Song-Based Reading Module and Learning through Playing Approach for Children with Learning Disabilities

Hanifah Sabin[a], Vincent Pang[b], Muhammad Idris Bullare@Bahari[c]

[a]Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia
[b,c]Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia
E-mail: hanifahsabin68@gmail.com

Abstract: Reading skills are essential skills since early childhood education. For children with disabilities in learning (CWDL), specific reading-learning methods should be provided with regard to the problems faced by the children. Hence, this concept paper provides an alternative in teaching and learning using the Modul Riang Ria Membaca (MRRM) based on songs and learning approach through playing. This study used a literary research method to obtain data for the development of reading modules for children with learning disabilities. The findings of the study were the "Riang Ria Reading Module" and the suggestion of the implementation of a fun and meaningful early reading instruction for CWDL. The use of songs as well as the integration of hands-on activities in the form of physical games creates an atmosphere of teaching and learning that can attract attention and focus of students with learning disabilities.

Keywords: Modul Riang Ria Membaca (MRRM), song, learning through play, students with learning disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Humans acquire wisdom and knowledge in various ways, and reading is one of them. Reading skills is also one of the fundamental sources of knowledge and the foundation of self-development towards becoming a knowledgeable human being (Jamain, 2011). Reading is the key to all of wisdom and knowledge. It is an important skill in all subjects. Jamian (2011) also explains that reading and writing capabilities are a range of skills that are fundamental in the process of effective teaching and learning in various disciplines in the school. For some children, mastering the reading skills may be an activity that is simple and fun. There are even children capable of expanding their ability to recognize and read words they have never seen before as they enter the early stage of education. However, studies conducted by the *National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities* (NJCLD) found that 20 to 30 percent of children had reading difficulty. In fact, respondents in a longitudinal study, consisting of children with learning disabilities (CWDL), acknowledge that reading is the most difficult thing they do in their lifetime. This CWDL is a special group that needs special education areas to help increase the potential for their inability in learning (Anizam et al., 2013).

According to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) in Cortiella and Horowitz (2014), CWDL has disruption in one or more psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, speaking or writing, nuisances that may be apparent in imperfect listening ability, thinking, speaking, read, write, spell, or do math calculations (Cortiella and Horowitz, 2014).

As a result, those who are also known as slow learners face self-conflict as a substantial decline in aspects of self-esteem, self-concept and motivation to learn due to their failure to master skills compared to their classmates. Thus, the failure to read well is getting worse due to the absence of effective teaching strategies and the opportunity to learn, and this has long-term effects for students (Mohamed, Yasin and Majid, 2012).

Children with special needs are categorized into three classes: 1) those with visual disabilities 2) those with hearing and speaking disabilities and 3) those with learning disabilities and autism. These children with special needs are the ones who have problems with the learning process at regular school settings. They need specialized education and services to develop their own potential and development (Sofi et al., 2010). Therefore, the Special Education Division (BPKhas) under the Ministry of Education sets up specific design to provide educational programs for the three types of disabilities namely hearing, visual and learning disabilities (Lokman and Nurul, 2010). Figure 1 shows the various disability groups in this Country.

Figure 1. Type of Disability in Malaysia

Hearing Disabilities	Visual Disabilities	Learning Disabilities
Level of Hearing • Low • Moderate • High	• *Low vision*) • Blind	• *Down syndrome* • *Autism* • *Dyslexia* • *Slow Learner* • *Hyperactive* • *Cleft Lip and Palate* • *Epilepsy* • *Mental retardation*

Table 1. Number of students with learning disabilities from 2012 to 2016

Class	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Preschool	641	662	690	714	680
Primary School	28,839	29, 391	28, 985	30, 833	29, 739
Secondary School	19,462	21, 274	21, 796	24, 399	23,185
Total	48, 942	51, 237	51, 471	55, 946	53, 613

Source: Nor Najihah et al., 2018.

Table 2. Comparison of Reading Achievement for Students with LD and Students without LD

Grade 4	Very poor	Basic Mastery	Smooth	Excellent
Learning Disabilities	69 %	20%	9%	2%
Without Learning Disabilities	27 %	35%	28%	9%
Grade 8	**Very poor**	**Basic Mastery**	**Smooth**	**Excellent**
Learning Disabilities	60%	31%	8%	1%
Without Learning Disabilities	18 %	43%	35%	5%

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Reading Grade 4 and 8 National Results, 2013.

In Malaysia, the number of special education students continues to grow year after year. A significant increase particularly in the category of children with learning disabilities (CWDL) shows that the problem is getting serious. In order to help students with special needs, the Department of Special Education has established special education schools or schools that carry out special integration education programs or inclusive education programs. Table 1 shows an increase in the number of students with disabilities in Malaysia from 2012 to 2016.

