The Phonics Approach Improves Early Reading Skills in Preschoolers Aged 4-5 Years

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the first education since humans are born into the world, which is given to children when they are 0-6 years old (Kusumawardani & Dimyati, 2021). Early Childhood Education is an effort to carry out coaching aimed at children from birth to the age of 6 years, which is carried out through the provision of educational stimulation to assist their physical and spiritual growth and development so that children have mature readiness to continue their education at the next level (Kusumawardani & Dimyati, 2021; Shofia & Dadan, 2021). Early childhood education aims to develop all their potential and prepare children to develop optimally at the next level of education (Mayar et al., 2022;
The potential that needs to be developed in early childhood includes several aspects of development, including moral and religious values, cognition, language, social-emotional, art, and physical motor (Ita et al., 2020; Lolong & Supriyadi, 2022). One aspect of development that is very important and influential in socializing early childhood life is language development (Aulia, 2020; Khosibah & Dimyati, 2021).

Language is a very important communication tool used by humans in everyday life. The function of language is as a tool for expressing ideas, and thoughts, asking questions, and understanding other people's feelings and thoughts, which can produce a concept in thinking (Anggraini, 2021; Fauziddin & Fikriya, 2020). Early childhood education standards explain that language development in early childhood is divided into three aspects: understanding language, speaking language, and literacy (Novita, 2018; Robiatus & Supriyadi, 2021). While aspects of language development that must be developed in early childhood are the ability to listen, speak, write, and read (Novela, 2019; Widiyanti, 2021). One aspect of language development that plays an important role in reading. Reading is conveying information or messages through words or writing (Friantary, 2019; Mahfudh & Imron, 2020). Early reading for preschoolers is the ability to read letters, syllables, and sentences presented in written form and applied in spoken form. Reading in early childhood must be taught early so children are not left behind in reading ability.

It's just that the reality shows that many Indonesian children are still illiterate (Maryono & Budiono, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Yahya et al., 2021). It aligns with the observations and interviews conducted at the TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik. Based on the results of observations and interviews with teachers conducted by researchers at the Muslimat NU 262 Kindergarten, Ujung Pangkah, Gresik, it was found that children aged 4-5 years, totaling 18 students in group A, had problems in children regarding early reading skills. The majority of students in TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik do not know the letters of the alphabet a-z, cannot sort the letters of the alphabet a-z correctly and correctly, cannot search for or find words that start with the letters a-z, cannot sound syllables and words so that reading skills are at an early stage in children aged 4-5 years are still not developing properly and are not by the Standard Level of Achievement of Child Development. Based on the observations made by the researchers, it can be seen that the school still needs to implement the method of teaching reading to children. Besides, learning media or teaching materials are limited, so teachers need help teaching reading to children. In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to read in children was not stimulated properly. It is because, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no adequate facilities to carry out learning as it should. Parents also find it difficult to teach young children because of their limited knowledge. In the interview process, the teacher also mentioned that introducing literacy to children was only done during center activities, which were carried out once a week. Therefore, the learning to read given to children could have been more optimal.

One of the efforts that can be made to overcome these problems is by applying a learning method or approach appropriate to the child's characteristics and age. Using methods that are appropriate for the child's age will be able to optimize the learning objectives to be achieved. The method is a way or tool to achieve learning objectives or desired goals (Ariep et al., 2020; Fatimatzahroh et al., 2019; Qowim, 2020). One method that can be used in teaching early reading in early childhood is the phonics method. The phonics approach method is a language learning model aimed at early childhood, which is developed by optimizing all language skills, listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Hasanuddin, 2019; Saragih & Widayat, 2020). This reading method emphasizes word recognition through listening to the sound of letters (phones) combined into syllables and words. How to read is not spelled like in ancient reading learning (Kristiana et al., 2022). For example, in introducing "a[ei]\" for [eipel], "b[beh]" for the boy[boi], and so on. The phonics method can also be said as a method of pronouncing letters. It can be seen in the learning to read activity, namely the activity begins by introducing the letters to the child separately or introducing the letters one by one, and then the child is invited to name the sounds of the letters (Amelasasih et al., 2021; Hasanuddin, 2019).

