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Exploring Preschool Teachers' Obstacles in Helping Children Teaching Malay Reading Skills

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Abstract. Reading problems among preschool children are not a new thing for preschool teachers. This article discusses the constraints and difficulties when helping preschool children master reading skills. This study used a qualitative method design involving 12 preschool teachers who teach in 12 National Schools in 7 states in Malaysia. The criteria of the non-random sampling selection were based on employment in the preschool field, having eight years of teaching experience, and being a Principal Trainer (JU) in the preschool field. Analysis by the interview method was conducted online. Each interview conducted was recorded. The NVivo software has been used to facilitate the data management and analysis. The research design used Grounded Theory to obtain the findings. The results of this study show that there are 11 factors representing the constraints and difficulties related to helping preschool children master reading skills. Among them are different levels of mastery, being forgetful or having a poor memory, being unable to recognise the alphabet, getting lost or lacking focus, diverse mastery, a lack of family support, limited time, background differences, a lack of interest in reading, the differentiation of the methods used or applied, and also the attitude or maturity of the preschool children. Preschool teachers also use various methods that can stimulate the children's interest and increase their confidence by having fun lessons to help them focus during the reading process, whether in the classroom or at home. This is because the practice of reading is not only focused on school but also elsewhere. In conclusion, the teacher's presentation plays an important role and effective methods need to be taken into account in order to attract children's interest to be involve in the learning session and subsequently increasing the level of mastery in reading. The importance of mastery of reading skills among children is emphasised in relation to their age. This is because reading is an important activity in human life, and because it is a basic skill of self-development related to gaining knowledge.

Keywords: Teacher restraint; qualitative; reading problems; preschool

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1. Introduction

The ability to read is crucial because it allows children to become acquainted with language and develop their preproduction abilities. Moreover, reading is also a fundamental skill of self-development on the road to gaining knowledge and searching for necessary information (Nicholas & Rouse, 2021; Abdul Said, 2018). Through reading, children can acquire other subjects like science and mathematics. In addition, reading helps children expand their vocabulary and strengthens their language acquisition (Zainal & Saad, 2022; Kilincci & Bayraktar, 2021). Children who are proficient in language can use appropriate words to convey their needs and thoughts.

According to the development stages of language acquisition, there are five stages, namely, (i) the receptive or preproduction stage; (ii) the early production stage; (iii) the speech emergence stage; (iv) the intermediate language proficiency stage; and (v) the advanced language proficiency stage (Yan 2008). The first category encompasses skills like reading and listening. Therefore, in order to maintain the children's progression to the following stages of language acquisition, it is imperative that they master reading and listening skills first.

Reading skills are an important principle in the intellectual and social development of individuals. These skills not only affect academic success but also success in everyday life (Nootens et al., 2019; Abid et al., 2023). A literature review shows that mastery in early reading skills has a strong correlation with academic achievement in the future (Al Jefri & Areepattamannil, 2019; Setiani et al., 2023). Children who do not master reading skills at an early stage are more likely to face academic problems throughout school later. Early reading skills also play an important role in the formation of self-confidence and motivation to learn (Danita, 2023).

Early age is the best time to teach children to read due to the brain's rapid development (Bailey, 2022; Klinberg, 2013; Frey & Fisher, 2010). Exposure to reading activities should be nurtured at an early age as this activity can assist in developing children's interest in books and printed materials (Alyson & Cremin, 2022; Neuman & Knapczyk, 2022; Zaharah & Mohamed, 2019). Additionally, these kinds of activities can stimulate reading in a way that maximises the child's ability to use their imagination. The process of reading involves the reader's imagination and the text. It is widely recognised that formal reading instruction will enhance the children's reading abilities, and they will become proficient (Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, to make teaching more effective, engaging, and capable of motivating children to read more, teachers must possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude (Moats, 2020).

