

IMPLEMENTATION OF PHONIC APPROACH IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UPT SD NEGERI 064037 MEDAN TEMBUNG

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Abstract: *This study aims to describe the implementation of the Phonics Approach in English learning at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung, as well as to analyze students' ability to recognize letter sounds (phoneme awareness), factors that influence the understanding of letter-sound relationships, and the contribution of the phonics approach to improving pronunciation accuracy and student confidence. The study was conducted through interviews with teachers as resource persons using an instrument in the form of five questions related to students' phonological abilities and the implementation of the phonics method. The results showed that most students still had difficulty distinguishing English phonemes that do not exist in Indonesian, such as /v/, /θ/, and the difference between short and long vowels. Common pronunciation errors include sound substitutions and the tendency to read words based on Indonesian spelling. Nevertheless, phonics learning has been proven to be able to improve pronunciation accuracy and student confidence, especially when implemented routinely with the support of interesting media such as songs, letter cards, and games. The success of the phonics method implementation is greatly influenced by teacher competence, the availability of audio media, limited language environment, and student motivation. Overall, the phonics approach has great potential in improving basic literacy and pronunciation skills of elementary school students, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on the consistency of implementation and the readiness of educators.*

Keywords: *Phonics Approach, Phoneme Awareness, Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondence, Pronunciation Accuracy, Elementary EFL Learners.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan Pendekatan Fonik dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung, serta menganalisis kemampuan siswa dalam mengenali bunyi huruf (kesadaran fonem), faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi pemahaman hubungan bunyi huruf, dan kontribusi pendekatan fonik terhadap peningkatan ketepatan pengucapan dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Penelitian dilakukan melalui wawancara dengan guru sebagai narasumber dengan menggunakan instrumen berupa lima pertanyaan terkait kemampuan fonologi siswa dan penerapan metode fonik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa masih kesulitan membedakan fonem Bahasa

Inggris yang tidak ada dalam Bahasa Indonesia, seperti /v/, /θ/, dan perbedaan antara vokal pendek dan panjang. Kesalahan pengucapan yang umum terjadi meliputi substitusi bunyi dan kecenderungan membaca kata berdasarkan ejaan Bahasa Indonesia. Meskipun demikian, pembelajaran fonik terbukti mampu meningkatkan ketepatan pengucapan dan kepercayaan diri siswa, terutama bila diterapkan secara rutin dengan dukungan media yang menarik seperti lagu, kartu huruf, dan permainan. Keberhasilan penerapan metode fonik sangat dipengaruhi oleh kompetensi guru, ketersediaan media audio, keterbatasan lingkungan berbahasa, dan motivasi siswa. Secara keseluruhan, pendekatan fonik memiliki potensi besar dalam meningkatkan kemampuan literasi dasar dan pelafalan siswa sekolah dasar, tetapi efektivitasnya sangat bergantung pada konsistensi penerapan dan kesiapan pendidik.

Kata Kunci: Pendekatan Fonik, Kasadaran Foném, Grafém–Korespondensi Foném, Akurasi Lafal, Murid EFL SD.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning at the elementary school level plays an important role in shaping students' communication skills, literacy, and cognitive development. Reading and writing skills as part of basic literacy are the foundation for students' success in understanding various subjects at the next level of education. However, in practice, there are still many elementary school students who have difficulty mastering reading skills, especially in terms of recognizing letters, distinguishing sounds, and understanding the relationship between written symbols and the sounds of language. One of the approaches that is considered effective in helping students overcome literacy barriers is *the phonic approach* or phonic approach. This approach emphasizes the skill of combining sounds (phonemes) with letters or groups of letters (graphemes), so that the reading process is not just memorizing the form of words, but understanding the sound system that builds them. The proper application of phonics has been proven to be able to improve decoding skills, reading accuracy, and students' understanding of language structures.

UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung as a basic education institution is committed to improving the quality of language learning through the application of innovative methods and in accordance with the needs of students. Conditions in the field show that some students still need a more systematic approach in recognizing the letters and sounds of language. This encourages schools to apply the phonics approach as one of the learning strategies that are expected to be able to improve initial reading skills effectively. However, the implementation of a learning method is inseparable from challenges. The effectiveness of the phonics approach

is greatly influenced by the readiness of teachers, the availability of learning media, and the suitability of methods with student characteristics. In addition, there has not been much research in the school environment that has examined in depth how the implementation of the phonics approach is carried out, the extent of its effectiveness, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in its application.

