

Implementation of Early Reading Games to Teach English Using Integrated Sound Word Method for Preschoolers

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ABSTRACT

In teaching English reading skills to preschoolers, two primary reading instruction approaches have been established: the Phonics Approach and the Whole Language Approach. However, no evidence was found in the past studies to support these methods in the Malaysian setting. This study examines the effects of early reading games on teaching English among second language learners in preschools using the Integrated Sound Word Method using 60 preschoolers aged six years old in the district of Kuala Lumpur as samples. Two groups were formed to be assigned as the control group and intervention group. Pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 were administered to the control and intervention groups before and after the quasi-experimental study. The Integrated Sound Word Method incorporated early reading games as an intervention for the intervention group. This study used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) as well as the learning outcomes of the experimental study to measure its significance. The findings showed that the intervention group performed better in improving early reading proficiency through games as compared to the control group at each level. The participants in the intervention group are able to grasp early reading proficiency after learning through early reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method. This study has several implications for educators and policymakers

in developing effective reading programs for second language learners, emphasizing the significance of a balanced approach to achieving the objectives of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025).

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INTRODUCTION

The first step in teaching children to read is to engage their attention (Hendrickson, 2014). All teachers desire to make learning the English language easy and interesting for students. Two primary reading instruction approaches have been established throughout the years: the Phonics Approach and the Whole Language Approach. *Jolly Phonics* (n.d.), developed by Chris Jolly in 1989, is one of the most widely utilized phonics methods in preschools worldwide. Meanwhile, Glen Doman's reading flash cards are well-known for their whole language reading strategy. Both theories differ in certain areas, but they benefit children's early reading development. These approaches may appear effective in foreign nations where English is the national language. However, there has been no evidence to support these approaches in the Malaysian setting, where most children are English as a Second Language learners (Mohidin et al., 2015). The approach to learning and teaching early reading for second language learners may differ slightly from English-native language learners. Malaysia is still considered a novice in teaching emergent reading to English as a Second Language (L2) learners in preschools. There is currently no concrete structure or system in place to effectively teach early reading for the English language (Azman, 2016). Specifically, exploring reading methods to teach children to read in the Malaysian context has not yielded appropriate results.

Hence, this study employed the Integrated Sound Word Method as an intervention tool for educational games to increase early English language reading proficiency among second language learners in preschools. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of early reading games on teaching English among Second Language Learners in preschools using the Integrated Sound Word Method. The purpose of this study also aligns with the Malaysia Education Blueprint's second transformation shift (2013–2025). The Integrated Sound Word Method is a balanced method of teaching early reading skills in preschools that are systematically and sequentially structured. It builds meaningful English words, phrases, and brief sentences using targeted alphabetical letters and sounds, using visual flashcards and translation from the mother tongue (L1; Haron et al., 2008). Local contexts are incorporated into preschool lessons to assist children in connecting the words they learn in the classroom to their real-life events. Furthermore, preschool teachers are encouraged to make learning enjoyable and meaningful by including early reading games to stimulate children's interest in learning English. In order for children to master a language, a friendly, interactive learning environment should be established for them to learn the language and apply the knowledge in their surroundings rather than learning through memorization (Yamat et al., 2014).

This research study intends to contribute new insights to improve the English

language early reading proficiency among second language learners in preschools to enrich the previous research studies. A quasi-experimental study was chosen to examine the effect of early reading games on teaching English using Integrated Sound Word Methods in preschools. The results from this research study hope to bring awareness to the importance of using a balanced approach to achieve the objectives of the Ministry of Education (MOE) as stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), where all students are “expected to acquire knowledge, high order thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics, spirituality, and national identity” (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. 30).

Literature Review

The teaching and learning philosophies in preschools differ from one another to meet the needs of their targeted preschoolers in supporting English language acquisition. Due to social and environmental changes, English language teaching and learning strategies have evolved over the last few decades to meet the needs of current students (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014). The focus of the current preschool curriculum is to create a balanced and holistic learning atmosphere that covers intellectual, physical, artistic, emotional, social, spiritual, and character development (Chee et al., 2017). It is crucial to choose and use a precise pedagogy to accommodate the needs of today’s young children in Malaysia. However, there is currently no systematic method to

effectively guide early reading in the English language within Malaysian contexts. The reasons include insufficient teaching and learning materials, which impacted the quality of English language learning in the classroom. Preschool teachers need to be better equipped in terms of English language proficiency. As a result, adequate training is required to teach English as a Second Language in schools, as most English teachers’ language proficiency falls short of the academic standard (Azman, 2016). Preschoolers begin to learn various new skills, including reading in English, during their early preschool years. As English is not their mother tongue language, many of them have difficulty understanding the language and struggle to perform well in school. Researchers argued that “strong influence in mother tongue language” has hindered Second Language learners from excelling in second language acquisition (Musa et al., 2012). This issue has allowed researchers to explore this area of study further.

