

Phonics Approach in English Teaching in China from 2011 to 2020

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ABSTRACT

Phonics has been regarded as an effective method to help primary English learners to understand the relationship between English alphabetic writing and their sound patterns. In this research, the writers searched the website at www.cnki.net, collected 113 academic articles relevant to the teaching practice of using phonics approach to teach English learners in China during 2011-2020. Through data analysis, it is found that since 2005, phonics approach has gained great popularity in English teaching practice in China, especially in primary English teaching. Phonics approach can help to improve students vocabulary and pronunciation greatly. It is also found that there is no uniform process of teaching Phonics among English teachers.

Keywords: *Phonetic approach, China, Primary English teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Phonics is a kind of teaching method for developing English learners' awareness of the relationship between alphabetic writing and their sound patterns.

Phonics has been defined as "an approach to, or type of, reading instruction that is intended to promote the discovery of the alphabetic principle, the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes, and phonological decoding" (Scarborough & Brady, 2002).

From the beginning of 20th century, phonics teaching method has been applied widely among most English-speaking countries for primary English teaching, especially in teaching reading and writing. Salman applied phonics in teaching English reading for seventh graders, and the findings are that phonics approach helped students in seventh grade significantly in their English reading. (Salman, 2019) Price-Mohr and Price did a survey of primary schools in England. They found that synthetic phonics approach is beneficial for both girl students and boy students. As for boy students, the mixed synthetic phonics approach seems to be a better way to learning reading. (Price-Mohr, 2017) Naning Tri Wahyunin, et al did the

research about combining phonics approach with story books to improve the effectiveness of English reading classes and improve the students' participation in language learning. They found that this method is effective for students. Students are keen and eager to follow such method. (Naning Tri Wahyuni, et al, 2016) Flynn et al. argue that teacher training for phonics is very important. They devised a training model of phonics teacher training and 584 practitioners attended this program. They found that such training was beneficial for teachers to teach phonics more effectively. (Flynn, et al 2021) Campbell did an investigation, trying to find out how teachers' beliefs and practices on phonics influenced their choosing the types of phonics approaches. (Campbell, 2020) Laura Tse and Tom Nicholson did a study with the purpose of improving children's literacy achievement who were with lower socioeconomic status (SES) in New Zealand schools. They chose 96 students. They found that enhancing Big Book reading with phonics, students made significant progress in word reading, reading comprehension, spelling and phonemic awareness. (Tse & Nicholson, 2014)

In China, the teaching practice of phonics has also been paid more and more attention. In February 2005, Lan Huafang published the article entitled *Phonics English and Children's Cognition*,

which can be regarded as the first academic article discussing the effectiveness of phonics approach in English teaching in China (Lan, 2005). Since the beginning of the 21st century, teaching materials of Phonics from Britain and America have been introduced to China. Among them were *Oxford Phonics World*, *Jolly Phonics from Britain and Hooked on Phonics: Learn to Read*, *Uncle Craig's Phonics*, etc. The using of these textbooks has also promoted the application of Phonics in English teaching in China. This paper summarizes the practice of Phonics in Chinese English teaching in the decade of 2011-2020, with a view to discovering the experience and shortcomings of Phonics in Chinese English teaching practice, and providing reference for the future teaching of phonics approach.

2. THE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC PAPERS PUBLISHED DURING 2011-2020 IN CHINA

In order to find out how phonics approach has been used in teaching English in China, the writers of this paper searched the website of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) at www.cnki.net, entered Chinese keywords "zi ran pin du fa", which is Chinese term for Phonics to find out how many academic papers were relevant to the topic of Phonics in English teaching in China during 2011-2020. 113 academic papers were found, with the yearly average number of 11.3. The yearly distribution of published academic papers discussing Phonics in English teaching in China during the 10 years from 2011 to 2020 is shown as the following.

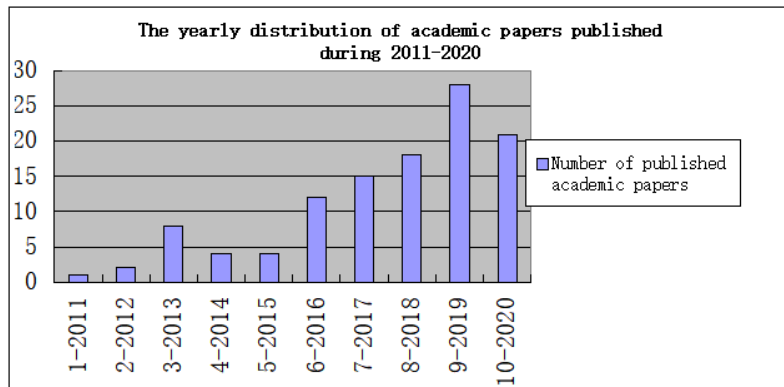


Figure 1 The yearly distribution of academic papers published during 2011-2020.

As can be seen from the "Figure 1" above, the overall trend in the number of published academic papers focusing on Phonic method in China during 2011-2020 is increasing year by year. The number of published academic paper on Phonics is only 1, which is the smallest number during the 10 years. In 2019, 28 papers focusing on Phonics in English in China were published in 2019, which is the most during the 10 years. The second most papers were published in 2020, with the number of 21. The third most papers were published in 2018, with the number of 18. In the latest three years of 2018, 2019 and 2020, 67 academic papers on Phonics in English teaching in China were published, which is more than half of the whole 10 years.

