

## **USING ABC PHONIC SONG AND LETTER CARDS TO IMPROVE YEAR FIVE PUPILS' ENGLISH SPELLING**

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### **Abstract**

The aims of this action research were to determine how the use of ABC Phonic Song and letter cards approach improve Year Five pupils' English spelling and to explore how the actions improve my teaching practice related to English spelling among Year Five pupils. I am the researcher with five Year Five pupils as the research participants. I used three methods to collect data: observation, interview and document analysis. The data were then analysed and triangulated. The pupils were introduced to the ABC Phonic Song since the beginning of session and in every session, the pupils were given guidance and tasks to practice phonics. Pupils were also given letter cards with pictures that could help them remember the sound of the letters. Initial data were collected in the first and final session to monitor the progress of the pupils' spelling. The findings show that the approach improve the Year Five pupils' English spelling. My practice related to teaching phonics also improved. I learnt that a proper guideline in teaching phonics is necessary to maximise the experiences of learning phonics and learning to spell. For future research, more appropriate activities could be done to maximise pupils' learning of phonics and spelling because singing ABC Phonic Song and sound drilling is insufficient.

**Keywords:** ABC Phonic Song, letter cards, spelling, Year Five pupils

### **Abstrak**

Kajian ini dijalankan dengan objektif untuk mengkaji bagaimana pendekatan ABC *Phonic Song* dan kad perkataan menambah baik ejaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris murid-murid Tahun Lima. Di samping itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka bagaimana pendekatan ini menambah baik pengajaran saya berkaitan dengan ejaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan murid Tahun Lima. Saya ialah penyelidik bersama dengan lima murid sebagai peserta. Saya telah mengumpul data melalui pemerhatian, temu bual dan analisis dokumen. Murid-murid diperkenalkan dengan ABC *Phonic Song* sejak sesi yang pertama dan setiap sesi yang seterusnya. Murid-murid turut diberikan kad perkataan yang mengandungi huruf dan gambar untuk membantu murid mengingat bunyi huruf tersebut. Pada akhir kajian, ejaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris murid-murid bertambah baik. Begitu juga dengan amalan pengajaran saya berkaitan dengan pengajaran fonik dan ejaan. Saya belajar bahawa perlu ada satu garis panduan dalam mengajar fonik untuk memaksimumkan pembelajaran fonik dan belajar mengeja dalam kalangan murid. Untuk penyelidikan masa depan, aktiviti-aktiviti yang boleh membantu dalam pembelajaran fonik serta ejaan harus dilakukan, bukan sekadar menyanyi lagu fonik dan latihan mengulang.

**Kata kunci:** ABC *Phonic Song*, kad perkataan, ejaan, murid Tahun Lima

## INTRODUCTION

### Context

I am a student teacher from the Degree in Teaching with Honours Programme (PISMP) at the Institute of Teacher Education Batu Lintang Campus, Kuching and I am in my final semester of the programme. The school that I had carried out my action research is situated in a suburban area where most of the pupils come from a family of squatters. The school session is divided into the morning and afternoon session for Level Two and Level One respectively. There are two classes in every grade with an average of 35 pupils in each class. There is an average of 12 teachers per session. For English, there are two teachers for each session. Other teachers who taught English do not major in English.

The pupils' discipline and academic achievement is not at a satisfactory level. Most teachers agreed that the majority of the pupils are disrespectful and do not care about their learning. For the English subject, the pupils find the subject to be boring. Thus, they are very weak in their acquisition of the language. Their average mark is 37 out 100. The pupils are mostly Malay and natives (Iban and Bidayuh). During class, the pupils do not attempt to speak the language even when the teachers are present. In summary, the pupils are extremely weak academically and have negative attitude towards learning. However, I am determined to promote some changes to help them.

### Research Focus

I had undergone three phases of practicum in three different schools. I had also undergone a month of internship in the same school for the third phase of practicum. Based on these experiences, I observed that the pupils share a similar problem which is related to spelling. Figure 1 shows examples of pupils' spelling problem during the third practicum.

