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Independent research into the impact of the systematic synthetic phonics government policy on literacy courses at institutions delivering initial teacher education in England

Final Report April 2020

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Preface

Since 2006 I have published articles, several books, and two edited books with contributions from leading experts in UK, USA, Australia, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on literacy, in particular, the place of synthetic phonics in the teaching of early reading. The early articles were brought together in my book *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice*. The first edition won the UKLA Academic Book Award in 2015 and the revised edition was published by Routledge in 2016. In these publications, the latest in March 2020, I placed the spotlight on government policy in England backed by Ofsted, which since 2006 has increasingly insisted that in primary schools the early teaching of reading should be ONLY by synthetic phonics. In 2012 the Phonics Screening Check was introduced for all six-year-olds to be retaken in Year 2 by those children who failed to achieve a mark of 32 out of 40. This involved reading aloud words, half of which were pseudo words. Achieving an increasingly higher percentage pass each year came to dominate early years' classrooms in England. There was no consultation with teachers or parents as to whether this check was of value and whether it should continue to be mandatory for all children. In 2018 together with Jonathan Glazzard, Sue Reid and John Bayley I undertook an independent enquiry into the views of head teachers, teachers and parents into the Phonics Screening Check. Over this same period government and Ofsted have put increasing pressure on institutions involved in initial teacher education to place emphasis on synthetic phonics in their courses as the only way to teach all children to read. The trainees during their teaching practice over this same period would be observing in primary schools required to have in place this approach to meet the demands in Ofsted inspections.

The independent research reported here was into the effect of the government requirements on literacy courses in institutions providing initial teacher education that synthetic phonics be presented as *the* way to teach all children to read. Our aim was by an initial survey to investigate the views of the professionals involved in these courses. We had 38 respondents to this survey, and we followed this with interviews of 10 of those who completed the survey. The team with which I undertook this current independent research, for which we did not seek funding, involved Sue Reid and Jude Sloan from Newman University, Jonathan Glazzard from Leeds Beckett University and Colin Mills from Manchester University (see the following section for our credentials). We intend to publish articles reporting our findings. However, in order to have them available as soon as possible we are putting this report on a Newman University website where the report can be read and downloaded. We will also place any relevant articles on this site.

In *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice*, (Clark, 2016) Part IV you will find an edited version of my articles on that topic up to 2015.

In a Special Issue of the *Education Journal* in 2019 Issue 379 'Literacy policy, synthetic phonics and the Phonics Screening Check' my key articles from that journal are republished.

The two edited books are:

Clark, M.M, (ed.) (2017) *Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning*. Birmingham: Glendale Education.

Clark. M.M. (ed.) (2018) *Teaching Initial Literacy: Politics, evidence and ideology*. (2018) Birmingham: Glendale Education.

In January 2020 after we had completed this research Ofsted published a draft Consultation Document for a policy to be implemented in September 2020 with an even greater emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics in all courses in institutions providing initial teacher education in England. This is discussed in my recent article:

Clark, M.M. (2020) 'The future of early reading in courses in initial teacher education institutions in England'. *Education Journal*. 407: 16-20 and under the same title in *Literacy Today* 92: 9-13.

Our previous research report is:

Clark, M.M and Glazzard, J.(eds.) (2018) *The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents*.

This can be read and downloaded from

www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-phonics-screening-check-2012-2017

This current research report can be downloaded from

[www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/independent-research-into-the-impact-of-the-synthetic-phonics-policy-on-literacy-courses-at-institutions-delivering-initial-teacher-education-in England](http://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/independent-research-into-the-impact-of-the-synthetic-phonics-policy-on-literacy-courses-at-institutions-delivering-initial-teacher-education-in-England)

Margaret M. Clark April 2020

Contributors

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Jonathan Glazzard is a Visiting Professor at Newman University and Professor of Teacher Education in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University. His research areas include inclusive education, special educational needs and/or disability in schools and early reading development in children. He has published papers on specific areas including autism, dyslexia and speech, language and communication needs. He has also authored several books to support trainee teachers. Jonathan is interested in research which improves educational outcomes for marginalised learners and in giving voice to children and young people who have experienced discrimination in schools.

Colin Mills is a Visiting Research Fellow at Newman University and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Education. Following a career as a teacher and leader in primary schools and as a local authority adviser, he taught at Exeter University, Worcester University and Birmingham City University. He published widely in the areas of primary schooling and literacy. His research interests now focus on the work of consultants in primary schooling, in particular the relation between privatisations, pedagogy and practice in literacy (see *Consultants and Consultancy: the case of Education* (with Helen Gunter, 2017).

Sue Reid is a Senior Lecturer in initial teacher education at Newman University with a specialism in English. She has experience as a teacher throughout the key stages; also in early years. She has worked as a National Strategies literacy consultant and trained many teachers in the implementation of systematic synthetic phonics before taking up her current role as a teacher educator.

Jude Sloan is a former classroom teacher experienced in KS 1-3, with most of her career in primary school settings. More recently she has transitioned to Higher Education academic quality and compliance, now specialising in information governance and data protection at Newman University.

*The research we undertook into The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of Head Teacher, teachers and parents was published in 2018. It can be read and downloaded together with relevant articles on <https://newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-phonics-screening-check-2012-2017>

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We are grateful to Anthea Shaylor for reading the proofs of this report.

We are grateful to Newman University for its willingness to be associated with this research and for the marketing Department at Newman University for their assistance in setting up a website for this version of the report and related articles.

Chapter 1 - Who determines literacy policies for initial teacher education in England: politicians or professionals?

Margaret M. Clark

In *Literacy Today* 92: 9-13 and the *Education Journal* 407: 16-20 in March 2020 a shortened version of this chapter was published with the title, 'The future of early reading courses in initial teacher education institutions in England: Who controls the content?'

N.B.: The education policy discussed here is mandatory only in England, not the United Kingdom, as education is a devolved power and The Department for Education and Ofsted are responsible only for schools in England. Since 2010 there have been five Secretaries of State for Education. However, Nick Gibb has recently been reappointed Minister of State for School Standards. He has over many years consistently promoted the systematic synthetic phonics policy, for which he has been complimented publicly in Parliament by both the Chairman of the Education Select Committee and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Nick Gibb has claimed the success of this policy in debates, in written answers to MPs' questions, in articles and at conferences around the world (including in Australia). It is for this reason that the quotations I have selected are from him, not the Secretaries of State.

Introduction

There has been a growing insistence by the government since 2012 that in the teaching of early reading in primary schools in England there should be a focus on phonics, not just as one of a range of strategies, but that systematic synthetic phonics should be adopted as the *only* way to teach all children to read. This policy is claimed to be based on research evidence that only systematic synthetic phonics is the best way to teach all children to read. None of the research that challenges the government statements and those of Ofsted is cited in government policy documents (Clark, 2019a). This policy has had a major impact on practice in schools, removing the freedom of practitioners in England to include other approaches they consider to be appropriate for their individual children. The introduction of the Phonics Screening Check in 2012 as a mandatory assessment for all children at the end of Year 1 when the children are around six years of age has had further, even possibly unintended, consequences, in narrowing the children's literacy experience in the early years. Teachers and parents have expressed concern at the effects of the check, including on children who can already read (Clark and Glazzard, 2018). In nursery and reception classes in many schools, children repeatedly practice real and non-words (pseudo words) in anticipation of the check; this continues for those who fail and are required to re-sit the check. This has become not a light touch assessment, but a high stakes test where schools are expected to achieve a higher percentage pass each year, and children who fail to read 32 of 40 words correctly are required to re-sit the check at the end of Year 2. Now the school's percentage pass on the PSC tends to be a major focus in Ofsted judgements and is frequently cited by the Schools Minister Nick Gibb as evidence of improvement in reading, and as a consequence of the government's insistence on systematic synthetic phonics.

In *Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice* (Clark, revised edition 2016) the evidence up to 2016 is reported and further evidence is available in more

recent articles and two edited books (Clark, 2017 and 2018, and Clark, 2019a). There is research evidence on the effects of the government's policy on classroom practice from observation, showing grouping for phonics as distinct from reading, even in nursery and reception classes (Bradbury and Russell-Holmes 2017). Carter in her research presents evidence through the voices of children (Carter, 2020a) and, in a further article, Carter reports on the voices of the teachers, 'those closest to the implementation of the PSC, and in doing so values the contribution of the professional voice'. (Carter 2020b). She supports her own research with evidence from other authors, who 'found that teachers had lost sight of why phonics is taught, and that phonics is not a subject in its own right but a means to an end'. To quote from her Conclusion:

Where teachers experience competing demands – outcome targets, parental concerns and children's learning needs – tensions arise when implementing new policy.

... these practices presented a tension between teaching to the test and reading development, including: the slowing of pace in teaching for higher-attaining readers; the quickening of pace for lower attaining readers; the teaching of pseudo words rather than their use as an assessment tool ...

(Carter, 2020b)

The above researches are summarised in an article in a Special Issue of the *Education Journal* (Clark, 2019b: 22-24).

There is little evidence of any improvement in attainment other than on the actual check that can clearly be attributed to this policy, though the government does cite the results of PIRLS 2016, a claim that may be exaggerated (See *Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies, evidence and ideology*, Clark ed., 2018 Part II).

Early Education in England: the power of politicians over policy and practice

A meeting of education ministers at the G7 in France in 2019 had as its focus early years schooling and teacher training. The following quotations are from the DfE press release (www.gov.uk).

...Minister Gibb reaffirmed his commitment to drawing on best practice and evidence from across the world when looking to improve the education system.

Many of the government's reforms introduced since 2010 have been based on world-leading successful practices identified in other countries...

Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies: Evidence and Ideology (Clark, 2018) 'Part II Evidence from PIRLS 2016 has four chapters on PIRLS. These include summaries of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland policies, both countries that rank statistically higher than England. The Republic of Ireland ranked fourth. Only two countries significantly outperformed Northern Ireland. To quote Sharon McMurray, this showed the:

importance of a highly skilled teaching profession who have the competence and confidence to exercise professional judgement in the work that they do and have the theoretical and practical knowledge which underpins sound decision making.

(McMurray in Clark, 2018: 51)

Yet according to Nick Gibb in 2017:

[The PIRLS results for England] are a vindication of the government's boldness in pursuing the evidence in the face of ideological criticism

And they are a reminder of the damage that can be caused when dogma flies in the face of evidence.

(This and other similar quotations are to be found in Clark, 2018: 31)

At no time has Nick Gibb referred to lessons that England might learn from either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Both ranked statistically higher than England in PIRLS, yet both countries take a very different approach to reading-pedagogy and to collaboration with teachers. Nor does the minister reference the cautions in the reports on PIRLS against drawing causal relationships from the data, nor possible alternative explanations for this rise in ranking (See McGrane *et al.*, 2017 and Clark, 2018).

While consulting on other aspects of assessment policy, the Department for Education has not consulted either teachers or parents as to whether they regard the PSC as providing valuable information, or about whether the PSC should remain statutory (see Appendix I in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Literacy Learning in the Twenty-first Century: what the focus on decoding neglects

From my own research and that of many others there is evidence that should influence policy and practice. Yet many politicians ignore such evidence and misrepresent or even ridicule academics who challenge their policies, claiming they are 'anti phonics' or ignorant of research. Any child who fails to read correctly at least 32 out of 40 words (20 real and 20 pseudo words) in Year 1 must re-sit the check the following year, even those who can already read with understanding. Thus, for some children the PSC continues to dominate their early years beyond Year 1.

Decoding is now stressed as *the* way to teach reading in the early years by the government and by Ofsted, including in reception classes (See Ofsted, 2017 and Scott, 2018). The current need for schools to achieve a high percentage pass in the PSC has had a major impact on classrooms in the early years. By contrast, little pedagogical attention is paid to high frequency words and their value for young children learning to read. I acknowledge that while high frequency words account for about half the *total words in written English*, to read, it is essential to be able to recognise fluently and speedily also the words that appear much less frequently. These words account for over 90 per cent of the *different words* in written language. Children, if they are to read *with understanding*, need to develop strategies for speedy recognition of words they have not met before. Like most academics I do not deny the importance of phonics in learning to read. However, there is evidence that this is better practised within context rather than in isolation. Time spent decoding words in isolation, or as in many schools in England on practising pseudo words to enable schools to achieve a high percentage pass on the PSC, might be better spent studying the features of real written English.

