The Effect of foniks*PINTAR Method on Emergent Literacy Skill of Preschool Children.

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Abstract

Academic success is closely related to children's reading ability at school age. Subsequently, reading ability is largely determined by emergent literacy skills at preschool age. Considering the low national Indonesian student literacy skills which are ranked at the bottom layer of PISA international assessments, it becomes necessary to set up strategic methods to enhance children's emergent literacy at preschool age. There is no standardized method of teaching pre-reading ability in Early Childhood Education in Indonesia. Phonological awareness plays a significant role in reading ability together with working memory, language skills, and letter knowledge. This article is part of a thesis that aims to see the effect of the foniks*PINTAR method based on phonics on the emergent literacy skills of kindergarten children.

This is a qualitative study with literature research using PubMed and Google Scholar search engines with keywords phonological awareness, emergent literacy, phonics method, and foniks*PINTAR.

Thirty-five relevant articles were obtained after following the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the research.

It was concluded that research is required to see the effect of the foniks*PINTAR method, which is a structured, systematic, and multisensory phonics-based method on the emergent literacy skill of preschool-aged children.

Keyword: preschool; emergent literacy; phonics methods; foniks*PINTAR

1. Introduction

Academic success is strongly supported by good reading abilities, and reading ability at school age is determined by emergent reading ability at preschool age (Mc Namara et al, 2011). At preschool age, children who have poor reading abilities tend to remain poor or below average when they are in grade 3 of elementary school. Research conducted by comparing a group of preschool-age children who underwent a phonics screening test and a PIRLS test in the 4th grade of elementary school has found that children who failed two phonics screening tests were lagging behind in their reading abilities compared to the group who passed. Moreover, the group of children who failed initially and then passed the phonics screening test still did not have the same abilities as the group of children who passed straight away (Double et al, 2019). This shows that children who do not have good reading skills are at risk of being left behind in their academic abilities compared to their friends. So there will be an increasingly large gap between children who have good reading skills and children who have low reading skills, which is called *the Matthew effect* (Stanovic, 1986).

For children who do not have good reading skills in the early grades (up to 3rd grade of elementary school), and are not managed quickly, there is little chance of completing formal education. Hernandez (2011) conducted research on 4000 students in the US and concluded that students who could not read fluently at the end of grade 3 of elementary school had a four times greater risk of not completing school. This condition shows that it is important to intervene with children in the critical period of their age, namely in their preschool age. *Phonetic decoding* abilities at preschool age play a very important role for children when first developing reading skills (Saracho, 2017; Castles et al., 2018).

Data based on assessment results from both domestic and abroad are able to describe the condition of the literacy level of school-age children in Indonesia. Among them is EGRA, also known as Early Grade Reading Assessment, which shows that although in general students in grades 2 and 3 can read words, they do not always understand the meaning of the words they read. Only half of the students were able to understand the reading material at a satisfactory level, by being able to answer at least 4 out of 5 questions correctly (ACDP, 2014). Another national assessment is the 2016 Indonesian Student Competency Assessment (AKSI), which shows that almost half, around 46.83% of students are lacking in reading ability, 77.13% of students are in the category of lacking in mathematics ability, and 73.61% of students are lacking in science (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017 GLN Guide). Another assessment is the 2018 Reading Literacy Activity Index (Alibaca Index) which maps literacy activities with 4 dimensions in 34 provinces in Indonesia. The average National Alibaca Index falls into the low literacy activity category, with two of the four dimensions, namely culture and access, having quite low scores. Of the 34 provinces assessed, most of the provinces were at a low literacy activity level (27 provinces) and not a single province was at a high literacy activity level.

To find out Indonesia's position among other countries, it is necessary to carry out an international assessment of students' literacy skills. One of the assessments is the PISA or Program for International Student Assessment, the results of which are not much different from the results of the national assessment. The scores obtained for the reading ability of Indonesian children are still below the average for OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development) countries. Even though there was an increasing pattern from 2000 to 2009, it had then fallen back to its original point in PISA 2018. The results of PISA 2022 show an increase of 5 - 6 positions in Indonesia's ranking compared to other OECD countries. However, the average score of Indonesian students in reading ability or literacy is still low at 359 compared to the world average score of 469. Therefore, it is important for the government to immediately address the problem of low reading ability. Where its preparation is determined from preschool age, which is the foundation for children's reading abilities in the future (Double et al., 2019; Saracho, 2017).