Based on this, this research is important to be carried out in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the application of the phonics approach in language learning at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung. Through this research, it is hoped that it will be known how the implementation process is, the success rate of the method in improving students' basic literacy skills, and recommendations for the development of more effective language learning strategies in the future.

1) Problem Formulation

1. How are students able to recognize and distinguish letter sounds (phoneme awareness) when reading simple words in English?
2. What factors affect students' ability to understand the relationship between letters and sounds in English learning in the classroom?
3. To what extent does the application of the Phonics Approach help improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence in reading English words?

2) Research Objectives

1. To describe students' ability to recognize and distinguish letter sounds (phoneme awareness) when reading simple words in English at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung.
2. To identify factors that affect students' ability to understand the relationship between letters and sounds (grapheme–phoneme correspondence) in English learning in the classroom.
3. To analyze the extent to which the application of the Phonics Approach contributes to improving the accuracy of pronunciation and students' confidence when reading words in English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Foundations

A. Phonics Approach (Phonics)

The phonics approach is a method of teaching reading that emphasizes the systematic relationship between sounds (phonemes) and letters or groups of letters (graphemes). This approach can be *analytic*, *synthetic*, or *embedded*, but the most recommended is systematic **and explicit** phonics learning, as it has been shown to be more effective in improving decoding skills and reading accuracy in early childhood. Studies have shown that systematic phonics programs produce an average gain of about a few months of additional progress in reading skills compared to other approaches.

B. Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological awareness includes the ability to recognize and manipulate the units of sound in a language — from syllables to phonemes. In particular, *phonemic awareness*, the ability to identify and distinguish phonemes, is a strong predictor of early reading success. Interventions that explicitly target phoneme awareness have been shown to improve decoding and spelling ability.

C. Hubungan Grapheme–Phoneme (GPC)

Students' ability to understand the correlation between grapheme (letters/groups of letters) and sounds (phonemes) — often called grapheme–phoneme correspondence (GPC) — is at the core of phonics learning. Mastery of GPC allows novice readers to decode new words without relying on memorization. Educational technology and repetitive/repetitious materials (e.g. GraphoGame) is used to train GPCs in a fun and effective way.

D. Influence on Pronunciation and Self-Confidence

Several studies in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) show that phonics/phonological awareness training not only improves reading skills but also helps improve pronunciation and increase students' confidence when reading/speaking in English. Structured interventions provide students with clear sound rules so that pronunciation becomes more precise and students are more confident.

2. Previous Research Studies

Various studies in Indonesia and internationally support the effectiveness of phonics in improving early literacy and pronunciation aspects:

A. Research in Indonesia (examples):

- A classroom action study that showed an increase in pronunciation and confidence scores after the application of the phonics method in elementary school students (e.g., elementary school studies in Ciwidey and Tomohon).
- A synthetic phonics trial applied to low-grade students in bilingual schools in Indonesia showed improvements in word recognition and reading ability.
- Other applied research highlights the importance of adapting phonics materials to local contexts and the need for teacher training for effective implementation.

B. Systematic review and review of the international literature:

- Recent reviews and meta-analyses confirm that systematic and explicit phonics instruction improves decoding, spelling, and sometimes reading comprehension skills in early childhood. In addition, phonemic awareness interventions have proven to be effective as a key component.

Summary of important findings from previous studies: structured phonics programs tend: (a) to increase phonemic awareness; (b) improve reading and pronunciation accuracy; (c) when supported by adequate teacher training and teaching materials, resulting in a more significant improvement; (d) local adaptation (mother tongue, classroom culture) strengthens effectiveness.

3. Previous Research Studies

Based on theory and empirical studies, some of the key factors that affect the success of the application of phonics in the classroom include:

1. Teacher readiness and competence: explicit training related to phonics teaching techniques and understanding of GPC is important so that instruction is delivered consistently.
2. Availability and quality of learning materials: worksheets, structured textbooks, audio media, and age-appropriate contextual materials.

3. Frequency and intensity of teaching: regular instruction, scheduled repetitions, and repetitive practice (drill + simple text reading) accelerate decoding automation.
4. Characteristics of students: differences in early phonological ability, motivation, mother tongue, and family support. Interventions need to be targeted as needed.
5. School context & curriculum policy: school support (timing, curriculum design, assessment) influences the scope of implementation.

4. Theoretical and Practical Implications for the Study

Based on the literature review above, research on "Implementation of Phonic Approach in Language Learning at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung" needs to focus on:

- Measurement of phoneme awareness (ability to identify and discriminate phonemes) using valid instruments (e.g., sound recognition test, phoneme merging/splitting task).
- Pronunciation and self-confidence evaluation: a combination of performance assessments (reading aloud rubrics) and affective instruments (confidence questionnaires). EFL studies in Indonesia have used a similar design and reported positive results.
- Analysis of supporting/inhibiting factors: teachers' abilities, materials, and classroom context that will provide an idea of why implementation is successful or not.

