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Evaluation of phonics content in PTB primary grade text books and assessment schemes: Scope for technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) and assessment tools

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Abstract

This research aims to evaluate the phonics content in primary level textbooks by Punjab textbook board and the assessment schemes from the perspectives of their strengths and weak aspects for teaching and assessing phonics as an oral skill. The scope for the technology-enhanced learning and assessing tools is also highlighted as a supporting tool for phonics teaching in government school system for the learners and teachers simultaneously. Following a qualitative approach, the macro-evaluation of textbook was adopted through researcher made checklists. The English textbooks taught from Grade 1-Grade V were surveyed thoroughly to investigate the phonics related teaching and assessment activities given in each unit of book; the formative and summative assessment schemes were also probed into to explore the synchronization between teaching and assessment material. After listing the nature and mode of phonics related content in primary grade textbooks, 20 visual excerpts from textbooks and 9 assessment questions from LND and Grade 5 board sample paper were also discussed. The findings realized a serious discrepancy that phonics content in the textbooks despite being relevant and appropriate could be potentially exploited to be taught through alphabetic method in case of not supported with some audio-visual material. Assessment schemes related to phonics skill of primary grade learners also assessed it mostly through written exercises that can have serious impact on the teaching practices and methodology of teachers as they may tend to make the learners cram the phonics concepts instead of uttering the sounds and develop the sound-letter association. On the basis of these findings, recommendations are made to use technology-enhanced tools for phonics teaching at primary level as supporting materials and assessing it as an oral skill.

Keywords: textbook evaluation, Phonics teaching, assessment schemes, technology-enhanced language learning

Introduction

In the modern times, the primary level learners are usually exposed to phonics to teach the basic sounds of any language (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe 2005; Rose, 2006; Five from Five, 2019) that is an alternate teaching method in which consonant and vowel sounds (segmental features) are taught first by associating them to written letters and then how they are combined and blended to form words and develop the strong basis of intelligible pronunciation and reading skill of English (Nation, 2017; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). According to Buckingham (2018) “Phonics is knowledge of how the sounds we hear in spoken words are represented by the letters we see in printed words. Written English is an alphabetic code, and phonics instruction teaches children to ‘decode’ words in order to read them accurately and fluently.”

Two significant educational factors related to curriculum that can impact the teaching of pronunciation and phonics from different perspectives (Mcgregor & Reed, 2018) are as follow:

- a. Designing, Availability and exploitation of different instructional materials i.e., a) print materials including textbook, b) non-print audio-visual materials, c) materials in both print and nonprint forms (digital resources) especially for self-access purposes, and d) authentic materials (Richards, 2001; Tejada & Santos, 2014; Zielinski & Yates, 2014; Saed et al., 2021)
- b. to develop the knowledge and implementation of different types of formative and summative assessment schemes (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2017; Rahman, Kahfi & Dalimunthe, 2018; Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Baran-Lucarz, 2021; Qutub, 2021) is also a vital aspect of phonics and pronunciation teaching as the backwash effect towards the curriculum, teaching methods and practices of teachers and learning progress of learners by highlighting the gaps and their weak areas.

A new dimension in the learning scenario is the incorporation of digital or analogous technology (using apps, softwares and e-learning services etc) either on its own or alongside the traditionally used materials not only as a valuable but also an irreplaceable tool to support and enhance the leaning process (Housseine, 2021). The learners of any age group being ‘digital natives’ in 21st century are tech savvy and quite comfortable while using smartphones, tablets and computers and are more motivated to learn that integrates technology. For the teaching of

pronunciation and phonics, Chun (2021) contends that the computer and other technology-enhanced tools offer immense input, practice and repetition for personal and immediate response, in both listening and speaking activities by giving a visual display of pitch and tone movements. As phonics and pronunciation are oral skills, L2 learners must listen to the sounds of target language to develop a concrete letter sound relationship and closely watch the articulators to observe how these sounds are made. This audio-visual support can be best provided by TELL tools available on different digital platforms . Not only can learners self-access to learn and self-evaluate (Crews & Curtis, 2011), but they can also be helpful to develop the competence of non-native instructors and reduce their burden.

Background of the present study

In this background, phonics and pronunciation content was included in 2015-2016 from elementary classes till matriculation in the textbooks for Government schools in Punjab. Unfortunately, the primary grade learners of government schools still lack the required competence in phonics skill as they read a letter or word through alphabetic or whole word method and usually unable to identify the grapheme-phoneme correspondence (Malik, 2022); one of the major reasons of this incompetence can be the lack of phonics and pronunciation knowledge and training on the part of the teachers (Huma, 2013; GoP, 2017; SNC, 2020). At the same time, this situation requires the analysis and evaluation of materials and assessment schemes through which phonics content is taught and tested to identify their quality and strengths and point out the aspects where lacking elements can be filled with appropriate materials/strategies.

