



**UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA DE SANTA
ELENA SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES
PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**“PHONEME-GRAPHEME MAPPING PRACTICE AS A
DIDACTIC READING STRATEGY FOR EFL FOURTH-
GRADES LEARNERS”
RESEARCH PROJECT**

As a prerequisite to obtain a:

**BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND
FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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Advisor's Approval

In my role as Advisor of the research paper entitled **PHONEME GRAPHEME MAPPING PRACTICE AS A DIDACTIC READING STRATEGY FOR EFL FOURTH-GRADE LEARNERS** prepared by **SUAREZ SANCHEZ MEILYN ELIZABETH** an undergraduate students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Major, at School of Educational Sciences and Languages at Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, I declare that after oriented, studied and reviewed the project, I approve it in its entirety, because it meets the requirements and is sufficient for its submission to the evaluation of the academic tribunal.

Sincerely,

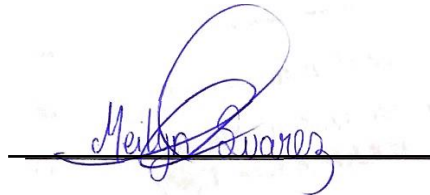


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I, Suarez Sanchez Meilyn Elizabeth, with ID number 0928210376 undergraduate students from Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, School of Education Science and Languages, as a prerequisite to obtaining a bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages in our role as authors of the research project **“PHONEME GRAPHEME MAPPING PRACTICE AS A DIDACTIC READING STRATEGY FOR EFL FOURTH-GRADE LEARNERS”** certify that this study work is our authorship, except for que quotes, statements, and reflections used in this research paper.

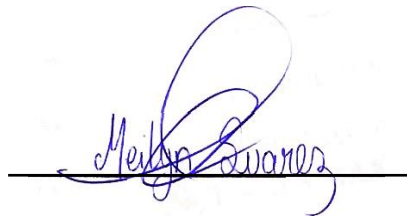
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Declaration

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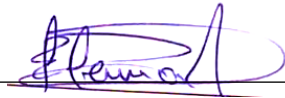
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The English songs I listened to at school and high school inspired me to discover what their lyrics mean and influenced my choice of this career.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to the almighty God, who has blessed me with the strength, knowledge, and wisdom to undertake this project. Also, to be special to my mom, my ultimate inspiration comes from my best friend, the dazzling woman from whom I received my second name and my life's blood, Roxana Elizabeth Sanchez H. My mother never told me I could not do whatever I wanted or be whomever I wanted. She fills our house with love, advice and music. She was unflagging in her efforts to give me role models, and she became the main one of them as she guided me through these incredible years. I do not know if she ever realized that the person I most wanted to be was her. Thank you to my guidepost for everything.

This is all because of you.

With love

Meilyn Elizabeth Suarez Sanchez

Abstract

This research project assessed the potential of applying Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping as a teaching strategy to enhance reading proficiency among fourth-grade students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The study aimed to improve essential reading skills, including fluency, decoding, and comprehension, to support young learners' development of reading skills.

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the phoneme-grapheme mapping technique. Eight English teachers were individually interviewed to gather information about their knowledge of the method presented.

Analysis of teachers' perceptions identified both strengths and challenges in applying this approach in a foreign language context. Findings emerged that phoneme-grapheme mapping addressed specific reading difficulties and supported cognitive memory skills, offering a tool to improve literacy among EFL learners. This study contributed to a clearer understanding of effective reading strategies in EFL education, providing practical information for educators.

KEY WORDS: reading skills, phoneme-grapheme mapping, EFL learners, qualitative research.

Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación evaluó el potencial de aplicar el mapeo fonema-grafema como estrategia de enseñanza para mejorar la competencia lectora entre los estudiantes de cuarto grado que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El estudio tuvo como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de lectura esenciales, incluida la fluidez, la decodificación y la comprensión, para apoyar el desarrollo de las habilidades de lectura de los estudiantes jóvenes.

Este estudio utilizó un enfoque de investigación cualitativo para explorar las percepciones y experiencias de los maestros con respecto a la técnica de mapeo fonema-grafema. Se entrevistó individualmente a ocho maestros de inglés para recopilar información sobre su conocimiento del método presentado.

El análisis de las percepciones de los maestros identificó tanto las fortalezas como los desafíos en la aplicación de este enfoque en un contexto de lengua extranjera. Los hallazgos surgieron de que el mapeo fonema-grafema abordaba dificultades específicas de lectura y apoyaba las habilidades de memoria cognitiva, ofreciendo una herramienta para mejorar la alfabetización entre los estudiantes de EFL. Este estudio contribuyó a una comprensión más clara de las estrategias de lectura efectivas en la educación EFL, proporcionando información práctica para los educadores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Habilidades de lectura, mapeo fonema-grafema, estudiantes de EFL, investigación cualitativa.

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Introduction

Learning English as a new second language can be challenging, especially for those still in the initial stages of learning English as a second foreign language. The differences among phonological and orthographic systems in their native language and the relationship between phonemes and graphemes in English can lead to several decoding and reading fluency limitations. For instance, EFL learners may need help pronouncing specific phonemes due to their unique phonological system, or they may find it difficult to recognize specific graphemes due to the differences in orthographic systems. Scherling (2021) suggests that phoneme-grapheme mapping, which consists of relating sounds (phonemes) with letters (graphemes), can be a solution to these challenges. This strategy's key characteristic is its ability to enhance pronunciation and strengthen assertive communication skills.

The PGM technique holds immense potential. It can help readers build reading fluency and confidence within an educational context, offering a promising path to significantly improved language skills. (Scherling, 2021).

This research, *Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping Practice as a Didactic Reading Strategy For EFL Fourth-Grade Learners*, aims to evaluate how this technique can benefit fourth-grade students in learning English as a second foreign language. Irie et al. (2023), state that reading comprehension problems in EFL learners are often due to limited phonological awareness. Recognizing and manipulating speech sounds is phonological awareness. The insights provided are crucial in shaping the future of language education, and the contributions are greatly appreciated; it is vital to boost reading skills. The PGM technique is essential to improve EFL students' phonological awareness and reading comprehension.

Similarly, this research values the experiences and opinions of eight teachers who have used this technique with their students within various institutions in Santa Elena province.

Chapter I

The Problem

Research Topic

Strategy - Reading Skills

Title of the project

Phoneme Grapheme mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy for EFL fourth-grade learners.

Problem Statement

Learning English and mastering more than one language is crucial and fundamental to a person's personal, academic, and professional development in today's globalized society. The development of these linguistic skills must begin in early childhood schooling. English is the principal language used worldwide for communication, as Tolibovna (2022, p. 65) asserts that communication proficiency is essential for engagement in contemporary society.

Mentions that it is essential to develop the ability to form sentences, in other words, the communicative skills that go hand in hand with vocabulary, phonetics and semantics. This study will examine how proper Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping (PGM) is if teachers apply it as a teaching strategy for scholarships for EFL learners. For example, one theory focuses on the role of author Vygotsky (1986, p. 57-58), who mentions that memory is related to perception, mind to memory, and language to an intrinsic cognitive connection. Likewise, Henry supports that theory (1974), mentioning that conventional thoughts are limiting and erroneous since they emphasize that reading is an analytical process, while writing is a synthetic process (p. 7). A general study carried out by (Hjetland et al., 2020) using a MASEM (Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Modelling Model) states that there is a strong relationship between code-related skills (word

recognition) and linguistic comprehension. This idea also supports the theory that educators establish the foundations for word recognition from an early age.

