

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' TEACHING PHONICS STRATEGIES AND THEIR REPORTED BELIEFS TO ASSIST PRIOR-TO SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (A CASE STUDY OF THE EARLY YEARS TEACHERS OF BEE BE GYM BABIES AND TODDLERS SCHOOL SEMARANG)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at (1) discovering the early years teachers' self-reported teaching phonics strategies in practices to teach alphabet knowledge and skills to their prior to school students, and (2) analyzing the teachers' self-reported beliefs in their teaching phonics strategies used to teach alphabet knowledge and skills to their prior to school students. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The participants of the study were ten non-native talented teachers experienced in teaching phonics to the young learners students.

The instruments of collecting data were questionnaire and interview. The data were obtained by using a direct survey and a semi-structured interview. The direct survey was used to investigate the early childhood teachers' teaching phonics strategies in practices, while to enhance the potential to understand self-reported teachers' beliefs in appropriate early literacy teaching strategies, the researcher did the interview. Based on the findings, dealing with the phonics teaching strategies, the teachers were mostly using either commercial phonics program and play based literacy learning strategies to teach alphabet knowledge and skills to their students within the commercial phonics program over largely focused on their service rather than the play-based literacy learning strategies.

In addition, from the interview, it could be concluded that the teachers believed that play could not be separated in the children's learning process. Both systematic and incidental learning process as well as componential and child-centered views were crucial in the children's acquiring literacy process and should be integrated.

Key Words: *Alphabet Knowledge and Skills, Early Childhood Literacy, Teaching Phonics Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching foreign languages to young children has been occurred for a long time in many countries (Karimkhanlooei & Seifiniya, 2015: 769). Despite these efforts, most Indonesian students still face the same issues in learning English. Most of the students are far than successful from oral as in and written English (Kam, 2002).

Emery (2013) emphasizes some issues related to those problems that occurred because children lack experiences in English and they do not be taught early literacy foundation such as alphabetic principles and how to blend the sounds to form new words. Insufficient preparation for teaching, teachers' inabilities to deal with challenges that take place in teaching context because of the lack of training, inadequate knowledge, teachers' poor language ability, and teachers whose English is not their subject area hired to teach it are also being the problems related to those issues that has been occurred.

Teaching English as a foreign language to young children are a complex task especially for teaching them to read and write. The contribution of many complex skills and concepts, including phonological and phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principles, a rich vocabulary, as well as comprehension are required for students being able to read fluently (Snow, 2008; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

In order to help students in gaining their literacy knowledge, several instructions needed to introduce to the young children early. With finding what the proper support would be given to the student, it is the teacher who may go through many strategies and instructions to provide the necessary experiences to each student (Hall, 2014).

Ariati, (2018) conducted a related study at one of the innovative bilingual Kindergarten schools in Bali. This study intended to share how to implement Jolly Phonics strategies as an effective strategy for enhancing children's literacy. The study found that the native teacher has been a success in implementing the Jolly Phonics Strategy. Reeb, (2011) discover that the amount of time spent on phonics instruction in kindergarten classrooms varied greatly and that a variety of instructional practices were being used. The study did find significant agreement regarding the desired outcomes of phonics instruction in kindergarten classrooms.

Beliefs have often been considered important because of their relation to practice. Therefore, Campbell, Torr, & Cologon, (2012) conducted research that aimed to analyze strategies used that are being the most preferred in teaching the alphabet to the prior to school students and their reported reasons. This study found that commercial phonics programs include *Jolly Phonics*, *Letterland*, *Ants*, *Apples and the ABCs* were being used in 36% of the early childhood settings surveyed. Campbell, Torr, & Cologon, (2014) in his further study conducted research that aimed to determine the reasons in commercial phonics programs as their preferred programs with children aged five and under. The study found that their reasons were pragmatic rather than pedagogical.

Little is known about prior-to school teachers' beliefs about children's English print literacy development, particularly in Indonesia in which English is still used as a foreign language. It is important for university and college educators to consider, from the perspective of preschool teachers, what is needed to improve the quality of their studies, particularly with regards to early literacy education.

Therefore, in this study the researcher aims to determine the strategies used by the teachers in one of innovative bilingual babies and toddlers school in Semarang and to find out the reasons and their reported beliefs in their decision of preferring those strategies to teach alphabet to their students to assist them in their emergent literacy in acquiring English alphabet knowledge as a foundation of English literacy continue to grow.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research design is following the criteria of descriptive qualitative research design. Agar, (1998: 413) conveys that "Qualitative researchers collect descriptive-narrative and visuals, non-numerical to gain insight into the phenomena of interest". In this term, the researcher wants to describe the phenomenon in according to actual circumstances.

