



Building a Strong Foundation in English with Phonics Method among the First Graders of Elementary School in Magelang

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL

Submitted : 2024-01-02

Review : 2024-04-16

Accepted : 2024-06-05

Published : 2024-06-30

KEYWORDS

Metode fonik, Keterampilan Membaca, Bahasa Inggris, Sekolah Dasar

Phonics Method, Reading Skills, English, Primary School

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A B S T R A C T

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai efektivitas metode phonics dalam meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa kelas satu sekolah dasar Indonesia. Kelompok inti berjumlah 32 peserta yang terdiri dari 15 siswa perempuan dan 17 siswa laki-laki dengan teknik observasi dan wawancara yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metode fonik dapat membantu meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata siswa anak usia dini, karena siswa dapat mengucapkan huruf dengan benar dan mengingat bunyi huruf dan kata. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa metode fonik memperkuat pemahaman awal mereka tentang bahasa Inggris dengan membantu siswa kelas satu dalam membangun dasar yang kuat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa adanya perbedaan hasil belajar membaca permulaan pada siswa yang mengikuti penggunaan media audio visual dan pada siswa yang tidak menggunakan media audio visual. Metode fonik membantu siswa membangun dasar yang kokoh dalam membaca, yang pada gilirannya memperkuat landasan kemampuan bahasa Inggris mereka. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya fonik sebagai alat pengajaran yang ampuh untuk mengembangkan keterampilan membaca pada tahap awal pendidikan formal.

This study aims to assess the efficacy of the phonics method in improving the English language proficiency of Indonesian first-grade elementary school students. The core group of 32 participants consisted of fifteen female and seventeen male students in the observation and interview techniques used to collect data. The results of this study showed that the phonics method can help

increase the vocabulary of early childhood students, as the students can pronounce the letters correctly and remember the sounds of the letters and words. The findings show that the phonics method strengthens their early understanding of English by assisting first-graders in building a solid foundation. The study's findings showed that there are differences in the learning outcomes of beginning reading in students who follow the use of audio-visual media and in students who do not use audio-visual. Phonic method helped students build a solid foundation in reading, which in turn strengthened their foundation for English language proficiency. This study emphasizes the importance of phonics as a powerful teaching tool for developing reading skills in the early stages of formal education.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential mean of human communication that is utilized on a daily basis. As a means of expressing ideas and thoughts, posing inquiries, and comprehending the emotions and thoughts of others, language serves as an instrument that can generate a conceptual framework in the mind (Khotimah et al., 2023). In this age of modernization, the term English is frequently encountered or spoken. Presently, English has evolved into a significant and practical language. English is progressively becoming more widely utilized in Indonesia; the government contributes to this development by implementing English instruction in all schools. Elementary school is one level of education where English is taught (Khusna et al., 2022). The English language encompasses a variety of abilities, such as writing, speaking, listening, and reading. Reading skills are an essential component of the four foundational language skills instructed in educational institutions.

Reading is an activity that understands the written meanings conveyed by the author to the reader. Reading activities can make a person obtain information read in writing with the knowledge or experience gained by the reader (D. N. Putri & Susanti, 2022). This reading means understanding the reading text to explore the meaning in the writing. Reading skills are important for students because they can add insight to elementary school students. In addition, students can develop a mindset so that students do not directly accept information obtained by others. Reading can also improve children's intelligence by enriching vocabulary and can improve children's social interaction (Anitra, 2022).

From this, it is necessary to use a method that can make them understand how to read English well and correctly. It is crucial that enjoyable activities, such as the use of methods, strategies, or media, be incorporated into the learning process so that children do not become bored too rapidly. Children will be more engaged in the learning process if it includes enjoyable activities and engaging activities (Firdaus et al., 2019). In order to comprehend symbolic language, children must initially acquire literacy skills. Language acquisition should therefore emphasize the development of both oral and written (symbolic) communication skills. Literacy is broadly defined as the foundational understanding that young children acquire. Literacy is the capacity to identify letters and phonemes of a language by each infant.