Researchers observed that fourth-grade schoolchildren face different reading fluency and comprehension challenges during pre-professional practice. The lack of accurate didactic strategies limits the students' progress. EFL learners have one of the main challenges while learning to read, especially when decoding and comprehending unfamiliar words in a foreign language. Teachers also pointed to a deficiency in communication as a contributing reason to these difficulties.

This study determines if Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping works well as a tactical intervention. In order to implement it as a capable teaching strategy to address these shortcomings, “Phonics could be effective in increasing English literacy for L2 students, according to recent research” (Yeung S. & Savage R., 2020, p. 5). In this way, students improve their decoding skills to enhance reading comprehension and phonetics in general since this problem highlights the need to investigate and apply more competent methodological approaches that add the PGM to enhance reading outcomes among fourth-grade EFL scholars.

Problem question

How would fourth-grade students significantly improve their reading skills using the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique?

Specific questions

1. What aspects of practical use does Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping have to be considered a positive methodology for the reading skills index?
2. How does Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping facilitate the brain's ability to connect what learners hear and what they see in print, enhancing their reading skills?

3. How does Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping contribute to specific teaching tools for developing reading skills in EFL learners?

General Objective

To assess how a technique such as Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping allows improved reading fluency in fourth-grade EFL learners, positively examining decoding progress and language skills.

Specific objectives

To determine the repercussions of the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique on fluent reading skills in fourth-grade EFL learners, evaluate how this technique fosters progress in decoding and linguistic competencies.

To identify common problems pupils, face in their reading comprehension and analyze how these problems affect reading performance, to decide how the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping procedure can address and overcome these obstacles.

To examine how phoneme-grapheme mapping affects students' cognitive memory abilities, analyze the link between its application and the reading performance of pupils using it with those using traditional approaches.

Justification

This study examines several methods for developing fundamental language abilities, particularly reading. English is the universal language a person can understand and interact with people worldwide. Lawes (2021) argues that:

Learning a foreign language may or may not be helpful in the real world; however, the authors assert here that it should be considered a crucial component of each person's

education. Proficiency in a foreign language can widen peoples' horizons and break down barriers connecting people from different countries and cultures. (p. 122)

English is essential for all areas, educational, professional, commercial, and cultural; knowing the language gives a wide window of opportunities. As Tursunovich (2023) highlights, foreign languages are indispensable and teaching them is essential for developing communicative skills in future work environments and academic settings. (p. 26-33). From then on, a first language (L1) scholar must progressively pick up a second language (L2) to prepare for the future's working world and gain a general understanding. However, how can children be expected to engage in and succeed in their English language studies without suitable teaching methods? Reading comprehension skills in schoolchildren may improve through constructive teaching strategies. Considering the importance of successful language instruction, reading techniques enable readers to engage in active interaction, which enhances the effectiveness of English language education (Banditvilai, 2020), considering the significance of helpful language teaching. It emphasizes methods for teaching phonemic awareness. Phoneme-grapheme mapping is the mapping of individual sounds, combinations of letters, or syllables, a manner considered in reading, as it is an approach that seeks to stimulate the scholar and attract their interest through active didactic components. (Njiru & Karuri, 2022, p. 1-7)

The units of phonemes and graphemes about Reading skills are part of the alphabetic writing system in English. It is essential to understand these two units. Ehri (2022) mentions that connecting spelling, correct pronunciation, and reading comprehension to decoding words is indispensable. Decoding words into large units, such as syllables, is more effective because it facilitates fluency and understanding of the text. Understanding how to apply and associate sounds and letters is extremely important for the success of reading skills.

Throughout pre-professional practices, analyses were carried out based on the observation that many fourth-grade pupils require assistance with reading correctly in English, either by mispronouncing terms already learnt in English or by warping phrases with Spanish language influence. The need to master phonemes and graphemes appears to be connected to this problem, affecting reading comprehension and general learning. The problems that the researchers saw in real-world environments led them to begin this investigation. Building kids' reading skills was intended to equip them to overcome obstacles in the classroom and at work in the future.

This research aims to explain the capacity of Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping as a teaching strategy that can improve scholar performance, especially in teaching English as a Second Language. Teachers face different challenges when teaching their pupils.

To assess its viability, used a qualitative methodology: interviews of English teachers who use various techniques in class, whether traditional or practical. A classroom analysis will allow us to put into practice the dynamics in which they integrate phoneme-grapheme mapping. This method will help to analyze strategies that will provide qualitative data. In addition, the practical approach will determine if it is efficient.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

In this research, within the theoretical framework, various sources' conceptual and theoretical foundations will be considered to delve into phoneme-grapheme mapping as a reading teaching strategy for students of English as a foreign language. To achieve this, international, regional and local studies will be analyzed.

Background

International

In the article by Larsen et al. (2020) carried out in Norway, entitled “Children’s knowledge of single- and multiple-letter grapheme-phoneme correspondences: An exploratory study”, they found that children’s knowledge of the PGM differs significantly between these and the types of graphemes, with younger children adequately understanding phonemes for most graphemes, but older children have a higher performance. Graphemes with only one letter are the ones they recognize the most, unlike those with multiple letters. They also highlighted that children find vowel phonemes-graphemes more complex than consonants, which indicates the importance of teaching vowels in education.

The thesis of Scherling (2021), developed in the United States under the name "Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping exercises can be applied to strengthen core reading skills in first-grade students" determined that practicing the PGM increases the identification of letter sounds, which reflects mastery and fluency in reading. The author also determined that many corrections are optional when acquiring fluency and that motivation and environment significantly influence it.

Evidence from research by Kahn-Horwitz & Goldstein (2023), conducted in Israel, entitled “English foreign language reading and spelling diagnostic assessments informing teaching and learning of young learners,” indicates that a lack of PGM strategies limits children’s reading and spelling learning. Similarly, the authors established that PGM as a strategy is very effective and crucial to promoting literacy since it contributes to students' more efficient and fluent learning of English.

The analysis carried out by Suárez-Coalla et al. (2024) in their study conducted in Spain under the name “Spanish children spelling in English as a foreign language: Central and peripheral processes” indicates that Spanish-speaking students have difficulties in understanding the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes in English, so they use the correspondences of their native language for spelling in English. However, these correspondences may disappear when students receive the appropriate strategies and develop their English skills. Another essential point of this study is that new phonemes represent a challenge for students because they are unfamiliar.

Regional

Data from the study of Alonso & Fernández (2022), produced in Cuba and titled "Enhancing motivation through ICTs in the EFL classroom: a case study in Cuba," reflect that fun and interactive activities like the games involved have to improve pronunciation, establish the relationship between words and graphics, and increase vocabulary. According to the authors, these activities can help teach PGM so that students can acquire knowledge of English and learn it more efficiently.

In the scientific article by Avalos et al. (2022) prepared in Mexico entitled “The impact of structured literacy approach to developing phonemic awareness and reading competence in

second-grade students from elementary school”, the authors express that teachers must know Techniques and procedures to teach students the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes, this knowledge must be consistent with the curriculum.

