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THE ROLE OF CVC PHONICS INSTRUCTION IN BUILDING FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS AMONG YOUNG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Developing early reading skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts presents considerable challenges due to learners’ limited exposure to authentic language input. One of the most effective ways to address these challenges is systematic phonics instruction that explicitly teaches sound–letter relationships. This study investigates the role of consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) phonics instruction in building foundational reading skills among young EFL learners. The research is based on a structured, synthetic phonics model emphasizing short vowel instruction, blending, segmenting, and mastery-based progression. The instructional model was implemented with preschool and early primary learners and supported by multisensory teaching techniques and planned repetition. The results indicate improvements in decoding accuracy, phonemic awareness, and reading confidence. The findings suggest that CVC phonics instruction provides a strong foundation for early reading development in EFL classrooms and supports the transition from emergent literacy to independent reading.

Keywords

CVC phonics, early literacy, EFL learners, decoding skills, phonics instruction, reading development

Introduction

Early literacy development is a critical component of academic success, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. In EFL settings, young learners often encounter difficulties in reading due to insufficient exposure to spoken English, limited phonological awareness, and reliance on memorization rather than decoding strategies. As a result, learners may struggle to read unfamiliar words independently, which negatively affects reading fluency and comprehension in later stages of education.

Research in reading pedagogy consistently emphasizes the importance of systematic phonics instruction in early reading development. Phonics-based approaches focus on teaching the relationship between letters and sounds, enabling learners to decode words through a structured process rather than relying on visual recognition alone. Within this framework, consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) word patterns represent an essential instructional unit, as they provide a clear and predictable structure for practicing sound–letter correspondence.

CVC words such as *cat*, *pen*, *sit*, and *top* allow learners to practice blending individual phonemes into complete words and segmenting words into their component sounds. These skills are fundamental to decoding and spelling and serve as the basis for more advanced reading tasks. Despite the recognized value of CVC instruction, its systematic application in EFL classrooms remains inconsistent, particularly at the preschool and early primary levels. The

purpose of this study is to examine the role of structured CVC phonics instruction in building foundational reading skills among young EFL learners. The study seeks to demonstrate how a step-by-step, mastery-based CVC model can support decoding accuracy, phonemic awareness, and early reading confidence.

Methods

The study employed a structured CVC phonics instructional model grounded in systematic and synthetic phonics principles. Instruction followed a sequential, mastery-based design in which learners progressed through clearly defined stages only after demonstrating adequate proficiency. The instructional sequence began with explicit teaching of letter sounds rather than letter names to ensure accurate phoneme production. Particular attention was given to short vowel sounds, which form the core of most CVC word structures. Following sound instruction, learners were guided to blend individual phonemes to read CVC words and to segment spoken words into their constituent sounds. Practice through word families (e.g., *-at, -an, -it*) was incorporated to promote pattern recognition and automaticity. The final stage involved reading decodable sentences and short texts composed exclusively of previously taught sounds, allowing learners to apply their decoding skills in meaningful reading contexts. Learners' progress was monitored through diagnostic assessments, weekly decoding checks, and performance-based rubrics focusing on accuracy, fluency, and sound discrimination. This multi-layered assessment framework enabled continuous monitoring of learner development and informed instructional adjustments.

Results and Discussion

The implementation of the CVC phonics instructional model resulted in noticeable improvements in learners' foundational reading skills. Learners demonstrated increased accuracy in decoding CVC words and showed greater confidence when reading unfamiliar words independently. The reliance on memorization and guessing strategies decreased as learners began to apply sound–letter correspondence systematically. One of the most significant findings was the reduction in short vowel confusion, particularly between commonly misidentified vowel sounds. Explicit instruction, contrastive practice, and multisensory articulation modeling contributed to more stable phonemic representations. Blending skills improved steadily, with learners transitioning from segmented pronunciation to smoother and more fluent decoding. Segmenting activities enhanced learners' phonemic awareness and supported early spelling development. Learners became more capable of identifying individual sounds within words, which improved both reading accuracy and written word production. The use of word families facilitated rapid expansion of readable vocabulary and reduced cognitive load during reading tasks. The mastery-based and spiral instructional design played a crucial role in sustaining progress. Regular review and retrieval practice prevented skill loss and reinforced previously learned phonics elements. These results align with established theories of reading development, including the Simple View of Reading, which identifies decoding as a foundational component of reading comprehension. In EFL contexts, where exposure to spoken English is limited, systematic CVC phonics instruction appears particularly effective in supporting early reading development.

Conclusion

This study highlights the important role of CVC phonics instruction in building foundational reading skills among young EFL learners. The findings demonstrate that a

structured, systematic approach to phonics instruction supports decoding accuracy, phonemic awareness, and early reading confidence. By emphasizing sound–letter correspondence, blending, and segmenting, the CVC model equips learners with a transferable decoding strategy that enables independent reading. The results suggest that incorporating CVC-based phonics instruction into early EFL curricula can significantly enhance literacy outcomes. The structured design, multisensory techniques, and mastery-based progression make the approach well suited to diverse learner needs. Future research may explore the long-term effects of CVC phonics instruction and its integration with digital learning tools to further support early literacy development in EFL settings.

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