Next, the comparison of achievement in reading performance for CWDL with those without learning disabilities (BP) children performed in the United States shows significant performance differences between the two groups. The findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress are shown in Table 2.

The failure to master the reading skills that existed at the early stage of education will continue and become more severe if there is no effective teaching strategy taken early on (Mohamed, Yasin and Majid, 2012). CWDL who does not master reading skills will face the higher risks of failing in the school system (White, 2012).

Every child is entitled to equal and quality education (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013). However, it cannot be denied that CWDL has extraordinary features in mental aspect, sensory capacity, and communication capability or social behavior. In addition, these groups also have different growth and developments as compared to normal children (Mohamed, 2005). Moreover, these groups have trouble paying attention, and collecting or processing information received in their memory. Consequently, they have trouble understanding abstract concepts, and they are weak in the ability to understand written symbols such as alphabet and numbers. In the social aspect, CWDL are passive and refuse to participate in teaching and learning activities. This has to do with the problem of self-concept and low self-esteem. According to Mohamed (2005), because these children have difficulty to focus,

they have difficulty processing information, completing tasks and others, causing them to face socio-emotional problems. As a result, these children will distract other peers. Therefore, CWDL needs a different teaching and learning approach than normal children.

The teaching modules, the Fun-based Reading Module (MRRM) were developed by the researchers to assist CWDL to master early reading skills. MRRM uses song and music as well as learning approaches through play in the teaching of reading. Past studies have shown the importance of using songs and music in reading. Umul (2014) explains that the song in the singing activity is an alternative to learning the language because the song is an art product that contains beautiful language elements, art elements that can be enjoyed and can give a sense of taste. According to Majid (2002), children respond naturally to music sounds and they are happy to express themselves through songs and music. Furthermore, a study by Kindermuzik's ABC Music & Me (SEG Measurement, 2013) suggests that the use of songs with musical exercises has a positive effect on the development of brain function. The study found that increased brain function had a very significant effect on the development of children's language. Benefits of using songs are obtained in seven aspects: enhancing oral proficiency, listening skills,

Enhancing new vocabulary, sensitivity to phonology and phonemes, sensitivity to printed word detection, helping children with special needs and thus providing opportunities for family involvement (SEG Measurement, 2013). Furthermore, cognitive psycholinguistic theory is the basis of MRRM's construction, emphasizing that every child born has a natural language ability known as LAD (language acquisition device). Every baby born in this world has different capabilities of learning everything in the environment by using their senses. This statement is supported by Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) director of LD Resources National Center for Learning Disabilities in Cortiella and Horowitz (2014) that learning problems are not a prescription for failure, but with proper teaching methods, guidance and support, there is no limit to the achievement by CWDL.

Hence, psycholinguistic theorists have presented four levels of taxonomy of thought in reading activity -literal level, interpretation, assessment and assimilation. However, in this module, the researcher focuses only on the literal level and interpretation in accordance with the capabilities and requirements of the CWDL. In the MRRM there are seven teaching units and reading studies that focus on literary level and interpretation. This module is composed of two sub modules, the first of which is pre-reading skill consisting three units. The second part is the activity

of recognizing letters covering four units comprising alphabet letters, vowels and differentiating uppercase and lowercase letters.

The learning approach through play was chosen as an alternative teaching method to CWDL. Learning through play is more encouraging through fun and child-centered learning (White, 2012). Fun is the key to any learning process inside or out of the classroom. It is supported by Piaget's cognitive development theory and Vygotsky's social development theory explaining that play is important for children. According to Piaget and Vygotsky, play contributes to cognitive and social development of children (Essa, 2011). Essa (2011) play is a child's task and children need the support and guidance of other individuals to help them master the skills while interacting. The types of games used in MRRM are physical and social games. Jasmi (2012) emphasize reading techniques that associate a sound that is taught with a relevant action. According to him, this technique can improve memory, vision and hearing while making learning sessions more fun and active.

MRRM also takes into account the application of Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory. This theory is based on four main domains: (1) influencing social interaction in development, (2) scaffolding, (3) modeling, and (4) difference between the works of (ZPD) independent children with the work through the help of others). The concept of scaffolding and ZPD is ideal for helping children with special needs. The greatest contribution of this theory is the emphasis on the sociocultural nature of the development and learning process. Vygotsky believes that higher mental functions generally arise through communication or collaboration between fellow socialists before the mental function is absorbed in individuals (Syamsul, 2010).