Local

A study carried out in Ecuador by Valdivieso-Arcos and Argudo-Serrano (2022), entitled “Advancing EFL learners' speaking proficiency through academic speaking tasks” points out that students need to make precise connections amid phonemes and graphemes to develop their reading skills, word encoding, pronunciation, and learning new words. Additionally, they state that motivation, self-correction, learning strategies, and practice outside the classroom are great allies for achieving adequate learning of English language skills.

According to the results published by Medranda et al. (2023) in their thesis carried out in Ecuador under the name “Reading comprehension: An essential process for the development of critical thinking”, in the country, there is a need for institutions to implement strategies, as well as design educational programs that promote and facilitate the learning of reading skills. They also mention that one must consider reading levels to develop reading efficiently. The first reading level is acquiring basic skills such as grapheme identification, coding, word recognition, converting graphemes to phonemes, and assigning syntactic functions.

In a recent thesis by Paucar (2024) in Ecuador, entitled " Experiential learning and the reading skill", he points out that high-quality phonetics and phonetic awareness instruction help students decode words effectively, leading to a better understanding of texts. Also, students who participated in phoneme-grapheme mapping presented better reading skills. Because of this, phonemic awareness approaches and phonics instruction are well suited to improve students' reading skills.

Pedagogical basis

Piaget's theory of Constructivism is fundamental because it states that children's knowledge is not built passively but actively through their interaction with their environment (Aeni et al., 2023). This theory also maintains that individuals' brains try to balance the new information provided to them with the experiences and knowledge they have previously acquired (Zhang, 2022). This theory is relevant in this study because by implementing the PGM, students can memorize the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes and adapt the new information to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of reading.

Another critical theory is Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, which postulates that a person's mental capacity cannot be separated from the social environment surrounding them since people develop cognitively through social interaction. As the actions of individuals occur in cultural environments that subsequently come through their language, better construction occurs within the cultural environment (Alkhudiry, 2022). Individuals will perform better if they receive help from others to carry out a task instead of doing it alone (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). The relevance of this study lies in the fact that through interaction and language, children can learn better by receiving support from third parties, such as their teachers, peers or family members, to develop reading promptly.

In addition to the theory, Ausubel's Significant Learning of Results fundamentally indicates significant learning results when interpreting individuals, relating and incorporating the new information they receive with the one they hold. Therefore, apply new information to resolve problems (Hoffman et al., 2021). This theory is relevant because students can use the PGM strategy to integrate the new relationships between phones and graphics they learn with their language knowledge, facilitating understanding and contributing to reading skills.

In summary, Gardner mentions his theories of multiple intelligences, where he defines each individual as having different intelligences, each capable of proposing or generating valuable products. Each fragment of intelligence is independent, defining whether each is strong or fragile (Ferrero et al., 2021). This theory is relevant to this studio because it can adapt the PGM to the multiple intellects of students to impact their reading skills significantly.

Didactic Strategy

Phoneme and grapheme mapping is a teaching strategy that helps beginning readers relate the sounds of words with their corresponding letters; however, when a person is learning a second language, there is something called a "pronunciation variant", such as Irie et al. (2023) this author highlights that is an alternative of speaking or intoning different base words and these pronunciation variations, in the same way, they are commonly known as "slang or dialect," which is when two or more cultures mix. However, by teaching spelling mapping in detail, the student can have more didactic tools to decode new words and read them since phonemes are the small segments of sounds that come together with other phonemes to form words.

Theoretical basis

Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping

First, it is necessary to determine what phonemes and graphemes are. As Roca (2022) says, a phoneme is a small unit of sound that allows us to differentiate the meaning of words. The English language comprises 26 letters, approximately 44 phonemes, and many graphemes, the combination of letters that make up a phoneme. These can be pronounced identically but with different graphemes; similarly, other phonemes can be pronounced differently with similar graphemes.

According to Spear-Swerling (2022), Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping (PGM), also called Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence, is a fundamental technique for teaching students to write and read because it provides them with a foundation for learning to encode words as well as developing fluent reading and writing skills. PGM consists of the direct relationship of the individual sounds that make up a word, the phonemes, and the groups of letters or letters they represent.

Based on Zoll et al. (2023), the PGM seeks repeated practice of reading and writing graphemes so that orthographic mapping occurs. It maps the phonetics of the English language to store it in the student's memory bank for future use in reading activities. Thus, if a student has problems remembering a word or part of a word, the word still needs to be adequately mapped since mapping is essential for words to be stored and automatically retrieved when necessary. As students improve their word recognition skills, their understanding of the language dramatically predicts reading comprehension.

Jump and Johnson (2022) express that mapping helps students relate phonemes to graphemes and allows them to store words in their long-term memory. As students have a more competent understanding of the alphabetic principle, they can read more words. Each connection allows students to dedicate their time and mental capacity to understand the text better and thus become more competent readers.

Reading Skills

For Tomalá (2021), Reading skills are essential because they integrate comprehension and understanding of language acquisition and reflect satisfactory academic performance.

Reading skills contribute to students' development so that they can understand text fragments, become familiar with critical thinking, and use vocabulary. In addition, reading is the third curricular axis within the five competencies that the English language presents.

According to Ortiz and Yagual (2023), the authors mention that the ability to read, comprehend, interpret, and decode texts relates to one's reading skills. To guarantee the reader grasps the reading fast and clearly, they also point out three steps to the reading process. The first stage takes place before reading, and this consists of identifying the title and determining the purpose of said reading so that prior knowledge is activated. The second stage is during reading, which allows assumptions to be made about the topic and to evaluate whether what is said is correct. The last stage occurs after reading, in which students can give their point of view and answers related to the text or ask questions about the topic.

Consistent with Rellanos & Musico (2024), reading consists of 5 significant components: reading comprehension, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and phonetics. As Solano (2022) states, reading comprehension of a text requires an interactive, interpretive and dynamic process. This process varies depending on each reader and how they carry out the reading process based on motivation, personal skills, objectives and the appropriate strategies to obtain the different reading levels.

In line with Luft et al. (2022), it is of great importance that early readers acquire phonetic skills (understanding that letters represent sounds and that by combining their words can be read), phonological awareness (Understanding that sounds and syllables form words), vocabulary (reading and understanding the meaning of words), comprehension (understanding literal or inferential messages in texts) and fluency (reading words in texts and sentences with some

accuracy, speed, and prosody). Explicit and systematic teaching of these skills can lead to students having better reading comprehension.

Relationship Between PGM and Reading Skills

Ehri (2020) indicates that the PGM allows students to develop reading skills. In the same way that it contributes to decoding words that help them read fluently, it also allows them to expand their vocabulary and improve their spelling. Therefore, adequate PGM instruction strengthens students' reading skills, a key component in teaching.

In the words of Milankov et al. (2021), several studies have shown that knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relationships and word-coding skills are essential for the early development of reading skills, especially for struggling readers. They enable proper identification of words and understanding of their meanings, which is necessary for reading comprehension. In addition, they highlight that students whose word coding is fluent and who connect phonemes with graphemes perform better in both text comprehension and reading.

