



The Relationship Between Beginning Reading Skills and Phonemic Awareness in Elementary School Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract: Early reading skills are a crucial foundation for developing literacy among students in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Elementary Schools (SD). One of the key abilities that supports success in early reading is phonemic awareness. This study aims to analyze the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness, as well as to identify effective instructional strategies through a literature review approach. The articles were retrieved from the Google Scholar, Garuda, and ScienceDirect databases using the PRISMA guidelines. The selection process was conducted based on inclusion criteria, including articles published between 2016 and 2026, focusing on early reading skills and phonemic awareness among Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Elementary School (SD) students, and available in full-text format. Of the 64 articles initially identified, 27 met the inclusion criteria and were selected for further analysis. The findings of the review indicate that phonemic awareness has a strong relationship with early reading skills by enhancing learners' ability to recognize phoneme-grapheme correspondences, decoding skills, and reading fluency. Explicit phonics instruction, phonological games, multisensory approaches, and the use of innovative instructional media have been shown to be effective teaching strategies. This study provides a comprehensive synthesis of the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness, serving as a foundation for the development of more effective early literacy instruction at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels.

Keyword: Early Reading Skills, Phonemic Awareness, Early Literacy, Elementary School, Literature Review

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How to Cite :

Introduction

Reading ability is one of the fundamental competencies that students must acquire from the elementary school level, as it serves as the foundation for understanding information, developing critical thinking skills, and supporting academic success across various subject areas. Mastery of early reading skills enables students to participate more effectively in subsequent stages of learning (Marisa, 2024). Proficiency in reading serves as the primary foundation for success in learning across various subject areas. Without adequate reading skills, students may encounter difficulties in understanding instructional materials, developing critical thinking abilities, and keeping pace with the growing body of information. During the early

years of elementary education, one of the primary concerns of educators is to establish the foundations of literacy, particularly through early reading instruction.

Early reading involves the ability to recognize letters, syllables, words, and simple sentences as the foundation for the development of more advanced reading skills. Success at this stage is strongly influenced by phonemic awareness, which refers to a child's ability to identify, distinguish, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Hanisah explains that poor early reading skills are generally associated with students' difficulties in recognizing letters, distinguishing speech sounds, and associating sounds with their corresponding letter symbols. Therefore, appropriate stimulation and instructional support are essential from an early age (Hanisah, 2022).

The importance of strengthening early reading skills is further underscored by recent studies demonstrating that reading proficiency in the early grades is a key predictor of students' academic success at subsequent educational levels. Systematic early reading instruction has been shown to improve elementary school students' ability to recognize letters, syllables, and words, as well as enhance their reading fluency, thereby establishing a stronger foundation for literacy development (Mardhotillah et al., 2026).

Phonemic awareness refers to a child's ability to recognize, identify, and manipulate the smallest units of sound (phonemes) in spoken language. This includes skills such as identifying initial and final sounds, segmenting words into individual phonemes, and blending phonemes to form words (Arianti, 2023). Children with well-developed phonemic awareness tend to recognize the relationship between speech sounds and letter symbols more easily, making the process of early reading acquisition more effective. This ability should be fostered through structured and continuous instruction, beginning with the recognition of letters, followed by syllables, words, and simple sentences (R. M. Sari et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in providing appropriate stimulation and selecting effective instructional strategies to foster students' phonological skills, thereby supporting the successful development of early reading abilities.

Numerous studies in Indonesia have also shown that poor early reading skills remain a common challenge among students in the lower grades of elementary school. This condition is influenced not only by students' phonological abilities but also by the quality of instruction, limited availability of instructional media, and insufficient literacy stimulation within the family environment. Therefore, strengthening phonemic awareness through systematic and evidence-based instruction is considered a key strategy for improving students' early reading skills (Hanisah, 2022; Marisa, 2024).

Recent studies have also demonstrated that phonemic awareness influences not only decoding skills but also contributes to improvements in reading comprehension.

This relationship indicates that mastery of the sound structure of language constitutes a fundamental foundation for the comprehensive development of literacy skills from the elementary school level onward (Zahira & Andreani, 2023).

In Indonesia, evaluations of reading proficiency among students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and elementary school (SD) levels continue to reveal concerning results. Many students are still unable to comprehend simple texts, indicating that they lack a strong foundation in reading established during the early stages of their education (Solihin, 2020). One of the primary factors contributing to this condition is the limited attention given to phonemic awareness and the use of appropriate early reading instructional techniques. Although Indonesia's elementary education curriculum recognizes the importance of early literacy, its implementation in practice continues to face several challenges, including limited teacher resources, insufficient training in phonological instruction, and teaching methods that are not yet fully aligned with students' developmental needs (Nisa et al., 2023).