This study will be carried out to achieve four objectives and answer four predefined research questions. The objectives of the study are (1) Identifying the level of reading ability of Year One CWDL. (2) Identifying the impact of MRRM on students' ability to recognize symbols and forms; (3) Identifying the impact of MRRM on abilities of students to identify and pronounce alphabet and (4) Identifying the impact of MRRM on CWDL's interest in reading Teaching and learning.

Therefore, this study is aimed at preparing an early reading teaching concept paper by applying MRRM teaching modules to CWDL (in-kind) in the Integrated Special Education Program class in Keningau, Sabah, Malaysia. The appropriate use of teaching strategies along with the support of Teaching Aids (BBM) and continuous support is aimed at improving the achievement of the CWDL.

Table 3. Content and Skills Aspects in MRRM

Sub Module(SM)	Unit & Learning Standard	Activity	Song	Learn through play
SM1: Mastering Pre-reading Skill	A. Recognizing Object (Object equation)	Recognizing object equations (various objects have similarities for example the shape and color of the objects are provided in the draw card)	Song: I Have Friends	Social game - *associative play* Wonderful brain
	B. Recognizing Objects (Objects difference)	Recognizing Object difference (Various objects have different shapes and colors)	Song: Book Face	Physical Games - Play the dough to produce a variety of shapes and colors
	C. Name the Object (in the class)	Naming various objects found in the class Books, pencils, chalkboard, drink bottles and so on	Song: Come to School	Social and physical games Acting an object symbol
	D. Naming the Object (outside of Class)	Name various objects found in school parks such as flowers, stones, leaves, insects and so on.	Song: See my Garden	Social Games and Physical Games - Play cooperative - Train to the Botanical Gardens
SM2: Learn Alphabet	A. Identify the alphabet	Pronounce the guided alphabet	Song: Riang Ria ABC	Social Games and Physical Games - (acting out the symbol of each alphabet)
	B. Pronouncing vowels	Pronounce the vowels	Song: AIEOU Horey-horey	Social Games (cooperative) and Physical Games– movement and percussion
	C. Identifying uppercase and lowercase letter	Differentiate lowercase letters and uppercase letters	Song: Riang Senada	Physical Games and social games – Play the flour dough to produce pairs of capital and lowercase letters

METHOD

In preparing this paper, the researcher used the literary research method to identify the problems and needs for developing the teaching module for children with learning disabilities in low-grade learning. The same method is used to obtain relevant data to develop MRRM teaching module as well as suggestions on the implementation of early teaching instruction for children with learning disabilities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Contents and skills for MRRM are compiled with reference to the 3M Foundation of Special Education (Learning Problem) for Year 1 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). MRRM is developed with the preparation of content based on content and learning and the skill levels from easy to difficult. The preparation of songs and the preparation of play activities are tailored to the objectives and skills to be achieved. The implementation of teaching and learning is in a small group of between two to three people to ensure each CWDL is actively involved. Subsequently, the allocation time for each unit and activity is recommended for 30 minutes. However, in order to meet individual needs, teaching and learning in the Special Education Program (Learning Problem) is flexibly developed in accordance with the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013, 8 (1) (c) stating that teaching and learning methods and techniques, the

time allocated for every activity, activity structure and BBM are according to the special education curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). The allocation of teaching and learning duration using the MRRM teaching module is for eight weeks. Table 3 shows the aspects of content and skills in MRRM.

Conceptual Implementation of MRRM Teaching and Learning

Figure 2 shows the implementation process of teaching and learning reading using MRRM. Individual Teaching Plan (ITP) must be provided for each involved CWDL. The preparation of ITPs should take into account the individual capability of each CWDL. The teaching and learning process will be implemented using the teaching materials as well as BBM proposed in the MRRM. The song and music materials will use the videos and slides that have been provided. After the singing activity, students will perform game activities as a reinforcement of early reading activity. Assessment to assess the achievement of learning objectives of each CWDL can be implemented throughout the teaching and learning session or after the implementation of teaching and learning. Finally, teachers need to reflect on the achievement of the objectives of teaching and learning and identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning that have been implemented and then propose improvements to the future teaching and learning.

