QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EFL TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT PHONOLOGICAL

AWARENESS AND PHONICS IN READING INSTRUCTION FOR EARLY

GRADERS IN QATARI GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: EFL teachers' knowledge and beliefs about phonological awareness and phonics for early graders in Qatari government schools

Supervisor of Thesis: Saba Qadhi.

This study aimed at exploring the knowledge of EFL female teachers possess regarding phonological awareness and phonics. Also, the study investigates teachers' beliefs about the use of phonics in reading instruction for early graders in Qatari primary government schools and kindergartens. Following the mixed methods research design, a 33-item survey was completed by 142 EFL female teachers, and ten teachers were interviewed for the data collection. To analyze the quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized, while thematic analysis was used for interview analysis. Findings revealed that the majority of participants lack basic knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics. Further, the results indicated that the participants hold positive beliefs toward the phonics importance in reading instruction for early graders. Based on these findings, this study provided implications for reading outcomes improvement in Qatar and similar contexts, and recommendations for further research are offered.

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my parents who taught me how to be ambitious and persistent. You taught me the value of learning and the joy of achievements. I am unable to thank you enough for your believing in me and your endless care and support, especially in the very tough times. I hope this success makes you proud of your daughter today and in the hereafter.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

No one doubts the importance of having children master reading skills as early as possible. According to Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018), reading plays a fundamental role in children's future social, economic, political, and academic success, as well as their lifelong learning. Morrow (2007) also asserts the importance of reading and emphasizes that children's educational futures depend on how well they are guided to read. Children who can read early have a strong foundation for later academic achievement (Şentürk, 2015; Stockard & Engelmann, 2010), as these children achieve better literacy measures than children with less print exposure (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

In developing children's reading skills, educators assume an undeniably crucial role (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Teachers work diligently to assist early graders in handling print and cracking the code. Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was passed, the bar for literacy in the United States has been raised; it increased the number of learning institutions responsible for assisting children in reading at the appropriate grade levels. The NCLB compelled schools to implement different approaches and strategies to enhance reading skills, including concentrating on and teaching phonological awareness for early graders (Bos et al., 2001).

1.2 Contextual Background

1.3 Literacy Outcomes in Qatar

It was expected that Qatari students would achieve a high literacy proficiency and English language standards. Several data sources nevertheless show that these expectations

are not being accomplished. Over the last ten years, the achievement levels of Qatari students have been decreasing in terms of global academic achievement measures, and specifically in English reading assessments such as the EF EPI (2014, 2020), the PIRLS (2016), and the PIZA (2012, 2016).

The Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) (2020) is a study that examines the level of adult English language skills from a hundred countries over the world. It assesses and rates the average levels of English skills in learners from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It shows that the average English proficiency levels of MENA have been declining since 2007. Qatar specifically has been ranked as a 'very low proficiency' area since 2013. The latest EF EPI reports (2020) show that the average level of English language proficiency among adults in Qatar is low.

Statistics also indicate that the reading rate for Qatari students is low compared to those of other countries worldwide. International reading assessments indicate that students in early years have poor performance in reading comprehension (Nasser, 2014). Qatar participated in the PIRLS assessments in 2016, an international assessment report on reading outcomes for fourth-grade students (LaRoche, Joncas & Foy, 2016). The performance rate revealed a low level of reading comprehension among students in Qatar, as they scored 442 points, which is below the centre point of the PIRLS scale (Baer et al., 2007).

PISA is another international student assessment. It focuses on assessing students' fundamental knowledge of English reading and other subjects (Grisay, 2003). The PISA report indicates that learners in Qatar seem to score lower than global averages (PISA, 2012). In 2018, 15-year-old students in Qatar scored 407 points, which is lower than the

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) score, which provided the data analysis (Rowley et al., 2019). Moreover, only 3% of students in Qatar achieved Level 5 or 6 in the PISA reading test, which indicates that a minimal number of students were at the top performance level in reading (Rowley et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the National Assessments in Qatar revealed that, in 2016-2017, sixth-grade students have problems with English language subjects in general, which might point to an issue in earlier stages of school (Weber, 2018). In the author's personal experience, average students from government schools lack English language reading and comprehension skills. Indeed, many researchers and educators worldwide always ask one question: why do children lack English language reading abilities?

1.4 Early Childhood Reading Instruction

1.4.1 Literacy Competency

The Qatar National Curriculum Framework (QNCF) (2016) sets out seven key competencies that children need to develop to be 21st-century citizens; one of them is literacy. According to the Qatar Curriculum Standards (QCS) (n. d.), the English standards in Qatar for kindergarten and first-grade children focus on showing emergent reading skills. 'Emergent reading' implies that development occurs through making sense of print, by interacting with books or a screen, by doing 'pretend reading,' and talking with teachers and classmates about stories, words, letters, and sounds. Teachers introduce children to literacy by engaging them in teacher-led storybook reading and open discussions about these books and playing interactive games, rhymes, and chants. Children need to develop all of these behaviours simultaneously over the whole school year. They learn from

opportunities to engage in literacy-rich activities in their English lessons, including picture storybooks, rhymes, chants, and dramatizations.

1.4.2 Learners Profile for Reading

According to the QNCF (2016), kindergarten children are pre-literate and develop familiarity with books and print. Therefore, at the kindergarten level, children learn written language to help them begin learning to read in primary school. Some children may be able to identify a small group of words in print, especially those related to their favourite things, or if they contain letters from their names (QNCF, 2016). They will also recognize some familiar brand names or signs, such as 'STOP!'. According to the QNCF (2016), children should be surrounded by a print-rich environment that provides visible printed words. Words should be 'real' and known to the children, emphasizing meaning and understanding, as well as developing reading skills. These words can also help children recognize and distinguish letters of the alphabet, such as naming the days of the week on a routine chart. In addition, children should hear and repeat rhymes and chants, which provide natural exposure to syllables and rhyming words (QNCF, 2016).

In Grade 1 learning standards for reading, enriching the classroom environment by displaying printed words can provide a visible model for children (QNCF, 2016). Teachers can also support students by encouraging them to name letters as they look at words. Children may progress at very different rates. Some may find reading challenging; others may be confused by learning two scripts simultaneously (QNCF, 2016).

Teachers can offer support to Grade Two children in several ways. In addition to creating a print-rich environment, they should have access to books, both fiction and

nonfiction. Displays should continue, as could the inclusion of a word wall, which can be topical but should also include common sight words. Teachers can also support children by helping them sound out letters as they read together and using plenty of praise for their success and effort. In this stage, children will still enjoy being read to, and this will continue to be an opportunity to model reading behaviour and decoding skills (QNCF, 2016).

1.5 Problem Statement

In Qatar, the achievement levels of students have been decreasing over the last ten years concerning global academic achievement measures. Teachers, especially in this critical stage, are considered an important factor in facing this challenge (Lee, Cawthon & Dawson, 2013). The research concluded that teachers' lack of language structure knowledge is strongly correlated to poor classroom instruction, leading to inappropriate delivery or non-delivery of early reading instruction (Birello, 2012). In this case, teaching reading for beginners, especially in the EFL context, requires teachers to know fundamental English language constructs and be aware of how children acquire and develop their reading skills (Vellutino, Scanlon & Tanzman, 1994). Teachers need to make an extra effort to ensure that their students are developing and acquiring literacy (Du, Chaaban, Sabah, Al-Thani & Wang, 2020). They should be aware of how to provide students with the most effective experiences; this knowledge is reflected in their classroom practices (Du et al., 2020) and will also result in students' academic achievement and extend their learning in the future.

1.6 Research Questions

This study examines the following research questions:

1. To what extent female EFL teachers in Qatari government schools are knowledgeable about phonological awareness and phonics?

2. What are the beliefs of female EFL teachers regarding the use of phonics for the early years of reading instruction in Qatari government schools?

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is well documented that early grade EFL teachers have insufficient knowledge about 'language foundations' (Pittman, Zhang, Binks-Cantrell, Hudson & Joshi, 2019; Alshaboul, Almahasneh, Hassanein & Ibrahim, 2019; Wong & Russak, 2020). The current study focuses on EFL knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics due to the assumption that teachers' understanding of these aspects is critical to early reading instruction and that their beliefs are the foundation of their practices in the classroom (Hulme & Snowling, 2013; Alshaboul et al., 2019; Wong & Russak, 2020).

The findings of this study will benefit MOEHE specialists in Qatar, as they are responsible for curriculum development. English language curriculum designers will benefit from this research's exploration of teachers' beliefs about the use of phonics for early graders since they are practitioners in the field and may construct their beliefs based on their students' achievements. This study will also be eye-opening for English language coordinators and teachers in Qatar on how reading instruction should be taught. Furthermore, the research findings will equip educators and decision-makers at the College of Education at Qatar University and professional development providers, with insights

into the level of English language preparation that teachers have. This study will provide research-based guidance on the appropriate approach to teaching reading, based on the teachers' point of view. It also forms a basis for future research to be conducted in EFL literacy teaching in Qatar.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Content knowledge is defined as the information that teachers must understand and teach and the knowledge that students are expected to learn in a particular area ('Content Knowledge,' 2016). Throughout this study, content knowledge refers specifically to the primary language aspects of phonological awareness and phonics. *Belief* refers to what individuals believe, judge, or think about the 'truthiness' of a specific idea (Skott, 2014). In this study, the researcher focuses on teachers' beliefs regarding using the phonics approach in beginner reading instruction.

Phonological awareness means the ability to manipulate unit sounds, including syllables, onset, and rimes (Hougen, 2012). This term includes *phonemic awareness*, which means the recognition and manipulation of individual sounds (phonemes) in a word (Hougen, 2012).

The *phonics approach* refers to instruction that focuses on teaching the relationship between phonemes and graphemes – that is, the letters and their corresponding sounds (Hougen, 2012). In contrast, the *whole language approach* is a philosophy of instruction that asserts the natural process of learning from the whole to its parts, moving from meaning to sounds and letters in reading instruction (Fukada, 2018).

EFL stands for 'English as a foreign language,' and the researcher uses this term to refer to the language used by non-native English speakers (Peng, 2019), such as Qatari learners of English in Qatar.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Understanding EFL teachers' knowledge of basic constructs and exploring their beliefs about phonics in early reading instruction requires examining the background literature. How do children develop their reading skills? Which approach promotes adequate reading instruction for early graders? The existing literature discusses the 'reading wars' between two main reading approaches: phonics and whole language. Concepts addressed include teachers' knowledge and beliefs and the developmental stages of learning reading skills. This section will highlight empirical studies on explicit reading instruction, teachers' knowledge about language contrast, teachers' preparation for teaching reading, and teachers' beliefs about learning to read in early childhood. Furthermore, this literature review aims to strengthen and support the context of existing literature through a specific theoretical framework.

2.2 The Reading Wars

Over the past decades, debates have revolved around two main teaching reading approaches: the phonics approach and the whole-language approach (Chall, 1967). Controversies over the best approach to reading instruction were prevalent. Each faction and group of experts defended their way of teaching reading as the best and most effective way of reading instruction. As they were known, these reading wars became the primary subject of discussions, reports, and research papers (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). Since the Ancient Greek era, phonics has been taught as a tool for teaching initial reading (Chall, 1983). In the United States, the oldest teaching approach for beginner readers followed the

phonics system (Chall, 1983). From 1920-1969, the consensus on how to teach reading was, to begin with reading as whole language *or* through sight words. Some people supported starting from stories and sentences to advocate meaning-emphasis. The reading war appeared in the United States in 1955, when Rudolf Flesch wrote a book titled *Why Johnny Can't Read,* which created a stunning transformation in the field of reading instruction (Chall,1967). In this period, the sight or meaning-emphasis method was the standard method of reading instruction in the US. However, Flesch recommended a changeover to the phonics or code-emphasis method (Chall,1967). Later research supported his view and proved that focusing on sight-reading was an incorrect mode of teaching (cited in Chall, 1967). Since then, there has been no consensus on the best way to settle this war, and those who are interested in literacy education are still wondering why we teach reading? What is the appropriate way to teach reading to young learners, and which approach is more effective? According to Garnett (1991), advocates of both phonics and the whole-language approach confirm that the ultimate goal of reading is to obtain meaning from text, and a rich literature environment is critical. However, each group of advocates has their point of view on how exactly to reach this goal.