There is a method called Phonic that can be an alternative. Phonics make use of the alphabet's distinct phonemes. An individual letter corresponds to a distinct phoneme. For meaningful sounds to be produced, each letter must be connected in

suitably. Every written form and word must be mastered to facilitate communication. utilized for communication and education. This grammar is an ongoing process for an individual who is in the process of learning (Prayogo & Widyaningrum, 2017). The goal of phonics education is to help students quickly recognize the phonemes of printed words that require identification (Khotimah et al., 2023). As an alternative learning strategy, the phonics approach utilized to teach beginning reading in English to young children who are not native speakers may be implemented (Westhisi, 2019).

Exciting and enjoyable activities are needed to improve the ability to learn foreign and new vocabulary in early childhood, as conducted by Mozes & Liando (2020). A solution using the phonics method is considered appropriate for teaching English vocabulary. The research will investigate the phonics method's effectiveness in improving young children's English vocabulary. The researcher used data from learning activities that used letter card media by using qualitative research. The investigator's steps included introducing letters using phonics and then learning new words.

According to Mozes' study, using phonics to teach English reading and writing to develop letters and their sounds and to understand how sounds relate to each other can be helpful for learning (Audina et al., 2022). This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the concept of phonics and its effectiveness and efficiency in developing early reading literacy.

According to earlier research by Jauhari, Marhaeni, and Utama (2013), the Phonics method, which introduces words from the smallest structure in the form of letters by using relevant learning media, also has a positive influence on children's learning outcomes based on experience occurring in the field experienced by early childhood education teachers (Sudiarta, 2017). It has been demonstrated that the use of educational media and creative learning activities enhances children's learning results. In schools where English is the primary language of instruction, phonics is undoubtedly used.

There were several researches related phonic method implemented to the young learners. Virdyna, (2015) implemented phonic method to enhance the students' reading skills. This method was defined as unique method and got positive responses from the students. N. A. N. Putri et al., (2022) used phonic method to stimulate the students' listening skills. Cerdas Berbahasa Indonesia Fonik (CBI Fonik) as the learning model was integrated to this research and the students were trained to identify the sounds through songs they heard. In addition, Chotimah, (2022) also integrated phonic method with Test Wechsler Intelligence Children Scale (WISC). This integration was regarded as the students' encouragement to improve their English skills.

This research focuses on the phonic methods used to improve the students' vocabulary building as it can be a strong foundation to acquire more English skills. This research analyzed how this method helps the students to recognize letters, its sound and the pronunciation. The ability to identify the letters and its sounds can be the basis for them to develop other English skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to find, describe, analyze, and interpret data on implementing the phonics method among the first graders of elementary school in Magelang. The participants of this study amounted to 32 students consisting of 15 female students and 17 male students.

The method used in this research is a case study. Case studies aim to provide an overview of the actual phenomena in the field regarding the process and the participants' point of view. The steps taken by the researcher to obtain data are submitting a permission letter at the intended school, making observations, interviewing teachers, and finally reaching the research data. The instruments used in this study were observation and interview. The author conducted observations from the beginning of students entering the classroom until the end of the lesson, with the primary purpose being to make a comprehensive summary of daily events. Compiling comprehensive conclusions regarding the observed object is the primary goal of this observation. Human behavior can be shown through observation, reported behaviors can be confirmed, test situations can be compared to others, and reports can be organized systematically. As a crucial tool for understanding and analyzing a wide range of phenomena and human behavior, observation becomes the most essential technique in this research.

The second instrument, interview, is a meeting between two persons to exchange ideas and information and provide context for a specific issue. The writers can identify problems requiring more investigation by interviewing people to gather information on the initial study. In this research, the researchers interviewed the English teacher to confirm the issues and phenomena during the observation. This is relevant when the investigator requires more details about the participants. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), unstructured and open-ended questions are typically utilized in interviews to elicit participants' opinions and thoughts. To interview the teachers, the researchers prepared open-ended questions to get deeper information and data.

