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Relation between Phonological Awareness and Systematic Literacy Instruction: Is Conditionality One-Way in Consistent Orthographies?

Extended summary

Phonological awareness is an important prerequisite for learning reading and writing, while initial literacy considerably contributes to its improvement. The development of the phonological processing skills begins at preschool age and it intensifies in primary education, especially by using analytical-synthetic exercises developed in methodology within the analytical-synthetic method and used not only in the preparatory period, but also in the phase of systematic literacy.

The aim of the research was to evaluate the phonological awareness of the first grade pupils (N = 143) and to determine whether the start of the systematic literacy instruction significantly enhances this ability. The research was of a comparative nature and it was implemented during the months of April and May of the school year 2017/18 in Banja Luka and Nikšić. The research goal was also achieved by determining the factors that impact language structures (sentence, word, and syllable) and phonological awareness. The research question was: Does learning to read and write accelerate the development of phonological awareness or does the development of phonological processing flow relatively independently from the start of a systematic literacy instruction? It was hypothesized that learning to read and write significantly enhances the development of phonological awareness. The subsamples came from the school

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systems according to the curricula which anticipate different starts of the systematic literacy instruction - in the first and the second grade of primary school. We used the phonological awareness protocol as the research instrument.

The results of the research indicate that there is a tendency - but not reliable enough evidence - that the start of the literacy instruction accelerates the development of the phonological processing skills. The results obtained on the tasks that demand deep phonemic awareness (word segmentation task) imply the conclusion that analytical exercises contribute to the development of phonemic awareness regardless of the start of the systematic literacy instruction.

The future research of the pupils' phonological awareness should involve examining the phonological awareness on its own, by using different types of tasks involving the manipulation of the phonemes (especially in words with different structure of the syllables), as well as analysing in greater detail the processes of sentence segmenting depending on its structure.

Keywords: analytical exercises, initial reading and writing, phonemic awareness, preparation period, sentence, word, and syllable structure.

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