RESEARCH METHODS

1) Survey Place and Time

Survey Location : UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung

Time : Tuesday, 11 November 2025

2) Survey Subject of Resource Persons

The subject or resource person in the research is one of the teachers at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung namely Mrs. Adinda Mutia Rahma

3) Data Capture Management

The collection and collection of data that the author has done is by the direct interview method with the source being researched using polite standard language.

4) Instrument Survey

In this study, it was carried out with data collection tools (instruments) used in the form of questions given to the resource persons. The questions that the author asks are:

1. How are students' ability to recognize and distinguish letter sounds (phoneme awareness) when reading simple English words?
2. What are some of the most common pronunciation mistakes students make when reading English words taught using the Phonic Approach?
3. What is the level of student activity and engagement when participating in Phonics Approach-based learning activities?
4. What factors affect students' ability to understand the relationship between letters and sounds in English learning in the classroom?
5. To what extent does the application of the Phonics Approach help improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence in reading English words?

5) Data Analytics Management

This research was conducted to explain how the development tasks of students in elementary education learning at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung school. The data that appears in this study is in the form of a series of sentences that are systematically arranged and there is a framework of thought about how the process of student development in learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews

1. How are students' ability to recognize and distinguish letter sounds (phoneme awareness) when reading simple English words?

Ability to recognize letter sounds (phoneme awareness) Most students still have difficulty distinguishing letter sounds in English because they are used to reading using Indonesian spelling. They are generally proficient with simple sounds, but have difficulty with sounds that do not exist in Indonesian.

2. What are the most common pronunciation mistakes students make when reading English words taught using the Phonic Approach?

Common pronunciation mistakes Common mistakes include pronouncing /v/ as /f/, /θ/ (th) as /t/ or /d/, and confusion in distinguishing between long and short vowels, as in the words "ship" and "sheep". Students also often read letters based on their spelling, not their sounds.

3. What is the level of student activity and involvement when participating in Phonic Approach-based learning activities?

Student Activity and Engagement Levels Students tend to be more active when learning uses engaging media such as songs, letter cards, and games. However, if learning is too theoretical, their engagement decreases.

4. What factors affect students' ability to understand the relationship between letters and sounds in English learning in the classroom?

Factors Affecting Letter and Sound Comprehension The main factors are the teacher's ability to teach phonics, the availability of audio media, a less supportive language environment, and student motivation.

5. To what extent does the application of the Phonics Approach help improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence in reading English words?

Impact of the Implementation of the Phonics Approach If applied regularly, the Phonics Approach helps improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence in reading. However, the results depend on the consistency and repetitive training of the teacher.

Discussion

The results of interviews conducted with teachers and students at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the Phonics Approach in English language learning. The following discussion relates the field findings to phonics theory and relevant literature.

1. Students' Ability to Recognize and Distinguish Letter Sounds (Phoneme Awareness)

The first findings show that most students still have difficulty distinguishing the sounds of English letters, especially in phonemes that are not found in Indonesian, such as /θ/, /ð/, /v/,

as well as the distinction of short-long vowels. This symptom is very common in the context of EFL learners.

In the phonological theory of second languages, phonemic difficulties arise due to negative transfer from the mother tongue (L1 transfer). Indonesian uses a simpler and more phonetic phonological system (letters are read according to spelling), so students tend to apply the L1 pattern to non-phonetic English. This is in line with previous studies that stated that Indonesian students tend to read English words based on spelling (spelling-based reading) because they have not mastered the relationship between English sounds and letters (Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondence).

From the perspective of the phonics approach, phoneme awareness is a key component in beginning reading. This difficulty shows that students' phonemic awareness skills still need to be developed through sound segmentation, blending, and discrimination exercises.

2. Most Common Pronunciation Mistakes

Several dominant pronunciation errors were found, such as:

- /v/ is pronounced as /f/
- /θ/ (th) is pronounced as /t/ or /d/
- Confusion distinguishing between short and long vowels ("ship" vs. "sheep")
- Reading letters based on spelling, not sounds

This mistake corroborates the first finding: students do not yet have a proper phonological representation of English sounds. Changes in /v/→/f/ are a common substitution phenomenon because /v/ is not present in Indonesian phoneme inventory. Likewise, /θ/ and /ð/ are replaced by /t/ or /d/ as the closest phonemes in the mother tongue.

