Improving Reading Comprehension in Arabic English Language Learners

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Abstract

While working at a charter school where students first language is Arabic, there has been a concern that Arabic English Language Learners (ELLs) often struggle with reading comprehension and teachers strive to find ways to fit additional instruction in with their rigorous reading curriculum. Therefore, the topic of this project thesis is how to increase reading comprehension for Arabic English Language Learners. It will look at the causes of why some Arabic ELLs struggle with reading comprehension and will briefly explore the differences between the English and Arabic orthographies. An increase and focus on phonological processing skills (specifically phonological awareness) and vocabulary instruction will be highlighted as methods to help Arabic ELLs who struggle with reading become successful English readers. The participants will be Arabic ELLs from a charter school in Southeast Michigan. The results will be shared upon completion of the pre and post-tests before and after this project is completed. Some of the ways this project will suggest improving reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs is to use activities that promote phonological awareness skills such as creating CVC words, focusing on specific vocabulary instruction that is relevant to what the students are learning, and using computer-based programs to get the students actively engaged. At the conclusion of this project, it is hoped to see ways that teachers can bridge the achievement gap for the Arabic ELLs from Arabic to English.

Keywords: reading comprehension, English Language Learner (ELL), Arabic orthography, phonological processing skills, phonological awareness, vocabulary

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Currently when you look for research on Arabic students and reading comprehension, you find minimal articles or studies that give a whole lot of information on how to improve their reading comprehension. Yet, Arabic English Language Learners (ELLs) are frequently cited to struggle with reading comprehension (Hayes-Harb, 2006). With the increasing number of ELLs in this country, there needs to be more time spent on how to help those students who are struggling to read in the English language. According to Dussling (2016), from 1999 to 2009 the ELL enrollment in schools grew by 51% whereas the non-ELL enrollment only increased by 7.2%. She also tells readers that although there is much research done on native Spanish speaking students, there needs to be more research on other native languages as there are up to eight different native languages per district. According to the Office for English Language Acquisition (2018), Arabic is the most commonly spoken ELL language after Spanish. It stands to reason that there should be a significant amount of research on how to help Arabic ELLs succeed. "Census 2000 data (United States Census Bureau, 2003) counted 1.2 million U.S. residents who reported Arab ancestry, representing an increase in the Arab population of the United States of nearly 40% during the 1990s" (as cited in Palmer, El-Ashryf, Ledere, & Chang, 2007, p. 8).

Historically, it has been noted that native Arabic speakers tend to go into reading English texts using strategies from the Arabic writing system which do not work with the necessary visual processing of the English language (Hayes-Harb 2006). This is a concern because if the reader is struggling to read written words in English, then it is impossible for them to be able to comprehend what they are reading. Through studying the way Arabic ELLs learn and clearly

eliminating the issues with phonological processing skills and vocabulary between English and Arabic with activities and supplemental programs, one can improve their reading comprehension.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

There is a major achievement gap between native English speakers and ELLs (Lovett, M. et al., 2008). According to Dussling (2016), it is very challenging for students to get caught up to their peers once they fall behind in school. She continues to say that there is a 90% chance that once students begin struggling with reading as early as first grade, they will stay struggling readers in fourth grade as well as a 75% chance that this will continue into high school. From there she proceeds to state that one in six children who are struggling readers in third grade are unlikely to graduate high school in the year they were supposed to. According to Jiang, Sawaki, and Sabatini (2012), ELL readers are often faced with obstacles in comprehending the texts they are given. They state that their lack of competence in being able to decode words and their struggles with word recognition has been documented as one of the factors that hinders reading comprehension in ELL students.

Saiegh-Haddad (2003) completed a study that found a direct link between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension among Arabic and Hebrew speakers. He found that oral reading fluency was more beneficial to reading comprehension than reading isolated words. Therefore, it is important to focus on those early readers in order to make sure they are reading fluently on grade level. If those early readers are able to read fluently, they are more likely to have the reading comprehension to be able to decode what they are reading. In Blachman, Tangel, Ball, Black, and McGraw (1999), they state that there is data from a number of intervention studies that show that early intervention in phonological awareness in preschool,

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kindergarten, and first grade shows an increase in early reading and spelling achievement. In another article, Blachman, et al. (2004), state that there is convincing evidence that shows that use of a program that focuses on decoding specific sounds in words and the alphabet can help reduce the achievement gap between students who are struggling to learn how to read and those who are learning how to read effortlessly. As finding out how to close the achievement gap is of the upmost importance, this project proposal seeks to use different techniques to improve the reading comprehension of Arabic ELLs through the improvement of phonological processing skills (specifically phonological awareness), vocabulary knowledge, and supplemental reading programs.

Background of Project

As stated in the Problem Statement of this thesis, it has been noted that native Arabic speakers tend to go into reading English texts using strategies from the Arabic writing system, which does not work with the necessary visual processing of the English language (Hayes-Harb 2006). According to Al-Khalifah and Al-Khalifa (2011), Arabic has a shallow orthography with only 25 consonants, 3 sounds that are similar to long vowels, and 3 short vowel-like phonemes that are typically replaced with diacritics placed either above or below a consonant to indicate the sound needed. They also tell us that the English language has a deep orthography, with 26 consonants and more that 14 vowels and diphthongs which can be created using over 265 different letter combinations. In his doctoral thesis, AlJuhani (2015) studied if native Arabic speakers struggle to recognize English vowels due to how minimally they are used in their native language since it relies heavily on consonant structures versus vowels. He found similar findings as Hayes-Harb (2006) where native Arabic speakers struggle with word recognition. Hayes-Harb (2006) shows that this ultimately affects their overall reading comprehension, and much of the

problem lies in the fact that most ELLs transfer their word recognition skills from their first language (L1) to the language they are learning (L2). Since the Arabic and English orthographies are vastly different, it stands to reason that students whose L1 is Arabic would struggle with decoding English (their L2).

As said by Ibrahim, Eviatar, and Aharon-Peterz (2002), there is a difference in how long it takes eyes to decode words depending on the language and the orthography of said language. They found that in Arabic, it takes 342 ms for gaze duration per word; this is largely in part to the fact that most texts written in Arabic do not have vowels. Ibrahim, Eviatar, and Aharon-Peterz continued to state that when vowels are found in written Arabic, they are indicated with diacritics above or below the consonants in the word (e.g. played, لعبت). As many Arabic words are construed through the context around them, that is what Arabic readers rely on in lieu of vowels (AlJahani, 2015). Since most ELLs use skills they learned while learning their native language, it stands to reason this is one of the reasons that Arabic ELLs struggle with word recognition and ultimately reading comprehension. As Abu-Rabia (2000) advocates, reading skills are essential when a child is young, even before they enter school. When they are read to at an early age, they acquire knowledge of that written language as well as vocabulary (Abu-Rabia, 2000). Reading to children at an early age gives those students a head start on word recognition, which can increase comprehension in the end. Since a large majority of Arabic ELLs are cited to struggle with reading comprehension in English, a need exists for more research on how to support students whose native language has been found to be harder to process, and therefore creates slower processing speeds for the reader (Hayes-Harb, 2006; Ibrahim, Eviatar, & Aharon-Peterz, 2002).

Statement of Purpose

Gottfired (2014) states that schools have a lack of resources needed to accommodate ELLs' specific needs, and teachers are underprepared to provide ELLs with the support they need to be proficient in both speaking and reading English. The purpose of this project is to investigate and design additions to a curriculum in order to tailor it specifically to Arabic ELL learning. As stated in the background section of this project, most ELLs use their skills from their native language when learning a second language. The skills that Arabic ELLs are adopting from their native language do not transition over well due to the fact that the orthographies of Arabic and English are so vastly different. English has a deep orthography with many graphemes and phonemes making diverse sounds; Arabic has a shallow orthography and minimal vowel sounds (Al-Khalifah & Al-Khalifa, 2011).

In this thesis project, I will explore the differences and similarities between English and Arabic in order to gain insight into how to help native Arabic speakers to decode the English language more fluently, and thus increase comprehension. I will accomplish this through a combination of promoting phonological processing skills and supplemental reading programs. To accomplish this, I will study what specifically a teacher can do to help Arabic readers make connections with the phonemes and grapheme differences between the two different languages. By spending more time on the various sound relationships of phonemes and graphemes as well as spending more time reading, the hope is to find or create a supplemental reading program to assist students with their phonological processing skills, which will make them more fluent readers, and ultimately improve their comprehension.

Objectives of the Project

The development of this project will come with the study of the differences and similarities between the Arabic and English languages, as well as how to bridge the gap between the two languages as it pertains to the comprehension of English by native Arabic speakers. The objectives include:

1. Develop a deeper understanding of the Arabic language

2. Understand how phonological awareness skills and vocabulary help bridge the achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers

3. Understand how early exposure to literacy, combined with an in-depth study of the phonemes and graphemes that create that literacy, improves a child's ability to read and comprehend

4. Develop supports with phonological awareness (specifically graphemes and phonemes) and vocabulary to Arabic ELLs

5. Develop supports to link phonological awareness and vocabulary to reading comprehension

Definition of Terms

Reading Comprehension – "Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from a written text" (Elsayyad, Everatt, Mortimore, & Haynes, 2016, p.872). In order to do this, a reader has to be able to read fluently (read and quickly decode unknown words) and then use the meaning of the words in what they are reading in order to make sense of what one is reading.

Native Language/L1 – The first language spoken by a person.

English Language Learner/L2- A student or person whose first language is not English, and they are in the process of learning English in addition to the language(s) they already speak.

Arabic Orthography- Just like English, the Arabic language is based on an alphabetic writing system. One of the key differences is the fact that "the letters of the Arabic 'alphabet' (sometimes referred to as an abjad) represent consonants along with long vowel sounds. Short vowels in the script are represented by diacritical markers above or below an Arabic letter/consonant" (Elsayyad et al, 2016, p.875). Short vowels, as a rule, are only included in texts for beginning readers where the reader still needs help at the syntactic level. As readers progress in Arabic, short vowels drop out and readers use the context of the sentence to make meaning/sense of what they are reading.

Phonological Processing Skills- Phonological processing "involves the association of sounds with letters, that is, the understanding of grapheme–phoneme conversion rules and their exceptions, which is the basis of decoding print" (Abu-Rabia & Siegel, 2002, p. 664). It refers "to the uses of internal forms of speech information for representing, storing and/or retrieving spoken and written language[1]" (Taibah & Haynes, 2011, p. 1052). Phonological processing skills include phonological awareness, rapid naming, and phonological memory. Through research these skills have been linked to successful reading comprehension among students of all languages.