Developing phonics skill is about listening to sounds of alphabets and spelling combinations, developing its knowledge to blend the sounds to form words and segmenting them as well, so it should be assessed accordingly. In Punjab government schools' formative and first, second and annual summative assessments, a written test/exam is taken for the oral phonics skill as well that is the major drawback of assessment schemes at the primary level. From grade KG-4, teachers in government schools prepare the question papers for their learners in the first, second term and annual exams according to the syllabus covered and board exams of 5 class are taken.

In 2020, students were promoted to 6 class without taking board exams of class 5 due to COVID-19 and in 2021, only oral exam of 50 marks was taken through school-based assessment. Till 2019, English paper was divided into two sections, i.e., Objective paper of 50 marks having 25 MCQs and Subjective paper of 50 marks having open-ended questions like paragraph writing, story, application and comprehension. Another project of assessment initiated by the School Education Department and the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) since 2015 is a low-cost, tablet-PC based student assessment app - used by School Monitoring Officers during their monthly visits to each government school (Literacy and Numeracy Monthly Spot Assessment, 2021). The assessment app is linked to an extensive multiple choice question bank for English, Math and Urdu for Grade 3 students and each question is tagged with the relevant student learning outcomes (SLOs). In this process, 7 students are randomly selected from grade-3 to take spot-test consuming less than 5 minutes per student; this test is uniformly taken across Punjab on monthly basis assessing almost 329,000 students monthly and results of each tehsil and district are displayed through Literacy and Numeracy Monthly Spot Assessment website of the Government of Punjab and shared with education administrators via an online dashboard and SMS-alerts. The major intention of this drive is to assess the in-class student learning and teacher's presence and performance as the assessment of teacher is based on the result of learner. The practice tests for this assessment are available on LND-version 8 (Mobile App) for the teachers to help their learners practice for the spot-tests as Student Learning Outcomes are updated every month. Phonics knowledge based SLOs were articulate and identify initial blends for the month of December 2021, trigraph for October 2021 and digraph for September 2021. So, in order to evaluate the phonics content in textbooks and assessment schemes, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What kind of phonics content is presented in PTB primary grade textbooks and phonics assessment schemes to teach and assess learners' phonics competence as an oral skill?
2. Whether the phonics content and activities in primary grade PTB textbooks are presented in written or oral form?
3. Whether the phonics assessments in textbooks, LND assessments and board exams taken in written or oral form?
4. How far the presentation of phonics content in PTB primary grade textbooks is dependent on teacher and is it accompanied by supplementary audio-visual tools?

5. What is the scope of technology-enhanced learning and assessment tools with the current textbooks and assessment schemes?

Literature Review

Textbook evaluation is a widely studied phenomenon as on the basis of it, McGrath (2002) and Cunningsworth (1995) developed checklists to investigate the textbooks from almost 35 different angles. Ellis et al. (1998) differentiated between macro evaluation from the perspective of overall efficiency and effectiveness of program/project/content by seeing the presence and absence of different elements e.g., audio-visual aids and ways to improve it through impressionistic analysis as compared to in depth-analysis of contents or textbooks through micro-evaluation. Tomlinson (2013, p.3) suggested to be creative with textbooks as Moazam and Jodai (2014, p. 2405) emphasized the necessary element of textbooks to meet the goals. In Pakistan, Aftab (2012), Naseem, Shah, and Tabassum, (2015), Fatima, Shah and Sultan (2015), Syed, Quraishi & Kazi (2019), Baig et al. (2021) Tahir, A., Mahmood, R., & Haque, A. (2021) and Nomaan (2022) evaluated different secondary grades Pakistani government textbooks from the perspectives of four major skills, their alignment with curriculum outcomes and modality analysis; All these researches highlighted the need to incorporate meaningful activities for developing oral communicative competence according to the needs of learners. Habib et al. (2018), Elyakine (2019), Kralova and Kucerka (2019), Park and Yoon (2019), Millard, College and Hirano (2020) investigated the pronunciation content in ESL textbooks and revealed that these textbooks did not provide enough relevant material related to segmental and suprasegmental features; no information and appropriate activities related to places and manners of articulation, stress and intonation was provided. Thus, these books did not help the learners to improve their pronunciation. In this context, Islam and Mares (2003) suggest the teachers to adapt the teaching materials adding, deleting, simplifying, reordering and replacing material for teaching language in general or any specific skill.

Oral Formative and Summative Assessment of phonics and pronunciation is as important as its teaching (Brown, 2004; Harlen, 2005; Taras, 2005; McClam & Sevier, 2010; Wiliam, 2011; Herrera et al. 2015; Isaacs and Trofimovich, 2017); for this, the teachers need to be trained about assessment literacy (Davies, 2008; Henderson et al., 2015; Ahmed, Ali and Shah, 2019) making them aware of different options available for oral assessment i.e., reading aloud, giving free speech tasks, recording speech sounds for learners themselves and providing feedback as well

alongside other integrated speaking tasks (Celce Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010; Brinton, 2012; Lindström et al., 2013; Janczukowicz, 2014, Otterstedt, 2016; Heikkinen, 2018).

