

# **“One size fits all or does it?”**

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“What is the impact of a synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults to overcome the barrier of false beginners?”

## **Abstract**

Our research focus evolved from an ongoing problematic issue around a number of learners in ESOL provision. As an ESOL provider we were faced with a challenging case of demonstrating progress within a designated time scale. In order to address this need, we had to implement a reading strategy that would advance learners' reading skills. We were fully aware that having tried and tested various reading classroom approaches, none had been successful in terms of accelerating progress in reading. Having previously experimented with teaching phonics to adults with limited reading skills, e.g. ESOL learners from overseas that had never learned to read and write in their own language, we decided that this would be the most effective method to adopt.

We have based our research upon the findings of Maxine Burton (2011) and Spiegel and Sunderland (2006). Because of lack of credible research in this field, and because of the resources commercially available are aimed at primary aged children, we had elements of doubts whether the approach would achieve its objectives.

We devised the following question “What is the impact of synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults to overcome the barrier of false beginners.”

Our preliminary findings have revealed that the use of systematic synthetic phonics will work in conjunction with regular ESOL provision, which justifies Burton's claim.

It has accelerated learners' ability to take small steps in reading whole words and sentences through blending and segmenting. This is an ongoing process.

We support the fact that this strategy is of interest to ESOL practitioners who are faced with the challenges of non-readers.

In order to use phonics successfully, we identified a number of learners that needed help and a number of challenges that any practitioners would face if they decide to implement this approach.

## **Introduction**

A group of ESOL adult learners in the mainstream class were taught using the prescribed programme accompanied by detailed teachers' notes. Although it implemented a variety of meaning - based approaches to teaching reading with bottom - up techniques, it still addressed ESOL learners with low literacy. That meant, some literacy was a prerequisite. Following the programme was a struggle for the tutor but especially for a group of non - literate learners. As a result, the progress was very limited. In spite of spending a great amount of time on lesson preparation and differentiating activities, a further intervention for flexible but structured and systematic approach which would bring the group in need to the stage of becoming independent readers was needed.

For our small scale research we devised the following question “What is the impact of synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults to overcome the barrier of false beginners.” In other words - ‘Synthetic phonics intervention outside the mainstream class in order to emerge reading skills and help ‘false beginners’ not to keep being stuck in the same low level group forever.’

We identified a small cohort of students that needed extra support for further discrete provision. A phonics based approach was implemented. The identified cohort consisted of three students who attended for two hours per week for a planned eight months of the year. We followed an adapted scheme of work created by us from the *Letters and Sounds* programme.

The preliminary findings so far have shown that using the approach in a systematic and structured way alongside the main ESOL class has positive effect on learners’ progress. There has been improvement in attendance and increase in intrinsic motivation, self - esteem, and even social interaction.

More and more providers face the same problem. The number of ESOL adults with no literacy in L2 and L1 is increasing and they are often placed in classes with literate students. Various reasons from time - bound progression goals to funders’ conditions cause limitations to learners’ progress. This research is for those who face this common problem.

## **Literature review**

‘Large numbers of adult immigrants who are not literate in any language currently settle in contexts where they must become literate and learn a second language at the same time.’ ‘In many of the places they settle, in North America, Europe, Australia or New Zealand, these immigrants must become literate in an alphabetic script - a writing system that uses visual symbols (graphemes) to represent phonemes in the language. Such adults, who must simultaneously acquire alphabetic literacy and oral second language skills, face a considerable challenge - one that has been insufficiently studied by second language acquisition researchers.’ (Herschensohn and Young - Scholten 2013: 180)

‘Some students spend years without getting the intensive, specific literacy teaching they require, and remain in low-level classes as ‘false beginners’, failing to make any progress to higher levels.’ Phillida Schellekens (2007)

We recognised that this description of false beginners with the experience of our learners was our issue and we realised that we needed to develop a strategy that would withdraw the learners from the situation they were stuck in.

‘We understand a basic literacy learner to be someone who is still learning to read a short simple text and struggles to write a simple sentence independently.’ Following with a more detailed description of various types of ESOL learners the authors continue, ‘some learners may be able to copy in English but not write independently beyond a few words, while others may be able to read simple texts or just make out some key signs but not write at all.’ (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006: 15) When Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) talk about learners with a basic level of English literacy, they potentially mean learners that can be enrolled on a wide range of ESOL and mainstream classes.