Vadasy and Sanders (2020) indicate that the relationship between phonemes and graphemes affects the ease children learn to read. Similarly, they express that transparent spelling languages have a one-to-one relationship among letters and sounds, which allows students to learn more efficiently by facilitating the decoding process. However, in languages such as English, spelling is inconsistent, and therefore, learning is more complex since letters and especially vowels represent multiple sounds at certain times. Likewise, phonemes can have many spellings, so students find it challenging to master the relationship between phonemes and graphemes and, therefore, need strategies to decode more flexible words.

As Grünkea et al. (2024) outlined, reading is a crucial axis both in the academic and other fields. Hence, developing skills competent for decoding, letter recognition, and sound knowledge

guarantees success in reading development since these are the predictors of later reading and writing skills and indispensable components of development at the phonetic level. Sound and letter recognition limitations, a negative aspect of reading skills, can continue throughout academic life if not developed adequately in early education. Because of this, it is necessary to implement the technique in the early stages.

Deductive Method

Considering the outlook of various specialists, a deductive approach includes people's knowledge as the basis of prior knowledge. Within the classroom, students acquire grammatical knowledge through practice and demonstration. Blašković (2022), this deductive method allows students to respect their cognitive processes and learning styles as they learn and their expectations about learning in the classroom. It even allows the teacher to address language points as they arise.

The deductive method will allow us to apply the relationship of Phonemes-Graphemes Mapping and how teaching impacts fourth-grade; the PGM strategy estimates how it differs significantly between graphemes. In addition to increasing the identification of sounds of the letters and influencing fluency in reading, it contributes to students learning English efficiently. PGM is a didactic teaching technique where fourth-grade learners can read and write, as it teaches how to code words and consists of directly relating individual sounds to form a words.

Legal basis

The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2021), in its article 26, mentions about education that:

Along with being a necessary and inescapable state obligation, education is a lifelong entitlement for every person. It is a priority of state investment and public policies.

Guarantee social inclusion and live with dignity and equity. Engagement in the educational process constitutes both a right and a shared obligation among individuals, families, and society. (p.17) In the same way, on art. 57, paragraph 14 emphasizes:

Develop, strengthen and enhance the bilingual intercultural education system with quality criteria, from early stimulation to higher education, by cultural diversity, for the care and preservation of identities in line with its teaching and learning methodologies. (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional del Ecuador, 2021, p. 29)

Furthermore, article 343 states that “the national education system will aim to develop the population's individual and collective capacities and potentialities since it facilitates the learning of the generation and also the use of knowledge, techniques, art and culture” (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional del Ecuador, 2021, p. 168). In its article 347, numeral 9, it indicates that the State must “Defend that the bilingual intercultural education model employs the individual official language of each ethnic group within the education context, with Spanish serving as the language of intercultural exchange (...).” (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional del Ecuador, 2021, p. 169).

According to General Regulations of the Organic Law on Intercultural Education (2023), article 3 in section B refers to the design and implementation of national public policy as follows:

Lifelong Education: This implies recognizing that education will be directed and guaranteed to everyone of all ages and in any circumstance or context. Educators implement it in the types of education (formal, non-formal, and informal) and its various modalities (face-to-face, semi-face-to-face, distance and virtual). Policymakers must base

their development and promotion on holistic, integrative, and inclusive approaches that guarantee lifelong learning opportunities. (p. 3)

Likewise, Article 9 concerns the content of the national curriculum:

The national curriculum will contain the essential competencies, abilities, skills and knowledge required for students from early childhood education to high school in all modalities of the National Education System, as well as the didactic and pedagogical guidelines for their application in the classroom; it will include cross-cutting themes, objectives of each subject or area of knowledge and exit profiles by levels and sub-levels.

(Secretaría de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe y la Etnoeducación , 2023, p. 4)

Also, article 22 notes that continuous feedback “teachers will provide ongoing feedback to students and their legal representatives. The feedback seeks to inform about the comprehensive development of each student and to design joint strategies to support the proper development of the student's educational paths” (Secretaría et al. y la Etnoeducación, 2023, p. 7).

Finally, the Organic Law on Intercultural Education (2021) mentions in article 2.3 in section h about the quality and warmth of the Sistema Nacional de Educación “Protect people's right to quality, convenient, innovative education articulated throughout the educational process in each system, according to the level, sub-level, or modality” (p. 12). While in its article 78, paragraph four, it indicates that “the curriculum of the Bilingual Intercultural Education System and Ethnoeducation will be developed within the framework of the current model by the national curriculum. It will reflect the State's intercultural and plurinational nature” (Alcaldía Metropolitana de Quito, 2021, p.72).

The previous articles highlighted that education is a crucial mandatory factor in every person's life and that it is also the responsibility of the State to guarantee it and a life of equal opportunities between social participation and equity within each educational process.

This study is part of the reflection on the lack of a bilingual and intercultural education system in terms of valuing and respecting the cultural diversity of students to strengthen their identities and how the PGM teaching strategy tool can help demonstrate improvements in L2 teaching. Besides, the approach relies on how each person has the capabilities to contribute to today's society. For this reason, it is essential to ensure a quality education where teachers apply precise teaching strategies, in this case, PGM, to improve reading skills, promote the acquisition of the English language and their preparation for the future in professional or academic life and training individuals with good skills in a second foreign language.

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

Method

The research aims to describe everything needed to collect data, including the methodological framework, method, research type, approach, techniques, and procedures. It is part of the research design as a guiding plan or framework for collecting, measuring and analyzing data (Pandey & Pandey, 2021), studying the effectiveness of the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy for EFL fourth-grade learners, and supporting their improvement in reading skills.

This chapter describes qualitative research methods, sampling process or techniques, data collection, and the analysis methodology used in this research.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative method was chosen in this part of the research since it is a methodological approach whose purpose is to study and understand human experiences, attitudes, and perceptions through non-numerical data and evaluate and interpret how students, in this case, perceive and respond to a phenomenon.

This qualitative research focuses on evaluating teachers' perceptions in the context of Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping to assess how fourth-grade students receive and respond to integrating a methodological teaching strategy to improve the development of reading skills. Finally, qualitative research is subjective and responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data through information-gathering methods such as individual interviews and

discussion groups. Since this is an interpretive approach, observing everything people say and do is, in essence, exploratory and open research (Kandel, 2020, p. 2)

Type of Research

Phenomenological studies

This study uses a phenomenological approach to assess or evaluate the ability to apply the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique in fourth-grade as a teaching strategy to increase decoding skills and reading comprehension. It will use an interview method with a group of eight English language teachers.

The standard interview questionnaire combines open-ended questions encouraging teachers to express their perceptions, views, thoughts, and experiences.

In addition, the phenomenological approach in the qualitative study focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' experiences and perceptions from their perspectives and how they make sense of them, which gives a deep understanding of the phenomena studied.

Finally, Taherdoost (2021) argues that the researchers employ different methods, such as audio recordings, sketches, notes, and prints. In addition, the people expect to answer questions about how, what, for what, when, and why through interviews, observations, and document review.

