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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalisation, English has become increasingly important in South-east Asia. In Brunei, it has become the second most important language after our national language – Bahasa Melayu. However, learning to read in English as a second language poses a problem for many children in Brunei Darussalam. This study explores how a class of kindergarten children in a local school learn to read in English by using Jolly Phonics as a teaching tool.

The Jolly Phonics is a systemic phonics instruction programme, which teaches the 42 sounds of English and blending skills to help children decode and become independent readers. This study investigates how the programme could help kindergarten children acquire decoding skills, which are some of the essential skills children need to have in order to learn to read. Two kindergarten classes in Temburong were involved in this study. The children in the Intervention group were taught the Jolly Phonics programme along with the prescribed syllabus, whereas the Comparison group was taught the prescribed syllabus only. The children in both groups were tested before and after the intervention. Their test scores were analysed using the SPSS programme.

The results show that 53% of the children in the Intervention group have become good or average decoders over a period of ten weeks. Thirteen out of 17 children demonstrate good (sound) knowledge of letter sounds after the intervention. To conclude, the children in the Intervention group who learned phonics are able to recognise more words using decoding skills than the children in the Comparison group who learned English through the prescribed syllabus only.

This study could raise an awareness of the current reading problems faced by many primary schools in the country. It could also provide educators with adequate

knowledge for facilitating the development of children's reading skills. The Curriculum Development Department of the Ministry of Education could take into account the findings of this study when planning and developing the English Language syllabus for primary schools.