Methodology

Data Sources	Sampling	No. and nature of sample
<p>The qualitative content analysis of primary level textbooks by Punjab textbook board (PTB) and formative and summative assessments taken from LND assessment schemes and Grade 5 sample board paper was conducted through document analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Bowen, 2009; Wood et al., 2020) because it helps to evaluate, explain and decipher the contents of the selected documents. For the analysis of contents, textbook evaluation methodology was exploited; evaluation is a means to better comprehend the most effective, less effective and useless items in any program (Rea-Dickens, 1994, p.28). In the views of Cunningsworth (1995) and Elyakine (2019), textbook evaluation is the process of making value judgement in terms of identifying the positive, negative and the lacking elements in already used textbooks and guiding criteria for the adoption of new materials and techniques, contents and methodologies in any textbook. The focus of this research was to check the availability of phonics contents, its presentation and teaching modes (written or oral) in textbooks taught in Punjab government schools and assessment techniques (written or oral) taken at the primary level; so, based on macro-evaluation design (Ellis et al, 1998), simple checklists were to be constructed to meet these objectives from each perspective. In the backdrop of student leaning outcomes (SLOs) stated in the curriculum for the development of pronunciation and phonics skills, the total number of chapters/units and the number, nature and mode of the topics activities and assessment related to phonics content in all the 5 textbooks taught at primary level were listed and evaluated through checklist; the phonics related activities and assessment exercises were unevenly distributed in each textbook so convenient sampling was adopted and 4 activities/exercises were randomly selected to be analyzed. Phonics related questions given in LND assessment and the model paper for Grade 5 board exams were also evaluated through simple researcher made checklists on three points Likert scale validated from three experts of the relevant field and the emergent perspectives were interpreted with relevance to the objectives and research question of the study (O’Leary, 2021). So, data was collected from the following resources:</p>		

Table 1: *Data Sources and Sampling*

1	Grade1-Grade 5 PTB textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities & Assessment in the textbooks • Grade 1: pgs. 11, 22, 83, 84 • Grade 2: Pgs. 22, 23, 31, 37 • Grade 3: Pgs. 84, 95, 96, 100 • Grade 4: Pgs. 18, 21, 57, 135 • Grade 5: Pgs. 6, 15, 20, 27 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 visuals (4 from each book) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consonants & vowels • diphthongs, digraphs, trigraphs • vowel & consonant digraphs, consonant blends • long and short vowels, consonant blends, hard and soft sounds, consonant digraphs/clusters • silent letters, vowel digraphs, beginning and ending consonant blends, beginning digraphs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Questions
2	Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonics related questions in LND Assessments (September, October, December, 2021) • 4 phonics related questions in Grade 5 board sample paper (2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Questions

An analysis of phonics content in primary grade textbooks

The textbooks from grade 1-5 were evaluated to understand what kind of phonics content was given in them; was that content relevant and helpful in teaching phonics to learners or not? What kind of activities were included and whether they were according to the level of learners? In government textbooks, phonics content is embedded with other language knowledge and skills. In the books of Grades 1 and 2, most of the content is phonics related; from grade 3 onwards, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary is more focused and each unit has a phonics concept given in the exercise of each chapter. A summary of this content is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: *An analysis of PTB primary grade textbooks from the perspectives of phonics content and assessment activities in them*

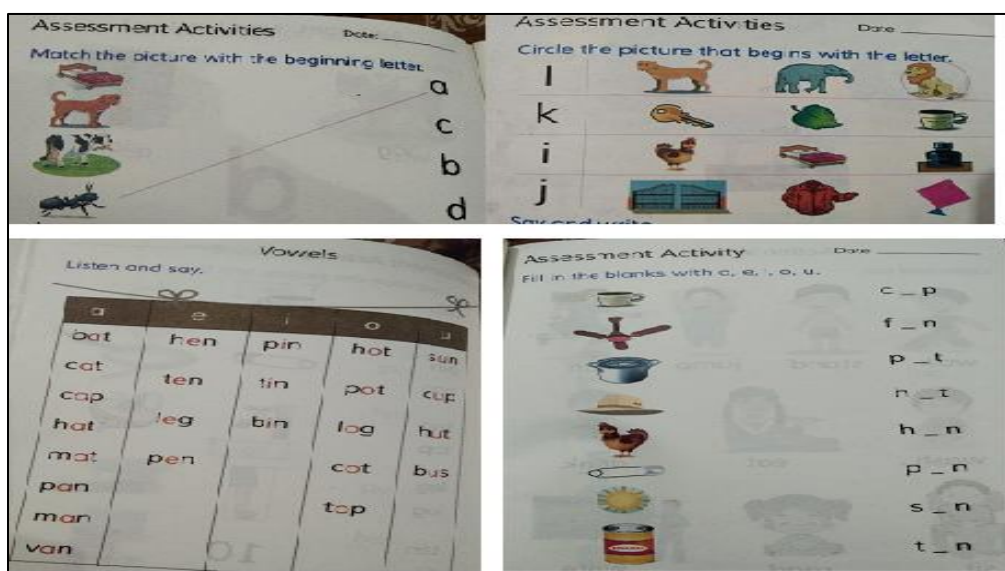
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
1 Total No. of chapters	24	25	24	26	11
2 Units introducing Letters /combination of letters in written form	14	5 (pg. 1-41)	13	Pre-pages (pg. 1-19), 6 Units	0
3 Assessment/exercises focusing on Letters /combination of letters in written form	8	5	23	6	10
4 Teacher as a resource for sounds' input	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5 Audio-visual supplementary material to listen the sounds	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