Preschool-age children's initial reading skills are important in supporting successful reading and writing at school age. These abilities include various knowledge of letters and letter sounds, knowledge of sound sensitivity or *Phonological Awareness*, understanding the concept of writing, starting to learn to write (*invented spelling*) including being able to write one's own name (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Justice, 2006; Jolongo, 2014). Although there is no official national data regarding the emergent reading ability of preschool-aged children in Indonesia, there have been several studies conducted by several researchers on a limited basis in several cities in Indonesia. Ministry of Education and Culture (2019) states that the low level of basic literacy skills in Indonesia is caused by three problems, namely the quality and competence of teachers, the literacy curriculum in the early grades, and learning resources (books and libraries). One of the literacy curriculums is related to the appropriate methods for teaching reading.

How to choose the right method for teaching children to read is an important factor that must be considered, given that reading is not a skill that is acquired from birth but must be taught through structured learning activities at school (Cain, Oakhill & Elbro, 2014; Crouch, L 2012). Systematic and explicit phonics-based instruction helps children make neurological connections between brain areas dedicated to visual (writing), phonological (sound), and semantic (meaning) processing. (Buckingham and Castle, 2019). In Indonesia, phonics-based methods have been used in several preschool education programs. The use of phonics-based methods is still quite diverse and is not standardized. One of the phonics-based methods developed by Dr Ong Puay Hoon is the foniks*PINTAR method which is parallel to the *Smarter Phonics method* which stands for ' *A Structured and Multisensory Approach To Enhance Reading'*. This method uses the principles of the *Orton-Gillingham Method* to teach phonics systematically and gradually and has been adapted to Malay for use in all kindergartens in Sarawak. Because Malay is of the same family as Indonesian, there is a possibility of teaching the foniks*PINTAR method to Indonesians. In one of the workshops held in Jakarta in 2019, the Smart Literacy Community together with Mr. Totok Suhardijanto, MHum, PhD, who at that time was still active as a postgraduate teacher at FIB-UI, adapted foniks*PINTAR into Indonesian. This article is part of a thesis that aims to find out how the use of this method affects kindergarten education in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emergent Reading Ability

Reading is an activity that must be taught to children. Parents, teachers, or adults are important figures for children in their process of learning to read. In addition to creating a

conducive environment to stimulate age-appropriate developmental abilities, parents and teachers must have sufficient knowledge to support young children in the process of learning to read.

In the stage of literacy development, children begin to understand that words they encounter every day have a function, such as family names, food labels, street signs, and shop or restaurant names. After recognizing its function, children will become interested in the form of writing. They will become intrigued by the components of letter names, the sounds, and the shapes of the letters that make up words. It gives an indication that learning to read is more than just understanding the function of writing. Furthermore, children will then learn how writing is formed. For instance, knowing that reading and writing proceed from left to right, punctuation serves a purpose in reading and writing, and that spaces delimit letters and words. Even though children initially only understand the function of writing, they will develop an interest in the form of words and how writing is constructed, even at a simple level(Morrow, 2020).

Jalongo (2014) states several critical components for emergent reading ability which include language, phonological and linguistic competence, the ability to identify letters, and understanding the concepts of writing. Several phases must be passed when a child learns to read. It starts with the transition of the ‘pre-alphabetic’ phase when children do not understand letters yet, the ‘partial alphabetic’ phase, and finally the ‘full alphabetic’ phase in first grade. During the initial phase, children will gradually learn the relationship between graphemes and phonemes systematically and how to combine phonemes to form words. Reading words by mapping and combining phonological elements systematically is called phonological re-coding. This is an important factor in children's reading because it allows them to independently translate sound symbols from unfamiliar words using phonological re-coding. When children perform these decoding activities repeatedly, words or parts of words will be stored in their memory as the orthographic lexicon. As children read more, words stored in the orthographic lexicon become more specific, making the decoding process in reading an automatic process. Furthermore, as children practice more re-coding activities, the decoding process becomes faster, and more efficient, and provides additional information when they combine sounds from even unfamiliar words. (Moniek et al. 2017).