A vast majority of learners are enrolled on funded programmes with prescribed syllabus. An example of a funded course currently used by many providers is English My Way, described thus: ‘it is a programme designed specifically for people living in the UK, whose

English language abilities are below Entry Level 1 of the Adult ESOL Curriculum.’ ([www.englishmyway.co.uk/find-out-more](http://www.englishmyway.co.uk/find-out-more))

In chapter four Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) look at Utta Frith’s model of reading acquisition that aims to explain how children acquire the ability to read. They also stress that ‘very little research has been conducted into how bilingual adults learn to read.’ ‘ESOL teachers working with beginner readers thus have few research - based models of reading acquisition to directly inform or critique their practice against, and must look to theoretical models based on studies conducted mainly with non-bilingual children.’ (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006: 55)

‘Morais, Cary, Alegria and Bertelson (1979) argued that it was important to study adults rather than children in order to determine whether phonological awareness emerged as a consequence of age or of external factors. The researchers concluded that the ability to manipulate phonemes orally is not a result of independent cognitive development, but rather a result of learning to read, in an alphabetic script.’ Herschensohn and Young - Scholten (2013: 182)

Kurvers, van Hout Vallen (2009) in Herschensohn and Young - Scholten (2013) conclude that formal instruction is required in order for non - literate adults to learn that signs represent phonemes, and to incorporate that knowledge into their cognitive processing of a second language.

According to Frith’s model, ‘children learning to read pass through an identifiable series of stages on route to becoming fluent readers.’ (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006: 56): logographic, alphabetic, orthographic. Through the beginning - logographic stage, the second stage starts with the development of phonemic awareness, which leads to an understanding of letter-sound correspondence, and finishes at the last one - orthographic - the stage which characterises mature reader. Spiegel and Sunderland (2006)

‘If we take Frith’s model into consideration, phonics is a skill that links to the alphabetic stage of reading acquisition. In this approach, the sounds of the letters of the alphabet are taught, and the correspondences between letters and groups of letters and their pronunciation are learnt.’ (Adams 1990) in (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006: 65)

Maxine Burton (2011) asks in her first chapter: ‘Why phonics for adults?’ By drawing on the research project conducted by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), she says ‘there is strong research evidence that systematic phonics instruction, within broad and rich literacy curriculum , enables children to make better progress in word identification than unsystematic or no phonics instruction.’ (Burton 2011: 7) In addition, Maxine Burton (2011) claims it is the most reliable method of word identification.

‘Adults who have learnt to recite the letters of the alphabet may still have failed to make the vital connection between the marks on the page and the sounds they represent, despite perhaps having memorised a good stock of sight vocabulary. She continues ‘even learners who are able to ‘sound out’ the letters, in the sense of connecting certain letters with certain sounds, may still struggle to blend these sounds into words. This is a very specific skill and to the beginner reader it is not immediately obvious.’ (Burton 2011: 8)

Herschensohn and Young - Scholten (2013) support Burton with Young-Scholten and Storm (2006), who administered a range of oral awareness and reading tests to a number of adult low - literate Somali and Vietnamese learners. ‘Their finding suggests that learning the names of the letters of the alphabet does not lead to phonemic awareness. Rather, phonemic awareness must be explicitly taught and not be assumed to develop as a result of memorising and reciting the names of letters of the alphabet.’ Herschensohn and Young - Scholten (2013: 196)

There was analytic versus synthetic approach conducted in Scotland with primary aged, non-bilingual children. The research strongly recommends the synthetic phonics approach. Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) explain that within the analytic phonics, letter sounds are taught after reading has already begun, children initially learning to read some words by sight, often in the context of meaningful text. Children thus learn about letter sound in the context of whole words. Synthetic phonics, on the other hand, begins from sounds prior to the children being able to read whole words. It is, however, vital to mention that in their experience, 'adult bilingual learners who have successfully used phonic strategies have been taught using an analytic phonics approach, embedded in a clear and meaningful context.' (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006: 68)

According to Wrigley and Guth (1992) phonics - based approaches as part of bottom - up approaches have their limitations. They claim they require the new reader learn to associate letters with sounds before moving on to meaningful texts. The opponents of phonics advocate meaning - based approaches which 'see reading and writing as a cognitive process through which the reader associates meaning with print.' Wrigley and Guth (1992: 25)