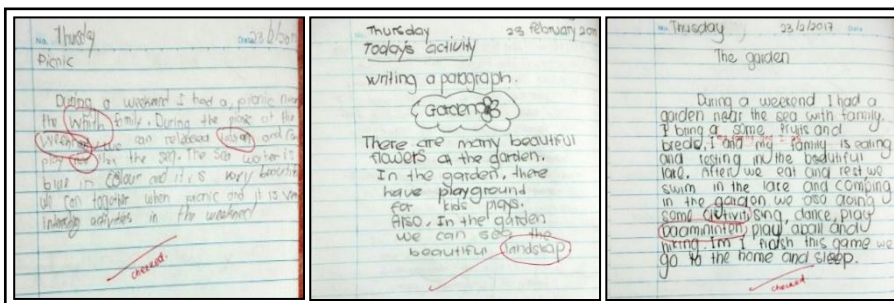


Figure 1. Sample of Year Five spelling errors

Spelling is now among the most common problem faced by pupils because many would think that spelling is not as important as other main skills. Not many research has been done in the area of pupils' use of

spelling strategies. Learning spelling is important for a child's future. Spelling aids in reading. Bad spelling would give readers a bad impression of a child. As an example, in today's Malaysian Examination system, pupils are still required to write in answering questions in the examination paper. A bad spelling would lead to the evaluator's difficulty in making meaning of a writing. Moreover, in the assessment rubric, spelling is also among the main criteria in grading a student. Thus, learning spelling is still very relevant to schools.

Based on the problem that I observed, I had decided to use phonics to teach spelling to the weak pupils. To learn phonics, I had integrated song which is the ABC Phonic Song, and used letter cards to help pupils remember the sound of the letters. The reason in choosing phonics is due to the fact that explicit phonics instruction can help students to learn patterns that will give them a framework to increase their chances of spelling accurately (Reading Horizons, 2017). Half of all English words can be spelled accurately because the letters used to spell the words predictably represent their sound pattern (Hanna, Hanna, Hodges & Rudorf, 1966). I have integrated song in the learning of phonics in supporting Murphey's (1990) opinion that there is a phenomenon called "Song Stuck in My Head". He concluded that musical features have a great importance in language acquisition thus making the learning process easier.

### **Research Objectives**

The objective of this research was to improve Year Five pupils' English spelling by using ABC Phonic Song and letter cards. In addition, it is also to improve my teaching practice of English spelling using ABC Phonic Song and letter cards.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed to achieve the stated research objectives.

- How does ABC Phonic Song and letter cards improve Year Five pupils' English spelling?
- How does the use of ABC Phonic Song and letter cards improve my teaching practice of English spelling among my Year Five pupils?

### **ACTION IMPLEMENTED**

The action research that I had implemented was an adaptation of Lewin's (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) action research models (TED, 2001) used at the Institute of Teacher Education, Malaysia. I had identified the focus of my action research related to spelling problem. I had planned a proper action to be taken to address this problem which was the use of phonics through ABC Phonic Song with the help of letter cards. I had used three types of data collecting method which were document analysis,

interview and observation. Then, I analysed and evaluated the data that I had collected.

I had collected the initial data through a test whereby the participants were required to spell ten words (apology, border, condolence, crutches, drain, gender, instrument, scream, score, plug). These words were among the words suggested in the Year Five Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) for English. For pronunciation accuracy, I had used the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary application to pronounce these ten words.

Session one until four consisted of activities to help the pupils in learning phonics, using the ABC Phonic Song and letter cards. Every session started with singing to the song, followed by practicing the sound using the letter cards. Figure 2 shows the letter cards used by the pupils. Then, pupils did blending activity using the blending worksheet (refer to Figure 3).