In their research study, Hardman and A-Rahman (2014) proposed a new teaching and learning English method that emphasized communication and interactive learning to overcome low English proficiency among Malaysian students. Earlier, the researcher performed experimental research on the whole language approach in private preschool classes in Selangor to remediate English language reading fluency (Gnanasugirtham, 2005). Another research study explored the computer program CAI to teach and learn English compared

to the traditional method (Lim, 2000). Additionally, a case study conducted by Ali (2003) mentioned that “some English teachers lacked the English language proficiency and the pedagogical knowledge to teach the language, and some claimed they were not confident in their language proficiency” (p. 4). Thirusanku and Yunus (2014) urged that there should be well-rounded and high-quality English teachers who will be able to articulate and teach the language. Teachers should also be equipped with the ability to encourage current-generation students. Ideally, a childcare center and preschool’s atmosphere should be inviting to instill learning, positively affecting children’s emergent literacy (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

A research study suggested that ‘a language curriculum that advances on inclusive, learning-by-doing experiences would encourage a more meaningful learning.’ To attract students’ interest in learning the English language, teachers must create a reflective learning pedagogy that allows students to be more independent and involved in their learning process (Musa et al., 2012). It is because the learning environment seems to impact the children’s holistic development as they feel confident to use the language and are given the exposure and opportunities to use the language (Yamat et al., 2014). Moreover, the implementation of active learning within the classroom setting has been shown to enhance students’ comprehension of the English language and facilitate improvements in their academic performance. This positive outcome can be

attributed to creating a supportive and non-intimidating learning environment, which effectively stimulates and sustains students’ motivation to engage with the language (Ibrahim et al., 2015). In conclusion, the utilization of early reading games as an instructional tool for preschoolers learning English as a second language has the potential to create a nurturing and motivating learning atmosphere conducive to language acquisition and development.

A century ago, there were heated debates in Western countries over the emerging reading and writing approaches. There are two known approaches: the Phonics Approach and the Whole Language Approach. The Phonics Approach is an alphabetical order system where each letter is represented by a unique sound called a phoneme. This approach teaches children to recognize letters and sounds in order from a–z, then blend a few individual sounds to build words. It is described as the “bottom-up” instruction to decode reading texts. It helps children to recognize the relationship between the letter and its sound. The combining and blending of the letters and sounds formed a word. However, each letter is independent and does not represent any meaning. On the other hand, the Whole Language approach emphasizes “top-bottom” instruction, where children are taught to read and recognize sets of words based on their prior knowledge and experiences encountered in the world around them (Gnanasugirtham, 2005). One of the avenues through which children acquire the ability to read meaningful words

is through their routine interactions with parents, siblings, and friends, as well as exposure to environments that facilitate the recall of learned words.

Although this method enables children to read familiar words rapidly, they are limited to recognizing and reading solely those words that they have previously identified and learned. Consequently, any words that are novel or unfamiliar to the children remain beyond their reading capacity (Yarmi, 2019). Another reading approach, the Integrated Sound Word Method, assimilates the Phonics and Whole Language approaches. It uses the strengths of both methods, integrating them systematically and allowing children to read and write meaningful words (Haron et al., 2008). The Integrated Sound Word Method is a balanced approach that targets the most used letters and sounds to build meaningful words. Children are taught a few vowel and consonant sounds to build simple words that they are familiar with in systematic and sequential ways. The children then expanded their vocabulary by incorporating more letters and sounds into their previous learning (Haron et al., 2008).

