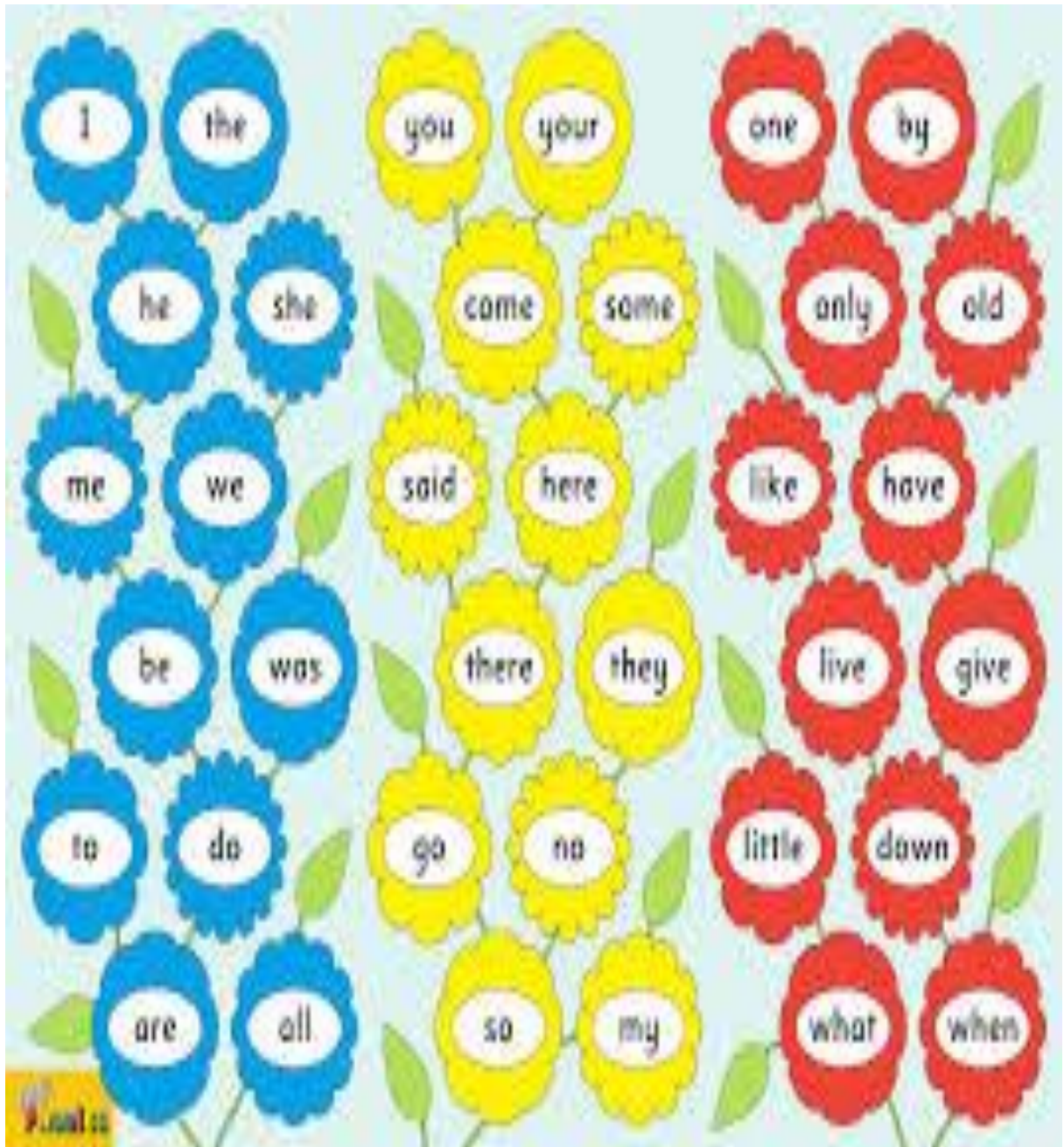
The Smith family is going on a picnic. The children help their mother pack the food. Adam packs the apples. Annie helps to make the jam sandwiches. At last, they are ready and set off for the picnic. When they arrive, they sit down, spread out a cloth and lay the food on it. Annie rubs her arm. “Something is tickling me,” she says. “Something is tickling me, too,” says Adam, eating his apple. Annie shouts “a, a, a ants!” They all look at Annie and see some ants crawling up her arm. They all jump up. There are ants all over the picnic cloth! “Oh dear,” says Dad. “We must have put our cloth over an ants’ nest.” They pack up their things and move to a nicer spot.

t



Tom and Tamiko have been watching an important tennis match on television. There was a crowd waiting for the match to begin. The players came on to the court and the crowd clapped. The match began, and they hit the ball to each other, “t, t, t.” The people in the crowd turned their heads from side to side, watching the ball. Now Tom and Tamiko are outside, pretending to be the tennis players at the match. They hit the tennis ball to each other, “t, t, t”. Some animals among the tulips are watching them play. They turn their heads from side to side, watching the ball, just like the crowd at the match.