2.2.1 The Phonics Approach

The phonics approach started in the United States in 1970 (Morrow & Tracey, 1997), after the first contribution to phonics in reading instruction – a book by Jeanne Chall, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967). Chall's book concluded that the phonics approach helps students achieve more fluent reading than the whole-word or whole-language approach (Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006). Chall (1967) asserts that phonics is

essential in teaching reading since it provides students with explicit tools to decode, and, from this process, students develop the ability to achieve fluency in reading. The recognition of letter-sound correspondence leads to solid decoding skills, which can build a reliable prediction for children's future reading achievements (Earle & Sayeski, 2016). Moreover, phonics provides the opportunity for children to become independent readers through the decoding process. It is necessary to develop children's abilities to read without assistance from teachers or other adults (Share, 1995). Teaching phonics to develop reading skills should occur in the kindergarten stage – perhaps even as early as in preschool. Research confirms that teaching early-year students to decode words enhances students' future achievement more than if they were taught later or by any other approach (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1983). Reading instruction that emphasizes systematic phonics in the early stage of learning will lead to a strong learning base and be an effective teaching approach to beginner reading (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

However, the phonics approach has been criticized for its emphasis on decoding letters rather than reading to understand and get meaning out of the text (Chall, 1967). From this stance, better results in terms of reading for understanding are achieved using methods that focus on decoding at the beginning rather than by using methods that emphasize meaning (Chall, 1967). The importance of phonics for beginner reading instruction is that if children did not master the critical tool of reading (decoding) at the earliest stage of instruction, they will not be able to read new texts or books later on. As a result, they will not understand what is written (Earle & Sayeski, 2016).

2.2.2 The Whole Language Approach

Although the literature shows that good teaching of reading must include decoding rules and phonics instruction (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998), other voices have advocated reading instruction in a natural context that focuses on the comprehension of written words, with little emphasis on their forms. This approach is commonly known as the whole-language approach (Hildreth, 1965). Indeed, it is not easy to define the whole-language approach because its proponents identify it as a philosophy of teaching rather than a specific approach (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987; Goodman, 1989; Newman, 1985). It is a holistic ideology that supports the meaning-emphasis strategy, which claims that teachers should create a setting where they follow top-down reading instruction. It focuses on comprehension as a starting goal rather than an end goal, as with the phonics approach (Fukada, 2018). The whole-language approach draws the attention of teachers and children to the overall language, not simply sounds or words, to help them make sense of what is being read. It suggests that reading instruction should be carried out in the context of real and authentic literacy experiences, starting by immersing children in a whole text (Fukada, 2018). Students break the text into parts, and then they reconstruct the text to use the language in meaningful ways.

Smith (1992) stated that reading is not only about interpreting or decoding written words; it allows children to give meaning to writing. In addition, advocates of the whole-language approach emphasize that, even if children eventually mastered phonics, they would go no further than 'recoding' print into oral form; they will become 'word callers' and will not be able to understand much of what is written (Watson, 1994). By contrast, whole-language teachers claim that the fundamental purpose of reading is to get meaning

from print, and that happens when teachers take advantage of their mother tongue, natural and language-rich environments, communication, and relationships (Halliday, 1978). Reading proficiency begins with the reservoir of children's previous experience of what they have acquired as oral language competence. Eventually, verbal and written language systems will interact and support each other in the reading process (Goodman, 1976).

2.2.3 The Balanced Approach

With the debate between the whole-language and phonics approaches being so persistent, some researchers wondered whether they had to continue to dichotomize, compete, or strictly debate one approach versus the other (McNinch & Gruber, 1996). Donat (2006) emphasizes that strict compliance with the whole-language approach would overlook children who might learn better with the phonics approach, and vice versa. There is no consensus on the definition of a balanced approach; however, Cowen (2003) offered a broad one: a balanced approach is a research-based, integrated, comprehensive, and dynamic approach that empowers educators to emphasize learning to read for meaning and joy by focusing on the students' literacy needs and providing appropriate coding instruction, vocabulary, reading comprehension, motivation, and communication. According to Nation and Macalister (2021), it is not a wise idea to strictly focus on a single reading instruction approach. Reading instruction should draw on evidence from new research. Tomlinson (2000) confirms that individual differentiation in needs, abilities, interests, experiences, life circumstances, learning style, and children's readiness to learn all need to be considered. While some children may benefit from both the whole-language and phonics approaches, these approaches may not be successful or appropriate for other

children, even if they are the same age. Therefore, to teach reading for all children successfully, recent literature confirms that teachers need a balanced approach that can address meaning and the direct instruction of phonics (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011; Nation & Macalister, 2021).

2.3 Knowledge and Beliefs of an EFL Teacher

Before addressing the concept of knowledge and beliefs for EFL teachers, an important question arises: what are effective teachers? According to Sapon-Shevin (2005a, 2005b), effective teachers need to have appropriate perspectives, adequate knowledge, and sufficient skills to provide highly effective learning experiences. Importantly, teachers' evolving knowledge base is significant; the more knowledge they have, the more effectively they will be able to plan and implement their lessons. According to Gillon (2018), successful teachers have a strong understanding of PA, and they know that phonemic awareness, in particular is a vital component before students can learn the associations between sounds and symbols of English words. Also, teachers' knowledge contributes to shaping their beliefs and attitudes regarding effective teaching approaches (Chai & Merry, 2006).

The literature shows a debate on the meaning of knowledge and beliefs. Borg (2006) defined these concepts from 30 different aspects. For some researchers, knowledge, and beliefs are synonyms; they are described similarly and used interchangeably (Borg, 2006; Verloop et al., 2001). Other researchers distinguish between the two terms, claiming that knowledge is objective and explicit (Woods, 1996). In contrast, beliefs are subjective and implicit and represent what individuals believe, judge, or think about the 'truthiness'

of a specific idea (Skott, 2014). It has been argued that knowledge consists of the facts, information, or experience that an individual develops through practical and theoretical understanding.

In contrast, beliefs tend to refer to individual principles, presumptions, and points of view that individuals have towards specific issues (Evans, Fox, Cremaso & McKinnon, 2004). The findings of De Villiers (2000) have elucidated that belief can be referred to as an attitude that can either be false or true. Ultimately, researchers suggest that teachers must have solid research-based knowledge and beliefs to provide appropriate and effective classroom instruction (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005).

2.4 Teachers' Content Knowledge of Basic Language Constructs

Teachers play a critical role in developing children's reading ability (Lee, Cawthon & Dawson, 2013). Studies over the past decades concluded that teachers' lack of language structure knowledge is strongly correlated to poor classroom instruction, leading to inappropriate delivery or even non-delivery of early reading instruction (Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Wray & Medwell, 1999; Bos et al., 2001; McCutchen et al., 2002; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2004; Birello, 2012). Having sufficient knowledge of English language structure and develop phonological awareness skills facilitates teachers' practices, and children's reading skills will significantly improve as a result (McCutchen & Berninger, 1999; McCutchen et al., 2002; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Birello, 2012).

According to Johnston and Goettsch (2000), there are seven categories to teachers' knowledge: "content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics,

knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational values" (P.8). Content knowledge is a pivotal aspect, as it is evident that teachers cannot instruct or deliver information that they do not know (Blair, 2006; Moats, 2009). A growing body of research confirms that teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness influences children's successful reading (McCutchen et al., 2002; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; McCutchen et al., 2009). Moreover, teachers' understanding of phonological awareness will contribute to children's reading proficiency in an early stage (McCutchen et al., 2002). Teachers should understand that phonological awareness is an aural skill through which children develop sensitivity to individual sounds in multiple linguistic units, such as identifying initial sounds in words, rhyming, segmentation, blending, deletion, and several other tasks (Barrnett, 2015).

Various studies concluded that teachers lack an understanding of essential language elements. For instance, Moats (1994) examined teachers' awareness of phonemes and morphemes and their knowledge about how these aspects are linked to children's reading efficiency. The key findings show that even the experienced teachers' knowledge about spoken and written language structure was poor, which prevented them from supplying students with appropriate reading instruction. This study formed the basis for many later studies that tackled teachers' knowledge about and competencies for teaching phonemic awareness (e.g., Moats & Lyon, 1996; Wray & Medwell, 1999; Mather, Bos, & Babur, 2001; Bos et al., 2001; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spear-Swirling & Brucker, 2004; Tibi, 2005). These studies concluded that teachers often demonstrate a low level of content knowledge about basic language constructs. Many other recent studies have reached the same conclusions, which show that teachers' content knowledge of phonological

awareness and phonics is limited (Fielding-Barnsley, 2010; Kelcey, 2011; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011a, 2011b; Kennedy, 2013; Moats, 2009, 2014; Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, Joshi, Martin-Chang, & Arrow, 2016; Washburn, Mulcahy, & Musante, 2017). Teachers' understanding of phonological awareness and phonics was studied by Pittman et al. (2019). They surveyed 150 elementary teachers and showed that they did not have adequate knowledge about phonics. However, the teachers had an advanced level of knowledge in the skills of syllable counting. In a similar context to the current study, a recent study was conducted by Alshaboul et al. (2019) to investigate EFL in-service teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness. The researchers surveyed 210 teachers, and the results indicated that teachers lack a basic understanding of PA skills. Interestingly, the study of Wong and Russak (2020) examined the knowledge of 124 kindergarten English teachers in Hong Kong through a survey. The study revealed that all participants had scored the highest in phonological awareness questions and scored the lowest in phonics knowledge. However, as teachers' knowledge has received increasing attention from many researchers lately, understanding what shapes teachers' knowledge contributes to maximizing teachers' preparation and children's learning (Kayi-Aydar, 2011).

2.5 Teachers' Preparation to Teach Reading

Teachers gain their knowledge either before they begin the profession, through their formal higher education or in-service training. In order to perform effective reading instruction, teachers need to be well-prepared. Teachers' preparation is critical since their knowledge guides their classroom practices (McCutchen et al., 2003). In addition, teachers need to have a more profound sense of the foreign language, including its nuances of

phonemics and sound variation, to effectively guide the students in using them (Svalberg, 2012).

The International Reading Association (Isgar, 1999) stated that teachers' preparation begins from university or education college. Students must take three or more courses on reading teaching strategies to motivate children to read. The ability of novice teachers to effectively teach reading depends on the quality of the undergraduate programs (Blair, 2006). However, Zein (2016) suggests that pre-service education is not sufficient to produce qualified teachers. Several studies showed that teachers might not be prepared to perform effective reading instruction (Bos et al., 2001; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011a, 2011b; Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, Joshi, Martin-Chang, & Arrow, 2016).

Spear-Swirling and Brucker (2004) concluded that graduate teachers often demonstrate a low level of content knowledge about fundamental aspects of language. Therefore, Lehrer (1998) stated that teachers who instruct primary graders need professional development and mentoring support for the first time. Additionally, Zein (2016) concluded that there is a need for serious preparation and training programs for English language teachers. Professional development in reading instruction should not happen as a one-time event; it is a continuous and ongoing process across the journey of lifelong learning that never ends (Learning First Alliance, 2000; McRobbie, 2000). Furthermore, schools should provide reading specialists to maximize teachers' knowledge of these complex subjects (Lehrer, 1998). In-service teachers also still need to continue learning, training and developing competencies.

2.6 EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Literacy Learning in Early Childhood

Teaching children not only involves the knowledge that teachers have (McCutchen et al., 2003) or the level of teachers' preparation (Blair, 2006). It also involves the beliefs that teachers have regarding students' learning (McCutchen et al., 2003; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Westwood, Knight, & Redden, 2009). Teachers' practices are influenced by their knowledge, beliefs, attitude, and feelings (Birello, 2012). Referring to educational theory, Kelchtermans (2009) claims that teachers decide what instructional method to use in their classrooms according to their knowledge and personal beliefs about the nature of the reading process and how children learn reading skills. In other words, the quality of teachers' instructional practices is strongly affected by their beliefs (Hindman & Wasik, 2008). Kelchtermans (2009) adds that teachers' beliefs about implementing and delivering knowledge are accumulated from their teaching experiences; they are fundamentally making decisions in the classroom based on previous trials, experiences, and practices of what works better. Birello (2012) also observed that teachers' beliefs regarding a subject and its methodology subconsciously get transferred into students' minds.

Concerning teachers' beliefs about reading teaching approaches, studies show that some teachers believe children learn reading best when immersed in a rich learning environment and exposed to natural contexts (e.g., Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1989a; Weaver, 1990). However, other teachers believe that, to produce good readers, children should learn basic phonological awareness and phonics skills (Stanovich, 1994; Harris & Graham, 1996; Carroll, 2016; Seastrunk, 2018).