The application of reading with a phonics approach emphasizes understanding the relationship between letters and the sounds in a word and applying the relationship to analyze the meaning of words that have never been heard or known. In a phonics approach to reading, children are taught clearly how the letters of the alphabet and groups of letters apply to the sounds in words (Salawati & Suoth, 2020). Phonics also includes several elements that can adapt between letters and sounds presented in several ways. If the letters have the same shape, the sound will come in different units (Darihastining et al., 2020; Delya & Wulan, 2021; Ruqiah & Titin, 2021). The role of the phonics method in learning to read is to emphasize the relationship between words and letter sounds. Recognition of letter sounds is arranged into syllables and words, while phonics teaching is an approach to teaching literacy that focuses on the relationship between letters and sounds (Diana & Lia, 2022). The goal of teaching phonics is to help students determine the sound of written words that still need to be recognized quickly.
Several previous studies have revealed that the phonics method can significantly improve the literacy skills of children aged 5-6 years (Natalia & Kurniawaty, 2022). Further research revealed that the phonics method could significantly reduce speech delay in children aged 4-5 years (Amelasasih et al., 2021). Further research revealed that the phonics method through PowerPoint animation could improve children’s reading skills in kindergarten (Erdi & Saridewi, 2022). Based on some of the results of these studies, the phonics method can significantly improve early childhood reading skills. In previous research, no study specifically discusses implementing the phonics approach to the early reading skills of preschoolers aged 4-5 years. So this research is focused on this study to explore children’s early-stage reading skills through phonics approaches so that they can develop reading skills at a later stage.

2. METHOD

Based on the data collected, this research belongs to the type of qualitative research with a descriptive approach. In this study, the data or information collected is by the phenomena that occur in the field so that it can be formulated into a conclusion that can be digested by human common sense. Field notes are very important in qualitative research because they are the main tool always inherent in various ways of collecting qualitative data. The data collected is descriptive by describing information on phenomena in the field as there are data sources related to the problem under study. The subjects of this study were group A students aged 4-5 years, totaling 18 children as a population with a total of 8 girls and ten boys. Of the 18 students in group A, there were indications of experiencing problems in the early stages of reading ability. The data obtained in this study was carried out using observation, interview, and documentation methods. The data obtained through observation and interviews can be in the form of arguments, evidence, statements, or knowledge of data sources about everything that is questioned by researchers related to research on the ability to read in the early stages of children aged 4-5 years. This research has two types of data, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data is information collected through data sources obtained directly. In this case, the teachers, principals, and students of TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik are the main data sources. To complete the data in this study, secondary data is also needed. Secondary data is obtained from field notes, documentation, literature, and research observation sheets related to research subjects. The secondary data obtained in this study is literature which refers to research theory, field notes, documentation, and observation sheets. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques by describing data analysis through 4 stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, conclusion, or verification. While the data instruments used, interview guidelines, observation sheets, and scoring rubric can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. The Research Observation Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Basic competencies</th>
<th>Observed aspect</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5/4.5</td>
<td>Children can say the letters a-z and their sounds through letter cards and Indonesian phonics songs</td>
<td>Saying the letters a-z and their sound through Indonesian phonics songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6/4.6</td>
<td>Children can sort letters of the alphabet a-z</td>
<td>Sort the letters of the alphabet a-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5/4.5</td>
<td>Children can search or find words starting with the letters a-z</td>
<td>Search or find words starting with the letters a-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.11/4.11</td>
<td>Children can sound open syllables through syllable and word displays</td>
<td>Sound open syllables through the syllable display</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Assessment Rubrication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment score (1-4)</th>
<th>Children’s Ability Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the child can carry out activities according to orders independently, properly, and correctly beyond the expected target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BSH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the child can carry out activities according to orders independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the child can carry out activities according to orders but with stimulation or assistance provided by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the child cannot or does not want to carry out activities according to orders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Data analysis in this study regarded the early reading ability of children aged 4-5 years at TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik. The data analyzed was supported by observations and interviews conducted by researchers with teachers and principals of TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik. The number of teachers interviewed was four teachers and one school principal. The research results are presented by focusing on questions regarding the problems of low reading ability in the early stages of children aged 4-5 years at TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik. The findings in the observation and interview activities are as follows: The first finding shows that during the observation, that is, before the center activities begin, the teacher writes the name of the day on the blackboard. After the teacher writes the day’s name on the blackboard, the teacher asks the children to identify which letters are in the day’s name. However, when the teacher asked the children to name the letters in the names of the days, none of the children could say them. In another activity, the teacher invites children to work on the Children's Creativity Sheet. On the Children's Creativity Sheet, the child is asked to write their name by imitating the writing of the name that the teacher has exemplified. After the child writes his name, the child is asked to say the letters in his name, but the child still cannot say the letters.

The second finding shows that when the teacher invites children to sing the ABC song in introducing the letters of the alphabet, some of the children sing along. Still, in singing the ABC song, the children cannot yet sing in the order of the letters of the alphabet, and most of the other children tend to be silent and have not been able to follow. The teacher sings ABC songs. As for other findings, when the teacher invites children to look for and find words at the beginning of the alphabet a-z, children find it difficult and cannot find words according to the letters of the alphabet. Children who use Javanese every day to communicate and socialize find it difficult when asked to find words in Indonesian. In addition, when the teacher writes down the name of the theme that will be learned by the child in the learning process, then the teacher invites the child to read or sound the name of the theme together, the majority of children have not been able to sound or read the name of the theme written by the teacher on the blackboard.