Children who receive explicit instruction in detecting, segmenting, and manipulating the sounds within words demonstrate more rapid progress in reading development. In addition, phonological game-based approaches have been shown to be effective in increasing students' interest and engagement in learning to read. Young children tend to respond more positively to instructional methods that are interactive, enjoyable, and contextually meaningful. Other factors that influence the effectiveness of early reading instruction include children's first-language background, home environment, and access to reading materials. Children who grow up in language- and literacy-rich environments generally develop stronger phonemic awareness. Furthermore, the use of technology-based instructional media has emerged as an innovative strategy for fostering phonemic awareness (Arianti, 2023).

Educational applications, animated videos, and phonics software can serve as effective tools to support phonological instruction. However, the integration of technology into reading instruction should be tailored to the school's context, teachers' readiness, and students' ability to use digital devices effectively (Ramadanti et al., 2024). Therefore, regardless of how advanced the technology may be, it will not be effective unless it is accompanied by appropriate pedagogical strategies.

This literature review aims to examine various approaches, instructional strategies, and research findings related to the optimization of early reading skills and phonemic awareness. By identifying the factors that influence successful early reading development, this study seeks to provide insights into improving reading instruction at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and elementary school (SD) levels. In this context, early reading is understood not merely as the ability to recognize letters and sounds, but also as the ability to understand how children connect visual symbols (*letters*) with spoken sounds (*phonemes*). This process, known as phonics, is closely associated with phonemic awareness. Difficulties encountered during the early reading stage may

hinder the development of more advanced reading skills if children do not receive appropriate stimulation and timely intervention from an early age (Hanisah, 2022). Oleh karena itu, penting bagi guru untuk mengetahui dan mengaplikasikan pendekatan pengajaran yang berbasis fonologis sejak dini, beberapa studi menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan kesadaran fonemik yang dilakukan secara konsisten dapat meningkatkan kemampuan decoding dan pengenalan kata secara signifikan.

Although numerous studies have examined early reading skills and phonemic awareness separately, most have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of specific instructional methods or have been conducted within limited school contexts. To date, studies that comprehensively synthesize empirical findings on the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness among students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels in Indonesia remain relatively scarce. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive synthesis to identify common research patterns, effective instructional strategies, factors influencing successful learning outcomes, and their implications for the development of early literacy. Therefore, this study aims not only to summarize the findings of previous research but also to provide a scientific synthesis of the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness based on 27 articles that met the inclusion criteria. It is expected that this synthesis will enrich the body of knowledge on early literacy, serve as a valuable reference for teachers and researchers, and provide an evidence-based foundation for the development of instructional practices and educational policies at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels in Indonesia.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive literature review approach (Mackiewicz, 2018). This method was selected to explore the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness based on findings from previously published studies in accredited national and reputable international journals. The data sources for this review consisted of journal articles, academic books, research reports, and conference proceedings addressing topics related to early reading skills, phonemic awareness, and literacy development strategies at the elementary school or *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) level (Subahan et al., 2021).

The research procedure began with the identification of the following keywords: "*early reading*," "*phonemic awareness*," "*elementary school/MI literacy strategies*," and "*phonological intervention*." These keywords were used to search for relevant articles in the Google Scholar, Garuda, and ScienceDirect databases. The retrieved articles were then screened according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) published within the last ten years, (2) published in nationally accredited journals (at least SINTA-indexed) or reputable international journals, and (3) addressing, either

empirically or theoretically, the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness among students at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) or elementary school (SD) level. Subsequently, a further screening process based on the titles, abstracts, and full texts of the articles was conducted, and only those meeting all inclusion criteria were included in the data synthesis.

The analysis was conducted through a process of identifying relevant studies, categorizing themes, comparing research findings, and synthesizing related evidence. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between phonemic awareness and early reading skills, while also identifying research gaps that warrant further investigation.

Literature Screening: Each study was screened according to the predefined inclusion criteria. This process helped minimize potential bias by applying clear and consistent rules regarding which studies were eligible to address the research question. By evaluating each study against the same criteria and documenting the selection outcomes, the basis for the review's conclusions was made transparent. The analysis was conducted by organizing the findings from various sources into several major themes, including: the role of phonemic awareness in early reading, explicit phonics instruction, the use of phonological games, and the importance of teacher and parental involvement. A narrative and thematic analysis approach was employed, enabling the authors to develop an integrative synthesis of the findings based on recurring patterns and trends identified across the relevant literature (Anggraeni et al., 2023).

The inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the studies included in the review demonstrated sufficient scientific quality, topical relevance, and currency of information. Restricting the selection to articles published within the past ten years was intended to ensure that the resulting synthesis accurately reflects the latest developments in research on early reading skills and phonemic awareness (Chourio-acevedo et al., n.d.).

Result and Discussion

Results

1. Results of Article Identification

The article identification process was conducted systematically in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The literature search was performed across three databases Google Scholar, Garuda, and ScienceDirect—using the following keywords: *early reading skills*, *phonemic awareness*, *beginning reading*, *phonemic awareness*, *elementary school literacy*, and *phonological intervention*. The search was limited to articles published between 2016 and 2026.

The initial search yielded a total of 64 articles. A screening process was then carried out by removing duplicate records and reviewing the titles and abstracts to

determine their relevance to the research focus. Articles that did not address the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels, were unavailable in full-text format, or did not meet the established scientific publication criteria were excluded from the selection process.

The next stage involved a comprehensive full-text assessment of the articles based on the predefined inclusion criteria: (1) publication within the past ten years; (2) publication in scientific journals indexed at least by SINTA or Scopus; (3) a focus on early reading skills, phonemic awareness, or relevant instructional strategies; and (4) alignment with the objectives of the present study. Following this assessment, 27 articles met all the inclusion criteria and were selected as the primary sources for analysis in this literature review.

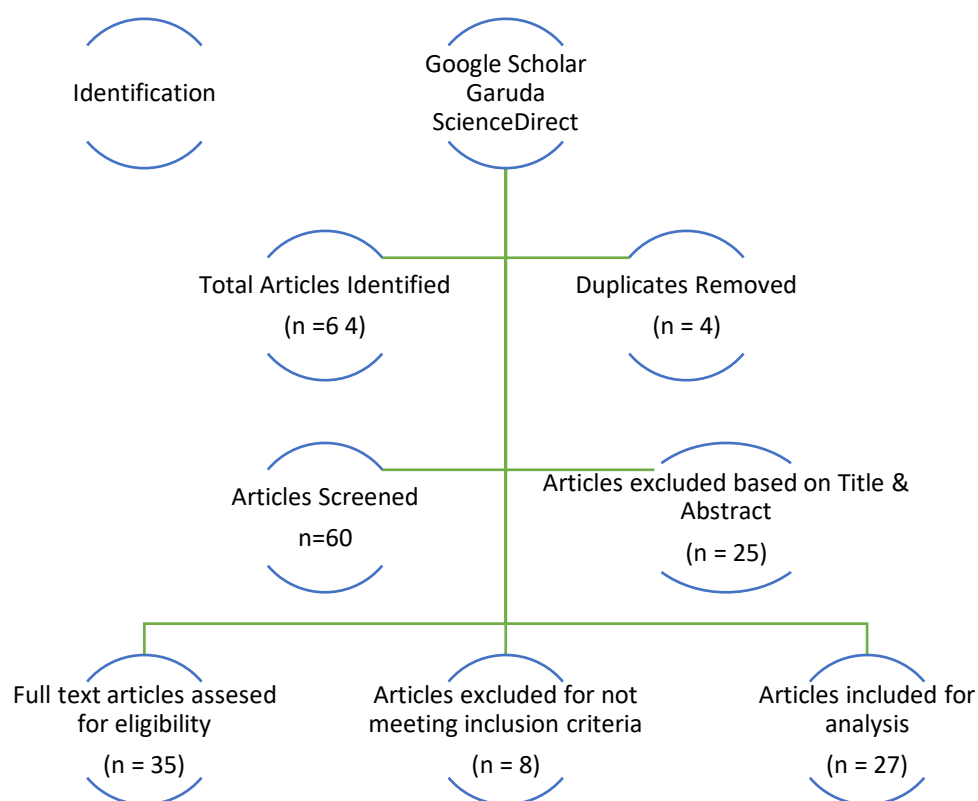


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process Based on the PRISMA Guidelines

2. Characteristics of the Included Articles

A total of 27 articles were included in the analysis, demonstrating diverse characteristics in terms of publication year, research methodology, research focus, and study context. Based on the year of publication, the majority of the articles were published between 2022 - 2025, indicating that research on early reading skills and

phonemic awareness has continued to develop as an active area of scholarly interest in recent years. In terms of research methodology, the reviewed studies were predominantly quantitative experimental and quasi-experimental designs, complemented by descriptive studies, case studies, classroom action research (CAR), and several literature reviews. This methodological diversity provides a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of various early reading instructional strategies as well as the factors influencing the development of students' phonemic awareness.