Appendix C: "Jolly Phonics some tricky words"



Appendix D: “Burt Reading Test”

Burt Reading Test (1974) Revised

to	is	up	he	at
for	my	sun	one	of
big	some	his	or	an
went	boys	that	girl	water
just	day	wet	pot	things
no	told	love	now	sad
nurse	carry	quickly	village	scramble
journey	terror	return	twisted	shelves
beware	explorer	known	projecting	tongue
serious	domineer	obtain	belief	luncheon

Appendix E: "Interview"

Interview questions

1. Do you teach children the letters of the alphabet and in specific the letter sounds?
2. How do you teach the sounds?
3. Have you ever made your own resources to teach the letter sounds?
4. Could you tell me your opinion on the performance of the students in class? Were they able to recognize the alphabet letters? Their sounds? Could they read or recognize English words?
5. What was their attitude towards the English class?

Appendix F: "ANTS Reader"

General Fiction

Ants

Jolly Phonics

Orange Level Readers

Level 2

Group 1: Ants
 Group 2: Fish and Cat's Paw
 Group 3: Girl in Red Coat
 Group 4: Jack and Jill
 Group 5: A Flea on a Flea
 Group 6: An Owl in a Nest
 Group 7: Mummy's Garden

Jolly Phonics

Jolly Phonics Readers are fully decodable books for new readers.

These Orange Level Readers have a very carefully controlled vocabulary and are specifically designed for children who are learning to read and write with Jolly Phonics. The text in the first three books uses only decodable regular words made up from the first group of letter sounds; the text in the next three books uses only the first and second groups of letter sounds; and so on, so that the text builds up cumulatively. The first three books in this set also include a small number of 'tricky' words (frequently used words that are not fully decodable at this stage).

Fast type is used for any silent letters, such as the *wh* in *gone*.

Comprehension questions and discussion topics are included at the end of the book. These ensure that children are not only able to read the text, but also get meaning from the stories.

This book contains the following:

Letter Sound Groups	Tricky Words
a a i i y y	i
c c k k n n d	the
g g u u l l s s	she
t t j j w w e e o o	he
l l o o ng n ne en	me
q q x x h h th th	we
r r u u er er or or	be

All of the letter sounds and tricky words used in this book are also shown on the front inside cover. These can be used as a quick practice activity before starting the book.

Jolly Learning Ltd
 11 Longwood Park Road, London, SE11 1AB, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7600 0000
 www.jollylearning.co.uk

Youtube video on the ANTS story:
<https://youtu.be/6u064spz8To>

Appendix G: "Likert scale questionnaire"





















































ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ

ΗΛΙΚΙΑ

ΑΓΟΡΙ

ΚΟΡΙΤΣΙ

ΒΑΛΕ ΣΕ ΚΥΚΛΟ ΤΟ ΠΡΟΣΩΠΑΚΙ ΠΟΥ ΔΕΙΧΝΕΙ ΠΩΣ ΝΙΩΘΕΙΣ

	Πάντα	Πολλές φορές	μερικές φορές	Ποτέ
1. Μου αρέσει το σχολείο				
2. Νιώθω ασφαλής όταν είμαι στο σχολείο				
3. Μου αρέσουν οι δάσκαλοί μου				
4. Μαθαίνω πολλά πράγματα στο σχολείο				
5. Μπορώ να συμμετέχω σε όλες τις δραστηριότητες				
6. Μαθαίνω πολλά διασκεδαστικά πράγματα στα μαθήματα				
7. Όταν διαβάζω μια λέξη στα αγγλικά ξεχωρίζω τους ήχους της.				
8. Μπορώ να διαβάζω λέξεις γνωστές που έχω μάθει στα αγγλικά				
9. Μπορώ να διαβάζω λέξεις άγνωστες στα αγγλικά				
10. Μου αρέσει να διαβάζω ιστορίες στα αγγλικά				
11. Μου αρέσει να παίζω με παιχνίδια στο μάθημα των αγγλικών				
12. Μου αρέσει να παίζω με τους φίλους μου παιχνίδια στο μάθημα των αγγλικών				
13. Μου αρέσει να μαθαίνω αγγλικά				

Author’s Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.