

Cracking the alphabetic code: instruction in phonics and morphology for elementary school students with reading difficulties

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The ability to read is essential in order to succeed in school. However, in 2022/23, approximately 8% of the students in elementary school did not achieve the required reading goals for the subject Swedish (Skolverkets statistikdatabas). Applying the best possible reading instruction methods at different stages of development is key in order to provide all students with equal chances in school. Previous studies show that phonics is effective in early reading instruction (Wanzek et al., 2018). Yet, few studies have explored what should come after this initial phase of reading instruction. Some studies indicate that instruction in morphology should be the next step to support word recognition of orthographically and morphologically complex words (Carlisle, 2010). This quasi-experimental intervention study aims to evaluate two complementary reading instruction methods – phonics vs. morphology – and their possible effects on word recognition and spelling in students with reading difficulties early in grade 2 or after “cracking the code” in grade 4. Participants were 57 students in grade 2 and 82 students in grade 4, with word reading skills at $z < -0.7$. A cross-over study design was used. Students in grade 2 received instructions in phonics (6 weeks) or phonics + morphology (6 weeks), while students in grade 4 received instruction in morphology (6 weeks) or phonics + morphology (6 weeks). A control condition of repeated reading (6 weeks) was used in both grade 2 and 4. Instruction was given in small groups. A mixed ANOVA will be used to analyse possible between- and within-group effects of the experimental and control conditions. The results will be discussed in relation to previous studies and theories on word recognition, spelling and reading instruction.

References

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