Phonological Awareness- According to Taibah and Haynes (2011), phonological awareness is "a set of linguistic and metalinguistic skills involving the capacity to reflect on the sound structure of spoken words[2]" (p.1052). Phonological Awareness is an umbrella term that encompasses a large portion of reading such as the words in a sentence, syllables, on-set and rhymes. It also

includes phonemic awareness which includes the blending and segmenting of words as well as isolating and substituting sounds.

Supplemental Reading Program- A supplemental reading program is a program that is used in addition to the original curriculum or required reading program that is designed to specifically target a particular audience and their needs.

Diglossia – Diglossia is "stable linguistic state" similar to dialects as it is the various dialects of the same language as well as the literary version of the same language (Abu-Rabia, 2000, pp 148). For Arabic, there are two different languages, one written and read by the elite and highly educated and then the spoken, spoken by the common everyday citizens (Abu-Rabia, 2000).

Diacritics – markings used on or near short vowels in Arabic to help beginning readers but are removed in texts for expert readers (AlJuhani, 2015).

Vocabulary: Vocabulary is the link between a word or picture and its meaning to form a link in one's mind to understand the connection between a word and what it means (Saigh & Schmitt, 2012).

Limitations of the Project

The ultimate goal of this project is to improve reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs. In addition, this will hopefully help them in the overall English language, but specifically help them make sense of the texts around them. Through the research found while researching Arabic ELLs and reading comprehension, it has been noted that there needs to be an improvement in phonological processing skills as well as vocabulary knowledge, and this can be done through supplemental reading programs where needed. Due to the lack of research on solely Arabic ELLs, this project does address some general ELL needs due to the lack of research on Arabic ELLs specifically, but also aims to include as much Arabic ELL research as possible. Some

limitations of this project may be the lack of research, the differences in Arabic and English orthographies and possibly my own lack of knowledge of the Arabic language.

The scope of this project will start in my classroom as I gather evidence to support my claims. Once I have the evidence needed to support my claims, this project will be extended to the remaining lower elementary classes in my school with the hope that one day it will reach many other teachers and students at other schools wherever it is needed. The goal of this project is to study the needs of Arabic ELLs specifically, since the population of these students is increasing every year and is the primary language spoken at the school in which I teach. Arabic is spoken by 80% of the students in my classroom, and this number stays fairly consistent throughout the whole school. If this project can help a large number of the students in my classroom, this will help the overall reading comprehension of the school over the years.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Anyone who has spent even five minutes looking for research on reading comprehension with Arabic English Language Learners (ELLs) can tell that there is very little research to be found. One can find a lot of articles about how to help struggling native-English readers, but very few of those articles focus solely on ELLs. And, of those, there are even fewer that focus on Arabic ELLs specifically. With an ever-growing Arabic ELL population in schools across the United States, there needs to be more research on how to help those struggling with reading, specifically with reading comprehension, which is where it has been noted as one of the areas where ELLs are the most challenged (Lovett et al., 2008).

There are many ways to help increase reading comprehension and close the overall achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL. This review will explore possible reasons why elementary Arabic ELLs struggle with reading comprehension and then delve into a variety of ways that can help these students succeed in reading. Specifically, this thesis will explore the differences between English and Arabic as well as the phonological differences. It will then lead into the importance of phonological awareness and vocabulary to reading comprehension and will end by exploring some supplemental reading programs to increase said reading comprehension.

Theory/Rationale

In the case of increasing reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs, this is how the students interact with each other as well as the texts they are reading which is sociolinguistics. Then there is the aspect of how the teacher teaches reading comprehension to their Arabic ELLs which is psycholinguistics.

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics is the study of psychology meeting the study of linguistics, meaning the study of human behaviors meets the study of language (Smith, 2012). In regard to this thesis, psycholinguistics is important because reading comprehension involves paying attention to all of the different aspects of reading from being able to sound out the words to how to interpret the meaning of what you are reading. Psycholinguistics involves three different cuing systems: graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic. According to Tracey and Morrow (2017), graphophonic cues are the way that letters and sounds correspond to one another to help the reader figure out the word. They continue with syntactic cues, which include the structure of the words or sentences because the order and structure of the sentence makes a huge difference. Finally, the semantic cues allow readers to use their background knowledge along with the other two cuing systems to help decipher meaning. As Keene and Zimmerman (2007) state, "Children need to learn letters, sounds, words, sentences, and how to comprehend what they read – *simultaneously*" (p.22). The quote here goes to show that all three of the cuing systems need to be used together in order for the reader to understand what they are reading. Teaching reading becomes more difficult when a student's first language (L1) is drastically different from their second language (L2). Therefore, the teacher needs to approach the teaching of reading differently, depending on the differences and similarities between students' L1 and L2.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is all about our interactions with one another and how those interactions have an impact on our literacy development. According to Romaine (as cited in Tracey and Marrow, 2017), sociolinguistics can also be the study of "multilingualism, social dialects, conversational interaction, attitudes to language, language change, and much more" (pp.160-

161). Multilingualism and social dialects are directly correlated to the students this thesis aims to address in that they speak multiple languages, and many of them speak different dialects depending on which country or area their families are originally from. In the classroom, sociolinguistics can be seen through collaborative learning within shared reading or book clubs, performances students put on based on literature, and students writing about their interpretations and experiences with texts. All of the previous activities will differ based on students' interactions with each other, as well as the background experiences they bring in with them. According to Bloom and Green (as cited in Tracey and Marrow, 2017), reading is both a social and linguistic process. They continue to say that socially, reading is used to create relationships between people whereas linguistically, reading is used to help make connections within the meanings of the reading with the author, as well as between the people who are reading the same text. Our students bring their backgrounds into their reading and make connections with each other while they are reading.

Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics are the two theories that most directly influence this project because the idea of increasing reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs stems from those students learning the English language fluently in order to comprehend what they are reading. One can only increase the reading comprehension of students if they are learning to decode, read, and understand the texts, and this can be done one on one or with groups of students working with the same texts.

Research/Evaluation

With the ever-increasing number of Arabic ELLs in the United States and the documentation that a large portion of these students struggle with reading in English, there should be research to help teachers provide instruction to improve the reading of those struggling

to read in the English language (Al-Khalifah & Al-Khalifa, 2011). According to the Office of English Language Acquisition (2019), the number of Arabic speaking students has increasing by about 75% since the 2008-09 school year which is roughly 49,000 students. They also state that in the 2015-16 school year, Arabic was the most common language spoken in schools after Spanish and was closely followed by Chinese. The reason why some Arabic students struggle to read in English has many different ideas behind it but they all stem from how the Arabic and English languages are so different. The differences between Arabic and English as well as how they need to be taught will be explored in this literature review.

Foundations of Language – Arabic and English

Arabic and English are drastically different languages. According to Palmer, El-Ashry, Leclere, and Chang (2007), the differences in the languages stems in their orthographies, concepts of print, and syntaxes. The number one difference regarding concepts of print in the Palmer et al. article is the fact that English is written from left to right while Arabic is written from right to left. With both Arabic and English there are different dialect and versions depending on where they are spoken as well as whether they are written or spoken (Saiegh-Haddad & Henkin-Roitfarb, 2014). According to Abu-Rabia (2000), in addition to different dialects, there are also two different versions of Arabic; literary Arabic as well as spoken Arabic and the two are vastly different. He continues to state that literary Arabic is what is taught in schools but is not used in day-to-day conversations. To follow-up on this, Abu-Rabia tells readers that often literary Arabic is not introduced until first grade and it is often seen as a second language for how much is differs from daily, spoken Arabic. Interestingly, there are also "major phonological, syntactical, morphological and lexical differences" between literary and spoken

Arabic so Arabic ELLs already have two different sets of phonemes and graphemes to learn before adding English into the mix (Kweider, 2014, p.22).

Within their orthographies, Palmer et al. (2007) show that English phonemes can have many different sounds represented by multi-letter graphemes whereas in Arabic each phoneme is equivalent to one letter. English also has a deep orthography whereas Arabic's orthography is shallow in the early grades and becomes deep when vowels are omitted, being replaced with diacritics (Palmer et al., 2007). Another distinct difference between Arabic and English is that English's vowel system remains the same for children and adults while Arabic uses short vowels for children with diacritical marks on consonants, but they are slowly removed starting in about fourth grade (Fender, 2008). Long vowels in English can be represented by many different letter combinations whereas in Arabic long vowels are represented with a letter, not multiple but single letter per vowel (Palmer et al., 2007). English has 44 speech sounds represented by just 26 letters, these speech sounds can be made using 150 common combinations of letters with a total of over 400 possibilities to make said 44 sounds; some of the letter combinations are only used in a few words (Waugh, Carter, & Desmond, 2015). Waugh, Carter, and Desmond (2015) also state that English is an evolved language that has assimilated words from many other languages over the years, which may be the reason for the numerous different speech sounds and letter combinations. One of the languages that they say English gets a lot of its speech sounds from is French. As for Arabic there seems to be a little bit of a discrepancy in how many letters there are. Al-Khalifah and Al-Khalifa (2011) state that there are 25 consonants, 3 sounds that are similar to long vowels, and 3 short vowel-like phonemes that are typically replaced with diacritics placed either above or below a consonant to indicate the sound needed. Contradicting that is Saiegh-Haddad and Henkin-Roitfarb (2014) who state that there are 28 Arabic consonants and 6 vowels

(3 short and 3 long). We will get more into the phonemes and graphemes of Arabic in the phonological awareness section.

According to Hayes-Harb (2006), native Arabic readers are able to use "contextual clues to fill in the missing vowels because short vowels typically represent grammatical information (e.g., part of speech, person, number, case, tense, and voice) that can be inferred from the semantic and syntactic context" and this would be repetitive in writing (p.322). She continues later by stating that for Arabic readers to be able to successfully read in English, they have to pay attention to both consonant and vowel letters. If they "transfer written word identification strategies that are appropriate to Arabic reading (i.e., that devote attention primarily to consonant letters) to English reading, the resultant word identification problems may contribute to native Arabic speakers' observed ESL reading comprehension difficulties" (p.325). Fender (2003) completed a casual-comparative study that investigated the effects of native speakers of Arabic and Japanese's L1 word-level reading skills on their ELL word-level reading skills (L2). The study starts out by discussing how research on reading has shown how important word-level processing is when it comes to both fluency and comprehension. Fender (2003) continues by presenting how L1 research demonstrates how word recognition and word integration processes are commonly used in both cognitive and linguistic processes of text processing. He also states that these same processes are also very widely used in L2 reading and text processing. Therefore, if the reader is adept at these skills in their L1 it would make sense that they would also be more likely to be adept in their second L2 as well. This study specifically focuses on native Arabic and Japanese speakers and how probable they are to experience difficulties with second language reading skills. Fender goes on to show how native Arabic speakers are more likely to experience these difficulties with the prelexical end of word recognition while native

Japanese speakers are more likely to struggle with word integration processes in phrases for comprehension. It all comes down to Arabic and Japanese speakers having different learning needs and interventions based on their native language. This is very important as many schools do not have just one second language in their buildings/district but many, so it is important to understand the needs of each ELL to succeed in reading.