Reading skills are very difficult skills for preschool children to master (Haiza, Halim & Azizah, 2021). According to a report by Faida Rahim in Astro Awani in 2023, it was stated that more than 170,000 school students in Malaysia are not good at reading, this includes reports of preschool dropouts (children aged 4 to 6 years who do not undergo learning before entering Year 1 in primary school) also show as many as 174,933 (17.1%) in 2019, 234,476 (22.2%) in 2020 and 286,861 (26.9%)

for 2021. The data shows that the consequences of this dropout are among the causes or causes of children being slow to master reading skills.

According to previous research, preschool teachers find it challenging to assist children in acquiring reading skills, especially in the Malay language (Manaf & Abu Bakar, 2022; Juppri, 2013). Children who are unable to learn the Malay language experience feelings of inferiority and are disinterested in being involved in learning activities (Ng & Yeo 2014). Children will then choose to play instead of participating. Furthermore, a lack of motivation in learning the Malay language will exacerbate weak reading abilities (Rasid, 2011).

Additionally, it has been reported that children lack basic reading comprehension skills such as knowing the alphabet's name and sounds (Haq, 2010). Besides, children often misidentify capital letters and small letters while reading, as well as not sounding out words correctly and accurately, being unable to pronounce words that are spelt, and often leaving out words whose meaning is unknown or failing to sound them out (Manaf & Abu Bakar, 2022; Rahim, 2023).

Therefore, the preschool teacher needs to be knowledgeable about and skilled at preparing and carrying out learning activities that might spark the children's interest in reading. Encouraging imaginative, and meaningful learning exercises is an essential component in supporting children's literacy development (Joohi, Joswick & Pole, 2023; Ching & Tahar, 2021; Kelly & Homes, 2020). It boosts self-esteem, encourages optimistic thinking, and enhances other academic skill areas (Pulimeno, Piscitelli & Colazzo, 2020). As a result, the children will be more willing to get involved with the learning activity.

Through the mastery of words, the child can express his ideas and opinions. It can develop children's potential comprehensively and integrated and includes in all aspects such as physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social through a safe and nurturing learning environment. The approach of teachers who apply fun learning activities in the classroom, especially in reading and writing skills, can increase children's mastery of these skills (Abdul Halim Masnan, Seah Siok Peh, Azila Alias, 2021).

However, there is only a little research that focuses on Malay reading proficiency in Malaysia at the preschool level (Winskel, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Most of the reading skills research focuses on the English language (Yussof & Sun, 2020; Salleh et al., 2020). Thus, this study was carried out to determine the challenges preschool teachers face when teaching Malay reading skills. By identifying the challenges teachers encounter, the appropriate support can be suggested and provided. In addition, the results of this study may offer helpful insights into the methods and strategies for teaching Malay reading skills.

2. Literature Review

In Malaysia, early childhood education services are divided into two categories based on the age of the child. The first category known as Nursery is governed by the Day Care Act 1984 (308) and provides services for children aged 4 years old

and below. The second category known as Preschool is governed by the Education Act 1996 (550) and provides services for children aged 4 to 6 years old. These two service categories are integrated into separate government-established curricula. The PERMATA curriculum is utilised in nurseries, and the National Preschool Standard Curriculum is applied in preschools.

The National Preschool Standard Curriculum consists of six strands, namely, (i) communication; (ii) spirituality, attitudes and values; (iii) personal competence; (iv) physical development and aesthetics; (v) science and technology; and (vi) humanities. The communication strand emphasises the importance of using both verbal and non-verbal communication in daily interactions. Children are expected to master both the Malay and English languages. Therefore, teachers must use Malay and English as instructional languages in the preschool classroom. For National Type Schools, children are expected to learn the Chinese or Tamil language too. Taking into account that the Malay Language is the national language of Malaysia, teachers are required to carry out teaching and learning using Malay for at least 600 minutes per week. Children have the aims of mastering listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

Reading skills are a very important aspect of acquiring knowledge. A person with good reading skills can easily acquire and improve their knowledge in various fields. Preschool education is a program that provides learning experiences for children aged four to six years old over a period of one to two years before they enter Year One at primary schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). Preschool education aims to develop the various potentials of children including the mastery of reading skills. With that, they can make progress in their studies, making it easier for the children to learn knowledge in various fields.