'Some ESL learners, however, may have difficulty understanding the meaning of a text. Their limited vocabulary and their unfamiliarity with the structure of the language may make it hard to see the connection between what they know and what they see on the page. These learners may need special support in blending top-down (meaning and communication) and bottom-up (phonics and grammar) processes.' Wrigley and Guth (1992: 27)

## Intervention

In the research we followed 'ETHICAL GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH' and all involved participants signed 'RESEARCH CONSENT FORM'. (Appendix 4)

<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Action</b>
Beginning of September 2015 - Middle of October 2015	1 tutor, 6 students	Students' initial assessment conducted and they are placed in low - literacy beginner class. English My Way for pre-entry learners is used. (Appendix 1) The differences between progressing and non - progressing students start to appear.
Middle of October 2015	1 tutor	Interview with their teachers conducted in order to identify the least progressing learners and if there is any common issue. It is becoming apparent they have difficulties to read in English.
Middle of October 2015	1 tutor	6 students who would benefit from intervention are identified.

Middle of October 2015	1 tutor, 6 students	Focus group began with 6 students, 1 trained teacher to teach reading. The tutor advised to use a variety of top - down and bottom - up approaches, including some phonics based exercises.
Middle of October 2015	1 tutor, 6 students	ILT with individual targets developed.
Middle of October 2015	1 tutor, 6 students	High expectations of attendance established, attendance closely monitored.
End of November 2015	1 tutor, 6 students	Decision taken to implement phonics as a sole approach.
End of November 2015	1 tutor, 3 students	Students screened using adapted assessment phases 2 - 6. (Appendix 2)
End of November 2015	1 tutor, 2 students	L1 literacy questionnaire undertaken in students' own language. (Appendix 3)
End of November 2015	1 tutor, 2 students	Results analysed. New ILP's formulated as the previous ones highly ambitious. (Appendix 7)
End of November 2015	1 tutor	Programme formulated by adapting <i>Letters and Sounds</i> . (Appendix 5)
End of November 2015	1 tutor	8 months delivery planned (Appendix 6)
February 2016	1 tutor, 2 students	Students screened.
May 2016	1 tutor, 2 students	Students screened.

## ETHICAL GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

As a part of this research project we have ensured that:

- Any personal information collected, the names of participants, tutor and organisation have remained strictly confidential
- Personal information of the participants has remained anonymous at all times.
- Written permission has been obtained on the usage and sharing of collected data.
- Compiled audio/video evidence, electronic and paper files for the basis of the project have only been used for research and educational purposes. Where these have been used, written consent has been obtained.

- All participants have the right to access any collected information or data that relates to the individual.
- Educational researchers maintained respect for persons participating in the research.
- Educational researchers ensured a duty of care to vulnerable participants and provided a safe, supportive and secure environment.
- At all stages of the research we have taken the 'learner voice' into consideration.
- We have taken all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion during the research process.
- The researchers complied with legal requirements in relation to working with vulnerable adults.
- Educational researchers recognised the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason. The participants have been informed about this right.
- All rights to protect the organisation compiling this research have been taken.
- All participants involved in the research have signed 'RESEARCH CONSENT FORM'. (Appendix 4)

Signed\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signed\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

### **The data and its analysis in terms of themes and categories**

In a small ESOL providing organisation a group of non-literate adult learners that attended a mainstream class for four hours a week were showing no progress, especially in reading and writing. A need for intervention was required. A decision was made to identify the least progressing learners and form a small group with strong focus on literacy. The provision would be extra two more hours a week.

At first the same material as in the mainstream class was used, applying various meaning - based and bottom - up approaches practising reading. With regard to writing skill practice, it became apparent there should be a shift from practice to teaching handwriting. Although the tutors and managers cooperated a great deal, the progress was extremely limited even with the extra provision. In addition, the students did not seem to show any enthusiasm, they only came and left, there was no outside-the-class interaction. After each lesson another lesson came, in which there was nothing to build on. There was no previous knowledge that could aid second language acquisition of the focus group. After a lot of discussion we eliminated all the approaches and decided to give phonics based approach to teach reading to ESOL adults a try. We wanted to address the following question: "What is the impact of synthetics phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults to overcome the barrier of false beginners."

In September 2015 the organisation had a large influx of semi and non - literate learners. It became clear a vast majority of them had never been in formal education in their home country. Also, the same vast majority were the speakers of non - Roman script languages. These learners wanted to learn English as soon as possible. They arrived in the country where they wanted to start a new life, but their day - to - day life required them to become proficient in all 4 skills. As we as an educational ESOL organisation were faced with a challenging issues, our students were facing a considerable challenge - surviving with no literacy or oral proficiency in L2. One of the students, Samir, from the small group said: "When you don't know reading and writing, you don't feel a full person. You face many difficulties all the time. I have got lost so many times simply because I was not able to read signs."

