THE IMPORTANCE OF ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study investigates English Language Education students' views on the alphabet, focusing on understanding, learning experiences, and future expectations. Semi-structured interviews with five female university students (18-20 years old) revealed positive experiences learning the alphabet through songs and technology. Students hope for expanded alphabet applications in technology and education, emphasizing innovation and accessibility. Key factors influencing pronunciation challenges were identified. The study contributes to understanding language education strategies and technological innovations.
Keywords: *Alphabet, English Language Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Education's etymology is derived from the Greek word paedagogie, which is made up of the words paes, which means kid, and agogos, which means direction provided to children. The English word for education is "to educate," which refers to enhancing morals and developing intellectuals. According to educational language, however, the idea concerns the alteration of a person's or a group's attitude and behavior in order to promote personal growth through educational and teaching endeavors (Bakhshandeh, 2023; Yuliana et al., 2023; Wade, 1998). During an exceptionally rapid developmental trajectory, children have unique individualities with distinct cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, physical, and artistic characteristics (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2021; Sanson et al., 2018; S. Yuliana, 2018). This period is a pivotal moment for life to come. As such, the period between birth and age six is considered a critical period. Juveniles have unique characteristics that distinguish them from adults; they are constantly energetic, lively, passionate, and curious about their environment. They also exhibit an unwavering desire to explore and learn new things. According to Duckworth and Yeager (2015), Hayes (2003), Sholihah et al. (2017), children exhibit egocentric tendencies, an innate curiosity, social inclinations, distinctive characteristics, a vivid imagination, a restricted attention span, and an optimal phase for cognitive development.

There is debate on the need of alphabet knowledge for beginning readers (Chall, 1967; Ehri, 1983; Venezky, 1975). According to Walsh, Price, and Gillingham (1988), knowing the names of the letters makes learning to read easier by "vesting the symbols (letters) with immediate familiarity" (p. 110), which speeds up and improves the information processing required for reading. Ehri (1983) has presented a convincing case for the idea that letter-name knowledge should assist beginning readers in connecting the sounds of the alphabet with their symbols. Ehri (1983, p. 143) noted that "the majority, if not all, of the names contain sounds commonly symbolized by the letters in word spellings." According to Ehri, the cornerstone for teaching youngsters the letter-sound system required for reading is the collection of letter names.

Children can learn to recognize letters in the form of fake items they frequently see in their daily lives with the aid of smart fun alphabet media, which is made of flannel fabric. The item will then be fastened to the corresponding letter can, which is composed

of flannel cloth pieces shaped like letters and fastened to cans that are coated in flannel fabric. To encourage youngsters to learn to recognize letters, each can is painted bright and affixed with an initial letter that represents the fake object (Fitriati & Widodo, 2022; Ningrum et al., 2023; Grace et al., 2023). Through activities that involve attaching objects to the appropriate letter cans, children between the ages of four and five can learn to recognize letters. For instance, they can identify objects that have the initial letters of several alphabets, such as the letter "a" on apple or wine objects, the letter "b" on duck or star objects, the letter "c" on lizard or dragonfly objects, and so on (Maulida, 2020).

Understanding the alphabet is crucial for children's literacy and for the performance of later generations. A child's literacy is developed from the very beginning of their life. As a communication tool, literacy is the capacity to decipher and comprehend communications from others. Children who are learning to read or write must comprehend the proper letter and sound forms. Children's literacy abilities will grow as a result of their alphabet understanding.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore participants' perspectives and experiences with the alphabet and related concepts. The design employs a semi-structured interview format, which provides a flexible framework for both structured questions and open-ended responses. This approach ensures that participants can share in-depth insights while maintaining a focus on the research objectives. The interview questions were developed with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence to facilitate meaningful and engaging discussions. The questions include: (1) What do you know about the alphabet? (2) What was the first alphabet you learned, and how was your experience learning it? (3) What are your hopes for the alphabet in the future? (4) How has your experience been with Alphabet's products like Google, YouTube, or Android? and (5) Do you think the alphabet can evolve or change in the future?

The participants for this study were purposively selected to ensure relevance and diversity within the targeted demographic. A total of five participants were involved in the study. All participants are female university students aged 18–20 years, enrolled in the English Language Education course. Each participant comes from a different class within the course to capture a broad range of perspectives.