In a recent valuable guidance publication for teachers, the Education Endowment Foundation lists key recommendations for the teaching of literacy at Key Stage 1 (EEF, 2017).

Three of the key recommendations are:

1. Develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language.
2. Use a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills.
3. Effectively implement a systematic phonics programme.

Note the emphasis is on 'integration of decoding and comprehension' and that the reference is to a *systematic* phonics programme, not to *synthetic* phonics as the *only* approach as currently required in England.

Ideology rather than consultation?

In written answers to questions and in his speeches, Nick Gibb repeatedly claims that current policy is 'evidence-based'. Until recently the research cited by the Minister in support of synthetic phonics as the only method for initial teaching of reading was that conducted in Clackmannanshire in Scotland around 2005 and this is still cited also by Ofsted. Clackmannanshire is a small rural county in Scotland with 18 primary schools. When considering this 'evidence' it is important to note that:

- The research cited was conducted in 2005
- Its methodology has been seriously criticised (see for example Ellis and Moss, 2014)
- As early as 2006 a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Scotland expressed concern at low standards of literacy in Clackmannanshire and in 2016 Clackmannanshire commissioned an independent enquiry which produced a damning report on literacy standards, as a consequence of which the county now has in place a different policy to improve the county's standards of literacy.

In an interview in 2018 Nick Gibb added a reference to research conducted earlier in USA by the National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000). Readers are referred to an edited book by Allington (2002) which includes a critical appraisal of the phonics aspect of the National Reading Panel Research by members of the panel who raised concerns about claims made in and for that report. Part I of the book is entitled: 'Unreliable Evidence...' and Part II 'Politics, Policies and Profits: The political context of the National Reports' A summary of the evidence is available (in Clark, 2019b: 11-12). To quote:

The push for evidence-based reading instruction is but a thinly disguised ideological push for a national reading methodology, for reading that meets the 'phonics first' emphasis of the Republican Party platform and the direct-instruction entrepreneurs, those who profit financially when federal and state governments mandate the use of curricular materials like the ones they produce' (Allington, 2002: 265).

The themes referred to by Allington have been explored and analysed in work which has sought to investigate the connections between the political espousal of a strong emphasis on 'phonics first' and the rapid growth of both commercial programmes and of consultancy in schools (Mills, 2011) Such work identifies the power and ideological

influences of consultants within policy and practice in the realm of reading, in particular of early reading in England (Ellis and Moss, 2014; Gunter and Mills, 2017, in particular in chapter 6). This applies not only in initial teacher education, but also in Continuing Professional Development, where commercial companies appear to be replacing Local Authorities and universities in receiving funding from government, often with synthetic phonics as the focus for early reading (Ellis, *et al.*, 2020). These themes and their influence on the perceptions of professionals and on practice in initial teacher education will be further explored in our research report in Chapter 5. It should be noted that a similar pattern can be identified within early reading policy in Australia as reported by several professional organisations there. In *Reading the Evidence: synthetic phonics and literacy learning* these developments in both England and in Australia are outlined, in the appendices the relevant documents, including those issued by UKLA and ALEA, and PETAA in Australia are reprinted, showing that these associations were not opposed to the teaching of phonics as was being claimed by both governments (See Clark, 2017 including the Appendices, and Appendix III in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In our independent survey of the views of teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check we found that many expressed disquiet at the effects of the pass-fail nature of the check, the requirement to re-sit the check should a child ‘fail’, the fact that half the words are non-words and the consequent emphasis on practising such words. Even many parents whose children had passed the check, or who could read, were disturbed at the negative effects on their children’s reading as a consequence of the dominance of decoding in classrooms, particularly of non-words in preparation for the check. Many teachers thought the check should cease as it told them nothing they did not already know and many teachers and parents thought that at least it should no longer be mandatory (Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In view of this evidence it seems important to call for a consultation on the future of the Phonics Screening Check involving parents and teachers rather than allow this expenditure to continue unchallenged (see Appendix II in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Initial teacher education in England since 2012

In 2012 Chief Inspector of Education Sir Michael Wilshaw issued an edict that:

Ofsted will sharpen its focus on phonics in routine inspections of all initial teacher education provision – primary, secondary and Further Education. Ofsted will start a series of unannounced inspections solely on the training of phonics teaching in providers of primary initial teacher education. (Clark, 2016: 127)

Evidence from professionals involved in initial teacher education and from newly qualified teachers reveals that many institutions involved in initial teacher education have narrowed their literacy courses to comply with this edict. Gardner, who taught in a university in England from 2004 to 2012 as a teacher educator, experienced the government’s determination to enforce this policy within universities involved in initial teacher education (see Gardner: 28 in Clark, 2017). Hendry, in a recent article, reports a study in which she observed teachers in training and interviewed them as they became newly qualified teachers (Hendry, 2020). Her study commenced in 2013 which she claims marked an important change in the delivery of initial teacher education in England:

University-led postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) routes were required to increase the number of days that student teachers spent in school from 90 to 120 in their 38 week courses... This change reflected government scepticism about universities' contribution to teacher preparation...and an emphasis on school led professional training rather than education for future teachers... As a consequence, university based time to engage with theory and pedagogy for teaching early reading was limited and the role of the school-based mentor became increasingly significant.

(Hendry, 2020: 58)

In her study she found that:

The participants' experiences highlighted the focus on phonics teaching as the main priority in the teaching of reading in the 20 schools involved in the study. As a consequence, the student teachers received limited examples of wider pedagogy and a rich environment for teaching reading... With one or two exceptions reading experiences were focused on phonetically decodable texts and phonics schemes.

She concluded that:

In essence when assessment and curriculum guidance prioritise one method for teaching reading, universities must work with schools, students and NQTs to re-establish a broader understanding of what it means to be an effective teacher of early reading.

(Hendry: 67)

Government policy with regard to synthetic phonics is likely to have been prioritised since at least 2012 in courses of initial teacher education in England. We have been investigating this in our current research by an independent online survey which had responses from 38 professionals involved in initial teacher education in England and with interviews of 10 of those who completed the online survey.

**Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook from 2020:
Consultation Document issued January 2020 with responses by 3 April 2020**

Since the completion of our research reported here, in January 2020, Ofsted has issued a consultation document on initial teacher education with the new policy to be implemented in September 2020 that: 'The arrangements for inspecting ITE from September are very different from those in the previous framework' (Ofsted 2020). It is stated that:

36. We will judge fairly partnerships that take radically different approaches to the ITE curriculum. We recognise the importance of partnerships' autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnerships curriculum favourably. (p.9)

91. Ofsted does **not** advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees... (p.22)

The ITE curriculum is designed to equip trainees with up-to-date research findings, for example as outlined for primary and secondary phase trainees in the ITT core content framework. (p.40)

However, there are numerous quotations in the document referring to the need for institutions to require systematic synthetic phonics as the only way to teach early reading. Two examples of such statements are:

For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence... (p.39)

An institution will be deemed Inadequate if:

Primary training does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach reading using systematic synthetic phonics (p.44)

Under Leadership and management, on page 46, and again on page 47, reference is made to the need in the primary phase for: ‘Thorough training in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics’.

On page 53 it is stated that leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following apply:

For early years and primary programmes mentors do not support the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Some trainees are being poorly prepared to teach systematic synthetic phonics after the completion of their course. (Ofsted, 2020).

There are no such edicts for any other subjects in primary or secondary schools in the document. No references are cited in the consultation document to justify this policy, removing as it does from professionals any freedom of choice in their presentation of literacy. Associated Ofsted/DfE documents have long and, in some cases, dated reference lists. None of the references refer specifically to evidence on synthetic phonics (DfE, 2019). Yet it would appear that following the recent Ofsted report *Bold Beginning* decoding, and in particular synthetic phonics and preparation for the Phonics Screening Check may dominate reading in reception classes and Years 1 and 2 in England and recently trained teachers will have had their initial teacher education courses in the institutions, and their observations in schools, dominated by synthetic phonics.

Should the proposed changes in initial teacher education be implemented in England in September 2020:

- Will tutors involved in literacy courses in initial teacher education retain any control over the content of their literacy courses?
- Will teachers in primary schools be equipped to critique this government mandated policy?
- Will they have any awareness of the approach to literacy teaching in other countries, or even that they may be different (even in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland)?

N.B.: In a recent article the change in policy in England in recent years as regards Continuing Professional Development is traced (Ellis, V. *et al*, 2020). Government funding for synthetic phonics in CDP, and the award of large amounts of funding to commercial programmes, is considered in the article. Thus, not only does synthetic phonics feature as a main policy in initial teacher education but also in the further development in primary schools. To quote:

We have argued that, since 2010, a new political economy for teacher development in England has emerged, representing a qualitative shift in the mechanisms and ethos of education privatisation...

We have argued that interdependent relations of power and privilege have been established with nationally determined CPD policy for teachers, unlike the service delivery organisations and companies selected for previous outsourced CDP interventions (Ellis, Mansell and Steadman, 2020).

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Chapter 2 - The initial training of primary school teachers in England

Jonathan Glazzard

Introduction

This chapter introduces the key training routes to becoming a qualified teacher in England. It also provides brief information from the census data about trainee numbers. The chapter then introduces key policy documents which emphasise the government and Ofsted's commitment to synthetic phonics, as the only method of teaching early reading. Some brief historical information is provided to set the context but greater emphasis is given to the current policy context in England through reference to the teachers' standards, inspection frameworks for schools and ITE providers and the ITT Core Content Framework.

Training routes

To become a qualified teacher in England, trainees normally have to complete a programme of initial teacher education (ITE). These programmes typically provide access to central training, school-based training and mentoring which support trainees to meet the teachers' standards (DfE, 2011).

There are several pathways into teaching. The undergraduate route is the normal route into teaching for trainees who do not have a degree. In England, teaching is a graduate profession. Undergraduate routes typically last for three or four years and provide trainees with a degree and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This route is more common for primary trainees than secondary trainees, although some secondary undergraduate courses do exist. Most secondary trainees have already completed a degree prior to undertaking their training and enter teaching via the postgraduate route, typically the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Postgraduate training routes can be undertaken through a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or via a school-led route. School-led routes include school-centred initial teacher education (SCITT) courses, the School Direct training programme (salaried and fee-paying routes) and the Teach First Leadership Development Programme. Early Years Initial Teacher Education and Assessment Only (AO) routes also exist.

At HEIs the university or college typically delivers the central training programme. This is supported by periods of school-based training which provides trainees with opportunities to develop practical experience of teaching. Most school-led routes also include a PGCE so many school-led partnerships link with HEIs. The HEI provides the PGCE element of the training. To achieve the PGCE qualification trainees typically study modules at level 7 of the National UK Qualifications Framework. This is equivalent to study at master's level.

The regulations state that regardless of training route, all trainees must complete a period of 120 days in a minimum of two schools before QTS can be awarded. This enables them to apply their understanding of theory into practice. For trainees on HEI postgraduate routes this limits the amount of time they can spend in college or university. The development of School Direct provision has grown over the last 10 years, resulting in an

increasing number of trainee teachers spending less time (or no time) in university, thus restricting opportunities for developing a theoretical understanding of the psychology of reading development. For trainees who are solely trained in schools, there is a danger that this results in them not developing a broader understanding of approaches to support reading development, other than those approaches that they are exposed to in their schools. These are likely to be approaches which align with the government's recommended approach. On these routes, training is often front-loaded at the beginning of the course, although providers may build in opportunities for trainees to return to the HEI in between periods of school-based training. For trainees on Assessment Only routes there is no requirement for them to complete a programme of training. For trainees on School Direct courses, partnerships have varying levels of involvement with the HEI. In some School Direct-HEI partnerships, trainees study the same programme of central training that trainees on provider-led courses study. In other partnerships, the training is completely delivered in schools by school-based trainers. Only the HEI can award QTS, not the School Direct provider. The HEI therefore undertakes a quality assurance role to monitor the quality of school-led training and school-based mentoring. In SCITT provision typically all training is delivered by non-HEI trainers unless the SCITT provider has opted for trainees to undertake a PGCE as part of the programme.