Phonological Awareness and Processing Skills

A large portion of the recent research found on Arabic ELLs and reading comprehension focuses on phonological awareness and vocabulary since students need to be able to read (decode) and understand (vocabulary) what they are reading in order to make sense (comprehend) of what they are reading. Since Arabic readers focus so much on phonological processing skills, it stands to reason that they will struggle with word recognition in English because English phonemes and vowels are inconsistent in sounds and change depending on the word they are used in (Fender, 2003). Fender also notes that this makes it hard for native Arabic speakers to decode English words and all together slows down the word recognition process which in turn slows down their reading. In the end, this can ultimately cause difficulty with comprehension since the longer it takes a reader to decode the less likely they will be to recall/process what they have read.

Fender (2003) states that Arabic ELLs would do well with being exposed to different kinds of computer-based word recognition games or tasks. They would also benefit from reading more English texts, "In fact, it is widely acknowledged in L1 and L2/ESL reading theory and research that the development of word recognition skills and orthographic processing skills in particular are a consequence of print exposure and experience" (Fender, 2003, p. 308). Arabic ELLs need to develop rudimentary word recognition and identification skills in order to improve

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their fluency, comprehension, and overall reading. This can be done by focusing on and improving Arabic ELL students' phonological processing skills.

Taibah and Haynes (2011) conducted a study that explored how different aspects of phonological processing skills affect comprehension, decoding, and fluency skills in Arabic speaking students. It does this through phonological awareness, rapid naming, and phonological memory which are three central parts of phonological processing. This study aimed to explore phonological awareness (PA), rapid naming (RAN), and phonological memory's (PM) capacity "to predict word reading, word decoding fluency, text reading fluency, and comprehension fluency in Arabic" (p.1023). Taibah and Hayes also support the current research in the fact that they state that PA is the "single best predictor of future reading achievement" (p.1035). Taibah and Hayes (2011) set out to find out how PA, RAN, and PM effects reader's skills and abilities at different grade levels and to find out if one was more of a predictor than another. This information was collected through a series of questions presented in different tests once the sample population was selected based on parent responses based on the questionnaire they filled out after they sent in the consent forms. In this experiment, Taibah and Haynes were trying to find the relationship between PA, RAN, and PM and reading. Once the students were selected, the researcher's developed tests "in the areas of literacy (word recognition, word decoding, reading comprehension, and fluency) and phonology (PA, PA, and PM)" (Taibah & Haynes, 2011, p.1025). It was found that "within each grade, phonological processing abilities correlated significantly with all reading skills and that these relationships ranged from moderate to high, with PA skills showing higher correlations with reading than RAN or PM" (pp.1034-35). It was also stated that these results most likely occurred "due to Arabic's shallow orthography in

Grades K-2" (p.1035). Overall, PA was found to be the "single best predictor of future reading achievement" (p.1035).

One would say that both Fender and Taibah and Haynes would agree that overall phonological processing skills (specifically PA) in students' native languages are an excellent predictor of how a student is going to learn in English. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis project, it would be highly beneficial to work closely with the EL teachers who work with the ELL students to find out how they are doing with reading in Arabic. This way the teachers can take that information and predict how the student will learn to read in English in the early grades and/or help students to progress in reading in the older grades. It would also be beneficial for the teachers to spend more time on phonological processing skills such as phonological awareness because PA is the foundation for being able to read. Since the sounds, phonemes, and graphemes in the English language are not consistent as they are in the Arabic language, spending a large portion of time on PA is necessary to help Arabic readers be successful English readers. Where there needs to be further study is how exactly or what exactly could be done to improve Arabic ELL students PA.

Phonemes, Graphemes, and Vowel Usage in English versus Arabic. According to Kahn-Horwitz (2015), effective literacy teaching is of the upmost importance when English is not the L1 of the students being taught as well as where the students come from a lower socioeconomic background. A lot of times these two phenomena tend to go together which creates even more of a need for thorough teaching of phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, and semantics for all students (Kahn-Horwitz, 2015). As stated above, there are many differences between the English and Arabic orthographies. Let us get a little more in depth with each of

these orthographies in order to think about how to help Arabic ELLs improve their knowledge of English orthography and the overall ability to increase reading comprehension.

It was already established that while English may only have 26 letters in the alphabet these graphemes can be combined to create many more phonemes, all with unique sounds that may only be used in a small number or words (Waugh, Carter, & Desmond, 2015). Palmer et al. (2007) tells readers that in English, letters stay the same in shape and form but in Arabic letter shapes change based on where they are placed in the word (beginning, middle, or end) and many Arabic letters are similarly shaped. They continue with the fact that in Arabic, each of the 28 letters equals just one phoneme whereas in English, the 26 letters can be represented by a single phoneme or multiple letter graphemes that makes English unpredictable. In English, vowels are confusing in that one vowel can make many different sounds depending on the letters surrounding it (Palmer et al., 2007).

Saiegh-Haddad (2007) points out that even though beginning Arabic has all of the diacritics necessary for the reader to see all of the phonemes in the words, it also uses letters so there are two different grapheme systems in use. The letters are typically consonants but may also be long vowels (ي, و, ا) and diacritics to represent the short vowels in the words. (Saiegh-Haddad, 2007). Look at this sentence in English: I am a first-grade teacher and then in Arabic: أنا معلمة في الصف الأول. Notice all of the diacritics above and below the words that represent different vowel sounds in the words.

Fender (2008) shows that in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), words that are of similar backgrounds are often composed of the same three or four consonants. He specifically demonstrates the consonants k-t-b which are the root consonants used for the concept of writing. Look at how similar these for phrases/nouns are, simply because they are derived from the idea

of writing. In Arabic, the phrase he wrote is كتب, he writes is يكتب, a book is كتاب, and office is

مكتب (Fender, 2008). Most of these words differ in one small diacritic or an addition of one

letter. When reading unvowelized Arabic, where the diacritics have been removed, the reader has

to look at "the consonant spelling and phonological information in the graphic display, but they

must rely on extra-lexical information such as morphological knowledge, syntactic knowledge,

and sentence and discourse context" (Fender, 2008, p.26).

Controversially, Hayes-Harb (2006) uses the examples of h-t and p-n-t in English. Unlike

in Arabic, just because words have the same root morpheme with consonant letters in the same

order it does not mean they are rooted in the same meaning. She uses the examples of hat, hot,

heat, hate, and hit for h-t. While these words are rooted the same, they are not related in

meaning. The same goes for point, pint, and paint. Hayes-Harb (2006) ends with the fact that in

English, vowels provide significant information to be able to determine what the word is and

what it means. She shows us that whereas in Arabic, the root of the word allows the reader to

understand what they are reading about, that cannot be said for English. Arabic and English

differ tremendously on their dependence and predictability that vowels provide in words.

Vocabulary

According to Stahl and Fairbanks (as cited in Wallace, 2008), vocabulary has been

identified as the number one predictor of a student's proficiency of oral language which is

needed in order to comprehend both literary and oral language. Wallace (2008) continues with

the fact that vocabulary knowledge is needed for reading comprehension which is shown by the

fact that if a student is unable to recognize as small as 2% of the words in a text that could limit

comprehension. He also states that a student learning to read in the first language already knows

5,000 to 7,000 words before they start learning to read in school, but the number is significantly

less for ELLs which already puts them behind native-English speakers. This is contributed to by the fact that native English speakers speak English at home while ELLs speak their native language at home. Haynes and Zacarian (2010) agree with this statement, stating that many parents of ELL's do not speak English or have a limited understanding of the language which results in many ELL's not understanding the conversations that take place around them at school. This tells educators that vocabulary needs to be taught directly. August, Carlo, Dressler, and Snow (2005) and Wallace (2008) state that research on acquisition of a second language has shown that transfer is an important part of learning a second language. That is, taking advantage of the similarities between the first and second language a student is learning. While this is ideal for students whose first language is Spanish or French, this does not bode well for Arabic speaking ELLs because of the differences in the language's orthographies.

Research on increasing reading comprehension via vocabulary instruction supports the idea that vocabulary instruction is important but does not seem to have one fool proof way to do it. Johnston, Mercer and Geres-Smith (2018) completed "a preliminary study to determine incorporating vocabulary instruction in reading" and how "interventions for ELLs would improve reading comprehension" (p. 63). They examined how the strategies of fluency only intervention, fluency and word definitions intervention and fluency and vocabulary processing questions intervention would affect four upper elementary students. With how small the sample size of this study was it is really no surprise that there was not a significant improvement in student knowledge of vocabulary. It is also slightly confusing that the researchers considered instruction in fluency to be a vocabulary task and the only time they saw improvement was when they combined fluency instruction with supplied definitions for the target words. One would

assume vocabulary instruction would be solely on defining targeted words which would in turn improve students' fluency and reading comprehension.

As one continues researching vocabulary, one may stumble across Baumann's (2009) study, where he conducted a critical analysis of three important studies conducted regarding vocabulary instruction effectiveness. Baumann examined studies performed by Beck et al. (1982) and McKeown et al. (1983, 1985) in which research determined that three circumstances must happen for vocabulary to have an effect on reading comprehension. They were as follows,

(a) instruction must include definitional and contextual information for the words that are taught; (b) students must have multiple instructional encounters with the words; and (c) instruction must require students to engage in active processing, or high depth of processing. (p. 313)

Beck et al. and McKeown et al. reported positive results with these conditions, but Baumann wanted to find the ideal amounts for each one. Baumann found he could not find an ideal amount because the data from the three chosen studies was unclear about how often a student heard or used a vocabulary word. Overall, it seems that researchers cannot find the ideal way to complete vocabulary instruction, but at the same time are determined to find the best way to use vocabulary words to improve reading comprehension. This leads one to believe that although researchers have not found out exactly how yet, vocabulary instruction is still a key part of reading comprehension.