According to several studies, there are several variables of emergent reading ability a child must have to support their reading ability in the future such as phonological awareness, recognizing letters randomly; being able to identify objects around them; recognizing familiar words, including their name, the names of family members, and friends; recognizing writing in their environment (signs, labels), and certain words from favorite books and songs; pretending to read favorite books and "track print" by pointing to words from left to right and top to bottom; being able to write their name and some letters, as well as understanding and appropriately responding to oral instructions. *National Early Literacy Panel* (2008); Allington & Walmsley, (2007); Dickinson & Snow, (1987); Torrance & Olson, (1985).

By observing that children already exhibit these emergent literacy behaviors, it is hoped that parents and teachers can create an appropriate support system, both in providing resources, an environment, and literacy-rich assistance, thus enhancing children's literacy development skills so that they can have good reading comprehension abilities in the future.

2.2 How the Brain Works When Reading

The hemisphere of the human brain that plays the dominant role in reading is the human left brain. Reading ability is associated with more left lateral activation with activation of parts of the left inferior (lower) occipital cortex (including the *fusiform gyrus*) of the human brain. (Buchweitz et al. 2009). Various research and studies have revealed the cognitive pathways and neural processes in the human brain when learning to read. For beginner readers, the pathway used to decode the "writing code" is the phonological (sound) pathway in the brain. Children will decode written phonology using knowledge of sound-letter relationships, then, they will be able to understand the meaning of words if they are in their vocabulary. When a word is seen and read (*decoded*) many times, it will be stored in long-term memory. The brain will recognize the stored words quickly regardless of size, font, and color, and without going through the phonological decoding process again. This process will reduce the cognitive load, allowing readers to focus on understanding in a broader sense, both explicitly and inferentially.

Acquiring literacy will reorganize the left brain's *ventral occipito-temporal* pathway, moving the brain's response to non-text visual stimuli to the right hemisphere resulting in an increased response to words or letters. Phonological coding activities will strengthen the relationship between phonemic and graphemic representations functionally and anatomically. (Dehaene S et al. 2015). This represents the ability of phonological sensitivity which is an important component of a child's reading process. In their study, Dehaene and Cohen (2011), Dehaene-Lambertz G, and Monzalvo K (2018) explained that an area in the back of the brain *(left lateral temporal occipital*), known as *the Visual Word Form Area* (VWFA), will be activated when children see various letters and writing around them. The VWFA facilitates the grapheme-phoneme association process in decoding when children read. This underscores the teaching of reading using associations between sounds (phonemes) and letter shapes (graphemes) because it aligns with the way the human brain functions during reading. (Figure 1).

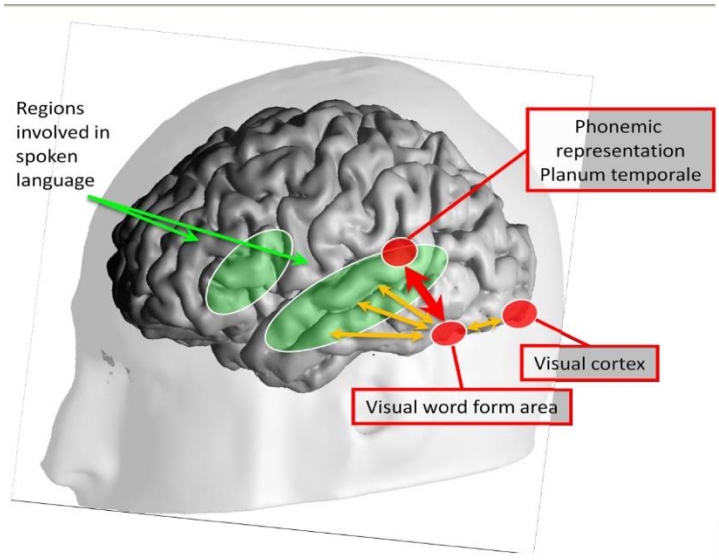

Figure 1: Brain circuits restructuring in the process of learning to read
Taken from: Dehaene, 2013. Inside the letterbox: how literacy transforms the human brain.