Data collection Techniques

One-on-one interview. This research is descriptive in approach, and the tools and techniques used for data collection are secondary sources. The aim was to ascertain reading fluency in fourth-grade EFL learners and how it contributes to decoding and language skills progress. A questionnaire method will collect data from individual interviews with eight English

teachers; these interviews were face-to-face, and others will be done digitally due to the unavailability of their workloads. Hence, Zoom is the platform for conducting the interviews. The main objective is to identify common problems, factors that affect student performance, how it intervenes with cognitive memory skills between the link of its application with performance to decide on the procedure that can address the PGM and to know if this strategy is accessible as a teaching resource compared to traditional teaching resources, interviews are a platform for teachers to share ideas, concepts and opinions that are relevant to the study, to provide a deeper understanding of PGM as a strategy.

Instruments

Questionnaire. The questionnaire is a critical resource in this type of research, as it facilitates the collection of information that allows a set of questions to be part of the questionnaires. Karunarathna et al. (2024), these questionnaires with designed questions can measure different variables, such as behaviour and opinions, in addition to collecting original information not obtained from secondary sources within a specific population. This multi-question design focuses on teachers' previous experiences using traditional teaching strategies and how they would employ the PGM strategy in class. The team asked a total of eight questions.

Open-ended questions. As mentioned above, open-ended questions allow each participant to share experiences, perceptions, and even opinions in a more comprehensive and detailed way. They can prompt short answers, long narratives, or lists. These types of questions focus only on what the interviewer wants the interviewee to focus on, and they are more effective because they provide a very detailed conversation about a specific topic (Lahmar,

2022). Finally, for this reason, precise information can be attained to support the research through this type of individual interview with open-ended questions.

Data Collection Processing and Resources

Table 1

For collect information

Basic Questions	Justification
What?	To collect data
When?	October-November 2024
Where?	At Peninsula of Santa Elena University, La Libertad – Santa Elena Province
Why?	To focus on teachers' previous experiences using traditional teaching strategies, how they would employ the PGM strategy in class, and any advantages or disadvantages they may observe.
How?	One-on-one interview - questionnaire

Population and Sample

The sample is the object of study; it is the set of people or objects we collect device information and seek findings. This research project bases itself on the teachers' perspectives on the Phoneme Grapheme mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy. In order to carry out this research, we must give due consideration to the population or sample, which are the teachers who teach classes specifically in the subject of English in fourth grade. The sample is eight teachers.

Sampling is an essential tool and means selecting a representative sample of the population of interest. Eight English teachers teaching fourth-grade children participated in the

interviews to obtain results. Several factors, such as time, resources and feasibility, determine the sample size. This delimitation allows the research to focus on certain motivational aspects of PGM as an academic strategy within the classroom.

It is essential to mention that the results are not versatile and do not extend beyond their limits. It helps prevent generalization and that not all teachers who teach fourth-grade classes will give the same results in behaviours, attitudes and beliefs.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Findings

Brief Explanation of the Findings

Interviewees' responses emphasized the teacher's perceptions from various institutions in Santa Elena; the research sought to understand the experiences of educators who work with fourth-grade students—eight teachers who have applied Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping as a teaching strategy in classes. The interviewees' responses emphasized the application of this PGM strategy to improve reading skills in English, providing an exploration of the incorporation of the specific strategy in the educational field to promote reading skills in fourth-grade children, as they suggest that it can significantly improve reading fluency and decoding skills in fourth grade EFL learners. They also indicate that PGM can be integrated effectively through daily decoding and sound activities by creating a structured reading routine.

Several respondents also highlight that PGM can positively influence cognitive memory by associating letters and sounds, aligning with examining mental skills' impact. Nevertheless, some teachers mentioned that focusing on PGM as a teaching strategy could limit the time for other necessary reading skills, so they proposed a balanced approach. Carefully combine PGM to maximize its benefits without neglecting other critical areas of English teaching.

Interpretation of data from the interviews

Question 1. Could you describe your current teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension in your English classes?

The interviewees responded by highlighting the visual resources such as colours and images that they use to increase reading skills because they have realized that by using these

resources, their students focus their attention more and in the same way, it facilitates the reader's comprehension of the text. They also highlight that in a visual approach, it is vital for children to associate words by context and concept, adding that they also use an activity book and worksheets that accompany reading with figures and colours since these represent scenes or characters from stories or tales as visual materials. Some interviewees mentioned that it is necessary to involve phonetics to help students recognize sound patterns; this agrees with Spear-Swerling (2022), who points out that phonetic fragmentation is decisive for reading fluency.

Question 2. How would you describe the reading level of your fourth-grade students in English as a foreign language?

The interviewees describe their students' reading level as a primary English reading level based on the age and educational context that the students have had throughout their school life. In addition to the limited decoding and comprehension skills being often somewhat complex, they observe that although some students recognize familiar words, they still need help understanding full texts. This observation fits with Rellanos & Musico (2024), who points out that reading comprehension requires phonological awareness skills such as decoding and fluency.

However, the interviewees pointed out that students do not generally progress when explicit teaching techniques are applied; according to Valdiviezo-Arcos & Argudo-Serrano (2022) a more personalized approach may be more beneficial.

Question 3. What common difficulties do EFL students encounter when learning to read in English, and how does it affect their reading performance?

The teachers interviewed mentioned that they identified specific hardships in students of English as a second foreign language. Several agreed that these problems are common, such as needing more knowledge in the correspondence between letters and sounds and needing clarification with English spelling. They emphasized that these complications affect reading performance because many students tend to guess words instead of decoding them correctly. According to the study of Suarez-Coalla et al. (2024), Spanish speakers need help understanding the relationship among phonemes and graphemes in English.

On the other hand, the interviewees point out that not all students face difficulties in the same way since those who are mostly exposed to reading in English develop decoding skills more easily.

Question 4. What strategies do you use to improve reading skills in your students? Have you noticed significant improvements in reading among those students who receive explicit instruction regarding sounds and letters? Explain

According to the interviewees' responses, teachers use many strategies to improve their students' reading skills. Most agreed on using interactive activities like shared reading, small group assignments, and visual materials, such as word cards and images. They also showed that constant practice is essential in reading, as is correcting pronunciation, since this helps students become familiar with the sounds and structures of new words in English.

Several respondents affirmed that explicit instruction on sounds and letters is more effective in improving decoding and reading fluency. They also noted that students who receive this instruction have a more remarkable ability to recognize words, consistent with Ferrero et al.

(2021), those who point out that more explicit instruction on sounds and letters can facilitate word retention and help students become more confident when reading.

On the other hand, other interviewees mentioned that although students who receive explicit instruction improve their reading skills and the reality is that it is not for all students, this is associated with the fact that they still struggle to apply what they have learned consciously. Intentionally, mainly if they do not receive additional practice outside the classroom; this is related to Solano (2022), who indicates that reading comprehension also goes hand in hand with continuous exposure and regular use of the strategies taught.

Question 5. In your experience, how familiar are you with phoneme-grapheme mapping in teaching English reading? What are the possible ways this approach assists students in developing reading fluency and making progress in their word decoding skills?

Most interviewees indicated they were familiar with the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping method. They acknowledged that although they do not always formally apply this strategy, some spontaneously incorporate it when visually explaining sounds and letters, using flashcards or reading activities, and they recognized its usefulness in developing reading fluency and decoding in English, significantly helps students relate sounds and letters. Spear-Swerling (2022) highlights that this method is important for developing reading skills.

Question 6. How do you believe that PGM can aid students in connecting the sound they hear with the words they read, making comprehension and retention more effortless for them? How do you regard this method to influence students' memory abilities compared to conventional reading instruction techniques?