The third finding shows that when the researcher conducted the first interview regarding the child's ability to read in the early stages before the phonics approach was applied, the teacher and also the principal explained that the child's low reading ability in the early stages was because in the process of learning to read there was no specific method applied. Besides that, the limited media makes it difficult for teachers to teach reading. Literacy learning at literacy centers could be more optimal in its teaching because this learning is only done once a week. Other findings of the teacher also said that there needed to be more cooperation between parents and schools in stimulating children's learning to read at home. The low knowledge of parents makes it difficult for them to teach young children to learn to read. In addition, learning to read early during the Covid-19 pandemic was difficult to implement because of the limited facilities teachers use in online learning. The interviews conducted by researchers with teachers and school principals are shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Interviews with Teachers and School Principals](image_url)

Discussion

The findings in a study regarding the early reading ability of preschool children aged 4-5 years at TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik indicate that the stage of children's reading ability is still not developed and is not by the Child Development Achievement Standards (STTPA). The majority of children still don't know the letters of the alphabet a-z, can't sort the letters of the alphabet a-z in an orderly and
correct manner, can’t search or find words that start with the letters a-z, can’t sound syllables, and words so early reading skills in children aged 4-5 years it can be said that it is not by the stage of achievement of reading development in children aged 4-5 years. Therefore, in the early stages, the researchers and the teacher designed a learning design using a phonics approach to solve problems in preschool children aged 4-5 years at TK Muslimat NU 262 Ujung Pangkah Gresik. In addition to designing learning designs, researchers also create research instruments in the form of research observation sheets and assessment rubrics to make it easier for researchers to analyze the data that has been obtained. The phonics approach is implemented daily for 40 minutes by getting children to sing Indonesian phonics songs before starting reading learning activities. In applying this phonics approach, the researcher uses a variety of interesting media as support for beginning reading activities. It is done so that children can learn easily and feel energized with the learning process. These results indicate that learning media can support the learning process, providing stimulation, information, and attitudes that can improve children’s ability to receive information (Darihastining et al., 2020; Ruqiah & Titin, 2021).

Beginning reading activity is one aspect of language that must be taught from an early age. It is because reading is a window of knowledge, which is the main door to acquiring other knowledge (Hanifah et al., 2021; Kurniawati, 2020; Rina, 2022). As for this case, the phonics method is used in beginning reading activities. This method takes advantage of children’s abilities by instilling in them the letters by how they read or sound (Santi et al., 2022). In learning, the phonics approach emphasizes words by listening to the sounds of letters. Where the first time, the child is invited to get to know the sound of the letters first. After that, the earlier letters will be combined, producing sounds into syllables and words (Diana & Lia, 2022; Huda & Rakimahwati, 2022). The introduction of reading to children begins with early reading activities by introducing children to letter symbols, letter shapes, and letter sounds and reading syllables and words (Aulia, 2020; Khosibah & Dimyat, 2021). Therefore, in the second stage of the learning design, researchers and teachers introduce children to letter symbols, letter shapes, and letter sounds using Indonesian phonics songs. With children’s learning, songs will be more fun (Anggraini, 2021; Fauziddin & Fikriya, 2020). Lagu juga dapat membuat belajar anak lebih santai, menarik, semangat dalam mengikuti pembelajaran, merangsang kreativitas dan kemampuan berfikir mereka (Kholik & Hasan, 2020).

The phonics approach is applied by inviting children to sort the letters of the alphabet starting from the letter a-z. In this activity, the media used is letter cards, with pictures representing the sound of the letters according to the song being sung. Letter card media will be very useful in helping children’s learning activities because children will more easily absorb the material presented by the teacher (Salawati & Suoth, 2020). In this activity, children are also invited to sing songs while looking for alphabet letters on letter cards in sequence according to the phonics songs being sung so that children will easily recognize and sort letters (Novela, 2019; Widiyanti, 2021). But before sorting the letters of the alphabet a-z, children are invited to name the letters on the letter cards first. An interesting and fun learning process helps students to learn more actively and improve early reading skills. The results obtained in this study are in line with the results of previous studies, which also revealed that the phonics method could significantly improve the literacy skills of children aged 5-6 years (Natalia & Kurniawaty, 2022). Further research revealed that the phonics method could significantly reduce speech delay in children aged 4-5 years (Amelasasih et al., 2021). Further research revealed that the phonics method through PowerPoint animation could improve children’s reading skills in kindergarten (Erdi & Saridewi, 2022). Based on the results of this study, the phonics method can significantly improve early childhood reading skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion in this study, applying the phonics method using phonics songs, letter cards, pictures, and syllable displays as an alternative learning method can significantly help children deal with early reading laziness.

5. REFERENCES