The process through the neural circuits in the brain occurs in all individuals when they learn how to read. The ability to utilize the phonological route in reading is the culmination of a complex learning process that some children find easier than others. Nevertheless, despite the varying levels of ease in learning among children, the fundamental acquisition process remains consistent.

2.3 Methods for teaching reading to early childhood

How to teach reading or which methods are appropriate can certainly be seen from many previous studies that have been carried out. Gough (1972), La Berge and Samuels (1974) in Kennedy et al (2012) explain the '*Bottom Up method*' which is a word recognition method. It progresses sequentially from letters to phonemes, then is represented at the lexical level, and finally at the structural level. The concept of '*The Simple View of Reading'* (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), which focuses on the role of *decoding* and language comprehension in reading, originates from the *bottom-up model of reading*. The *Simple View of Reading* (SVR) concept states that reading comprehension (*Reading Comprehension* = RC) is the product of *Decoding* (D) and Language Comprehension (*LC*) so RC = D x LC. This concept, however, does not address the challenges readers face in processing various clues or sources of information while reading. For example, it does not take into account whether readers have sufficient background knowledge to understand a text, nor does it take into account the socio-cultural context of literacy learning. The second approach is *the* '*Top - down model*' initiated by Smith (1971) and Goodman (1967, 1994) requires the role of text context in identifying words that the reader does not know. Therefore, readers must have relevant prior knowledge, as well as semantic and syntactic knowledge, in order to extract words from the text that confirm its meaning. This approach raises various questions. Although context may be useful for confirming the meaning of newly identified words, it cannot be used as a stand-alone approach for identifying new words. The third approach is '*The Interactive Model*' developed by Adams (1990) in the form of the interaction of four processor components, namely the context processor, the meaning processor, the orthographic processor, and the phonological processor. These processors work together to convey information to the reader. When readers recognize the letters in a word, the corresponding patterns of spelling, pronunciation, and meaning are activated. At the same time, the context processor constructs a coherent interpretation or message. In this model, skilled readers access the spelling, sound, meaning, and context of familiar words almost automatically. Words are recognized quickly and fluently. Each of these systems interacts and receives information from one another. The most important system in this model is the orthographic processor which receives information directly from writing. If the word is known to the reader, its meaning will be accessed automatically. If the meaning is unknown, then the reader will engage in additional phonological processing or may need information from the context processor and meaning processor. Readers who are already skilled will use a lot of familiar cues during the reading process. However, the direct route from the orthographic processor to the meaning processor is still seen as the most efficient route.

In line with the '*Interactive Model*' above, there is an opinion that divides it into two approaches, namely the '*Decoding approach*' versus the '*Visually Based Retrieval*' approach

(Papalia 2008). The *Decoding approach* is where children translate words in writing using sound components that build them through the process of remembering from long-term memory. In this case, children must have phonics knowledge or master the phonetic code that connects letters with their sounds. The *Visually Based Retrieval* approach is an approach where children see the letters and then remember them. The *Decoding* approach is referred to as the Phonetic Approach or *code emphasis approach* which emphasizes the process *of decoding* unknown words, while the *Visual Based Retrieval Approach* is referred to as *The Whole Language Approach* which emphasizes visual recall and the use of contextual cues.

The *Whole Language Approach* refers to constructivist theory which views learning as an active process. Children will build knowledge by solving problems, guessing, and approaching things they observe and find in their surroundings. Likewise in reading activities, children are believed to be able to learn to read and write naturally, as much as they learn to understand and use language in everyday communication. Children learn to read with better comprehensibility and enjoy written language as a means to acquire information and express their ideas and feelings, rather than as an isolated system of sounds and phonetics that must be learned through practice. However, some experts criticize this approach as one that encourages children to read quickly (skimming), and guess words and meanings without attempting to verify the reading or correct spelling errors.