Based on their research focus, the analyzed articles can be classified into several major themes: the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness; early reading instructional strategies; the use of instructional media; factors facilitating and hindering reading development; parental involvement in literacy instruction; and the implications of phonological instruction for improving students' foundational literacy skills. The diversity of these research themes provides a strong basis for synthesizing the findings, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels.

3. Synthesis of the Literature Review Findings

Based on the analysis of the 27 articles that met the inclusion criteria, six major themes consistently emerged in studies examining early reading skills and phonemic awareness at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. These themes include: (1) the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness; (2) effective instructional strategies; (3) factors supporting successful early reading development; (4) barriers to early reading acquisition; (5) implications for instructional practice; and (6) best practices in the implementation of early reading instruction. The synthesis indicates that, despite differences in research approaches, designs, and contexts, the studies reveal a relatively consistent pattern highlighting the critical role of phonemic awareness as a foundational component in the development of early reading skills.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Literature Review Findings

Review Theme	Synthesis of Findings	Number of Articles
Relationship Between Early Reading Skills and Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic awareness serves as a fundamental foundation for early reading development by enhancing children's ability to recognize speech sounds, establish phoneme-grapheme correspondences, and improve both reading accuracy and reading fluency.	8
Instructional Strategies	Explicit phonics instruction, phonological games, multisensory instructional materials, digital learning media, and syllable flashcards have been shown to be effective in improving early reading skills.	7
Supporting Factors	Teacher competence, parental involvement, a literacy-rich environment, and the availability of instructional media are key factors that contribute to the successful development of early reading skills.	4
Barriers to Early Reading Development	Low levels of phonemic awareness, limited instructional media, a weak literacy culture, and insufficient environmental stimulation were identified as the primary barriers to the development of early reading skills.	3
Implications	Phonemic awareness should be systematically integrated into early reading instruction and supported through strong collaboration between schools and families	3
Overall Findings (Total)	The synthesis findings indicate that phonemic awareness is a fundamental component of early reading development and should therefore be an integral part of early literacy instruction at the <i>Madrasah Ibtidaiyah</i> (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels.	27

Based on this synthesis, it can be concluded that all of the reviewed studies demonstrate a relatively consistent pattern regarding the critical role of phonemic awareness in supporting the development of early reading skills. Furthermore, the effectiveness of early reading instruction is determined not only by the instructional strategies employed by teachers but also by the support provided by the learning environment, parental involvement, and the availability of appropriate instructional media. These findings provide a strong foundation for further discussion of the relationships among the variables, their educational implications, and their relevance to both the theory and practice of early reading instruction.

Discussion

Based on the synthesis of the literature review presented in the previous section, this discussion aims to interpret the major findings by relating them to relevant theories, previous research, and the context of early reading instruction at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. The discussion not only examines the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness but also explores effective instructional strategies, the factors influencing the successful development of reading skills, and their implications for educational practice. Through this discussion, a more comprehensive understanding is expected to emerge regarding the importance of phonemic awareness as a foundational component of early literacy development and as a basis for formulating recommendations for teachers, schools, and future researchers.

1. Analysis of the Relationship Between Early Reading Skills and Phonemic Awareness

Based on the synthesis of the analyzed articles, the findings consistently indicate that phonemic awareness is one of the fundamental components underlying the development of early reading skills among students at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. Nearly all of the reviewed studies demonstrate that the ability to recognize, discriminate, blend, and manipulate the sounds of spoken language is a crucial prerequisite for understanding the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. These skills contribute significantly to improving word recognition accuracy, reading fluency, and decoding ability, all of which serve as essential foundations for early literacy development (Hanisah, 2022; Nurjanah, 2022; Nurma Pertiwi et al., 2019; Zahira & Andreani, 2023).

The consistency of these findings indicates that phonemic awareness is not only associated with the ability to identify speech sounds but also plays a significant role in the cognitive processes involved in learning to read. Hanisah (2022) found that students with well-developed phonemic awareness acquired early reading skills more easily than those who were unable to accurately discriminate speech sounds. These findings are supported by Nurma Pertiwi et al., who reported that most reading difficulties among students in the early grades stem from limited ability to distinguish letter sounds, associate sounds with their corresponding letter symbols, and blend individual sounds into complete words. Similarly, Zahira and Andreani (2023) demonstrated that improvements in phonemic awareness contribute to enhanced reading skills and reading comprehension by enabling students to process phonological information more efficiently.

Although these studies employed different research approaches including experimental, descriptive, and correlational designs they consistently reported similar findings. This consistency suggests that the relationship between phonemic awareness

and early reading skills remains robust across diverse student characteristics and instructional contexts. Therefore, phonemic awareness can be regarded as a fundamental foundation that supports the development of reading skills from the earliest stages of elementary education.