6	Phonics Topics	A-Z letters, short vowels, Word Patterns	A-Z letters, short and long vowels, diphthongs, digraphs, three letter sounds	A-Z letters, short and long vowels, diphthongs, digraphs, three letter sounds, vowel and consonant blends	short and long vowels, diphthongs, digraphs and trigraphs, three letter sounds/clusters, hard and soft sounds, silent letters,	Silent letters, long and short vowel, beginning and ending consonant blends and digraphs,
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a. Phonics content in textbook of Grade-1

There are five major aspects of language covered in Grade 1 textbook i.e., identification of letters, small and capital letters, sight words, vowels, word families with CVC words apart from general aspects of vocabulary building through learning names of colours, animals, fruits, body parts etc and rhymes. There are various activities given in the textbooks, a few of which are given in Figure 1:

Fig. 1: A screenshot of phonics content given in Grade 1 government textbook

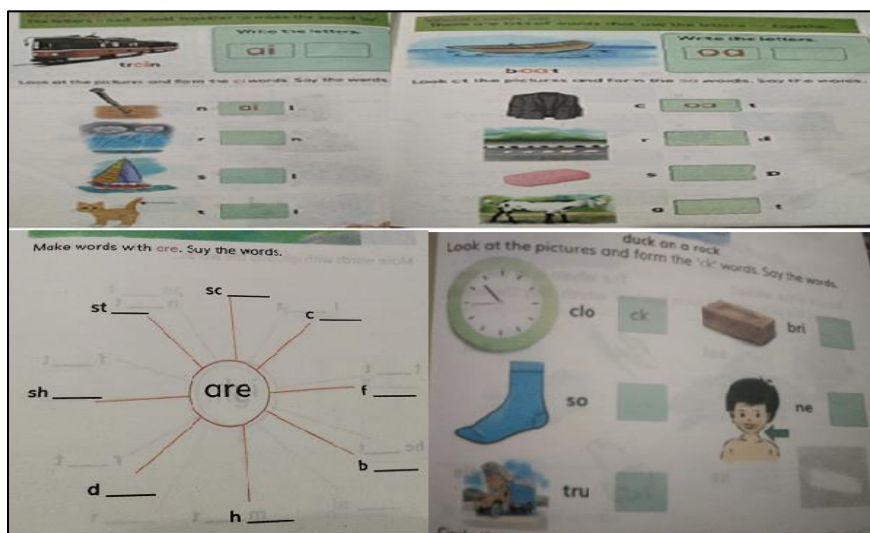


If the sounds of letters are taught properly and then the students are asked to write, match or circle the letter according to picture, then these activities are relevant. But if the teachers start teaching the letters, their identification and related vocabulary through alphabetic method, these activities can be easily manipulated to serve that purpose as students can easily guess that A for Ant or L for Lion. The instructions for each concept guide the learners, ‘Listen and say’ followed by matching, circling or fill in the blank activities. If learners listen to the alphabets instead of the sound, the result is learning English language with alphabetic and whole word method instead of grasping the sound system of second or foreign language.

b. Phonics content in textbook of Grade 2

In Grade 2 textbook, the concepts of alphabets, vowels, consonants are revised and long vowels, diphthongs, digraphs and three letter sounds are introduced. The first two screenshots in Figure 2 below realize the activity of diphthongs in which the spelling of ‘ai’ and ‘oa’ are to be added to complete a word and then say the word. Similar is the case with bottom two images where three lettered words and ending digraph are to be written to make words by seeing the picture as well and then say them. In most of the other activities as well, pictures, words and letters are connected for a phonics concept which have similar potential to be done through alphabetic method unless the sounds are pronounced properly and blended to form words. The listening input resource is just the teacher who may not have the required competence of phonics or not trained properly to deliver the phonics content to the learners.

Fig. 2: A screenshot of phonics content given in Grade 2 government textbook.