Hence, integrating these methodologies holds significant importance in facilitating the English language acquisition process within the Malaysian education system, particularly for emergent readers, such as preschool-aged children. In the Malaysian context of English language education, teachers must exhibit tolerance towards students' cultural and social backgrounds to enhance their proficiency in reading

English (Kustati et al., 2020). Living in a multicultural country like Malaysia, acquiring English requires a different approach compared to acquiring the students' native language (Ramlan & Maarof, 2014). Even though the English language and the Malay language share some common terms as they come from the same Latin roots and use an alphabetical system, the letters in both languages produce different phonemes. Furthermore, the use of grammar in sentence structures or syntax in the English language is different from the Malay language (Haron et al., 2008).

A 'Simple View' of reading was developed by Philip Gough (as cited in Wren, 2000), according to which a person's capacity for reading comprehension (R) is determined by their ability to decode (D) and comprehend (C). Therefore, for a person to master a reading skill, he or she must be able to decode text and comprehend the language ($R = D \times C$). The value of D and C can range from 0 to 1 (Wren, 2000). Imagine a child who has no difficulty understanding a spoken language, which means he or she would have a perfect comprehension score of 1. Unfortunately, the child cannot decode any text at all, which gives him or her a decoding score of 0. When these numbers are put into $R = D \times C$, $R = 0 \times 1 = 0$, the child fails in reading comprehension because if the child is unable to decode text, he or she is possibly unable to read and comprehend text. On the other hand, if a child can decode text and comprehend spoken language, he or she would score 1 in decoding and comprehension. It leads

to $R = 1 \times 1 = 1$, which concludes that the child has successfully achieved a reading comprehension skill (Wren, 2000).

The term comprehension refers to the ability to understand and draw inferences from speech in a language the person can understand (Wren, 2000). Living in a multicultural country like Malaysia, children's native language (mother tongue) comprehension may be high, but if they are in a classroom learning English as a second language, their English language comprehension ability may be limited. Children must know about the environment in which they live and have detailed background knowledge relevant to what they are trying to understand to have strong language comprehension skills. This knowledge is more important than memorizing facts or word definitions. Personal experiences, scripts, and schemas can help those children understand how the world around them works. Children learn by imitation and draw inferences from the new information based on the information they already know. The English language is derived from the individual sounds assembled to form words, a combination of words to form sentences, and arranged to convey ideas. It is known as linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge builds upon the three elements of phonology, syntax, and semantics (Wren, 2000). Phonology comes into play when children are able to hear and distinguish the sounds that make up the spoken language. Usually, children who grow up in a normal linguistic environment can distinguish between

different speech sounds in their native language. However, lack of exposure to English phonology may cause difficulty in differentiating the English phonemes, which leads to confusion when these words appear in context, and their comprehension skills will be affected (Wren, 2000).

The English lessons conducted in preschool classrooms are highly structured and give little room for preschoolers to express themselves, and they do not represent the ideal reflection of effective practice for early childhood education. The assumption of fun, meaningful play-based activities in preschools was found to be taught seated from one subject to another in the classroom most of the time (Qin & Md Nor, 2018). Children learn through games because they are associated with play. In the olden days, many preschools preferred to separate learning and playtime because many parents in Malaysia expect their children to excel in academic achievement, such as mastery in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic (3R) before they enter primary education. The emphasis on academic achievement in Malaysian preschools resulted in the poor implementation of active learning and play-based approaches (Qin & Md Nor, 2018). A significant shift has occurred in the learning field from a traditional, didactic model of instruction to more child-directed learning. Empirical evidence shows that games can effectively enhance learning and understanding of complex subject matter (Garris et al., 2002). According to Jean Piaget's perspective, play is considered as children working with

experiences that give them opportunities to be in control of their tasks (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). Whitehall and McDonald (1993) and Ricci et al. (1996), as cited in Garris et al. (2002), found that incorporating game features in learning instruction led to improved learning, which resulted in greater persistence on the task and led to greater attention to the content and greater retention. Hence, game-based English learning as a pedagogical approach is potentially an efficacious means of enhancing the language acquisition process among preschool children.