The data collection process begins with observation, where the researcher observes the condition and teaching activities at SDN Ngasem Tegalrejo, focusing on the teaching using phonic method to understand the situation in a natural setting. Following the observation, the researcher conducts interviews with the teacher and some students to gather data from them about their opinions, beliefs, and feelings about situations in their own words, using interviews to gain specific information about the teaching teaching using phonic method.

The research applied data triangulation to analyze the data. The researchers triangulated the data from the observation and interview. Those data are corroborated and described it.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The teacher introduced the sounds of English using the phonics method. The early activities started with praying together, asking the students about their feelings and conditions, and preparing the students for the lesson. After that, the teacher played the song "Yes Yes Fruits Song" as an initial apperception. The students sang together, guided by the teacher. This song served is an introduction to the vocabulary materials about fruits. Twenty-four students were observed to be uninterested and silent in participating in the activity because it was unfamiliar to them to get an initial apperception using the song. While the other eight students were still trying to read the lyrics in the song video.

During the core activity, the teacher repeated the vocabulary from the song. The students imitated the sounds produced by the teacher. When the teacher uttered "apple,"

the students immediately repeated it. In the next activity, the teacher showed some cards with pictures of fruits and asked the students to name the fruit. It turned out that when the teacher showed the apple picture card, some students still pronounced it as "apel" or "aple," which was the incorrect pronunciation of "apple." In other words, the students were still reading it using the sounds from the Indonesian language. Realizing this situation, the teacher corrected the students' pronunciation.

Based on the observation, students initially needed clarification about pronunciation, which differs from writing in English. After the teacher repeatedly modeled the correct pronunciation, the students looked more enthusiastic about imitating the words spoken by the teacher. This was evidenced by the fact that only four out of thirty-two students were less enthusiastic. This made them able to combine each letter sound into a word. Thus, students can learn more actively because they can pronounce the vocabulary directly.

There is an increase in the students' English language skills towards using phonics methods in the classroom. The first skill taught is vocabulary. Students began to use a variety of new vocabulary in their daily conversations. Based on the observation, it was seen that the students were shy to mention the things in English. They tended to mention the vocabularies in Indonesian Language. When the teachers uttered in English, the students followed it and they were accustomed to mention the things in English.

The second skill is pronunciation; with the application of this method, the students become clearer in pronouncing English word, improve intonation, and reduce errors in pronouncing their sounds. They also adjusted their accent to better match the standard English accent they are learning. It could be seen during the observation. At the beginning, some students made pronunciation mistakes, but when the teacher revised it and gave the example, the students could produce a better pronunciation.

The third skill is reading. In this case, the skill improved is related to the reading comprehension, fluency, and ability to understand the vocabulary that is more complex alphabetically, such as "cucumber" and "pineapple". They can capture essential details by describing pictures. The next skill is listening. The ability of students to understand pronunciation in English, such as how to pronounce the names of fruits. This could be concluded during the observation in which the students made such kinds of improvement.

Improvements in these skills can create a more positive learning environment and provide additional encouragement for students to continue improving the English skill. Motivation to learn English increases along with this improvement as students begin to see tangible progress in their abilities and feel more confident using English in various context. This is also corroborated by the interviews conducted with English teachers who apply the phonics method.

"My teaching method starts with practicing phonemic awareness, which means identifying and changing the sounds present in words. Then, I teach the letter sounds. I combine sounds with movement, sing alphabets songs, write letters and

name their sounds. I use games, songs and other activities to make learning phonics fun. Their enthusiasm makes it fun, too."

It is found that when the teacher implemented phonic method, the students can be aware on the English sounds of English vocabulary. The students got the point that the sounds in English are different from its written form. After several meeting, it can be seen that the students have been accustomed to mentions some vocabularies studied in English. In addition, the teacher also combined this method with the games, songs and other activities to make learning phonics fun. This combination could increase the students' enthusiasm in English class.

Interviewer (Teacher): "How do you feel about learning English, Jasmine?"

Jasmine: "I like it because it's fun."

Interviewer (Teacher): "That's great! What do you like most?"