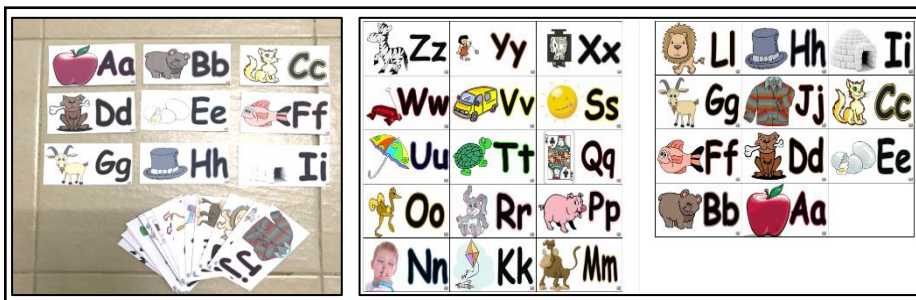


Figure 2. Letter cards used to remember the sound of the letters

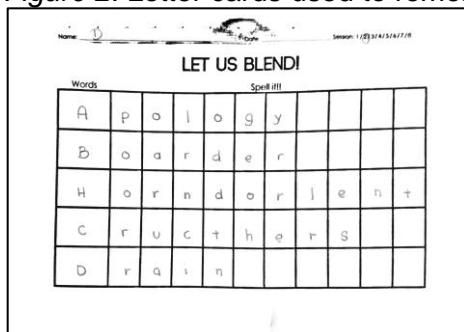


Figure 3. Blending worksheet

During the blending activity, the pupils were encouraged to work together to identify the sound that they were able to listen to from the words and write the letters that represent the sound on each grid. After the pupils had written down all of the letters, the pupils were required to blend the sound that they had just written on each grid with the letter on the next grid. This is a student-centred approach for pupils to check their own spelling.

The participants practiced the same word from session one until four. However, during the final session (fifth session), the pupils were given 12 different words (ambition, century, congratulations, exit, hundred thousand, ramp, serve, term, upstairs, bottom, consider, peculiar) to spell. These words are not taken specifically from the suggested word list in the Year Five Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) for English. This is to explore whether the approach used is effective in improving the pupils' spelling as it is of high chance that the pupils had never spelled or exposed to these words before. In the final session, the pupils practiced what they had learnt throughout the four previous sessions and apply them in this final session. Their spelling worksheets were then collected for evaluation and documentation purposes.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Participants

In this research, five pupils were involved as participants. In addition, I was also involved as one of the participants other than being the researcher. One of the pupils is an average level pupil whereas the others are from the low level in terms of English proficiency. Table 1 shows the summary of pupils' information whereas Table 2 shows the participants' latest English examination marks. Pseudonyms are used instead of real names in the research conducted.

Table 1

#### *Participants' Information*

Name	Gender	Level of English proficiency	I think that English is ...
Abby	Female	Average	"fun but I do not know a lot about English"
Bella	Female	Low	"very hard"
Cate	Female	Low	"boring and hard"
Dion	Male	Low	"I do not know"
Eric	Male	Low	"fun but hard"

Table 2

#### *Participants' Latest English Examination Marks*

Name	Gender	Paper One	Paper Two
Abby	Female	60	62
Bella	Female	48	66
Cate	Female	30	56
Dion	Male	30	22
Eric	Male	34	44

The participants were selected based on the following criteria which were having the willingness to learn and cooperate with each other. Before

the research was implemented, I had brief the school administrators, my mentor and the class teacher the purposes and the objectives of my research.

### **Data Collecting, Analysing and Checking Methods**

In this research, I had carried out three different data collecting methods: observation, interview and document analysis. Observation is the systematic description of events, behaviours and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study (Kawulich, 2005). My observation was done during the implementation of the action and I had taken field notes and photographs to help in observing the pupils. Other than that, I had also used checklist for reflection after every session. Moreover, to ensure that I was not bias, I invited my critical friend to observe the activity (in session 3). I had informed her the aspects to observe and asked her to provide feedback in a feedback form about the session.

I had also collected pupils' spelling and blending worksheets for records on their proficiency level related to phonics. By analysing their spellings, I was able to evaluate whether ABC Phonic Song and letter cards assist them in remembering the sound of the letters thus, able to spell words according to its sound.