Census data

The census data in 2019 (DfE, 2019) shows that there were 29,580 new entrants to postgraduate ITE courses in 2019-20 compared with 29,215 entrants in 2018-19. This represents a slight increase of 1%. There were also 4,963 entrants to undergraduate ITE courses, a slight drop of 1% but broadly in line with previous years. (DfE, 2019). Overall, these statistics demonstrate that recruitment to ITE programme is neither declining nor increasing but stable.

Historical context

The expectation on ITE providers to embed synthetic phonics into their courses emerged after the publication of the Independent Review in the Teaching of Early Reading, written by Sir Jim Rose (Rose, 2006). Since that time the UK has been led by five prime ministers. In 2010 the coalition government, led by David Cameron, rejected most of the education policies that were introduced under the New Labour government (1997-2010). However, the one policy they held firm to was synthetic phonics. This political commitment, in England, to synthetic phonics as the solution to solving the nation's reading problems has been continued by all successive prime ministers, regardless of political allegiance a succession of Secretaries of State for Education, five in recent years. It is an aspect of English education policy which has clearly stood the test of time. However, there has been little evidence of an improvement in attainment as a consequence of this policy other than on the Phonics Screening Check.

The teachers' standards

Trainee teachers are required to meet the teachers' standards (DfE, 2011) by the end of their training. If trainees do not meet these standards, they cannot be recommended for Qualified Teacher Status. ITE courses must be designed to enable trainee teacher to meet these standards. For HEI provision courses must be designed in partnership with schools

and initial teacher education partnerships must provide clarity in relation to which aspects of training will be taught centrally and which will be developed by school-based mentoring and school-led training. ITE includes HEI-based and school-based training. Training is delivered across these different contexts. It may not be best practice for universities and colleges to deliver all the theoretical content and for schools to address the practical implementation of theory. Developing trainees' understanding of both theory and practice should be done in both settings.

For trainees on primary courses, the teachers' standards state that trainees must 'demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' (DfE, 2011, p. 11). For over a decade, ITE providers have been required to include synthetic phonics in ITE courses, well before this was mandated in the teachers' standards. For many years, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) have been asked to evaluate the quality of their ITE programme in systematic synthetic phonics. This information was subsequently used by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to RAG-rate providers (into red, amber or green). This information was then used to trigger an Ofsted inspection in cases where NQTs raised concerns. In addition, Ofsted introduced focused monitoring inspections in synthetic phonics. This provided inspectors with an opportunity to monitor the quality of the training in this aspect and also the extent to which trainees were being given adequate opportunities to observe, teach and assess pupils' learning in synthetic phonics. For trainees on courses to teach 3 – 7 year olds there was opportunity for them to observe, teach and assess synthetic phonics. For trainees on courses to teach 5 – 11 year olds, inspectors recommended that providers must ensure that there is sufficient opportunity for them to meet this standard in the school contexts that they are placed in. This might include ensuring that trainees in Key Stage 2 classes have opportunities to teach struggling readers.

The Education Inspection Framework

The new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019a) was implemented in September 2019. It includes a much stronger focus on the quality of a school's curriculum. There is a greater emphasis on the quality of education in terms of what pupils are actually learning rather than an exclusive emphasis on test and examination results. However, Ofsted's commitment to synthetic phonics is clear. Inspectors will evaluate the extent to which

a rigorous approach to the teaching of reading develops learners' confidence and enjoyment in reading. At the early stages of learning to read, reading materials are closely matched to learners' phonics knowledge.

(Ofsted, 2019a: 10)

There is an emphasis on decodable books in the early years and Key Stage 1. The research document (Ofsted, 2019b) that has underpinned the development of the EIF states that:

... [early years' educators] need to know how children develop language and literacy, and how to teach early phonics (p.11)

... A rigorous and sequential approach to the reading curriculum develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading. At all stages, reading attainment is

assessed and gaps are addressed quickly and effectively for all pupils. Reading books connect closely to the phonics knowledge pupils are taught when they are learning to read. (p.20)

... These studies show that explicit and systematic teaching of the manipulation of phonemes (the smallest unit of sound in a language) and phonemic awareness (the ability to identify phonemes in written words) is crucial and should be continued until children can automatically process this information. (p.20)

... However, while important, authentic literature and rich contexts are not a suitable replacement for explicit teaching of phonics decoding skills. (p.20)

Key research studies are cited in the Ofsted research report (Ofsted, 2019b) without any acknowledgement of the methodological weaknesses that have been identified in subsequent research in relation to these studies. For example, Glazzard (2017) synthesises the weaknesses of the methodological approach adopted in the Clackmannanshire study (Johnston and Watson, 2004). However, the Ofsted research report (2019), like the Rose Review (Rose, 2006) simply accepts the findings of this study:

In an influential study in Scotland, Johnston and Watson (2004) compared a group of children taught using synthetic phonics with a group taught using analytic phonics; they found the former to be more effective. A Dutch study reported similar findings (de Graaff et al, 2009). There is also some evidence of long-term effects. A follow-up study in Scotland compared 10-year-old boys and girls who had learned to read using analytic or synthetic phonics methods as part of their early literacy programmes. The pupils taught using synthetic phonics had better word reading, spelling and reading comprehension (Ofsted, 2019b: 21).

It is clear from these extracts that although inspection teams are not supposed to align themselves with specific pedagogical approaches, there is a clear preference for synthetic phonics and an expectation that this approach should be the only approach used in schools. The research which is cited by Johnston and Watson (2004) had methodological weaknesses, many of which have been documented in previous literature (see Chapter 1). The study design was not methodologically robust enough for large-scale policy to be implemented on the back of it (Ellis and Moss, 2014; Glazzard, 2017 and Chapter 1 in this report).

The ITT core content framework

The ITT core content framework was published in 2019 (DfE/EEF, 2019). It is not a curriculum for ITE in itself but the document sets out the minimum content that trainees must know by the end of their training. ITE providers are required to design a coherent curriculum for trainee teachers that embeds the content in the ITT Core Content Framework as well as additional content which ITE partnerships feel is critical. Providers must also teach any underpinning content which is not in the ITT Core Content Framework but there is pre-requisite knowledge required by trainees in order to understand the knowledge in the Framework.

There is a clear expectation in the framework that providers will provide trainee teachers with a synthetic phonics curriculum:

As the Teachers' Standards make clear, it is important for teachers teaching early reading and early mathematics to have a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics and appropriate maths teaching strategies. (p.6)

[trainees should observe] how expert colleagues demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics, particularly if teaching early reading and spelling, and deconstructing this approach. (p.15)

The ITT Core Content Framework is aligned with the teachers' standards and as identified above, synthetic phonics is embedded within the teachers' standards.

The draft ITE inspection framework

We have introduced the draft ITE inspection framework in Chapter 1. In line with changes to the school inspection framework outlined above, it is no surprise that Ofsted has decided to revise the inspection framework for ITE provision. Ofsted's commitment to synthetic phonics is very clear in the draft consultation document (Ofsted, 2020):

For inspections of primary partnerships, inspectors will focus on early reading/phonics and the foundation subjects as a whole (p.16)

Inspectors will visit a selection of trainees to support their focused reviews of the ITE curriculum: Primary and EY [early years] teams will always include a focused review and trainee visits on early reading and phonics, and foundation subjects (p.19)

Inspectors must inspect early reading and phonics when looking at early years and primary training courses. For primary and secondary ITE curriculums, inspectors must ensure they will be able to judge whether the course provides trainees with their minimum entitlement, as set out in the ITT core content framework (p.20)

Inspectors should ensure that they also consider trainees' knowledge and practice in behaviour management, meeting the needs of pupils with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language and (primary only) systematic synthetic phonics. (p.26)

A more alarming statement is included on page 39:

For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that *trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence* [our emphasis].

In addition, it is proposed that the quality of the ITE curriculum will be judged inadequate if:

Primary training *does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics*' (p.44, our emphasis). Leadership and management team must ensure thorough training in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics' (p.46).

Also, it is proposed that leadership and management of the ITE programme will be judged inadequate if:

For early years and primary programmes, mentors do not support the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Some trainees are being poorly prepared to teach systematic synthetic phonics after the completion of their course (p.53)

When evaluating the programme, inspectors will take into account:

whether trainees, 'if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' by the end of their training (p.56)

Conclusion

The documentation cited in this chapter demonstrates that there is a clear policy agenda in England which is mandating the teaching of synthetic phonics both in schools and in initial teacher education provision. It is deeply worrying that despite the methodological weaknesses of the research into synthetic phonics, this approach is being heralded as the best approach for promoting early reading development. The mandate in the draft ITE inspection framework will penalise initial teacher education providers who choose to introduce trainee teachers to other approaches to teaching early reading. However, the approach does not work for all children. If it did, there would not be a tail of underachievement in reading. It is worrying that by limiting trainees' exposure to a broad range of strategies to promote reading development, their capacity to support struggling readers who have not successfully mastered the skill of word recognition using synthetic phonics will be severely restricted.

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Chapter 3 - Outline of the independent research into the views of professionals and tutors involved in literacy courses in initial teacher education institutions in England

Margaret M. Clark and Jude Sloan

The purpose of this independent research

Our aim was to investigate both the content of current literacy courses in institutions involved in initial teacher education for primary schools in England, the attitudes of the professionals in those institutions towards current government literacy policy and its impact on ITE course content. We wished to establish the extent to which the content has been influenced by the government edicts since 2012 outlined in chapter 1 of this report. The online survey and follow-up interviews were intended for professionals and tutors involved in any way in delivering literacy courses for trainee primary teachers in these institutions in England. We were committed to ensure that we secured as large and representative a sample as possible and to this end circulated information about the online survey through various national organisations as well as to professionals known to be involved in such courses. We stressed that it was an independent survey and that responses would be anonymous.

The research team

Professor Margaret M. Clark, Sue Reid and Jude Sloan from Newman University together with Professor Jonathan Glazzard from Leeds Beckett University and Colin Mills from Manchester University. Professor Margaret Clark, Sue Reid, Jude Sloan and Professor Jonathan Glazzard devised the online survey whilst Sue Reid and Colin Mills conducted the individual interviews.

The importance of this research

Both the government in England, and Ofsted, remain committed to synthetic phonics as the only way to teach all young children to read. As can be seen from the information in Chapter 1 not only is this government policy mandated in schools, but edicts have been issued by Ofsted to instruct institutions involved in initial teacher education to forefront this in all their literacy courses. Furthermore, a major aspect of Ofsted inspections is to ensure that this government policy is enforced. Any evidence of the current situation, and the views of those involved, is all the more relevant following the consultation document issued by Ofsted in January 2020, after we had completed our research. Should its recommendations be implemented, from September 2020 the emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics will be further strengthened and enforced. See Appendix I for a summary of the relevant aspects of the consultation document.

The aim of the research and how it was conducted

Our aim in this independent research project was to inform government policy, with evidence concerning the views of professionals currently involved in the literacy aspect of initial teacher education. Those completing the online survey were assured their responses

would remain anonymous but were encouraged, should they wish, to comment on the issues arising by using a dedicated email address only accessible by members of the research team. We indicated that there might be a further phase of the research involving focus groups and asked those who completed the survey to let us know if they would be interested in participating in these. However, in the event we decided rather than organised focus groups it would be more informative to conduct follow-up interviews with a sample of those who had completed the online survey, allowing opportunity for more in-depth answers. 38 completed the online survey and 10 of these participants were subsequently interviewed face-to-face or via phone / internet call, five by Sue Reid and five by Colin Mills.