Playing games with peers allows them to exercise self-control and develop skills they already know, such as taking turns, cooperating, and socializing. Research findings by Fung and Min (2016) revealed that board games are a useful tool to engage students in class and to enhance the speaking ability of low-proficiency ESL learners. Montessori's (1912) pedagogy claims that play activities activate the child's inner drive to learn using appropriate tools/toys. Whereas in the High Scope program, children are facilitated by teachers during activity sessions at the child's level of development using structured instruction where children have to be active. In Sweden, the preschool curriculum requires the environment in preschools to be joyful to ensure the children feel a sense of belonging as well as encourage communication, play, and learning (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). However, in Malaysia, students feel that learning the English language is boring and dreadful as it mostly does not

play a part in their life outside of school (Fung & Min, 2016; Rahman & Maarof, 2018). Teachers should increase teaching methodology through games as learning activities to stimulate students' interest in learning the English language and enhance proficiency. The influence of games has rapidly evolved into a trend for learning and interactive learning experiences. It allows more flexibility for students to control their learning while governed by the structural game rules (Fung & Min, 2016). Lee (2012) stressed that implementing board games aligned with the national curriculum and matched with specific learning objectives can be effective for learning. It creates a meaningful teaching tool as students learn and generate a substantial amount of new vocabulary from the games. Learners can practice all the language skills and types of communication through games (Ersoz, 2000).

According to the findings, game-based learning has the potential to enhance children's turn-taking abilities by providing equal opportunities for play and fostering cooperation skills within learning contexts (Loukatari et al., 2019). This skill creates a learning environment that incorporates the elements of cooperative learning, competition, excitement, curiosity, and creativity (Fung & Min, 2016). However, the effectiveness of early reading games in teaching English has not been proven in the Malaysian context. Therefore, there is a need for rigorous implementation to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality

in preschoolers' English teaching and learning using the integrated Sound Word Method (Qin & Md Nor, 2018). To ensure the research questions proposed are well-supported, they require evidence: Does the Integrated Sound Word Method with early reading games enhance the English early reading proficiency of preschool children?

Following the literature review mentioned above, hypotheses 1 and 2 were proposed.

H1: Implementing the Integrated Sound Word Method through early reading games significantly enhances the early learning of English among participants in the intervention group.

H2: In each level of the post-test, the intervention group shows greater improvement in the early learning of English through reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method compared to the control group.

Therefore, the effect of encouraging preschoolers' interest in learning the English language through early reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method is the focus of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used quasi-experimental research, where the study is framed as a quantitative study. This type of research directly attempts to influence a particular variable, and it is suitable for cause-and-effect relationships (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Recruitment and Consent

The study was conducted in public preschool classrooms in Kuala Lumpur. It strives to instill early English reading effectively and meaningfully. In general, regardless of the level or type of school, the Malaysian education system promotes bilingualism and multilingualism in teaching and learning instructions. In vernacular schools, mother tongue and English are used as mediums of instruction and communication (How et al., 2015). Preschoolers who enroll in any preschool in Malaysia are required to learn English as a Second Language. In recent years, preschoolers' enrollment in government schools has increased from 194,225 in 2014 to 198,574 in 2015 and 200,522 in 2016 (Educational Planning and Research Division, 2016). By 2017, there were 201,249 enrollments in government-funded preschools, while 329,251 preschoolers were from private kindergartens, and 297,455 preschoolers were from other educational agencies (Educational Planning and Research Division, 2017). Many preschoolers get their first exposure to the English language through formal education in preschools (Azman, 2016).

In this study, a total of sixty participants from two government preschools located in Kuala Lumpur were selected through purposive sampling and were then assigned as the control and intervention groups. All the participants were selected through a matching process, where the participants are at the age of 6 with low English proficiency. The purpose of the matching process is

to control the threat to internal validity. The researchers also matched the gender of participants in this study to get an almost equal number of female and male participants in the control and intervention groups. The control group consists of thirty participants, including sixteen females and fourteen males, while the intervention group consists of thirty participants, with fourteen females and sixteen male participants. The population's demographics are classified as low socioeconomic group, with most residents living in government-supported housing apartments and having little understanding of the English language. Most of the students in these schools are Malays learning English as a second language.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the authors' University. Upon obtaining ethical clearance, we sought the assistance of preschool directors and class teachers to facilitate obtaining informed consent from the parents of sampled children included in our study. The consent forms were duly signed by all parents, thereby ensuring their voluntary participation and agreement to adhere to the study procedures. Our commitment to ethical standards and procedures was further strengthened by conducting the study in accordance with the relevant guidelines and protocols.

