

Phonic Game as an Approach to Improve Letters Recognition Skills

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Abstract- The first LINUS screening of reading has shown that the year 1 pupils at a rural school were struggling in grasping the basic literacy skills in reading, letter recognition. The purpose of this action research was to investigate the phonic game intervention in improving the letters recognition skill. This action research focused on 9 pupils of seven years old of the native tribe (Iban) of a school in rural area of Kapit. The data were collected with the use of pre and post-test. This research follows the Kemis and McTangart (1988) cyclic process of research. The focused skill were the ability to identify and distinguish letters of alphabet and their ability in associating sounds with the letters of the alphabet. The findings shows that intervention with the use of Phonic game helped in improving the pupils' ability to recognize letters and the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. The pupils retain the growth and improvement in their ability to identify and distinguish letters as well as associating sounds of the letters of the alphabet by passing the K1 and K2 level in their second LINUS screening.

Index Terms- Phonic game, early literacy, letters recognition, distinguishing, associating letters sound

I. INTRODUCTION

Early literacy is a growing concern among parents and educators as it serve as the basic foundation for young learners. There are 6 known early literacy skills and literacy skills are all the skills needed for reading and writing, such skills included are awareness of sounds in language, awareness of printed language and the relationship of letters and sounds. These skills act as an important basic before furthering to the next skills including word recognition such as vocabulary, spelling and reading literacy that is comprehension. According to Yunus, M.M. et. al. (2013), capability in English is highly prized in all field of interest, and students are aware that getting a good score in English greatly increases the chances to be accepted in major companies. Most young learners usually equipped with basic writing and reading letters first knowledge ever to be learnt at school, this is known as letters recognition and distinguishing letters with letters sound.

Letter recognition is well known to one of the important knowledge that young learners should master in order to proceed to word mastery. The important of it has been stress on since the foundation year, the pre-school. The more letters children can recognize and identify at an early age, the better their future reading achievement and the lower the risk of academic failure (Hurst, 2016). Letter recognition comprises of the sound and the name. In order to recognize the letter, the sounds of the letter need to be distinguished first. Therefore, in the mastery of letter recognition, phonics plays essential part as well.

The first LINUS screening of reading has shown that the year 1 pupils at a rural school were struggling in grasping the basic literacy skills in reading, letter recognition. There are twelve constructs in the LINUS reading instrument, with different level of skills being tested. The LINUS instruments assessing these twelve skills, namely, Construct 1: Able to identify and distinguish shapes of the letters of the alphabet, Construct 2: Able to associate sounds with the letters of the alphabet, Construct 3: Able to blend phonemes into recognizable words, Construct 4: Able to segment words into phonemes, Construct 5: Able to understand and use the language at word level, Construct 6: Able to participate in daily conversations using appropriate phrases, Construct 7: Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in linear texts, Construct 8: Able to understand and use the language at phrase level in non-linear texts, Construct 9: Able to read and understand sentences with guidance, Construct 10: Able to understand and use the language at sentence level in non-linear texts, Construct 11: Able to understand and use the language at sentence level in linear texts and Construct 12: Able to construct sentences with guidance (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2014).

From the LINUS Construct, the letter recognition skill is at the first and the second construct. The results of the participants' school-based reading and spelling assessments show that participants in this study were struggling with their early literacy. The purpose of this action research was to investigate the phonic game intervention in improving the letters recognition skill. As such, it is important to provide effective reading instructions that will help develop their reading skills. The underlying assumption in this present study is that the phonic game strategy would boost their confidence and increase their interest in reading and spelling. The focused skill is to identify and distinguish letters of alphabet and their ability in associating sounds with the letters of the alphabet.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most common study recognizes this skills as Alphabetic principle, which also take in account the importance of the involvement of phonics in recognizing alphabet. The alphabetic principle is the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds (Texas Education Agency, 2018). In the context of this research, Malaysian students are still at an average proficiency level in the mastery of basic skills in reading and writing.

Despite spending 6 years in primary school, many students are having difficulty with reading and writing once they enter the secondary school. Hence, to overcome the problem, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has come up with an educational intervention program, the 'Literacy and Numeracy Screening' (LINUS) which was implemented in 2013 (Azman, H., 2017). LINUS2.0 aims to enhance the rate of literacy in English Language among Malaysian lower primary ESL learners. Sight words play a major role in reading skills. As Calhoun, E., Poirier, T., Simon, N & Mueller, L. (2001) stated based on the Picture Word Inductive Model, sight vocabulary is crucial to the literacy skills and with the help by phonetic and structural properties will encourage learners to enhance their input and output skills. Phonological aspects that contain rhyme and phoneme segmentation also help the learners to achieve success in the reading skill (Martin, K., Emfinger, K., Snyder, S. & O'Neal, M., 2007). In the LINUS module, sight words can be seen everywhere as they are being introduced and repeated frequently to enhance memorization and automaticity.