The online survey

The online survey questions are found in Appendix II. The online survey was completed between February 2019 and October 2019. The online survey was hosted by JISC Online Surveys. The questions were phrased and structured to elicit the following information:

- The professional initial teacher education experience and current role of the survey participant
- The types of ITE courses offered by the institution and the content of those courses especially with regards to synthetic phonics
- The level of attention given by Ofsted to the teaching of synthetic phonics in inspections at the participants' institutions
- The perceived impact of the systematic synthetic phonics government policy and Ofsted's commitment to that policy
- Whether or not the survey participant agrees with the current government policy on systematic synthetic phonics.

The key results from the online survey are reported in Chapter 4 and the details of the survey questions are to be found in Appendix II.

The follow-up interviews

The outline questions for the follow-up interviews are in Appendix III. These were sent to the interview participants in advance of their interview to allow time for them to reflect and prepare. This was in order to maximise the quality of the answers provided. The interviews were conducted in the closing months of 2019 after the research team had had an opportunity to study the results of the online survey. All those who were interviewed signed participation consent forms and had their data safely stored and deleted in accordance with current legislation.

The findings from the interviews are reported in Chapter 5 and the indicative interview questions are to be found in Appendix III.

Ethical approval for the online survey and follow-up interviews

We sought and received approval from Newman University Research Ethics Committee initially for the online survey. Subsequently when we decided to undertake follow-up interviews rather than the focus groups we had originally planned, we applied for and received approval to modify the research plan. We met all the required guidelines. We

prepared an advertisement which is reproduced here as Appendix IV. We circulated information about the survey as widely as possible through individuals and national associations such as UCET, UKLA, BERA, NEU, NAPE and TACTYC. We requested the associations to encourage their members to participate.

We piloted the survey with a few members of staff at Newman University. We also sought the views of two reinvited literacy researchers on our proposed questions and modified the questions in the light of their comments.

Funding

This research was undertaken with support from Newman University but no grants were sought or awarded.

Key Results

The key results from the survey are reported in Chapter 4 and from the interviews in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 - The results of the survey into literacy courses in institutions in England providing initial teacher education for primary school teachers

Margaret M. Clark, Jonathan Glazzard and Sue Reid

We received 38 responses to our survey of synthetic phonics in courses in institutions involved in initial teacher education in England. 10 of those who completed the survey agreed to be interviewed and the results of the interviews are reported in Chapter 5. The survey questions are to be found in Appendix II.

Background details

1. Region in which the institution is based:

We had responses from all nine Regions in England. Greater London and South East Regions 7 from each; West Midlands and North West Regions 5 from each; South West 4; East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber and North East Regions 3 from each and one from East of England Region.

2. Length of time the respondent had worked in ITE:

6 respondents had been in the institution fewer than 2 years; 21 between 2 and 10 years; 8 between 11 and 20 years and 3 more than 20 years.

3. How many years the respondents had taught in primary education:

10 respondents had taught between 3-10 years; 20 between 11-20 years and 8 more than 20 years.

4. The respondent's role in the institution:

Some respondents had more than one role. 29 of the respondents were English tutors; 15 were module leaders; 16 were subject leaders, 5 were programme leaders; 11 were tutors in other areas and 4 indicated other.

5. Courses offered in the institution (multi answers to this question)

Undergraduate 3-7	16
Undergraduate 5-11	26
Undergraduate 7-11	7
Postgraduate 3-7	23
Postgraduate PGCE 5-11	32
School Direct	29
Other	5

Results

N.B. There were variations in the answers for different courses, whether Undergraduate, PGCE or School Direct. As not all institutions offered all these courses the totals answering vary. Interesting comments were made by many respondents to some questions.

The numbers of comments to each question are indicated. We have included comments that illuminate our research questions. See chapter 5 for further information based on the interviews with 10 of these who completed the survey.

6. Do you regard your programme as specifically training students to teach in England?
N.B. Northern Ireland Scotland and Wales have a separate curriculum from England.

Undergraduate 3-7 Yes 13 No 2

Comments (out of 2):

- We would openly talk about how there are other curricula
- In English we do not specifically teach to the curriculum... Our belief is that schools will adapt the curriculum to the community in which they serve. We cannot do that at university level.

Undergraduate 5-11 Yes 20 No 3

Comments (out of 1):

- In English we do not specifically teach to the curriculum... Our belief is that schools will adapt the curriculum to the community in which they serve. We cannot do that at university level.

Undergraduate 7-11 Yes 6 No 2

Comments (out of 1):

- In English we do not specifically teach to the curriculum... Our belief is that schools will adapt the curriculum to the community in which they serve. We cannot do that at university level.

Postgraduate 3-7 PGCE 20 4

Comments (out of 4):

- We look at a whole English curriculum starting with quality texts and centralising the role of talk.
- We touch on others.
- We use the National Curriculum for England as our starting point with students.
- We also refer to the [Phonics] Screening Check and the Assessment Framework for England.

Postgraduate 5-11 PGCE Yes 26 No 7

Comments (out of 6):

- We focus on the English National Curriculum as that is what the vast majority go on to teach but more importantly focus on developing the students' fundamental

understanding and reflective and critical skills which could be applied to the curriculum.

- We look at a whole English curriculum starting with quality texts and centralising the role of talk.
- We touch on the others.
- Some general aspects around pedagogy and some very specific aspects that are just about England re curriculum, national assessment etc.
- We use the National Curriculum for England as our starting point with the students. We also refer to the [Phonics] Screening Check and Assessment Framework in England.

School Direct Yes 22 No 6

Comments (out of 5):

- There is less time to discuss this together and students are more embedded in local practice.
- Teaching and learning are the same no matter what part of the country or indeed the work you are in. We are training teachers of humans, not teachers of English children.
- We touch on others.

7. Has the government's mandate on the teaching of reading affected the way you teach reading in the initial teacher education programme? (N.B. The government in England remains committed to its literacy policy with synthetic phonics mandated as the only way to teach all children to read and to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment of children at the end of year 1).

Undergraduate 3-7 Yes 13 No 2

Comments (out of 6):

- Yes, we recognise government policy, but also highlight the fact that systematic synthetic phonics is only one way to teach reading and that children draw on a range of cueing systems including semantic and syntactic cues. systematic synthetic phonics does not work for all children and we do not advocate the phonics screen which is decontextualized. The same information could be gained from teacher assessment.
- Yes, however we stress the importance of phonics within a language rich environment.
- The students I teach on the BA in early childhood often go on to be primary school teachers, so I believe it to be very important that they have a deep understanding of the research upon which the phonics agenda relied. I therefore cover this aspect in detail in order to help students make up their own minds about whether or not it is the best method to teach reading.
- It is the first aspect of the 'English' curriculum that our students cover at the detriment of them learning about children's early language development. We are concerned from the outset that they are going into schools with an understanding,

ready to observe, plan and then teach. Planning for phonics has become a focus for module assessment and I question whether we actually look at this through a critical perspective and look at alternatives. I worry we are training technicians but this seems to be what the schools want. ...the pressure to get experience observing and teaching phonics feels like it dominates standards.

Undergraduate 5-11 Yes 23 No 1

Comments (out of 9):

- Far greater focus on systematic synthetic phonics teaching phonics as key strategy for reading. Whilst we cover a more complex view of reading students mainly see phonics in schools so feel they need support with this
- systematic synthetic phonics is only one way to teach reading... systematic synthetic phonics does not work for all children
- Yes in so far as we teach phonics in a more explicit way... We strongly urge our students to engage with evidence-based research... with the expectation that this informs the development of their professional identity as a teacher
- Yes we have a focus in each year on aspects of phonics to demonstrate progression through the Phases and across ages ranges – covering subject knowledge/theory and pedagogy
- We have a clear focus on subject knowledge in systematic synthetic phonics

Undergraduate 7-11 Yes 7 No 1

Comments (out of 2):

- Yes, in as far as we teach phonics subject knowledge in a more explicit way but we present evidence-based research.

Postgraduate 3-7 Yes 23 No 1

Comments (out of 6):

- We have a strong emphasis on phonics as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.
- We have had to adapt the training to incorporate specific emphasis on teaching phonics

Postgraduate 5-11 Yes 31 No 2

Comments (out of 10):

- We have a strong emphasis on phonics as part of a broad balanced curriculum
- We have had to adapt the training to incorporate the emphasis on teaching phonics – subject knowledge pedagogy theory as well as plan for trainees to observe phonics in school and attend at least two days further training in phonics.

School Direct Yes 28 No 2

Comments (out of 6):

- We are accountable for the phonics training across PGCE and School Direct
- It has affected us in so far as we teach phonics subject knowledge in a more explicit way
- We now include the Phonics Screening Check as part of the curriculum and insist that trainees support the pre-assessment checks in schools during their practice

Other Yes 6 No 2

N.B. one commented that the EYITT programme was established within the current climate. This may be true of some other courses which answered No.

8. Approximately how many hours of direct teaching are allocated for synthetic phonics in each of the courses:

A few courses indicated that they devoted more than 20 hours, but most reported either 1-10 or 11-20 hours

9. Do you use any of the following approved phonics schemes to support your teaching (tick all that apply).

The commonest schemes were: Letters and Sounds; Jolly Phonics and Read Write Inc

PGCE Courses 3-7	Letters and Sounds	22	Read Write Inc	12	Jolly Phonics	10
PGCE Courses 5-11		32		14		13
School Direct		28		14		13

10. Please list core texts/documents you recommend to support students' knowledge of phonics?

A variety of texts were listed and several of the respondents mentioned:

Teaching systematic synthetic phonics and early English (2017) J. Glazzard and J. Stokoe
 Teaching systematic phonics in primary schools (2015) Joliffe, Waugh and Carss
 R. Johnston and J. Watson (2014) Teaching synthetic phonics.

11. Do you include a mandatory assessment task which assesses a student's knowledge of the alphabetic code (synthetic phonics)?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	10	No	5
Undergraduate 5-11		17		6
Undergraduate 7-11		5		2
Postgraduate 3-7		18		5
Postgraduate 5-11		25		7
School Direct		21		7

12. During placement are all student expected to observe a synthetic phonics lesson?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	15	No	0
Undergraduate 5-11		23		0
Undergraduate 7-11		7		0
Postgraduate 3-7		24		0
Postgraduate 5-11		33		0
School Direct		30		0

13. During placements do all students have an assessed observation teaching synthetic phonics?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	14	No	1
Undergraduate 5-11		20		3
Undergraduate 7-11		7		0
Postgraduate 3-7		22		2
Postgraduate 5-11		30		3
School Direct		26		3

14. Do you include an assessment task which requires teachers to critically analyse synthetic phonics?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	10	No	6
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Comments (out of 7):

- As part of a theory into practice module
- There is an assessment task but I don't feel there is any critical analysis
- The students can choose to critique the research that led to phonics
- Becoming mandatory as an example of educational research

Undergraduate 5-11	Yes	15	No	9
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Comments (out of 7):

- As part of a reading assessment
- As part of a theory into practice module
- Students have to plan for a series of activities to support the teaching of phonics
- No but students are asked to demonstrate subject knowledge, understanding and key principles and pedagogies that underpin English teaching and this includes critically analysing systematic synthetic phonics and recognising the range of ways that children learn to read and write, not just systematic synthetic phonics

Undergraduate 7-11	Yes	4	No	4
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Comments (out of 1):

- Discussed in workshops after school experience

Postgraduate 3-7	Yes	9	No	14
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Comments (out of 1):

- Discussed in workshops after school experience

Postgraduate 5-11	Yes	12	No	20
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Comments (out of 2):

- We reflect critically strengths and potential challenges on the teaching of synthetic phonics
- Discussed in workshops after school experience

School Direct	Yes	11	No	17
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Comments (out of 3):

- They have to watch a week, teach a week and assess to what extent learners use SP in their reading.
- Discussed in workshops after school experience

15. How many hours are devoted to other aspects of English literacy?

No course stated zero hours.

