



The role of alphabet book in improving preschool children's letter recognition

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Abstract

Letter recognition is the first stage in developing children's reading skills. It is hence important to optimize the stimulus for letter recognition, either in terms of methods or media. One of the media helpful for improving children's letter recognition is the alphabet book. The present study aims to depict the role of the alphabet book in improving preschool children's letter recognition. This qualitative library research garnered articles and books using two keywords: alphabet book and letter recognition. The data were collected using documentation and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's descriptive analysis. The result showed that Alphabet Book improved children's letter recognition. Alphabet book could improve children's ability to recognize letter shapes and sounds and write the letter. This improvement appears to be accounted for by the book's various themes, attractive illustrations, and words representing each letter. The alphabet book is also interesting when used together with storytelling and play methods. Alphabet book also plays a role in improving children's learning interest and enriching their vocabulary.

Keywords: preschool children, letter recognition, alphabet book

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a period between 0-6 years of age, a period known as the golden age. Children in this period tend to exhibit rapid physical and psychological development. According to Susanto (2011), development refers to a gradual mental change from simple abilities to more complex abilities, such as intelligence, attitude, and behaviors. Preschool children's development covers six aspects, including physical-motor, cognitive, religious, socioemotional, language, and art aspects (Santrock, as cited in (Sit, 2017).

Language development is one of the fundamental aspects a child should possess as it plays an important role in improving their intellectual, social, and emotional development (Hemah, Sayekti and Atikah, 2018). Language aspects support one's communication, a key to children's life as social creature. Developing children's language skills in early childhood is necessary to allow to them express themselves sufficiently. Children's language skill development is helpful for children to express their thought and communicate effectively (Firdaus, 2021). It is necessary for preschool children to have adequate language skills to ensure

they can communicate their needs, feelings, and idea to ask for what they want, to defend and control themselves Papalia, Olds, dan Feldman (2018). Preschool children's language skills serve as a means to think, listen, speak, read, and write (Suhartono, as cited in Pebriana, 2017).

One of the aspects of language development is letter recognition (Hayati, Amelia, and Hanisah, 2020). As mentioned in the Regulation of Minister of Education and Culture no. 137 of 2014, one of the indicators of early childhood language development, particularly related to letters, is to know and mention letter symbols. Letter recognition is a child's must-have ability prior to developing reading skills, as letter recognition is closely associated with a child's reading and writing skills (Firdaus, 2019). Reading refers to an activity of matching letters or pronouncing written symbols (Darmadi, 2018). In the early childhood education context, reading activity emphasizes more on reading preparation for the next education level by introducing letter symbols and understanding the meaning of words in a story (Risna, 2016). Letter recognition is the initial stage in developing children's reading skills (Rahayuningsih, Soesilo, and Kurniawan, 2019).

Reading activity in early childhood education begins with recognizing letters, which should be done using various methods and media. Using a variety of learning media is expected to affect children's letter recognition ability. Alphabet book, as the name suggests, is a book designed by teachers containing alphabets (Yusyofriend, as cited in Gusnita, 2019). Alphabet books have been reported to improve children's independent practices of early literacy behaviors, such as letter and object naming, and at the lower level, pointing to and pronouncing a letter (Nowak, 2015).

However, some parents are not interested in stimulating their children using the alphabet book, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic that forces shift to online learning activities and causes excessive gadget use among children. Despite its adverse impacts, most children are exposed to excessive gadget use. A previous study reports various impacts of gadget use on children's health, physical, and psycho-motor developments such as eye strain, headache, balance disorders, obesity, and sleep disorders.

Studies on the use of alphabet book as an early childhood learning media for improving children's language aspects have drawn our interest in conducting a literature review focusing on preschool children's letter recognition. Previous studies have spelled out a range of objectives of the use of alphabet book. Therefore, this paper focuses on compiling and reviewing previous studies' report in order to depict the advantages of Alphabet book in improving preschool children's letter recognition, among others (e.g., improving learning interest and vocabulary).