These findings are also consistent with early literacy development theory, which posits that reading skills develop through the mastery of phonological awareness before students are able to comprehend written texts at more advanced levels. From a cognitive development perspective, the ability to recognize the sound structure of language enables students to establish connections between spoken and written language, thereby facilitating more effective decoding. Therefore, early reading instruction should extend beyond simply introducing letter forms; it should also provide systematic practice in recognizing, categorizing, and manipulating speech sounds as a foundation for the development of reading proficiency.

In addition to students' phonological abilities, the relationship between phonemic awareness and early reading skills is also influenced by the quality of instruction provided by teachers. Numerous studies have shown that systematic, explicit, and sequential phonological training accelerates the development of students' reading skills more effectively than instruction that focuses solely on letter recognition. Therefore, teachers play a strategic role in designing learning activities that integrate phonemic awareness into early reading instruction through a variety of approaches, such as sound-based games, phoneme segmentation exercises, syllable blending activities, and the use of engaging instructional media.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed studies, it can be concluded that phonemic awareness is a key determinant of successful early reading development. These findings indicate that the development of reading skills depends not only on students' ability to recognize letters but also on their capacity to process phonological information accurately. Therefore, early reading instruction at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels should incorporate the development of phonemic awareness as an integral component of early literacy instruction. Such an approach will provide students with a strong reading foundation that supports their academic success in subsequent stages of education.

2. Analysis of Strategies for Optimizing Early Reading Instruction and Phonemic Awareness

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed articles, the findings indicate that improvements in early reading skills and phonemic awareness cannot be achieved through a single instructional approach. Rather, numerous studies demonstrate that successful instruction depends on the implementation of strategies that are systematic, explicit, interactive, and developmentally appropriate for students. The instructional approaches most frequently reported as effective include explicit phonics instruction,

the syllabic method, multisensory approaches, phonological games, the use of audiovisual instructional media, syllable flashcards, and the integration of digital technology into reading instruction. (Gustiani et al., 2022; Haslinda Haslinda et al., 2023; Mardhotillah et al., 2026; Marisa, 2024; Oktaviany et al., 2025; Primadita, 2017).

The synthesis findings indicate that explicit phonics instruction is one of the most consistently effective strategies for improving early reading skills. Phonics instruction enables students to develop a systematic understanding of the relationship between speech sounds (phonemes) and letter symbols (graphemes), thereby facilitating the decoding of words and simple sentences. These findings are consistent with the results reported by (Ozaria, 2019) reported that the implementation of the phonics method significantly improved letter recognition accuracy and reading fluency among students in the early grades. Similar findings were reported by Marisa (2024), who explained that syllable-based instruction facilitates students' recognition of sound patterns, thereby making the reading process more effective.

In addition to phonics instruction, numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of engaging instructional media can enhance students' motivation and participation throughout the learning process. Audiovisual media, syllable flashcards, digital learning tools, and educational games provide more concrete learning experiences, enabling students to better understand the relationship between speech sounds and letter symbols. Haslinda et al. (2023) reported that audiovisual media significantly increased students' active participation in early reading instruction, while Mardhotillah et al. (2026) found that the use of syllable flashcards significantly improved the reading skills of first-grade elementary school students. These findings were further supported by Oktaviany et al. (2025), who concluded that technology-based educational games can enhance students' learning motivation while simultaneously strengthening their foundational literacy skills.

On the other hand, the multisensory approach has also been widely recommended in the literature as an effective instructional strategy. Gustiani et al. (2022) explained that instruction involving multiple sensory modalities including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile experiences helps students develop a more concrete understanding of the sound structure of language. This approach is particularly beneficial for students who experience reading difficulties, as it provides diverse learning experiences tailored to their individual needs. Consequently, early reading instruction should focus not only on learning outcomes but also on creating instructional processes that are aligned with students' developmental characteristics and learning needs.

The synthesis of the reviewed studies also indicates that the effectiveness of instructional strategies is strongly influenced by teachers' competence in selecting and implementing appropriate teaching methods. Teachers play a role not only as providers of instruction but also as facilitators who create learning environments that

foster the development of phonemic awareness. Therefore, teachers should be equipped with the ability to integrate a variety of instructional strategies, utilize innovative learning media, and conduct continuous assessment to ensure that early reading instruction is delivered effectively.