Figure 2. The Implementation Concept Framework of Teaching and learning Using MRRM
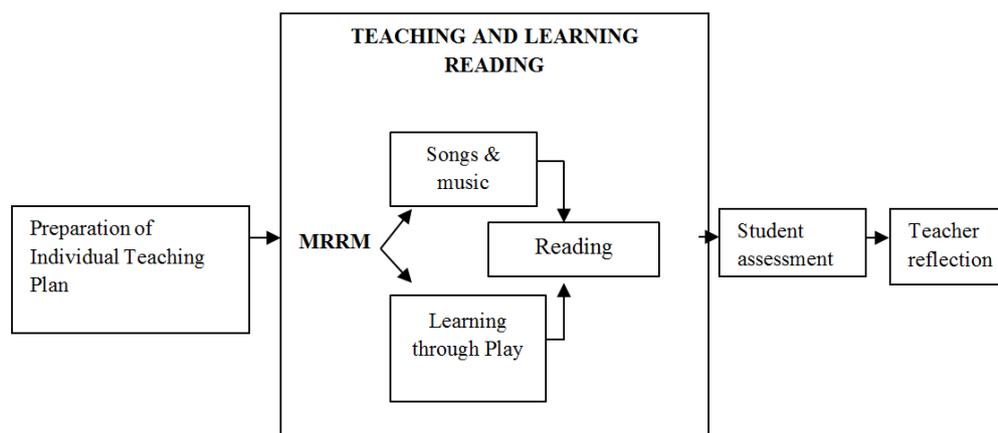
CONCLUSION

In line with the National Education Philosophy, every child needs education to develop the potential of each individual. However, there are still CWDL groups who need special education due to their lack of character. Hence, this paper proposes the application of reading teaching using songs and music as well as learning concepts through play provided in the MRRM module which is expected to provide an alternative teaching for fun reading to CWDL. It is hoped that this MRRM will not only enhance the interest and motivation of CWDL in early reading but can help increase the level of mastery of early reading skills as an essential skill in every child.

Subsequently, the use of MRRM as a material and method of early reading instruction for CWDL contributes materials and teaching alternatives to special education teachers, especially to teach those with learning disabilities. In addition, MRRM is also intended to be used for visual impaired children because singing and music are still relevant for this category. By doing some modifications to the materials and activities, games like flour processing are still suitable for use with the guidance of teachers and facilitators. Furthermore, this concept paper is expected to enrich the ideas and suggestions for planning specialization activities for special education teachers at the District Education Office and State Education Department.

REFERENCE

Jamian, A. R (2011). Permasalahan kemahiran membaca dan menulis Bahasa Melayu murid-murid sekolah rendah di luar bandar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Melayu. 1*(1), 1-12.

Anizam, M. Y., Manisah, M. A., & Amla, M. S. (2013). Pendidikan Vokasional Pelajar Berkeperluan Khas Kearah Memenuhi Pasaran Pekerjaan. In *Proceeding Of The International Conference On Social Science Research, ICSSR* (pp. 4-5).

Cortiella, C., & Horowitz, S. H. (2014). *The State of Learning Disabilities: Facts, Trends and Emerging Issues*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities

Essa, E. L. (2011). Introduction to early childhood education (6th Edt.). Los Angeles: *Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.*

Mohamed, J. K. A. (2005). *Pendidikan Khas untuk kanak-kanak istimewa.* Bentong: PTS Professional Publishing Sdn. Bhd.

Mohamed J. K. A., Yasin, M. H. M., & Majid, R. A. (2012). Pelaksanaan Pengajaran Kemahiran Membaca dan menulis dalam Bahasa Melayu Bagi Murid Prasekolah Bermasalah Pembelajaran. *Jurnal Bahasa Melayu. 2*(2),111-127.;

Jasmi, K. A. (2012). Metodologi Pengumpulan Data dalam Penyelidikan Kualitatitif dalam Kursus

Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. (2013) Ringkasan Eksekutif. Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (2013 -2025).

Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. (2015). Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah Pendidikan Khas (Masalah Pembelajaran). Asas 3M. Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran Tahun 1. Putrajaya.

Lokman, T., & Nurul, Q. M. (2009). *Faktor-faktor yang Mempengaruhi Keberkesanan Pendidikan Khas Teknik dan Vokasional Untuk Golongan Orang Kurang Upaya di Tiga Buah Politeknik.* Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

SEG Measurement. (2013). *Improving Student Language and Literacy Skill: A Study of theEfectiveness of the ABC and Me*. Music and Program.Retrived from: https://www.kindermusic.com/schools/kinder musik-curriculum-works/

Sofi, N., Rohana, H., & Amirmudin, U. (2010). *Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan Memperkasa Peranan Pendidikan Teknik Vokasional dan Pendidikan Khas*. Edupress. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

Syamsul, B. T. (2010). *Psikologi Pendidikan Berbasis Analisis Empiris Aplikatif*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group.

Umul, K. (2014). Pemanfaatan Lagu Sebagai Pilihan Bahan Belajar Bahasa. *Jurnal Aktual, 1*(2), 12-17.

White, R. E. (2012). The power of play: A research summary on play and learning. *Rochester: Minnesota Children's Museum.*

Majid, Y, A. (2001). *Pendidikan Muzik. Kursus Pendedahan Pendidikan Khas Peringkat Negeri Perak*. Kedah: Harvard Suasana Hotel.