Most of the research on using vocabulary to increase reading comprehension in ELLs is not specific to Arabic ELL's. In fact, currently there is minimal research on the connection between language and reading on Arabic ELLs in the United States (Farren, 2016). Of that

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minimal research that has been conducted, much of that research seems to study English speaking students learning Arabic as their second language as researchers have noted that it takes an English native approximately 1,320 hours with an intensive Arabic program to become proficient in Arabic (ElKhafaifi, 2005). ElKhafaifi also notes that it only takes an English speaker 480 hours to become proficient in French or Spanish. A lot of the struggle in learning Arabic has to do with the two very different diglossia's of Arabic, namely spoken and literary Arabic but learners are also anxious about the difference in the alphabets between Latin and Arabic and finally the cursive nature of Arabic writing (ElKhafaifi, 2005).

Farren (2016) conducted a study on Dual Language Learners (DLLs) where the student's primary language was English, and they were studying Arabic, and she suggests that the Arabic and English languages are not that different after all since they are both alphabetic languages. She found, through her study of English speakers learning Arabic, that vocabulary is foundational, and it is essential that it is introduced and improved in both the L1 and L2 in order to assure success in reading comprehension. So, while she is studying the opposite of this thesis with her focus being on English speaking students learning Arabic instead of Arabic speaking students learning English, it still stands to reason that it is essential for student's vocabulary to be supported in both languages.

In Alyami and Mohsen's (2019) article "The Use of a Reading Lexicon to Aid Contextual Vocabulary Acquisition by EFL Arab Learners", they studied Arabic speaking college females from Saudi Arabia who were learning English. While this thesis primarily targets early elementary aged students, there is much to be learned from this study. They state that contextual vocabulary acquisition is done by exposing students to texts that have unfamiliar words and are not quite easy enough to read fluently. By challenging the student, they are being asked to use

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the skills of inferring and the contextual cues around the unfamiliar word to make meaning. These authors also used a reading lexicon, specifically Nation's K-Level reading lexicon, where it organizes words into list of word families in order to assess a reading passages level of difficulty. Alyami and Mohsen found that through deliberate contextual vocabulary acquisition and increasing the amount that students read, one can increase a student's vocabulary and ultimately their reading comprehension.

Overall, there is much research to be done on the ideal way to teach vocabulary to Arabic ELL's, but all of the researchers agree that exposure is key. The students must be exposed to the vocabulary in order for the students to learn it. It also seems to be quite the controversy whether Arabic and English's languages are similar enough for students to transfer their native language skills into the language they are learning. This is not something this thesis will study, but it is a hope that one day there will be adequate research completed to settle this dispute. What this thesis will study is how teachers can use vocabulary to increase reading comprehension, as well as the what as in "What works?"

Supplemental Reading Programs

Another way the research says that one can increase reading comprehension in ELLs is to use supplemental reading programs (which will include both phonological awareness and processing skills as well as vocabulary). Tam, Heward, and Heng (2006) conducted a study that "investigated the effects of an intensive intervention program consisting of vocabulary instruction, error correction, and fluency building on the oral reading rate and reading comprehension of elementary-level English-language learners who were struggling readers" with a secondary purpose of examining how students were effected by two different fluency building methods (p.81-82). Utley (1995) felt that "Among those overrepresented in special education

programs, culturally and linguistically diverse, at-risk children, in particular, are in 'quadruple jeopardy'" (as cited in Tam et al., 2006, p.79). Therefore, they designed this study to examine the effects of vocabulary instruction, error correction, and fluency building on reading comprehension since it has already been proven these three strategies are effective on word recognition skills and oral reading fluency. The participants in this study were five ELL students (two girls and three boys) from a public elementary of about 500 students where about 100 of those students have been identified as ELLs. The students were selected based on teacher recommendation ranging from grades three to five. Two of the students are native Spanish speakers, two are native Amharic speakers, and one spoke Khmer. Before the study commenced the first author gave the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Basic Skills test in order to gain background knowledge on the students' reading levels. The testing sessions were done one-on-one in a classroom with all of the necessary teaching materials and lasted about 35 minutes. Reading passages were selected based on what the authors knew about the participants and then the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid grade level functions in Microsoft Word was used to select the readability of the passages.

During the first set of meetings where the student was introduced to a new passage each time, the

> author (a) explained the meanings of new vocabulary words from the session's passage, used each vocabulary word in a sentence, and asked the learner to use each word in a sentence; (b) corrected oral reading errors during the learner's initial oral reading of the passage; (c) asked the learner to read the passage as fast as she or he could for three consecutive trials; and (d) asked five literal comprehension questions about the passage. (p.79)

The same steps were also used during the same passage sessions where the students were asked to read a passage multiple times to help improve their fluency of the passage. The students read the same passage during multiple sessions until they could read a certain amount of words correctly. All of the learners in this study were found to have improved both their oral reading rates and reading comprehension during the two intervention sessions. This suggests that the three different skills, vocabulary instruction, error correction, and fluency building, work together to help ELL students improve both their fluency and reading comprehension.

A second study on using supplemental reading programs is "The Impact of a Supplemental Reading Intervention of the Literacy Skills of English Language Learners and Native English-Speaking First Grade Children" by Tess Dussling (2016). Since most of the ELL research is on native Spanish speaking students, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a supplemental reading program. This program puts emphasis on phoneme awareness and phonics with small groups of native English speakers and non-Spanish speaking ELLs. Dussling (2016) states that this study is a single-subject research design, specifically a multiple baseline design. After getting kindergarten teachers recommendations at two different upstate New York schools it was decided to only use one of the two schools and thirteen of the original 16 students were selected based on their results from "Word Identification subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R; Woodcock, 1987), as well as three subtests from the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI; Texas Education Agency, 2003): Letter-Name Knowledge, Letter-Sound Knowledge, and Blending Onset-Rimes and Phonemes" and consent forms were returned (Dussling, 2016, p. 41). These students were 7 non-Spanish speaking ELLs and 6 native-English speakers, all identified as needing extra support in reading.

Three groups of four to five students were formed, mixing the ELL and native-English speakers. The research questions aimed to find out if

> a supplemental reading program that emphasizes phoneme awareness and phonics and that has been shown to be effective with native English-speaking students also effective in terms of gains on phoneme awareness, letter sound knowledge, reading, and spelling when used with small groups that include both native English-speakers and ELLs whose first language is not Spanish. (p.37)

The result of this study showed that the supplemental reading program was effective for native English speakers also effective with ELLs, it showed "that students made growth during the intervention on all measures, including blending, segmenting, letter sound knowledge, word identification, word attack, and spelling, as indicated by both statistically significant effects on all measures" (Dussling, 2016, pp.105-6).

In another study by Dussling (2018), she used lessons adapted from Road to the Code (Blachman, Ball, Black, & Tangel, 2000), a phonological awareness program. According to Ball and Blachman (1991) and Blachman, Ball, Black and Tangel (1994), "This program develops phonological awareness skills, teaches letter names and sounds in an explicit and systematic fashion, and was selected because it has been shown to be effective in previous research with native speakers of English" (as cited in Dussling, 2018, p.278). Upon completing the first few lessons, it was noted that the students had already made improvements with letter names/sounds and phoneme awareness, so she switched to lessons adapted Road to the Code: Bridge Lessons by Blachman and Tangel in 2004. The lessons in the bridge program aimed to close the gap between basic skills and reading. During each lesson, Dussling reviewed letter sounds with students and then had the students make basic CVC words with letter cards, had the students

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practice reading CVC as well as sight words that cannot be sounded out. She then continued by having students "read sentence strips containing words that had been reviewed during the word recognition games in previous lessons or read a decodable book" and finished with students writing "four phonetically regular words" that had been previously practiced or followed the same spelling pattern on white boards (p. 279).

All of these studies are beneficial to this literature review because it shows that by increasing the time students spend reading, one can also increase their reading comprehension. It stands to reason that if a teacher of ELL students spent time introducing new vocabulary at the beginning of a lesson, unit, or even just before reading a new passage during guided reading, the students could have a better understanding of what was being read or what they were reading. Along with that new vocabulary, when a teacher takes the time to supplement the curriculum with a secondary supplemental program, students are being taught a slightly different way and being reintroduced to the same material with a second chance at understanding. These programs can be used during small group time or even in the students' ELL or RTI sessions. Through these studies it had been shown that struggling readers (ELL and native-English speaking) can benefit from a supplementary reading program that focuses on phonemic awareness skills and provides thorough instruction on the alphabetic code of different sounds as well as direct vocabulary instruction.

Summary

As the number of ELLs rises in the United States, there needs to be studies done and supplemental materials created to increase reading comprehension in ELLs, specifically Arabic ELLs as there are many studies on Spanish speaking students. According to the Office of English Language Acquisition (2019), the number of Arabic speaking students has increasing by

about 75% since the 2008-09 school year which is roughly 49,000 students. While keeping psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics in mind, reading comprehension is a mix of being able to decode and understand what you are reading as well as using your background knowledge and experiences to further that comprehension. Being able to decode as well as using the structure of the sentence or text you are reading is psycholinguistics while using your background knowledge and experiences to help decode is sociolinguistics.

Decoding Arabic and English is a very different process. While there are a similar number of letters in both languages, the usage and sounds of these languages differ tremendously. There are a lot more sounds made by different combinations of letters in English than Arabic. In Arabic each letter stands for its own phoneme and then there are long vowels with the short vowels being depicted with diacritics. Arabic readers focus heavily on phonological processing skills so when learning English, they often struggle with word recognition in English because English phonemes and vowels are inconsistent in sounds and change depending on the word they are used in (Fender, 2003). Fender also notes that this makes it hard for native Arabic speakers to decode English words and all together slows down the word recognition process which in turn slows down their reading. Often this struggle to decode causes difficulty with comprehension since the longer it takes a reader to decode the less likely students will be to recall/process what they have read. It is important to increase an ELL's phonological awareness skills in order for them to decode more fluently.

As for vocabulary, there is still much research to be done on Arabic ELLs, but based on the research out there on ELLs in general, increasing a student's vocabulary will ultimately increase their reading comprehension. A lot of the research shows that just having students spend more time reading will increase their vocabulary (Ayami and Mohsen, 2019). Most

English Language Learners acquire vocabulary directly, which is why direct instruction of vocabulary is necessary for English Language Learners (Haynes & Zacraian, 2012). This can be done by directly introducing vocabulary from books the students are going to read as well as multiple chances to experience words.

Finally, there are a lot of different supplemental reading programs out there to use in order to increase reading comprehension. The ones explored in this thesis all seem to have similar results with increasing overall time spent on reading. Reading comprehension through supplemental reading programs can be done through programs that focus on phonological awareness, thorough instruction on various letter/sound combinations, and finally through direct vocabulary instruction.