Many activities have been organised to improve reading skills among preschool children. However, it is inevitable that there are some children who need intensive help to develop their reading skills. This situation occurs due to the existence of a poor level of intelligence among children, and some of them need special education (Jamian, 2011). In addition to that, children are likely to have problems mastering reading skills who have poor eyesight or who are lacking in visual observation skills. Without reading skills, children will not be able to progress. The children's failure to read well is often associated with failures in exams. This causes it to be difficult for the children to understand the content of the lessons due to their failure to read well. Children who have reading problems are also found to have problems mastering subjects other than the Malay language. As a result of this weakness in mastering reading skills, their achievements in subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science are also affected.

Therefore, the delay in mastering reading skills is caused by several important factors that affect the preschool children's mastery of reading skills. Among the main factors is a lack of intelligence and psychological awareness among children as a result of various genetic factors, the children's physical disabilities, and their surroundings, which tend to cause problems for the children when they are trying to learn and remember the lessons taught by the teacher. Children who inherit a

low level of intelligence often show emotional disturbances such as worry, fear, anger and other feelings that affect concentration and attention to learning (Jamian, 2011).

In addition, environmental problems are external phenomena that occur due to the practices of the school system. Different aspects of children's abilities are often neglected, so the gap that results in the mainstream of learning at school is a result of the formation factor and the use of non-standard language practices. Lack of experience and an unhealthy association make children more vulnerable to the speech and practice of using regional language and market language, which also contributes to learning problems, especially in the Malay language (Jamian, 2011). Factors that cause tardiness in mastering reading skills are the children's confusion when recognising capital and small letters while reading, not sounding out words correctly and accurately, not being able to say spelled words and often leaving them out, and omitting words of unknown meaning or failing to sound them. This creates a crawling reading pattern and means that the children do not understand the information and meaning of the reading material (Jamian, 2011).

Educators agree that reading is a good sign of academic achievement. Apart from that, also according to the Executive Report of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), it has been reported that the mastery of reading skills of Malaysians is positioned as 54 out of 74 participating countries. According to Mahzan Arshad (2008), reading is a process carried out by readers to form or give meaning to the text they read before deciding. In addition, there have been previous studies showing the importance of mastering early reading skills from childhood, as it can even have a positive effect on the development of children's minds (Yahya et al., 2013).

The National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) (2017) states that the mainstay of communication in preschool education consists of Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil. Language skills are at the core of communication. Language skills are divided into listening and speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills. These four skills are important for developing children's verbal communication and literacy fundamentals for their next stage of learning in the future.

In order to explore the extent of the problems faced by children in mastering reading skills, the questions asked during the interview were more directed to issues or constraints faced by preschool teachers. In addition to that, teachers also share methods or techniques that are suitable and used by them in the class when the learning and teaching sessions are conducted. Based on the experience of preschool teachers, the period required to help children who have not yet mastered reading skills depends on the child himself and there is no period that can be estimated. This is because it depends on the approach given by teachers and parents in helping them read.

The standard of content in the mainstay of communication involves reading skills such as mastering pre-reading skills, knowing the letters of the alphabet, building

and reading syllables and words, reading and understanding phrases and sentences, reading and understanding reading materials, and fostering broad reading. The preschool curriculum has been formulated to provide preschoolers with meaningful knowledge in mastering reading skills through the content of the preschool education curriculum before stepping into Year One (Chee, 2017).

For preschool children who have not yet mastered reading skills, teachers must make use of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) as guidance and as a reference at school. This is because children can be assessed continuously to identify their level of mastery in terms of certain knowledge, skills and values, as well as enabling teachers to take follow-up actions to improve the children's achievements. Mastering reading skills will not only help children master other pillars but it will also help to improve the progress of their mental, psychological, and social development.