Lastly, I did a simple interview with two of the pupils to elicit their opinion about the activities that were introduced to them. The interview was done after conducting all the sessions. I did not use questionnaire to get their opinion because it might be difficult for the pupils to write their responses as they were low level proficiency pupils. I also interviewed my mentor and another English teacher to collect data about their opinion on the activities conducted. Their answers were recorded and collected, then triangulated with the data that I had collected.

To analyse these data, I had chosen to use content analysis. Content analysis is a technique used by interpreting and coding textual materials. I had interpreted these three different data that I had collected to find similar code.

To check the data collected, I had used triangulation. Triangulation is a strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. In this action research, I had triangulated the data through methodological and person triangulations to ensure that the data collected is valid and not influenced by my personal opinions.

**Methodological triangulation.** Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods to study the data (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2013). In this research, I had used several methods to collect data which were observation, document analysis and interview.

**Person triangulation.** In this action research, I had triangulated the data collected from my critical friend and the English teachers in the school.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

- **How does ABC Phonic Song and letter cards improve Year Five pupils' English spelling?**

The use of ABC Phonic Song and letter cards helped pupils learn Phonics, thus improving the pupils' English spelling. Through the use of ABC Phonic Song and letters cards, the pupils had learnt to be independent spellers. Moreover, the pupils learnt better through the integration of ABC Phonic Song thus creating a fun and conducive learning environment.

Figure 4 shows the spelling of 12 words of the participants. Based on their result obtained, it can be concluded that although some of the 12 words were unfamiliar words, the pupils were able to spell some of the words independently with the help of the letter cards. Table 3 shows the number of correct spellings obtained by the participants.

Participant	1. Ambition	2. century	3. congratulations	4. Exit	5. Hundred thousand	6. Ram	7. serve	8. term	9. up stairs	10. bottom	11. considre	12. peculiar
Participant 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 4. Pupils' spellings of the twelve new words in the final session

Table 3

*Number of Correct Spelling (Final Session)*

Name	Gender	Correct spelling (out of 12 words)
Abby	Female	9
Bella	Female	6
Cate	Female	6
Dion	Male	7
Eric	Male	10

Figure 5 shows that the pupils had fun learning with the integration of song and they were able to improve on their spelling with the help of the song and the letter cards.

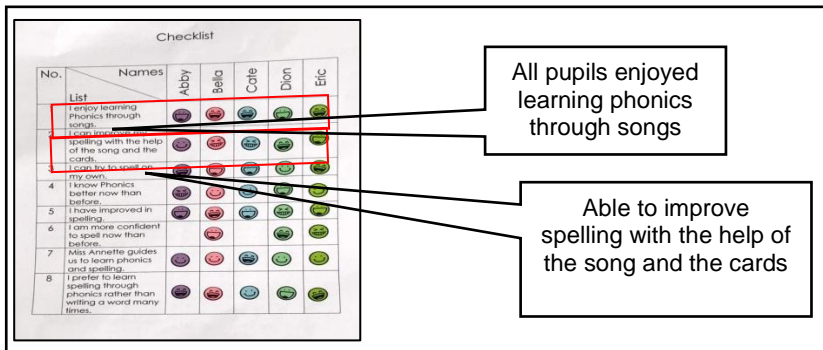


Figure 5. Pupils' feedback from checklist

ABC Phonic song and letter cards help in improving Year Five pupils' English spelling by teaching the sound of the letters and this provided the pupils a framework for spelling that will increase their chances for spelling accurately. Moreover, ABC Phonic song was able to produce independent learners and spellers whereby pupils were able to spell the words by remembering the sound of the letters that they had learnt from the song. Their spelling was almost accurate.

Lastly, ABC Phonic song created a comfortable and positive learning environment for the pupils. Thus, the pupils were motivated and determined to learn and this resulted in the improvement in the pupils' spelling. However, improvements in other areas could be done to ensure a more satisfying result for the pupils.

