

Critical Analysis of Phonics Reading Approach Implementation for Very Young Learners in Non-Formal Education

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Abstract. The existing literature has documented the success of the phonics approach in teaching early reading in school contexts. Yet, research examining how teachers implement this approach, particularly in non-formal educational settings, remains limited. This qualitative case study aims to explore and critically analyze the application of phonics in a private language course in Jember, Indonesia, as well as the associated challenges. The study involved four teachers from the institution, and data were collected through observations, interviews, field notes, and document analysis. The findings suggest that phonics can help guide very young learners to develop their early literacy skills when applied explicitly and systematically. However, phonics itself can prove more complex than anticipated. Due to its technical nature and lack of support for meaning comprehension, phonics should not be the sole approach in a reading class. Therefore, it should be incorporated with meaning-based reading approaches and adequate teacher training to promote effective phonics instruction.

Keywords: non-formal education; phonics; reading; very young learners

Abstrak. Literatur yang telah ada mendokumentasikan keberhasilan pendekatan phonics dalam pengajaran membaca awal di konteks pendidikan formal. Namun demikian, penelitian yang menelaah bagaimana guru mengimplementasikan pendekatan ini, khususnya dalam setting pendidikan non-formal, masih terbatas. Studi kasus kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis secara kritis penerapan pendekatan phonics di sebuah kursus bahasa swasta di Jember, Indonesia, serta tantangan-tantangan yang menyertainya. Studi ini melibatkan empat orang guru dari lembaga tersebut, dan data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, catatan lapangan, serta analisis dokumen. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan phonics dapat membantu pembelajar usia dini dalam mengembangkan keterampilan literasi awal mereka apabila diterapkan secara eksplisit dan sistematis. Namun, pendekatan phonics itu sendiri dapat lebih kompleks daripada yang diperkirakan. Mengingat sifatnya yang teknis dan kurangnya dukungan terhadap pemahaman makna, phonics tidak seharusnya menjadi satu-satunya pendekatan yang digunakan dalam pembelajaran membaca. Oleh karena itu, phonics perlu dipadukan dengan pendekatan membaca berbasis makna serta pelatihan guru yang memadai untuk mendorong pelaksanaan pengajaran phonics yang efektif.

Kata kunci: anak usia dini; membaca; pendidikan non-formal; phonics

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential literacy skill for English learners, and its development should begin at an early age. The acquisition of reading skills is a foundational element in a child's educational journey, profoundly influencing their future academic achievements and overall cognitive development (Veríssimo et al., 2021). Research conducted in Florida demonstrated a strong correlation between kindergarten reading skills and reading fluency in the tenth grade (Cameron, 2001), emphasizing the importance of early intervention. As a result, many educators advocate for teaching reading from a young age, even to very young learners (VYLs), to lay a strong foundation for long-term literacy development.

Teaching reading to VYLs poses unique challenges because of their limited vocabulary (Cameron, 2001), short attention span (Harmer, 2007; Musthafa, 2010), and diverse socio-economic backgrounds that affect literacy readiness (Joanna, 2013; Weigel et al., 2006). Teachers must use simplified language, visual aids, and engaging activities such as picture books (Niland, 2021; Yum et al., 2021) to support learning. Moreover, reading is a complex cognitive skill (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009; Buckingham et al., 2019; Oakhill et al., 2015) involving multiple developmental phases (Ehri, 2005), and scaffolding plays a vital role in enhancing comprehension and motivation (Lutz et al., 2006; Safadi & Rababah, 2012).

To effectively teach reading to VYLs, teachers must align strategies with learners' developmental stages (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Cameron, 2001). While various methods exist—including Balanced Literacy, Individualized Reading, Linguistic Approaches, Phonics, and Whole Language (Guzzetti, 2002); Paul (2003) recommends phonics and whole language as most suitable for Asian EFL contexts. Whole language encourages natural reading and meaning-making (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Fukada, 2018), while phonics emphasizes decoding through phonemic awareness (Guzzetti, 2002; Buckingham, 2018). The contrasting philosophies of these methods have led to the "reading wars" (Narey, 2017; New & Cochran, 2007). Although whole language offers benefits, it assumes access to rich English input, which is often lacking in non-English-speaking countries like Indonesia. Therefore, phonics presents a more accessible and structured option for VYLs in such contexts, aiding them in building foundational reading and pronunciation skills (Herrera et al., 2016; Lloyd, 1998) and promoting independent word decoding using systematic phoneme-grapheme patterns.

