

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the special issue: Teacher knowledge of literacy skills international perspectives

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In 1994, Moats published a study showing that professionals involved with literacy skill interventions often lacked sufficient knowledge related to literacy concepts and instruction (Moats, 1994). Since then, other studies have been conducted to explore teachers' knowledge of literacy related skills, but the vast majority has been conducted with English-speaking participants. Of course, what is true for English may not be true for other languages. In this special issue, we have compiled a series of papers that examine the extent to which teacher knowledge differs between practitioners of English as a foreign language compared to English teaching in the native language.

In the first paper of this issue, Yin, Joshi, and Yan (2020) explored teachers' knowledge in a large group of teachers from three different regions of mainland China, including Kindergarten teachers from developed regions, primary school teachers from developed regions, and those from less developed regions. Similar to other studies, Chinese teachers performed poorly on topics relating to dyslexia. Moreover, teachers' knowledge within less developed regions was consistently lower than teachers from more developed, urbanized regions. Similar results have also been shown in the United States (Pittman, Zhang, Binks-Cantrell, Hudson, & Joshi, 2020). Certainly more uniform exposure to and evidence-based research information relevant to dyslexia in less developed regions is needed.

Luo, Main, Lock, Joshi, and Zhong (2020) also explored teachers' knowledge (in a different region of China to Yin et al. 2020) and found similar results to Yin et al. Namely, teachers had insufficient knowledge of language constructs related to literacy skills. In depth, observation of three classroom teachers indicated that explicit instruction was not being used in the classrooms rather rote memorization was encouraged. However, they did not find any relationship between teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy for teaching.

Nicholson and McIntosh (2020) explored the relationship between knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics and self-efficacy for teaching. A total of 51 international students from Malaysia were administered surveys of phonological and phonics knowledge along with self-efficacy for teaching. The results showed that the participants had difficulties correctly on items relating to phonological and phonics knowledge survey. Furthermore, participants who provide high levels of self-assessed knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics performed better on items relating to phonological knowledge but not on items related to phonics. Additionally, participants who scored higher on measures of phonological knowledge also scored higher on self-efficacy for teaching these constructs.

Vaisman and Kahn-Horwitz (2020) also explored the linguistic knowledge of teachers who were teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), as well as measuring the amount of time teachers allocated to instruction various skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, and syllabic, and orthographic knowledge. Results showed that EFL teachers in this sample from Israel generally had insufficient knowledge of English language constructs needed for literacy instruction. Further analyses showed that those teachers who had higher knowledge of the linguistic skills of phonemic awareness, orthographic, and syllabic knowledge, allocated more time to teaching these skills. In contrast, teachers with a lower knowledge-base of these concepts allocated less time to instruction within these important linguistic domains. Certainly, better knowledge of linguistic knowledge related to English language may result in teachers spending time in teaching them.

Most studies of teacher knowledge have been conducted with teachers of early grade levels of 1–3. Wijekumar, Beerwinkle, McKeown, Zhang, and Joshi (2020) explored the instructional knowledge of teachers in the United States from grades 4 and 5 (ages 10–12) relating to teaching main ideas as well as identifying main ideas on a passage. The results showed that teachers showed a lack of factual knowledge of best teaching practices for promoting reading comprehension and also did poorly on reading comprehension measures themselves. Interestingly, students' performance on identifying main idea on a state-mandated test is also low.

The general theme of the papers in this issue points towards insufficient knowledge about teaching literacy concepts among teachers in various countries. Internationally, there is a lack of teacher knowledge and practical skills for teaching literacy skills and concepts at the most basic levels. This lack of knowledge might have reflected in the poor performance of students in literacy concepts. One interesting finding, however, was that teachers who were more knowledgeable about the basic literacy concepts also allocated more time in teaching those skills (Vaisman & Kahn-Horwitz, 2020). It is hoped that the results presented in this special issue will increase the awareness about the importance of teacher knowledge in scientifically based instruction and practices to increase the literacy skills of our students.

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