METHOD

This library research collected data from relevant literature. The literature search was performed using two keywords: alphabet book and letter recognition. The reviewed articles were those involving preschool children as the research subject, published in Bahasa Indonesia and English between 2006 and 2020, and accessible in pdf. format. Relevant articles that met the inclusion criteria are those focusing on alphabet books, letter recognition, and preschool children. The reviewed articles are those discussing the role of the alphabet book in improving preschool children's letter recognition. The following table presents the inclusion criteria.

Table 1 Inclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion
Period	Published between 2006 and 2020
Language	Bahasa Indonesia and English
Subject	Preschool Children
Article Topic	Alphabet book for improving letter recognition

The search was performed using Google Scholar, the keyword 'Alphabet Book' generated 440,000 articles, and the keyword 'letter recognition' generated 77,700 articles. In total, the two keywords yield 517,700 articles. Of this number, 420,500 articles were excluded after the publication period of 2006-2020 filter was applied, leaving 97,200 articles for further selection. When other inclusion criteria were applied (i.e., published in Bahasa Indonesia and English between 2006-2020, involving preschool children as research subjects), eight relevant articles were selected, as presented in Fig 1.

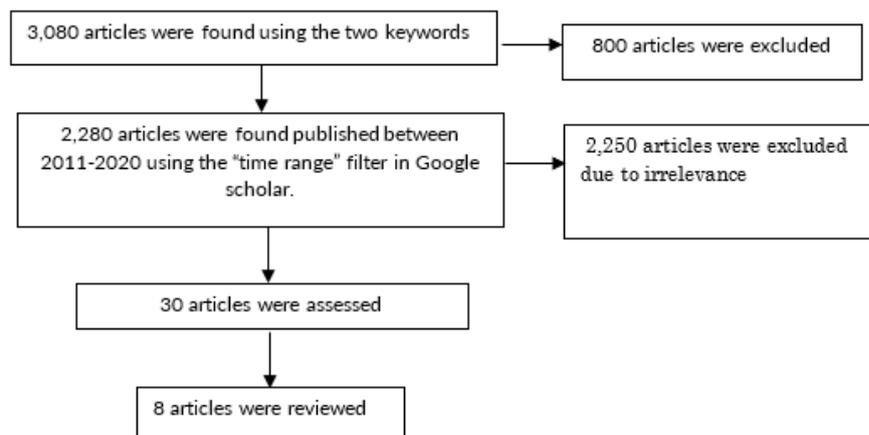


Fig 1. Article Review Diagram

After collecting the data, the next step was to analyze the data. This step aims to display and interpret the collected data. The data were analyzed descriptively following Miles and Huberman's proposed technique, consisting of three main activities: data reduction, data display, and verification. The data validity was tested by enhancing due diligence and using reference materials.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we elaborate on previous study results by comparing, confirming, and drawing conclusions. As mentioned previously, alphabet book could develop preschool children's letter recognition skills, learning motivation, and vocabulary.

Table 2 Comparison Table Articles Review

Author	Method	Result
Helmiati and Indra Yeni	A two-cycle classroom action research involving sixteen preschool children with each cycle consisted of three meetings.	In cycle 1, children's improvement was noticed despite has not achieved the minimum achievement criteria. In cycle 2, children exhibit significant improvement (90% on average) of stating the first letter in the alphabet book, stating letters within the book, and imitating the letter shapes. To conclude, this study reports an improved letter recognition through alphabet book use.
Fitta Ummaya Santi et al.	Action research consisting of problem formulation, planning, implementation, and reflection stages was performed. It trained nineteen early childhood educators in Samigaluh, Kulonprogo. The data were collected through interviews and observation, and analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusion. The data validity was tested through extended observation and triangulation.	The result showed that the training brings positive impacts for the target group. Early childhood educators in this study obtained knowledge and skills to introduce alphabets to children using fun methods and media. They were also able to create a learning media by utilizing resources available in their surroundings. One of the developed medias was smart kids Alphabet book, which was proven to improve children's learning interest. Using the developed media, the learning activities become more interesting and motivating.
Elvira Gusnita et al.	This classroom action research applied qualitative and quantitative approaches involving fifteen children. The action research consisted of two cycles of three meetings each.	In cycle 1, children's improvement was noticed despite has not achieved the minimum achievement criteria. The noticed improvement includes children's ability to mention letter symbols, combine consonant and vocal letters into words, and imitate the letter shapes. In