2.7 Explicit Code Instruction

Children cannot isolate phonemes easily; therefore, researchers recommend explicit code instruction, where teachers use conspicuous strategies to manifest the way of reading action (Blair, 2006). Developmental research confirms that children in early reading learning stages cannot detect phonemes naturally, and many children cannot acquire it without purposeful instruction (Behrmann, 1995; Felton, 1993; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1989). Also, according to Falzon (2012), all research – whether qualitative, clinical, theoretical, philosophical, experimental, or empirical – points to the need of supporting beginner readers in explicitly learning language structure. Similarly, Adams (1990) asserts that explicitly teaching phonics is more effective than implicitly teaching phonics. The National Reading Panel (2000) recommended explicit and systematic phonological awareness instruction in the early stages of literacy acquisition. Ehri (2003) concluded that the systematic teaching of phonics has greater effect on children's reading success when it is taught within a context. More recently, according to Takanishi and Menestrel (2017), reading programs in grades K-5 should include explicit instruction of literacy.

2.8 Developmental Stages of Learning Reading

Over the past decades, researchers have presented significant contributions to understanding how children learn to read (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007; Mathes & Torgesen, 1998; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). Researchers claim that children learn reading very early; indeed, they start learning both oral and written language from birth before they begin any formal schooling (Morrow, 2011; Griffith, Beach, Ruan, & Dunn, 2008).

2.8.1 Emergent Literacy

Children are surrounded by different forms of written language, such as signs, newspapers, books, television, and mobile phones. Also, they are surrounded by people using different types of print in different situations to read recipes, write notes, and read texts. The wide range of print usage and oral language in society leads children to know about reading and writing at an early stage. This is called early learning emergent literacy (Griffith, Beach, Ruan, & Dunn, 2008). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) referred to emergent literacy as a learning process that consists of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that begin in the early stages of children's lives and continue to unfold throughout their early years. In other words, emergent literacy is a developmental continuum of learning through which pre-readers interact with their surrounding rich-literacy environment, know that print has meaning, and differentiate between print and pictures before they start reading words or begin formal instruction (Rohde, 2015; Morrow, 2011).

Emergent literacy may appear in children's performance when they pretend to do adult activities – for example, holding a book and turning its pages or holding a pencil and pretending to write (Griffith, Beach, Ruan, & Dunn, 2008). Research and observations confirm that children who have less exposure to texts are more likely to have fewer opportunities to practice emergent literacy skills (Blair, 2006).

2.8.2 Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Researchers over the past decades have demonstrated the link between language sound awareness and learning reading skills. Phonological awareness (PA) refers to the ability to analyse a variety of sounds and manipulate auditory language units, specifically

initial and ending sounds, syllables, onset, and rime in words (Torgesen & Mathes, 1998; Gellert & Elbro, 2017). PA is the understanding of oral language segments (units of word structure), including syllable recognition. PA is an umbrella term that involves the main parts of language structure: phonemic awareness and phonics (Barrnett, 2015). Phonemic awareness is the recognition of individual sounds; it focuses on smaller units in the auditory language, whereas phonics focuses on the letter-sound correspondence (Donat, 2006).

Naturally, children go through several stages when they develop phonological awareness, beginning from listening skills, rhyming abilities, alliteration, syllable recognition, blending, segmenting, and manipulating phonemes (Donat, 2006). According to Donat (2006), these developments occur in the stages between preschool and the second grade. Children learn rhyming skills at the age of three: alliteration, the recognition of words that begin with the same sound, is the skill that follows, emerging in the preschool stage (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004).

According to Stanovich (1994), educators argue that phonological awareness is a continuum from basic and early phonological awareness, represented in rhyme and syllable recognition, to deep sensitivity, represented in phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the most challenging aspect for children to develop (Donat, 2006). Researchers define phonemic awareness as the consciousness and recognition of sounds, or the ability to recognize and distinguish between different individual sounds (phonemes) and split or blend them in spoken words (Armbruster et al., 2006; Hougen, 2012). The phoneme is the smallest unit in the oral language that distinguishes one word from another. For instance, the sound of the letter 'P' is a phoneme because it gives a different meaning in words (tag – tap) (Donat, 2006).

While educators debate how children should start learning reading, studies over the past decades indicate that, for early reading development, PA and phonics skills are fundamental (Morrow, 2011; Pressley, 2006; Chall, 1967). PA has long been considered as a strong predictor for reading acquisition – more than any other predictor, such as vocabulary, listening comprehension, and IQ (Cárnio, Vosgrau, & Soares, 2017; Driver et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2013; Verhoeven & Leeuwe, 2011; Kroese, Mather, & Sammons, 2006; Bos et al., 2001; Alexander & Lyon, 1997; Padelford, 1995; Perfetti & Rieben, 1991; Adams, 1990; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1989; Juel, 1988; Fox & Routh, 1975). It is evident that children who cannot recognize or manipulate sounds in spoken words, which appears in processes like blending, segmenting, and deletion, will suffer from poor reading in the future (Anthony & Farncis, 2005; Hatcher et al., 2004; Share, 1995; Snowling, 1998; Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004). The children who are most prepared for formal learning of reading are the ones who have a high level of phonological awareness (NRC, 1999). Therefore, reading tasks will be challenging for children who lack or have limited phonological awareness skills in the early stages (Schuele & Boudreau, 2008; NRP, 2000; Torgesen, 1998, 2004).

According to Chard and Dickson (1999) and Liberman and Shankweiler (1989), phonemic awareness is a fundamental step for alphabetic principle comprehension, which underlies the print system. In other words, to understand the alphabetic principle, children need to apply their knowledge of the 44 phonemes in different skills, including word analysis, spelling, and phonics (Harris & Smith, 1976; Welsford & Whitten, 1999). Sine phonological awareness deals with oral language, children in this stage are not required to

know the letters' names. The connection between speech and print is established in a later stage.

2.8.3 Letter Knowledge – Phonics

Another critical aspect of the English language stemming from phonological awareness is called phonics, which creates a relationship between alphabets (graphemes) and their corresponding sounds (phonemes) (Armbruster et al., 2006; Fox, 2010; Hougen, 2012). It is known as the ability to identify individual letter symbols or a group of letter symbols and their corresponding sounds (e.g., /f/ and /ph/) (Levin & Ehri, 2009). Levin and Ehri (2009) stated that phonics is a crucial step towards learning to read. Children's reading ability could be improved by focusing on phonics training because phonics emphasizes the relationship between letter and sound and thus enhances the child's ability to decipher the correspondence between the two elements (Harris & Hodges, 1995). To help children achieve the main goal of the reading process (comprehension), letter knowledge is primarily needed by decoding words (Foulin, 2005). By the end of grade 2, children can master all phonological and phonics skills (Donat, 2006).

According to Muter, Hulme, Snowling, and Taylor (1997), a significant correlation between letter knowledge and learning to read the English language has been reported in the literature. Chall (1967) asserts that phonics is essential in teaching reading because it provides students with explicit decoding tools. Moreover, this process fosters the ability to achieve fluency in reading. Gough and Tunmer (1986) affirmed that children who learn reading using phonics would perform excellent decoding for any strange words in isolation accurately and quickly. Consequently, children would have better reading skills. For instance, when children are introduced to a new word such as 'sun,' teachers first train

them how to pronounce each letter individually /s/ - /u/ - /n/, and then they teach students to combine those sounds to read the whole word. The recognition of letter-sound correspondence leads to successful decoding skills, which can be a strong prediction for children's reading achievement in the future (Earle & Sayeski, 2016). Phonics provides the opportunity for children to become independent readers through the decoding process; it is necessary to develop children's abilities to read without assistance from teachers or other adults (Share,1995). The literature on reading instruction proposes that teaching phonics to develop reading skills should occur in the kindergarten stage or even in the preschool stage.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

This study provides research-based evidence from the perspective of Qatari governmental school EFL teachers regarding how early grade children should be taught reading skills in the best way. The study is grounded in the National Reading Panel (NRP) report (2000) and consequent studies that view phonemic awareness as a main part of reading skills development.

NRP (2000) is a funded project that was established in the United States in 1997. It was an evidence-based assessment that provided valuable suggestions on five core domains for producing literate children: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Such research-based evidence emphasizes the priority of teaching phonemic awareness and phonics in the early stages of learning reading. The purpose of the report was to assess the existing literature on teaching reading approaches to find the best approach to reading instruction. It examined and analyzed a total of 52 experimental and quasi-experimental studies on phonemic awareness instruction. These studies were

conducted under different conditions, and the report findings revealed that phonemic awareness instruction was much better than any alternative strategy of reading instruction.

NRP (2000) also conducted another meta-analysis, reviewing 75 experimental and quasi-experimental studies on systematic phonics that appeared after 1970. The meta-analysis received much attention from educators because it provided solid evidence on the effectiveness of phonics for reading outcomes. The findings showed that systematic phonics instruction improved children's reading performance more than all methods used for teaching the control group. It greatly impacted children's reading skills and spelling growth in the kindergarten and grade-one levels. Additionally, the report showed that teaching phonics is useful for kindergarten students up to grade six, as well as for teaching disabled children, and it also helps all students regardless of their socioeconomic status.

As the NRP (2000) reported, teaching phonics early in kindergarten is much more effective than introducing phonics after grade one. The report indicated that children in kindergarten and grade-one levels would highly benefit from phonics instruction. In this developmental stage, children have the potential to learn phonemic awareness and phonics. Additionally, it recommended that teachers be aware of basic language constructs in an explicit and structured way, to effectively teach decoding skills for all early graders.

2.10 Gaps in Existing Literature

To date, significant contributions have been made in different contexts toward understanding early years EFL teachers' knowledge and beliefs about phonemic awareness and phonics (Nazari & Xodabande, 2020). However, there are no studies conducted in this scope in the context of Qatar. There is a lack of evidence supporting the extent to which

EFL teachers have knowledge about fundamental aspects of English language structure and what beliefs they possess concerning beginner reading instruction in the context of Qatar. In this exploratory study, the researcher has addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the knowledge of female early-year EFL teachers about phonological awareness and phonics. It also investigates their beliefs regarding phonics instruction for early graders in government schools in Qatar.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to examine teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics. It also investigates female EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of phonics in reading instruction for early graders. The study was conducted in government primary schools and kindergartens in Qatar. In this chapter, the researcher will present the explonatory mixed methods that were used in this research and how it allowed for utilizing the questionnaire and the interview for collecting data. This chapter will discuss the population, sampling methods, research design, instruments, validity, reliability, data collection, and procedures of the study.

3.2 Population

This research takes place in government primary schools and kindergartens in Qatar. Primary schools have six grades, starting from grade one and ending with grade six. English language teachers in the early grades may have classes from either G1 or G2 levels, and they may teach both. Kindergartens are composed of KG1 teachers who teach four-year-old children and KG2 teachers who teach five-year-old children. Some teachers may have both KG1 and KG2 classes at the same time. According to the Teachers Affairs Office of the MOEHE, the total number of female English language teachers in G1, G2, and all kindergartens is approximately 413 teachers during the 2020-2021 academic year. Of this population, 11 teachers are male and 402 teachers are female.

3.3 Sampling Methods and Techniques

According to Wagner (2015), sampling is a significant issue for conducting research. Due to the difficulty of reaching all members of the population, the researcher surveyed a total of 142 female EFL teachers (see Table 1) from government primary schools and kindergartens in Qatar, which is 35.3% of the population. In this first phase, the researcher tried to reach the greatest number of teachers from all schools to be representative of the population. Participants shared the same professional characteristics, as all of them were teaching EFL for non-native early graders and they all were female.

A total of 142 female EFL teachers participated in the quantitative phase (35.3% of the total population). Their teaching experience ranged from 1 year (9.2%) to 11 years and above (31.2%). Most of the participants (64.8%) had a bachelor's degree in education, while 18.3% held a bachelor's degree in non-education, 9.2% had post-graduate qualifications (i.e., diploma or master's degree), and only 7.7% of teachers graduated from a community college in Qatar. In response to which grade level they teach currently, KG1 teachers accounted for 21, KG2 teachers accounted for 36, and teachers of both KG1 and KG2 accounted for 18. Regarding early school grade levels, 23 respondents were teaching grade-one students, 22 respondents were teaching grade two, and 22 participants were teaching both grade-one and grade-two students. The table below shows a summary of the participants' demographic data.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

		n	Column N %
Education level	Community College	11	7.7%
	Bachelor in Education	92	64.8%
	Bachelor (Non-BEd)	26	18.3%
	Dip and Master Graduate Program	13	9.2%
Present Teaching grade level	KG1	21	14.8%
	KG2	36	25.4%
	KG1 and KG2	18	12.7%
	G1	23	16.2%
	G2	22	15.5%
	G1 and G2	22	15.5%
Years of teaching experience for K-2 grade levels (including this year as a full year)	1 year	13	9.2%
	2-5 years	33	23.4%
	6-10 years	51	36.2%
	11+ years	44	31.2%
Total		142	100.0%

In phase 2, the researcher interviewed (n=10) female teachers to explore how they rate their knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics and to assess their beliefs regarding learning to read. In this phase, the researcher targeted experienced teachers who have been teaching for more than five years in Qatar. Participants came from different cultures and countries and they had different academic qualifications. Four participants had experience ranging from 6 to 10 years in teaching reading, while 6 participants had more than ten years of experience. Of all participants, six graduated from education college, and four majored in English language literature. Also, 4 participants had post-graduate education or similar accreditation. It is important to bear in mind that, as mentioned earlier,

the participants received their qualifications from different universities in various countries (Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, UK, China).