Undergraduate 3-7	1-10 hours	3	11-20 hours	12
Undergraduate 5-11		3		20
Undergraduate 7-11		1		6
Postgraduate 3-7		7		17
Postgraduate 5-11		8		25
School Direct		9		19

16. When was the last Ofsted Inspection?

Undergraduate 3-7	< 2 years	4	3-5 years	10	> 5 years	1
Undergraduate 5-11		5		13		6
Undergraduate 7-11		2		6		1
Postgraduate 3-7		5		14		6
Postgraduate 5-11		8		18		8
School Direct		8		16		7

17. During the last Ofsted inspection of your ITE provision was the quality of your synthetic phonics provision a focus of your inspection?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	10	No	5
Undergraduate 5-11		15		7
Undergraduate 7-11		7		3
Postgraduate 3-7		17		7
Postgraduate 5-11		22		10
School Direct		19		9

18. During your last Ofsted inspection did inspectors assess student teachers' subject knowledge in phonics?

Undergraduate 3-7	Yes	10	No	1
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Comments (out of 3):

- Not in school but in the conversation and meetings and in looking at the evidence they provided in school experience folders and on student survey

Undergraduate 5-11	Yes	15	No	4
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Comments (out of 3):

- Not in school but in the conversation and meetings and in looking at the evidence they provided in school experience folders and on student survey
- It wasn't as big a focus as might have been expected.

Undergraduate 7-11	Yes	5	No	1
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Comments (out of 2):

- Through observation of phonics teaching

Postgraduate 3-7	Yes	16	No	3
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Comments (out of 5):

- Through observation, critique of placement files and student feedback
- Not directly but came through in questioning
- Not in school but in the conversations and meetings with trainees and in looking at the evidence they provided in SE folders and on Student survey
- Phonics lessons in schools

Postgraduate 5-11	Yes	22	No	8
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Comments (out of 6):

- Through observation, critique of placement files and student feedback
- Not directly but came through in questioning
- Not in school but in the conversations and meetings with trainees and in looking at the evidence they provided in SE folders and on Student survey
- Phonics lessons in schools

School Direct	Yes	18	No	8
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Comments (out of 5):

- Not directly but came through in questioning
- Not in school but in the conversations and meetings with trainees and in looking at the evidence they provided in SE folders and on Student survey
- Phonics lessons in schools

19. Which other aspects of English are covered in addition to phonics?

Most respondents mentioned the following:

Children's literature, poetry, reading for pleasure, attention to the needs of individual children, balance of attention to meaning and word identification, use of context in word identification.

20. Are all students expected to read texts on the teaching of reading other than those concerned with synthetic phonics?

Undergraduate courses	Yes	25	No	0
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Comments (out of 2):

- Phonics is only one aspect of effective reading.
- Yes - encouraged to develop a wider range of knowledge of aspects relating to reading.

Postgraduate courses	Yes	33	No	1
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Comments (out of 7):

- There is a good balance.
- Recommended texts to develop teaching reading and deepen understanding of theories relating to teaching reading
- Various texts

21. Are students set assignments on approaches to teaching of reading that go beyond current literacy policy in England?

Undergraduate	Yes	21	No	5
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Comments (out of 4):

- Not directly-assessed tasks leading to grades, but school-based tasks. Can also choose to investigate as part of research project.
- Focus on picture books and what it means to be a successful writer and critique of a literacy article

Postgraduate courses	Yes	14	No	17
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Comments (out of 10):

- the main focus is likely to be current literacy practice in England but some students look beyond this and all students are encouraged to look more widely at the theory that underpins different approaches
- Not directly-assessed tasks leading to grades, but school-based tasks. Can also choose to investigate as part of M' level desktop research project.

22. Are the students given information on government literacy policies in other countries?
If yes give comment.

Yes	10	No	28
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Comments (out of 10):

- Only very broadly
- Provide an overview of the teaching of reading over time and internationally
- [Only a few examples of another country given e.g.] New Zealand

23. In England the teaching of synthetic phonics is mandatory. Do you agree with current government policy which states that synthetic phonics is the best way if teaching children to read?

Yes	11	No	27
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Summary

The survey data suggests that teacher educators in England lack autonomy in relation to how they prepare trainee teachers to teach early reading. They feel obliged to focus on systematic synthetic phonics at the expense of developing trainees' understanding of a broad repertoire of strategies for teaching reading development. In addition, the data suggest that the time allocated to systematic synthetic phonics results in limited time for supporting trainees broader understanding of English, for example the importance of spoken language in children's literacy development.

Implications

Government and Ofsted may, by the current policy and proposed changes, shut down critical debate in relation to the teaching of early reading and thus undermine the expertise and professionalism of experienced tutors. Given the extensive research which exists which points to the need for a balanced approach to early reading development, it is critical that teacher education courses support trainee teachers to use this research to critically interrogate government literacy policy. It is also essential that trainees are introduced to approaches which have been successful in other countries and other parts of the UK. However, we recognise that a divergence from government and Ofsted policies may be a dangerous move for teacher education providers in England, particularly if the proposed draft ITE framework is ratified. It is therefore critical that researchers, teacher

education and literacy organisations continue to debate these issues and engage in professional dialogue and debate with the Department for Education and the inspectorate.

The expertise and knowledge of teacher educators in England is already being undermined as many who responded to the survey feel the need to comply with both DfE and Ofsted directives which promote a limited view on early reading development. This has potentially serious implications which we have outlined below:

1. Senior managers in institutions, in order to keep their accreditation, may currently not be challenging the centrality of synthetic phonics in their ITE curriculum. This is at present resulting in friction between them and some tutors. Should the recommendations of the Ofsted consultation document be implemented, these conflicts would be even greater.
2. The next generation of primary teachers in England may complete their training with a view of the teaching of early reading which puts synthetic phonics at its centre but with little attention to other aspects of reading.
3. Lack of time during their courses may result in trainees emerging from training with less expertise in the teaching of other areas of English.
4. Government policy on phonics, including the focus in Ofsted reports which in the 2020 consultation document states that systematic synthetic phonics is the only way to teach early reading, is shaping the primary English curriculum in both schools and ITE institutions. This simplifies the complexity of reading development and results in a one-size fits all approach to reading which does not meet the needs of all children.
5. The undermining of tutors' expertise will result in educational policy being the preserve of the ideology promoted by the government in power at the time.
6. Students may emerge from their training in England unaware that other countries have very different, and highly successful early literacy policies.

The issues and implications within this chapter informed the design of the interviews with 10 of the 38 who completed the survey. These interviews are discussed in more detail and depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - The findings from interviews of 10 respondents to the survey into literacy courses in institutions in England providing initial teacher education for primary school teachers

Sue Reid and Colin Mills

Context

The questions for the interviews were drawn from responses to the survey which is outlined in Chapter 4. The indicative questions sent in advance to those interviewed are to be found in Appendix III. From the 38 original participants in the survey 10 volunteered to be interviewed and we interviewed all the participants who volunteered. All of the interviewees were either currently or previously English tutors in initial teacher education departments of English Universities. Some held senior managerial positions within their institution and had at least 10 years' experience teaching in the primary sector before entering higher education.

Their institutions had a variety of courses, some ran only Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) courses including School Direct and some institutions also ran undergraduate 3/4-year courses. On the postgraduate course students spend 120 days i.e. 24 weeks of their 38-week course in school (DfE 2015 cited in Hendry 2020); undergraduates on a three-year course also spend at least 24 weeks in school.

All participants have been given a pseudonym and the names used are gender neutral.

It is important to note that all participants were from institutions in England and the issues raised and comments made refer only to England and not to the devolved areas of the United Kingdom.

Methodology

Data from the survey was used to formulate focused questions for the semi-structured interviews. This approach was used as it gave scope for supplementary questions which enabled further exploration of answers. The interviewees were given copies of the questions in advance of the interview to enable them to frame their responses and in some cases to consult colleagues who were also involved in ITE (see Appendix III). All except one of the interviews were conducted by phone and with the permission of the interviewees were electronically recorded. The interviews were conducted by Sue Reid and Colin Mills and took place between 2018 and 2019.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using participant triangulation (Walliman and Buckler 2008 p. 207) and thematic analysis was used to identify patterns emerging from the data.

Pro-phonics

Although there were a number of tensions identified from the interviews it is important to note at this point that all the tutors interviewed considered phonics to be an essential part of the teaching of early reading. This was a key theme which was prevalent throughout the

interviews. However, they supported the view of the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) which is cited by Ofsted as evidence in their consultation on inspections in initial teacher education (2020), that the of teaching early reading should be holistic and that phonics, although important was only part of learning to read with meaning.

Emerging themes

As cited in Chapter 1, Michael Wilshaw's edict in 2012 when he was HMCI of Ofsted, had focused inspections on how institutions prepare their students to teach phonics. The result of this focus made phonics central to the teaching of early reading and gave rise to tensions between the expertise of the tutors, their theoretical and practical knowledge of the teaching of early reading and the need to have a positive outcome in Ofsted inspections. All of the tutors interviewed have had inspections since this focus on phonics was introduced. This chapter will explore this key area of friction using the evidence from the interviews and consider the themes which became apparent and issues that have arisen as a result of the focus on systematic synthetic phonics and the pressure of Ofsted inspections. Further themes which emerged from Government policy were:

- the centrality of phonics in the ITE curriculum;
- its impact on professional expertise;
- student experiences and competence to teach early reading;
- tensions between schools and ITE institutions

Government policy and the centrality of phonics in the ITE curriculum

In 2015 the DfE increased by 30 days the amount of time students on PGCE and UG courses were to spend in school, thus reducing the time for University-based learning. This coupled with the focus on phonics resulted in less time being devoted to other aspects of the English curriculum. The interviewees indicated that this focus on phonics and the reduction in days spent at University had an effect on the content of the literacy courses. As Lee stated in the interview, it has resulted in less time for other areas of the English curriculum, such as poetry, storytelling, non-fiction and even the teaching of writing. Val also made the point that there has been less time to devote to improving students' knowledge of children's literature. All respondents except Harley, indicated that their institutions are using much of the time allocated to English for the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. This was in order to ensure that their students are prepared to teach early reading as proscribed in the National Curriculum (2013) and that their institution complies with the Ofsted guidelines (2015). Rowan illustrated this:

It was Ofsted and fears of being caught out that gave rise to decisions....so students tend to do as much phonics as matched the rest of the English curriculum.

Hendry (2020), drew similar conclusions, that the constraints on the ITE curriculum would result in limited access to the wider pedagogy of teaching reading. Ellis (2020) was also concerned that the controls on the teaching of early reading already inherent in the system would be exacerbated by the new ITT core curriculum and the proposed inspection framework for ITE. Initial teacher education institutions will have to toe the line and not challenge or indeed critique the statutory guidance on the teaching of phonics nor will they be allowed to teach any 'competing approaches' to systematic synthetic phonics should the

proposals in the current Ofsted consultation document be implemented (see Chapter 1 and Appendix I).

These policies together with the DfE guidelines for the accredited initial teacher education have already resulted in a tension between as Ashley commented, ‘holding on to their core beliefs and ensuring that their institution is able to keep its accreditation as an ITE provider’.

A conflict which is summed up by Drew:

I obviously have a professional and ethical commitment to the University I work in...I am obliged that they (the students) meet the standards that are enshrined in law.

And as Alex states ‘there’s a lot at stake’.

This mandatory Government policy is policed by Ofsted and of the 10 interviewees 8 had changed at least part of their English curriculum as a consequence of the focus on phonics by Ofsted inspectors. Sam’s experience when interviewed by an Ofsted inspector is interesting as the inspector, although interested in the vision of the English curriculum said he could not put this in his report. He then went on to ask predominantly about how many hours were spent teaching phonics and how student confidence and competence in phonics was assured. The inspector spoke to Sam informally afterwards as he was interested in how the module looked as a whole. However, this episode left Sam with the feeling that the whole module for English and the expertise of the tutors and their professional judgement was cast aside to focus on phonics provision.

