

# PROFILE OF CHILDREN WITH PRE READING DIFFICULTY

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## Abstract

This research is a qualitative research aiming at understanding the profile of children who have impairment in pre-reading development area applied in three kindergartens in Bandung with 37 children as subjects. The method implemented is a test on pre-reading ability which is pictured in 6 aspects of pre-reading ability, namely: 1) oral language development; 2) concept about print; 3) alphabet knowledge; 4) phonemic awareness; 5) letter-sound correspondence and 6) beginning reading vocabulary, observation and interview are also accomplished other than the test to further picture the children's profile. The result of the test shows there are 12 children with impairment in pre-reading ability, with the most problems as follow: 92.3% having impairment in letter-sound correspondence, 84.6% with impairment in beginning reading vocabulary, 69.2% having impairment in alphabet knowledge, 61% having disability in oral language development and 38.4% having impairment in concept about print. In the second phase of the research it is found out that among the 12 children with pre-reading difficulties there are 10 children who have impairment in linguistic awareness and 6 children having problem with visual perception. The result of observation and interview show that there are more children with pre-reading difficulties in schools with minimum learning facilities and parents with less concern about their children's learning problems and impairment.

**Keywords:** profile, pre-reading area, difficulty

## Introduction

*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*, an international study in the field of children reading throughout the world sponsored by *The International Association for the Evaluation of Achievement* published its result of study which shows that the average of Indonesian children's reading ability is number four from the last among 45 countries in the world. (downloaded from : Portal Kompas Online Edition October 28, 2009)

This matter is quite disturbing as reading is a very important ability that children should acquire. Without having adequate early reading ability, a child will likely have learning problems in the future. (Depdikbud, 1991/1992: 22)

Another fact shows that many school age children experience reading difficulties. Although there isn't any exact number yet in Indonesia, the number in some countries is quite high, its prevalence ranges from 5- 10 % in school age (Michel, 2000), from 5-17% (Sandra, 2010).

The fact on the field when children are entering elementary school, they are demanded to have been able to read. For sure, children with reading difficulties experiencing academic problems, and even they have to stay in the same level. This has made a wider impact, Melody (2009) quoted Rutter & Yule (1970), stating that children with reading difficulties, show a stronger anti-social behavior as compared to other children who do not experience reading difficulties. One research stated that lack of reading ability also brings negative impact to self confidence (Chapman &Turner, 1997 in Melody , 2009)

Reading is a process with phases. Marlene JMcCracken (1995) explained that there are 3 natural steps in which children have to undergo in learning reading. Those 3 steps are: (1) pre-reading, (2) early reading , and (3) reading. Naturally, the process from pre-reading to early reading is programed for 5-6 year old children (Mary Anne Hall, 1979).

In regards to the above matter, it would be good if these obstacles in reading can be detected earlier, before the effect of the children's difficulties influence the academic achievement and bring about other additional problems as explained above. In relation to this matter we are not supposed to neglect those impairment that children show by the time they start their pre-reading phase.

It is important to identify any difficulties that the children experience, and the background factors of these difficulties. This is aiming at obtaining the intact picture of the children's profile, which at the end of the day can be implemented as the base for planning the program, as well as activities best suited to the children's profile. Finally, it is hoped that reading impairment can be minimized as early as possible.

Related to the mentioned problems above, it is necessary to do a more systematic research to find the type of the difficulties that the children face and the background of their difficulties in the pre-reading phase.

## **Reading**

Foertsch (1998) mentioned the three definition of reading as the following: *:"first definition, learning to read means learning to pronounce words. According to the second definition, learning to read means learning to identify words and get their meaning. According to the third definition, learning to read means learning to bring meaning to a text in order to get meaning from it."* Wikipidea dictionary explains the understanding of reading as: *"'Reading' is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of constructing or deriving meaning (reading comprehension)."* Similar to the above statement, Sally (2003) explained that process of reading are of two prime components; *decoding* (deciding which symbol in this case it is identification of words) and *comprehension* which in this case is related to the building of understanding.

According to Joyce (2006:11) there are three elements contributing strongly in the building of understanding during reading, namely (1) the reader himself, (2) text material being read, and (3) situation while reading.

Based on the above explanation, in a simple way reading can mean as a process to build an understanding of symbols which, in this case, are writings. This process of building an understanding is influenced by the ability of the reading, the context being read and the situation in which reading takes place.

### **Reading difficulties**

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, to be exact in November 1896, Dr. W Pringle Morgan of Seaford, England wrote in "British Medical Journal" about a boy named Percy F, aged 14. Percy appeared as a smart boy, with normal eyes he could see well. He could read numbers well. However, he had difficulties in reading. Since he was 7 years old, his teacher needed to work very hard to teach him to read. Percy F had problems in saying the letters that constitute a word. Percy had a good mathematical ability. He could say number 7, but he could not write *seven*. This is the starting point of reports on children's reading difficulties. Afterwards, there appeared similar cases reported by doctors not only from England, but also from South America, and United States ( Summarized, based on a book *Overcoming Dyslexia*, 2003).

