

Improving Early Reading Ability Using Environmental Print Approach in the Family

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Abstract-This study exposed the problem of low early reading ability in children aged 4-5 years old in Padang. The researcher proposed an environmental print approach in the family as an alternative solution. The research conducted was an action research. The stages of the research included; diagnosis, planning, action, evaluation, and learning. Techniques of the data collection used observation, interview, and documentation. The research subjects were 20 children aged 4-5 years old. The data analysis used the percentage technique. The results of two cycles showed a significant increase in the early reading ability of children for each indicator between pre-action and post-action. The success of the environmental print approach in the family was also significantly determined by the involvement of parents who acted as research collaborators.

Keywords-Ability, Early Reading, Approach, Family Environment

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of good language skills is one of the keys for children to be able to mingle and accepted into their vicinities. Language skills also influence the development of children's potential intelligence, such as social intelligence, emotional intelligence, and cognitive intelligence. Children who acquire the language skills will both easily adjust and be accepted by their surroundings in which they reside in. They will be able to interact and establish good communication with their peers or adults around them. Moreover, children with good language skills somewhat attract those whom around them, they are more likely to be favored as compared with children who have slow language skills acquisition.

In terms of language skills, particularly reading ability, according to experts, no harm made when children are stimulated into reading skills since the

early age. As [1] argued, from the results of his research, that no negative effects made from early reading. Children who exposed to read and write before enrolling elementary schools are generally outperformed those who have never received the stimulation. Montessori cited from [2], suggested that children age 4-5 years old are possible to be taught to read and write and that can be a fun game for the early learners.

Findings from observation and interview conducted by the writers in several early education institutions (PAUD) in Padang, showed that fewer children (age 4-5) to have the good reading ability after they were given the stimulation of reading skills. Some of them have difficulty and trouble in reading skill acquisition. Meanwhile, in reality, parents expect their children to be able to read as it is one of the requirements when enrolling in primary schools. Factors that affected children's slow language acquisition are the lack of attention and the support from the parents. This has become one of the prominent causes of their stagnant reading skills. This supposedly occurs by the fact that parents only rely solely on the stimulation performed by the teachers at school, when the stimulation period performed at school is limited and the activities conducted are diverse. On the other hand, children stay at home for a long period of time that enables them to obtain sufficient opportunity in receiving the stimulation. Therefore, if the stimulation is not only performed in early childhood education institution but also at home, the children's reading skill can be significantly developed. Thus, in this research, the writer offers an alternative approach to improve early reading skills using environmental print in the family.

A. Early Childhood Reading Skills

Language skills are a unit composed of a variety of components in mutual assistance. Language ability is a special feature possessed by human but not other creatures. According to Santrock (1995) language is a system of symbols in communication which includes phonology (unit of sound), morphology (the unit of meaning), syntax (grammar), semantics (the meaning variation), and pragmatics (the use of language). With the language skills acquisition, everyone including the children can communicate their intention, goals, thoughts, and feelings to others. In addition, Owens as cited in [4], also argued that children age 4-5 years old are capable of using 900 to 1000 different vocabularies and put 4-5 words into one affirmative, negative and interrogative sentence.

Language development in early childhood consists of four aspects; speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The communication ability of the adults, both parents and educators, will naturally help children's language development by providing the proper language experience to the children's needs. The four language proficiency mentioned has mutual relations. Furthermore, reading is a complex activity involving various kinds of skills and a combination of several activities that are; recognizing letters and words, correlating them with the sound and meaning and also drawing conclusions from what is read. [5] stated that reading is primarily a process to understand the meaning of writing. Reading activity includes; 1) introduction of the letter (alphabet), 2) the sound of the letter or series of letters, 3) meaning and the comprehension of the contextual meaning.

According to Leonhardt Mary (1999) , children need to obtain early reading skills and several reasons to justify it are explained as follows;

1. Children who enjoy reading will obtain good reading skills and spend their time reading
2. Children who enjoy reading will have advanced eloquence which enables them to read, write and comprehend complex ideas.
3. Children who enjoy reading have a wide range of knowledge which enables them to easily and quickly learn.
4. Reading builds children's affection for their environment
5. Children who enjoy reading are able to self-develop creative thinking
6. Children who enjoy reading always have alternative solutions for solving problems.

Based on the above description parents should contribute and fully support the development of the children's reading skills from an early age. It should be noted that the stimulation should be undergone by the parents in accordance to the characteristics of the early childhood, and that the process should be conducted without any element of coercion or pressure. As [7] stated that the stimulation of various

aspects of children's development embedded within its manner to obtain optimal results. To be able to obtain the expected results from the stimulation of early reading ability, the parents or educators need to pay attention to the developmental stages of early childhood. According to Cochrane cited in [8], reading skills in children ages 4-6 years takes place in five stages, namely; 1) magical stage, 2) self-concept stage, 3) bridging reading stage, 4) take off reader stage and stage 5) independent reader stage.

B. Environmental print Approach

Environmental print means the print found in the natural immediate environment. Each child will spend their daily basis in the middle of the family. In order to optimize the reading skill stimulation in the excess time and opportunity, parents can design or customize the surroundings with meaningful writings and attached them to everyday objects which often come into contact with the child. Items or objects which often come into contact in every day include tableware, toys, furniture or other parts of the house so that children will always to be able to interact with letters, words or sentences. The role of parents is not only customizing the environment but also as reinforcement of the printed writings attached in the objects. Home environment influence early language skills of the children, the experiences they gained are expected to help their readiness for school [9].