Overall, the synthesis indicates that effective early reading instruction integrates explicit phonemic awareness training, the use of engaging instructional media, interactive learning activities, and active student participation throughout the learning process. Thus, the optimization of early reading skills does not depend on a single instructional method but rather on teachers' ability to combine various teaching strategies in accordance with students' needs and developmental characteristics. These findings suggest that strengthening teachers' competencies in designing phonemic awareness-based literacy instruction should be a key priority in efforts to improve the quality of elementary education in Indonesia

3. Analysis of Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Development of Phonemic Awareness and Early Reading Skills

The synthesis of the reviewed articles shows that the successful development of phonemic awareness and early reading skills is influenced by a range of interrelated factors, both internal to students and external within the learning environment. These factors include students' cognitive and linguistic abilities, teacher competence, instructional strategies, availability of learning media, the school literacy environment, and parental involvement in supporting early reading development. Conversely, insufficient phonological stimulation, a weak literacy culture, limited instructional media, and a lack of instructional strategy variation are among the most frequently identified barriers across the studies (Lestari et al., 2023; Mukhlis, 2023; Putri, 2022; Ramadanti et al., 2024; Rohman et al., 2022; Snow et al., 2022).

Based on the synthesis findings, teacher competence emerges as one of the most dominant supporting factors in determining the success of early reading instruction. Teachers who understand early literacy development and phonemic awareness are more likely to select instructional strategies that align with students' learning characteristics. In contrast, instruction that remains teacher-centered and relies on conventional methods without gradual phonological training often leads to students' difficulties in connecting speech sounds with letter symbols. This indicates that the quality of instruction is highly dependent on teachers' ability to design learning activities that are systematic, engaging, and responsive to students' needs.

In addition to teacher-related factors, the literacy environment also makes a significant contribution to the development of early reading skills. Several studies indicate that students who are regularly exposed to literacy-rich environments, both at school and at home, demonstrate better phonemic awareness development compared to those who receive limited reading stimulation. Learning environments

that provide varied reading materials, opportunities for shared reading activities, and regular practice in recognizing speech sounds can accelerate students' reading skill development. Therefore, the establishment of a literacy culture in both schools and families is an integral part of efforts to improve early reading skills.

On the other hand, parental involvement is also a supporting factor that is consistently identified across various studies. Parental guidance through shared reading activities, early introduction of letters and sounds, and providing children with regular opportunities to practice reading has been shown to strengthen students' phonological skills. Effective collaboration between schools and families enables learning processes to take place not only in the classroom but also to continue at home, thereby ensuring more optimal stimulation of children's literacy development.

Meanwhile, the synthesis also identified several inhibiting factors that are frequently found in early reading instruction. Low levels of students' phonemic awareness represent a major barrier that leads to difficulties in recognizing letter sounds, distinguishing phonemes, and blending sounds into complete words. This condition is often exacerbated by limited instructional media, insufficient teacher training in phonological instruction, and a weak reading culture within the family environment. As a result, the learning process tends to focus primarily on letter recognition without adequately developing phonological skills, which are essential as the foundation of reading proficiency.

Based on the overall synthesis, it can be understood that the success of early reading instruction is not determined by a single factor, but rather by the interaction between student characteristics, instructional quality, the literacy environment, and family support. Therefore, efforts to improve early reading skills should adopt a comprehensive approach involving teachers, schools, parents, and education policymakers. Such an integrated approach is expected to create a learning environment that effectively supports the optimal development of phonemic awareness, enabling students' early reading skills to develop in a sustained manner.

4. Implications of the Relationship Between Early Reading Skills and Phonemic Awareness for Instruction in MI/SD

The synthesis of the 27 articles indicates that the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness has broad implications for the development of literacy instruction at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. Phonemic awareness does not merely function as a supporting skill in reading but serves as a foundational component that determines students' success in acquiring early reading abilities. Therefore, the development of phonemic awareness should be positioned as an integral part of early literacy instruction from the first grades, enabling students to build a strong foundation for further reading development and deeper reading comprehension.

Based on the synthesis findings, the most prominent practical implication is the need for a shift in early reading instructional approaches. Reading instruction should not be limited to letter recognition, syllable practice, or mechanical reading exercises, but must integrate various activities that develop students' phonological skills. Activities such as identifying initial and final sounds in words, phoneme segmentation, sound blending, language games, and the use of interactive learning media have been shown to strengthen the relationship between phonological awareness and reading ability. Therefore, teachers need to design instruction that provides students with opportunities to gradually practice processing speech sounds before progressing to more complex reading stages.

In addition to implications for the learning process, the review also highlights the importance of improving teachers' competence in early literacy instruction. Various studies indicate that the successful implementation of phonemic awareness-based instruction is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to select appropriate strategies, instructional media, and assessment methods that align with students' characteristics. Therefore, teacher professional development programs should place greater emphasis on phonological instruction, early reading strategies, and the use of innovative learning media, enabling teachers to implement more effective, evidence-based instruction.