3. Methodology

This study employed a generic qualitative research design. A generic qualitative research design relies on the views of the participants, asks broad and general questions, collects data in the form of words or text from the participants, explains the words in the form of themes, and conducts inquiries in a subjective form and without bias. Therefore, it is fit to achieve this research objective.

A purposive sampling technique was used in the participant selection process. This technique was to ensure that the participants could offer extensive and meaningful information about their experiences of teaching young children to master reading skills. Two selection criteria were established which were that (i) the participants had at least 8 years of experience teaching in preschool, and (ii) that the participants must be a Principal Trainer (PT) for preschool. The participants were selected based on their teaching experience in the Preschool field because the teacher knows the field more deeply. This is because they have built a good and close relationship between teachers and preschool children. Indirectly, teachers are more familiar with the situation of children in the classroom in helping them master reading skills.

Based on these criteria, 12 participants were involved in this research. Table 1 provides detailed information on the participants.

Table 1: Participant Information

Participants/ Categories	Gender	Age (years old)	Teaching Experience (years)
R1	Female	33	9
R2	Female	33	9
R3	Female	50	28
R4	Female	39	9
R5	Female	37	15

R6	Female	42	20
R7	Female	44	12
R8	Female	41	17
R9	Female	35	8
R10	Female	32	8
R11	Female	43	17
R12	Female	52	10

4. Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview protocol was used in the data collection process. A semi-structured interview was chosen because it can help the researcher develop a relaxed and in-depth interview protocol with the participants to help the researcher understand the context of the study. The interview protocol was developed based on the previous research and the aim of exploring the experiences of preschool teachers in teaching young children reading. Experts in early childhood education with 15 years of experience were appointed to review the interview protocol to ensure the questions would be able to answer the research questions. A total of 16 interview questions were generated from five constructs. The construct were (i) current teaching method and technique, (ii) teaching aide, (iii) assessment and evaluation process, (iv) support needed, and (v) recommendation for new module.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

One-to-one interview sessions were conducted with each participant. The interviews were conducted online via the Google Meet platform. An online platforms was chosen due to the location of the participants. Since the participants were located around the Malaysia, online interviews were the best method to reach all of them. Each interview session took 40 to 60 minutes, and were recorded for transcribing purposes.

The NVivo software has been used to facilitate the data management and analysis. The thematic analysis method by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to analyse the interview findings. Six stages were involved in the thematic analysis, namely (i) data management, (ii) coding, (iii) theme construction, (iv) reviewing the themes, (v) defining and naming the themes, and (vi) writing the report.