Environmental print-based research had been conducted by [10], who proved that environmental print approach or logo is one effective way to encourage early reading skills. As for Delaney who came from Mount Saint Vincent University, he emphasized his research in the utilization of logos and environmental prints that already existed naturally in the environment. What distinguishes this research from existing research is that the writers conducted customized environment at home where the children live with their family and spend the time with parents, thus every room is designed with logos and printed visual environment.

II. THE METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This research is an action research. According to Mc Nif, (1992), action research is a reflective research by conducting a specific action, aiming to professionally and effectively improve the practice of learning. This action research planning use Davison, R. M., Martinsons, M. G (2004) which divided the action research into a 5-stages cycle, namely: diagnosis, action research planning, action, evaluation, and learning. The data on action preparatory were obtained through interviews with the educators of early childhood education institution and parents as the research samples. As for the data in the correlation between activity design and action, the process was obtained by observation. And the documentation data

of home situations were obtained by notes equipped with video recordings.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Results of the Research

The assessment of early reading skills in pre-action session aims to examine the children's initial condition. The data obtained are used to identify the improvement made after the action. The initial assessment was the base foundation for the researcher to design and conduct the action. The next action was conducted after the pre-action analyzed. The assessment data of pre-action and post-action are presented below:

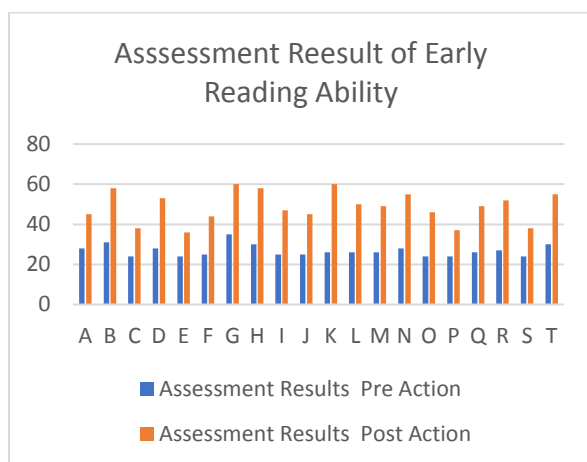


Figure 1. Result of early reading capability assesment pre and post action

The figure showed that all children have improved in early reading skills. The distinct result can be seen from the pre-action and post-action. Marked with the average calculation of score, the average value within pre-action was 26.8, while the post-action was 48.75, and also no child is scored below 37. Thus, the action taken in this research was effective as the expected goal was reached.

B. Discussion

Based on the research findings, the environmental print in the family was proven to help in improving early reading skills of early childhood (4-5 years old). The analysis of environmental print showed that it was an effective approach to stimulate early reading ability. The environmental print approach is a learning design which reflects the relationship between the individual characteristics of the children and the proximity to their family. Children will receive optimal stimulation when they are in pleasant situations [13]. Activities accompanied by the closest people will help children to freely behave and express.

The utilization of setting or rooms around the home which often frequently visited by the children becomes another important point. We can provide each room with special tools or objects and attach pictures printed with symbols or letters which signify a certain characteristic of the room as stimulation. Christie, J., Enz, B.J., Vukelich (2011) stated that parents should provide a supportive environment to help children develop their literacy skills. Customizing the environment help them to frequently interact with letters, words, and reading. The role of family members especially the father, mother, and sibling significantly determine the success of this approach. Customizing rooms with pictures, letters, words and symbols will remain ineffective if it is not fully supported by family members. This approach demands the efforts of family members to actively trigger the children's curiosity and emphasize the introduction of letter and sound.

In association to the importance of the role of the family on the development of children's language skills, Rodriquez, E.T. (2009) found that the literacy experience (such as handing out text), the quality of the mother interaction with her child, the availability of learning materials are essential to home literacy experiences to positively develop the children language development.

The advantage of using the family environment in this approach is that a family is the most familiar environment to the children. Children can enjoy the whole process of stimulation without feeling awkward. Children can freely to behave and express or ask without feeling intimidated or shamed. Furthermore, as the children spend most of the time with their family, the environmental print can be efficiently performed and thus the stimulation obtains better outcomes. On the aspects of the efficiency, the implementation of environmental print in the family to stimulate children's reading skills does not charge expensive cost. The media needed for this approach are only pictures attached with words letters and interesting design. Parents from all kinds of economic and educational background can create and use this approach to stimulate children's reading skills.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

The findings and discussion of the research concluded that environmental print is an effective and efficient learning approach to improve children's early reading ability. The effectiveness is obtained as this approach involves the children's surroundings and the people around them to help the stimulation process. Those who participate in the process are the people closest to the children, hence, they understand the children's characteristics and behavior and the children can enjoy the stimulation experience without

feeling any pressure. Besides, the efficiency is obtained from the costless charge of this approach as the media used are parents' hand-made with their respective creations.

B. Suggestion

The writers proposed several suggestions regarding this approach: 1) Parents can implement the environmental print approach to improve the children's early reading skills. And that parent's active participation influences the outcomes of the approach. 2) Educators are expected to use the environmental print approach in early childhood education by utilizing the rooms and available objects as the media. And the writers hope that many alternative solutions to be conducted to stimulate children's early reading ability in order to get the children ready for next secondary education.

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