Phonics encompasses both the knowledge of the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes, as well as an instructional method for teaching reading and writing predicated on that relationship (Guzzetti, 2002; Merchant, 2008; Donat, 2003). These definitions often cause confusion, but Robinson (1955) clarified that phonics is the practical application of phonetics. Bald (2007) supports this view, defining phonics as the systematic teaching of letter-sound correspondence and blending. Historically, phonics dates back to the 1500s, with contributions from Ickelsamer and Hart (Groff, 1977; Lahr-Well, 2020). Despite early resistance, phonics gained traction by 1850 and remains essential in literacy instruction in countries like England and the US, where phonics screening checks are mandatory (Taylor et al., 2017). Unlike the whole language approach, phonics focuses on decoding through sound recognition (Paul, 2003).

Phonics instruction varies by approach, including synthetic, analytic, analogy, embedded, onset-rime, and phonics-through-spelling (Ehri et al., 2001; Guzzetti, 2002; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005). Each method emphasizes different pathways to decoding, with synthetic phonics being the most widely used (Mather & Wendling, 2012; Bald, 2007). Based on Skinner's behaviorist theory, phonics should be taught systematically and explicitly, progressing from simple to complex skills (Bergin & Bergin,

2018; Beck & Beck, 2013; Blevins, 2016). Instructional success relies on teacher knowledge and planning (National Reading Panel, 2000; Holsted, 2015).

Studies have confirmed the benefits of phonics instruction for early literacy, showing that it supports decoding, reading, spelling, and even comprehension (Double et al., 2019; Ehri et al., 2001; Maddox & Feng, 2013). For instance, a phonics screening in the UK revealed that six-year-olds with phonemic awareness developed better comprehension skills over the next four years (Double et al., 2019). Similarly, students taught using phonics principles outperformed their peers in reading fluency and spelling accuracy (Maddox & Feng, 2013).

Despite these benefits, phonics also has its limitations. English is a non-phonetic language, making it difficult to decode all words using phonics alone (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Venezky, 1970; as cited in Honig, 2001; Spache, 1961). Critics argue that it can limit language exposure, confuse learners due to dialectal differences, and fall short when applied to irregular English words (Honig, 2001; Pollatsek & Treiman, 2015; Rayner et al., 2012; Spache, 1961). Furthermore, an overemphasis on decoding may undermine comprehension (Strauss, 2005; Garan, 2001). To address this, Ehri (2022) and others advocate combining phonics with decodable texts and embedding it within a balanced literacy framework (Cecil et al., 2015; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005). The approach emphasizes informed teacher decisions that integrate phonics, phonological awareness, reading, and writing (Donat, 2003; Spiegel, 1998). Therefore, scholars suggest complementing phonics instruction with meaning-based approaches such as the whole language method (Almasi & Hart, 2011; Cecil et al., 2015; Ehri, 2022; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005) to ensure more comprehensive reading instruction.

In Indonesia, phonics is gaining recognition for its usefulness in teaching reading to VYLs and YLs. Studies show that phonics helps young children pronounce and recall letters and simple words (Mozes & Liando, 2019), enhances reading skills at the kindergarten level (Indriana & Suparno, 2019; Rahwati & Windarsih, 2021; Vita et al., 2019), and improves phonological awareness in elementary students (Rahmah & Pandjaitan, 2018). While phonics is beneficial for beginner readers, it remains limited to decoding skills (Paul, 2003), whereas the ultimate goal of reading is understanding (Woolley, 2011). However, limited research exists on how phonics is implemented for VYLs in Indonesia's non-formal education (NFE) context.

NFE, distinct from formal education (FE), refers to structured, intentional learning that occurs outside traditional schools, such as in language centers or private institutions (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020). Although its definition varies (Rogers, 2005), NFE was introduced to meet educational needs not addressed by FE (La Belle, 1982), bridging the gap between rigid formal systems and informal, unstructured learning (OECD, n.d.). NFE offers advantages like flexible scheduling, relevant materials, inclusivity, and adaptability to societal changes (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 2018; Rogers, 2005; Hoppers, 2006). In the EFL context, NFE helps students enhance their English skills and prepare for exams, often employing advanced teaching methods (Faujiah, 2017; Jannatussholihah et al., 2020; Widodo, 2020). However, challenges remain, including limited government oversight (UNESCO, 2006; Tan, 2017) and the lack of formal recognition for NFE learning outcomes (Werquin, 2009; Yasunaga, 2014). Still, scholars and global organizations advocate for acknowledging NFE as a key part of the education system (Hoppers, 2006; Rogers, 2005; Werquin, 2009; Yasunaga, 2014), which justifies further research on English teaching practices in NFE settings.

