

1.39 Cat or /k/ /æ/ /t/? : an analysis of two Sri Lankan ESL (English as a Second Language) books for teaching primary school students.

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ABSTRACT

The use of ‘phonics’ versus the ‘whole word system’ (look and say method) has been under debate in Sri Lanka (Lets learn English-Grade3, Educational Publications Department Sri Lanka 2000, Perera, 2007). Research on reading acquisition has found that phonemic awareness facilitated by the phonic system is extremely important and that it initiates the foundation of a good reader or successful reading acquisition by any child (Ehri, 1998). This study deals with second language acquisition of primary school children, English in this case.

Sri Lankan government schools have implemented the whole word system at present, and a recent analysis of the Grade 3 textbooks has predicted difficulties in children’s reading (Perera 2007). Despite instructions to use the whole word system, some teachers believe, similar to many researchers that phonics is more of a success in comparison to the whole word method. Instructional strategies also affect how students learn (McBride-Chang et al, 2004).

This work researches the issue of instructional material in teaching reading, pursuing the question “Does the whole word approach work better than phonics?”

Textual analysis will be employed as the research method drawing a comparison between the Grade 3 text book with a primary level text that employs the phonics system. The strengths and weaknesses of these texts will be analyzed to discover which approach is more of success.