Procedure

In this quasi-experimental study, since all participants have been matched prior to the commencement of the experimental study, the participants' age, English

language proficiency, and gender will not be considered as factors that affect the study results. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), researchers who conduct experimental studies try their best to control any subject characteristics that might affect the study's outcome. Matching allows the participants to be matched on a certain variable of interest.

To achieve the objectives of this research study, both the control and intervention groups received pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 before and after the quasi-experimental study. The Integrated Sound Word Method was incorporated through early reading games as an intervention mode for the intervention group. Purposive sampling was used to select the preschools because these schools have been identified as being at risk for English language deficiency.

Teaching Training and Materials

The researchers then instruct the preschool teacher to carry out the teaching instructions in the classroom using all the teaching materials provided. There are large groups and small group activities in each lesson, with early reading games as an essential part of the instruction.

Firstly, the teachers were introduced to the early reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method and its benefits for preschoolers. Then, teachers are provided with a detailed explanation of the early reading games, including alphabet card games, alphabet dice games, "I Spy," "Letter Sounds Listening Game," "Blending Bus," "Words Builder," and "The Magic Pot."

Next, they need to understand how these games are designed to achieve the learning objectives and encourage social interaction among preschoolers. Specifically, teachers should have a clear understanding of the learning objectives for each lesson and how to track each child's progress. At the same time, the teachers should be trained on how to conduct large and small group activities effectively. The researchers provide specific instructions to teachers on carrying out the teaching instructions in the classroom using all the provided materials to ensure the teachers understand how to integrate early reading games and other activities into the lesson plan.

During the intervention period, the participants received weekly English language instruction. Specifically, a list of 15 words was taught each week, resulting in 60 words learned throughout the intervention. Within each week, the same list of 15 words was taught in each session. Classes were conducted for 30 minutes per day, three times weekly, over 4 weeks, providing 6 hours of English language instruction. The intervention group was instructed using the Integrated Sound Word Method, which incorporated early reading games, whereas the control group received early reading instruction without such games. It is crucial to employ conventional curricula as control conditions. The teachers in the control group continued using traditional early reading activities, which are typical for preschoolers.

Outcome Assessments

Preschoolers' early reading proficiency can be measured using various assessments, such as testing letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and decoding skills. A preschooler who demonstrates early reading proficiency may be able to identify letters, match words to sounds, and recognize some basic sight words (Lonigan et al., 2000). All participants were assessed for early reading proficiency through pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2, which included measures of word-sound recognition and reading comprehension within the 60 taught words. The pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 each lasted one week. The pre-test and post-test were spaced apart by 4 weeks, while a 2-week interval separated the post-test and post-test 2. Identical assessments were administered to both groups.

Analysis

Data collected from pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 were analyzed using IBM Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were used to summarize the overall trends or tendencies of the data to get an in-depth understanding of how the scores might vary and to provide insight into how one score stands compared to two variables (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to determine the overall changes over time and whether participants in the intervention group elicit a significant effect in learning English through early reading games using the integrated Sound Word Method.

ANOVA measured if there is a significant difference between the pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 scores of the control and intervention groups. Then, repeated measure analysis examines differences in mean scores between pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2. The significance level is specified at 0.05 (alpha, $\alpha = 0.05$).

RESULTS

Data collected from the quasi-experimental study were sorted for analysis. The analysis was divided into two sections: (1) a descriptive analysis of the profiles of participants and (2) a descriptive and inferential analysis of the effect of early reading games in teaching English using the Integrated Sound Word Method in preschool.

The mean scores of Level 1 pre-tests for control and intervention groups are 47.33 and 55.00, while the standard deviations are 29.24 and 23.89, respectively. The mean scores of Level 2 pre-tests for control and intervention groups are 22.33 and 22.00, while the standard deviations are 32.63 and 25.82, respectively. For Level 3 pre-tests, the mean scores and standard deviation of the control group are 8.67 and 23.89. The intervention group's mean score is 8.00, and the standard deviation is 14.72 for the same Level 3 pre-test. Whereas the Level 4 pre-tests' mean score and standard deviation for the control group are 5.00 and 20.13, respectively, and for the intervention group are 3.67 and 9.64, respectively.