Val raised concerns that, because of the pressures from senior management, students, parents and schools, some colleagues in ITE had unquestioningly accepted the message from Government about systematic synthetic phonics:

I think people run scared, especially course leaders and senior managers who may not have a strong primary or literacy background.

The concern was that, rather than reflecting on or challenging the policy, some colleagues were implementing it without in depth consideration. As Alex commented:

...the University was ‘put on the naughty step’. That gave rise to lots of panic and rethinking of things...I know that has had a big effect on course leaders and others in the hierarchy.

This observation implies that senior managers, rather than tutors with expertise in English, were influential in designing the English curriculum. There were strong indications that (i) *policy*, (ii) *the monitoring* of that policy and therefore (iii) *accountability* to Ofsted were all impacting on practice within departments and faculties. This was perceived to be supplanting the expertise and professionalism of tutors. As a consequence, the experience that students were having in university might have been affected.

These shifts in power have created tensions within education departments and faculties. In one ITE institution which had previously been graded as ‘outstanding’ and was downgraded to ‘good’, the English department was made to feel that this was their fault:

fractured working relationships developed and became a major institutional and management issue.

Government policy and its impact on professional expertise

Teacher education in universities is often seen as resistant or slow to change (Ellis, *et al* 2018) and with regards to phonics, Gibb (2014), writing between his two tenures as School Standards Minister, maintained that universities were resistant to the teaching of phonics. However, the interviews showed that any current resistance to the focus on phonics for them came not from opposition to teaching phonics, but resistance to the centrality of phonics as the only way to teach children to read. This was coupled with the high-stakes nature of Ofsted inspections, which focused on this, and judged the whole institution based on the teaching of synthetic phonics.

Participants were asked whether within a continuum on the dominance of phonics, and therefore Government policy, they considered themselves to be compliant, questioning or resistant. Morgan was compliant and questioning:

...I do believe phonics has an important part to play...but done badly it can put them (the children) off

And Eden stated: *... partly all of them.*

Sam, however, claimed to be:

not resistant to phonics I think it (phonics) has an appropriate place in education...but I have to question the one size fits all policy.

This sentiment of resistance and compliance was shared by Rowan, Val and Lee

Drew who identified as questioning commented: *'...I have real concerns about the pervasiveness of phonics'*.

Those who identified as questioning and resistant considered themselves to be reflective practitioners and the resistance was based on the need to:

... point out the flaws in the research behind it (systematic synthetic phonics) and to 'encourage our students to think very hard about it.

I have to give them the confidence whilst keeping them asking questions... that is not always easy... phonics becomes a sort of religion to the followers...

However, the interpretation of compliance for Ashley, who identified as resistant, shows that it is the legal/mandatory status of systematic synthetic phonics that makes the lecturers focus on it instead of being allowed to take a professional stance, which would tolerate challenge of systematic synthetic phonics as the only way to teach early reading:

... we have to give the students the skills and the grit to work against such practices. Sometimes that means compliance.

The interviews showed that there is a concern within ITE institutions that the expertise of tutors and lecturers is being undermined and superseded by statutory Government policy

on the teaching of early reading. As Val remarked: *'we have to follow a particular approach'*.

This was supported by Drew who stated:

... the pressure to teach reading in a particular way laid waste to a lot of our expertise and to our use of evidence and to the ways we use scholarship and research in our teaching.

The tension with compliance was indicated through comments on the statutory nature of systematic phonics in the National Curriculum (2013). As Eden pointed out:

I make the point to them (the students) that it's a legal requirement for me to teach it and for them to use it in schools.

But Eden also felt that rather than teaching the direct skills of phonics it would have been more beneficial to spend time on the vital element of phonemic awareness and to teach early reading in a more holistic way.

Eden's viewpoint gives an example of the general trend in these interviews where ITE tutors feel that Government legislation denies both tutors and student teachers the opportunity to critique and reflect on the theories and pedagogy of the teaching of early reading. This in its turn will be replicated in how students are taught to teach early reading and therefore ultimately impact on classroom practice. With the proposed new punitive inspection framework and ITT core curriculum, this will only be further reinforced. As Ellis and Moss (2014 p.256) state:

The research community ought to be genuinely shocked about the restrictions government policy now sets on the freedom of university academics in England to engage critically with literacy research and to enable teachers and student teachers to do this.

Thus, undermining the nature of universities as places of inquiry, supporting innovation through evidence-based research, and the expertise of tutors will be silenced as they comply with Government policy in order to keep accreditation for their institutions.

Student experiences and competence to teach early reading

The interviews showed that there were concerns that student experiences had been affected by the focus on phonics both at university, and during school placements. In one institution, students fed back to staff that they feel that a disproportionate amount of time is spent on phonics.

The demand for extra assessments because of the focus on phonics, and the need to track progress has had an impact on how students experience and perceive the teaching of early reading and phonics. Eden considered that the students had lost sight of how and why we learn to read, going on to say that their concerns were centred not on their understanding of the complexities of teaching reading but: *'how I am going to tick off standard 3D'*. Similar concerns were expressed by Morgan but who also added that phonics: *'has facilitated a greater understanding of what decoding and phonics can offer'*, with the caveat that this was only one aspect of teaching reading.

Audits have been introduced to monitor understanding of both the terminology of phonics, new to many students, and the concept and pedagogy. Drew considered that the assessments made students anxious about going into schools as they felt they were being judged. Alex asserted that although phonics is not the *'be all and end all'* of teaching reading, the focus that they have put on it through time given and all the assessments gives the students mixed messages. This, together with the need, as Lee, with reference to the National Student Survey put it, for students *to, 'express confidence in teaching systematic synthetic phonics'* is shaping the curriculum and affecting the student experience in ITE.

All respondents felt it was important to provide their students with publications and writers including those who were critical of systematic synthetic phonics, as well as publications from those who whole heartedly supported systematic synthetic phonics. The agenda around the simple view of reading, including critique of this model, was also considered, as was critical analysis of the evidence on which the centrality of systematic synthetic phonics as the only means of teaching early reading was based. However, as one respondent observed: *'...it is important not to be too negative'*, going on further to explain that students see phonics being taught in school where explanations are not always clear.

Tensions between schools and universities also arose because, as one respondent reported, they had some schools asking why there was so much focus on phonics, and others that they didn't do enough. Partnerships between schools and universities should be founded on mutual trust of the training that is being given to students, and an understanding that to critique or question is not to criticise. It is reflection in order to deepen understanding that enhances the student experience and produces effective teachers.

Tensions between schools and ITE institutions

Schools and Universities have many masters to serve and ultimately it is the quality of education that the pupils receive which is important to both institutions. However, the focus on phonics is creating tensions as the new Ofsted inspection framework for schools implemented in September 2019 and the proposed inspection framework for ITE institutions both make phonics a key element for judgement.

In 2012, Michael Gove the then Education Secretary, announced there would be more school based teacher training, effectively shifting the dynamic between schools and ITE institutions. Although the Carter Review (2015) emphasised the need for good partnerships between schools and ITE providers, respondents felt that, with regards to phonics, tensions have been created and initial teacher education institutions now are required by Ofsted to be more dogmatic and prescriptive about what they want the students to observe in school. One respondent felt that schools are now expecting students to meet specific teachers' standards (2012) early on. Many schools, due to Government focus and high stakes testing with the Phonics Screening Check, have gone overboard on phonics and their priorities and anxieties are passed on to students. Ashley, whose institution works with a number of different local authorities and has a range of initial teacher education courses, including PGCE and School Direct, was positive about the strong relationships that have been built. However, concern was also expressed about the time and energy checking up on schools to quality assure their phonics input with students and monitoring students teaching phonics in school. Val was also aware of tensions and suspected that the message broadcast that

universities do not focus on phonics (Gibb, 2014) resulted in schools making harsh judgements on students as they perceive that the training in universities is not strong.

Schools will have developed a pedagogy to teach phonics in order to prepare children for the statutory high stakes Phonics Screening Check in Year 1. This pedagogy is often based on commercially available schemes and will not be the same for every school. For some students their experience of the teaching of early reading in school is based on these phonics programmes whereas at university they will be exposed to a wide range of strategies to teach early reading. This message, that students should be supported to use phonics as one element in the teaching of early reading but also be presented with other strategies, came through clearly in each of the interviews. However, tutors felt that the experience students have in school of the teaching of early reading based solely on phonics is affecting their attitude to the teaching of reading. As Morgan stated:

students may now... have a greater understanding of what phonics and decoding can offer.

But as Eden commented: ‘...*They have lost sight of why we learn to read*’, adding that students are not learning to teach reading but learning how to teach phonics. This opinion was reflected in Hendry’s study (2020). To counter this, all the tutors interviewed tried to provide their students with evidence which either supported or critiqued, the teaching of phonics and in many cases did both. However, as Alex stated:

We try as far as possible to give them a balanced view...but I am very aware of some of the messages they get from schools and the media...

Conclusion

The interviews showed that phonics is considered to be an aspect of the teaching of reading by all interviewees. However, all maintained that it was only one aspect of the teaching of early reading. Within ITE institutions there is a concern that the centrality of phonics is detracting from teaching of other aspects, not only English, but because of time limitations, other areas of the curriculum. Also, some schools have embraced phonics whole heartedly and this has resulted in a tension between what university tutors are presenting to students as a holistic view of teaching early reading and the sometimes-polarised experience they have in school.

Other concerns were expressed around how Ofsted inspections are enforcing a focus on systematic synthetic phonics and how the quality of phonics training in institutions can affect the overall judgement given in an Ofsted inspection. This issue which will become even more important if the draft framework for inspecting ITE is ratified, as failure to comply with teaching early reading using only systematic synthetic phonics will result in an Ofsted judgement of ‘inadequate’ (See Appendix I and Clark 2020; Ellis, 2020).

As Chapters 1 and 2 set out, the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (2019) has impacted on schools’ curriculum and although there is more of a focus on the whole curriculum, decoding is still the focus for teaching early reading. Tensions within ITE institutions occur as they grapple with producing reflective graduate teachers and complying with the demands of Ofsted in order to retain accreditation. In addition to this as the focus of universities is to produce reflective and enquiring graduates, they need to

be able to question and critique. Beyond QTS, University-based courses should have a depth of thinking and reflection on pedagogical practices and evidenced theory. This would enable students to make professional judgements to support progress, but also to challenge policy which is not supported by evidence. The tutors interviewed were all providing their students with the opportunity to do this, but recent proposed changes to the ITE inspection framework (2020) will make this difficult to maintain, as this could result in an Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' and a possible loss of accreditation.

It would seem that the Government is seeking to shut down enquiry with regards to the teaching of early reading and '*...not encourage a seeking for a different order of things*' (Bernstein, 2003: 8), thus undermining the expertise and professionalism of experienced tutors.

The teaching of early reading in universities is in danger of presenting a simplistic view of reading, where ideology based on flawed research is promoted over evidence-based research which presents the teaching of early reading as a complex skill. This is reinforced by the high stakes accountability of Ofsted inspections which can put in doubt the very existence of initial teacher education institutions if they do not comply.

Implications

1. The next generation of primary teachers will have a view of the teaching of early reading which puts phonics at its centre. Because there remains less time during their course, they will have less expertise in the teaching of other areas of English.
2. Government policy on phonics, including the focus in Ofsted reports which in the 2020 consultation document states that systematic synthetic phonics is the only way to teach early reading, is shaping the primary English curriculum in both schools and initial teacher education institutions.
3. The expertise and knowledge of tutors is undermined as they feel unable to challenge the centrality of phonics because it is enshrined in law.
4. Senior managers in institutions need to keep their accreditation and are therefore not challenging the centrality of phonics in their initial teacher education curriculum.
5. The undermining of tutors' expertise will result in educational policy being the preserve of the ideology promoted by the government in power at the time.
6. We face a future where the new generation of teachers in England will not have been given the opportunity to challenge government policy during their university course and therefore may merely replicate what has gone before.