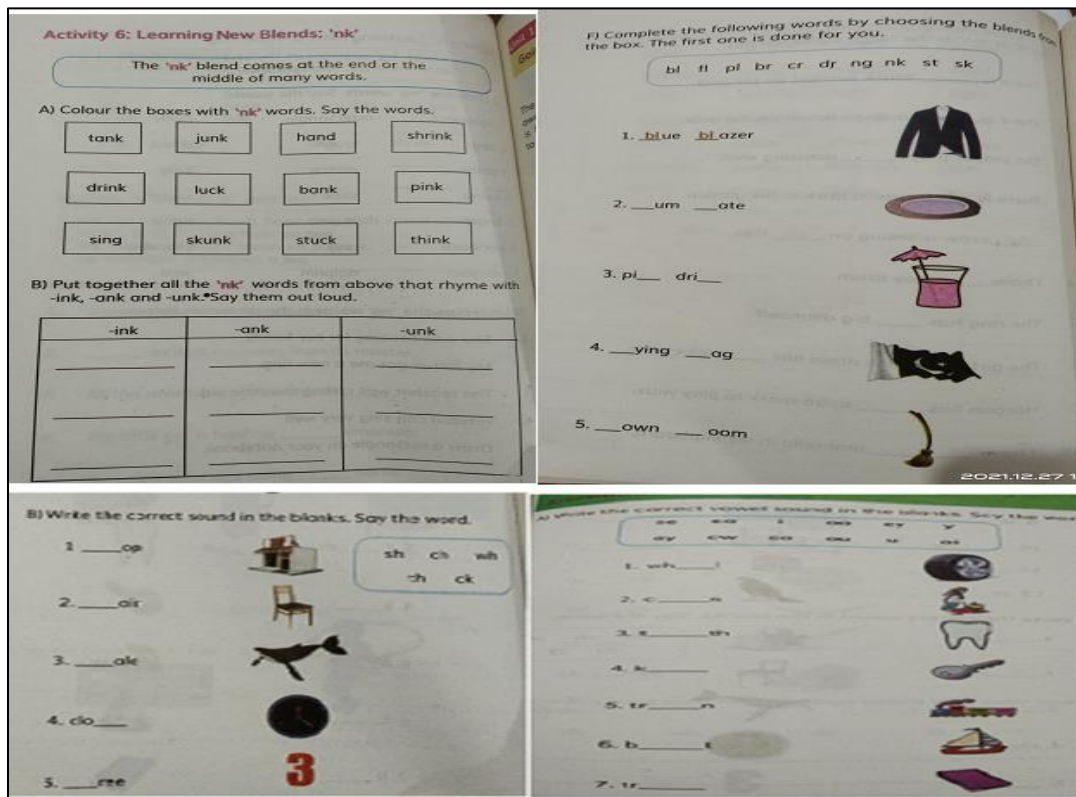


c. Phonics content in textbook of Grade 3

In Grade 3 textbook, alphabets, vowels, short vowel as middle sound, long vowels, digraphs, two and three letter sounds are revised in pre-pages; different consonant blends are introduced in the exercises of different chapters. In Figure 3 below, the top two screenshots realize the activities for beginning and ending consonant blends where learners have to write the blend to complete the word and sort out the blends into groups. The bottom two images are related to digraphs, diphthongs and long vowels activities in which after seeing the picture, correct digraphs or vowel sound spelling is to be added in blanks to complete the word and then say it. There is no assessment scheme which can determine whether learners say or blend the sounds. Students can

simply write the letters to successfully complete the activity.

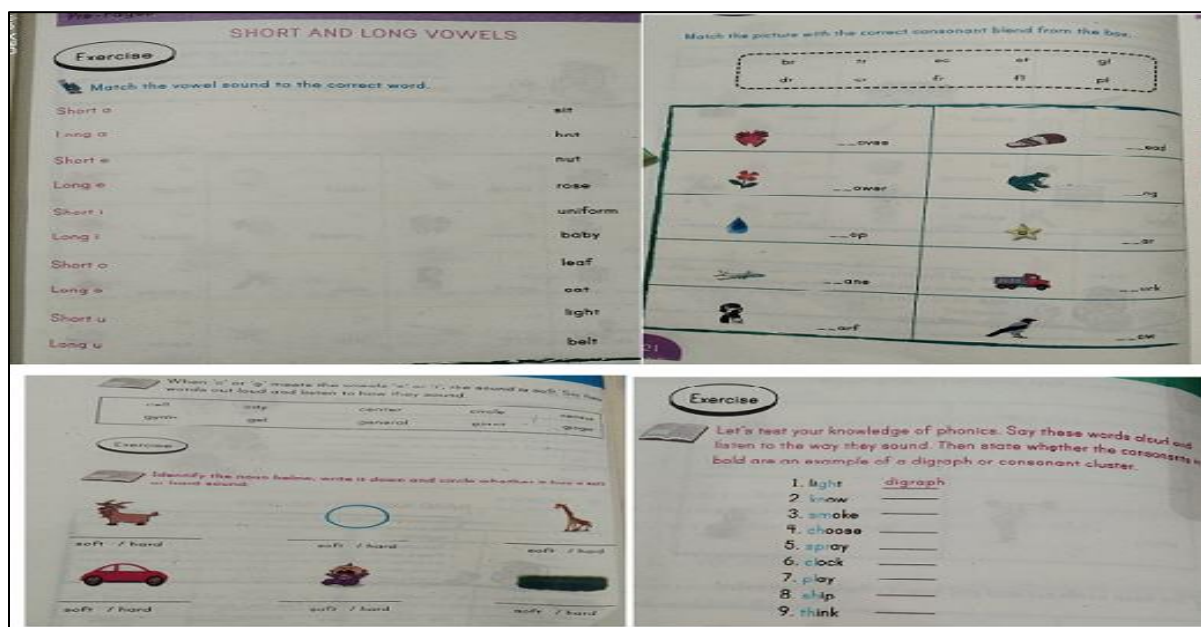
Fig. 3: A screenshot of phonics content given in Grade 3 government textbook