It has been proven that a lot of research shows the success of teaching methods that emphasize phonemic awareness skills and early phonics training on children's reading skills. (Liberman and Liberman 1990; National Reading Panel 2000 in Papalia 2008). Children will learn phonics skills along with various strategies that can help them understand what they read. This approach is expected to align with the child's brain when they read because reading skills are a cognitive process that results from the collaborative function of different parts of the brain working together.

Nancy Young, a Master of Education in Special Education with a focus on dyslexia and also a member of IDA (*International Dyslexia Association)* created an infographic in the form of *a Ladder of Literacy* which is the result of research based on studies from R. Lyon, NICHD, *Reading Initiative* (1998), *National Reading Panel*, 2000 and Moats, L & Dakin, K. (2015). *IDA: Fact sheets: Dyslexia basics*. This infographic contains statistical data on the percentage of children who are able to read using various methods according to their needs. Around 5 - 10% of children do not require any specific method or are effortless, 35% of children are able to read with any method, another 40 - 45% require explicit and systematic instruction in moderate amounts, and about 10 - 15% require continuous instruction with extensive repetition (in cases of reading difficulty). From this data, it is concluded that approximately 80 - 85% of children require teaching with specific methods in reading and about 55 - 60% of children require teaching using explicit instruction, code-based components, and phonemic and phonics-based awareness. (Figure 2).

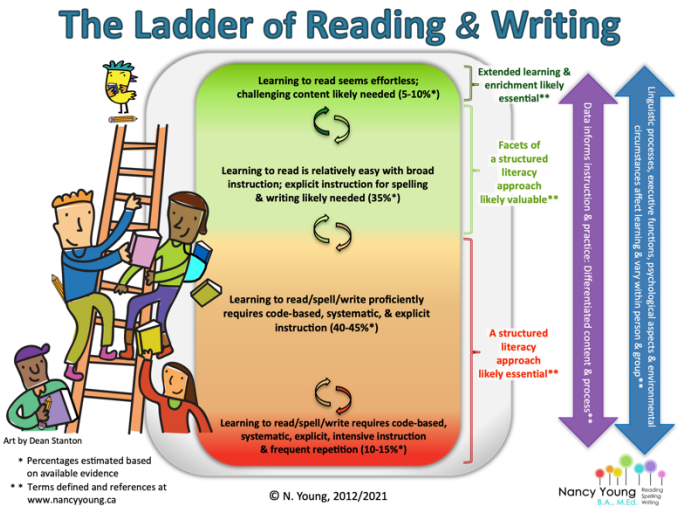

Figure 2: *Ladder of Literacy* taken from https://www.nancyyoung.ca/permission-information

According to Young's 2021 statistical data, the majority of children require teaching that is explicit and systematic, utilizing code-based or code-based components employing a phonetic approach. Explicit and systematic phonics instruction helps children make neurological connections between areas of the brain that are devoted to visual (writing), phonological (sound), and semantic (meaning) processing. Some children form these neurological connections quickly, while others require more intensive instruction and repeated exposure. A small number of fortunate children can make connections on their own, without clear instruction. When children start school, teachers cannot accurately predict which group will struggle to learn to read without explicit and systematic phonics instruction and which will not. Therefore, the most ethical and wise action is to provide all children with the most effective teaching methods based on the best available evidence, thereby accelerating the progress of all children and minimizing the likelihood of any child struggling to learn to read.