Learners will use the language either in daily life or in their formal situation as being literate in the language is very crucial. Identifying the letter in alphabet generates an important matter as the learners who are able to have this skill will grow better achievement in their reading and motor skills (Gupta, 2013; Martin, Emfinger, Snyder and O'Neal, 2007; Cusumano, 2006, as cited in Angela 2010). As teachers play a significant role in its execution, their beliefs and perception are valuable to help realize the effectiveness of the program's features. It will help the teachers to be focused on the target group and suitable methodology in enhancing these literacy skills.

It is stated by Tubah, H. & Hamid, Z. (2011) that the LINUS programe is the furtherance of the KIA2M programe which consists of twelve constructs that need to be achieved by the learners in the literacy skills. It also requires the teachers to guide the learners in mastering the skills and hence answering the constructs with the target accuracy. Being able to teach these learners, teachers have to guide them in the classroom although it is not stated in any research yet. Teachers have to come up with a special lesson plan to teach these learners with guidance from the Teacher's Module provided by the Ministry of Education (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2014). For this study, game is the considered to be the most common way to elicit students especially young learners' engagement with the learning. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen the basic literacy first prior to the mastery of the sight words. Concurrent to that emerge the purpose of this study which is to investigate the phonic game intervention in improving the letters.

According to Ali, A., Aziz, Z., Majzub, R. (2011), game as part of early childhood education has the potential to provide preschool children with highly involvement and meaningful setting for learning reading and being successful in early literacy concept. The involvement of game in learning has become a trend now among the educators, particularly in learning language. According to Yunus, M. M., et. al. (2011), languages, especially English, have always had to be studied and used by children to involve and participate in games. The experiential learning theory explains how learners create their own learning through experiencing new situation and understanding. For school which English is not the first, second nor third language, it has become a daily practice for teachers teaching the targeted language to use any means of game in order to engage pupils with the learning. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, recognise and manipulate individual sounds or phonemes in spoken words (Nee, W. O. Y. & Yunus, M. M., 2017). Before young learners learn to read text, they need to become more aware of how the sounds in words work. In the teaching of phonic or widely call phonics instruction, game conjointly become the most common way to conduct it. Phonics instructions helps children attend to parts of words, including individual sounds and syllables (Lapp & Flood, 1997). It may increase pupils' motivation on reading when they can blend the letter sounds. Besides that, according to Kamarundzaman, N. S. (2014), it may increase pupils' spelling and speaking skill. This is because learning through phonics system is not only help reading proficiency but improve pupils' spelling and pronunciation as well.

In the Malaysian context of education, the important of phonics is essential that it is included in the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools (SBELC) in 2011. It is important to point out that one of the basic principles of the SBELC is to provide learning that was fun, meaningful and purposeful (Prasad et al,2016). Young learners being at the state of human being where attention span is very short, what better way to engage young learners with fun and meaningful learning is none other than game.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Purpose

The purpose of this action research is to investigate the phonic game intervention in improving the letters recognition skill. As stated earlier in this action research, the results of the participants' school-based reading and spelling assessments shows that participants in

this study were struggling with their early literacy skills of recognizing letters and distinguishing the sound of the letters of the alphabet. From these problem rise the following questions:

1. How do phonic instructions improve the pupils' letter recognition skills?
2. How does phonic game can boost the pupils' confidence in engaging with phonics instruction?

B. Research design

The data were collected with the use of pre and post-test and adopt the Kemis and McTanggart (1988) cyclic process of research. Parallel to the data collected methods which is the pre and posttest, the cycling is suitable for this research. The pretest is administered during the first cycle while the posttest is on the second cycle. The result then is treated with mean, and standard deviation in order to analyze the improvement made by the participants from the pre and post-test, respectively with first and second cycle.

C. Sampling

The sample are chosen from the year one pupils as they complement the characteristics of and emergent learner. All the pupils come from the background of native tribe (Iban) of a school in rural area of Kapit where English is less exposed. Therefore, by exposing the pupils with basic knowledge of English with association of game would help these pupils to be motivated to learn English. The participants consist of 5 male and 4 female of lower and average proficiency, with different level of constructs that they have passed during the first LINUS. The first LINUS result of all the participants has been set as the benchmark as the minimum result for this action research and also in targeting a higher result. Table 1 below shows the demographic data on the participants of this action research.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Data

Pupil	Gender	Level of proficiency	The first LINUS result
P1	Male	Low	Did not pass
P2	Female	Low	Did not pass
P3	Male	Average	Pass construct 1 only (K1)
P4	Female	Low	Did not pass
P5	Male	Low	Did not pass
P6	Male	Average	Pass construct 1 only (K1)
P7	Female	Low	Did not pass
P8	Female	Low	Did not pass
P9	Male	Low	Did not pass

D. Procedure

Game has been widely known to be the most interactive ways to engaged pupils in learning. A Phonic game was created to adhered to the standard of the K1 and K2 construct which are, able to identify and distinguish letters of the alphabet and able to associate sounds

with the letters of the alphabet. Prior to the intervention, pupils have already been taught the letters of alphabet with pictures of items to represent the sounds of the letter.