Conclusion

As Lervåg and Aukrust (2010) state, "adequate reading comprehension skills are crucial for virtually all aspects of formal education as well as for full participation in society" (p.612). With how crucial reading comprehension is in all aspects of school, educators need to do whatever they can to increase it. As show above this can be done through both an increase in phonological awareness and processing skills as well as vocabulary. Increasing these two literacy areas can be done through implementation of various reading programs and increasing the overall time ELLs spend every day reading and practicing the English language.

Chapter 3: Project Description

Introduction

In order to increase reading comprehension in Arabic English Language Learners (ELLs), one must compile the limited research in order to find the right way to help Arabic ELLs specifically. According to Taibah and Haynes (2011), phonological awareness is the best way to predict a student's future success in reading. Both Fender (2003) and Taibah and Haynes (2011) would agree that overall phonological processing skills (specifically PA) in students' native languages are an excellent predictor of how a student is going to learn in English. While a student's first language (L1) skills are a major predictor of their second language (L2) acquisition skills, for this project the focus needs to be on the differences in the orthographies between Arabic and English in order to increase students' phonological awareness skills, and then ultimately their reading comprehension. As there is not a direct correlation between Arabic and English letters, and the use of the vowels are so drastically different, it is challenging for Arabic ELLs to master the English language (Palmer et al., 2007).

Along with phonological awareness, Stahl and Fairbanks (as cited in Wallace, 2008) state that vocabulary has been identified as the number one predictor of a student's proficiency of oral language, which is needed in order to comprehend both literary and oral language. Wallace (2008) continues with the fact that vocabulary knowledge is needed for reading comprehension which is shown by the fact that if a student is unable to recognize as small as 2% of the words in a text that could limit comprehension. He also states that a student learning to read in the first language already knows 5,000 to 7,000 words before they start learning to read in school, but the number is significantly less for ELLs which already puts them behind native-English speakers.

This project aims to use both phonological awareness and vocabulary to help increase Arabic ELLs reading comprehension. In order to do this, this project will evaluate the effectiveness of the first-grade curriculum *Reading Street Common Core* published by Pearson. As this is a yearlong program, this project will evaluate and determine what supplemental materials are needed to support Arabic ELLs in just the second unit of the program, Unit 1. Unit 1 was chosen over Unit R because Unit R is a review of everything the student's learned in kindergarten. Unit 1 is ideal because it is the first unit after all of the review is accomplished and the curriculum gets into new learning for the students.

Project Components

Before diving into the needs of *Reading Street Common Core*, first the different sections of what the curriculum aims to do each week needs to be explained. Each *Reading Street Common Core* unit is six weeks long and is broken down into weekly sections with different stories and skills that are the main focus of each week. There are four main sections broken down into smaller sections. The four main sections are "Build Content Knowledge", "Get Ready to Read", "Reading and Comprehend", and "Language Arts".

Within "Build Content Knowledge", there are the subsections of "Integrate Science and Social Studies" which connects the weekly topic to a science and/or social studies concept, "Weekly Question" which is an umbrella question that connects the science and/or social studies concept with the content for the week, and "Knowledge Goals" which are the objectives for the week.

In the "Get Ready to Read" section, the subsections are "Phonemic Awareness" which explains the letter/sound(s) that will be the main focus of the week as well as any other skills that will be focused on. There is also "Phonics" which reinforces the letter/sound(s) of the week as

well as what we be reviewed from previous weeks. Lastly, there is "Spelling" which again reinforces the phonemic awareness and phonics focus.

In the "Read and Comprehend" section, the subsections are "High-Frequency Words" which are words that are used frequently in the story and on the skills work pages, "Comprehension" which concentrates on a skill and a strategy, "Vocabulary" which in this section is referring to words that will help the reader understand the story (this is not the only vocabulary taught), and "Fluency" which emphasizes the need to read accurately and easily.

For the final section, "Language Arts", the subsections are "Writing" which also focuses on a weekly skill or type of writing, "Conventions" which concentrates on the different parts of a sentence, "Listening and Speaking" which emphasizes the importance of different parts of speaking such as asking questions, and "Research Skills" which is all about how to use different aspects of research such as a dictionary or something as simple as selecting a book.

Now, to be clear, there is an ELL extension to *Reading Street Common Core* but this project is just evaluating and supplementing the main curriculum. There are also small notes about how to adapt the main curriculum for ELLs, but most of this direction focuses on Spanish ELLs, not Arabic. In addition, there is a small ELL teacher manual that has one or two additional tasks for each week, but these will be taught through the students' EL teacher who sees them for 30 minutes 2-3 times a week.

Overall, *Reading Street Common Core* has many elements of phonological awareness and vocabulary that are crucial for Arabic ELLs, but there are also areas where the program needs to be enhanced. While the Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and Spelling subsections of the Get Ready to Read section all have to do with the same letter/sound(s) for the whole week, there are

some areas that are lacking the necessary practice needed for student to be successful in mastering the letter/sound(s). The same goes for Vocabulary. There are high-frequency words that could be considered vocabulary words as they are explained and used throughout the story and worksheets for the week. There are also amazing words which relate to the content for the week, as well as the weekly question, but are not necessarily used in the story or related to any other work for the week. Finally, there is vocabulary that relates to different skills in each week. To be fair, there is too much in this curriculum to teach in a standard reading block, so teachers need to be purposefully selective with the activities and intentional with the ones they choose to leave out. Appendices A, B, C, D, E, and F are an overview of what will be revised and added into the already pre-existing content. Let's explore this a little more.

Necessary Revisions

As far as phonological awareness goes, *Reading Street Common Core* does a good job of focusing on the different skills that fall under the phonological awareness umbrella. However, for vocabulary, Baumann (2009) shows that instruction in vocabulary needs to include definitions of the vocabulary words for the words to be used in context, for students to have multiple instructional experiences with the words and be engaged in activities that help them understand the words. When it comes to the Amazing Words, looking at Unit 1 Week 1, the story is *Sam, Come Back!* and the weekly question is "What do pets need?". The story is all about a mischievous cat that runs away and plays with yarn. The Amazing Words for the week are needs, responsibility, shelter, cuddle, tickle, faithful, fetch, and heel. None of these words are in the story but these words are considered Oral Vocabulary. Better vocabulary words for this week's story would be pet, nab, and the high frequency words for the week which are in, my, on, and way. This is the same with a large majority of the words for all six weeks of this unit so in

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Appendices A, B, C, D, E, and F you will see revisions to the vocabulary words for all six weeks. These words will need to be defined, shown in context, and where applicable have images to go along with the word for students to be able to visualize the word as well. This can be seen in Appendices G, H, I, J, K, and L. The front side of the vocabulary cards have the word as well as a visual image and the back side has a first-grade friendly definition of the word as well as the word itself for more exposure.

Necessary Additions

As stated above, *Reading Street Common Core* does well including many aspects of phonological awareness in a way that allows students to have the possibility of achieving mastery of the phoneme or grapheme that each week focuses on. This is done through a combination of oral, whole class work, worksheets that can be completed together or independently (or both), as well as some work in the anthology book where there are words that have the phonics skills for the week. Where this curriculum is lacking is more hands-on, interactive work for the students, which is what this project will add to the current curriculum.

Since Arabic readers focus so much on phonological processing skills, it stands to reason that they will struggle with word recognition in English because English phonemes and vowels are inconsistent in sounds and change depending on the word they are used in (Fender, 2003). Fender (2003) also notes that this makes it hard for native Arabic speakers to decode English words, and all together slows down the word recognition process, which in turn slows down their reading. In the end, this can ultimately cause difficulty with comprehension since the longer it takes a reader to decode, the less likely they will be to recall/process what they have read. By spending more time on decoding and creating words with different consonants and vowels, students will have more exposure and experience with being able to recognize words quicker

which will aide in their comprehension. This can be seen in Appendix M where the students are asked to write a word on their white board and then directed to change different sounds before decoding the new word. Students will complete this task weekly with the new phonological awareness concepts taught each week.

The example in Appendix M only shows short a, but will be completed with each of the vowels adding on each week, meaning that for week two the teacher will include short a as well as i since that is week two's vowel. The same concept will apply for the CVC Word Factory Game seen in Appendix N. This game asks the students to spin the spinner and pull out either a beginning consonant, medial vowel, or final consonant. Once they have one of each piece the students are to put the pieces together to form consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) words. For the first week they will only be allowed to use short a (all other vowels will be removed) and in subsequent weeks the teacher will add the vowel of the week in until the game is played with all five vowels. As for Appendices O, P, Q, R, and S the students will be asked to match words with the short vowel of the week to their associated picture. The teacher will help students identify the pictures but will only assist with the words once the students have tried decoding on their own. If students are successful with completing the task quickly, they will be asked to sort the words by word families. Each student will have their own word sort or they will be paired up to complete the sorts.

Fender (2003) also states that Arabic ELLs would do well with being exposed to different kinds of computer-based word recognition games or tasks. In order to address this in this project the teacher will allow computer time during small group instruction or in any section of the day where time allows. The computer-based tasks (Appendix T) will be in the form of websites, some of which need logins and some which do not. Some of the websites like readingeggs.com

and ixl.com allow the teacher to assign certain skills for the students to work on to individualize and differentiate the tasks.

Project Evaluation

Evaluating student learning from this project will be slightly challenging in that it will be hard to separate what they would have learned without the necessary revisions and additions. Most evaluation will be done through informal assessment such as observation. Before beginning Unit 1 the teacher will ask the students to tell them what sound each of the five short vowels makes and then read a list of fifteen short vowel words (Appendix U) along with the consonant pattern -ck, the consonants x, and s (sounding like z), plural -s, inflected endings -s and -ing, and initial and final consonant blends. Students will read this same list at the end of the six weeks, and the teacher will be able to see what the students learned during Unit 1. There will also be a fifteen-word assessment after each week of the unit. These weekly assessments (Appendices V, W, X, Y, Z, and AA) will build on each other, mainly assessing that week's phonic focuses, but also including skills from previous weeks so the teacher can determine if there is a sound that needs to be reviewed again.

For vocabulary, students will be asked to tell what they know about the vocabulary words before starting the unit (with the teacher reading the words to them if needed), and then at the end of the unit the teacher will ask the students to either tell in words or draw the meaning of the vocabulary words (still reading them if necessary since the goal is to know what the word means). Although the teacher wants students to be able to read the vocabulary words (Appendices BB, CC, DD, EE, FF, and GG), if they do not follow the patterns or include the phonemes and graphemes of this unit, then it will not be expected that students will be able to sound them out/read them.