2.4 The foniks*PINTAR method (adaptation of *Smarter Phonics*)

Many methods based on the phonics approach are used in teaching activities on how to read at an early age. Phonics serves as one component used alongside other teaching methods, or phonics itself is a primary component, and some even become commercially oriented methods. The foniks*PINTAR method is a teaching method for reading that has a phonic approach as its main component, characterized by a systematic, structured and also uses a multisensory approach. The foniks*PINTAR method, which was discovered by Dr Ong Puay Hoon, the chairman of the Sarawak Dyslexia Association, is parallel to *Smarter Phonics* which is an abbreviation of ' *A Structured and Multisensory Approach To Enhance Reading* '. In addition, the foniks*PINTAR method has been implemented as the official method of learning to read in all preschools in Sarawak (Ong Puay Hoon 2016). Since many people in Sarawak speak Malay and do not understand English, Dr. Ong adapted the *Smarter Phonics method* to teach how to read in Malay, making foniks*PINTAR the first teaching method to read in the Malay language.

The foniks*PINTAR method uses the *Orton-Gillingham method* principle, by using a phonetic approach and a multisensory approach to teach children how to read. The materials used in foniks*PINTAR to introduce letters employ simple and inexpensive media. For example, bottle caps with letter representations will be used for teaching purposes. In Ong et al.'s 2015 study, a literacy boot camp involving activities with a structured and cumulative reading instruction program, utilizing bottle caps with letters as manipulative aids, was proven to be effective in enhancing the reading proficiency of 13 children with reading difficulties, encompassing both sight words and words with CVC patterns. Additionally, multisensory activities incorporating tactile components (part of Visual, Auditory, and Tactile), utilize a plastic mat cut to the size of 20 x 10 cm, which is employed when children engage in letter tracing activities prior to writing on the board and paper.

The foniks*PINTAR methods adhere to explicit, structured, systematic, and multisensory principles. Explicit teaching involves clear and direct instruction provided by the teacher. The systematic principle entails teaching starting from the smallest units of words, which are sound components, and progressing to syllables, words, and sentences. Meanwhile, the structured aspect ensures that the taught sound combinations or phonotactics follow a pattern, progressing from simple to complex patterns in alignment with the reading development characteristics of Indonesian children (Anjarningsih, 2018). Multisensory aspects are evident in activities that engage large muscle movements for understanding and memory associations, manipulation using bottle caps, playing activities with songs to enhance listening/auditory skills, and tracing letters using hands on a tactile mat to prepare for writing letters on a board or paper.

In its application, the foniks*PINTAR method uses the following stages:

a. Initial activities comprise of:
    - Improving listening skills through various activities of listening to sounds, telling stories as well as movements and songs.
    - Developing *sorting* or grouping skills through playing activities with blocks, colored pencils, seeds, buttons, etc.
    - Developing sound sensitivity skills through word awareness activities. Such as word recognition, merging, segmentation, isolation, and deletion activities.
b. Developing knowledge of the relationship between sounds and letters. The activities carried out include:
    - Pointing to and recognizing the sound of letter sets, whether individual, group, or class.
    - Pronouncing the letter sounds from sets of letters, whether individual, group, or class.
    - Pay attention to the letters at the beginning, middle, and end and match the letter sets. (Individual)
    - Make words that start with the letter sound given according to the letter set. (Group)
    - Awareness of letter shapes. (Individual and pair)
c. Ability *to blend* and *segment* KV, VK, and word patterns according to letter sets.

- *Blending* or combining letters into KV, VK, or word patterns. Both in the form of class and group activities
- *Segmenting* or separating letters from KV, VK, or word patterns into the smallest sounds. Both individually and in pairs.
- Activities to process auditory abilities on KV and VK syllables or words using bottle caps or letter cards on the board. (Individual)

d. Ability *to blend* and *segment* KVK pattern words from letter sets.
   - Making words with KVK patterns using the letter cards on the board. (class)
   - Blending *letters* to form KVK words using letter cards on the board (class and group)

The letters introduced to children using the foniks*PINTAR method are not in alphabetical order but are organized into letter sets. In the Sarawak edition of the foniks*PINTAR letter set, the sequence is based on the most common Malay words used in Sarawak. During the foniks*PINTAR workshop in Indonesia in 2019, the Smart Literacy Community, together with the late Mr. Totok Suhardijanto, MHum, PhD, who was then a postgraduate teacher at FIB-UI, adapted it into Bahasa Indonesia by selecting the sequence of letters from the most common words in Bahasa Indonesia. The sequence of letters is arranged into ten sets and outlined in ten-letter set guidebooks. These letter sets refer to the sounds taken in sequence from the Indonesian language corpus, which closely matches the phonological acquisition sequence of Indonesian children. This sequence follows the development of the child's expressive language (Dardjowidjojo 2000 and Budhiono 2011), making it easier for the child to recognize and master as it aligns with their stages of language development (figure 3).