3.4 Research Design

There are various kinds of research designs used to conduct research, such as qualitative research design, quantitative research design, and mixed methods research design. In this study, the researcher followed a mixed methods research design to answer the research questions. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), using different research methods can solve the limitations of specific methods, and together they complement each other. Additionally, researchers outline that the advantage of using mixed methods is to triangulate the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009; Creswell, 2003). The researcher can converge operations through triangulation, which also facilitates maximizing the validity of the data by double-checking from more than one source.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), six types are included in the mixed methods research design: exploratory sequential design, explanatory sequential design, convergent parallel design, embedded design, multiphase design, and transformative design. This descriptive study follows the sequential exploratory research approach (Figure 1), which is widely used when the researcher needs to investigate deep information about a specific topic. The researcher collected data through two separate stages: quantitative followed by qualitative. While the researcher might gather a lot of information using the quantitative method, more details, explanations, and in-depth information can be collected from participants through the qualitative research method, using one-on-one interviews. To gain informative insights from the subjects and better understand their beliefs regarding

reading instruction, the researcher carried out interviews with ten purposefully chosen participants. This phase is essential and could be described as adding salt to the tasteless meal of quantitative results.
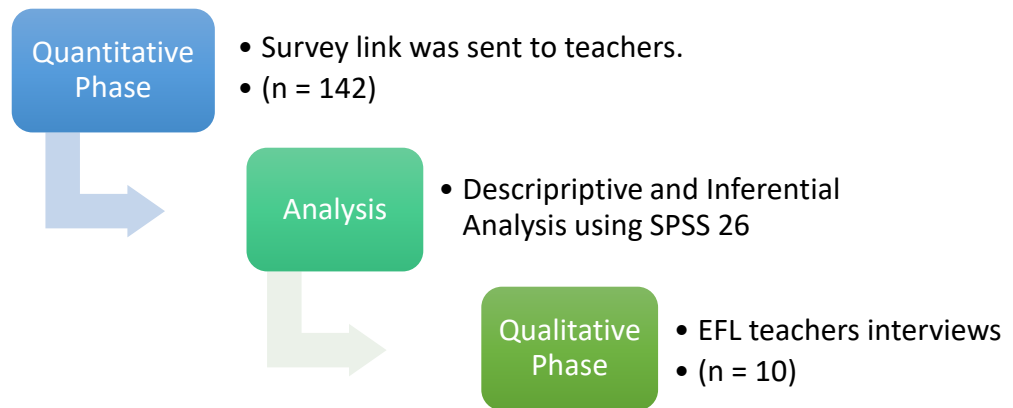
Figure 1. Phases of the Study

3.5 Procedures

Before implementing the study, the researcher considered the ethics of conducting research. The literature review and methods were deployed to collect information on the research topic. The investigator developed questions to ensure that correct information was collected, evaluated, and inferred. The investigator used a variety of databases as sources of information, including Google Scholar, books, articles, journals, and the internet, to conduct literature reviews and gather significant information on the research topic.

Then, the researcher submitted the research proposal to Qatar University's International Review Board (QU-IRB) to obtain ethics approval before beginning the study. Approval from the MOEHE was also obtained to get access to school teachers and

reach the intended participants. After receiving IRB and MOEHE approvals, the researcher started collecting data using a questionnaire and interviews.

The researcher prepared the online survey using the Survey Monkey website and sent it to early-year teachers who belong to the MOEHE via WhatsApp and email, with a brief explanation of the research objectives and its population.

After collecting data, the researcher computed the mean scores, standard deviations, and response percentages using the SPSS program to analyse the data and identify to what extent female EFL teachers in Qatari government schools are knowledgeable about phonological awareness and phonics. EFL teachers' beliefs regarding teaching reading were computed as well.

After analysing the survey, the researcher interviewed experienced teachers from different grades (KG–G2) to help triangulate the data. Triangulation refers to the use of two research methods in one study for data collection (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018). To conduct the interviews, the researcher contacted ten participants via email, giving them a consent form and including brief information about the study (see Appendix B). This step is important for participants to have more details about the purpose of the study they are participating in, their rights, confidentiality, and how much time it will take. After securing participants' agreement, the researcher messaged them through WhatsApp to set a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview online via the Teams application. The meeting times ranged from 14 to 30 minutes. Afterward, the researcher manually transcribed all of the interviews and sent the transcripts to the participants to avoid bias, ensure their reliability, and give participants the right to do any modifications. In the end, the researcher carried out an inductive analysis of the data to acquire the findings and results of the study.

Following this process, the researcher addressed the findings of the research, reporting the quantitative and qualitative data in a narrative presentation and tables. Then, the researcher interpreted and analyzed the results in light of the theoretical framework and the literature review. The period of the study covered the first and second terms of the 2020-2021 academic year. Throughout the study, female EFL teachers from all early grades (K–2) took part in the survey.

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

The researcher used a questionnaire and an interview for the data collection. The distribution of the survey was through email and WhatsApp in an online format using the Survey Monkey website to K–2 female EFL teachers who belong to the MOEHE. It included the research title, research purpose, and target participants. The time required for the participants to complete the survey was about 25 minutes. The researcher obtained all of the primary schools' contact information from the MOEHE and sent the survey to the intended schools' administration via email, asking them to encourage their early-year EFL teachers to participate and respond to the survey. The researcher also visited 13 different schools and kindergartens to personally meet with EFL teachers and encourage them to participate in the study. The personal visit is important because people interact better with personal visits than contacting via email, WhatsApp messages, or phone calls (Twum, Okyere & Secker, 2012). After a month, the researcher contacted the primary schools and kindergartens administrators again, individually, through phone calls, to remind them of the survey and to ensure that their EFL teachers had already received it. The number of schools contacted was 121 primary schools and kindergartens, out of which 283 responses

were received from teachers. However, only 142 respondents completed the survey, and 141 responses were missing. Teachers were given two months to respond to the survey (1 November 2020 to 1 January 2021).

After collecting and analysing the quantitative data, the researcher collected qualitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten female K-2 expert EFL teachers to further explore their perspectives on the topics examined. The researcher intended to get substantive information from experienced teachers; 15 teachers were invited to participate in the interview and only ten teachers accepted. The researcher attained participants' permission to audio record their answers for later content analysis. Participants were informed that if they refuse audio recording, the researcher will take notes during the interview. The interviews were conducted at the teachers' preferred time on the Team platform. The reason behind choosing this platform is that teachers were familiar with it, it is free, and it has a recording option. Each interview took approximately 20-30 minutes. After conducting the interviews, the researcher reflected on them, reviewed the common responses, coded the responses, and classified them into themes.

3.7 Research Instruments

In this section, the researcher provides information regarding the instruments used in this study to collect the data. As the study utilized a mixed research design, the researcher used the instruments of a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and interviews. The information regarding these instruments is presented below.

3.7.1 Questionnaire

Since the researcher intended to reach a large number of participants (approximately 402 female teachers) within a limited timeframe, a survey was the most appropriate tool for data collection. After reviewing instruments used in previous studies (e.g., Westwood, Knight, & Redden, 1997; Bos, et al., 2001; Kostopoulou, 2005; Dow & Baer, 2006; Mahar & Richdale, 2008; Falzon, 2012; Sandvik, van Daal, & Adèr, 2014), the researcher combined pre-existing knowledge assessments and teacher literacy beliefs questionnaires from research on teaching literacy that examines teachers' knowledge about phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics (Bos, et al., 2001). Another questionnaire was also used to explore teachers' beliefs regarding the use of phonics in reading instruction (Authors, Westwood, Knight & Redden, 1997).

The advantage of adopting pre-existing tools is to facilitate the comparison of findings, especially when it is the first time such a study has been conducted in Qatar. The researcher combined two tools because there was no existing tool that covers both areas (knowledge and beliefs) to answer the research questions. The reason behind choosing the Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language tool (Bos et al., 2001) is that, although it covers the same ground as the previously mentioned instruments, it is more detailed and comprehensive and uses simple and clear language. The researcher also chose the Teachers' Beliefs About Literacy Questionnaire (TBALQ) (Westwood et al., 1997) because it has been extensively evaluated before it was used officially, and it is more relevant to the research questions.

The survey consisted of 33 items. Section 1 was the Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language adopted from the study of Bos et al. (2001), which

consists of a 20-item multiple-choice assessment – e.g., Which word contains a short vowel sound? (a) treat (b) start (c) slip (d) cold (e) point. Twelve items examined phonological awareness (items 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18), and eight items asked about phonics (items 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 19, 20). The authors adapted the survey items from several sources.

Section 2 of the study included the TBALQ, which was adopted from the study of Westwood et al. (1997). The authors drew on previous literature to construct statements that either reflected the fundamental concepts upon which the phonics instruction and are whole-language approach founded or represented evidence from relevant studies concerning the development of reading learning. Although the original TBALQ (Westwood et al., 1997) consisted of the three sections of reading instruction, writing instruction, and general belief self-rating, the second section was not included in the current survey as this exploratory study focuses on reading instruction. Items 21-32 of the current survey were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, scored from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The last question (#33) asked participants to rate their beliefs position on a scale from 1 (children should be taught in a highly structured way) to 7 (children should be taught in an unstructured way). The survey also gathered demographic data, including qualifications, grade level of teaching, and years of experience. It was distributed via a Survey Monkey link that was sent to teachers by WhatsApp and email.

3.7.2 Validity

The survey combined two previously existing questionnaires, the Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language (Bos et al., 2001) and the Teachers' Beliefs

About Literacy Questionnaire (TBALQ) (Westwood et al., 1997). For the knowledge assessment, the researcher considered the content and discriminant validity. To ensure the content validity and the appropriateness of the assessment for the Qatari setting, a panel of three experienced university professors in the field of English language instruction was consulted. All of them agreed and accepted the tool with no changes. Additionally, the discriminant validity of the assessment was computed using an independent sample t-test to check whether it distinguishes between individual differences of high or low levels of knowledge among female early-year EFL teachers. The assessment results were divided into three levels: weak, moderate, and advanced. Then, the researcher compared the participants' highest and lowest mean scores and found that there are statistically significant differences between them (t=22.695, P=0.000). This indicated that the assessment was successful because it was able to identify participants who had accurate knowledge and participants with poor undemanding of the intended areas.

For the TBALQ (Westwood et al., 1997), the authors considered two aspects of validity: content validity and concurrent validity. To ensure that the statements were representative of all aspects of the measured domain (content validity), including teachers' beliefs about early reading instruction, the researchers constructed items from the recent literature that represented fundamental aspects of the whole-language approach and the phonics approach. The authors also referred to educational literature that focused on how children learn reading, and they administered the survey twice to 30 experienced educators. According to their feedback, the authors removed some items and rewarded some items for increasing the clarity. For the current study, to ensure that the instrument is valid in the context of Qatar, the TABLQ was presented to three university professors and researchers

in the field of English language, and they did not comment on or adjust any items of the survey, showing that they agreed with the appropriateness and clarity of all mentioned items.

3.7.3 Reliability

The survey consisted of two sections: knowledge and beliefs. For the knowledge section, the original knowledge assessment had an overall internal consistency of 0.60 Cronbach's alpha (Bos et al., 2001). For the current study, the researcher double-checked and computed the internal test reliability using Cronbach's alpha, with a result of 0.64, similar to the original study. For the TBALQ instrument, the survey's internal consistency coefficient was 0.75 (Westwood et al., 1997). For more endurance, the researcher computed the TBALQ's internal reliability for the current study and found the Cronbach's alpha coefficient value (0.80) to be acceptable.

3.7.4 Interview

After analysing the online survey, the researcher conducted interviews as the next stage of data collection. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), interviews can add significant value to educational research approaches because they directly obtain rich and in-depth data from the participants. Specifically for this study, the nature of interviews contributes to a better understanding of teachers' opinions, perspectives, and attitudes regarding the topic. There are three kinds of interviews that researchers can conduct, according to the nature of the study and research questions: structured or standardized interviews, semi-structured interviews, and loose or unstructured interviews.