Table 1
Differences in early reading diagnostic pre-test of control group – intervention group

Early Reading Diagnostic		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Level 1 Pre-test	Between Groups	881.67	1	881.67	1.24	0.271
	Within Groups	41336.67	58	712.70		
Level 2 Pre-test	Between Groups	1.67	1	1.67	0.002	0.965
	Within Groups	50216.67	58	865.81		
Level 3 Pre-test	Between Groups	6.67	1	6.67	0.017	0.897
	Within Groups	22826.67	58	393.56		
Level 4 Pre-test	Between Groups	26.67	1	26.67	0.107	0.745
	Within Groups	14446.67	58	249.08		

Table 1, shown above, is a One-way ANOVA result that shows overall changes in pre-test mean scores by groups. It means that there is no difference in the overall Level 1 pre-test between the control group

and the intervention group. Similar patterns are shown in the Level 2 pre-test's score $F(1, 58) = 0.002, p > 0.05$, the Level 3 pre-test's score $F(1, 58) = 0.017, p > 0.05$, and Level 4 pre-test's score $F(1, 58) = 0.107,$

$p > 0.05$. As a result, the Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 pre-test results are not significant since all its p -value is greater than 0.05. There are no significant differences in the overall mean scores before the treatment program started in this research study. The Test of Homogeneity of Variances supports these scores through Levene's test. The pre-test scores of Levels 1 to 4 for both control group and intervention group are not significant as ($F = 2.18, p = 0.146$), ($F = 2.11, p = 0.152$), ($F = 0.94, p = 0.335$), and ($F = 1.10, p = 0.298$) at its respected level, where the α values ($p > 0.05$). It means that participants in control and intervention groups are at equally similar levels in early reading English proficiency before the commencement of the experimental study.

The mean scores of Level 1 pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 for the control group are 47.33, 64.00, and 57.67, respectively, while its standard deviations are 29.24, 28.11, and 31.48. The mean scores of Level 2 pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 are 22.00, 41.00, and 37.33, while its standard deviations are 32.63, 43.58, and 41.02, respectively. For Level 3 pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2, mean scores and standard deviation are ($M = 8.67, 25.33, 23.00$) and ($SD = 23.89, 43.30, 39.49$), respectively. Level 4 pre-test mean score is 5.00, post-test mean score is 15.00, and post-test 2 mean score is 13.67. Its standard deviation showed 20.13, 35.11, and 32.32 for pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2.

Table 2
Differences in early reading diagnostic of a control group

Early Reading Diagnostic		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Level 1	Between groups	4246.67	2	2123.33	2.42	0.095
	Within groups	76443.33	87	878.66		
Level 2	Between groups	6095.56	2	3047.78	1.97	0.146
	Within groups	134736.67	87	1548.70		
Level 3	Between groups	4886.67	2	2443.33	1.83	0.166
	Within groups	116123.33	87	1334.75		
Level 4	Between groups	1768.89	2	884.44	0.99	0.376
	Within groups	77796.67	87	894.22		

As shown in Table 2, there was no statistical difference between Early Reading Diagnostic's mean scores in the control group as determined by the one-way ANOVA results. The overall changes in the

mean score in Level 1, $F(2, 87) = 2.42, p > 0.05$ is not significant. Similar results were shown in the Level 2 mean score $F(2, 87) = 1.97, p > 0.05$, Level 3 mean score $F(2, 87) = 1.83, p > 0.05$, and Level 4 mean score

$F(2, 87) = 0.99, p > 0.05$. As a result, the Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 mean scores differences are not significant since all its p -values are greater than .05. The analysis has revealed that participants in the control group did not show the effect of learning English early reading.

In the Intervention group, the mean scores of Level 1 pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 are 55.00, 91.33, and 87.00, respectively, while its standard deviations are 23.89, 26.49, and 26.28, respectively. The Level 2 pre-test, post-test, and post-

test 2 mean scores are 22.22, 93.33, and 85.67, while its standard deviations are 25.82, 25.37, and 23.59, respectively. Level 3 pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 mean scores and standard deviation are ($M = 8.00, 74.00, 66.33$) and ($SD = 14.72, 42.07, 38.73$), respectively. Level 4 pre-test mean score is 3.67, post-test mean score is 84.33, and post-test 2 mean score is 75.33. Its standard deviation showed 9.64, 29.67, and 28.01 for pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2, respectively.