BUKU	SET HURUF	HURUF
1	1	a, b, m, t
1	2	a, b, m, t, i, k, n
2	3	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s
3	3	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s
4	4	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s, o, d, h, l, p
5	4	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s, o, d, h, l, p
6	5	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s, o, d, h, l, p, e, ĕ, g, j, y
7	5	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s, o, d, h, l, p, e, ĕ, g, j, y
8	6	a, b, m, t, i, k, n, u, r, s, o, d, h, l, p, e, ĕ, g, j, y, c, f, v, w
8	7	a, b, m, t, u, k, s, i, n, y, o, d, h, l, r, e, ĕ, g, j, p, c, f, v, w, ng
9	8	a, b, m, t, u, k, s, i, n, y, o, d, h, l, r, e, ĕ, g, j, p, c, f, v, w, ng, ny, kh, sy, q, z
9	8	a, b, m, t, u, k, s, i, n, y, o, d, h, l, r, e, ĕ, g, j, p, c, f, v, w, ng, ny, kh, sy, q, z
9	9	a, b, m, t, u, k, s, i, n, y, o, d, h, l, r, e, ĕ, g, j, p, c, f, v, w, ng, ny, kh, sy, q, z, st, sp, br, pr, sr, kr, tr, dr, pl, ...
10	-	semua

Figure 3: Development of Indonesian Adapted Letter Sets (Suhardijanto, 2019)

3. Materials and Methods

This research employs qualitative methods with a literature review approach by collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing various relevant literature sources. The author conducted electronic searches using the PubMed and Google Scholar databases from January 2015 to December 2022. The review includes prospective and longitudinal cohort studies, narrative and systematic reviews, as well as editorials and correspondence. Titles and abstracts were initially screened, followed by retrieval and assessment of the full texts of all relevant

articles for eligibility. Additionally, references of all selected articles were reviewed to identify potential articles for inclusion. Non-eligible articles were excluded based on predefined criteria, and duplicate articles were removed. In cases of duplicate studies from the same author(s) and/or institution(s) reporting on the same or overlapping subjects, only the most recent study with the longest follow-up was included, although older studies were considered if certain data were not reported in the newer studies. Search terms included “phonological awareness,” “emergent literacy,” “phonics method,” and “foniks*PINTAR.” The search was restricted to articles in English and Bahasa. Inclusion criteria comprised studies focusing on preschool children, preschool settings, multisensory approaches, Indonesia, and typical child development.

4. Results

After applying the inclusion criteria in the first stage of the review process, 893 of 1090 (82%) did not meet the inclusion criteria based solely on the study title and abstract. After a comprehensive full-text examination of the 197 remaining studies, 162 were further excluded. Finally, 35 studies were included in the study. Among these, 5 show the condition of literacy in Indonesia, 8 studies describe the use of the phonics method in Indonesia, 12 studies show the importance of early reading skills at preschool age on reading skills at school age, 3 studies explain how the brain works when reading, 3 articles regarding the use of multisensory media in teaching reading skills, 3 studies related to children's phonological acquisition and 1 study regarding the use of the foniks*PINTAR method.