Several previous studies have explored the use of phonics in FE classrooms, such as in New Zealand (Chapman et al., 2018), Malaysia (Prasad et al., 2016), India (Gupta, 2014), Indonesia (Mozes &

Liando, 2019), Botswana (Mokotedi, 2012), as well as Japan (Takeda, 2007). However, studies exploring English instruction in the NFE context remain scarce. This research, therefore, aims to investigate the implementation of phonics to fill this gap and answer these two questions:

1. How do teachers use phonics reading approaches to teach VYLs in an NFE context?
2. What challenges do they have to overcome in class?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how four VYL teachers implemented phonics reading strategies in an English language institution in Indonesia and the challenges they encountered. Grounded in Stake's (1995) and Merriam's (2009) principles of qualitative case study methodology, the research emphasizes thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities. The data collection utilized four primary instruments: observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, ensuring triangulation and in-depth understanding. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and grounded theory coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), enabling the researchers to extract meaningful themes.

Meanwhile, this research was carried out over three months at a non-formal language institution in Jember, East Java, Indonesia. The institution was selected for its longstanding implementation of phonics instruction, its monolingual English teaching environment, and unique Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)-aligned curriculum. Four teachers—Adrian, Elisa, Nana, and Ucup (pseudonyms)—were chosen on purpose because they were the only ones teaching VYL classes at the time, and each had over a year of experience teaching phonics. Ethical considerations were maintained by using pseudonyms for the teachers, hiding the name of the institution, and excluding student involvement in the data collection process as requested.

The data collected were then analyzed in three steps, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2014). During the data condensation process, the researchers selected, simplified, and transformed the data into formats that are easy to use. For instance, audio recordings collected from the interviews were converted into interview transcripts and then coded to find themes or patterns. The second phase of data analysis started when the data were displayed and visualized in an organized way, such as through tables. At the conclusion of their data analysis, the researchers formulated and validated their findings. Throughout this process, the researchers reviewed all of the data and compared it with the related theories and previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Phonics

The research site featured a program called "Small Stars," which catered to young learners between the ages of four and six. The program was structured into four levels based on the students' age and English proficiency, ranging from Small Stars 1 to Small Stars 4. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has offered both online and offline class modalities, though this study focused solely on the online component. Each level of the VYL program encompassed ten units, with each unit comprising six 40-minute lessons that covered various topics. In this context, the phonics approach was employed in two distinct ways to support the development of early reading skills. Firstly, phonics-focused

materials were the primary focus in units 2 and 6, which appeared to concentrate on enhancing students' reading abilities. Secondly, the remaining units incorporated phonics-based activities as brief review sessions.

Regarding the class observations, the study focused on Adrian's and Nana's classes, which were observed while covering units 6 and 2, respectively. During these observations, the teachers specifically taught their students phonics materials and guided them in decoding words using the phonics approach. In contrast, Elisa's and Ucup's classes were observed while discussing units 5 and 4, where phonics was not implemented in every meeting but rather reviewed in some meetings as a way to familiarize their students with the approach. The observation period for each class mentioned lasted for six meetings, as each unit was taught throughout six meetings.

The implementation of the phonics approach in the very young learner classrooms across the institution exhibited variation among the participants, reflecting their distinct pedagogical styles although certain discernible patterns were evident in their respective execution of the phonics instructional approaches.

Table 1 Participants’ Implementation of Phonics Reading Approaches

Aspects	Teachers			
	Adrian	Nana	Elisa	Ucup
Types of phonics approach	Synthetic phonics and phonics through spelling	Phonics through spelling and (attempted) synthetic phonics	Phonics through spelling and synthetic phonics	Phonics through spelling
Way of implementing phonics	Explicit and systematic	Explicit and systematic	Explicit and systematic	Explicit but unsystematic
Presenting phonics materials	Yes, consistently all lessons (1-6)	Yes, consistently all lessons (1-6)	Yes, but only as a review in lessons 2-6	Yes, but only as a review in lessons 2-3
Presenting the concept of phonics approach to students	Yes, in lessons 1-3	Yes, in lessons 1-4	No. Phonics was only explained a little when giving examples on how to complete some tasks	No. Phonics was explained and suggested to students only when needed
Providing exercises	Yes, well-developed (print/words are present supported with pictures)	Yes, but some are not well-developed (print/words are missing in reading-based exercises)	Yes, but many of them are not well-developed (print/words are missing in reading-based exercises)	Yes, but many of them are not well-developed (print/words are missing in reading-based exercises)
Teaching media	PPt slides, ABC (phonics) song, decodable text, practice book, homework book	PPt slides, ABC (phonics) song, decodable text, practice book, homework book	PPt slides, ABC (phonics) song, practice book, homework book	PPt slides, ABC (phonics) song, practice book, homework book