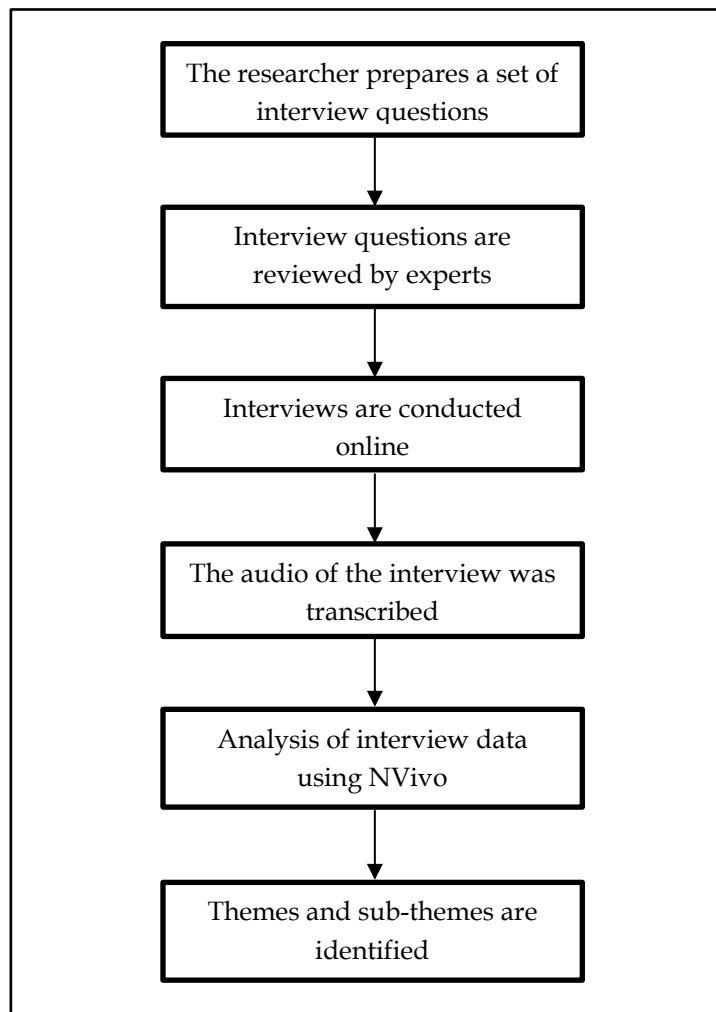


Figure 1: Diagram of the data collection procedure

Credibility and Consistency

Credibility and consistency are two crucial elements in qualitative studies because they are key features in determining the suitability and usability of the research itself. Credibility is the extent to which all evidence supports interpretations based on the data. Meanwhile, consistency for qualitative studies refers to the extent to which the study findings can be replicated with the assumption that repeated studies will yield similar results. Consistency also involves the details reported within the context of the interviews conducted. In this study, credibility and consistency was ensured through member checks and peer review.

The reliability of qualitative data is related to the researcher's observations of whether it has internal or external consistency. Consistency in referring to the data obtained arranged in a meaningful form. While the external consistency is confirmed through checking the observations obtained with various other data sources. Member checks involved reviewing the data and interpretations for them to be referred back to the study participants, enabling them to confirm the accuracy and truthfulness of the information and study reports. This agreement not only tested the accuracy of the data but also provided evidence to enhance the

credibility and consistency of the findings. In order to accomplish this, the participants were given the transcript of their interview conversation. The participants were given a week to review the transcript. All participants agreed with the transcripts.

Peer review refers to the process of obtaining expert feedback on the research findings or proposals by experts in the relevant field. Experts can provide valuable feedback and constructive criticism to enhance the overall quality of the study. Peer review is a method used to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and credibility of qualitative research. Two experts with over 15 years of experience in early childhood fields were appointed to scrutinise the themes, sub-themes and interview findings. Both experts suggested some amendments to re-organise the findings into other themes or sub-themes. The improvements were made according to the expert suggestions.

6. Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the constraints and difficulties faced by preschool teachers in Malaysia when teaching Malay reading skills. Five themes emerged from the interviews, namely, (i) the diversity of children's abilities; (ii) the children's lack of basic reading skills; (iii) the lack of family support; (iv) one teaching strategy not fitting all; and (v) limited time. Through the results of the interview, all the participants stated that for each factor that has been identified, the teacher sees for himself how the condition and behavior of the child is in the class. For example, when the learning session is conducted, children cannot focus and concentrate while the teacher is teaching. When these children do not focus, then the teacher has to repeatedly help them with the same skill before moving on to the next skill. Indirectly, the time required will take more time for one reading skill.

Further information on the themes and sub-themes is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Constraints and difficulties of preschool teachers in helping children to master reading skills

No.	Theme	Sub-Theme
1.	The diversity of the children's abilities	Varying rates of learning
		Children ability to memorise
		Children's lack of concentration
2.	Children's lack of basic reading skills	Children did not recognise the alphabet
		Children struggle to recognise the syllables
3.	Lack of family support	Parents spoil their children
		Parent's commitment

4.	One teaching strategy does not fit all	-
5.	Limited time	-

6.1 The Diversity of the Children's Abilities

The first theme is the diversity of the children's abilities. The participants describe that children in their classroom have a diverse range of abilities. There are three sub-themes for this theme, namely (i) a varying rate of learning; (ii) the children's ability to memorise; and (iii) the children's lack of concentration.