The data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. This method allowed for a blend of pre-determined questions and spontaneous follow-up inquiries, facilitating rich, detailed qualitative data. The interviews primarily focused on participants' knowledge, experiences, and perceptions related to the alphabet, vowels, and technological aspects associated with Alphabet's products. To ensure a comfortable and open environment, interviews were conducted in a conversational style. Audio recordings were used (with participants' consent) to accurately capture their responses for transcription and analysis. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided the flexibility needed to explore participants' unique perspectives while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the critical importance of alphabet knowledge in literacy development, emphasizing its pivotal role in children's cognitive, social, and linguistic growth during crucial developmental periods. The etymology of education, derived from the Greek word paedagogie, highlights its purpose of shaping morality and intellectuality. Literature suggests that knowledge of letter names facilitates children's reading

development by helping them associate letter symbols with their corresponding sounds. Ehri (1983) emphasizes that mastering letter names serves as a foundational step in introducing the sound-letter system essential for reading. This process equips children with fundamental skills to understand language structures, accelerating their literacy development.

Moreover, innovative approaches to teaching the alphabet, such as the use of tactile alphabet media made from flannel materials, demonstrate effectiveness in helping children recognize letters through interactive activities. These media are designed as familiar everyday objects, with letters attached to brightly colored cans and adorned with images corresponding to the initial letter, such as “a” for apple and “b” for bird. These activities engage children aged 4–5 years in identifying letters and objects in an enjoyable way, fostering curiosity and motivation to learn. This hands-on interaction not only aids in letter recognition but also strengthens cognitive abilities through exploration and pattern recognition of sounds and letters.

The study adopts a qualitative approach to examine university students’ perspectives and experiences with the alphabet, both in traditional and modern contexts. Using semi-structured interviews, researchers explored participants’ knowledge, early experiences, and views on the future role of the alphabet, including its connection to modern technologies such as Alphabet’s products (Google, YouTube, Android). The participants included five female university students aged 18–20, enrolled in an English Language Education program. Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity and relevance. The conversational style of the interviews allowed participants to share their unique perspectives in depth, while audio recordings ensured accuracy in transcription and data analysis.

Findings indicate that early mastery of the alphabet significantly impacts children’s literacy skills, supporting not only their childhood learning but also preparing them to navigate digital literacy challenges in the modern era. Alphabet knowledge serves as a foundation for reading and writing and remains relevant in understanding and utilizing evolving technologies. Thus, the alphabet retains its strong relevance across generations, serving as both a traditional learning tool and a cornerstone for adapting to contemporary and future technological advancements.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the foundational role of alphabet knowledge in fostering literacy, cognitive, and social development during critical childhood years. The etymology of education highlights its transformative purpose in shaping intellectual and moral growth, aligning with the idea that teaching the alphabet is more than just imparting knowledge—it involves fostering meaningful developmental changes. The literature confirms that mastering letter names is essential for associating symbols with sounds, enabling early reading skills and laying a foundation for lifelong learning.

Innovative teaching methods, such as tactile alphabet media made from flannel materials, have proven effective in engaging young learners. These interactive tools make letter recognition enjoyable and intuitive, combining exploration and creativity to enhance cognitive and linguistic abilities. By associating letters with familiar objects, children between ages 4 and 5 are motivated to learn in a playful yet structured environment, reinforcing their early literacy skills.

The study’s qualitative approach sheds light on the perspectives of young adults who have experienced alphabet learning, both traditionally and through its modern technological applications. Semi-structured interviews reveal how early mastery of the

alphabet not only supports childhood learning but also equips individuals with the adaptability required for navigating the digital age. Technologies such as Alphabet's products (Google, YouTube, and Android) further extend the relevance of literacy skills into contemporary contexts, bridging traditional learning methods with modern advancements.

Overall, the findings emphasize that alphabet knowledge is a cornerstone of literacy and remains vital across generations. It serves as both a traditional educational tool and a foundational skill for engaging with evolving technologies. This dual significance underscores the enduring value of the alphabet in promoting personal growth and adapting to future challenges in an increasingly digital world.

Suggestion

To enhance the study and its implications, several suggestions can be proposed. First, broadening the participant demographics beyond female university students aged 18–20 would provide a more comprehensive perspective. Including participants from diverse age groups, genders, and roles, such as parents and educators, could yield richer insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking children's progress from early education into adulthood could offer a deeper understanding of the long-term effects of early alphabet mastery on literacy and cognitive development. While the qualitative approach is valuable, integrating quantitative measures, such as standardized literacy tests, would provide measurable data to complement the findings.

Moreover, the study could further evaluate the integration of digital tools, such as educational apps or interactive platforms, to explore how modern technologies support alphabet learning. Expanding on tactile teaching methods like flannel materials, future research might investigate the use of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or interactive e-books to engage children more effectively. It is also crucial to consider cultural contexts by examining how alphabet systems in various languages influence literacy and cognitive development.

Incorporating feedback from teachers and parents could provide practical insights into effective teaching strategies and challenges encountered during instruction. Furthermore, exploring the impact of play-based learning activities on broader developmental skills, such as creativity and problem-solving, could enhance the understanding of holistic education. By addressing these areas, future research can build on this study's findings and contribute to a deeper understanding of alphabet learning in traditional and digital contexts.

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