Table 1 compares the teachers' approaches, including the types of phonics methods used, their consistency in presenting the materials, and the teaching media employed. Adrian, Nana, and Elisa primarily employed explicit and systematic phonics instruction. They modeled the pronunciation of specific letters or blends and then guided the students through the step-by-step decoding of certain words using phonics. Additionally, they offered clear, straightforward explanations and exercises to reinforce the decoding practice.

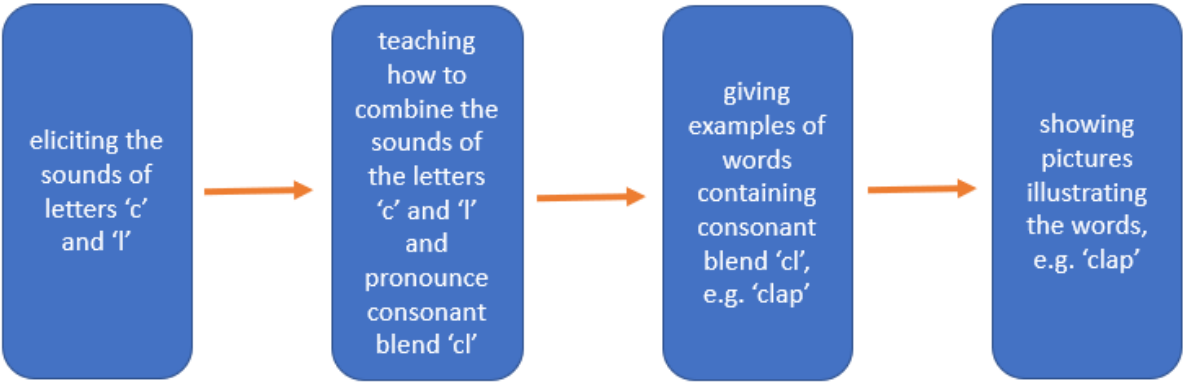


Figure 1 Example of Adrian’s Systematic Synthetic Phonics Instruction

As a result, their students could follow the teachers’ instructions and apply phonics to decode certain words quite well. This is in line with the teachers’ positive views on phonics, as they said,

It is helpful, especially because it helps them decode unknown words. A lot of the time I found that students know the spoken word, they can associate it with an image but they are less familiar with the written form. Once they are able to decode the written form, their understanding comes quickly as they can associate the pronounced word with the image. (Adrian)

At some point, it is easier because they only need to know the sound of the alphabets and the sounds of some blends. Thus, I guess it is easier since they do not recognize alphabets and letters yet. Sometimes most of them cannot read yet, so I guess that is easier, especially dealing with the fact that the sound and the alphabet can be so different. (Nana)

From my point of view, I think using phonics to teach reading is the best way at the moment because very young learners cannot even remember the alphabets yet. By drilling phonics to them, it is going to be easier for them to read the English words, because it is the sounds instead of the alphabets. (Elisa)

... I myself think this method is quite successful. The prove is my own students. I could see their improvement. And also, it reminds me of when I was a kid. I didn’t learn phonics to read, so it took me quite a while for being able to read. As I remember, when I was a kid, I memorized the form of the words through my eyes or visual. And when students now learn phonics, it means not only do they learn through their eyes or visual, but they also learn from their ears or auditory. As we know, the more sensors we use to learn something, the more successful the learning process is. (Ucup)

This finding aligns with other studies indicating that explicit and systematic phonics instruction is the most effective for teaching young learners to read (Beck & Beck, 2013; Blevins, 2016; Kilpatrick,

2015). Clear and well-organized phonics instruction helps VYLs grasp the materials with ease and avoid confusion.

Regarding the types of phonics approach, all participants employed phonics through spelling (or invented spelling) in their teaching, a method shown to facilitate spelling and decoding skills (Martins et al., 2016; Pulido & Morin, 2018). Adrian, Nana, and Elisa additionally incorporated synthetic phonics, though Nana did not fully adhere to the core principles of this approach. Synthetic phonics, which is effective in helping students develop early literacy skills, particularly for those struggling with reading (Guzzetti, 2002; Jamaludin et al., 2016; Price-Mohr & Price, 2018), was utilized more effectively by the first three participants compared to Ucup, who did not implement it consistently.

