

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Research Background

English has become the global language which is important to be learned by all people around the world in all age. The function of learning English is not only for communication or interaction anymore, but also to open opportunities in many aspects of life such as for business or even for academic purposes.

Since the importance in mastering English has become necessity for everybody to achieve, many parents sent their children earlier to school to make them are able to speak and read in English. Many school also supported the young learners to learn English even from the preschool level. According to Beck (2006), developmental of literacy base begins in the preschool level and they will be able to visual word recognition such as in picture.

Besides encouraging the young learners to speak English in daily conversations, to prepare the readiness of young learners in learning reading in the future has also been the purpose of the school and teachers to teach English in preschool. Therefore, to be ready to spell and blend the letters in early reading stage in the future, learning and mastering the letter sound is highly needed in preschool. A fundamental insight developed in children's early years through instruction is the

alphabetic principle, the understanding that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds (Adam, 1990).

Letter sound correspondences are the relationships between sounds (or phonemes) and letters (or graphemes). Bradley (2006) also stated that letter recognition is also known as alphabet knowledge or alphabet principle that is ability to recognize the letter shapes, names and sounds along with the ability to recall each letter. Phonemic awareness is also primarily an auditory skill in recognizing the sound structure of language. It means the connections between the sounds in words and the letters that are used to represent those sounds included are two alphabetic principle and letter recognition.

Llyod (1992) analyzed that many children with poor phonemic awareness struggle in memorizing and recognizing the letter sounds. Some individuals have a definite natural phonological weakness. Basically, the child's natural phonological abilities are not related to intelligence. In fact, many highly intelligent children have phonological weakness and made them has difficulties to recognize the letter sounds.

The high expectations to be able to recognize and sound the letters start in young learners' academic progress. It is also happened in the preschool students in Royal Tots Academy, where this research conducted. They were expected to be able to read in kindergarten level. In order to support the reading goal in kindergarten level in the future, the preschool students in Royal Tots Academy should be prepared from now to be able to recognize the letter sounds as the basic of spelling and blending in reading skill.

However, the preschool students in Royal Tots Academy have difficulties in mastering the letter recognition and letter sounds. 75 % of the students still lack of letter sounds understanding and ability. They seemed haven't master yet the letter sounds because they feel difficult to recognize and memorize the letters and the sounds. The preschool students' in Royal Tots Academy got excited when they were singing ABC or Phonic songs but when it comes to recognize the letters and the sounds, they were only able to recognize some letters sounds such as: some vowel (/æ/, /o/ and /u/) and some consonants (/b/, /c/, /r/, /s/). They are confused to sounds some of similar letters sound such as: /t/, /e/, /f/, /v/, /k/, /p/, /d/, /b/, etc. The preschool students' in Royal Tots Academy were not able to sounds the letters since there are no visualizations. They also seemed did not interest to learn in recognizing the letters and the sounds. They got bored with the activities and the conservative worksheet. They did not get the visualization of letters and movements that have been introduced.

The researcher believe that in order to assist the preschool students on their mastery of letter sounds, it is significant to evaluate more on the difficulties and at the same time offer a creative and an attractive new idea in teaching and learning of letter sounds. Preschool students should be mastered the letter sounds and recognize the letters formation to prepare themselves in kindergarten level. In order to improve preschool students' mastery of letter sounds the researcher used a method which is called letterland.

The young learners are active participants in building language and literacy skill, they learned as they participate in meaningful experiences and interact with children and adults, constructing language during the process. Much of the language children learned to reflect the language and behavior of the adult they interact with and listen to, (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Adults scaffold children's language learning by providing a model that is expressive, responsive and enjoyable. Therefore, the teachers (as adults in preschool) needed to stimulate an enjoyable and attractive letter sounds learning and found. Letterland as a unique, phonics-based approach offering attractive movements in letterland characters, explain the full range of dry phonics facts so young learners are motivated to listen, to think and to learn. These stories explain letter sounds & shapes, allowing children to progress quickly to word building, reading and writing. A central goal during these preschool years is to raise children's exposure in concepts about print and visualization (Clay, 1979; Holdaway, 1979; Teale, 1986). Therefore, the characters (of the alphabet) in letterland as visual print may improve the mastery of letter sounds understanding and enrich the vocabularies of the preschool students.

Some of previous studies also revealed how letterland could improve preschool students' the mastery of letter sounds. Letterland, a phonics-based method in teaching reading, writing and spelling to students in K-2 classrooms, was implemented in Wake County Public School System's (WCPSS) kindergarten classrooms in 2012-2013, grade 1 classrooms in 2013-2014, and grade 2 classrooms in 2014-2015. As part of the WCPSS balanced literacy method, letterland explicitly

taught the phonetic patterns based on the six syllable types in the English language. Student participation in phonic story logic and play is integrated with language by using alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme to improve student retention of letter shapes and sounds. It was revealed that the impact of letterland on students' pre-reading achievement was neutral to positive. A significantly higher percentage of kindergarten students were at or above benchmark mid-year on Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Nonsense Word Fluency-Correct Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS) than matched students from a comparison school district. Letterland's design engaged students in developing the critical foundational skills and vocabulary needed for reading and writing.

Another research conducted by Alfiana (2015) showed that letterland helped the preschool students in informal education at Bandar Lampung in learning early reading skill. Based on the observation, daily teaching activities and worksheet given, the children excitement in learning were increasing and they were able to memorize the letter sounds quickly.

The researcher's experiences in previous school also revealed that letterland was an attractive method that can be used to teach and learn the letter sounds and able to enrich students vocabularies. With the attractive movements and simple story about the character which suitable to preschool students' stage of learning, the students from the previous school were interest and able to mastery the letter sounds and letter recognition.

B. The Research Questions

The questions to be answered in this research are as follow:

1. Can letterland improve the preschool students' mastery of letter sounds?
2. How is the preschool students' reaction in mastering letter sounds using letterland?

C. The Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follow:

1. To know whether letterland can effectively improve the preschool students' mastery of letter sounds.
2. To investigate the preschool students' reaction in mastering letter sounds using letterland.

D. The Research Scope

This research conducted limited only to the twenty of three to four and half years old preschool students as the subjects of the research in two cycles. In addition, the data collected using test score, observation carried by a colleague of the researcher and simple students' interview. The researcher limited this research in learning of letter recognition and sounds in the beginning sounds of the words using letterland characters, action tricks and simple story lines as the additional elements.

E. The Research Significances

The results of the research are hopefully useful to the followings:

1. English teachers are able to give more ideas how to improve preschool students' mastery of letter sounds. They are expected to be more creative and interactive to make the preschool student's excitedly engage in learning letter sounds activity.
2. To other researchers, the result of this research hopefully can be used as a basis for further studies and will give information to conduct a research in the same area.