Author	Method	Result
		cycle 2, the improvement rate was significant and passed the minimum criteria with an average of 85%. The study concluded that alphabet book could improve preschool children's letter recognition.
Sarah Nicole Nowak	This study has two phases. The first phase hypothesized that (a) children prefer fewer texts as they appear more accessible and aimed to explore the relationship between alphabet knowledge (i.e., letter name and pronunciation) and their book preference. The second phase was conducted to evaluate the effects of the alphabet book design on children's letter knowledge, letter pronunciation, and the phonological awareness through an eight-week interventional study.	The study reported an improvement of early literacy skills, showing that children exhibit significant improvement of all aspects of early literacy skills (i.e., letter case name, letter sound, and phonological awareness) As hypothesized, all conditions in this study exhibit advantages.
Karen Sue Bradley and Jack Bradley	In this study, alphabet book was described in three sections: Themed book, sequential/serial book, and potpourri book. This categorization generates a range of potentials of alphabet book use.	The result showed that alphabet books could improve the learning processes in kindergarten, elementary, and middle education levels. Teachers could use alphabet book as an opportunity to support the reading, language, and cross-curricular learning activities.
Dayang Rohaya Awang Rambli, et al.	The study was performed by observing fifteen children 5 years of age when introduced to augmented reality alphabet book by their teacher. The teacher also briefly explains how to use the media. Students were allowed to explore the book freely. During the test, Students were questioned whether or not they recognize the letter they were holding.	The study reported that most children answer correctly when asked about the alphabet they recognize. Their requests to use the application repeatedly was a positive indication that augmented reality application was viewed as an interesting, fun learning tool.
Hari Santoso	The study discusses an attempt to develop preschool children's reading	Each alphabet within the book is followed by an illustration of objects begin with the letter. The illustration should have a clear design, simple,

Author	Method	Result
	interest through an illustrated alphabet book.	identifiable objects and is relevant to the key letter. Several alphabet books were organized following their themes, e.g., farming and transportation. The alphabet book helps, stimulate, and supports enriching students' vocabulary while providing visual and verbal input for them.
Edna G Brabham, Bruce A Murray, and Shelly Hudson Bowden	The study was performed by comparing pretest to posttest results of ability to identify letters and phoneme use letter as phonetic requirements to identify and obtain vocabularies.	The result showed A statistically significant improvement of preschool children's ability in identifying letter and phoneme and in using letter as phonetic requirements to identify and obtain vocabularies, Which could also be seen during the 4-week learning process where the teacher reads the book loudly. This study showed that reading aloud could improve children's phoneme awareness. It implies that alphabet book would be more significant when combined with phoneme emphasis and auditory activities.

This eight selected articles (Table 2) are describe in detail in the result section of this paper. Gusnita et al. (2019) examine preschool children's letter recognition through alphabet book in a kindergarten. The study reports that children are enthusiastic in playing alphabet book. The alphabet book displays various images according to the theme, e.g., food images, healthy food images, etc. It prevents children from being bored. Authors also used alphabet book and play activities that significantly affects children's happiness. After the learning process, children are reported to be able to mention letter symbols, combine several consonants and vocals to word, and imitate the letter shapes. It shows that alphabet book may improve children's letter recognition skill in Putih Asri Kamboja Kindergarten, South Sumedang Pesisir. Consistent with Gusnita et al, Helmiati (2020)'s study on children's literacy skills through storytelling using alphabet book also reports that alphabet book is helpful for improving their letter recognition skills. In this context, the alphabet book serves as a media to stimulate children's learning interest.

One of techniques in using alphabet book is described in Brabham, Murray, and Bowden's (2006) book entitled *Reading Alphabet Books in Kindergarten: Effects of Instructional Emphasis and Media Practice*. A statistically significant improvement of preschool children's ability in identifying letter and phoneme and in using letter as phonetic requirements to identify

and obtain vocabularies, as shown during the 4-week learning process where teachers read the alphabet book aloud. This study showed that reading aloud could improve children's phoneme awareness. In order to obtain more significant improvement, alphabet book use could be combined with phoneme emphasis and auditory activities. The study also found that children were more interested in directly accessible books than in alphabet book in CD-ROM.