Many opponents of phonics suggest using only meaning - based top - down strategies to teach reading and bottom - up techniques such as the phonics or word recognition should be 'a complement' blended into the meaningful context. Even Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) said they were aware of the learners who succeeded in learning to read through analytic phonics, a version of phonics - based approach that offers some context. Whereas analytic phonics required working out the patterns, synthetic phonics was teaching two very important skills, blending and segmenting. None of our learner had worked out any sound pattern while being exposed to environmental signs in their daily lives. We also thought that formal instruction of a simple bottom - up strategy was needed, which would

#### Case study

Samir came to my class for the first time in July 2015. I actually only started to teach that class, it was not very formal and the attendance was not monitored as closely. Samir was 22. He came with some other friends as he had been in the country for over two or three weeks. He was very quiet. When asked to repeat a word or answer a question, I never understood his pronunciation. He would come for a couple of weeks, then disappear and come again. Because we started to monitor the group very closely and adopted zero tolerance to lateness and too many absences, he remained and became a regular student. He was still very quiet and blended in with the rest. By then I had learned he was a true beginner but also completely illiterate in English. Because he would attend regularly, he started showing progress in oral language. Literacy, however, was still very low. When we asked him whether he was interested in extra literacy class, he agreed. Only after the interview in his home language we found out he had never ever in his life been in any kind of education. He had never held a book in his hands.

After a while, the progress started to be noticeable. At the same time he was granted the status of an asylum seeker and for a while we were all facing the challenges from the Job Centre. They were trying to send him to college not believing in our project, threatening him not to give him his financial allowances. He had to start it and missed a few classes with us. We fought hard and after several weeks they allowed him to come back to our classes. From then it has been like a Cinderella story. We 'had' to move him to a 'higher' beginner group because of his sudden boost of oral language. He absolutely fell in love with learning the language and especially to read. As his tutor in the mainstream class I could see how he was trying to apply decoding strategy when he encountered a new word. Before then, he would look at the first letter and guessed. Once, twice, it did not matter. But after some time in literacy class, it was about becoming a reader.

The best thing was his transformation as a person. He became happier. Me and the other tutor saw more smiles and jokes. He started to look after himself more and you could feel his increased confidence in the air around him. He was ready to start his new life in the UK and in the middle of June he started looking for a job.

'Samir, how and why does literacy class motivate you to learn?'

'I know that learning to read and write is a good thing. It has helped me to make me want to learn. I like learning.'

teach our learners to learn transferable skills enabling them to become independent readers.

One of the ESOL learners from the small group knew the names of the letters of the alphabet. He could not read at all. He started attending literacy group but had to be removed due to his lack of commitment. As mentioned in one of the previous sections, knowing the names of the alphabet letters does not grant the ability to read. He was an example of such claim. At the beginning he struggled a lot, as that was a terrible interference for him. He would often start sounding out the words by saying the names of the letters. That was quite surprising but as said, 'a specific skill not immediately obvious to the beginner reader'.

So what is the impact of synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults in order to overcome the barrier of a false beginner stuck in a low level class forever? Enormous.

Burton is a strong believer of using a systematic synthetic phonics instruction to teach adult ESOL adults to read. She did not, however, offer any particular solution on how to fully exploit its potential. Yet, she seems to be the only advocate of our claim. Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) have experience with analytic phonics, but they do not mention L1 script and educational experiences in L1. Meaning - based supporters encourage embedding the strategy in a meaningful context. This suggest conducting learning the sounds in one lesson.

Our preliminary findings show that the impact of synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging adult ESOL learners is significant when used in a systematic and structured way alongside a mainstream class that offers a meaningful context and can enormously speed up the process of learning to read. After all, this is what these learners want. To learn to read as fast as possible.

### **Key findings**

The provisional indications of this small scale study suggest that systematic use of synthetic phonics - based approach to teach reading to non-literate adult ESOL learners when used as an intervention alongside a mainstream class has been beneficial so far. They also show that there are tools which simply prevent practitioners from classifying a certain group of learners as 'false beginners' but help them overcome this barrier that adults illiterate in their own language often face in ESOL classes.