Varying Rates of Learning

The participants reported that children in their classrooms learnt at varying rates. Some children picked things up quickly and effectively, making them fast learners. Some children, however, were slower because they required more time and effort to absorb and process the new information. Because of this, the participants found it difficult to determine the most appropriate teaching strategy able to work for all children and when it was the best time to introduce them to new learning objectives. The children in the slow learning group will fall behind if the learning activities are adjusted to suit the needs of the quick learners. The children in the quick learner group will lose interest if they follow the slow learning group. R11 in the interview stated,

"The reason for teaching reading is... (long pause). For me, the effective way is to focus. I need to focus on that student. Because of the different levels."

Children Ability to Memorise

The participants disclosed that children struggle to remember new information, even when it is presented in small amounts. This is even when the new knowledge that has been introduced to them is a basic reading skill such as letter sounds. Later, when it comes to more difficult tasks like pronouncing open and closed syllables, the situation gets worse. In the end, the participant has to repeatedly teach the basic reading skill over and over again, and this situation is time-consuming. R5 in the interview stated,

"Their memorising ability is poor, forgets to sound the letters, and always forget to combine the sounds of the letters."

This is because children's weak memory causes them to be unable to recognize letters and unable to spell syllables or words. Indirectly, these children will cause them to fall behind in their studies compared to other friends.

Children's Lack of Concentration

One of the constraints that the participants confronted was the children's lack of focus. The participants stated that children don't seem to be interested in Malay language activities. When a teacher is teaching, children are more prone to playing and paying less attention. R11 in the interview stated,

"I think the difficulty is how to get the student interested in reading. Because teachers have to be creative. I feel like finding the latest ideas is difficult to draw interest among children. Because I see now, this child seems a little less interested in this book to read. So, the teacher had to diversify the methods to attract their interest."

The participants additionally disclosed that some children didn't cooperate for more than fifteen minutes when it came to the reading activities. After the allotted time had elapsed, the children became side tracked and began to play or converse with others. R7 in the interview stated,

"Children love to play. If I want to teach him face to face, I will have to take some time. He can't focus for long. There are children who can focus for a long time, the longest will be about 15 minutes for me. That's the longest you can focus on these boys."

Participants had to find appropriate methods to attract their attention and focus in class. They also seemed to lose attention with what the participants taught. His lack of interest in reading is caused by his failure to master reading skills well. For children playing is more important than reading.

6.2 Children's Lack of Basic Reading Skills

The second theme generated was the children's lack of basic reading skills. The participants describe that children in their classroom did not know basic literacy. This, in turn, exacerbates reading difficulty. There are two sub-themes in this theme, namely (i) the children did not recognise the alphabet and (ii) the children's struggle to recognise syllables.

Children Did Not Recognise the Alphabet

The participants reported that the children were not familiar with the names or sounds of the alphabet. Therefore, the participants opted to start the teaching and learning activities by introducing the names and sounds of the alphabet before moving to the more difficult tasks such as blending sounds. R1 in the interview stated,

"Children don't recognise ABC, but the six-year-old students who have just enrolled, most of them are at the consonant-vocal level, or at least able to recognise ABC."

Based on the results of interviews conducted with 12 participants, one of the methods they often use to help children master reading skills is the use of cards. Seven participants stated that the use of cards was effective in helping them read in class. Among them are letter cards, picture cards, syllable cards, scan cards and so on. Most of the cards used were produced by the participants themselves.

Children Struggle to Recognise the Syllables

The participants reported that children in their classroom faced difficulty recognising the syllables. The difficulties identifying and pronouncing words then

caused the teachers to have an issue when teaching the children to master reading skills effectively. R1 in the interview stated,

“The children have difficulties in recognising the syllables. It is because they don't master the letters. If one does not master the letters, one will not master the syllables. And if one doesn't master the syllables, it will take longer time for my students to remember the syllables.”

Meanwhile, R6 stated that they are

“unable to segment syllables. For example, from an open syllable with the closed syllable, when he wants to segment it, he can't. He only gets the open one, the closed one is gone.”