5. Discussion

Preschool-age children's initial reading skills which we call emergent reading ability are important in supporting successful reading and writing at school age. Although there is no official national data regarding the emergent reading ability of preschool-aged children in Indonesia, there have been several studies conducted by several researchers on a limited basis in several cities in Indonesia. From the following studies, we get a picture of the condition of preschool children's emergent reading ability which is still lacking in several places in Indonesia. Haryati 2015, Fitriana 2020, and Fahrurrozi 2017, conducted research on emergent reading ability assessments in Kindergarten B class, and showed that the results were poor and not yet well developed. Kindergarten group B children cannot yet recognize letters and pronounce letter sounds simply. Nearly 50% of children in this class cannot differentiate between letters that sound almost the same, such as kq, and fs, and letters that sound almost the same, such as bd, p, and q. This is in line with research by Sari and Rianto (2016), Asmonah (2019), Choirina (2020), and Darmawan (2017), which shows that several children in Kindergarten B class experience problems in their initial reading skills, such as recognizing letters and their shapes, pointing and mentioning letter symbols and reading simple words. This is certainly in line with the results of assessments of reading ability in school-age children in Indonesia which are still low. Both assessments are carried out domestically, as well as international assessments such as PISA, where Indonesia's position is still below the average ranking of OECD countries. Therefore, it is important for the government to immediately address the problem of low reading ability. Where preparation is determined from preschool

age, which is the foundation for children's reading abilities in the future. (Double et al. 2019; Saracho 2017).

Several research panels have been conducted regarding learning using the phonics method in Indonesia. Haryati (2015), and Suparno and Indriana (2018) used the phonics method to develop or improve children's initial reading abilities in Group B in Kindergarten and were said to be quite successful. Sari and Rianto's (2016) study showed quite good results with different subjects, namely kindergarten class A. Sumarti (2017) conducted media development research to improve language development based on phonemic awareness in the form of APE such as (1) posters containing names and sounds in Indonesian, (2) separate cards and labels, (3) enrichment books for children that can be done by families, which are expected to stimulate the language skills of Group A kindergarten children. Different media are letter cards from Fitriana's research, Hayati, Oktariana (2022) is proven to be able to improve initial reading skills in group B children in PAUD. One study conducted by Salamah and Agustin (2018) used a method called Smart Indonesian Phonics (CbI Fonik) which was used to train beginning reading skills. However, this study places more emphasis on how to plan, implement and evaluate the method in one school so that it can be accepted by children and becomes an enjoyable learning activity, rather than assessing the effectiveness of the method in relation to children's initial reading abilities. The effectiveness of the *Cerdas Berbahasa Indonesia Phonics* (CbI Phonik) method was researched by Alfian, Rahmawati, and Kristiana (2022) on the listening ability of children in the Kindergarten A group, and it was found that there was an increase in listening ability through pre-phonics activities through single-story posters and songs.

From several studies that have been carried out above, it was found that teachers' understanding of the concept of beginning reading still varies. The phonics methods applied are still diverse and do not yet have a systematic, structured, and explicit teaching system which is an important component in teaching reading (Young 2012). The activities often carried out by kindergarten teachers in teaching early reading also vary in method. Some use the concept of syllables, where children are taught to recognize syllables to be able to read a whole word. There are also those who teach reading with storytelling activities using picture books containing simple text. This aims to help children recognize words through pictures and context, as well as understand stories. There are also teaching reading using children's songs and playing games related to words. Through this method, children learn new words through songs and get to know their writing through games of looking at the writing given by the teacher. There are those who use the concept of letter sounds or phonics to teach reading, but it is still not consistent and is still random in its implementation

6. Conclusion

Seeing the importance of early reading skills in preschool children, and the low level of literacy skills in Indonesia, especially preschool children's early reading abilities, researchers consider it necessary to conduct an experimental study using the foniks*PINTAR method which is a phonics-based, structured, systematic and multisensory method that has never been used before in research in Indonesia to help improve initial reading skills in kindergarten age groups A and B. Apart from the fact that the foniks*PINTAR method is explicit, structured,

and multisensory, another thing that is also new in this research is that the foniks*PINTAR method teaches the letter sequence uses a set of letters that are guided by the Indonesian language corpus which is similar to the phonological acquisition of Indonesian children or phoneme sequences that are appropriate to expressive language development in the research of Dardjowidjojo 2000 and Budhiono 2011.

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