

Developing the teaching of reading in modern foreign languages: can instruction in phonics and reading strategies improve students' progress and motivation in Key Stage 3?

Submission date 21/02/2017	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☐ Protocol
Registration date 07/03/2017	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☒ Results
Last Edited 01/07/2021	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

French is a language taught very widely in schools. Learning to read in French can pose particular challenges for students because of its complex spelling system. Previous studies have suggested that explicit instruction in reading strategies may help foreign language learners to understand challenging texts. However, this view is controversial, and it has also been suggested that the limited available lesson time in modern foreign languages (MFL) would be better spent teaching the language itself, rather than teaching strategies to compensate for students' lack of language knowledge. Other previous studies have suggested that explicit instruction in French phonics (learning to map written words and strings of letters onto the spoken forms they represent) is needed for beginner MFL students to develop the ability to pronounce written words accurately in the language. This is something that is currently becoming more widespread in schools and indeed is gaining increasing support. There is, however, currently limited evidence concerning the effectiveness of this approach. Addressing these issues, the current study contributes to a longer-term aim of improving the teaching of French reading in beginner MFL classrooms. It seeks to increase the evidence base that teachers can draw on when deciding on how to plan the teaching of French reading in their lessons. The specific aim of this study is to investigate the effects of two approaches on students' French reading understanding, to find out which approach is more effective.

Who can participate?

Year 7 students who are learning French in a participating school

What does the study involve?

Participating schools are randomly allocated to one of three groups. In the first group, students receive explicit instruction in French phonics from their teacher, that is, they will learn about how particular letters and combinations of letters are pronounced in French. In the second group, students receive explicit teaching in how to tackle challenging texts, so that they can understand some of the contents even when they don't know all the words. In the third group,

students follow their usual teaching, although they will also read some additional texts (the same as the ones used in the phonics and strategies groups). However, they do not do any explicit phonics or strategies work with these texts. All groups spend about 20 minutes per week on teaching related to the study, over a period of 16 weeks. To measure the effects of the different teaching approaches, students complete a series of tests and questionnaires at the start of the project (Winter 2016) and again at the end, once the teaching is complete (Summer 2017). There is a further round of testing in Winter 2017, in order to see whether any effects of the teaching are long-lasting. All students in participating classes are invited to complete the tests and questionnaires, although it is entirely voluntary and they are free to opt out if they prefer. Some students are also invited to take part in interviews with the research team, in order to gather more detailed information.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

All of these research-related tasks are similar to those that students might routinely expect to complete in the course of their MFL lessons, and can be seen as beneficial in terms of their learning of French. It is also hoped that students will enjoy taking part in the study and will develop their understanding of what educational research is and how it relates to classroom practice. There are no risks to taking part.

Where is the study run from?

The study is run from University of Oxford Department of Education, University of Reading Institute of Education and University of Southampton and takes place in 36 state schools in England (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

September 2016 to December 2018

Who is funding the study?

The Nuffield Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?

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Contact information

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

EDU/42585

Study information

Scientific Title

Foreign Language Education: Unlocking Reading ('FLEUR'): an evaluation of two approaches to teaching French reading to beginner learners in Modern Foreign Languages classrooms

Acronym

FLEUR

Study objectives

Research questions:

1. To what extent does a programme of explicit instruction in reading strategies or phonics lead to improvements in French reading proficiency amongst Year 7 MFL students?
2. To what extent do the programmes of instruction lead to improvements in students' French phonological decoding proficiency; their strategic behaviour when reading in French; their vocabulary knowledge; and their motivation for learning the language?
3. Is one of the programmes of instruction more effective than the other on any of the above measures?
4. What are teachers' and students' views on the two programmes of instruction?

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

University's of Oxford's "Central University Research Ethics Committee" (CUREC), 07/10/2016

Study design

Cluster randomised efficacy trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Foreign language reading

Interventions

French classes at the 36 participating schools are randomly allocated to one of three groups using a minimization procedure (using the free software MinimPy: <https://sourceforge.net/projects/minimpy/>). The allocation is independently audited and takes place after baseline testing.

Explicit phonics instruction group: Students receive explicit instruction in a range of French grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPC) which have been shown previously to pose difficulties for English-speaking learners. Students also have opportunities to practise the target GPC both in controlled contexts (short practice sentences and rhymes) and in more open-ended, communicative contexts (in French texts on topics of cultural interest, specifically written to exemplify the GPC in question).

Explicit reading strategy instruction group: Students initially complete awareness-raising tasks to highlight the role of strategic behaviour in overcoming reading challenges, and to help them become aware of the strategies they already use. New strategies are then introduced and modelled by the teacher. Students then have opportunities to practise these strategies when reading challenging texts on topics of cultural interest (the same texts as the ones used by the phonics group). Again, these texts have been written specifically to encourage the application of particular strategies, such as inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words from context, and checking that a particular interpretation of the text makes sense in light of existing world knowledge. Students are encouraged to reflect on and evaluate their strategy use by means of strategy checklists, class discussions and individualized teacher feedback.

Control group: Students follow their usual teaching program. They will also read some additional texts (the same as the ones used in the phonics and strategies groups). However, they do not do any explicit phonics or strategies work with these texts.

All groups spend about 20 minutes per week on teaching related to the study, over a period of 16 weeks.

Participants are followed up using a series of tests and questionnaires at the start of the project (Winter 2016) and again at the end, once the teaching is complete (Summer 2017). There is a further round of testing in Winter 2017, to assess the long-term effects of the teaching.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

There are three main points of data collection: time 1 = November / December 2016; time 2 = June / July 2017; time 3 (delayed post-test) = November / December 2017. At each time point the outcome variable are as follows:

1. French reading comprehension is measured by two translation tasks and two additional texts with reading comprehension questions
2. French phonological decoding is measured using a pen-and-paper test developed by the researchers
3. French vocabulary knowledge is measured using a version of the widely-used X_Lex self-report instrument
4. Strategic reading behaviour - measured by a strategy self-report checklist (together with think-aloud interviews with a sub-sample of students)
5. Self-efficacy for French reading is measured using a self-report questionnaire

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Teachers' and students' perceptions of the programme of instruction they have followed are assessed using questionnaires designed for the purpose of this study and interviews at time 2 (Nov/Dec 2017)
2. Teachers' perceptions of their engagement in the research study and the relationship between research and classroom practice are assessed using questionnaires designed for the purpose of this study and interviews at time 2 (Nov/Dec 2017)

Completion date

31/12/2018

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Year 7 student (aged 11-12)
2. Learning French
3. In a State school
4. Who gives voluntary informed assent and parental consent
5. Whose teacher has volunteered to participate in the project

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Lower age limit

11 years

Upper age limit

12 years

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. Native speaker of French
2. Those from a French-speaking family

Date of first enrolment

12/10/2016

Date of final enrolment

25/11/2016

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

University of Oxford Department of Education

15 Norham Gardens

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Study participating centre

University of Reading Institute of Education

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Study participating centre

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Study participating centre

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RG1 5EX

Sponsor information

Organisation

Nuffield Foundation

ROR

<https://ror.org/0281jqk77>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Nuffield Foundation

Alternative Name(s)

NuffieldFound

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location

United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The current data sharing plans for the current study are unknown and will be made available at a later date.

IPD sharing plan summary

Data sharing statement to be made available at a later date

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results	public report			No	No
Other publications	supplementary analyses	07/11/2020	01/07/2021	Yes	No
Plain English results				No	Yes