The next study was conducted by Bradley dan Bradley (2014) entitled *Using Alphabet Books Across Grade Levels: More Than 26 Opportunities*, which describes various possible opportunities provided by alphabet book usage. Teachers could implement visual arts to stimulate oral languages. Pop-up Alphabet Book was also found to be interesting for stimulating children's learning motivation while helping teachers and students to communicate.

Another study was conducted by Nowak (2015) entitled *ABCs by Design: The Role of Alphabet Book Design and Children's Alphabetic Behaviours in Emergent Literacy Skill Acquisition*. The study reported a progress in early literacy skills. It showed that children exhibited a significant development of early literacy skills when using Alphabet Book as the learning media (e.g., letter case, pronunciation, and phonological awareness). The proposed hypotheses were supported, in which all applied conditions lead to advantages. Regarding the research intervention, children with higher frequency of reading alphabet book exhibit three-times higher interaction with storybook, implying that the alphabet book may serve as a means to train early childhood reading skills.

Rambli et al. (2013)'s study applied an augmented reality-based alphabet book, the study was entitled *Fun Learning with AR Alphabet Book for Preschool Children*. The study reports that most students watched virtual objects appeared through a computer monitor. Their facial expression implies an enjoyment when using the application. Their requests to use the application repeatedly was a positive indication that augmented reality application was viewed as an interesting, fun learning tool. After conducting the survey, classroom teachers observed the students and conducted a brief interview, stating that students appear to enjoy the use of Augmented Reality-based alphabet book. In addition to providing an enjoyable learning process, AR Alphabet book also helps them to identify a letter they were holding.

While previous studies focused on illustrated *Alphabet Book as a learning media*, Santoso (2008) scrutinize the development of early childhood reading interest through illustrated book by using various illustrated books to improve children's reading interests. His study found that Alphabet Book Smart Kids brought positive impacts on both early childhood educators and the children. Although alphabet should not be introduced in early childhood education level, the

provision of fun media and method may prevent children from learning stress. The activity focuses on alphabet introduction in a play atmosphere.

The media was reported to draw children’s attention, creating an interesting learning activity and motivating them to learn. Their learning motivation encouraged them to explore further the Alphabet Book Smart Kids and other media made from the surrounding environment and used items.

Based on the description above, the roles of Alphabet book in early childhood letter recognition skills improvement are as follows:

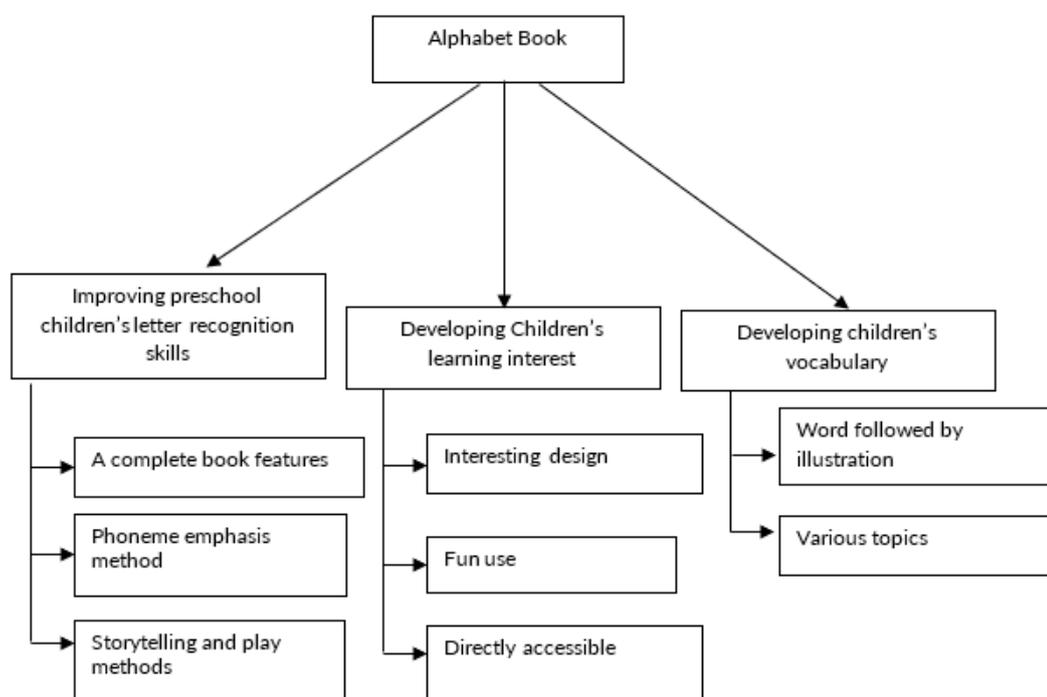


Figure 2. Research Result Framework

Improving preschool children’s letter recognition skills Alphabet book is consistently reported to improve children’s letter recognition skills because (a) it provides a letter case feature followed by relevant words and illustration, (b) it also develops phonemic awareness when combined with phoneme emphasis and listening activities, which is helpful for children to identify the phonemic differences, (c)it could be applied to various learning methods, such as storytelling and play activities, two methods commonly loved by most children.

Letter Recognition Skills Improvement

Letter recognition is a stage in which children know the association between letter shape and sound, and are able to give meanings to the letter (Darjowidjojo, 2003). Children with a good letter recognition skill will find it easier to learn to read and write. In this regard, an innovative, interesting learning media is necessary to develop children's reading and writing skills. The present study focuses on discussing Alphabet Book as a learning media.

Preschool children's letter recognition skill improvement is reported in Gusnita et al.'s (2019) study finding that children exhibited better letter recognition, indicated by their ability to mention the letter sound, combine consonants and vowels to form a word, and imitate the letter shape. This indicates that alphabet book could be used as a learning media for improving preschool children's letter recognition.

Nowak (2015) examined three learning conditions using recommended features alphabet book (RF), Standard features alphabet book (SF), and story book (SB). Of these three book types, an improved early literacy skill was noticed as children exhibited significant early literacy skill improvement (i.e., letter case, phonics, and phonological awareness).

This improvement may be accounted for by the alphabet book's features, such as letter case, phonemic emphasis, and object clarity. Alphabet book also provides an illustration of objects whose name begin with the letter (Santoso, 2008). The illustration should have a clear design, simple, identifiable objects and is relevant to the letter. The format of the storybook also plays an important role in drawing children's attention. Its shapes, image, illustration, font types, color combination, layout, and paper quality are believed to play important roles in preschool children's interest.

In addition to its abundant features, alphabet book's advantages also lie in its applicability to various learning methods, including the play method. Play is one of the early childhood educations, through which children are engaged to explore, discover, and use their surroundings for various learning purposes, including letter recognition. As Gusnita et al. (2019) report, children exhibit an improved letter recognition skills when teachers provide a fun learning strategy and atmosphere through fun race activities. The fun play activities were found to be helpful in achieving the learning goals optimally.

Indeed, the learning process at early childhood education level should be carried out through various interesting activities. Teachers, as the educators and facilitators, are expected to be able to select a proper learning method to achieve optimal children's development using the surrounding environment as a learning source, among others. Reading activities delivered through various play settings will likely be more fun for children and effective.

Alphabet book could also be used in storytelling method. According to Yaumi dan Ibrahim (2016) storytelling is a learning activity that may contribute to children's skills in presenting information, concepts, ideas. This method allows such skills to be integrated into the learning goals. In Helmiati (2020)'s study, the storytelling activity using alphabet book was reported to be highly interesting for children while improving children's letter recognition skills.

Developing Children's Learning Interest.

The analysis result found that Alphabet Book also plays an important role in developing children's learning interests. During the learning process, it is necessary to develop responses, motivation, and attention to the learning topic. Therefore, uninteresting media will likely prevent individuals from experiencing a proper learning process. In this regard, Alphabet Book is considered interesting because (A) it has features and colorful design with different illustrations, (b) it could be used in fun activities, and (c) it could be directly accessed by children.

Alphabet book is reported to play a role in improving children's interest in learning activities Gusnita et al. (2019). Interest could be viewed as a motivation that affects one's attention, thought, and achievement. Likewise, lacking reading interest may hinder reading skill development. Thus, learning interest is the foundation of children's learning habit development (Santoso, 2008).