6.3 Lack of Family Support

A third theme that emerged was lack of family support. According to the participants, family support has a significant impact on the children's ability to master reading skills. The participants assert that children with supportive families demonstrate proficient reading abilities. This, in turn, exacerbates the reading difficulty. There are two sub-themes merged with this theme, namely, (i) that parents spoil their children; and (ii) the parent's commitment.

Parent's Spoil Their Children

One participant stated that parents should participate in nurturing their children so then they are interested in reading. R4 in the interview stated,

“In terms of social background, parents also play a role. It is because half of these children are already weak, then they are spoiled, difficult and cannot be reprimanded.”

Parent's Commitment

A participant mentioned that some parents provide their children with the best help possible when it comes to their education. Parents in this category typically expose their children to books at a young age before enrolling them in early childhood education. When these kids begin their early formal education, they already have a printed awareness. In addition, the participant also underlined that families play a crucial role in assisting preschool-aged children in developing their reading skills. R7 in the interview stated:

“Children come from various backgrounds making us feel like suffocating, the difficulty of teaching is difficult with various teaching methods or techniques, children say words upside down, some memorise quickly, and when they memorise too quickly, they tend to not see the word. But he looked at the picture.”

6.4 One Teaching Strategy Did Not Fit All

The participants stated that they had to use different teaching techniques based on the children's preferences. Certain children pick up phonics quickly, while others are better at spelling, and others pick up words by

sight quickly. This situation put a toll on the participants because they had to implement different teaching strategies to fit with the children's abilities and preferences. Besides, the participants always used trial and error or did experiments to identify suitable teaching strategies for each child in their classroom. R7 in the interview stated,

"These children are prone to phonics while some are prone to segmenting. Some are more inclined to spelling. This is where I have to code mix. I see what their tendency is, using various techniques and methods, makes us feel suffocated, teaching with various teaching methods or techniques is difficult, children say words upside down, some memorise quickly that they don't see the words. But he looked at the picture. He will say book, but actually he can't."

6.5 Limited time

A participant mentioned that they didn't have much time to teach children to read. The participant also mentioned that it takes a longer time for children to focus and keep up with their more advanced reading peers. R9 in the interview stated,

"...especially in terms of time. We are lacking time. Especially if it is an individual reading. If the students who achieve better than other students, there will be no problem with time. We want to catch up so that everything is at the level we are required to be. The biggest problem is time."

7. Discussion

The ability to read must be mastered by all children in order to allow them to explore all written information. However, previous research has reported that children show a low interest and face difficulties when learning reading, especially in the Malay language. Therefore, teachers need to employ appropriate teaching strategies and techniques to encourage active participation among children in the classroom. In order to make the reading instruction more engaging, broad, and capable of igniting the children's genuine interest in learning, according to Haiza et al. (2021), teachers must thus vary their approaches to teaching reading. This will prevent children from easily forgetting the new lessons.

The process of reading involves the reader's imagination and the text. To help children read, a variety of techniques and exercises can be applied. Teachers must select activities that are suited to the children's abilities. Preschool teachers must implement appropriate teaching approaches and techniques to help children enhance their reading abilities (Wong & Nurfaradilla, 2021). This is due to the fact that not every youngster responds well to the same strategy. Certain children acquire reading abilities rapidly, while others require more time. Therefore, when working with children with different levels of ability, teachers must be prepared and know the ability of each child in the classroom.

By understanding each child in the classroom, teachers can design and perform ideal teaching strategies suited to them. Teachers should give more attention to children who are having difficulty reading. When dealing with this circumstance,

extra reading activities and different teaching approaches need to be performed. Teachers also need to be more creative when it comes to attracting the children's interest and making them participate actively in the classroom activities (Norlela et al., 2021).

In order to ensure that learning sessions in the classroom are interesting and able to have an impact on children, teachers need to play a role in creating a learning environment that is fun and attracts children to learn (Haiza, Halim & Azizah, 2021). Preschool teachers need to be smart in dealing with this situation in helping children master reading skills. This is because children easily lose focus or concentration in class. Their focus is more on friends or more interested in playing. Because of that, their mastery of reading skills is weak.