Other implications relate to curriculum development and education policy. The findings of this review indicate that phonemic awareness should be more systematically integrated into early literacy instruction, including through the formulation of learning outcomes, the development of teaching materials, and the provision of instructional media that support students' phonological development. In addition, schools need to foster a literacy culture involving all school members and strengthen collaboration with parents so that reading stimulation does not only occur in the classroom but also continues within the family environment.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study reinforce previous research that positions phonemic awareness as a key predictor of early reading success. The consistency of findings across the reviewed articles indicates that mastery of phonological aspects forms the foundation for the development of decoding skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Thus, this study not only confirms theories of early literacy development but also provides a more comprehensive synthesis of their implementation within the Indonesian educational context, particularly at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels.

Overall, the implications of this study indicate that improving early reading skills requires a comprehensive approach involving multiple instructional components, including strengthening phonemic awareness, enhancing teacher competence, providing a conducive literacy environment, and ensuring support from families and education policies. The synergy among these components is expected to

create more effective early reading instruction, thereby improving students' foundational literacy skills in a sustainable manner.

5. Analysis of Best Practices in the Implementation of Phonemic Instructional Strategies

One of the most frequently recommended best practices is the implementation of explicit and systematic phonics instruction. The synthesis indicates that instruction beginning with the introduction of phoneme grapheme correspondences, followed by practice in sound segmentation, blending phonemes into syllables, and progressing to simple word reading, can significantly improve students' reading accuracy and fluency. This finding is consistent across various studies showing that continuous phonological practice yields better outcomes than reading instruction that focuses solely on letter recognition (Ehri et al., 2001; Fitriani, 2023; Rohman et al., 2022; Tiani et al., 2023).

Another best practice involves the use of varied instructional media that are appropriate for elementary school students' characteristics. Various studies show that the use of letter cards, syllable cards, audiovisual media, educational games, digital learning tools, and illustrated storybooks can enhance students' learning motivation while helping them understand the relationship between speech sounds and letter symbols in a more concrete way. These instructional media provide more interactive learning experiences, encouraging students to actively participate in the early reading learning process (Anggraeni et al., 2023; Haslinda Haslinda et al., 2023; Mardhotillah et al., 2026; Oktaviany et al., 2025).

In addition to the use of methods and instructional media, the synthesis also shows that successful teaching practices consistently involve *student-centered learning activities*. Teachers provide opportunities for students to practice through phonological games, read-aloud activities, group discussions, singing, and exploratory sound-based activities conducted repeatedly in a fun learning environment. These activities not only improve early reading skills but also enhance students' confidence, communication skills, and learning motivation.

Another consistent finding is the importance of integrating phonemic awareness training across various learning activities, not only within Indonesian language instruction. Several studies indicate that the development of phonological skills can also be supported through different learning contexts, such as introducing word sounds during mathematics, science, or thematic lessons. This approach provides students with continuous opportunities to practice recognizing speech sounds in diverse learning situations, thereby supporting more natural and sustained development of reading skills.

The review also shows that best practices yield more optimal results when supported by collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents. Teachers play a

role in designing systematic instruction, schools provide a conducive literacy environment, while parents support learning through shared reading activities, introducing new vocabulary, and encouraging children to engage with reading materials at home. This synergy enables the continuous stimulation of phonemic awareness across both school and home environments.

Overall, the synthesis of various studies indicates that best practices in implementing phonemic awareness-based instruction are not determined by a single specific method, but rather by teachers' ability to combine instructional strategies, learning media, phonological activities, and supportive learning environments into a meaningful learning process. These findings reinforce the view that effective early reading instruction requires an integrated, student-centered, and consistently implemented approach, in order to build a strong literacy foundation for students at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels.

6. Analysis of the Study Findings from an Educational Perspective

The synthesis of the 27 articles indicates that early reading skills and phonemic awareness are two closely related and inseparable components in the development of early literacy at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. The consistency of findings across studies shows that mastery of phonemic awareness provides the foundation for students to recognize the relationship between sounds and letter symbols, develop decoding skills, improve reading fluency, and build reading comprehension. Therefore, early reading instruction should be understood as a process that integrates students' phonological, linguistic, cognitive, and social development in a holistic manner.

Theoretically, the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness can be explained through Piaget's cognitive development theory and Vygotsky's constructivist theory. According to Piaget, young children are in the preoperational stage, where they learn through concrete experiences and direct interaction. This supports the use of phonemic games and visual media in learning (Etnawati, 2022). Meanwhile, Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning. Accordingly, the involvement of teachers, peers, and parents becomes a crucial element in the development of phonemic awareness. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) also suggests that, with appropriate guidance, children can achieve higher levels of skill than they would be able to reach independently (R. Sari, 2020).