Yet, aside from the successful application of phonics in helping the VYLs develop their early reading skills, two interesting findings come to light. First, some students in Ucup's class unfortunately, seemed to get confused regarding the approach sometimes. This might be due to Ucup's inconsistent use of phonics, reflecting his lack of understanding of phonics as a pedagogical tool for teaching reading. Despite some attempts at explicit phonics instruction, such as guiding students through spelling exercises, Ucup's failure to incorporate phonics systematically into his lessons or provide written words for reading practice limited the effectiveness of his approach. This lack of consistency in phonics instruction, combined with his limited knowledge of phonics as a teaching method, aligns with findings from Gupta's (2014) study, which highlighted teachers' inadequate understanding of phonics in some contexts. Despite that issue, Ucup himself acknowledged the benefits of phonics instruction, recognizing its success in helping students learn sounds and improve their reading skills.

Second, despite the participants' claim on how effective phonics was for teaching early reading skills to their students, they did not use phonics as the only approach in class. Instead, they complemented it with other reading approaches, namely, whole language and read aloud. They also incorporated a variety of resources to support their phonics instruction, including PowerPoint slides, flashcards, the ABC song, practice books, and homework books. Even Adrian and Nana were seen using decodable texts in their lessons.



Figure 2 Example of Flashcards Used in Nana's Class

This use of diverse media aligns with recommended practices for teaching very young learners (Slattery & Willis, 2001), especially regarding the visual and auditory tools such as songs and flashcards, as well as exercises incorporating both print and pictures (Mozes & Liando, 2019). Yet, it also provides evidence to the critic's claim that phonics does not directly contribute to students' comprehension of word meaning (Strauss, 2005). Thus, it is important to note that phonics instruction cannot be used solely as the only approach applied in a VYLs' reading class. Instead, it should be

incorporated with other meaning-based reading approaches as suggested by balanced literacy approach experts (Almasi & Hart, 2011; Cecil et al., 2015; Ehri, 2022; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005).

Challenges in applying phonics in VYLs' reading classes

The challenges faced by the participants in their VYL classes regarding the implementation of phonics were diverse and multifaceted. Table 2 provides a summary of these challenges and the solutions implemented by each teacher to address them.

Table 2 Challenges in Participants' Implementation of Phonics and the Solutions Taken

Teacher	Challenge	Solution Taken
Adrian	Students' inaccuracy in completing reading exercises	Guiding the students to use phonics
	Students' difficulty in reading a decodable text	Reading the decodable text and asking the students to repeat
	Students' inability to read questions	Reading the questions and guiding the students to choose the correct answer
	Students' difficulty in spelling words through phonics due to missing print in the exercise	—
Nana	Some students' confusion in using phonics to complete reading exercises	Asking the problematic students to follow other students who could do the exercises correctly Showing the correct answer directly, without using phonics
	Some students' inability to read words leads them to cheat on other students' answers during reading exercises	—
	Some students' difficulty in spelling and writing words	Guiding the students to use phonics through spelling
	Students' inability to read a decodable text fluently	Nana and the students' parents helped the problematic students
	Demands of teacher creativity in making various kinds of teaching media/materials	Asking for suggestions from other teachers at the institution
	Some students were too young to recognize the alphabet letters yet	—
Elisa	Students' boredom leads them to ask for permission to go to the restroom	—
	Students' tendency to answer questions randomly due to the missing print on the reading exercises	—
	Disparity in students' age and educational background, resulting in their different skills in using phonics to read words	Repeating phonics materials, letting students practice reading through phonics more, and making good use of teaching media provided by the institution, such as the ABC (phonics) song
Ucup	Ucup's misconception towards the concept of 'magic e' as a phonics-related material	—
	The missing print/words in the reading exercises	—
	Students' difficulty in spelling or writing words	Asking the students to copy the spelling of the words on the book
	Ucup's failure to apply a phonics approach while guiding students to learn how to read through phonics	—
	Ucup's mispronunciation of the sound of an alphabet letter	—
		—

Teacher	Challenge	Solution Taken
	Lack of ideas on how to create fun activities through an online class platform Students' tendency to play with toys in class signals their lack of focus and boredom	– Reminding students of the class rules, and coordinating with the course consultant and parents

One of the prominent issues observed in the classroom was that several students struggled with reading and writing words despite prior phonics instruction. This issue can be attributed to VYLs being in the pre-alphabetic or partial alphabetic phase (Ehri, 2005), meaning they have limited knowledge of the alphabetic system. In this case, teachers need to start with basic phonics skills and gradually progress to more complex concepts, as highlighted by Adrian's consistent use of explicit and systematic phonics instruction, which aligns with recommendations from prominent scholars (Cecil et al., 2015; DEST, 2005; Ehri, 2022; Rose, 2006).