Regular attendance is very important and equates achievement. The lowest attendance is 95%. The attendance of one of the participants has improved nearly by 20% in his main class.

One of the key findings of the research is the fact that the learners are applying their phonic knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. Not only did they learn to recognise simple words, they have also acquired a new skill which they are applying on new unknown words. They are able to read simple books based on their phonic knowledge. The biggest transformation is seeing the learners being able to apply emerging reading strategies to simple unfamiliar texts and being successful.

Being at the early stages of reading has seen an increase in their confidence and self-esteem. The sense of achievement increased learners' motivation and despite a number of setbacks from higher authorities, they were happy to adopt a flexible approach when a quick change was needed so there was no interruption in regularity of the intervention classes. Moreover, one of the participants started to look for a job.

The amount of time, however, required for the programme to be implemented needs to be longer because it takes more time to build confidence in adults than in children. From a



teacher's perspective, it is essential to revisit and recap numerous times because there is a need for constant concept checking. From a linguistic point of view, first language has great impact on the progress. L1 interference and confusion between letter names and sounds impedes progress so this makes the delivery more repetitive.

<b>Key findings:</b>	
Effective and continuous improvement	After the intervention had been introduced to our learners in need and they grasped the idea of what was expected from them, their progress was especially evident from lesson to lesson in the mainstream class. With regard to their ability to read, of course, it may have been difficult to notice by an outsider, when compared to the previous progress, the difference was enormous. In the second half of the academic year the difference between the participants and literacy class drop-outs was evident.
As expected, issues with L1 interference and vowels	Having looked at the second language acquisition of illiterate learners and L1 interference, we knew this situation would occur. However, it is important to be prepared and include many activities in the course scheme of work, which would help to minimize the issue. Elimination is a long-term goal.
Confidence increased	Those participants who attended the intervention class regularly became the confident members of their group: in the mainstream class they stopped speaking quietly, they were willing to take more risk and were not afraid to attempt to read an unknown word or a sentence in front of their peers.
Decoding unfamiliar words	Already at an early stage of the project, after only the first phase of learning to read, during a reading activity it was noticeable they were trying to apply blending and segmenting techniques to read unfamiliar words.
Intrinsic motivation increased	The participants' attendance in the main class improved by nearly 20% and if a situation occurred when one of them could not attend their reading lessons, they were asking for additional hours.
Reading simple books	In the last third of the intervention course, simple books were introduced, which the learners enjoyed reading and even holding in their hands.

### **Recommendations and limitations**

This research project is an example of a staff development model called the inquiry or reflective teaching model. The inquiry model starts with problems that arise out of practice and then gives teachers the opportunity to explore solutions. Wrigley and Guth (1992) describe it as a process that links teacher practice with relevant theory in the field. At the beginning a teacher identifies a classroom issue that has arisen out of their own teaching

experience and then proposes a way of addressing this particular problem. The action research process often involves examining and discussing research articles that speak to the problem, formulating a research question that focuses on a particular aspect of the class, and proposing an appropriate "intervention." It is said to be rather based on personal experience of the 'researcher' and usually includes a small number of 'subjects'. Although Wrigley and Guth (1992) justify its limitations with the fact that it is conducted for more restricted purposes than wide scope academic research, the results mirror the progress of only three students so far.

'The learners' backgrounds, education, skills, and the reason why they left their country of origin create a complex picture. The more you know about your learners, the better you can plan for their learning.' Schellekens (2007: 9) The focus group has typically not learned in traditional classroom settings and has not had the opportunity to learn to read or write in their home language. To teach effectively, you need to take into account not just language needs but also prior experience, educational background and factors affecting second language acquisition. Schellekens (2007) In addition, there will be strong language one (L1) interference. Anticipate this phenomenon by learning about L1 interference and how to incorporate appropriate steps to overcome the problem in the teaching programme. Phonics based approach is a bottom - up approach that requires the learners to work with something outside the context. Use this approach as additional but regular intervention. It is, however, imperative the mainstream class remains alongside the intervention providing the learner with essential context through a variety of meaning - based approaches. On the other hand, in order to see results, the phonics - based intervention must follow the structured and systematic programme of this bottom - up approach.

Considering all the mentioned internal and external factors that influence the learning process, if you decide to experience with this approach, allow measurable timescale to see impact. There are many negative views towards phonics, therefore be persistent and wait patiently for results.

