

## **Methods of teaching reading in first grade Hebrew-speaking classrooms in Israel**

*Neora Mizrachi, MA student. Supervisor: Prof. David Share*

**General research topic:** Beginning reading instruction in Israel's Hebrew-language classrooms.

### **Specific research questions:**

- 1) What methods of reading instruction are currently used in Israeli Hebrew-language 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms and how satisfied or dissatisfied are teachers with the current methods?
- 2) Are different reading methods associated with (i) different (quantitative) levels of reading and spelling performance and (ii) different (qualitative) patterns of early reading and spelling?

**Why is my study unique?** This study will provide up-to-date information on methods of beginning reading instruction (nominal and actual) in a non-alphabetic writing system (Hebrew is written in a consonantal system or abjad). It will be the first study to ask not just what method is used but how it is used, with special attention to the grain-size of the units taught (whole words, sub-syllabic multi-phonemic CV units (“*tserufim*”), or the graphic units – consonantal letters and vowel diacritics, that correspond to individual consonant and vowel phonemes.

**Preliminary analyses and findings:** I am now using quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the data from a subsample of 38 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers in the Safra longitudinal study who responded to a questionnaire containing structured and semi-structured questions about their reading scheme and their instructional methods. This questionnaire sought information about the nominal method – *which* reading scheme (textbooks) is used in the classroom, and the actual method – *how* teachers teach their class to read. Teachers were also asked about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the method used in their class. I will also be looking at the relationship between the instruction method and (quantitative) levels of reading performance, as well as qualitative data on patterns of reading and spelling in these classrooms, with special attention to the needs of struggling students.

**Why is my research important for education?** The foundations of literacy are the basic decoding skills taught (and, in most cases, mastered) in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Owing to the phonological transparency of pointed Hebrew, almost all initial reading instruction in Israel's Hebrew-speaking sector are variations of “phonetic” or “phonic” approaches. However, there is still considerable controversy over the “grain-size” of initial reading instruction, yet little is known about the impact of methods that teach different grain-sizes. To date, no attempts have been made to go beyond the reading scheme and study the actual methods used in the class, either using teachers' self-reports or direct

classroom observation. This study will yield important insights into the influence of different teaching methods on both quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of early reading. Furthermore, I plan to follow-up this research with direct classroom observation of teaching methods.