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Chapter 6 - Outline and summary of independent research into the impact of the systematic synthetic phonics government policy on literacy courses at institutions in England delivering initial teacher education for students training as primary school teachers

Margaret M. Clark, Jonathan Glazzard, Colin Mills, Sue Reid and Jude Sloan

Outline

The aim of the independent research was to investigate:

1. The content of current literacy courses in institutions involved in initial teacher education for primary school teachers in England.
2. The attitudes towards the current government policy and its impact on ITE course content of the lecturers and tutors involved.

The online survey, and follow-up interviews, were all completed by October 2019, prior to the publication by Ofsted in January 2020 of its consultation document on initial teacher education (Ofsted, 2020). The results of the Ofsted consultation are due to be published in Summer 2020 and its new recommendations implemented in September 2020. As can be seen from Chapter 1 and Appendix I of our report it is likely that in order to retain approval for their initial teacher education courses institutions involved in initial teacher education in England will be expected to show evidence that their courses on early reading stress systematic phonics as the only way to teach early reading. No other aspects of either the primary or secondary courses appear to be dictated to by Ofsted in this way by defining precise content.

Information on the survey was advertised widely through national associations which were asked to draw the attention of their members to the survey (see Appendix IV). It was stressed that this was an independent survey and that responses would be anonymous. The survey was open from February 2019 and when the survey closed in October, we had 38 responses from institutions across England. The questions asked on the survey are to be found in Appendix II. The survey was followed by interviews of 10 of those who completed the survey. Initially we had intended to follow the survey with focus groups but decided that individual interviews would be a more productive way to enrich the findings from the survey. The aim of these interviews was to explore in more detail issues that had arisen from the survey. The indicative questions sent in advance to those who agreed to be interviewed are in Appendix III.

The research team

Professor Margaret M. Clark, Sue Reid and Jude Sloan from Newman University together with Professor Jonathan Glazzard from Leeds Beckett University and Colin Mills from Manchester University formed the research team. Professor Margaret Clark, Sue Reid, Jude Sloan and Professor Jonathan Glazzard were responsible for the online survey whilst Sue Reid and Colin Mills conducted the individual interviews.

The importance of this research

The government in England, and Ofsted, remain committed to synthetic phonics as the only way to teach all young children to read. As can be seen from the information in Chapter 1, not only is this government policy mandated in schools, but edicts have been issued by Ofsted to instruct institutions involved in initial teacher education to forefront this in all their literacy courses. Furthermore, a major aspect of Ofsted inspections is to ensure that this government policy is enforced. Our evidence of the current situation, and the views of those involved, is particularly relevant following the consultation document issued by Ofsted in January 2020 as our evidence highlights the current situation. We had planned and completed our study prior to the publication of the consultation document, so were not able to explore with the participants their views on this probable further restriction on the content of their courses on early reading. Should the recommendations of the consultation document be implemented, from September 2020 the emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics will be further strengthened and enforced by Ofsted. See Appendix I for a summary of the relevant aspects of the consultation document.

The aim of the research and how it was conducted

Our aim in this independent research is to inform government policy with evidence concerning the views of professionals currently involved in the literacy aspect of initial teacher education for primary school teachers in England.

In the survey we investigated:

- The professional initial teacher education experience and current role of the survey participants
- The types of initial teacher education courses offered by the institution and the content of those courses especially with regards to synthetic phonics
- The level of attention given by Ofsted to the teaching of synthetic phonics in inspections at the participants' institutions
- The perceived impact of the systematic phonics government policy and Ofsted's commitment to that policy
- To what extent the survey participants agree with the current government policy on systematic phonics.

These issues were explored in more depth in the interviews with 10 of those who completed the survey and volunteered to be interviewed.

The key results from the survey are reported in Chapter 4 and from the interviews in Chapter 5.

Findings and their implications

It was clear both from the findings of the survey, and the interviews, that the focus in English courses in institutions involved in initial teacher education of primary teachers in England is predominantly on the requirements of the government and Ofsted. Limitations in time spent in the institutions by the students currently necessitates this emphasis if the institutions are to meet Ofsted requirements. There is clearly little time to devote to wider aspects of English, though it was clear that tutors did attempt to present as comprehensive

a course as possible. The answers to the survey made it clear that within most courses it was assumed that the trainees would teach in England. Limited time was available either to critique government policy, or to compare and contrast it with the literacy policies in other countries, even within the other constituent parts of the United Kingdom. In Scotland, Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland education is a delegated power and these countries have very different policies for early reading. It appears that many students who train in England may be unaware even that their policies are indeed different.

All 10 lecturers and tutors interviewed considered phonics to be an aspect of the teaching of reading. However, all maintained that it was only one aspect of the teaching of early reading. They indicated that within institutions involved in initial teacher education there is concern that the centrality of phonics is detracting from teaching of other aspects, not only of English, but because of time limitations, other areas of the curriculum.

Participants indicated that there may be tension between what university tutors are presenting to students as a holistic view of teaching early reading and the sometimes polarised experience the students may experience in schools, many of which have adopted the government's policy wholeheartedly; the students' experience on teaching practice may well not give them a wider experience.

Concern was expressed around how Ofsted inspections are enforcing a focus on systematic synthetic phonics, and their experience that the quality of phonics training in their institutions may affect the overall judgement given in an Ofsted inspection. This is an issue that will become even more important if the draft framework for inspecting ITE is ratified, as failure to comply with teaching early reading using only systematic synthetic phonics will result in an Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' (See Chapter 1 and Appendix I).

As Chapters 1 and 2 set out, the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019) has impacted on schools' curriculum and although there is more of a focus on the whole curriculum, decoding is still the focus for teaching early reading. From the interviews it was clear that tensions within ITE institutions occur as staff grapple with producing reflective graduate teachers and complying with the demands of Ofsted in order to retain accreditation. They felt that the focus of universities should be to produce reflective and enquiring graduates that need to be able to question and critique. University-based courses should have a depth of thinking and reflection on pedagogical practices and evidenced theory. This would enable students to make professional judgements to support progress, but also to challenge policy which is not supported by evidence. The tutors interviewed were all providing their students with the opportunity to do this. However, were they to be implemented recent proposed changes to the inspection framework will make this difficult to maintain, as this could result in an Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' and a possible loss of accreditation for any institution in England that challenges the centrality of systematic synthetic phonics as the way to teach early reading.

Implications

Government and Ofsted may, by the current policy and proposed changes, shut down critical debate in relation to the teaching of early reading and thus undermine the expertise and professionalism of experienced tutors. Thus, the teaching of early reading in universities is in danger of presenting a simplistic view of reading, where ideology based

on flawed research is promoted over evidence-based research which presents the teaching of early reading as a complex skill. This fear is reinforced by the high stakes accountability of Ofsted inspections which can put in doubt the very existence of ITE institutions if they do not comply.

1. The expertise and knowledge of teacher educators in England is already being undermined as many feel unable to challenge the centrality of phonics, both promoted by government, and required by Ofsted as a key aspect in inspections not only in schools but also in the institutions involved in ITE.
2. Senior managers in institutions, in order to keep their accreditation, may currently not be challenging the centrality of phonics in their ITE curriculum. This is at present resulting in friction between them and some tutors. Should the recommendations of the Ofsted consultation document be implemented, these conflicts would be even greater.
3. The next generation of primary teachers in England may complete their training with a view of the teaching of early reading which puts phonics at its centre but with little attention to other aspects of reading.
4. Lack of time during their courses may result in trainees emerging from training with less expertise in the teaching of other areas of English.
5. Government policy on phonics, including the focus in Ofsted reports which in the 2020 consultation document states that systematic synthetic phonics is the only way to teach early reading, is shaping the primary English curriculum in both schools and ITE institutions.
6. The undermining of tutors' expertise will result in educational policy being the preserve of the ideology promoted by the government in power at the time.

Students may emerge from their training in England unaware that other countries have very different, and highly successful early literacy policies. Furthermore, they may be unaware that policies in other countries may not have been imposed by government, but developed and implemented with the active involvement of the teaching profession. There is a danger that rather than being well-qualified professionals, trainee teachers may emerge from their training rather as skilled technicians, with a limited knowledge base from which to critique government policy and to contribute to the development of future policies. It is disturbing that this may be true also of future tutors who remain in the institutions providing initial teacher education should there be any further restriction on the courses they are required to deliver.

Conclusion

The qualitative data presented in this report supported the survey data. The findings suggest that teacher educators in England lack autonomy in relation to how they prepare trainee teachers to teach early reading. They feel obliged to focus on systematic synthetic phonics at the expense of developing trainees' understanding of a broad repertoire of strategies for teaching reading development. In addition, the time allocated to systematic synthetic phonics is having a detrimental impact on the time allocation for other aspects of English.

Given the extensive existing research which points to the need for a balanced approach to early reading development, it is crucial that teacher education courses support trainee teachers to use this research to critically interrogate government literacy policy.

It is also essential that trainees are introduced to approaches which have been successful in other countries and other parts of the UK. However, we recognise that a divergence from government and Ofsted policies may be a dangerous move for teacher education providers in England, particularly if the proposed draft ITE framework is ratified. It is therefore critical that researchers, teacher education and literacy organisations continue to debate these issues and engage in professional dialogue and debate with the Department for Education and the inspectorate.

Appendix I - Summary of Ofsted Consultation Document on initial teacher education in England January 2020

Margaret M. Clark

This is a summary with key quotations on early reading from the Consultation Document published by Ofsted in January 2020¹. There is until 3 April 2020 to respond. The framework will then be published in summer 2020 and implemented in September 2020. The full consultation document, is found on the government consultations website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/initial-teacher-education-inspection-framework-and-handbook-2020-inspecting-the-quality-of-teacher-education>

Title: Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook

Subtitle: Framework and handbook for inspecting initial teacher education partnerships in England under section 18B of the Education Act 1994 and Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Ofsted)

N.B. The first part of the document is the framework; the handbook is the second part. Reference no: 200002 The framework will be published in summer 2020.

This is a summary of the key points relevant to early reading from the consultation document.

N.B. All are quotations.

29. The arrangements for inspecting ITE from September 2020 are very different from those in the previous framework. The inspection will have more responsibility for focusing on areas that have the greatest impact on a trainee's education and development, and the overall impact on a trainee's education. (page 8)

36. ... We recognise the importance of partnerships' autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnership's curriculum favourably. (page 9)

58. ... For inspections of primary partnerships, inspectors will focus on early reading/phonics and the foundation subjects as a whole. Other subject areas may be agreed as a focus with the partnership leaders. (page 16)

Evaluating different approaches to teacher education

91. Ofsted does NOT advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees. (page 22)

¹ This summary of the consultation document was placed on the [UKLA website](#) and [NAPE website](#) for their members.

Overarching approach to inspection

92. The ITE framework focuses on factors that both research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to high-quality education and training. (page 22)

Reaching a judgement of good, requires improvement or inadequate (from page 35)

(Outstanding (1) Good (2) Requires improvement (3) Inadequate (4)

Requires improvement and Outstanding comments are general. However,

Good (2) (from page 39)

Designed around subject and phase

- For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence. (page 39)

Informed by up-to-date evidence

- The ITE curriculum is designed to equip trainees with up-to-date research findings, for example as outlined for primary and secondary phase trainees in the ITT core content framework. (page 40)

Inadequate (4) Designed around subject and phase (from page 44)

- Primary training does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics. (page 44)

Leadership and management (from page 46)

169. Inspectors must consider how effectively leaders and managers ensure that overall partnership provision prepares trainees to teach subject(s) well, including...in the primary phase, trainees receive:

- thorough training in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics, early number work and handwriting, including focused practice in school placements, based on up-to-date research.