The phonics approach is actually designed to address this problem through the explicit teaching of sound-letter relationships. However, the results of the interviews show that there is still a gap between the application of phonics and the mastery of sound, which can be caused by:

- lack of repetitive drills
- lack of authentic audio media
- Limited learning time

Thus, although the phonics approach has been used, its application has not been fully optimal in reducing certain pronunciation errors.

3. Student Activity and Involvement Levels in Phonics Learning

Teachers report that students are more active when learning uses engaging media such as songs, letter cards, videos, and phonics games. Activity increases when students engage in activities that are multisensory, rhythmic, or demand direct participation.

In contrast, when learning is too theoretical—for example, just explaining rules without practice—student engagement decreases. These findings are in line with the principles of phonics-based multisensory learning, which emphasizes that elementary school-age students have an easier time understanding sound concepts through activities that combine:

- visuals (letter cards, images)
- Auditory (songs, sound recordings)
- kinesthetic (movement, game)

It is also supported by a child's learning theory that emphasizes the importance of fun and interactive activities. Therefore, the success of phonics in the classroom depends on how the teacher packages the activity so that it is not monotonous or too abstract.

4. Factors Affecting Students' Understanding of the Relationship of Letters and Sounds

The interview identified several influential factors:

a) Teachers' Abilities in Teaching Phonics

The teacher's understanding of phonics techniques greatly determines the quality of instruction. If teachers have not been trained, then the delivery of GPC (Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondence) material tends to be inconsistent.

b) Availability of Audio Media and Teaching Materials

Since phonics focuses on sound, audio media is essential. The lack of an original sound source leaves students only hearing examples from teachers, which may not always be consistent.

c) Less Supportive Language Environment

Students are rarely exposed to English in everyday life, so phonics learning is not reinforced by practice outside the classroom.

d) Student Motivation

Students with low motivation tend to lack confidence and are reluctant to try to read or pronounce new words.

These factors show that the mastery of phonics does not only depend on the method, but also the readiness of the learning system and the support of the educational environment.

5. The Impact of the Phonics Approach on Pronunciation Accuracy and Self-Confidence

Interviews show that the application of phonics has a positive impact, especially if it is done by:

- orderly
- Recurring
- accompanied by reading and listening exercises,
- using interactive media.

Students who are used to practicing phonics show:

- increased accuracy in reading the words that have been learned,
- more confident when reading new words,
- Dare to try to say words without relying too much on spelling.

However, this positive impact is highly dependent on the consistency of implementation. Without continuous reinforcement and practice, progress can slow or be uneven between students. These results are in line with previous research showing that phonics has high effectiveness, but requires a stable intensity and quality of execution to provide the best results.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the results of a mini research on the implementation of the Phonics Approach in English learning at UPT SD Negeri 064037 Medan Tembung, it can be concluded that

students' ability to recognize and distinguish letter sounds is still limited, especially in English sounds that are not found in Indonesian. These difficulties can be seen from the tendency of students to read words based on Indonesian spelling and the existence of common pronunciation errors, such as pronunciation /v/ to /f/, /θ/ to /t/ or /d/, as well as confusion in distinguishing between long and short vowels. Nonetheless, the application of the phonics approach has been proven to improve students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence, especially for those who receive regular and targeted training. The level of student involvement was also seen to increase when learning was supported by interactive media such as songs, games, letter cards, and videos, but decreased when learning was delivered theoretically without interesting activities. In addition, several factors also affect students' understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds, such as teachers' competence in teaching phonics, the availability of audio media, a less supportive language environment, and students' motivation in learning. Overall, the phonics approach has great potential in improving students' basic reading and pronunciation skills, but its success is highly dependent on consistency, media support, and teachers' readiness to implement it.

Suggestions

Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that teachers receive additional training on systematic and explicit phonics techniques so that they can convey material on the relationship between letters and sounds consistently and effectively. Schools also need to increase the availability of audio and visual learning media, such as phoneme recordings, interactive videos, and phonics cards, so that students get a more authentic exposure to English sounds. Phonics learning should be done repeatedly and consistently so that students have the opportunity to build automation in reading and pronouncing words. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to use a multisensory approach involving visual, auditory, and movement activities to increase student engagement. The school environment can also be made more supportive of English learning through the provision of reading corners, literacy activities, or habituation programs that provide regular exposure to the language. Finally, it is recommended that further research be carried out with a quantitative approach to measure the development of students' phonemic and pronunciation skills so that the results can be analyzed more objectively and thoroughly.

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