Respondents agreed that the PGM technique facilitates the connection between sounds and words, helping students' comprehension and retention. The PGM allows students to map words phonetically, thereby increasing memory. However, not all respondents indicated that PGM can be effective for students with short-term memory, and those students need additional strategies to complement learning. Jump & Johnson (2022) points out that it is crucial to complement the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping strategy with other reinforcement techniques to ensure long-lasting student retention.

Question 7. What resources or tools do you consider essential to foster reading development in EFL students, especially regarding word decoding? Why do you consider them important?

The teachers' responses emphasized the importance of having different educational resources. They mentioned the importance of using educational resources such as printed materials (books), worksheets, booklets, or even digital resources such as music and videos since the interviewees said that these types of resources help with the decoding of words and also increase the interest of fourth-grade students. According to Luft et al. (2022) it is important to integrate other resources that help increase phonetic and phonological skills, especially in beginning readers.

Question 8. How do you think the Phoneme Grapheme Mapping strategy can be integrated into the fourth-grade curriculum to increase reading skills?

The teachers proposed that the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique could be effectively blended into the fourth-grade curriculum through daily sound and decoding practice activities and a classroom reading routine to reinforce students' progressive learning. They

propose phoneme-grapheme mapping activities that include word cards, writing exercises, or sound games, as well as guided reading and pronunciation practice. As Larsen et al. (2020) suggest, knowing the PGM correspondence is essential to employ in the early years of reading. Several studies mentioned in the second chapter support the idea that PGM aids students in connecting the way they write by relating words to corresponding sounds.

This technique is helpful in English, where letters and sounds often confuse EFL learners. According to Vadasy & Sanders (2020), integrating PGM allows students to internalize the relationship between sounds and letters, facilitating faster and more accurate reading; in the same way, they mention the importance of having these specific materials and the adequate time to apply the PGM in daily readings.

However, two respondents mentioned that integrating PGM as a teaching strategy may limit the time to work on other aspects of reading skills. For this reason, they emphasize that although the strategy can be valuable, its integration must be careful in terms of time of use to avoid taking time away from other areas of reading and other English skills. Reflecting on a balanced point about the PGM and how teachers can practically and realistically integrate it into the classroom ensures that the benefits outweigh the challenges and limitations.

Below, there is a summary of the most relevant findings.

Table 2

Analysis of teacher's perceptions to the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy for EFL fourth-grade.

Questions	Could you describe your current teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension in your English classes?	How would you describe the reading level of your fourth-grade students in English as a foreign language?	What common difficulties do EFL students encounter when learning to read in English, and how does it affect their reading performance?	What strategies do you use to improve reading skills in your students? Have you noticed significant improvements in reading among those students who receive explicit instruction regarding sounds and letters? Explain
Answers	<i>The interviewees used various visual resources, such as images, books, and comprehension activities. These techniques and resources help students develop essential reading skills, such as recognizing sounds and associating them with words.</i>	<i>Most teachers interviewed agree that fourth-grade students have a basic reading level. Students have certain limitations in decoding and comprehension skills; although they recognize familiar words, they have difficulty understanding text.</i>	<i>Respondents identified the difficulty in articulating sounds and letters in English, as EFL learners tend to guess words rather than decode them. In addition, the differences between their native language and English increase the difficulty.</i>	<i>Respondents' replies mention using strategies such as interactive activities, visual materials, and active reading, such as pronunciation correction, for their students' reading skills. They also point out that students' reading skills improve when they receive explicit instruction on sounds and letters. However, daily practice is necessary since not all students learn similarly.</i>
Authors	<i>The importance of direct instruction to improve reading skills, especially in the development of phonological awareness and phoneme-grapheme relationships Spear-Swerling (2022)</i>	<i>Rellanos & Musico (2024) point out that reading comprehension in English requires phonological awareness skills such as decoding and fluency.</i>	<i>According to the study by Suarez-Coalla et al. (2024), students who have Spanish as their first language need help to understand the relationship connecting phonemes and graphemes.</i>	<i>Ferrero et al. (2021) point out that explicit word instruction helps students read, and Solano (2022) indicates that reading comprehension goes hand in hand with continuous practice.</i>

Tabla 3

Analysis of teacher's perceptions to the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy for EFL fourth-grade.

Questions	<i>In your experience, how familiar are you with Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping in teaching English reading? What are the possible ways this approach assists students in developing reading fluency and making progress in their word decoding skills?</i>	<i>How do you believe that PGM can aid students in connecting the sound they hear with the words they read, making comprehension and retention more effortless for them? How do you regard this method to influence students' memory abilities compared to conventional reading instruction techniques?</i>	<i>What resources or tools do you consider essential to foster reading development in EFL students, especially regarding word decoding? Why do you consider them important?</i>	<i>How do you think the Phoneme Grapheme Mapping strategy can be integrated into the fourth-grade curriculum to increase reading skills?</i>
Answers	<i>The teachers interviewed mentioned that they are familiar with the PGM method. However, they underline that they only sometimes apply it formally; some incorporate it spontaneously. They highlight that this strategy is beneficial for developing reading fluency and for students to recognize and remember words.</i>	<i>Teachers agreed that the PGM method facilitates the connection between sounds and words, increasing students' retention and memory. Although not all interviewees agreed on the same point, they mentioned that students with short-term memory need additional strategies as reinforcement for reading.</i>	<i>The teachers interviewed frequently mentioned visual resources such as flashcards, illustrated books, worksheets and digital tools that support word decoding and reading skills.</i>	<i>The teachers mentioned that the PGM can be positively integrated into the fourth-grade curriculum and used through daily sound practice and decoding activities, suggesting phoneme-grapheme mapping activities such as writing and reading exercises and pronunciation guides. However, two of the interviewees cautioned that the use of the practice could limit the time dedicated to other reading skills. They suggested balanced implementation to maximize benefits without affecting other areas of English learning.</i>
Authors	<i>Spear-Swerling (2022) highlights that this teaching strategy is essential for developing reading skills.</i>	<i>Complementing the PGM strategy with other reinforcement techniques is necessary to ensure student retention. Jump & Johnson (2020)</i>	<i>According to Luft et al. (2022), it is essential to integrate more teaching resources to support increasing decoding skills and much more in beginning readers.</i>	<i>Larsen et al. (2020) and Vadasy & Sanders (2020) mention methods supported by studies claiming that PGM teachers can integrate the strategy to enhance understanding of the correspondence between sounds and letters.</i>

Chapter V

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter details the results of research exploring the efficacy of the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique as a teaching strategy to improve reading skills in fluency, decoding ability, and comprehension in fourth-grade students. Through structured activities, the goal is to reinforce the connection between phonemes and graphemes. Interviews were conducted with teachers to determine if they were familiar with this technique, how they applied it, and how they perceived the practice in the classroom. The qualitative research project critically analyzed the insights acquired regarding the potential impact of the method in critical areas that significantly contribute to improving English reading skills and the limiting factors that hinder the reading development of EFL learners.

The following section presents the conclusions derived from the research findings

Conclusion

This research aims to demonstrate the most relevant aspects of Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping as a technique applied to fourth-grade EFL students. They interviewed eight teachers from various Santa Elena institutions whose conclusions reflect the value of PGM and its challenges and limitations.