Finally, the tutors that conduct the intervention class should be professionals willing to work on their own development in the area. They should be aware of the complexity of second language acquisition, differences and similarities in learning to read and write in a first and second language, the critical aspects of adult learning, relationship between literacy in the native language and learning literacy in the second language. 'Accurate and systematic phonics teaching requires a good underpinning knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of English. Burton (2011: 11) The tutor must possess this and also understand the role that phonics play in literacy learning.

During the process, there will be various obstacles that have negative effect on learners' progress. Different people have different levels of motivation, which also lies behind good attendance. Moreover, many ESOL learners are refugees or asylum seekers. If higher authorities require their presence during the day of their class, be prepared to accommodate a flexible timetable. Regularity is the key and requires dedication from both sides, participants and tutors.

At the beginning we wanted to narrow the gap between the two sets of skills of ESOL learners, speaking and listening and reading and writing.

The very primary aim is to enable low literacy learners to take Skills for Life exams in all skills, especially reading and writing. For the last year the emphasis was put mostly on reading and finding the most effective way of transforming non - literate and semi - literate learners into independent readers, although letter formation took place during various phases. When a new group is started in September, there will be a strong need to

incorporate regular and systematic focus on letter formation and handwriting which will enable more active work on improving learners' writing skill.

Ensure you have well-trained and consistent practitioners.	Few know how to teach a non - reader to read.' (Howard and Kings, 2010, p. 61) in Burton (2011: 11) Stressed by many authors and from our experience, learners need knowledgeable teachers for whom English phonology is not a complete mystery. 'Accurate and systematic phonics teaching requires good and underpinning knowledge of the individual sounds and sound system of English.' Burton (2011: 11)
Read up carefully on L1 interference.	Second language acquisition and L1 interference literature are vital sources of information that determine lesson planning. E.g. Arabic language has vowel sounds but they are interchangeable. This is not the case of English vowel sounds. Therefore, strong focus on vowel sounds recognition needs to take place during lessons. This needs to be anticipated by the teacher and reflected in the plan.
Be persistent - it is a long slow burn. Do not have too many high expectations. Allow measurable timescale to see impact. Do not forget your first learning experience.	It takes longer to build confidence in adults than in children. It is not easy to overcome inhibition or peer pressure and become risk - taking. Life experience, culture, age, gender, religion - they are additional factors that influence building learners' trust in teachers and themselves.
Have a regular class provision and an intervention running alongside.	Spiegel and Sunderland (2006) and Burton (2011) suggested that systematic phonics instruction works well within a broad and rich literacy curriculum.
Resources for lessons must be produced appropriately. Do not disregard children's material.	Many practitioners are still reluctant towards phonics as an additional but powerful tool for ESOL adults. One of the reasons can be the fact there are more of them for children than for adults. However, many can be adapted for adults.
Do not use it with roll - on and roll - off provision.	Preliminary findings indicate progress only in those that attended regularly the mainstream as well as intervention classes.
Do not produce sounds incorrectly.	'... fresh ears and fresh understanding.' Burton (2011: 12) There is a strong difference between n/nəh/ and n/nnnnn/ as in the sound of a flying aeroplane. Adult learners need a lot of exposure to correct sounds individually and in context before being asked to produce them.
Do not jump around with the order.	Phonics is a systematic instruction where a certain structure is followed developing blending and segmenting skills.

Our aim was to implement a phonics based methodology outside mainstream ESOL class that allows non - literate and semi - literate ESOL learners of non - Roman language to acquire emerging literacy skills that reflects progress. We asked ourselves 'What is the impact of a synthetic phonics based approach when teaching literacy to emerging ESOL adults to overcome the barrier of false beginners?'

We found that with careful consideration of all the known limitations, our project research raises the awareness of helping 'false beginners'. If such a situation is dealt with right at the beginning and the suggested approach is implemented straight away, a systematic use of synthetic phonics to teach reading to ESOL adults provides help for practitioners to narrow the gap between speaking - listening and reading - writing skills, and eventually leads to learners taking Skills for Life exam in all skills in a much shorter time span rather than in a few years between them or never.

### **Dissemination strategy**

The ESOL provider in which the project has been taking place is planning to continue the group as the final aim are independent readers taking Entry 1 Skills for Life exams in reading and writing. They are also planning to start a new group, there is still a high and continuous influx of illiterate adults that have never received any formal education in their own language.

The tutors are planning to share good practice within the company, as well as on local and national levels. The researches would like to present the findings at the national ESOL conference organised by NATECLA.

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