Various methods and media are applicable for improving early childhood language skills. However, it should be noted that the learning process needs to take children's readiness and maturity into account and suits the early childhood education principles. A proper book selection also plays important roles in improving children's reading interest. When the selected book does not fit the children's interest, they will not likely learn as expected. Therefore, an interesting book is needed and one of the books reported to be interesting is the Alphabet book. Alphabet book plays a role in improving children's enthusiasm and learning interest due to their interesting design and themes.

According to Sudarsana (2014) An individual is interested in certain object if he/she exhibits (a) attention, (b) enjoyment, and (c) willingness. Regarding attention, an interested individual will likely pay attention to the object they are interested in. In this regard, an interesting alphabet book may improve and direct children's attention and develop their learning motivation. An interested individual may also exhibit enjoyment toward the object. An interested individual may, in turn, exhibit a desire to possess the object, making them try to maintain the object. An enjoyment when using Alphabet book may arise when teachers create

a fun learning atmosphere through play activities. Willingness refers to the inclination towards a certain purpose that is responsible for the emergence of attention towards an object. Since the letter introduction could not be done aggressively Santi et al. (2020), a combination of the alphabet book smart kids and fun learning method will likely present a fun, stress-free learning atmosphere. It is a play activity that involves alphabet introduction.

In the same vein, Helmiati (2020) reports that children are enthusiastic about engaging in learning activities due to the story and design varieties in every meeting, as shown during the study where the first meeting uses the story about a farmer, the second meeting about merchant, the third meeting about doctor, etc. Thus, motivating children to engage in the learning activities.

Children are also enthusiastic about using Alphabet book because they can directly access it. The study also found that children were more interested in directly accessible books than in alphabet books in CD-ROM. (Brabham et al., 2006). These studies further assert that alphabet book could improve children's enthusiasm and learning interest.

Developing Children's Vocabulary

Enriching children's vocabulary may help them develop their linguistic intelligence, and their vocabulary mastery may significantly affect their communication skill (Indrijati, 2020:75). Children with richer vocabulary will likely have a broader reference. High vocabulary mastery may contribute to children's understanding of what they read (Adhim, 2014). In this regard, alphabet book provides children with letters and their relevant illustration and words, which is helpful for children to gain new vocabulary and its meanings.

Several alphabet books are designed with a certain theme, such as farm, transportation, animals, and fruit, among others. These thematic books could stimulate children's vocabulary development. Gusnita et al. (2019) Used various themes in their alphabet book, such as staple foods for the first meeting (including illustrations of rice, corn, wheat, and sago, etc.), healthy food for the second meeting (including illustrations of soup, fish, egg, and tempe), snacks for the third meeting (e.g., cilok, batagor, siomay, etc). In the next cycle, they used daily outfit theme (e.g., shirt, pajamas, trousers, etc.), followed by school outfit in the second meeting, and footwear in the third meeting. These selected themes are related to children's daily life, in line with Usman (2015), who suggests the use of daily life vocabulary for enriching children's vocabulary. Themes in the alphabet book presents relevant illustration and words, helping children to obtain a concrete vocabulary, i.e., words that refers to objects that could be

captured by senses. (Usman, 2015). Alphabet book presents a clear illustration, thus helping children to enrich their vocabulary.

The description above supports the current understanding that alphabet book could motivate and increase children's curiosity about reading activities (Gusnita, Hartati, dan Marlina, 2019). From children's perspective, an alphabet book is deemed interesting due to its colorful features. Teachers select an alphabet book to develop preschool children's language skills and symbol-phonetics association (Criscoe, 1988). Therefore, this book is interesting for drawing children's attention to engage in learning process.

Their improvement when using alphabet book will likely increase their motivation and curiosity for reading activities. The use of alphabet book is reported to improve children's letter recognition skills (Gusnita et al., 2019). In the same vein, Helmina and Indra Yeni (2020) report that storytelling activities using alphabet book may improve children's literacy and develop their cognitive and social aspects. The storytelling activities using alphabet books allows children to develop their early reading preparation and retelling the story.

Alphabet book is reported to play roles in children's vocabulary development because it contains illustration and words that enrich children's vocabulary. In this regard, selecting book topics that suit local culture or children's daily life will likely result in a more meaningful and understandable learning process.

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