170. Inspectors must consider how relentlessly leaders and managers pursue a vision for excellence focused on improving or sustaining high-quality provision for trainees, including:

- a thorough analysis of improvements in trainees' practice, for example in securing good behaviour, in teaching reading using systematic synthetic phonics...

Inadequate (from page 53)

- For early years and primary courses, mentors do not support the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Some trainees are being poorly prepared to teach systematic synthetic phonics after the completion of their course. (page 53)

Evaluating the quality and effectiveness of training in subject/specialist areas of the ITE curriculum (from page 56)

- whether trainees, ‘if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics’ by the end of their training... (page 56)

N.B. There are eight references to systematic synthetic phonics as required for early reading in the consultation document but to no methods for other subjects.

Appendix II - The online survey questions

This is the survey that participants completed online.

Independent research into the impact of the systematic synthetic phonics government policy on literacy courses at institutions delivering initial teacher education in England.

This independent survey is intended for members of staff involved in delivering the Literacy/English aspect in courses for initial teacher education (early years and primary) in England. If you are a member of staff in a university or other institution offering initial teacher education for early years or primary and are involved in any aspect of the English/literacy courses, we hope you will complete this survey.

It is important that we achieve a large and representative sample to ensure our evidence has credibility in informing debates on the effect of current literacy policy in England on the content of initial teacher education courses. Please take part in the survey whether or not you agree with government literacy policy.

The team: Professor Margaret M. Clark Visiting Professor Newman University in collaboration with Colin Mills Honorary Lecturer University of Manchester, Professor Jonathan Glazzard Leeds Beckett University, Sue Reid Senior Lecturer Newman University and Jude Sloan Information Governance Manager Newman University.

Why is this survey important? The government in England remains committed to its literacy policy with synthetic phonics mandated as the only way to teach all children to read and to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment of children at the end of Year 1. We feel it is time to assess the impact of this policy on initial teacher education courses in England.

What is the aim of the research? This is an independent research project to inform government policy, evidence-based by the views of those involved in initial teacher education. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your answers will remain anonymous. Our aim in collecting geographical information, and years in teaching, is to enable us to assess how representative a sample we achieve. Should you wish to contribute further to the research either in writing or by an interview please contact us at the dedicated email address accessible only to the research team ITEsurvey@newman.ac.uk.

To read about how we will protect your personal data if you contact us please read www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/privacy-notice-for-research-contacts/

The survey starts on the next page.

1. In which region is your initial teacher education (ITE) provider based? Select all that apply. (Answer Required)

Greater London
South East
South West
East Midlands
West Midlands
East of England
Yorkshire and Humber
North East
North West

2. How long have you worked in ITE? (Answer Required)

Fewer than 2 years
2-10
11-20
More than 20 years

3. How many years did you teach in primary education? (Answer Required)

Less than 1 year
1-2
3-10
11-20
More than 20

4. What is your role in your institution in relation to ITE? Select all that apply. (Answer Required)

English tutor
Module leader
Subject leader
Programme leader
Tutor in other area
Other, please specify:

5. What ITE courses for primary school ages are offered in your institution? Please tick all that apply. (Answer Required)

Undergraduate 3-7 (U 3-7)
Undergraduate 5-11 (U 5-11)
Undergraduate 7-11 (U 7-11)
Postgraduate 3-7 (PGCE 3-7)
Postgraduate 5-11 (PGCE 5-11)
School Direct (S Dir)
Other, please specify:

For questions 6 - 18 please select N/A where the question is not applicable as you do not run the courses stated.

6. Northern Ireland / Scotland and Wales have separate curriculums to England. Do you regard your programme content as specifically training students to teach in England? Please comment. (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7 (U 3-7)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 5-11 (U 5-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 7-11 (U 7-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 3-7 (PGCE 3-7)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 5-11 (PGCE 5-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
School Direct (S Dir)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Other	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

7. The government in England remains committed to its literacy policy with synthetic phonics mandated as the only way to teach all children to read and to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment of children at the end of Year 1. Has the government's mandate on the teaching of reading affected the way you teach reading in initial teacher education courses? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7 (U 3-7)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 5-11 (U 5-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 7-11 (U 7-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 3-7 (PGCE 3-7)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 5-11 (PGCE 5-11)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
School Direct (S Dir)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Other	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

8. Approximately how many hours of direct teaching are allocated for synthetic phonics in each of the following courses offered in your institution? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7 (U 3-7)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
Undergraduate 5-11 (U 5-11)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
Undergraduate 7-11 (U 7-11)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
Postgraduate 3-7 (PGCE 3-7)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
Postgraduate 5-11 (PGCE 5-11)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
School Direct (S Dir)	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20
Other	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20	More than 20

9. Do you use any of the following approved phonics schemes to support your teaching? (Tick all that apply). Use N/A where your institution does not have the programme indicated. (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Floppy's Phonics	Jolly Phonics
	Letterland Phonics	Letters and Sounds	Phonics Bug
	Read Write Inc	Sound Discovery	Sounds-Write
	Tap Tap Bat	Other, please specify:	

Undergraduate 5-11	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write
School Direct (S Dir)	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write
Other	N/A Letterland Phonics Read Write Inc Tap Tap Bat	Floppy's Phonics Letters and Sounds Sound Discovery Other, please specify:	Jolly Phonics Phonics Bug Sounds-Write

10. Please list core texts/documents you recommend to support students' knowledge of phonics or answer N/A if not applicable. (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Comments:
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Comments:
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Comments:
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Comments:
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Comments:
School Direct	N/A	Comments:
Other	N/A	Comments:

11. Do you include a mandatory assessment task which assesses students' knowledge of the alphabetic code (synthetic phonics)? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
School Direct	N/A	Yes	No
Other	N/A	Yes	No

12. During placements are all students expected to observe a synthetic phonics lesson?
(Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
School Direct	N/A	Yes	No
Other	N/A	Yes	No

13. During placements do all students have an assessed observation teaching synthetic phonics? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
School Direct	N/A	Yes	No
Other	N/A	Yes	No

14. Do you include an assessment task which requires student teachers to critically analyse synthetic phonics? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
School Direct	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Other	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

15. How many hours are devoted to other aspects of English/literacy? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
School Direct	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20
Other	N/A	None	1 – 10	11 – 20

16. When was your last Ofsted inspection? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago

School Direct (S Dir)	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago
Other	N/A	< 2 years ago	3-5 years ago	> 5 years ago

17. During the last Ofsted inspection of your ITE provision was the quality of your synthetic phonics provision a focus of your inspection? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No
School Direct	N/A	Yes	No
Other	N/A	Yes	No

18. During your last Ofsted inspection did inspectors assess student teachers' subject knowledge in phonics? (Answer required)

Undergraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Undergraduate 7-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 3-7	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate 5-11	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
School Direct (S Dir)	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Other	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

19. Which other aspects of English are covered in your courses in addition to phonics? Tick all that apply (Answer required)

Undergraduate Courses	Children's literature
	Poetry
	Reading for pleasure
	Balance of attention to meaning and word identification
	Attention to the needs of individual children
	Use of context in word identification
	Importance of volume of reading
	Grammar
	Other, please specify:

Postgraduate Courses	Children's literature
	Poetry
	Reading for pleasure
	Balance of attention to meaning and word identification
	Attention to the needs of individual children
	Use of context in word identification
	Importance of volume of reading
	Grammar
	Other, please specify:

20. Are all students expected to read texts on the teaching of reading other than those concerned with synthetic phonics? (Answer required)

Undergraduate Courses	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate Courses	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

21. Are students set assignments on approaches to the teaching of reading that go beyond current literacy policy in England? (Answer required)?

Undergraduate Courses	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:
Postgraduate Courses	N/A	Yes	No	Comments:

22a. Are the students given information on government literacy policies in other countries? (Answer required)

Yes No

22b. Do you have School Direct provision in which students receive all their phonics training in school? (Answer required)

Yes No

23. In England, the teaching of synthetic phonics is mandatory. Do you agree with current government policy which states that synthetic phonics is the best way of teaching children to read? (Answer required)

Yes No

Thank you very much for participating in this research survey. Your time and input is highly appreciated. All the answers provided are anonymous and non-attributable.

Appendix III - The indicative questions sent to participants in advance of the interviews

Interview Questions

The survey was completed by 38 professionals and tutors involved in literacy courses in institutions offering initial teacher education in England for primary teachers. 10 of these who completed the survey agreed to be involved in further stages of the research. We interviewed all the participants who volunteered to be interviewed. The interviewees were assured that their identity would not be revealed.

The following document was sent to the 10 participants in advance of one-to-one interviews, to give them time to consider their answers.

Introduction

These interview questions will be set in the context of the following quote from Sir Michael Wilshaw, at the time the head of Ofsted, and our research aim, which is to consider to what extent phonics has impacted on the initial teacher education curriculum in your institution.

‘Ofsted will sharpen its focus on phonics in routine inspections of all initial teacher education provision - primary, secondary and Further Education. Ofsted will start a series of unannounced inspections solely on the training of phonics teaching in providers of primary initial teacher education (Education online No. 461 16 March 2012).’

Context setting questions

- What is your experience in:
 - Early Years teaching (3-7 years)?
 - Experience of Primary teaching (5-11 years)?
 - Experience in initial teacher education (ITE)?
- What is your job title?

Main questions

- In what ways has the focus on the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics affected your teaching
 - In English sessions
 - In other areas of the curriculum in your institution?
 - Can you give examples of how you would have done things differently?
 - What do you think has been the effect on students? E.g. their attitudes to reading? Their experience in school?
- What opportunity if any do your students have to critically examine the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics?

- What evidence based research do you use with your students to support systematic synthetic phonics?
- What is your experience of Ofsted inspections with regards to phonics?
- The questionnaire showed that 70% disagreed with current Government policy on the teaching of early literacy. 30% agreed with current policy. Why do you think this is?
- Where would you rate yourself on a continuum of phonics' dominant which goes from compliant, then questioning and then resistant?

Appendix IV - The online survey advertisement

Survey Opportunity: Synthetic Phonics in Initial Teacher Education



Participates are sought for this independent survey intended for members of staff involved in delivering the Literacy/English aspect in courses for initial teacher education (early years and primary) in England. If you are a member of staff in a university or other institution offering initial teacher education for early years or primary and are involved in any aspect of the English/literacy courses, we hope you will complete this survey. Please forward this link to other contacts that fit the criteria above.

Access the survey here:

<https://rdap1psi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/survey-synthetic-phonics-in-initial-teacher-training>

It is important that we achieve a large and representative sample to ensure our evidence has credibility in informing debates on the effect of current literacy policy in England on the content of initial teacher education courses. Please take part in the survey whether or not you agree with government literacy policy. We estimate it will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The team:

Professor Margaret M. Clark - Visiting Professor Newman University in collaboration with Professor Jonathan Glazzard - Leeds Beckett University, Colin Mills - Senior Research Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Education, Sue Reid - Senior Lecturer Newman University and Jude Sloan – Information Governance Manager / DPO Newman University.

Why is this survey important?

The government in England remains committed to its literacy policy with synthetic phonics mandated as the only way to teach all children to read and to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment of children at the end of Year 1. We feel it is time to assess the impact of this policy on initial teacher education courses in England.

What is the aim of the research?

This is an independent research project to inform government policy, evidence-based by the views of those involved in initial teacher education. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your answers will remain anonymous. Our aim in collecting geographical information, and years in teaching, is to enable us to assess how representative a sample we achieve. Should you wish to contribute further to the research either in writing or by an interview please contact us at this dedicated email address, accessible only to the research team ITESurvey@newman.ac.uk

We hope to plan focus groups to explore these issues in more detail. Should you be interested to participate in this aspect of the research or wish to make further comments please contact the team on the following dedicated email address ITESurvey@newman.ac.uk. To read about how we will protect your personal data if you contact us please read www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/privacy-notice-for-research-contacts/

Access the survey here:

<https://rdap1psi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/survey-synthetic-phonics-in-initial-teacher-training>