

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the findings are summarized to answer the research question (RQ) about the effects of syllable-awareness based phonics instruction on spelling multi-syllable words. We will start by reviewing the empirical main findings, and then the pedagogical implications are generated for instructors and educational authorities. Finally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for the future research are offered for readers.

Main Findings

Since English education has started from the 3rd grade in elementary school, students' reading and writing abilities are gradually emphasized. Students in the 7th grade are required more skills to spell words, especially multi-syllable words. However, the previous research discussing on students' spelling ability seems to be limited in the instruction on phonics and focus on the application of spelling mono-syllable words. The present research tried to provide a possible solution --- syllable-awareness based phonics instruction--- to enhance students' spelling ability and stimulate their motivation on memorizing and spelling English vocabulary.

Two research questions were explored for the effects of this proposed instruction: they were: (1) Is the syllable-awareness based phonics instruction more effective than the phonics instruction only on spelling multi-syllable words for 7th graders? (2) After the instruction, are there differences between the two groups in learning attitudes and perceived difficulties?

A hypothesis was assumed to predict the effects of syllable-awareness based

phonics instruction on spelling multi-syllable words. It is hoped that the instruction could benefit students not only on their spelling ability, but also enhance their motivation. The data analysis of subjects' multi-syllable word spelling tests showed that there was no significant difference between the control group and the experimental group although students in both groups improved respectively.

As for the RQ2 about subjects' attitude changes and perceived difficulties, the data of the pre- and post-instruction questionnaire on learning and interviews were collected. The result of the post-instruction questionnaire on learning showed that the experimental group's positive attitude on memorizing vocabulary and learning English increased more significantly than the control group's. In addition, some questions about the instruction and the teacher's teaching in the post-instruction questionnaire also revealed that the experimental group had more positive attitude after the instruction. The findings clearly proved that syllable-awareness based phonics instruction can reinforce more positive attitude of students toward spelling words and learning English. In terms of the perceived difficulties of students, the open-ended question at the end of the post-instruction questionnaire on learning and interviews both revealed that the lack of the concept of letter-sound correspondence will affect the development of the spelling ability of students. Furthermore, syllable awareness was helpful for the experimental group, but the application of syllabification in spelling was still not easy for subjects. Apparently, syllabification should be taught through more intensive practices and to become more effective for learners.

In conclusion, although no significant difference could be found in the multi-syllable word spelling tests of the two groups, more positive attitude in the experimental group showed the evidence of the encouraging effects of syllable

awareness. Obviously, syllable awareness training can ease the fear of spelling long words.

Pedagogical Implications

Several pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study for instructors and educational authorities.

First, the concept of letter-sound correspondence should be reinforced. According to the questionnaires on learning and interviews about the difficulties of the instruction, subjects revealed that their poor spelling ability resulted from their failure in mastering letter-sound correspondence, an essential part of phonic instruction. In fact, according to the MOE's guideline of the elementary school curriculum of English, an elementary school graduate should have acquired the skills of applying letter-sound correspondence. However, in this study, the researcher found that students even in the 7th grade were poor at utilizing it. That is, more instructions and more practices should be given when students start to apply phonics on reading or spelling words in elementary school.

Second, syllable awareness should be introduced after students have established solid foundation in phonics. The analysis of the post-instruction questionnaire on learning indicated that syllable-awareness based phonic instruction could not only lower the worry and anxiety of students in spelling long words, but also enhance their vocabulary learning and memorization. Hu's report (1999) also recorded that phonological awareness, including syllable awareness, should be taught based on the foundation of the phonic instruction. In other words, syllable awareness on the basis of phonics instruction will benefit students' vocabulary learning and bridge the gap of spelling long words.

Furthermore, interviews reflected some of the difficulties of applying

syllable-awareness based phonic instruction. According to the interviews, subjects who felt difficult or uneasy with utilizing the syllable-awareness based phonics instruction would prefer to use the ineffective method --- rote learning. It points out that syllable-awareness based phonic instruction, which needs both phonics and the concept of syllables, is not naturally developed for learners in Taiwan. That is, better designed instruction and sufficient exercises of the method are called for. Only after adequate practices, can learners naturally utilize it and give up the ineffective learning habit of rote memorization.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for the Future Research

Although the present study leads to positive attitude changes, several limitations of the study and suggestions for future research need to be recognized.

First, the sample size of subjects was small and the variable on subjects was hard to control. In order to select subjects with the same beginning level, syllable counting and spelling tests were both conducted. The selected subjects were confined to 22 in each group and the sample size of 44 seventh graders in this study may be too small. Consequently, more researches with larger sample size are needed to see if the findings can be generalized to all 7th graders. Furthermore, it was hard to prevent subjects from extra learning outside of the classroom, i.e. joining the cram school or getting help from members of family. It was advised for the future researchers to change the subjects to 5th and 6th graders who are unfamiliar with phonics and may benefit more from the training of syllable awareness. Most important of all, it is not so common for elementary school students to go to cram school. More suitable subjects can thus be found more easily.

Another limitation is that only short-term, not long-term, effects of training were

examined. The spelling training was regarded as an advanced level that calls for long-term instructions and practices. In the researcher's opinion, more instruction time needs to be used to develop the subjects' spelling skills. The more time they have, the more confidence and better performance they will get.

Next, the instruction of syllable awareness training was not enough, either. On the one hand, the difference of the instruction between the experimental and control group was only in the 8-minute production, and the total training time is only 176 minutes. On the other hand, EFL learners were at a disadvantage in acquiring syllable awareness because their mother language lacks the concept of syllables (Liow & Lau, 2006). All these may result in no significant difference between the two groups in the present research. Moreover, more supra-segmental feature, such as stress, should be taught. Stress in different syllables may produce different sounds which influence the process of encoding words. As a consequence, the spelling instruction should include stress at the same time. Furthermore, more syllable activities can be included for the future researches, such as syllable deleting, syllable adding, syllable reversing, or syllable substituting as introduced in Goldsworthy's *Sourcebook of Phonological Awareness Activities* (1998).

Finally, some of our tests should be revised to detect the effects of syllable instruction on spelling multi-syllable words. The multi-syllable word spelling tests have only 15 words and 1-4 syllable words. Tests with more items or even 5 syllable words should be used. Different types of tests could show more detail results for discussions, such as spelling pseudo-words or decoding words.

To summarize, students who received syllable-awareness based phonics instruction showed more positive attitude and confidence in spelling multi-syllable words. Their reduced fear of spelling long words also affects their attitude of

learning English in the later development. It even prevents some 7th graders to spell words from rote learning. As a result, the researcher recommends that the elementary school teachers should give the syllable instruction in the 5th or 6th grade and add more practices for students. When such students attend junior high school, teachers need to put more emphasis on the syllable-awareness based phonics instruction to help them bridge the gap in spelling long words. In the end, students who develop solid concepts of phonics and syllables and do sufficient practices on spelling words early on can succeed in decreasing the anxiety of spelling long words.