Table 3
Differences in early reading diagnostic Levels 1 to 4 of the intervention group

Early Reading Diagnostic		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Level 1	Between groups	23628.89	2	11814.44	18.06	0.000
	Within groups	56926.67	87	654.30		
Level 2	Between groups	91108.89	2	45554.44	73.20	0.000
	Within groups	54140.00	87	622.30		
Level 3	Between groups	78175.56	2	39087.78	33.64	0.000
	Within groups	101096.67	87	1162.03		
Level 4	Between groups	117242.22	2	58621.11	100.04	0.000
	Within groups	50980.00	87	585.98		

There was a statistically significant difference between the early reading diagnostic scores in the intervention group as determined by the one-way ANOVA results (Table 3). The overall changes in the mean score of Level 1, $F(2,87) = 18.06, p < 0.05$ is significant. The same results were shown in the Level 2 mean score $F(2,87) = 73.20, p < 0.05$, Level 3 mean score $F(2,87) = 33.64, p < 0.05$, and Level 4 mean score $F(2,87) = 100.04, p < 0.05$. As a result, the

Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 mean scores differences are significant since all of Table 3's p -value ($p = 0.000$) is less than 0.05. The analysis has revealed that Early Reading Games using the Integrated Sound Word Method showed a significant effect in improving early reading proficiency among participants in the Intervention group. Therefore, the results have confirmed Hypothesis 1 as postulated in this study.

Table 4
Multiple comparisons overall changes by time of early reading diagnostic Level 1 to 4 of the control group and intervention group

Group	Early Reading Diagnostic	Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I – J)	Standard Error	Sig.
Control Group	Level 1	Pre-test	Post-test	-16.667	7.654	0.081
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-10.333	7.654	0.372
		Post-test	Post-test 2	6.333	7.654	0.687
	Level 2	Pre-test	Post-test	-19.000	10.161	0.154
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-15.333	10.161	0.292
		Post-test	Post-test 2	3.667	10.161	0.931
	Level 3	Pre-test	Post-test	-16.667	9.433	0.187
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-14.333	9.433	0.287
		Post-test	Post-test 2	2.333	9.433	0.967
	Level 4	Pre-test	Post-test	-10.000	7.721	0.402
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-8.667	7.721	0.503
		Post-test	Post-test 2	1.333	7.721	0.984
Intervention Group	Level 1	Pre-test	Post-test	-36.333*	6.605	0.000
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-32.000*	6.605	0.000
		Post-test	Post-test 2	4.333	6.605	0.789
	Level 2	Pre-test	Post-test	-71.000*	6.441	0.000
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-63.333*	6.441	0.000
		Post-test	Post-test 2	7.667	6.441	0.462
	Level 3	Pre-test	Post-test	-66.000*	8.802	0.000
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-58.333*	8.802	0.000
		Post-test	Post-test 2	7.667	8.802	0.660
	Level 4	Pre-test	Post-test	-80.667*	6.250	0.000
		Pre-test	Post-test 2	-71.667*	6.250	0.000
		Post-test	Post-test 2	9.000	6.250	0.325

Note. *The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

It is a comparative analysis to investigate further and determine which groups have significantly improved early reading proficiency in each level through Tukey Post-Hoc Multiple comparing the overall changes by time between pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2. Table 4 shows the mean differences of pre-test, post-test, and post-test 2 of Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4

for the control group and the intervention group. As shown in the control group, the significant values for all tests between pre-test-post-test, pre-test-post-test 2, and post-test-post-test 2 for Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 are greater than 0.05 level of significance, which means that there are no significant differences in the mean scores. On the other hand, the Intervention group showed

significant values of $p = 0.000$ for pre-test-post-test and pre-test-post-test 2 for Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4, which are smaller than the .05 level of significance. It means that there are significant differences in the mean scores. The significant values for post-test-post-test 2 Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the intervention group are $p = 0.789$, $p = 0.462$, $p = 0.660$, $p = 0.325$, respectively, which are greater than 0.05 level of significance. It suggests no significant differences in the mean scores in post-test and post-test 2. The findings thus show that the Intervention group performed better in improving early reading proficiency through games as compared to the control group in each level. These findings are also consistent with the hypothesis of H2 proposed according to the previous literature. Therefore, the participants in the Intervention group can grasp early reading proficiency after learning through Early Reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method.