Another challenge identified through observations was students' confusion in using phonics and completing reading exercises. This was especially apparent in Nana's class, where some students had difficulty applying synthetic phonics. The researchers found that the way Nana explained synthetic phonics contributed to the confusion, supporting previous studies that point to a lack of phonics knowledge among teachers as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of phonics instruction (Chapman et al., 2018). Similarly, Elisa and Ucup also faced difficulties when students struggled to complete tasks, partly due to missing print in their exercises. This absence of print made the exercises harder for students to complete, as visualizing written words can be challenging for VYLs, who are still developing basic reading skills (Apfelbaum et al., 2013; Ehri, 2022).

Besides the problems identified through classroom observations, interviews with the participants revealed additional recurring challenges. Adrian, for example, faced issues with students who joined the class late, leading to difficulties in catching up with the phonics materials. This challenge is common in VYL classes where students may have varied levels of prior knowledge and experience. Nana also mentioned that some of her students were too young to recognize the alphabet, which hindered their ability to learn phonics effectively. Similarly, Elisa noted the disparity in students' ages and educational backgrounds, which sometimes led to differences in their phonics proficiency. These issues reflect broader challenges in the non-formal education sector, as observed in Tan's study (2017), which pointed out the lack of standardization in age and educational levels in many such institutions.

Lastly, a common obstacle faced by Ucup and Nana was the demand for creativity in developing engaging and effective teaching materials and activities for VYLs. Phonics materials can often be technical and uninteresting, and with classes conducted online, the challenge of keeping students engaged was heightened. Nana mentioned receiving support from colleagues at her institution, which helped her to overcome this challenge. Adrian also highlighted the importance of sharing ideas and resources with colleagues, a practice supported by Asbari et al. (2019), which fosters innovation and creativity in teaching.

The challenges above mirror the results from another study, highlighting that teachers' problematic phonics instruction could be the result of their lack of pedagogical content knowledge (Gupta, 2014). It also underscores the importance of providing teachers with comprehensive phonics training and professional development to enhance their pedagogical content knowledge, as emphasized by various

studies (Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Flynn et al., 2021; Mokotedi, 2012; Prasad et al., 2016). In the context of Non-Formal Education (NFE), it is the responsibility of NFE institutions to offer training that equips educators with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in teaching phonics and reading to Very Young Learners (VYLs).

CONCLUSION

While the phonics approach appears effective for developing early reading skills among VYLs, it is evident that the method is inherently complex. Not only does phonics demand a robust comprehension of its core principles, but it also entails certain limitations. Consequently, teachers of very young learners must receive adequate training in the phonics approach before implementing it in their classrooms. Additionally, these teachers would greatly benefit from regular workshops focused on designing instructional materials that can effectively support the use of phonics. This would enable them to deliver explicit and systematic phonics instruction that is readily understood by young learners, irrespective of the specific phonics approach being employed.

Aside from that, this study also identified several challenges associated with implementing the phonics approach for very young learners in the participant classrooms. First, the approach was found to be less effective when not applied explicitly and systematically. Second, the technical nature of phonics could lead to student confusion, particularly when clear instruction or exemplification was lacking. Third, the approach required students to possess a similar level of alphabetic knowledge, which was difficult to achieve. Finally, phonics instruction was sometimes perceived as overly complicated or less engaging for very young learners, necessitating teachers to incorporate diverse teaching techniques and engaging educational media to maintain student interest and learning.

All in all, although phonics can be an effective approach for developing early reading skills among very young learners, it may not be equally suitable for more advanced students, as it primarily focuses on decoding rather than reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that phonics alone is insufficient for cultivating well-rounded reading abilities. The implications of the study underline the necessity of a balanced literacy approach and emphasize the importance of providing adequate teacher training in phonics. The study recommends that policymakers ensure teachers receive proper training before implementing phonics in classrooms and encourage them to actively pursue ongoing learning and professional growth in phonics instruction.

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