- **How does the use of ABC Phonic Song and letter cards improve my teaching practice of English spelling among my Year Five pupils?**

Spelling problem has been my main focus since the beginning of my teaching practice. In this action research, I decided to introduce the use of phonics in spelling. This approach does help me in improving my teaching practice among Year Five pupils' English spelling in many aspects.

Firstly, I had found an alternate strategy for teaching spelling. Writing a word 10 times in the exercise book is a classic spelling lesson for pupils. This classic approach is similar to drilling and it is still being practiced. In my previous teaching practices, I had done the same approach too. However, I was not satisfied with the approach and this approach does not work for every pupil. Introducing ABC Phonic Song and letter cards to the pupils help me in improving my teaching practice. Figure 6 shows that all pupils



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preferred learning spelling through phonics rather than the traditional approach of learning spelling.

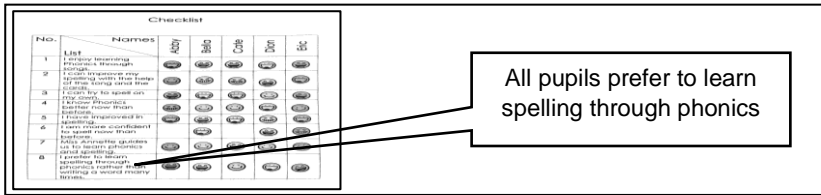


Figure 6. Pupils preferred phonics to learn spelling

Secondly, I have developed the pupils into becoming independent spellers. During each session where the pupils did the blending worksheet, I had noted that the pupils no longer refer to the teacher for answers but they had referred to the letter cards and their friends. All pupils were able to be independent when spelling and they had acknowledged that the teacher (me) had guided them (refer to Figure 7).

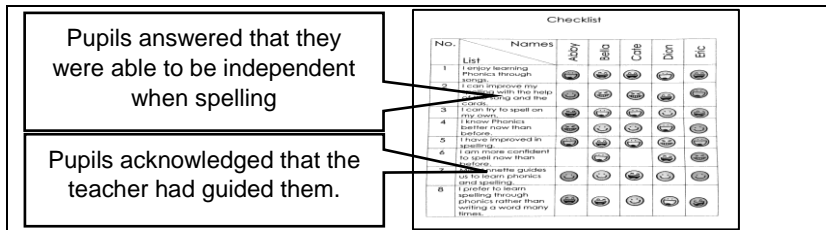


Figure 7. Pupils became independent spellers

Lastly, I have improved my teaching practice by learning how to integrate song into my practice. The ABC Phonic Song and letter cards that I had introduced were able to help even the weak pupils in learning spelling. There is positive development in the pupils' spelling when I introduced the phonic song and letter cards used in my teaching practice. The song used in the classroom created a fun environment and allowed my pupils to participate in the learning session. Moreover, phonics is not a lesson favoured by most pupils and pupils usually would become passive and demotivated in learning phonics. However, through the use of songs, pupils were more excited to learn (refer to Figure 8).

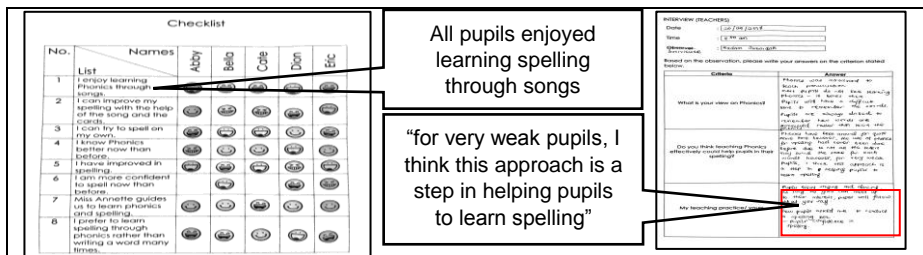


Figure 8. Pupils and teacher's feedback on phonic song used

In conclusion, my teaching practice in teaching spelling to my Year Five pupils had improved. This led to improvement in English spelling of my Year Five pupils. This research had helped me to explore the use of songs in teaching and helping pupils in their learning. Indirectly, I had also improved on my instructional delivery towards becoming a better teacher in the future.