The game mainly help to strengthening the sample's ability to recognize the letters and distinguishing them through sounds without appear to be drilling them with the input. The game is adapted from Cash Cab game, but instead of getting money for every correct answer, the samples was given point, and for wrong answer of more than three times, they are totally out from the game instead of from the cab. After all 34 letters taught to them the samples start to play the game as an enrichment activity. The game comprises 2 different types of question representing two construct that the samples need to achieve. Example of questions for the K1 construct is shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: One of the type of Question for K1 Construct.

The question for K1 construct requires the samples to name each of the colored letters orally within the time limits begin. There are 20 questions for each level of construct. There are 5 ways of questioning that were asked, naming the colored letters in words, naming the colored letters in random orders of the alphabet, naming the missing letters in the order of alphabet, naming the letters in the selected shape, and naming the letter shown in 3 seconds.

The questions for K2 construct is shown in Figure 2 below.

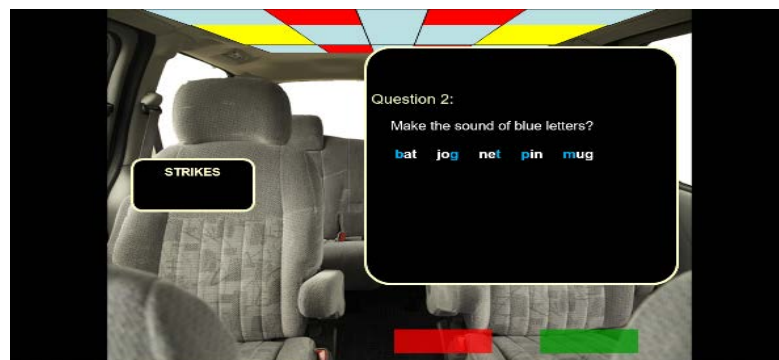


Figure 2 : One of the type of Question for K2 construct

The questions for K2 construct too were asked in 5 different way but for K2, the samples need to sound out the letters. The time limits for the questions for the second construct is much longer than the first construct.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Central tendency of descriptive statistics is selected to analyse the data of pre and post score of LINUS2.0 screening using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 2: Data Analysis

Pupils	Pre-test score	Post-test score
P1	40	80
P2	50	100
P3	50	100
P4	10	60
P5	20	80
P6	50	100
P7	20	70
P8	20	50
P9	10	50
Mean (M)	3.00	7.67
Standard Deviation (SD)	1.73	2.06

Using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS), the following are the results of this analysis; pre-test, N=9, M=3.00, SD=1.73 and post-test, N=9, M=7.67, SD= 2.06. The results show that the pupils' scores are more consistent and higher during post-test.

V. IMPLICATIONS

After reflecting upon the results of the action research, there were several implications emerged. Students should be given opportunities to collaborate with one another in the classroom in order to achieve a goal, which here during the intervention, only the teacher conduct the game while the participants play. For a wider purposes and for future research, participants should be given the opportunity to conduct and handle the game among themselves. Playful competition is another way to gain student motivation, ultimately yielding successful results (Cardella, K,2013).

The intervention by using the game has help the sample in recognizing letters and distinguishing letters with the letters sound. It shown in their pre and post test score with a significant increase in their ability to recognize and distinguish letters in alphabet. It is shown in their second LINUS screening whereby most of them passed the first and the second construct of the screening and their amount of correct answer during the game, therefore this situation answer the first questions, on how phonic instructions improve the pupils' letter recognition skills. The participants also requested that the game is played again even after the intervention. Its shows that their excitement while playing the game, therefore this situation answer the second question of how phonic game does can boost the pupils' confidence in engaging with phonics instruction.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Phonic-LINUS Derivational game has indeed improved the samples ability to recognize and distinguish letter sounds. This will gradually help them in the next level of reading literacy, word recognition and sight words. The game has also improved their motivation in learning session, they improve in their participation to answer question by volunteering to be in the game. The game is also suitable to be used as a part of set induction in other lesson to refresh back the samples knowledge in their learning of alphabet or to be used as a teaching aids for the next lesson to keeps strengthening the samples ability in recognizing and distinguishing name and sounds of the letters of the alphabet.

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