From the perspective of these two theories, the development of phonemic awareness is not only viewed as the acquisition of linguistic skills, but also as the result of active interaction between children's cognitive development and their social environment. Therefore, early reading instruction should be designed in a contextual,

collaborative manner that is aligned with students' developmental stages, so that literacy learning objectives can be achieved optimally.

From an educational perspective, the findings of this study show that the process of learning to read in elementary school students is influenced not only by individual abilities but also by the quality of learning experiences provided during instruction. Various studies indicate that systematically designed instruction, the use of explicit strategies, and meaningful learning activities can provide more optimal stimulation for the development of early reading skills. These findings reinforce the idea that teachers play a strategic role as facilitators who not only deliver content but also create learning environments that support the continuous development of students' literacy potential.

In addition, the synthesis indicates that the success of early reading instruction cannot be separated from the application of **student-centered learning principles**. Learning activities that involve sound exploration, phonological games, discussions, the use of instructional media, and active interaction between teachers and students provide more meaningful learning experiences compared to instruction that relies solely on memorizing letters or mechanical reading drills. Therefore, early reading instruction should be designed to be active, contextual, and adaptive to students' developmental characteristics in order to enhance learning motivation while strengthening foundational literacy skills.

From a curriculum development perspective, this study shows that phonemic awareness should not be positioned as an additional topic but rather as an integrated component of early-grade Indonesian language instruction. This integration can be realized through the formulation of learning objectives that emphasize phonological development, the provision of instructional materials aligned with students' developmental stages, and the design of assessments that measure not only mechanical reading skills but also the ability to recognize and manipulate speech sounds. Such an approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of students' early literacy development.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to the development of research in elementary education. Although various studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between phonemic awareness and early reading skills, most research has focused on testing the effectiveness of specific instructional methods within limited contexts. Therefore, future research should expand its scope to include broader investigations, such as the implementation of phonemic awareness-based instruction across diverse school contexts, the integration of digital technology in early literacy instruction, and the development of instructional models that accommodate the varying reading abilities of students. In this way, the findings of research can provide not only theoretical benefits but also more substantial contributions to educational practice in Indonesia.

Overall, this study shows that improving early reading skills requires a comprehensive approach through the synergy of phonemic awareness development, teacher competence, effective instructional strategies, a supportive literacy environment, and strong support from both families and schools. The synthesis of various studies not only reinforces previous findings but also provides a more holistic understanding of how phonemic awareness can be effectively implemented in early reading instruction at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. Thus, this review is expected to serve as a scholarly reference for the development of early literacy instruction as well as future research in elementary education.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that phonemic awareness is a fundamental factor in the development of early reading skills among students at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and Elementary School (SD) levels. Based on the synthesis of 27 articles that met the inclusion criteria, the findings indicate that the ability to recognize, discriminate, blend, and manipulate speech sounds contributes significantly to the development of decoding skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension, all of which constitute the foundation of early literacy development.

The review also indicates that the implementation of phonemic awareness-based instruction is more effective when supported by instructional strategies that are explicit, systematic, and student-centered. Various approaches, including phonics instruction, phonological games, multisensory learning, the use of innovative instructional media, and the integration of digital technology, have been shown to improve early reading skills when implemented consistently. Furthermore, the success of early reading instruction is influenced by teacher competence, the school literacy environment, and parental involvement in providing reading stimulation at home. The primary contribution of this study lies in presenting a comprehensive synthesis of the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness within the context of elementary education in Indonesia. This synthesis demonstrates that the successful development of early literacy requires an integrated approach that combines effective instructional strategies, teacher competence, a supportive learning environment, and active family involvement.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the review included only articles retrieved from the Google Scholar, Garuda, and ScienceDirect databases published between 2016 and 2026. Consequently, relevant studies indexed in other databases may not have been included. Second, this study employed a literature review approach that focused on synthesizing existing research findings without conducting a quantitative analysis, such as a meta-analysis. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as a comprehensive overview of the relationship between early reading skills and phonemic awareness based on the literature analyzed. Future research is encouraged to include a broader range of

databases and adopt more rigorous approaches, such as a systematic literature review (SLR) or meta-analysis, to provide stronger empirical evidence.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers systematically integrate phonemic awareness activities into early reading instruction, schools strengthen their literacy culture by providing supportive learning environments, and education policymakers prioritize curriculum development and teacher professional development focused on evidence-based early literacy instruction. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to extend this work by conducting systematic literature reviews (SLRs) or meta-analyses with a broader range of studies, thereby generating stronger empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of various phonemic awareness interventions in elementary education.

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