In the current study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility by asking open-ended and structured questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). This format encourages follow-up questions to avoid misconceptions, request further data, or confirm an interviewee's points of view by echoing them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009; Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012).

Although face-to-face interviews have long been the conventional way to conduct interviews (Opdenakker, 2006), the online interview technique is also commonly used in qualitative research, and it has recently become the norm due to the recent circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated concerns of social distancing. The researcher found MS Teams to be the most convenient and common platform for teachers in the MOEHE and used it to conduct one-to-one interviews.

The researcher purposefully selected ten female EFL teachers from ten schools and kindergartens to participate in the interviews. The purposive sampling criterion was teaching experience above five years, to receive quality feedback, authentic responses, and overall credibility (Etikan, 2016). Experienced teachers are exposed to the curriculum and reading materials, and they have more experience in teaching reading than novice teachers. Therefore, experienced teachers could provide more substantial information, as their beliefs were developed through their teaching experience. This is consistent because beliefs normally take time to be developed; therefore, with more years of experience, teachers realize the importance of phonics in literacy instruction (Anthony & Francis, 2005). The participants came from various cultures and contexts in which English is a foreign language and a first language. Also, they had different qualifications and academic backgrounds.

Interview questions were constructed based on the results of the quantitative phase (questionnaire), and they highlighted the two domains of the study. The interview consisted of the following questions:

1. How would you rate your knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics?

2. How did you know and learn about phonological awareness and phonics?

3. Do you believe it's essential for teachers to be knowledgeable and experienced in teaching reading in the early years?

4. How do you see the difference between beginning and later reading instruction?

5. How do you see responsibilities in teaching reading in English as a foreign language in the early stages in Qatar?

6. How important are illustrations and teaching phonics in beginning reading instruction? Why?

3.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to obtain valuable information. In the present study, the researcher has collected qualitative and quantitative data; therefore, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. To analyse the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, the researcher used frequency analysis with the help of SPSS. Using frequency analysis, the researcher analyzed the respondents' responses regarding the EFL teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the development of reading skills for early graders in Qatar public schools (Flandrin, 2018). Furthermore, the researcher conducted reliability

testing of the instruments used in the study. The instrument's reliability testing was done using Cronbach's alpha and t-test with the aid of SPSS.

For the knowledge assessment, the researcher computed the raw score (0 or 1) for the item responses as either right or wrong; each correct answer was worth one point. The researcher analyzed both overall assessment scores and individual item scores by grouping them into two descriptive categories: phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics. This was to determine the level of knowledge that participants had in terms of both types. Moreover, descriptive analyses for items of reading instruction beliefs in the TBALQ concentrated on standard deviations, range, mode, and means. The researcher removed all missing responses.

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis is considered the most important method of analyzing qualitative data obtained from interviews (Gavin, 2008) because it is very flexible and can easily be used with all types of qualitative data. Furthermore, this method is relatively quick and easy to learn (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and the result obtained from the thematic analysis can be communicated to practitioners, policymakers, and the educated general public without any major difficulties.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

To follow ethical standards in conducting this research, the researcher first submitted the research proposal and relevant forms to QU-IRB to obtain ethics approval before the research began. Importantly, permission was obtained from the MOEHE to run the intended study in the government primary schools and kindergartens. In the research

process, the privacy of all participants is maintained, and no participant was forced to take part in this research. Respondents were provided with a brief description of the study's aims, and their consent was obtained. Furthermore, the research does not pose any harm to any of the respondents. To keep participants from any harm due to the spread of COVID-19, the researcher conducted all of the interviews online. The questionnaires were also sent online. The data collected are only used for this research, and the participants' anonymity is preserved. When the study was completed, the researcher disposed of the data.

CHAPTER 4: DATA RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings according to the two main topics of the study: EFL female teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and their beliefs concerning the use of phonics in reading instruction. Reading is commonly the most significant challenge that children face early in their lives. The researcher believes that if children struggle with reading in the first and second grades, they are more likely to continue to struggle throughout their schooling experience and become at risk in later years (Snow & Matthews, 2016). To reiterate, this work stems from the researcher's belief that teachers' knowledge and beliefs shape good or bad classroom practices, which in turn might contribute to enhance or decline the literacy level of EFL children. Phonological awareness is knowing about sounds, hearing sounds, or something like manipulating sounds. Phonics refers to the sound and letter correspondence. The respondents' knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics ranged from moderate to low levels. Additionally, the study reports that teachers believe in the use of phonics in reading instruction for early graders.

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 26. In section one of the survey (see Appendix A), the researcher used the Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language survey (Bos et al., 2001) to collect data to answer the first research question (To what extent female EFL teachers in Qatari government schools are knowledgeable about phonological awareness and phonics?). The researcher used section one and section three of the Teachers' Beliefs About Literacy Questionnaire (TBALQ) (Westwood et al., 1997) to answer the second research question

(What beliefs do EFL teachers have regarding the use of phonics in reading instruction for early graders in Qatar public schools?). Finally, to maximize the validity of the results, and to collect data from more than one source, the researcher conducted ten semi-structured interviews after analyzing the survey results to gain first-hand information from participants.

4.2 Teachers' Knowledge: Quantitative Phase

The Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language (Bos et al., 2001) includes 20 multiple-choice questions worth 1 point. The responses were graded according to the following rule:

Category length = (The highest score – The lowest score) ÷ Knowledge assessment categories. (20-1) ÷ 3 = 6.33

The final grading is as follows:

Table 2. Weight Interpretation

Weighted Average	Interpretation
1 - 7.32	Weak
7.33 - 13.66	Moderate
13.67 - 20	Advance

The study addressed two main questions:

1. To what extent female EFL teachers in Qatari government schools are knowledgeable about phonological awareness and phonics?

2. What are the beliefs of female EFL teachers regarding the use of phonics in the early years of reading instruction in Qatari government schools?

To answer the first question, Table 3 shows the number of participants (n=142), the mean scores of the overall assessment, standard deviation, and the maximum and minimum earned scores. The items examine the aspects of phonological awareness and phonics. Results show that, out of 20 items, teachers scored approximately an average of 10 items correct, with a standard deviation of 3.37 (see Table 3). The table below shows that the maximum earned score on the assessment was 19, and the minimum was 3. The table below indicates that none of the teachers had scored zero on the test. However, none of them reached the total score of the assessment, either.

Table 3. General Performance on Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Knowledge Assessment	142	9.9718	3.37059	3.00	19.00

Table 4 demonstrates the three levels of knowledge according to the weight mentioned above, the number of participants in each level, the percentage of participants in each level, the chi-square value, and the significant value. From the data in Table 4, it can be seen that half of the respondents (n=71) scored between 8 and 13.65, which means that 50% of participants have an intermediate level of knowledge. While only 15.5% of participants were highly knowledgeable about the three aspects of language (n=22), 34.5% of them showed weak performance on the overall assessment (n=49) (See Table 4). Based on the chi-square value (25.451), with a significant value (0.000), we can conclude that most participant teachers were placed in the moderate level with the highest significant percentage in the knowledge assessment compared to the other two levels. This result could

be generalized to the whole population. In other words, the data revealed that 50% of the early-grade EFL teachers show a moderate level of understanding about basic concepts of language structure, including phonological awareness and phonics. This result is similar to the findings of Bos et al. (2001), where the mean score of pre-service teachers was 10.6. However, the overall level of teachers' knowledge in the current study is lower than the previously reported levels (M=12) of in-service teachers (Bos et al., 2001).

Table 4. Teachers results in Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language

	Observed N	Column N %	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Weak	49	34.5%		
Moderate	71	50.0%	25.451[a]	0.000
Advance	22	15.5%		
Total	142	100%		

The researcher analyzed the percentage of correct and wrong answers for each item under the two groups: phonological awareness and phonics (see Table 5 and Table 6). Concerning phonological awareness, Table 5 shows that more than 54% of teachers incorrectly answered an average of seven items related to phonological and phonemic awareness. Of the items in this category that participants answered incorrectly, six items showed statistically significant results (P≤.05) and one item (#3) about the sound /c/ deletion task had a highly significant value based on the chi-square value (59.2%, chi-square=1.380a, P=0.24). The question for which the majority of respondents scored the lowest was about the number of speech sounds in the word 'box' (85.2%, chi-square=64.901a, P=0.000). The rest six items are listed in order from the lowest to the

highest percentage including: reversing order of sounds in the word 'enough' (71.8%, chi-square=17.606a, P=0.000), reversing order of sounds in the word 'ice' (65.5%, chi-square=13.634a, P=0.000), mark the false item about phonological awareness (61.3%, chi-square=10.169a, P=0.001), how many speech sounds 'grass' (60.6%, chi-square=23.690a, P= 0.000), identify the second sound in the word 'queen' (54.9%, chi-square=6.338a, P=0.012).

On the other hand, more than 52% of participants answered only two questions correctly, with a significant level (P<.05) based on the chi-square value. These items are syllable recognition (68.3%, chi-square=7.211a, P=0.007) and identifying the pair of words that begins with the same sound (63.4%, chi-square=23.690a, P=0.000). Although more than half of the respondents correctly answered the remaining three items in this category, including questions about the definition of phoneme (69%), the number of speech sounds in the word 'eight' (63.4%), and digraph sounds blending in the word 'shoe' (52.8%), the statistical analysis shows that the P-value is large in these items (P>.05) and the chi-square value is not significant. Therefore, it cannot be proved whether teachers have a good understanding or not. However, they demonstrate a moderate level of knowledge about these aspects.

Table 5. Percentage of Teachers' Correct and Incorrect Answers on Phonological Awareness by Question

SN	Questions	Correct Answer (1)		Wrong Answer (0)		Chi	Sig
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %		
2	A pronounceable group of letters containing a vowel sound is a:	97	68.3%	45	31.7%	7.211[a]	0.007
10	How many speech sounds are in the word "eight"?	90	63.4%	52	36.6%	3.408[a]	0.065
16	Identify the pair of words that begins with the same sound:	90	63.4%	52	36.6%	23.690[a]	0.000
13	What type of task would this be? "I am going to say some sounds that will make one word when you put them together. What does/sh//oe/say?"	75	52.8%	67	47.2%	1.014[a]	0.314
14	What is the second sound in the word "queen"?	64	45.1%	78	54.9%	6.338a	0.012
3	What type of task would this be? Say the word "cat." Now say cat without the/c/sound.	58	40.8%	84	59.2%	1.380a	0.240
12	How many speech sounds are in the word "grass"?	56	39.4%	86	60.6%	23.690a	0.000
5	Mark the statement that is false:	55	38.7%	87	61.3%	10.169a	0.001
17	If you say the word, and then reverse the order of the sounds, "ice" would be:	49	34.5%	93	65.5%	13.634a	0.000
18	If you say the word, and then reverse the order of the sounds, "enough" would be:	40	28.2%	102	71.8%	17.606a	0.000
11	How many speech sounds are in the word "box"?	21	14.8%	121	85.2%	64.901a	0.000

Table 5 shows the percentages of respondents' correct and incorrect answers for the eight items related to phonics. It is apparent that more than 52% of teachers incorrectly answered an average of five items related to phonics. The highest percentage of incorrect answers was for item #19, which asked respondents to identify the word that does not have silent letters (67.6%, chi-square=27.070a, P=0.000). The remaining four items were identifying what represents the phonics reading method (57.7%), identifying voiced and unvoiced consonants (54.2%, chi-square=70.423a, P=0.000), defining consonant blending (54.2%, chi-square=10.169a, P=0.001), and defining digraph (52.1%). Further analysis shows that, of these items, two items (#6 and #9) had a highly significant value based on the chi-square value. This indicates that teachers have an intermediate level of knowledge about digraph and phonics terminologies.

On the other hand, what stands out in Table 5 is that the question for which most respondents correctly answered and scored the highest was: Which word contains a short vowel sound? (83.8%, chi-square=20.535a, P=0.000). Most respondents also correctly answered two more questions related to phonics with a significant value (P<.05). The items were identifying the sound of i in the word *tife* (70.4%, chi-square=19.042a, P=0.000) and identifying the soft c (70.4%, chi-square=4.761a, P=0.029).