The results of this study demonstrate that teachers have a hard time teaching reading to children who do not recognise the alphabet. Letter recognition is basic knowledge for reading as without it, teachers cannot start to teach reading. As a result, the teacher must devote more time to teaching the alphabet's name or sounds first. This circumstance can make children feel that they are not as good as their classmates. This situation indirectly causes them to feel a lack of confidence and to stop engaging in the learning activities.

Different mastery levels are also one of the biggest factors for preschool teachers in helping them master reading skills. Therefore, teachers must first identify their level of mastery in which part before finding and using various methods or techniques in the classroom. In addition, teachers need to constantly experiment and try various ways to help preschool children master reading skills. When the PdPc session in the class is interesting and it is able to have an impact on children, teachers also need to play a role in creating a learning environment that is fun and attracts children to learn (Haiza, Halim & Azizah, 2021).

A contributing factor to the children's reading difficulties is a lack of familial support (La Jeti et al., 2022). Maintaining a child's education at home is crucial since it increases their enthusiasm for reading. Additionally, reading exercises that children do at home might ignite their interest and improve their attention span. However, the majority of parents only expect their teachers to help and instruct children in reading. Reading activities have become sporadic as a result of this gap between home and school.

It can be challenging to assist all children in learning and acquiring reading skills within the limited time provided for Malay language learning in the preschool classroom, especially when children are unable to grasp the reading skills instantly. Consequently, teachers are faced with a difficult decision: should they go to the next syllabus or wait for the children to acquire the reading skills first? In Malaysia, preschool teachers are required to teach all topics listed in the National Standard Preschool Curriculum within a year.

It is crucial for educators to carefully choose a teaching strategy that matches each child's degree of proficiency when learning the Malay language. This is because

different children have different backgrounds and skill levels, therefore not all strategies and practices are suitable for children. Reading comprehension will not be successfully achieved if teachers and children in particular continue to face barriers when learning to read. This will eventually result in ineptitude in other academic domains.

For this study, the use of cards is one of the methods often used by participants in class. This is because the use of this card is easy to produce yourself, the necessary materials are easy to find and cheap. The use of flash cards as a teaching aid in preschool education is very diverse and adaptable. Apart from that, participants can give cards to children to hold and can take home as one of the steps to review at home. The role of parents is also important at home in helping them to master reading skills. In encouraging children to read continuously, parents can make various efforts that are common but need to be done continuously.

Future studies could incorporate observational data or feedback from children and parents to provide a more comprehensive view of the challenges in preschool reading instruction. This is because their opinions can help overcome the problem of children who are slow to master reading skills, especially the opinions of parents. They know their children better and have a close relationship since childhood.

8. Conclusion

This article discusses the constraints and difficulties to do with helping preschool children master reading skills. This study used a qualitative method design involving 12 preschool teachers teaching in 12 National Schools in 7 states in Malaysia. Five themes were identified, namely the diversity of the children's abilities, the children's lack of basic reading skills, a lack of family support, teaching strategies not fitting all pupils, and having a limited time available. The five themes were based on the data collected through the conducted interviews.

The State Education Department or the District Education Office can seek help from external experts such as government or private bodies that are skilled in the preschool field to help teachers by providing them with training in dealing with the problem of children who are slow to master reading skills. The selection of methods or techniques used by experts can be shared and used in schools according to the environment and appropriate for the children in the school. Apart from that, the curriculum in preschool can also be changed according to the current situation where it suits the level and skills of preschool children. The role of the administrator, especially the head teacher in the school, is very important in helping teachers and children who are not good at reading, where the administrator must always meet and discuss with the teacher how to deal with the problem. Indirectly, head teachers can get to know children more closely who have problems mastering reading skills. Reading will also help to increase and strengthen the vocabulary that a child has. This is because by reading, children will find different types of new words. The weakness of preschool children when it comes to mastering reading skills affects their potential and mastery not only in Malay subjects but across additional subjects as well.

9. References

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