## REFLECTION

Conducting this research has provided me a platform to evaluate and reflect my own teaching practice. Firstly, phonics should be taught and continue to be used throughout the early years of a child. My initial target group to apply this approach was pupils in Level One. However, since I was given Level Two (Year Five) pupils, I decided to involve them as participants in my research. Phonics instruction is most effective when it begins in the first or second year of formal schooling (NICHD, 2000). So it was not a surprise when my pupils had difficulty in learning the phonics as they had little knowledge of it. Moreover, I had only done my research within a short period of time and this is not enough to enable pupils in mastering phonics (Konza, 2011).

Secondly, even though there is a proper guideline for teaching phonics systematically (Konza, 2011), there is lack of research done on the area concerned. Thus, I have limited research to refer to when implementing my action research. The pupils were limited to only listening to a sound for a letter while some letters have more than a sound.

Thirdly, phonics instruction is necessary. In my action research, every session only consisted of singing to the songs, practicing the sound and practicing spelling by blending. These activities are still insufficient. According to Konza (2011), along with phonics instruction, young children should be listening to stories and information texts read aloud to them, reading texts, and writing letters, words, messages and stories.

I had also realised the importance of integrating fun elements in my lesson. Dulay and Burt (1977), Krashen (1982) and many educational theorists have proposed that students retain what they learn when the learning is associated with strong positive emotion. Studies have shown that children learn best when the learning comes from a side-effect of a fun activity. Through my action research, I could see that it is important for pupils to learn in a fun and comfortable environment. Moreover, pupils are more behaved when there is a mutual interest between the teacher and the pupil.

In general, this research helps me to recognise the important role of a teacher and the influences that the teacher has towards the pupils.

Indirectly, it provided me a wider perspective to see the overview of my own teaching practice and areas that I should improve on. This research had been a fun learning process for me.

### SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER ACTION

The result of this research had shown improvement in the pupils' English spelling. However, pupils were still unable to accurately spell some of the words due to some reasons.

To help pupils in improving their spelling, further action that can be integrated into the lesson is phonic reading. Figure 9 shows an example of a text for phonic reading. In phonic reading, the pupils need to identify and circle or underline the words that have almost the same sound. Other than practicing their fluency in reading, pupils would be able to identify letters that may produce the same sound when combined. Moreover, this action may also expose the pupils to sight words and pupils would be able to pronounce the words and remember the spelling of the words based on the pronunciation.

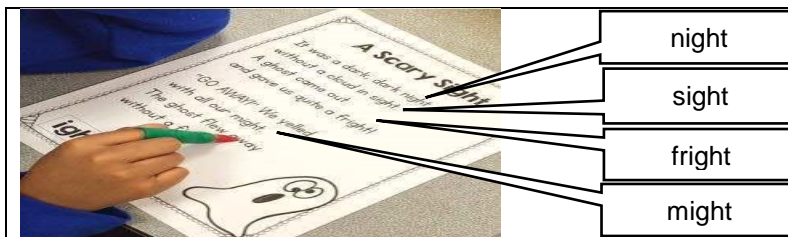


Figure 9. A sample of phonic reading activity for pupils

Apart from that, the approach used in this research could also be conducted for pupils of different language proficiency. Pupils of different proficiency levels could be separated and placed in groups according to their proficiency level. With this, the teachers could focus on the difficulty faced by the pupils and find solution to help based on the difficulty experienced by the pupils.

In summary, I am satisfied with this teaching approach to teach spelling and I will surely implement this in my classroom when I am placed as a beginner teacher. I will look into these stated aspects and improve on them to ensure a better quality in terms of teaching and learning.

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Annette Odette Joseph/Using ABC phonic song and letter cards to improve Year Five pupils' English spelling

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