After reading these 113 academic papers thoroughly, the writer has found that Phonic

method has been used for the Chinese English learners from young children to college students. The following table showed the distribution of academic papers on phonics approach used for different kinds of students in China in the 10 years from 2011-2020.

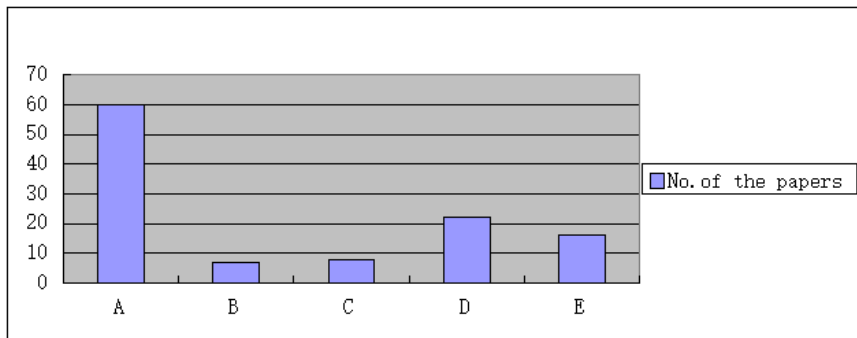


Figure 2 Number of academic papers on phonic method for different students during 2011-2020.

a **Note:** In the above "Figure 2", A represents for primary school students, B for junior middle school students, C for senior middle school students from vocational schools, D for college students, and E refers to those papers in which specific students were not mentioned.

It can be seen from the above "Figure 2" that among the 113 academic papers on Phonics in English teaching in China during 2011-2020, different kinds of students, ranging from primary students, to middle school students, to college students, were taught Phonics in their English learning. It can also be noted from the above table that the coverage of using Phonics in English teaching in China during the 10 years is different. Generally speaking, phonics approach was used much more for primary school students than for the students of other levels. Among the 113 papers on phonics approach in English teaching in China during the 10 years, 60 papers discussed about the application of using phonics approach in primary school English class, occupying more than half the number of the whole papers. 22 papers discussed about the application of phonics approach in college English teaching, ranking the second among the five items.

Why phonics approach was widely used in primary school English teaching? The possible answer could be that phonics approach can help English beginners develop their awareness of the relationship between letter spelling and the composition of letter sound in English. For almost all the primary school students, it is the first time for them to learn English. So teaching phonics in English class for primary school students can be an effective way to reduce students' anxiety in learning English and at the same time stimulate their interest in learning a new language, that is, English.

But why teachers applied phonics method to college English class comparatively widely in China? Studying the 22 academic papers on Phonics method in college English class, it can be

found that in most papers, the college students were from vocational college in China. The English proficiency of most vocational college students in China were in lowest level, comparing with the other college students, because these vocational college students, when they were in their senior middle school, most of them had no English class in their senior school. As a result, when they came to vocational college, they did not have good mastery of English. Some of them even didn't know how there was a relationship between English letter and English sound, which brought them great difficulties to their English learning. Their English teachers taught them Phonics, aiming to help the students to learn the basic knowledge of English spelling and English pronunciation, and helped them to improve their understanding of the relationship between pronunciation and spelling of English word, in which way the students' English foundation could be laid solidly and their abilities of memorizing English words could also be improved at the same time.

Among the 113 academic papers on Phonic approach in English teaching in China from 2011-2020, 26 papers discussed about how to apply Phonics approach to improve students' vocabulary learning, 15 papers about how to apply Phonics approach to improve students' phonetics, and 66 papers gave a general introduction to Phonics approach. As for the application of Phonics approach to vocabulary teaching, from their teaching practice, teachers found that using Phonics could help students' abilities in word recognition, word memorizing and word spelling. (Zhang Weining, 2016) In applying Phonics approach to phonetics teaching, some teachers taught their students the common pronunciation of 26 letters in

English, and then taught them the common pronunciation of 5 vowels, followed by the letter formation and other steps. (Cui, 2012) Some teachers followed Sue Lloyd's method and taught Phonics in the following 7 groups step by step. The first group consists of *s, a, t, i, p, n*; the second group is *c/k, e, h, r, m, d*; the third group is *g, o, u, l, f, b*; the fourth group is *ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or*; the fifth group is *z, w, ng, v, little oo; long oo*; the sixth group is *y, x, ch, sh, voiced th, unvoiced th*; and the seventh group is *qu, oi, ou, ue, er, ar*. (Chen, 2013) It is well known that good teaching materials are important to English learning. For Phonics teaching materials, some teachers combined two or three textbooks from Britain and America to their Phonics teaching and achieved positive effects. (Yuan, 2013)

3. CONCLUSION

From the above data analysis, we can draw the following conclusion.

First, since being introduced to China in 2005, Phonics approach has attracted more and more English teachers and they have put this approach into their English teaching practice for more than 15 years with the satisfying effects.

Second, it can be seen that Phonics approach has been gradually used in English teaching practice in China and influenced different kinds of students in their English learning. Phonics approach has been much more used in primary school English teaching class than in middle school and college English class.

Third, Phonics approach can improve students' English skills, especially in their vocabulary learning and pronunciation.

Fourth, the teaching procedure of Phonics varies from teacher to teacher. There is no uniform process in this field.

Fifth, teachers adopted different teaching materials for their Phonics teaching. There are no authoritative textbooks.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Guangping Sun conceived the presented idea, investigate the findings. Wenqin Xie contributed to the interpretation of the research results. Guangping

Sun wrote the manuscript in consultation with consultation with Wenqin Xie.

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