Table 6. Percentage of Teachers' Correct and Incorrect Answers on Phonics by Question

SN	Questions	Correct Answer (1)		Wrong Answer (0)		Chi	Sig
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Chi	Sig
20	Which word contains a short vowel sound?	119	83.8%	23	16.2%	20.535[a]	0.000
7	If tife were a word, the letter i would probably sound like the i in:	100	70.4%	42	29.6%	19.042[a]	0.000
15	A soft c is in the word:	100	70.4%	42	29.6%	4.761[a]	0.029
9	Two combined letters that represent one single speech sound are a:	68	47.9%	74	52.1%	.254a	0.615
4	A combination of two or three consonants pronounced so that each letter keeps its own identity is called a:	65	45.8%	77	54.2%	10.169a	0.001
8	Example of a voiced and unvoiced consonant pair would be:	65	45.8%	77	54.2%	70.423a	0.000
6	A reading method that focuses on teaching the application of speech sounds to letters is called:	60	42.3%	82	57.7%	.451a	0.502
19	All of the following nonsense words have silent letters, except:	46	32.4%	96	67.6%	27.070a	0.000

4.3 Teachers' Knowledge: Qualitative Phase

In the questionnaire, 50% of respondents showed a moderate level of knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics. However, 34.5% of respondents appeared to have low and limited knowledge of the basic language structure. For a more in-depth exploration of teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics, the researcher interviewed ten teachers and conducted thematic analysis for the interviews. The researcher did this by coding the responses, creating themes, and finding similarities and relationships in the data. Two themes appeared throughout the thematic clustering related to teachers' knowledge:

- Teachers self-rating their knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics
- Teachers' responsibilities in teaching reading for early graders

4.3.1 Teachers' Self-rating Knowledge about Language Structure

Teachers are accountable for bringing quality reading instruction into their classrooms. However, this cannot happen if teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about the basic principles of language structure (Moats, 2009). Participants' ratings of their knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics ranged from simple to advanced. Only one teacher rated her knowledge as simple. She stated that the survey she had done was difficult and that she did not recognize the terms. However, she clarified that she loves teaching reading and that she is good at the practical side. Six of those interviewed reported that they have good knowledge but that they are not perfect, and three participants claimed that they have a high level of knowledge about these aspects.

Nevertheless, when asked the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics, the majority expressed a common misconception and failed to answer correctly.

Although teachers' answers on the phonemic awareness components were uncertain, only one participant – a native speaker from the UK – answered the question correctly: 'Phonemic awareness is knowing about sounds, hearing sounds or something like manipulating sounds around. Phonics is like the sound, and that is the letter for it'. EFL educators' failure to acknowledge the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics indicates that teachers do not have a basic understanding of how to teach reading. Therefore, they cannot provide appropriate instruction. This confirms similar thoughts of a respondent in the study of Anthony and Francis (2005): the respondent discussed issues about educators being mixed up about specific basics regarding phonemic awareness and phonics and could not connect that with the development of learners' reading skills. One would conclude that EFL educators disserve the learners and contribute to their failures rather than offer adequate instruction. Indeed, it is logical to expect that the educators' present knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics principles will be misrepresented, resulting in great confusion among children (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

4.3.2 Teachers' responsibilities in teaching reading for early graders

All of the interviewees noted that it is critical and important for teachers to be knowledgeable and experienced in phonological awareness and phonics when teaching reading for early graders. One of the respondents noted that governments in the western countries choose the oldest teachers to teach children in the early years because they are more experienced; early-grade teachers should be more experienced in teaching than any other teacher. This is supported by the findings of Alexander et al. (2008), who argued that, if the teachers do not teach phonics correctly, the child will not be able to read. Studying will only get harder and harder for students when they get older. This is because children

lack the basic strategies and skills of reading. One participant added that, if the teachers teach the reading strategies correctly, they will even see a four-year-old child trying to read. They will be able to read above their grade level, which will give them confidence. The participants reported some reasons for the importance of being a knowledgeable teacher mentioning that families do not support their children, children lack motivation and previous knowledge, and the class-time restrictions. Therefore, it's the teachers' responsibility to be knowledgeable in language structure to be able to deliver quality instruction.

4.4 Teachers' Beliefs: Quantitative Phase

For assessing teachers' beliefs about reading instruction, the researcher used section one and section three of the TBLAQ (Westwood et al., 1997). Section one of this questionnaire is comprised of 12 items regarding reading beliefs, coded to a rating scale from 1 to 5. All items are scored with Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Uncertain = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5. A total of five items in the TBALQ (1, 2, 3, 9, 11) reflect the whole-language approach (the top-down model), and the remaining seven items (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12) ask about phonics-based direct skills instruction (the bottom-up model). Participants were asked to choose from all descriptors that best characterized their beliefs regarding how children learn to read. Sections three of the TBALQ asked participants to self-rate their beliefs regarding how literacy should best be taught for early graders, on a scale from 1 to 7.

For the interpretations of the findings, average scores below three meant that participants' beliefs are more likely trending towards the whole-language approach. Average scores above three indicate that respondents favour the phonics approach and

consider it to be important in the beginning of reading instruction. The mid-range scores (almost M=3) represent the belief in integrating the main elements of both the whole-language and phonics approaches, (the balanced approach) in reading instruction.

For the TBALQ (Westwood et al., 1997), 125 participants completed all of the items. To answer the second research question, the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of the TBALQ are summarized in Table 7. The mean score was computed to find the central tendency for responses across the 12 items in this section. Table 7 shows that participants are more likely to agree with the effectiveness of the phonics approach in teaching reading (M=3.7, SD=0.45). On average, most respondents (74.1%) were shown to have a belief that supports the importance of the phonics approach in beginner reading instruction.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics from the TBALQ

	N	Mean	Weighted mean%	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TBALQ Reading Section	125	3.7053	74.1065	0.45997	0.04098

For more details, the researcher computed the mean, standard deviation, range, and mode for each item. Table 8 shows the participants' scores across items 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, which represent descriptors of the whole-language approach. The mean scores of all five items were above three, with four modes, which indicates that teachers disagreed with the whole-language approach. Looking at the data, teachers showed the strongest disagreement with item #2 in the reading learning beliefs (Children learn to read in the same natural way that they acquire oral and aural language skills), which scored (M=3.52, SD=0.969). Although

the mean score of item #9 (about the direct teaching of phonics) was slightly above three

(M=3.04), with a mode of two, the significant two-tailed score indicates that there is an

agreement with the statement (SD=1.274). However, this score does not reflect complete

agreement with the phonics approach; it is more likely that teachers favour the balanced

approach.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics from Whole-Language Approach Items on the TBALQ

	Items	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mode
Q1	There is very little difference between the skills needed by the beginning reader and those used by proficient readers.	4	3.40	1.272	4
Q2	Children learn to read in the same natural way that they acquire oral and aural language skills.	4	3.52	0.969	4
Q3	Devoting specific time to word study in isolation is undesirable since this practice decontextualizes a component skill of language.	4	3.44	0.881	4
Q9	Direct teaching of phonics is not necessary as children can learn all they need to know about the alphabetic code by being helped with their daily reading and writing activities and by observing others.	4	3.04	1.274	2
Q11	Proficient readers pay very little attention to the details of print when reading.	4	3.44	1.085	4

The remaining seven items (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12) demonstrate the phonics approach

(the bottom-up model). They describe beliefs about more structured and direct instruction.

Table 9 shows the mean, standard deviation, range, and modal scores of each item. All of

the items' mean scores were below three, with modes of one and two. This indicates that

teachers favoured the phonics approach and understood its use in beginner reading

instruction. Table 9 shows that item #7 (Beginning readers should be taught phonic skills)

had the lowest mean score (M=1.67), with the smallest standard deviation (SD=0.856),

which indicates the greatest agreement of participants was with the phonics approach in beginner reading learning.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics from Phonics Approach Items on the TBALQ

	Items	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mode
Q4	Teachers should select books for children to read based on the difficulty level of the text.	4	2.18	1.106	2
Q5	Learning to read should involve attending closely to the print on the page.	4	2.21	0.966	2
Q6	Flashcard drill should be used to build up children's sight vocabularies.	4	1.73	0.880	1
Q7	Beginning readers should be taught phonic skills.	4	1.67	0.856	1
Q8	Graded reading schemes using controlled vocabulary should be used in classrooms.	3	2.01	0.857	2
Q10	Sight vocabulary learnt in isolation does transfer to text reading.	4	2.47	1.025	2
Q12	For effective learning, literacy programs should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.	4	2.10	0.907	2

For the last question in the study survey, teachers rated their general beliefs position on a scale from 1 to 7 concerning how reading should be taught for early graders. The scale started from 1 (unstructured–child-centred) whole-language approach to 7 (highly structured–direct instruction) phonics approach. Table 10 shows the overall scores for the ratings (M=3.34, SD=1.760), suggesting that the 125 participants believe in using the phonics approach. They understand that beginner reading should be taught in a more structured and teacher-directed way rather than an unstructured one.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics from the Last Item on the TBALQ

Item	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mode
Q25 On the scale from1 to 7 below please select the number to indicate what you believe to be your position concerning how the first stages of reading and writing should be organized for young children, from child-centered and unstructured (7) through to teacher-directed and highly structured.	6	3.34	1.760	4

4.5 Teachers' Beliefs: Qualitative Phase

The quantitative phase demonstrated an overall agreement with the phonics approach in early-year reading instruction. However, the researcher conducted interviews to investigate teachers' beliefs about using the phonics approach in beginner reading instruction. After running the coding process, the researcher found three themes throughout the thematic clustering related to teachers' beliefs:

- The importance of teaching beginner readers through the phonics approach
- The importance of teaching beginner readers through the whole-language approach
- The importance of teaching beginner readers through a balanced approach

4.5.1 The importance of teaching beginner readers through the phonics approach

Regarding teaching formal reading in general, all participants agreed that it is very important for children to master reading skills. One interviewee said that children in their future years would be required to follow a curriculum, not mainly focusing on learning reading strategies. As Anthony and Francis (2005) confirm, if students miss learning reading skills in the early stages, there will be a big gap for them later. How important are

illustrations and teaching phonics in reading instruction for beginners? The qualitative phase showed that more than half of the participants (n=6) believe teachers should start teaching reading through phonics. One respondent argued that children should learn phonological awareness and phonics early; if they did not know the letters or how to blend and segment them, they would struggle in reading skills. Another respondent claimed: 'We can't teach reading without teaching letters' names, sounds, blending sounds, rhymes, consonants, illustrate all these concepts at the beginning, then, move further.' Therefore, one must focus on letters and words to make sentences at an early age. With time, this helps them discern meaning from written texts. Another respondent said that children might learn through the whole-language approach, but this method takes too much time and most students tend to fail in English subjects at this early age. This was supported by other participants who affirmed that phonics makes it easier, faster, and more enjoyable for children to learn reading skills. Teachers believe that reading instruction should be provided gradually in a direct way, such as by teaching letters, blending sounds, words, and sentences, and telling stories – not immediately giving them words or stories to read. One participant added that the phonics strategy would help children read any strange word they see. Participants believe that it is very important to illustrate basic English language structure concepts to build a strong foundation in learning how to read. Hence, phonics is a fundamental part that teachers have to focus on while teaching children in this early stage.

Finally, two participants suggested 'Jolly Phonics' as an effective intervention that would enhance children's learning to read. "I think when we teach reading, we have to do like the Jolly Phonics approach. If I have left alone in my class and I have enough information and training I think I would just be doing more jolly phonics with children".

4.5.2 The importance of teaching beginner readers through the whole language approach

As this section shows the participants' beliefs towards how reading should best be taught, it is notable that only one participant suggested that reading instruction should begin with the whole-language approach, by immersing children in a rich environment and enhancing social communication. This participant stated that, in this stage, teachers have to enrich the classroom environment with stories to help children memorize the word shapes, and teachers have to use the shared reading strategy and let the student follow the teacher's hand movements while she is reading. Later, after some time, teachers have to teach children phonics. The participant shared some limitations with the whole-language approach, saying that it is hard to follow it 100%. Still, educators have to provide appropriate situations for learning the English language everywhere, whether at home, school, or elsewhere. She added that we might support English language learning through the environment by telling parents that their kids have to practice English at home, reading anything, listening to conversations between parents in English, and so on. That is because class time alone is not sufficient for children to acquire the English language, and teachers have to try to help children acquire the English language through acquisition, not as direct learning. In the end, the only advocate of the whole-language approach stated that teachers might need to directly teach phonics in some cases, but this is not the main focus. Another participant perceived it in another way, arguing that children can learn through the whole-language approach, but they would master reading faster if they learned phonics skills. The participants' disagreement regarding teaching beginner reading using the whole-language

approach is evident when one participant said: 'I'm not with giving students words immediately and ask students to recognize them, words are not like colours so they can recognize them easily. If students learn all sounds and give them the sound in different positions (beginning, middle, end) of words, moving to blend and read words, after that they would be encouraged to learn the other things.