Initially, teachers' feedback highlighted their experiences with concrete improvements in their students' reading fluency, decoding skills, and text comprehension in English. The analysis demonstrates that students significantly improve in identifying and associating phonemes with graphemes, word recognition and correct pronunciation, thereby positively supporting their confidence when reading new texts in English, a multi-sensory approach that combines visual

and auditory elements, offering more inclusive learning by adapting to different styles teaching and besides making students keep information. According to the responses, most of the teachers interviewed agree that in terms of elementary reading level, their fourth-grade students have a basic level appropriate for their age, and they also mention that there are limited comprehension and encoding skills. They point out that they share common challenges, such as phoneme-grapheme correspondence. In turn, they indicate that the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping technique is a complement to increase instruction and cognitive memory. However, the frequency conditions this benefit of use and the integration of this strategy into daily integration activities. It is also evident that its success depends on a careful and complementary implementation aimed at maximizing its impact without neglecting other areas of learning.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, the following suggestions are to enhance the implementation of the Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping strategy in teaching English as a foreign language.

First, recommendations include integrating PGM into the daily curriculum in educational institutions as a regular practice in teaching English reading. Implementing activities would help students become progressively familiar with letter-sound correspondence.

Second, the curriculum should balance PGM and other reading strategies. Interactive activities such as group reading and audiovisual materials will allow teachers to integrate the PGM strategy and encourage students to develop different skills.

Additionally, monitoring and evaluating your progress will allow the teacher to identify where to apply personalized strategies.

Finally, it is advisable to do more research on this strategy; exploring its impact will enable teachers and institutions to design programs that fully exploit its benefits.

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Annex A. Certified Anti-Plagiarism

Certificado Sistema Anti Plagio

En calidad de tutora del Trabajo de Integración Curricular denominado **PHONEME-GRAPHEME MAPPING PRACTICE AS A DIDACTIC READING STRATEGY FOR EFL FOURTH-GRADE LEARNERS** elaborado por la estudiante **SUAREZ SANCHEZ MEILYN ELIZABETH** de la Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros, de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación e Idiomas, de la Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, me permito declarar que una vez analizado en el sistema anti-plagio COMPILATIO, luego de haber cumplido los requerimientos exigidos de valoración, el presente trabajo de investigación, se encuentra con 4% de la valoración permitida, por consiguiente se procede a emitir el informe, para proceder a revisión por parte del especialista.

Atentamente,



Vergara Mendoza Ketty Zoraida, MSc.

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Annex B. Interview Model for Teachers

Topic: Phoneme Grapheme mapping practice as a didactic reading strategy for EFL fourth-grade learners.

1. Could you describe your current teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension in your English classes?
2. How would you describe the reading level of your fourth-grade students in English as a foreign language?
3. What common difficulties do EFL students encounter when learning to read in English, and how does it affect their reading performance?
4. What strategies do you use to improve reading skills in your students? Have you noticed significant improvements in reading among those students who receive explicit instruction regarding sounds and letters? Explain
5. In your experience, how familiar are you with phoneme-grapheme mapping in teaching English reading? What are the possible ways this approach assists students in developing reading fluency and making progress in their word decoding skills?
6. How do you believe that PGM can aid students in connecting the sound they hear with the words they read, making comprehension and retention more effortless for them?
7. What resources or tools do you consider essential to foster reading development in EFL students, especially regarding word decoding? Why do you consider them important?
8. How do you think the Phoneme Grapheme Mapping strategy can be integrated into the fourth-grade curriculum to increase reading skills?

Annex C. Interview of Teachers via Zoom and Face-to-face

Interview of Teachers

Interview 1.

1. Could you describe your current teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension in your English classes?

1. Visual resources, such as color images, are essential to capturing students' attention. With my students, I have realized that when I apply strategies, they can associate words with concepts more transparently and effectively.
2. Worksheets and activity books with shapes and colors are precise tools to improve comprehension. In my experience, these support materials help students greatly visualize what they are reading, which can be scenes from stories or books. They facilitate the reading process so that it is more attractive for them.
3. Fourth-grade students learn better when they can relate words to concrete images; for this reason, I usually integrate these types of activities so that they are more practical, where they can relate by making visual connections.
4. In my experience, phonics is essential to the teaching process. It helps students identify sound patterns and connect them to written words, facilitating reading fluency and comprehension.
5. I can describe the teaching strategy I use in class for reading skills. It is based on a combination of visual resources and phonetic exercises, which I consider more effective and less tedious for children. For example, I usually use cards with images and words to reinforce vocabulary.

6. In my experience, the constant practice of illustrated children's stories maintains the interest of the students. I also tend to focus on pronunciation, because I believe it improves their reading comprehension.
7. I consider the use of graphic-visual media such as images or videos an excellent strategy because it helps students visualize what is meant in the text; this helps them recognize certain words in English and understand more easily.
8. I only sometimes use visual strategies other than those within the text. Still, I do use them when I identify students who are having difficulties since they are a way to engage easily distracted students.

2. How would you describe the reading level of your fourth-grade students in English as a foreign language?

1. In my experience, the reading level of fourth grade students is A1. I think it is appropriate for their age. They can recognize familiar words, but they still have difficulty understanding complete texts.
2. I believe that the student's level of English is conditioned by their lack of exposure to English in their daily lives. I explain that it is not that they do not practice daily or that English is spoken in their homes; they only see English for one hour a day.
3. I think that fourth-grade students have an initial level according to their age; this is due to the lack of practice outside the classroom.
4. Defining their reading level can be somewhat complicated. In my experience in the fourth grade course, they have a hard time deciphering complete texts; it could be a basic level.

5. Some students advance faster than others, but to lead a class with equity, I do not focus on those who have a better command of English in terms of reading but on those whose level of English is a little lower. Many struggle with vocabulary and need constant support to improve.
6. My students understand more when I reinforce the class with innovative strategies, but this is only sometimes. At a basic level, we could increase the student's reading progress with a more personalized approach.
7. In my opinion, the students' level is limited because they are still developing fundamental skills such as decoding and phonological pattern recognition.
8. I think that the reading level varies a lot between students since some are more exposed to English at home, progress faster, and focus more on English, while others only rely on what they learn in class and do not practice it outside of class.

3. What common difficulties do EFL students encounter when learning to read in English, and how does it affect their reading performance?

1. In my experience, many people need help understanding the relationship between letters and sounds, and more in English. It can lead to students having to guess the words, which they often relate to words in Spanish.
2. The problem lies in the complexity of English spelling, a source of deep frustration for many students. They often feel defeated by words they perceive as difficult to read and pronounce.
3. The lack of regular exposure to English is one of the greatest difficulties, significantly limiting the ability to develop reading skills. Many students only see an hour at most

- of English in class, making it very difficult to learn reading skills at a level much higher than the basic one.
4. Based on my observations in my fourth-grade class, some students struggle with phonetic segmentation, a critical reading skill that involves breaking down words into their sounds.
 5. Some students tend to rely too much on contextual clues. They stop focusing on decoding words. It also affects reading comprehension because many Spanish words look similar to English, but their pronunciation differs. So, they need clarification on words.
 6. In my experience, I have noticed that some students struggle with phonetic segmentation. In other words, they need help advancing in reading fluency and tend to need clarification onwards. However, not all students face the difficulties in the same way since many are mostly exposed to reading in English or are more interested in learning a new language and developing decoding skills more quickly.
 7. In my case, I have noticed that several students need clarification on similar sounds, and this slows down their progress since I have to start teaching them pronunciation word by word. So, this is what delays reading progress.
 8. Not all students have the same difficulties. Based on my experience, it is better not to generalize. Students who are more exposed to English have fewer problems pronouncing words. In this case, it would be a good idea to use teaching strategies that help them learn to read.