Another area the teacher will informally evaluate the students will be in their independent reading achievements. The teacher will read with each student twice a month for the duration of the project books that are deemed to be on the student's level. Through reading with the students one-on-one, the teacher will be able to gather more insight into the student's comprehension and be able to tailor the projects various aspects to help each student be more successful with their reading and overall comprehension.

Plans for Implementation

This project will be implemented at Hanley International Academy in a first-grade classroom. It will start at the completion of *Reading Street Common Core* Unit R. Unit R is typically started around the second or third week of school and is six weeks long. If everything with Unit R is completed on schedule, Unit 1 will be started around the middle or end of October. While this project aims to see the results of an increase in reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs, this project will be completed with my entire class (the majority of which are Arabic ELLs) because I feel strongly that all of my students' reading comprehension would benefit from its implementation. The necessary revisions of vocabulary will take place during both whole class instruction, as well as during guided reading through a review of vocabulary at the center taught by the teacher. The necessary additions will mostly take place during guided reading centers, unless time does not allow. The necessary additions will typically take place during the center with me, but may also take place on a computer for the computer-based additions (Appendix T). Revisions will take place daily, whereas additions will take place on whichever day they are needed to support student learning. Plans will change based on how students are progressing and will be adapted to their needs as we move throughout Unit 1. Eventually, as the success of this project is measured, it will be used as a model to be

implemented with all six units of the *Reading Street Common Core* curriculum. The goal is to

increase reading comprehension in Arabic ELLs, and when this project is deemed successful, it

will be given to other first-grade teachers who use this curriculum or adapted to fit other

curriculums and grade levels, depending on need.

Project Conclusion

The goal of this project is to increase Arabic ELLs reading comprehension. This will be

done through an increase in lessons of phonological awareness and vocabulary by revising and

adding to the current curriculum *Reading Street Common Core*. While developing this project,

the theories of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics were used. Psycholinguistics involves three

different cueing systems: graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic. Keene and Zimmerman (2007)

state, "Children need to learn letters, sounds, words, sentences, and how to comprehend what

they read – *simultaneously*" (p.22). The quote here goes to show that all three of the cueing

systems need to be used together in order for the reader to understand what they are reading. All

three of these cueing systems were used while developing this project. Graphophonic cueing is

the relationship between letters and their sounds, so this is seen as the letter sounds are taught

and reinforced, both orally as well as in the activities provided. Syntactic cueing is seen through

the inflected and plural endings taught throughout the unit. Finally, semantic cueing is increased

through the thoughtful, intentional vocabulary that was created both to help enhance students'

understanding of the story of the week as well as their overall reading comprehension. This is

done as the students are introduced to words that will help further their reading as they recognize

images they were unable to identify before.

Sociolinguistics is all about our interactions with one another and how those interactions

have an impact on our literacy development. For all of the added hands-on material, students will

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be working with other students and sharing their background knowledge to assist each other in the phonics and vocabulary tasks. Students will also be asked to read together on Day 4 of each week and instructed to discuss the story, as well as the illustrations, in order to further their comprehension of the story.

The first-grade students of Hanley International Academy will benefit from the intentional revisions and additions to the *Reading Street Common Core* curriculum. There will be an initial sound assessment to see what the students gain throughout the unit, as well as weekly assessments to monitor what the students learned. For vocabulary, the students will be exposed to words all week long through vocabulary cards and the story of the week. At the end of each week, the teacher will ask the students to draw or write the meaning of each of the vocabulary cards to assess students' understanding of the words. As far as comprehension goes, the teacher will be able to gather what the students have gained throughout the unit through informal discussions with the students, as well as through their independent reading achievements. Overall, this project will help students be more confident, successful readers as their reading curriculum is tailored in a way that helps students reach new reading levels that may not have been otherwise possible.

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Appendix A: Unit 1 Week 1 Overview**

Sam, Come Back!

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduce this week's phonics: short a by demonstrating the sound it makes.	Review this week's short a sound and introduce the consonant pattern -ck.	Review the short a and -ck sounds.	Review the short a and -ck sounds.	
Practice with short a: Have students practice identifying the short a sound in words such as cat, ran, sad, etc.	Practice making words with the -ack ending by placing consonants in front of the ending sound and determine if they are real words.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word cat on their board. Change the consonants to make new words but leave the vowel the same. (Appendix M)	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory with just "a" for the vowel. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short a sound. (Appendix N)	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension). (Appendix O)
Introduce Content Vocabulary: pet, nab, on, in, lap, sack, pack, pat, way with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix G)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *Sam, Come Back!* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *Sam, Come Back!* Whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *Sam, Come Back!* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short a and -ck sounds. (Appendix V)

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Appendix B: Unit 1 Week 2 Overview**

Pig in a Wig

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduce this week's phonics: short i by demonstrating the sound it makes.	Review this week's short a sound and introduce the consonant x /ks/.	Review the short i and -x /ks/.	Review short a, short i, and - x /ks/.	
Practice with short i: Have students practice identifying the short a sound in words such as sit, mix, wig, lip etc.	Practice making words short i rhyming words that rhyme with mix, then other short i word families.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word mix on their board. Change the consonants to make new words but leave the vowel the same.	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory with "i" and "a" for the vowels. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short vowel sounds.	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension). (Appendix P)
Introduce Content Vocabulary: she, up, take, wig, pig, tick, dip, and jig with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix H)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *Pig in a Wig* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *Pig in a Wig,* whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *Pig in a Wig* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short i and x /ks/ sounds as well as last week's phonics skills. (Appendix W)

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Appendix C: Unit 1 Week 3 Overview**

The Big Blue Ox

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduce this week's phonics: short o by demonstrating the sound it makes.	Review this week's short o sound and introduce the plural -s and consonant s making the /z/ sound.	Review short a, i, and o and the plural -s and consonant s making the /z/ sound.	Review short a, i, o and the plural -s and consonant s making the /z/ sound.	
Practice with short o: Have students practice identifying the short a sound in words such as hop, cob, pot, etc.	Practice making words short o rhyming words that rhyme with hot, then other short o word families.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word hot on their board. Change the consonants to make new words but leave the vowel the same.	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory "a", "i", and "o" for the vowel. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short vowel sounds.	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension). (Appendix O)
Introduce Content Vocabulary: ox, little, use, mop, produce, and town with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix I)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *The Big Blue Ox* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *The Big Blue Ox* whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *The Big Blue Ox* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short o sound, the plural -s, and consonant s making the /z/ sounds as well as previous week's skills. (Appendix X)

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Appendix D: Unit 1 Week 4 Overview**

A Fox and a Kit

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Review short a, i, and o and introduce this week's phonics: inflected ending -s by demonstrating the sound it makes and how it is used.	Review short a, i, and o and introduce this week's phonics: inflected ending -ing by demonstrating the sound it makes and how it is used.	Review short a, i, and o and this week's phonics: inflected endings -s and -ing by demonstrating the sound it makes and how it is used.	Review short a, i, and o and this week's phonics: inflected endings -s and -ing by demonstrating the sound it makes and how it is used.	
Practice with short vowels a, i, and o: Have students practice identifying the short a, i, and o sounds in words such as hop, cab, pit, etc. Have student identify which vowel is used in the words orally.	Practice making rhyming words with short a, i, and o.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word hot on their board. Change the consonants to make new words as well as the vowel for the 3 short vowels learned.	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory "a", "i", and "o" for the vowel. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short vowel sounds.	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension).
Introduce Content Vocabulary: eat, add, spill, kit, fox, nip, wild, observe, and parent with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix J)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *A Fox and a Kit* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *A Fox and a Kit* whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *A Fox and a Kit* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short o sound, inflected endings -s and -ing as well as previous weeks phonics skills. (Appendix Y)

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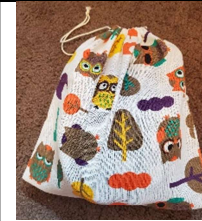
Appendix E: Unit 1 Week 5 Overview**

Get the Egg!

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduce this week's phonics: short e by demonstrating the sound it makes.	Review this week's short e sound and introduce initial consonant blends.	Review short a, i, o, and e and initial consonant blends	Review short a, i, o, and e and initial consonant blends	
Practice with short e: Have students practice identifying the short e sound in words such as ten, bed, pet, etc.	Practice making short e rhyming words that rhyme with pet, then other short e word families.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word pet on their board. Change the consonants to make new words but leave the vowel the same.	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory "a", "i", "o", and "e" for the vowel. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short vowel sounds.	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension). (Appendix R)
Introduce Content Vocabulary: hatch, chirp, bird, nest, snap, twig, net, and habitat with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix K)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *Get the Egg!* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *Get the Egg!* whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *Get the Egg!* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short e sound and initial consonant blends as well as the previous weeks phonics skills. (Appendix Z)

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Appendix F: Unit 1 Week 6 Overview**

Animal Park

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduce this week's phonics: short u by demonstrating the sound it makes.	Review this week's short u sound and introduce final consonant blends.	Review short a, i, o, e, and u and final consonant blends	Review short a, i, o, e, and u and final consonant blends	
Practice with short u: Have students practice identifying the short e sound in words such as sun, rug, luck, etc.	Practice making short e rhyming words that rhyme with sun, then other short e word families.	Pass out white boards to a small group or whole class and have students write the word sun on their board. Change the consonants to make new words but leave the vowel the same.	In a small group play the game CVC Word Factory "a", "i", "o", and "e" for the vowel. Have students practice creating CVC words, sounding them out and blending them, emphasizing the short vowel sounds.	Play a sorting game with pictures and words for a mixture of phonological awareness and vocabulary (in the sense of picture identification to help with comprehension). (Appendix S)
Introduce Content Vocabulary: home, camp, truck, band, blend, rest, hunt, pond, and bump with verbal explanations and visuals where applicable (Appendix L)	Review content vocabulary by reviewing definitions and visuals	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Review content vocabulary by using the vocabulary in sentences or by drawing pictures (depending on students' English abilities)	Ask students to individually use the vocabulary in sentences to show what they have learned.
	Listen to the story *Animal Park* with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	Read the story *Animal Park* whole class with students, stopping at the end of each set of pages to discuss the vocabulary	If possible, have students read *Animal Park* in small groups, otherwise read the story whole group as on Day 3.	Small assessment on the short vowel sounds and the other phonics skills taught in Unit 1. (Appendix AA)