4.5.3 The importance of teaching beginner readers through the balanced approach

This is another theme that appeared in the interviewees' responses to the question: How important are illustrations and phonics in beginning reading instruction? The majority agreed with the importance of the explicit illustration of phonics. However, three participants did not show full agreement. Interviewees mentioned that illustration is essential, but, as teachers, we have to include stories – not only teaching letters separated from their context. One respondent argued that 'enriching the classroom environment with the language and indirect reading instruction should have a place but it cannot be fully. Actually, it has to be a mixture or a balance between them'. Another respondent clarified that, although much of the teaching time should be devoted to explicit phonics instruction, teachers should not rely on only one approach. Combining the two ways would be the best approach, because both have their advantages and disadvantages, and teachers need to use the advantages of the whole-language approach and of the phonics approach. A remarkable response mentioned that teachers should consider students' differences when teaching reading. In other words, the respondent believes that not all students will learn to read in this method. Therefore, teachers should consider differences within the class and use different strategies to match students' diverse needs in learning to read. The participants

confirmed that reading instruction should depend on the students' levels and ways of learning. One respondent argued, "Of course we cannot dispense the direct way of teaching letters and words, especially for kids since it is hard for them to learn language implicitly if they do not have the foundations of English language and exposed to the language anywhere in any way. However, I prefer to take parts from all methods according to my students' needs and abilities. I believe that following one approach might be achievable with a certain percentage of students but not all of them".

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

Teachers' knowledge of English language structure is a pivotal component of quality reading instruction and teacher proficiency (Pittman et al., 2019). Teachers' beliefs are also an important factor contributing to their proficiency (Sapon-Shevin, 2005a, 2005b) and influencing their choice of reading instruction method (Westwood et al., 1997). Based on this, it was important to explore early-year EFL teachers' knowledge about the basic principles of English language: phonological awareness and phonics. This study was also intended to explore EFL teachers' beliefs towards the use of phonics in beginner reading instruction. The researcher used a survey for data collection, and this was followed by interviews to attain more in-depth insights from the participants. In this chapter, the researcher combines the results of both quantitative and qualitative phases to discuss and explain them in light of the NRP (2000) framework and the previous relevant studies mentioned in the literature review. This chapter will also discuss the limitations and implications of the study, as well as recommendations for future research. Before presenting the findings of this research, it is important to consider that the findings reflect the participants' thoughts about their knowledge and beliefs within the context of Qatar.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent female EFL teachers in Qatari government schools are knowledgeable about phonological awareness and phonics?

2. What are the beliefs of female EFL teachers regarding the use of phonics in the early years of reading instruction in Qatari government schools?

5.2 Research Question One

To answer the first question, the researcher borrowed an assessment tool from Bos et al. (2001), which included 20 items: 12 items measuring phonological awareness and eight items examining phonics skills. Chapter 4 reported the results in detail. In general, the findings from 142 participants revealed that teachers had a modest level of knowledge (M=9.97) in the overall Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language. However, the most important finding to emerge from the analysis is that not a single respondent got all 20 items correct. Only 22 of the 142 participants (15.5%) demonstrated accurate knowledge of basic English language constructs, leaving the majority of participants with insufficient knowledge. This is similar to the findings of Alshaboul et al. (2019), who examined EFL teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness in Jordan (M=8.73, SD=2.54).

Although participants' overall assessment results show that they possess a considerable amount of knowledge, their performance on phonological awareness and phonics seems very low. Most of the participants (68.3% or fewer) got only three items correct out of 12, with a significant value below 0.05. Of the 142 participants, 119 got only 3 of 8 items correct in responding to questions about the phonics principle and its applications. Not surprisingly, the respondents had serious problems regarding phonemic awareness skills, as the majority of them (n=121) failed to correctly identify the number of speech sounds in the word 'box.' This might confirm that phonemic awareness is the most difficult skill in reading progression, representing advanced and deep sensitivity to sounds (Donat, 2006). The data from the knowledge assessment indicates that there is a shortage in basic language structure knowledge, and the results are similar in the two aspects

measured in this study. These aspects, for which most participants are lacking, are the foundation for early reading instruction; this undoubtedly influences the quality of reading instruction they can offer to the children.

Based on the survey results, participants found it easy to identify the short vowel sound, and they scored the highest in this question (83.8% correct answers). However, although teachers appeared to have background knowledge about the two aspects of language structure in the quantitative phase, the qualitative phase revealed that the majority of the participants do not have precise knowledge, as they failed to distinguish between phonemic awareness and phonics concepts. These results are not very encouraging. According to Alshaboul et al. (2019), teachers' inability to recognize the difference between the basic components of language (phonemic awareness and phonics) highlights a concern that teachers responsible for teaching early graders are not offering a rich environment and sufficient opportunities for learning to read. This in turn leads to ineffective reading instruction in a critical stage of learning.

Bos et al. (2001) initially used this instrument with pre-service and in-service teachers. The mean degree for the pre-service educators was more than 10 (M=10.6, SD=2.8), while in-service teachers scored 12 (M=12, SD=2.8). However, this study focused on in-service teachers. A comparison between the findings of Bos et al. (2001) and the results of this study show that the participants in this study scored lower (M=9.97, SD=3.37) than both pre-service and in-service educators. Unfortunately, the findings are congruent with what was evident in the recent literature – that teachers lack basic knowledge about the constructs of language, phonological awareness, and phonics (Fielding-Barnsley, 2010; Kelcey, 2011; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011a, 2011b;

Spear-Swerling, & Cheesman, 2012; Kennedy, 2013; Moats, 1994, 2009, 2014; Washborn, Mulcahy, & Musante, 2017, Pittman et al., 2019; Alshaboul et al., 2019; Wong & Russak, 2020).

An explanation for this result was illustrated from the qualitative phase of the current study, where ten teachers were interviewed after analysing the quantitative data. Of the participants, three said they are advanced in phonological awareness and phonics, while six rated their knowledge as moderate. One expressed that the knowledge assessment was difficult and challenging for her. When the researcher asked them about the definition of phonemic awareness and phonics, and what the difference between these concepts is, all of the participants were confused and mixed up the two principles, except for one, who said, 'Phonemic awareness is knowing about sounds, hearing sounds or something like manipulating sounds around. Phonics is like this the sound, and that is the letter for it' It could be argued that the positive response was because the only participant who gave the accurate answer was a native English speaker from the UK. However, this participant was uncertain about how much knowledge she possessed. Thus, she rated herself at a moderate level. The possible reason behind this shortage of knowledge is that most teachers did not receive any in-service training about these aspects of the language. Also, if they had studied it in university, they had forgotten. Four participants explained that they had studied language structure in university, but they graduated a long time ago and no longer remembered these concepts. The remaining six participants clarified that they did not study phonological awareness and phonics in university, and, if they knew anything, it was due to their interest and experience.

Another source of uncertainty for participants was that, as they clarified, they did not receive any training from the ministry concerning language constructs. They shared that everything they knew was through self-learning. In total, the majority of participants (n=7) confirmed that they did not receive any training from the MOEHE focusing on phonological awareness and phonics constructs. Since 6 of 10 participants did not study the basic principles of the English language in university, and 7 of the participants had not received training on these basic constructs, it is, therefore, possible that participants demonstrate weakness in the knowledge assessment. The interviewees' responses confirm the results of the studies mentioned in the literature review (Bos et al., 2001; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011a, 2011b; Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, Joshi, Martin-Chang, & Arrow, 2016), which proved that teachers might not have sufficient preparation and training to provide effective reading instruction.

Will this cause changes in teacher education and professional development programs in schools? Previous studies confirm a need for serious preparation and training programs for English language teachers (Zein, 2016). As discussed in the literature review, the International Reading Association (Isgar, 1999) suggested that teacher preparation programs should include three or more courses on reading instructional strategies and on how children develop their reading skills. Lehrer (1998) also suggested that in-service teachers should be trained and provided with reading specialists in schools to prepare them and maximize their knowledge and abilities of this complex subject.

5.3 Research Question Two

As this part of the study focuses on teachers' beliefs towards the use of phonics in beginner reading instruction, the researcher used section one of the TBALQ (Westwood et al., 1997), which describes beliefs related to the whole-language approach (the top-down model) and the phonics-based direct skills instruction (the bottom-up model). Scores below three mean that participants favour the whole-language approach, and scores above three represent an agreement with the phonics approach. However, the mid-range scores (almost M=3) reflect a belief tendency toward a balanced approach to reading instruction. The current study also included section three of the original instrument (TBALQ), which asked participants to rate their general belief position on a scale from 1 to 7, concerning how reading and writing should be taught for early graders. The scale started from 1 (unstructured–child-centred) whole-language approach to 7 (highly structured–direct instruction) phonics approach.

According to Alshaboul et al. (2019), beliefs have a strong role in steering the behaviour of individuals. The literature highlighted that, if teachers' beliefs are effective, it will be reflected in students' performance and achievements (Kelchtermans, 2009). In this regard, the NRP (2000) framework underpinning this study suggested that teachers should focus on five core domains for producing literate children: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The data gathered from participants in the quantitative phase regarding the overall TBALQ revealed that the greatest agreement was toward phonics instruction for early graders (M=3.7). Teachers clarified that emphasizing phonics in reading instruction at the early stage will foster reading proficiency, build self-confidence in children while reading, increase their motivation to

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read, and prevent reading failures in the future. These arguments align with the theoretical argument of NRP (2000), and the results of a variety of research are supportive to this stance, as it is presented in the literature review, such as with the Ph.D. dissertations of Seastrunk (2018) and Carroll (2016) which used the same instrument and concluded that teachers believe in the use of the phonics approach for literacy development (M=3.34).

The qualitative findings of the study also supported the view of the NRP and the existing literature about the importance of using phonics in reading instruction. In response to the question of how important illustrations and teaching phonics are in beginner reading instruction and why, six of the ten participants confirmed that it is essential to start teaching through phonics and that it is a fundamental part to focus on while teaching reading for children in this early stage. Only one participant suggested emphasizing communication and natural learning environments, following the whole-language approach. However, the remaining three participants preferred to combine and mix the components of both approaches. This may help us understand that, within this group of participants, a predominantly phonics approach to reading instruction is emerging with attention to the balanced approach.

These findings are surprising, considering that the MOEHE standards emphasize enriching the environment with the language and focusing on the whole-language approach, with little attention to phonological awareness and phonics instruction (as mentioned in Chapter 1). The reading curriculum of the MOEH does not follow the natural developmental stages of learning to read. However, they focus on comprehension rather than on phonics skills. Moreover, the MOEHE provided very few guidelines for early graders' teachers about their role in supporting children in developing phonological

awareness and phonics. Participants were aware of the ministry standards; as one said, 'The government provided kindergartens with things and materials that help students' learning. I think that the classes are well equipped for students to learn, the classrooms are big, the environment is good, but phonological awareness is missing in the curriculum'. Another participant shared: 'I see the ministry need memorization rather than the actual skills of reading; girls looking at the letters and blending them trying to make words.'

5.4 Conclusion

Educators and researchers worldwide contributed attentively to developing proficient readers and preventing illiteracy (Ponitz & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). The extent to which reading is supported in the early-year stages is dependent on teachers' knowledge and beliefs towards reading development. This study has investigated the degree to which teachers understand phonological awareness and phonics constructs. Also, this thesis has provided a deeper insight into what beliefs teachers have concerning the phonics approach in early reading instruction. The study affirms and extends the findings of Moats (1994) and complements subsequent studies (Carroll, 2016; Seastrunk, 2018; Alshaboul, 2019; Wong, Wong, & Russak, 2020).

This is the first research to study and document that a majority of female early-year EFL teachers in Qatar appear to have poor knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics. The knowledge assessment was difficult for some participants, which is evident in their scores. Additionally, like overseas educators, teachers in Qatari government schools are convinced by the positive results of the phonics approach for effective reading

instruction. Participants are aware of and understand the use of phonics, and they expressed the need for more phonics instruction in developing children's reading skills.

5.4.1 Research Limitations

There are limitations to every study, regardless of how well the study is conducted. The limitations of this study are identified as follows:

- The present study is primarily focused on teachers in Qatari government schools. Therefore, the findings of this study are confined to the government schools in Qatar. Being limited to Qatari government schools makes these findings less generalizable; they cannot be applied to international schools or government schools of any other region. However, this limitation can be overcome if this kind of study is conducted in different regions.