Reading difficulties could be caused by various factors. Kibby (1995) in Joyce (2006) explained that reading difficulties can be caused by the individual himself, residential factor, social and cultural environment, school environment, and factor of cultural differences.

#### *Individual factor*

Many reading difficulties are intrinsic from the individual himself. Medical research has been done for more than 100 years to know the factors causing reading difficulties experienced by an individual. Research show that neurological factors influence reading problems. Research using fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) show the fact that there are differences of function of the brain between normal reader and reader having reading impairment (Shaywitz, 2003) in Joyce (2006).

Psychologists and educators researching cognitive factor, like phonemic awareness, visual processing, auditory processing, memory ability and language factor (Lyon, 1997; Stanovich&Siegal, 1994) and their research show someone with reading difficulties have weaknesses in cognitive area.

#### *Residential Factors, social and cultural environment*

Residence, social and cultural environment influence children's reading ability. Some children growing up in an environment unsupportive to the school achievement. Residence with many troubles like poverty, unstable family, annoying neighbors can bring risks of failures in school (Joyce, 2006).

#### *School environment*

Research indicates that some schools contribute to the reading problems. Teacher might easily give up or easily get angry when teaching reading. Children with reading difficulties do not get enough opportunity to develop their reading ability.

Factors of cultural and language differences

Some children might come from different culture and language. These children come from a region with different language in school which, of course, they experience difficulties in reading as well as in understanding a piece of reading.

### **Pre- Reading**

Reading is a process with phases. Marlene J McCracken (1995) explained that there are 3 natural phases for children learning to read. These 3 phases are (1) pre-reading, (2) early reading, and (3) reading.

Sandra (2010) wrote pre-reading ability in a term *pre-reading* or *early literacy*. Pre-reading is a skill needed in order that a child can be a reader. Sandra (2010) wrote pre-reading or early literacy ability in normal child, mostly gained naturally at home and environment before the child goes to school. Chastain (1988) mentioned that the aim of the pre-reading activity is to motivate children to be willing to read and prepare them to be able to read. Naturally, the process from pre-reading to early reading is a program for 5-6 year old children. (Mary Anne Hall, 1979) (downloaded from [www.familylearning.org.uk](http://www.familylearning.org.uk), 2010).

In the book “The Dyslexia Checklist” Sandra (2010) wrote that there are several abilities included in the pre-reading ability:

Understanding voices which form words, identifying, combining, separating voices from every single word.

Identifying initial, middle and final voices in every word uttered

Knowing letters (small and capital)

Mentioning letters in accordance with the sounds

Knowing that reading is done from left to right from upper part to lower part of the page.

Being able to read and write his own name

Learning to combine sound of a letter to become a combined letters

Being able to differentiate a letter and a word which appear similar (p and q in part and quart) or differentiate b and d

Spelling

Arranging letters properly to form a word

Joyce (2006) explained that there are six area included in the early literacy concepts, they are :

#### **1. Oral language development**

In reading activity, a child has to be able to express and comprehend one whole idea of a story, (for example) To be able to completely understand it the child need an ability in language development especially the ones related to the story. For instance, a child retells the story with the correct sequence and he understand the story correctly. This comprehension includes the characters and events in the story. Before the child acquire his reading ability the teacher can assess the child's comprehension ability from the story. Comprehension of the story is an important prediction of the reading success later on (Paris & Paris, 2003) in Joyce (2006).

#### **2. Concepts about prints**

This is a very important concept, children have to be able to comprehend the three print concepts. Firstly, print in this case is not a picture that has a meaning.

Secondly, children have to know that reading activity is done from left to right and from upper part to lower part of a page. Thirdly, in the print every single word has to be separated by a space. This concept is developed in the kindergarten years. Some children having reading problems in the first year of elementary school show immature ability in this concept.

3. Letter knowledge

This is the knowledge that there are capital letters and small letters. Children have to be able to automatically identify and mention the letter shown in random. Research shows that ability of mentioning letter can be used as good prediction to see early reading ability.

4. Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is knowledge of sound which is formed by the sound of the combined letters. For instance the word “ban” is formed by the sounds of the letters b, a and n. Children having good phonemic awareness are able to manipulate the sounds of words, combine them, separate them and identify initial sound, middle sound as well as final sound of words. Research shows that children’s ability to identify, manipulate elements are related strongly to reading and spelling ability (Ball &Blancman, 1991; Byrne Fielding-Barnsley; Dreher&Zenge, 1990; Hammill, 2004, Muller, Hulme& Taylor, 1998 ; Naslund& Schneider , 1997; Paris. 2003; Stanovich. 1998) in Joyce (2006)

5. Letter-Sound Correspondence

To be successful in reading, children have to be able to identify and manipulate and know the relation between letters and their sounds. The children’s knowledge about the relation between letters and their sounds is strongly related to the reading ability later (Dreher&Zenge , 1990; Morrow, 2004; Naslund& Schneider, 1996) in Joyce (2006)

6. Beginning Reading Vocabulary

Children start reading their vocabulary items from their environment. They start to know them from logo of different items or from advertisements. Clay(1993, 2002) in Joyce (2006) recommended that teachers assess first vocabulary items in reading by developing words using list of 15words of high frequency possessed by the children in which later teacher ask them to read those words.