DISCUSSION

The quality of the preschool curriculum has to be maintained at the highest level to ensure that preschoolers gain the utmost benefits during their early childhood years (Qin & Md Nor, 2018). A few factors contributed to the growth of preschoolers' ability to learn English through early reading games. Through Early Reading Games, the Integrated Sound Word Method used a balanced approach as the primary teaching instruction. The games improved early reading comprehension by sharpening the children's decoding skills with pictures to

comprehend. This approach is consistent with the 'Simple View' theory, which states that $R = C \times D$ leads to $R = 1 \times 1 = 1$, implying that the preschoolers have successfully acquired reading comprehension skills (Wren, 2000). By the end of the intervention program, the findings show that preschoolers had mastered Level 4 of early reading comprehension and improved their English language proficiency.

In addition, preschoolers were divided into large and small groups based on explicit and implicit instructions. Preschoolers interacted with the preschool teacher or peers in each early reading game. This social learning approach has encouraged preschoolers to learn together and assist one another in moving on to the next level. As a result, it made classroom learning more enjoyable and meaningful. This interpretation is related to several early literacy studies and theoretical approaches. The findings of this present study are supported by Yamat et al. (2014), who claimed that the learning environment impacts children's holistic development by providing exposure and opportunity to use the English language. Students feel confident in speaking the English language when they feel supported by teachers and peers (Yamat et al., 2014). Furthermore, active learning in the classroom increases students' understanding of the English language and improves their English language performance because a conducive and non-threatening classroom environment can evoke and retain the students' interest in learning the language (Ibrahim et al., 2015).

Living in a multicultural country like Malaysia, acquiring the English language requires different approaches compared to the acquisition of the student's native language (Ramlan & Maarof, 2014). English teachers must tolerate the student's cultural and social backgrounds as this will contribute to their attainment of English language proficiency (Ramlan & Maarof, 2014). It is a challenging task for the teachers as many Malaysian parents are worried that when their children learn the English language, they will lose their mother tongue proficiency, culture, and national identities (Musa et al., 2012; Mustafa & Azman, 2013). One of the ways to remediate this issue is to integrate local contexts into the early reading games to create a meaningful learning experience for preschoolers and allow them to relate their learning to the world around them.

Furthermore, the findings of this study support Jean Piaget's perspective, who believed play is equivalent to children working with the experiences and taking control of the tasks they were doing (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). It allows preschoolers to work independently and cooperatively in early reading with minimum assistance from the teacher. It also aligned with a study conducted by Fung and Min (2016), which found that games can promote turn-taking skills among students, allowing everyone to play equally and learn to cooperate as a team (Fung & Min, 2016). Whitehall and McDonald (1993) and Ricci et al. (1996), as cited in Garris et al. (2002), stressed that incorporating game features in

learning instruction led to improved learning, which resulted in greater persistence on the task and led to greater attention to the content and greater retention (Garris et al., 2002). These skills create a learning environment incorporating cooperative learning, competition, excitement, curiosity, and creativity (Fung & Min, 2016).

In conclusion, this study has elicited a significant effect of early reading games to teach English using Integrated Sound Word Methods in preschools. It further supports the study by Lee (2012), who argued that implementing games aligned with the national curriculum and matched with specific learning objectives can be effective. It creates a meaningful teaching tool as students learn and generate a substantial amount of new vocabulary from the games (Lee, 2012). The results from this research study hope to bring awareness to the importance of using a balanced approach to achieve the objectives of the Ministry of Education (MOE) as stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), where all students are “expected to acquire knowledge, high thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics, spirituality, and national identity” (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. 30).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study aimed to examine the effectiveness of early reading games in teaching English to second language learners in preschools using the Integrated Sound Word Method. The results indicate that the intervention group improved their

early reading proficiency through games significantly better than the control group. The participants in the intervention group were able to grasp early reading proficiency after learning through early reading games using the Integrated Sound Word Method. This study supports the notion that a balanced approach to reading instruction can be beneficial for achieving the objectives of the Malaysian Education Blueprint. It is suggested that the Integrated Sound Word Method, which incorporates early reading games, can be an effective method for teaching English to second-language learners in preschools. These findings may have important implications for educators and policymakers in developing effective reading instruction programs for second language learners. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of the Integrated Sound Word Method and compare its effectiveness to other reading instruction approaches in the Malaysian setting.

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