- This study was limited to early-year in-service female teachers (K-2) in Qatari government schools. Therefore, the upper-grade teachers (3-6), pre-service educators, and male teachers had no investment in the data collection.

- Another important limitation of this study is related to time. Time is the most important part of any research, as every study has to be conducted within a given timeline. Therefore, there is always a time pressure on the researcher. If the researcher had more time, she could have increased the sample size and collected data from more respondents.

- The researcher used the instrument of Bos et al. (2001), which focuses on phonological awareness and phonics assessment. A major limitation is that the researcher did not investigate writing development or the other reading skills mentioned by the NRP, including vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

- Additionally, the researcher used the TBALQ, which is comprised of beliefs about reading and writing instruction through the top-down and bottom-up models. However, this study used items from section one of TBALQ – beliefs regarding reading instruction only – and section three, which was a question about rating general beliefs. This is because section two of TBALQ, which concerned writing instruction, was not relevant to this study and the researcher did not want to expand the scope of the study due to the time restrictions.

5.4.2 Implications and Recommendations

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study suggests that reviewing and making changes in the reading standards of the MOEHE and the reading goals in the early-year English curriculum to emphasize phonics instruction would contribute to fill the gap between present and target proficiency levels of learners and produce better reading outcomes. The MOEHE should consider the amount of PA and phonics available in the early-year English curriculum. To produce proficient readers from an early age, it is critical to set reading standards that follow the natural developmental stages of reading skills moving from simple to more complex skills. Most importantly, teachers should be provided with clear strategies to follow and a guidebook on teaching phonics effectively as a part of their reading lessons. In the reading curriculum reform, it is equally important that teachers and practitioners be involved and given the opportunities to share their thoughts and good experiences.

Additionally, specialists should emphasize students' individual differences and include various activities in the reading curriculum paying attention to the balanced approach. This study suggests that following the natural developmental stages of learning

to read and focusing on phonics instruction may help prevent reading failure among children in Qatar. English language specialists in the MOEHE should support implementing the phonics approach in reading instruction and encourage teachers to focus on letter-sound correspondence teaching. The MOEHE must follow up teachers' practices in the classrooms to ensure that they link between theory and practice.

The study finding has important implications for designing teacher preparation programs. Despite the exploratory nature of the study, the findings recommend college principals and policymakers offer pre-service and in-service teachers intensive training programs and workshops to develop in-depth knowledge in basic language structure. Teachers' responses showed there is a lack in professional development or inconsistency of training on the language constructs. Therefore, it is logical for the MOEHE to improve the current professional development programs and provide teachers with a clear and planned path to improve their knowledge and practices in terms of reading instruction. A key policy priority should therefore be to plan for the long-term care of teachers' assessment to identify the starting point and follow up the progress of reading instruction over time.

Additionally, providing teachers with reading specialists and experts in their schools is significant to assist in-service teachers with training on how to teach reading for beginners, support maximizing their knowledge, observe them, test teachers regularly, and focus on teachers who miss the mark. While content knowledge about language structure does not necessarily mean proficiency and success, it is evident that teachers with solid knowledge can provide students with appropriate learning experiences and effective classroom practices. For future practice, continued efforts from the MOEHE, school

administrators, and coordinators are needed to make PA, phonics, and lifelong learning programs more accessible to teachers. There is a definite need for providing teachers with a platform to network and voice their best practices and share their recommendations on reading instruction. Rewarding teachers who create reading culture and invest time in improving their knowledge about PA and phonics and celebrating teachers' success in reading instruction will increase their motivation for self-learning and constant professional development.

Moreover, English language teachers are recommended to set goals to improve their language structure knowledge, search and study the critical domains in reading instruction, in particular, PA and phonics, and begin implementing them immediately in their classroom instruction. Teachers must update their knowledge and create opportunities to review the recent theories and most effective methods on reading instruction regardless of the formal training in the schools. This would serve as a foundation for teachers to understand how children learn reading skills. Thus, this knowledge would enrich teachers to provide effective learning experiences in the classrooms and improve the quality of reading instruction.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and the extent of preparation and professional development that are offered to educators in Qatar. As this study focused on in-service teachers, this would be a fruitful area for further research examining pre-service teachers' knowledge and beliefs and assessing education preparation programs and in-service teachers' professional development projects. A greater

focus on this area could produce interesting findings that account for the MOEHE, Qatar University, and other educational institutions.

Although this study provided fundamental data, several questions remain to be answered about the context of Qatar. For instance, to what extent is teachers' knowledge correlated to their beliefs? What are the real practices of reading teachers in the classroom? What are the challenges teachers confront in reading instruction? Is there any significant correlation between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices? How do demographic data affect these variables?

Finally, a natural progression of this work is to analyze the reading standards of the MOEHE for the early years and determine the amount of phonics instruction included. Also, more experimental studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of multiple interventions on children's reading achievements, such as Jolly Phonics.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Title: EFL teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the development of reading skills for early graders in Qatar public schools Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to examine the EFL female teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics, and their beliefs about the use of phonics in early reading instruction in the context of Qatar. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you will not be obliged to participate and if you decide to do so, you are free to withdraw at any time or to skip any question without having to give a reason and without consequences. For any information please, contact ta1206815@student.qu.edu.qa

Personal Background Information

Education level

- Community College

- Bachelor in Education

- Bachelor (Non-BEd)

- Dip. Graduate Program

- Master (M.Ed)

Present Teaching grade level

- Kindergarten 1

- Kindergarten 2

- KG1 and KG2

- Grade 1 teacher

- Grade 2 teacher

- G1 and G2

   Years of teaching experience for K-2 grade levels (including this year as a full year)

- 1 year

- 2-5 years

- 6-10 years

- 11-20 years

- More than 20 years

   Section 1: Knowledge Assessment (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski & Chard, 2001)

   Mark the best response to each question.

1. Which word contains a short vowel sound?

(a) treat

   (b) start

   (c) slip

   (d) cold

   (e) point

2. A phoneme refers to:

(a) a single letter

   (b) a single speech sound

   (c) a single unit of meaning

(d) a grapheme

3. A pronounceable group of letters containing a vowel sound is a:

(a) phoneme

(b) grapheme

(c) syllable

(d) morpheme

4. If *tife* were a word, the letter i would probably sound like the i in:

(a) if

(b) beautiful

(c) find

(d) ceiling

(e) sing

5. A combination of two or three consonants pronounced so that each letter keeps its own identity is called a:

(a) silent consonant

(b) consonant digraph

(c) diphthong

(d) consonant blend

6. Example of a voiced and unvoiced consonant pair would be:

(a) b-d

(b) p-b

(c) t-f

(d) g-j

(e) c-s

7. Two combined letters that represent one single speech sound are a:

(a) schwa

   (b) consonant blend

   (c) phonetic

   (d) digraph

   (e) diphthong

8. How many speech sounds are in the word "eight"?

(a) two

   (b) three

   (c) four

   (d) five

9. How many speech sounds are in the word "box"?

(a) one

   (b) two

   (c) three

   (d) four

10. How many speech sounds are in the word "grass"?

(a) two

   (b) three

   (c) four

   (d) five

11. What type of task would this be? Say the word "cat." Now say cat without the/c/sound.

(a) blending

   (b) rhyming

   (c) segmentation

   (d) deletion

12. What type of task would this be? "I am going to say some sounds that will make one word when you put them together. What does/sh//oe/say?"

(a) blending

   (b) rhyming

   (c) segmentation

   (d)manipulation

13. Mark the statement that is false:

(a) Phonological awareness is a precursor to phonics

   (b) Phonological awareness is an oral language activity

   (c) Phonological awareness is a method of reading instruction that begins with individual letters and sounds.

   (d) Many children acquire phonological awareness from language activities and reading.

14. What is the second sound in the word "queen"?

   (a) u

   (b) long e

   (c) k

   (d) w

15. A reading method that focuses on teaching the application of speech sounds to letters is called:

(a) phonics

(b) phonemics

(c) orthography

(d) phonetics

(e) either a or d

16. A soft c is in the word:

(a) Chicago

(b) cat

(c) chair

(e) none of the above

17. Identify the pair of words that begins with the same sound:

(a) joke - goat

(b) chef - shoe

(c) quiet - giant

(d) chip - chemist

18. If you say the word, and then reverse the order of the sounds, "ice" would be:

(a) easy

(b) sea

(c) size

(d) sigh

19. If you say the word, and then reverse the order of the sounds, "enough" would be:

(a) fun

(b) phone

(c) funny

(d) one

20. All of the following nonsense words have silent letters, except:

(a) bamb

(b) wrin

(c) shipe

(d) knam

(e) phop

Section 2: Teachers' Beliefs (Westwood, Knight & Redden, 1997)

For each of the statements 21 - 33 below please indicate the description which indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Uncertain - Agree - Strongly Agree

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. There is very little difference between the skills needed by the beginning reader and those used by proficient readers.					
22. Children learn to read in the same natural way that they					

acquire oral and aural language skills.					
23. Devoting specific time to word study in isolation is undesirable since this practice decontextualizes a component skill of language.					
24. Teachers should select books for children to read based on the difficulty level of the text.					
25. Learning to read should involve attending closely to the print on the page.					
26. Flashcard drill should be used to build up children's sight vocabularies.					
27. Beginning readers should be taught phonic skills.					
28. Graded reading schemes using controlled vocabulary should be used in classrooms.					

29. Direct teaching of phonics is not necessary as children can learn all they need to know about the alphabetic code by being helped with their daily reading and writing activities and by observing others.					
30. Sight vocabulary learnt in isolation does transfer to text reading.					
31. Proficient readers pay very little attention to the details of print when reading.					
32. For effective learning, literacy programs should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.					

33. On the scale from1 to 7 below please select the number to indicate what you believe to be your position concerning how the first stages of reading should be organized for young

children, from child-centered and unstructured (7) through to teacher-directed and highly

structured (1).

Least Structure   <   > Most Structure
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Immerse child in stimulating
reading/writing environment
No direct teaching

Directly instruct child in
component skills for
reading/writing
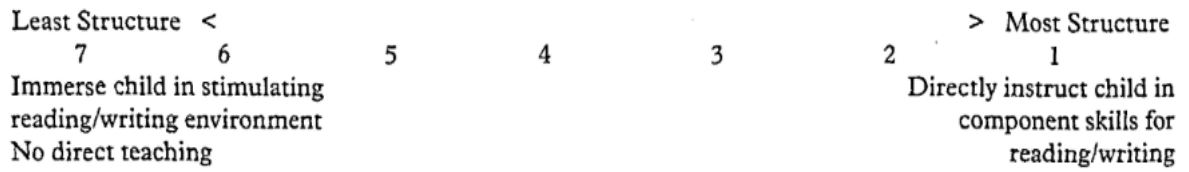
Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Title of Study: "EFL female teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the development of reading skills for early graders in Qatar public schools"

Purpose of the research: English as a foreign language (EFL) early year teacher, need to be sure that they are updated and using the most effective approach while teaching reading for early-year students. This study aims to investigate early year EFL teachers' knowledge about phonological awareness and phonics, and exploring teachers' beliefs concerning the use of phonics in early reading instruction in the context of Qatar.

Benefits and Discomforts/risks: The risks in this study are minimal. There are no foreseeable discomforts or dangers to you in this study. You are expected to benefit from reflecting on one's own teaching through participating in the research.

Procedures: You will participate in the study by answering interview questions in an online mode environment at your convenience of time and communication device preferences which may take 30-40 minutes. The audio recording will be used with your permission. There are no right or wrong answers on these questions but to understand your opinions. In case you do not wish to be audio recorded during the group interview sessions, we will respect that and only make notes instead of audio-recording. Any information or

personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you will not be obliged to participate and if you decide to do so, you are free to withdraw at any time or to skip any question without having to give a reason and without consequences. If at any point during the study you wishes to terminate the session, you may do so. Participation in the study will not in any way interfere with the teacher-administrator relationship or affect your professional assessment. And unwillingness to participate in the study and/or withdrawal from the study will not in any way interfere with the teacher and school administrators relationship.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by Qatar University Institutional Review Board.

The study is being conducted by Tahani Allouh from Qatar University.

For any question you may contact Tahani: ta1206815@qu.edu.qa

The approval number of QU-IRB is **QU-IRB 1410-EA/20**; If you have any question related to ethical compliance of the study you may contact this email at QU-IRB@qu.edu.qa.

Please read the above information carefully before you sign. By submitting this form, you are indicating that you understand and agree to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences.

- o **Yes**

- o **No**

I agree to have the interview audio recorded.

- o **Yes**

- o **No**