## **Research Method**

### **Phase I**

Aiming to identifying children with pre-readingdifficulties, the actions taken in this phase are:

Arranging test instrument for pre-reading ability

This instrument is in the form of pre-reading ability tests, having items summarized from pre-reading ability written by Sandra (2010) in the book “*The Dyslexia Checklist*” and [www.familylearning.org.uk](http://www.familylearning.org.uk) (2010).

Instrument validation with trial test and construction (trial test is accomplished to see the validation level of the content and construction using the opinion of 2 experts)

#### Giving pre-reading ability test to children

##### Data processing

A child is given a score 1 for correct answer and 0 for incorrect answer for every single instrument item. Then a percentage can be calculated based on the correct answers.

##### Data analysis

Analysis of children's pre-reading ability is implementing descriptive technique, in which initial picture is arranged based on statistical calculation of total average (mean), so that average of the children's pre-reading ability is obtained. Based on this data children having pre-reading ability below average are identified.

#### **Phase II**

This research implemented qualitative method to trace factors causing difficulties in pre-reading phase. As promoted by Sugiyono (2010:8) qualitative method is the method implemented to make a research on object innatural condition. In so doing, the condition of the data obtained is the factual data free from the researcher's tricks.

##### Research Subjects

To further discover the above factors, researcher address the following subjects:

- a. Children experiencing difficulties in the pre-reading phase
- b. Teacher teaching in the class, where children experiencing difficulties in pre-reading exist in this class
- c. Parents of children having problems in pre-reading phase

##### Research Instruments

In focusing this research on factors causing difficulties in pre-reading phase, researcher developed research instruments.

The research instruments designed is in the form of auditory and visual perception test, guidelines for interview, observation guidelines and documentary study.

##### *Analysis of Research Data*

To analyze this research data, following are the steps:

- a. Data validation, accomplished by copying the result of all interview in the form of transcription and given back to the subjects to recheck their statements.
- b. Categorization of all data obtained, test result, result of observation, interview and documentation will be summarized with consideration upon matters which are important and tend to have the same pattern. In the summary, data having similarities will be grouped in a particular category. The objective is to obtain several categories picturing meaningful information.
- c. Data presentation, data obtained after being categorized will be presented in the form of explanation and addressed to clarify the relation of every category of one subject with another.
- d. Analytical technique

To get data about factors causing children's difficulties in pre-reading phase, researcher took the following actions:

1. To see the cause which is assumed to be intrinsically from the individual himself, researcher will do it based on the result of auditory perception, visual and memory ability and documentary study of the children's portfolio.

2. To see the cause which is assumed to be extrinsically from teacher and school environment, researcher will see it from the interview with the children, the teacher, and the result of class observation, and documentary study.
3. To see the cause which is assumed to come from parents and home environment will be seen from the result of interview with the children and their parents.  
The test result above is analyzed based on the data which have most similarities , and bring significant data.
- e. Conclusion  
Conclusion is the findings which are summarized from the data that has been analyzed .

## Research Result

### Profile of children with early literacy difficulty

Based on the calculation the average for every aspect of children's pre-reading ability in three kindergartenin: 1) Development of spoken language 70%; 2) Concepts of reading pieces 89%; 3) Knowledge of Letters 79%; Phonemic awareness 77%; 5) the relation between letter and its sound 68% and 6) start reading vocabulary items 72%

*Table 1 -Percentage of Number of Children Based on Problems area*

No.	Development area	Children with ability below average	Percentage
1	Development of spoken language	8	61,5%
2	Concept of reading pieces	5	38,4%
3	Knowledge of Letters	9	69,2%
4	Phonemic awareness	11	84,6%
5	Phonemic awareness relation of letter and its sound	12	92,3%
6	Start reading vocabulary items	11	84,6%

The above table shows that the biggest problem mostly found in aspect of relation between letter and its sound which reaches 92.3 %

### Picture of children condition, school environment, teacher and home environment as well as parents

The findings of the second phase of the research show :

Based on the assessment of children's ability in visual perception and linguistic awareness it is found out that 17% of subject children have heavy impairment in visual perception, 33 % medium and 50% experience visual perception impairment in medium level. Based on the linguistic awareness it is found out that 33% of the above children have bad linguistic awareness, 50 % have medium and 17% have good linguistic awareness.

The assessment of interaction quality between parents and children especially the interaction related to learning and parents' concern about children's problem shows this: 33% parents pay quite good attention to education and learning problems, 50% parents pay least attention and 17% pay very poor attention.

Based on supporting facilities for children learning at home, only 8% have books and adequate educative toys, 58 % less adequate and 34 % least adequate.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the research it could be concluded that basically children who experience difficulties in pre-reading development area , each of them has different problems. Based on the research, problem of relation of letters and their sounds mostly found in children with pre-reading difficulties.

Children with pre-reading difficulties show that they have impairment in visual perception and linguistic awareness, linguistic problem found more in children with pre-reading difficulties than impairment of visual perception awareness. Children experiencing pre-reading difficulties are found more in schools which have less facilities, and parents who have less concerns on their children's learning problem..



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