Jasmine: "I like fruits."

Interviewer (Teacher): "How do you feel about learning English, Hafizh?"

Hafizh: "It's fun because so many pictures."

Interviewer (Teacher): "What do you like most about it?"

Hafizh: "I like the games we play."

The results of the interviews with several first-grade students show that they greatly enjoy learning English. Jasmine finds learning English fun and especially likes learning new words. Hafizh also enjoys learning English because they use cards, and he particularly likes playing games with them. In conclusion, interactive and fun learning methods not only enhance students' understanding of English but also increase their enthusiasm for learning.

On the other hand, the teacher also realized the improvement on the students' English skill, especially on the students' reading ability, in which the students can read aloud the English words in correct pronunciation. It is proven when the teacher shows the card then the students respond by mentioning using the correct pronunciation based on the picture shown.

Discussion

The phonics method can be used in learning English beginning reading for young children (grade 1 elementary school) who are also non-native speakers. In doing this practicum consists of two stages, including the introduction of letter sounds and the introduction of letter symbols. The use of phonics method in learning English beginning reading for early childhood starts from the introduction of letter sounds which is done in stages. First, the child will learn the initial sound and the final sound in a word. This activity takes place orally. When the child has mastered it well, the teacher begins to introduce the middle letter sound. During the observation, the teacher sorts out vocabulary that is close to the child, such as the names of fruits, animals, objects, and family.

During learning, media becomes a support to convey material to children. One of them is pictures that can help both teachers in delivering learning materials and children to improve their English vocabulary. Visuals presented during the learning

process can be accepted by the five senses of children, so that it can facilitate children's understanding and increase children's English vocabulary. The use of picture media in the application of the phonics method in learning to read for English beginners makes several positive contributions, such as helping teachers provide examples, convey material related to the pronunciation of letters, help children remember vocabulary, motivate children and can improve children's intellectual abilities. In addition, printed media such as pictures, letter symbols presented on the blackboard or books are the best way to communicate educational materials to children. The use of picture cards can also enrich children's vocabulary, especially picture cards that do not have letter symbols. This is because children do not need to recognize words visually at the beginning of reading.

Children use media as an essential tool in their learning process. Visual media is one type of media that educators use to convey information and expand students' vocabulary. Children's visual interpretation abilities aid in lesson comprehension and memory enhancement. Teachers, for example, use colored cards and graphic boards to depict various types of fruits, allowing students to learn about fruit characteristics through pictures. Using letter cards and letter boards to teach children shapes and letter recognition is also effective.

Children who learn to read English can identify and group letter sounds based on specific patterns. This process begins with simple consonant-vowel combinations, such as "bi," and progresses to more complex structures like consonant-vowel-consonant combinations, such as "cut." They also become comfortable with longer letter-sound combinations, like those found in words like "best" and "drop." This stage signifies their mastery of the skill of joining and separating four letters together while reading English.

The facts presented above show that using visual media, specifically pictures, to implement the phonics method in early English reading learning has numerous benefits. Visual media helps to convey material related to letter sounds, strengthens children's memory of previously learned vocabulary, and provides concrete examples, which improves teacher motivation and children's intellectual ability. Print media, such as pictures or letter symbols in books or on the blackboard, has proven to engage children in discussion effectively.

The teacher uses colorful cards and drawing boards to illustrate examples of fruits to the children based on the observations made. Through the pictures, children are introduced to the types of fruits and understand each fruit's shape and distinctive properties. This approach helps children identify different fruits' visual appearance, color, and physical characteristics. The use of cards and letter boards also plays a role in assisting children to understand shapes and letter recognition.