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Front

pet	nab	on
in	lap	sack
pack	pat	way

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An animal that lives in a person's home. **pet**	To nab means to grab something. Ex. The person grabbed the marker. **nab**	To be on something. Ex. The marker is <u>on</u> the book. **on**
When something is inside of something else. Ex. The pieces are <u>in</u> the basket. **in**	The flat area when someone sits down and is between the stomach and legs. **lap**	A bag that has a string at the stop to tie it closed. **sack**
A bag to put things in that closes at the top like a backpack. **pack**	To pat is to lightly tap on something with you hand. Ex. I will pat the cat. **pat**	A direction. Ex. Let's go this way. **way**

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Front

she	up	take
wig	pig	tick
dip	jig	

A word used for a girl or woman. she	A word used to show direction. up	To take means to remove something from another location. take
Fake hair that someone wears on their head. wig	A pink animal that often lives on a farm. pig	The sound a clock makes. tick
To dip means to put a spoon in a bowl and eat it. dip	To jig means to dance. jig	

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ox	little	use
mop	produce	town

An ox is a male cow. ox	Little is something that is small. little	To use means to take or hold an item. use
A tool used to clean floors. mop	Food grown on a farm. produce	A small city with houses and stores. town

Front

eat	add	spill
kit	fox	nip https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vectors/nip-vectors
wild	observe	parent

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To eat means to put food in your mouth and swallow. eat	To add means to put things together. add	To spill means something to come out of the container it is in. spill
A kit is a baby fox. kit	A fox is an animal that looks similar to a dog and and is often orange or brown. fox	To playfully bite nip
To be wild means for something to live outside or in nature. wild	To observe means to watch observe	A parent is a person, animal, or plant that has children. parent

Front

hatch	chirp	bird
nest	snap	twig
net	habitat	

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To hatch means an animal is born out of a shell. **hatch**	Chirping is the noise an animal makes. **chirp**	A bird is an animal that has wings, feathers, a beak, and can often fly. **bird**
A nest is an animal's home. Ex. A bird builds it's home out of sticks. **nest**	Snap is a sound that something makes when it breaks. **snap**	A twig is a small branch of a tree. **twig**
A net is a tool used to catch things like fish. **net**	A habitat is where something lives that has everything it needs. **habitat**	

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home	camp	truck
band	blend	rest
hunt	pond	bump

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A home is where something lives. **home**	Camp is where someone has set up a tent to live in. **camp**	A truck is a vehicle that may be used to carry big or heavy things. **truck**
A band is a group of animals (ex. zebras) or a group of instruments. **band**	In this case, blend means for things to be hard to see or to be the same color. **blend**	To rest means to take a break or sit/sleep. **rest**
To hunt may be to look for an animal to eat or to look for something. **hunt**	A pond is a small lake where fish and other animals live. **pond**	A bump is a spot in the ground that is higher than the rest. **bump**

Appendix M: White Board Changing Sounds

1. Write the word cat on your board.

2. Change the c to a b, what word did you make?

3. Change the t to a b, what word did you make?

4. Change the b to an s, what word did you make?

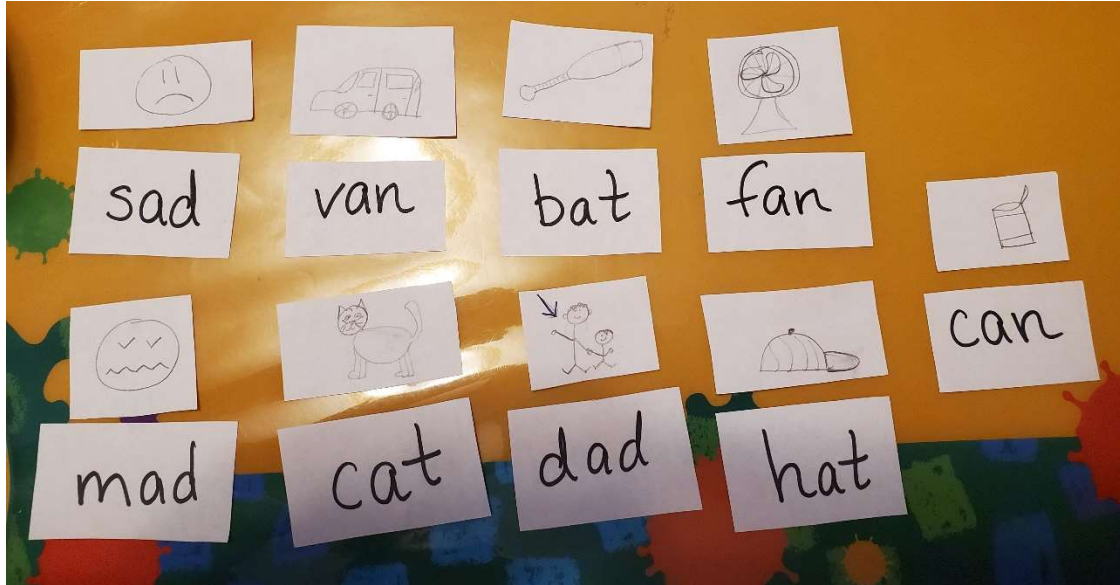Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

Appendix N: CVC Word Factory

Students will make only short a words for this week but will spin to determine whether they are picking a beginning consonant, vowel, or ending consonant.
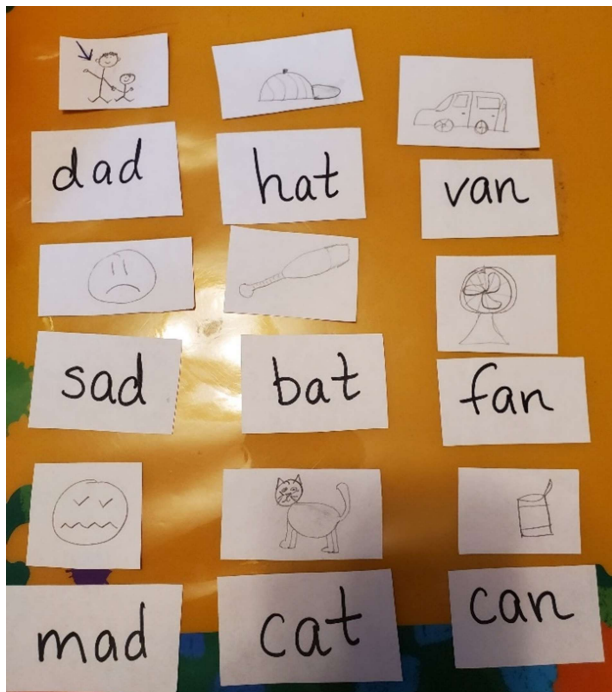
Appendix O: Short a Sort

Round 1: Beginning

Teacher will help students with pictures but will avoid helping them sound out the words.

Round 2: Intermediate/Advanced

If students are successful in quickly sorting/matching the pictures and words, they will be asked to sort the words and pictures by word families.
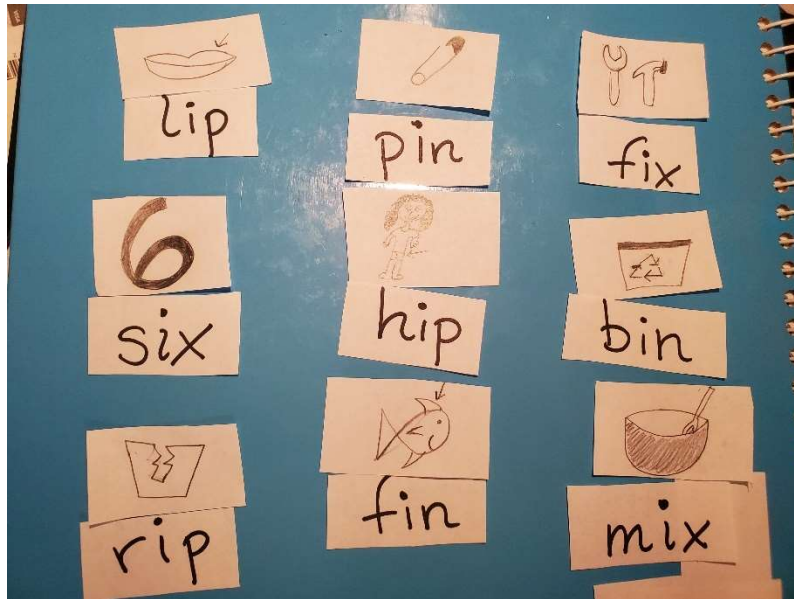

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Round 1: Beginning

Teacher will help students with pictures but will avoid helping them sound out the words.

Round 2: Intermediate/Advanced

If students are successful in quickly sorting/matching the pictures and words, they will be asked to sort the words and pictures by word families.