d. Phonics content in textbook of Grade 4

In Grade 4 textbook, short and long vowels, digraphs, diphthongs and consonant blends/clusters are revised whereas hard and soft sounds of ‘c’ and ‘g’, silent sounds and trigraphs are introduced in the exercises of lessons. In this book, more conceptual activities are given like in 1, 3 and 4 screenshots of Figure 4 below, learners have to think about the sound and spelling correspondence before matching, writing or identifying the highlighted letters; activity of screenshot 2 is similar like previous grades’ textbooks. At Grade 4, learners are mature and they have a lot of content to study like comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and oral communication. It is expected, at this stage, that learners have developed the full command of all the basic concepts of phonics and now onwards, they just need to practice and critically apply the knowledge. The question arises about weak learners; if the learners in previous grades are not taught properly, then how will they be able to critically apply that knowledge to form and read new words?

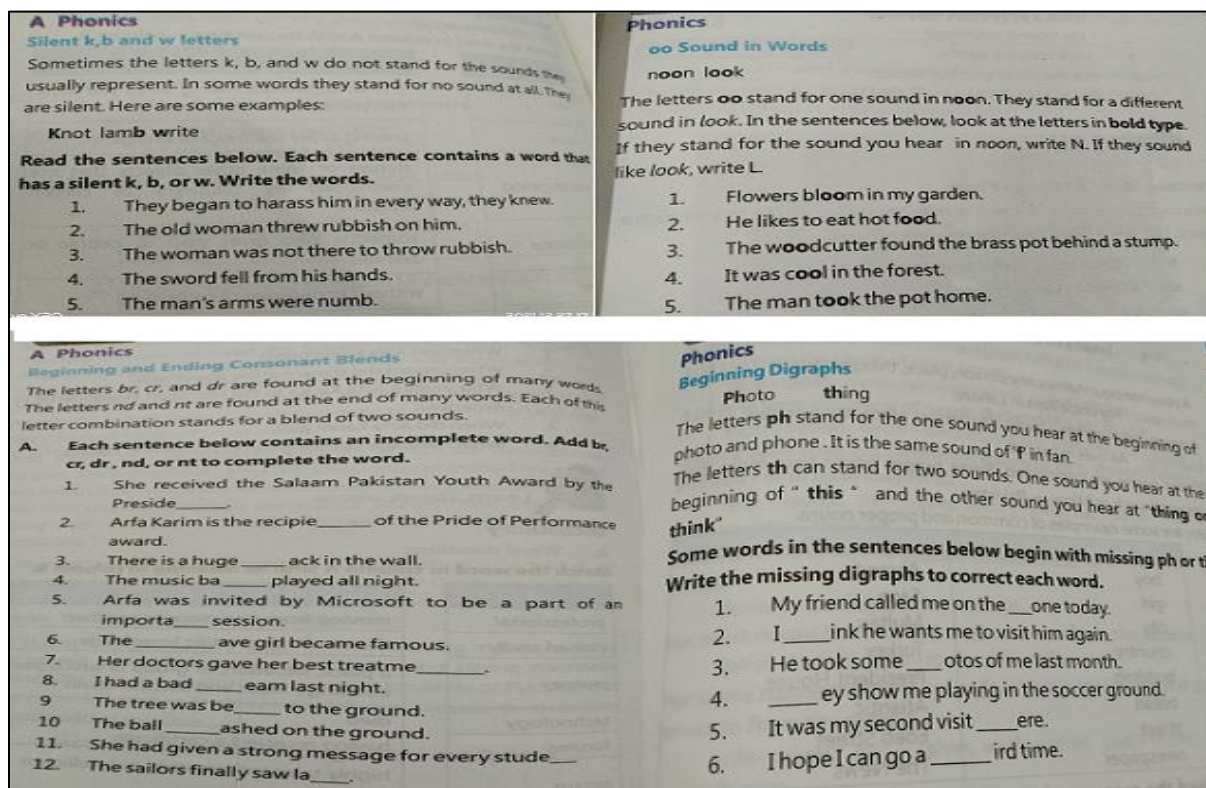
Fig. 4: A screenshot of phonics content given in Grade 4 government textbook