The challenge that teachers encounter with children is when they meet children who do not comprehensively understand the concept of letter sounds. The obstacle comes from the child not from the use of the phonics method. The phonics method used is considered good, appropriate, and appropriate. In implementing the phonics method, no significant obstacles were found because the phonics method is neatly packaged through playing which is also supported by colored pictures as learning media. The teacher's description of the obstacles during the implementation of the phonics method shows that children's readiness and concentration are very important in absorbing information and the concept of letter sounds. Especially when dealing with children who have low memory. This can hinder children in mastering 26 letter sounds which are

the initial foundation in learning English beginning reading for early childhood. Learning activities through play that contain elements of imitation and repetition can be applied in learning English beginning reading through the phonics method. This is because play activities that involve elements of imitation and repetition can help children in aspects of physical, social and language development. In addition, repetition activities can be adapted to other learning strategies, so that learning activities become more meaningful (Larsen-Freeman, 2012); Saville, 2011); Dafouz & Hibler, 2013). One of the ways when children do not understand the concept of the sound of the middle letter, the teacher will lengthen the sound of the letter in question. The findings in the field show that this method is successful and effective. It can be concluded that learning strategies by repeating, imitating, and extending letter sounds can help children to understand the concept of letter sounds in the implementation of English beginning reading learning through the phonics method (Durst & Joseph, 2016). Based on the results of the interview, so far teachers have not experienced major obstacles in the evaluation process in learning English beginning reading through the phonics method. This is because all types of evaluations needed have been made by the ICR tutoring center in Singapore, so teachers only read the evaluation guidelines. If there are parents who want to talk directly with the teacher at the end of the lesson about the child's development, the teacher will write a special note on a small paper and leave it at the reception desk due to the busy teaching time from one class to the next or the teacher will make an appointment with the parent by phone to report the child's progress. Then, the assistant teacher will usually relay the evaluation to the parents. This shows that teachers are able to maintain good communication with parents in the delivery of the learning process and learning outcomes and vice versa, parents are able to cooperate with teachers to encourage children to become individuals who develop optimally in all aspects of development.

The writer's review included several articles on phonics techniques, and some focused-on teaching students to identify English letters and their sounds. In addition, the report delves into sound-based learning strategies that help students grasp the intricate connection between letters and sounds in the language. Teaching resources that center on phonics, like storybook settings with organized phonics learning sequences, are the main emphasis. Unlike the article, ours focuses on a more dynamic method of teaching phonics, specifically how to implement phonics strategies within the framework of group-based learning, encouraging greater student engagement and cooperation in the classroom. Our study stands out because it proposes an approach that encourages students to be more imaginative by emphasizing how they express themselves through the English language's phonics-based instruction.

Puspitasari (2018) highlights in research conducted on the subject of kindergarten students that the advantages of the phonics method are that it can develop strategies so children can interpret words they rarely encounter. Interpret each word in the word, then understand their meaning. Through this method, students gain new experiences about sounds. Dhieni et al., (2014) says that through new experiences, children can understand the proper writing of letters and develop several other aspects of language development. This is in line with the statement that the phonics method is a method that relies on learning the alphabet given first to learn the names of letters and their sounds.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study underscores the efficacy of employing the phonics method for teaching English beginning reading to young, non-native speakers in elementary school. The two-stage approach, involving the introduction of letter sounds and symbols, proves beneficial in enhancing children's foundational skills. Visual media, particularly pictures and cards, plays a pivotal role in conveying materials, fostering teacher motivation, and boosting children's intellectual abilities. Despite challenges related to children's comprehension and concentration, the incorporation of play activities with elements of imitation and repetition is identified as a successful strategy. This not only aids in addressing obstacles, especially for children with lower memory capacities but also contributes to holistic physical, social, and language development.

The findings indicate that strategies involving repeating, imitating, and extending letter sounds effectively facilitate children's understanding of letter-sound concepts in English beginning reading through the phonics method. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of maintaining effective communication between teachers and parents for optimal child development. Unlike existing literature, this research stands out by proposing a dynamic approach within a group-based learning framework, fostering greater student engagement, cooperation, and imaginative expression in the English language through phonics-based instruction. Moving forward, educators are encouraged to integrate these dynamic strategies into their teaching practices to create a more engaging and effective learning environment for young English learners.

After completing the research, the future researchers can explore the implementations of phonic methods on certain skills in English. It could be expanded to the activities in teaching listening to the young learners or adult learners.

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