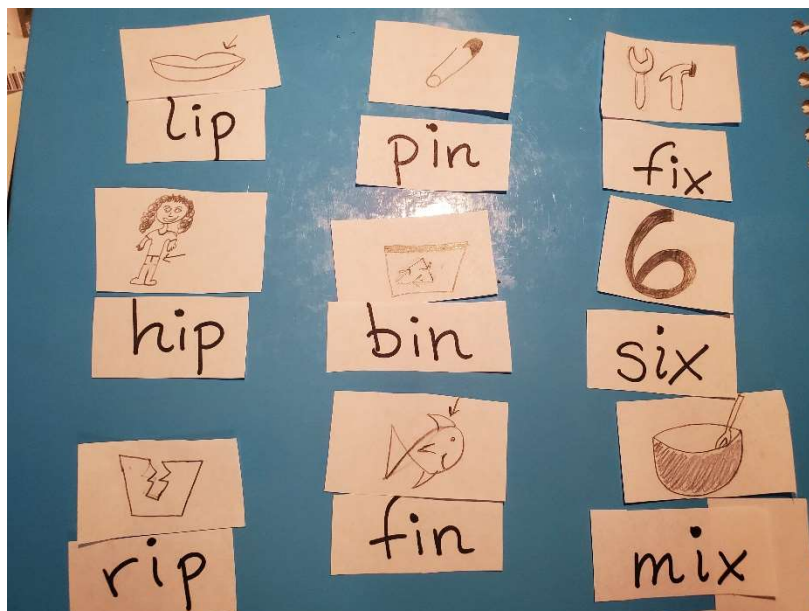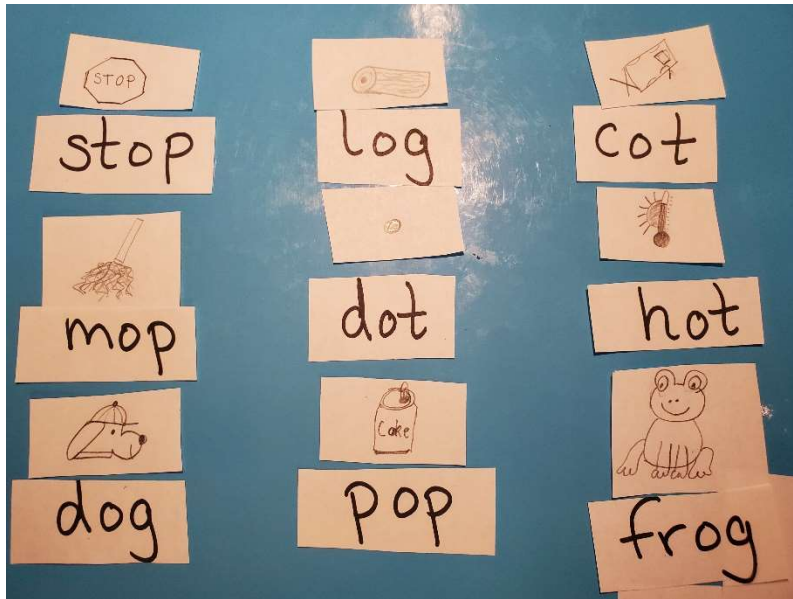Created by Amanda Watson, 2020
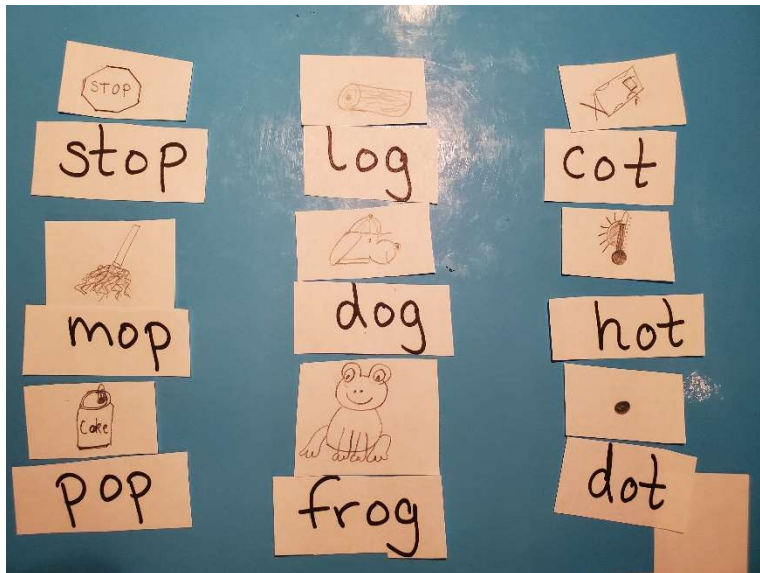
Appendix Q: Short o sort

Round 1: Beginning
Teacher will help students with pictures but will avoid helping them sound out the words.

Round 2: Intermediate/Advanced
If students are successful in quickly sorting/matching the pictures and words, they will be asked to sort the words and pictures by word families.

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Round 1: Beginning
Teacher will help students with pictures but will avoid helping them sound out the words.

Round 2: Intermediate/Advanced
If students are successful in quickly sorting/matching the pictures and words, they will be asked to sort the words and pictures by word families.
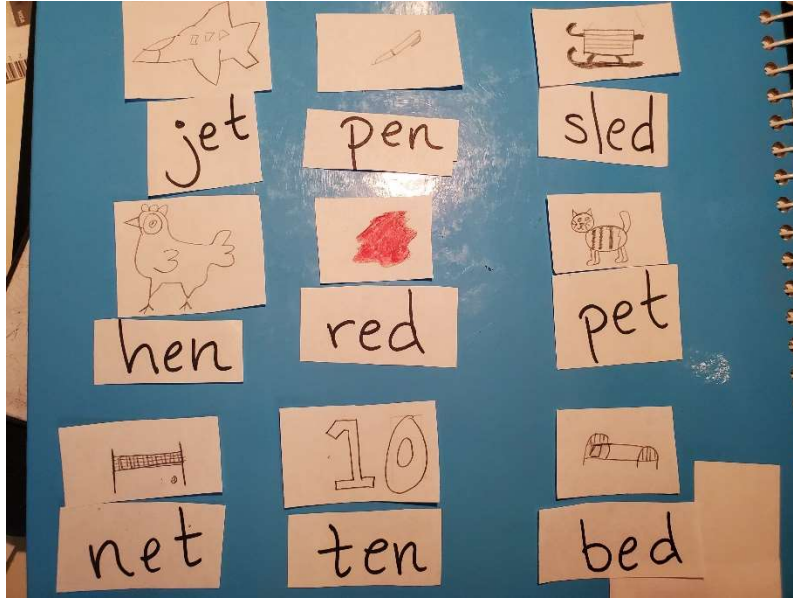

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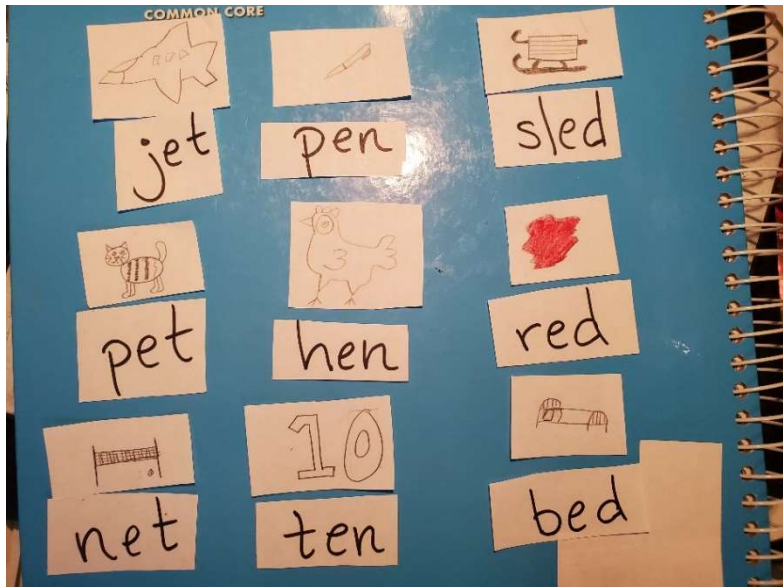
Appendix S: Short u sort

Round 1: Beginning
Teacher will help students with pictures but will avoid helping them sound out the words.

Round 2: Intermediate/Advanced
If students are successful in quickly sorting/matching the pictures and words, they will be asked to sort the words and pictures by word families.
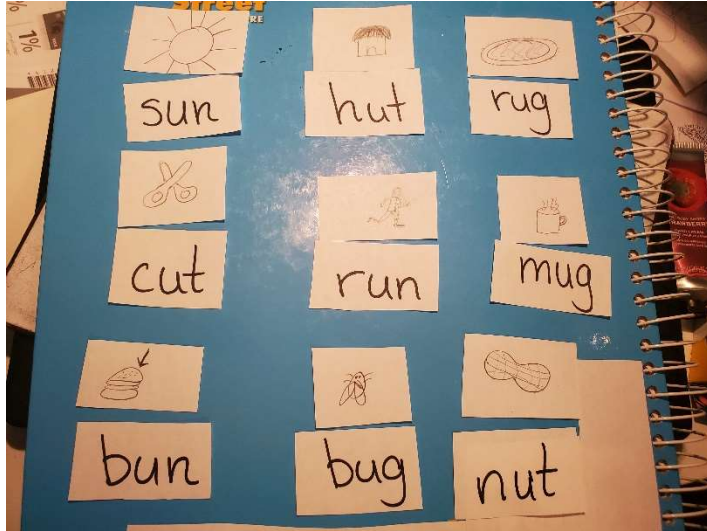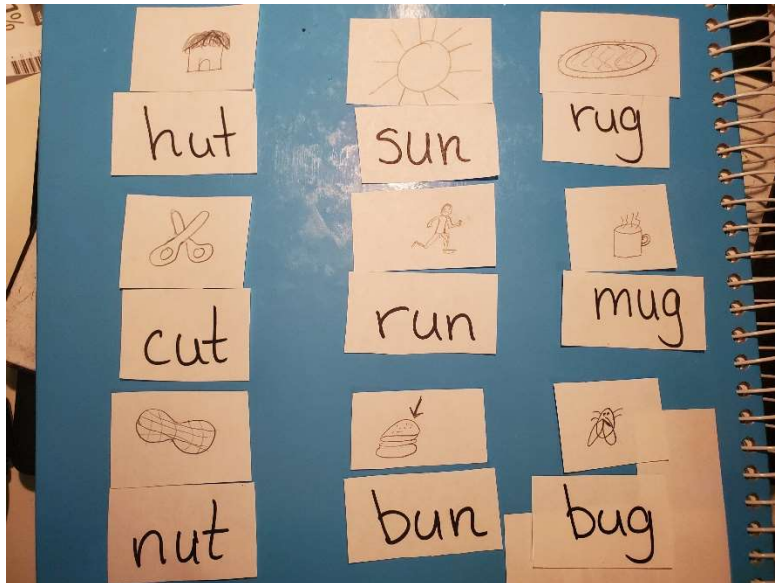

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

Appendix T: Online, Interactive Websites

http://www.readingeggs.com

http://ixl.com

http://www.starfall.com

http://www.abcya.com

pet	sun	sits
fix	grabs	mom
pans	box	luck
flag	cup	ending
mixing	ten	top

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

sad	pan	tack
van	rack	can
cat	ham	pack
sack	nab	bag
map	back	cab

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

Appendix W: Short i assessment

mix	rat	fin
tin	pit	tax
Max	sip	fix
six	nap	tip
sit	sick	tag

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

mix	rocks	cob
kids	pot	tax
dot	sip	fox
six	log	top
mop	sick	tags

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

Max	socks	rob
lids	pat	adds
pot	sip	box
fix	fog	tin
top	ticking	tags

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

men	rocks	plans
cat	jet	dress
sled	sip	fox
six	frog	ten
step	tell	tags

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

fun	just	truck
bump	bat	tug
dot	flip	fox
six	slug	desk
mug	luck	sand

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

pet	nab	on
in	lap	sack
pack	pat	way

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.   Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

she	up	take
wig	pig	tick
dip	jig	

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

ox	little	use
mop	produce	town

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.   Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

eat	add	spill
kit	fox	nip
wild	observe	parent

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.   Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

Appendix FF: Week 5 Vocabulary Assessment

hatch	chirp	bird
nest	snap	twig
net	habitat	

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.   Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

hatch	chirp	bird
nest	snap	twig
net	habitat	

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.

Created by Amanda Watson, 2020

home	camp	truck
band	blend	rest
hunt	pond	bump

**Students will write or draw what each of the vocabulary words mean.