e. Phonics content in textbook of Grade 5

In Grade-5, silent words, short and long sounds of 'oo', beginning and ending consonant blend, beginning and ending digraphs are practiced more. The phonics content is reduced to just one exercise at the end of chapters; the concept is given and exercise is to be solved in written form without any picture-word association as the learners are older at this stage not requiring any visual attraction to understand the concepts. Critical understanding of phonics concept and its application is focussed assuming the command of learners on all the background knowledge of phonics taught in previous grades. Teacher is expected to explain the concept and learners would solve the exercise. These two conditions of learners' command on previous concepts and teachers' competence of phonics skill must be met to make the pedagogy of phonics effective.

Fig. 5: A screenshot of phonics content given in grade 5 government textbook



Assessment of Phonics skill

Another aspect of phonics skill at the primary level that needs probing into is its assessment. If the exams do not assess the phonics skill properly, its pedagogic practice would be compromised. In this respect, the model paper of grade 5 is published on the website of Punjab Examination Commission, Government of Punjab which has objective section of 25 MCQs. Out of 25, 4 items are related to phonics as given below in Figure 6. It can be seen that these questions do not cover the whole knowledge of phonics and Q.6 and Q.7 are more of general nature which can be guessed by learners without having phonics competence. Q.3, Q.11 and Q.19 are identification-based questions that can be associated with the understanding or cramming of phonics knowledge but they do not assess the blending and segmenting skills of learners as there is no oral assessment taken.

The top two screenshots are related to ending and beginning trigraphs i.e., ma (tch) and (thr)ee; the two screenshots in the middle are related to initial and ending digraphs i.e., (sh)oe and so(ck); the bottom left screenshot displays question related to initial consonant blend i.e., (bl)ack; and the bottom right screenshot displays the result in terms of correct, incorrect response count and percentage alongside the detail of each question and its correct answer.

In each question, an image is displayed which learners have to see and identify the word and then choose the option to complete the word; If the learner first identifies the object as ‘sock’ and then s/he start articulating the spelling of that word stored in their memory as this is very easy word for a third-grade learner i.e., s-o-c-k, and chooses ‘ck’ to complete the spelling. The performance would be accurate in terms of obtained marks but the competence would be that of alphabetic method of spelling, whole word construction and identifying picture/object-word spelling correspondence instead of sound-letter correspondence. These are same kind of assessments like given in the textbooks which are taken digitally from only 7 students from each class; whereas, the actual strength of learners in each class can be around 4-8 times higher than this number. How can the obtained marks of 7 learners’ performance be called the indicators of teachers’ pedagogic practices? This LND assessment is taken at the Grade 3 level that does not account for the phonics knowledge learned at the Grade 1 and 2 levels arising the question that how background knowledge would be assessed? In the instructions, the word ‘articulate’ is mentioned, are the monitoring officers trained in phonics knowledge to assess whether the learner uttered the sound correctly or not for the elicited phonics aspects? Similar kind of objective type written questions are asked in school exams.

Discussion and Summary of Findings

The findings related to evaluation of textbooks, assessment schemes through document analysis are summarized below:

Evaluation of Phonics content in the primary grade textbooks

The analysis of phonics content given in the primary level textbooks against the checklist realizes that despite following the grade-wise progression in phonics aspects and designed according to the age of the learners, this skill is primarily represented through written activities and is dependent on teacher for aural input of sounds to a great extent.

Table 3: *Evaluation of phonics content in textbooks against checklist.*

Criteria	Indicator	To great extent	a	To some extent	Not at all
Primary level Textbook evaluation	1. Content follows the grade-wise progression skill in phonics.	√			
	2. Textbooks provide knowledge about letter-sound correspondence of vowels and consonants in visual/written form.	√			
	3. Textbooks provide knowledge about letter-sound relationship of vowels and consonants in oral form.				√
	4. Textbooks incorporate written activities for sound-letter correspondence.	√			
	5. Textbooks incorporates oral activities for sound-letter relationship.				√
	6. Textbook is dependent on teacher for aural input of sounds.	√			
	7. Letters and their combinations can be manipulated through alphabetic method.	√			
	8. Activities are designed according to the age of learners.	√			
	9. Textbooks have any supplemental audio-visual aid for listening to sounds.				√
	10. Activities engage and create interest in learners.			√	
	11. Textbooks incorporate oral activities for blending and segmenting sounds.				√