4. What strategies do you use to improve reading skills in your students? Have you noticed significant improvements in reading among those students who receive explicit instruction regarding sounds and letters? Explain

1. In my experience, I use interactive activities such as shared readings and visual materials that come inside the book that the institution gives us, such as cards with words and images. These strategies help students improve pronunciation and comprehension in reading.
2. Constant practice is essential in my classes. I implement repetitive exercises with specific words so students become familiar with them, and I don't have to. Students who receive explicit instruction in sounds and letters progress faster in decoding words.
3. Correcting pronunciation while reading aloud is a key strategy. In my experience, students who work on sounds and letters directly show more confidence in reading.
4. Grouping small activities is very effective. I have observed that students can practice together. The results are more significant in students who receive clear instructions on the relationship between sounds and letters.
5. Based on my experience, combining visual strategies such as phonetic exercises is more than functional. For example, I use word games and images to reinforce what students learn about sounds and letters. It is a constant learning process of repetition and practice.
6. Explicit instruction works, but it is not always the same. Some students need more time to internalize what they have learned and apply decoding strategies internally. Some have a more challenging time than others.

7. I usually use cards with words and help myself with audiovisual media for the sounds. In this way, I teach students to segment words. It helps a lot with fluency and retention.
8. Traditional instruction is not always enough. Students also need continuous practice with accurate strategies and support outside the classroom to consolidate their learning.

5. In your experience, how familiar are you with phoneme-grapheme mapping in teaching English reading? What are the possible ways this approach assists students in developing reading fluency and making progress in their word decoding skills?

1. I am familiar with the phoneme-grapheme mapping technique. Although I knew it as phoneme-grapheme correspondence, it helps teach the relationship between sounds and letters and helps students' reading fluency.
2. Although I only sometimes use this technique formally in my classes, it is very beneficial. I also apply activities such as showing sounds that connect with words using visual cards.
3. Based on my experience, this technique is a valuable tool. It helps students develop decoding skills faster.
4. This technique can be effective, but I have not always used it to recognize its usefulness. I relate sounds to written words or images but do not explicitly know that it is the strategy of phoneme-grapheme mapping.
5. As teachers, we sometimes explicitly tell the students the names of the strategies they are using. It is more like today's class as the activity of the day, so this technique

- allows students to be more aware of how letters represent sounds, which increases their reading fluency. However, the students don't know that it is decoding what is phonological; they don't know, but I implicitly teach them that.
6. I am not that familiar with this technique, and I have not listened to it carefully; however, I believe this strategy can be better integrated with more practical activities, that is, it is not so boring for the student that the student cannot get bored, it is an interactive class in which everyone participates, and everyone is included.
 7. I think that phoneme-grapheme mapping is a valuable strategy. Still, in my experience, it needs to be combined to take advantage of and use the strategy correctly, so I think this strategy should be better combined with other teaching methods to enhance its effectiveness.
 8. Based on my experience, the phoneme-grapheme mapping strategy allows students to be more aware of how letters represent sound, which improves their fluency. However, due to their age, I feel that this could confuse students in some way.
- 6. How do you believe that PGM can aid students in connecting the sound they hear with the words they read, making comprehension and retention more effortless for them?**
1. PGM is a technique that facilitates the connection between sounds and words. It helps with retention between word comprehension and identification.
 2. This technique significantly improves students' memory because one of its advantages is that it helps them relate what they hear to what they read, which is only sometimes achieved with traditional methods.

3. Phoneme-grapheme mapping can be effective compared to conventional techniques because it helps students understand words through sounds in a structured way.
 4. PGM allows students to internalize sounds and connections with words, but it is also essential to resort to other strategies to support students with short-term memory problems.
 5. PGM increases retention because students are actively involved in mapping, which is more challenging with more traditional techniques.
 6. Every strategy is helpful to be more effective in the long term; other visual and repetition strategies should complement it.
 7. This technique works nicely to improve fluency and comprehension. However, it is difficult for students with short-term memory.
 8. In my case, I have observed that a technique like PGM can help me remember words easily if it is practiced daily, but in my opinion, it should not be the only strategy used in the classroom so as not to neglect other areas of learning in the English language.
- 7. What resources or tools do you consider essential to foster reading development in EFL students, especially regarding word decoding? Why do you consider them important?**
1. Visual materials such as cards with words or figures are necessary when teaching students to associate words with images because they facilitate decoding
 2. In my experience with students of different ages, printed materials such as worksheets and books are fundamental; this helps many children learn and practice constantly and reinforces their reading skills.

3. I consider digital resources such as videos and music attractive tools for students because they are out of the ordinary and draw their attention. These resources also increase students' interest and help them learn more dynamically.
4. Educational games and interactive exercises are vital tools in my background. Games motivate students to participate actively in the learning process.
5. Books with illustrations and related activities are essential for developing reading skills. Images help students connect words with meaning.
6. Cards and figures, in addition to repetitive exercises, are the best resources to encourage decoding, especially in fourth-grade students. These tools allow for structured and gradual learning at an early age.
7. Traditional materials such as books and written exercises are sufficient. These resources work well when used consistently and appropriately.
8. I consider it necessary to have educational resources that are attractive to the student, such as printed materials, books, or worksheets. Digital resources such as music and videos can help with word decoding and be a support tool for the technique, increasing the student's interest.

8. How do you think the Phoneme Grapheme Mapping strategy can be integrated into the fourth-grade curriculum to increase reading skills?

1. PGM can be integrated through daily activities, including word cards and writing exercises. These activities can effectively reinforce the relationship between sounds and letters.

2. This strategy could be integrated into the daily reading routine, focusing more on pronunciation exercises and guided practice. This would allow students to improve their fluency and comprehension progressively.
3. Of course, this strategy can be integrated through educational games or other things that make it more dynamic and entertaining. I think that the methodology would increase the students' interest and facilitate their reading comprehension.
4. Based on my experience, small group activities could be included where students work together to identify sounds and letters, but I also feel that this would take a lot of time. This approach promotes collaboration and educational learning.
5. Phoneme-grapheme mapping can be integrated into the curriculum through guided reading exercises, where students practice specific sounds before reading them in full. This technique facilitates the connection between words and their sounds; however, I feel that it can limit the learning process of students in other types of English skills.
6. Strategy can be integrated into specific activities, including audio recordings or repetition exercises. This helps students reinforce sounds constantly. However, parents must also help their children. It is like learning outside the home, such as helping with homework outside of class, doing repetitions, etc.
7. PGM can be included as part of the weekly reading choices using cards, words, and structured phonetic exercises; this will allow students to progress gradually and effectively.
8. In my case, I think that PGM could be integrated in a limited way to avoid taking time away from other vital skills; I think it would be helpful to complement reading activities but not as a primary technique.