But for the audio input, the whole reliance is on teacher as expressed by Aftab (2012), Naseem, Shah, and Tabassum, (2015), Fatima, Shah and Sultan (2015), Habib et al. (2018) and Syed, Quraishi & Kazi (2019) during their evaluation of Pakistani government textbooks; if teachers do not have competence or intentionally do not focus the phonics skill while teaching English language as a subject, these activities can be easily handled through alphabetic or whole word teaching method; therefore, context-specific teaching materials are to be used (Lewis, 2020). If the content of government textbook is compared with Oxford Phonics World (Series 1-5) to see the level of both the books, Oxford Phonics world is exclusively designed for the teaching of phonics where each book covers a level and concepts of phonics from simple to complex with different activities, a CD as a digital book (audio-visual aid) and an online access code for the mobile application where learners can play phonics games that create interest and

develop autonomous learning environment. It provides the learners and teachers a handy digital resource in which learners are not dependent on teachers for the audio input of sounds and learning blending and segmenting skills to carry out assessment activities on their own; teachers can use it any time to develop their own knowledge and check their learners' progress in phonics skill through digital assessment activities; as the use of these digital technologies is just like a set of tools to be used in learners' routine lives (Oblinger, 2003) being 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). There are other mobile applications as well like Taleemabad, Sabaq and YouTube resources that provide the audio-visual input alongside the written content that can be utilized and associated with government run schools as LMS to teach and assess the phonics skill among young learners, make a report of their progress and provide feedback on the weak areas (Pennington and Rogerson-Revello, 2019). Tejada & Santos (2014), Zielinski & Yates (2014) and Saed et al., (2021) emphasize designing, availability and exploitation of different instructional materials for the pronunciation teaching at different levels because until the learners do not listen to the sounds, they will never be able to learn the letter-sound correspondence and blending skills to form words.

Evaluation of phonics assessment schemes against checklist

When the formative and summative assessment schemes to measure the phonics competence of learners are evaluated against a checklist, the indicators in Table 4 below realized that textbook assessment activities, formative and summative assessment of phonics skills are mostly conducted through written assessments and teachers do not maintain the record of formative assessment sheets as recommended in SNC as opposed to the views of Celce Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (2010) Brinton (2012) Lindström et al., (2013), Levy (2013), Janczukowicz (2014), Otterstedt (2016) and Houston (2021) who consider different oral formative and summative assessment techniques integral to phonics teaching. The blending and segmenting of sounds to form words and their inter-relation with the reading skill has not been the focus of any assessment scheme that was the major focus of National Reading Panel, UK (2000); hence, in the words of Isaacs and Trofimovich (2017), Rahman, Kahfi and Dalimunthe (2018), Saito and Plonsky (2019), Baran-Lucarz (2021) and Qutub (2021), this gap in assessment schemes implies a grave backwash effect on the whole pedagogic practice in terms of teacher' beliefs and practices, teachers' extrinsic motivation to improve their knowledge of phonics skill and student learning outcomes (SLOs).

Table 4: *Evaluation of phonics assessment schemes against checklist.*

Criteria	Indicator	To great extent	a To some extent	Not at all
Evaluation of phonics assessment schemes	1. Summative assessment-based exams include written questions about phonics.	√		
	2. Summative assessment-based exams include oral question (uttering sounds, blending and segmenting) about phonics.			√
	3. Questions about phonics knowledge can also be answered having knowledge of word’s spelling.	√		
	4. Teacher maintains and forwards formative assessment record of phonics activities to higher-ups.			√
	5. The objective type questions related to phonics skill realize the literacy assessment of teachers for pronunciation.			√
	6. Phonics screening check at the beginning and end of academic session is implemented to identify the weak areas of primary grade learners.			√

This analysis of all the in-school and digital assessment practices reveals a serious gap in assessment methodology i.e., evaluating an oral skill through written exam and matching/identifying objects with words that have the potential to use the alphabetic and whole-word knowledge at the same time as Stobart (2008) argues that inappropriate choice of assessment policy can steer the battleship of education in wrong direction. Moreover, no phonics screening check is conducted before, in-between and at the end of academic session systematically as proposed by Torgesen (2006), Buckingham (2016), Reading Rockets (2022) as universal assessment plan for all the primary grade learners to identify their weak areas by the teachers.

Conclusion & Recommendations

On the basis of the above-mentioned findings and discussion, it can be concluded that there is a dire need to add some technologically enhanced audio-visual aids for teaching and assessing the phonics skill of the primary grade learners to attain the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in government educational setup. For this, the following recommendations are suggested:

Assessment schemes of learners should be shifted from written mode to oral mode where their competence of sound identification, production, blending and segmenting of words and the inter-relation of phonics skill with the reading skill should be emphasized. For this, a central learning management system should be set up in which all the learners of government schools should be enrolled and after conducting the phonics screening check before starting each class, their oral assessment progress should be recorded on weekly or monthly basis; the results should highlight the weak areas of learners as backwash effects towards teachers' knowledge and current practices, areas to be focused in teacher training and curriculum development. Teacher literacy assessment in this perspective is also a major area to be focused to enhance the capacity of teachers to measure any language skill according to its requirement.

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