This part deals with the target of the research study. It refers to the populations which are meant by the entire group of persons, things, or events that shares at least one common trait (Sprinthall et al, 1990).

Therefore, the participants in this study are 10 non-native talented and experienced teachers in one of innovative bilingual preschool Semarang who have been experiencing in teaching alphabet knowledge and skills towards prior-to school students in which English is used as their foreign language. They are graduated from several different varieties of qualifications. Thus, they were chosen as they are appropriate with the particular social situation regarding these research questions.

This study focuses on the teachers' practices and their self-reported beliefs in teaching alphabet strategies. This research is an endeavor to determine strategy supported by the early years teachers to assist prior-to school students' emergent literacy in acquiring English alphabet knowledge as their beliefs

in the strategies are being used. Thus, the object of this study is the teaching alphabet strategy and their self-reported beliefs in strategy for students in prior-to school. Prior-to school in this term refers to the pre-schoolers in Bee Bee Gym Semarang in the age of three to four years.

Besides, this research conducts some instruments within the use of questionnaire and the interview. The questionnaires was aimed to determine what phonics strategies used by the early years teachers at this center to teach English alphabetic knowledge and skills to their young learners students in the age of under-five. using commercial phonics program, and specific statements related to the reasons and perceptions in the teachers' decision of implementing the strategies.

In order to know what motivates early years teachers' teaching phonics strategies to their prior to school students, as well as their beliefs in the typical phonics strategies, the researcher also conduct the interview process with the participants. In this case, the interview guide is provided structurally in the form of the questions regarding the research problems. In order to make the researcher easier in investigating the data, the audio recording was used. It was done when the participants were doing the interview.

The researcher analyzed the data by using steps of early years teaching phonics strategies analysis by Campbell et al., (2012). The types of teaching phonics strategies were analyzed using the theory of Morrow, L., & Tracey, (1997), while the beliefs in the children' early literacy learning processes were based on Snow (2008).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It consists of both the early years teachers' self-reported practices in teaching phonics strategies and the teachers' self-reported beliefs in appropriate early literacy teaching. The researcher had analysed the questionnaire as the first research instrument in the survey design, and the data interview to find out the theme of each question. The result of the data survey were analysed using descriptive analysis (SPSS 21.0) to determine what strategies used by the early years teachers at this center to teach alphabet knowledge to the young learners students and the results of the data interview were analysed using analysis of themes based on repetitions Ryan & Bernard, (1996).

With finding what strategies used by the early years teachers at this center, 24 statements were provided in this study in which the participants were required to respond each statement on a five-point Likert scale which is ranging from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'unsure', 'agree', 'strongly agree'.

Commercial Phonics Program Used by the Early Years Teachers

The evident of the early year's teachers' preferences on a commercial phonics program as the teaching phonics strategy for young learners' students at this center are described on the statements below:

Table 1. *Teachers Practices Currently Using CPP*

Statement Item	Statements	Yes		No		Unsure	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
9	I use all the major parts of a commercial phonics program to teach letters/sounds introduction	6	60%	0	0%	4	40%

12a	I have a commercial phonics program but only use parts of the program because I only have access to parts of the program	0	0%	7	70%	3	30%
12b	I have a commercial phonics program but only use parts of the program because I have chosen to use only components are relevant for children	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%
14	I use a commercial phonics program to teach letters and sounds only	5	50%	1	10%	4	40%
16	I follow a commercial phonics program suggested sequence of letters introduction	4	40%	3	30%	3	30%

In this part, we focus solely on the responses of the teachers who stated that they are currently using commercial phonics program to teach alphabetic knowledge to their students. The result suggests although teachers at this center are using commercial phonics programs, they are adapting programs in a range of ways that they felt relevant for the service, children and their beliefs.

Moreover, giving the large evidence of the teachers' preferences on this strategy comparing to one another, the researcher tried to determine the mean score of each program. Using statistics descriptive SPSS 21.0 the mean score of early years teachers' preferences on commercial phonics program are described on the table below:

Table 2. *Early Years Teachers' Preferences on CPP*

Statement Item	Statement	Mean	Range Likert Scale
9	I use all the major parts of a commercial phonics program to teach letters/sounds introduction	3.70	Agree
12a	I have a commercial phonics program but only use parts of the program because I only have access to parts of the program	1.70	Disagree
12b	I have a commercial phonics program but only use parts of the program because I have chosen to use only components are relevant for children	4.00	Agree
14	I use a commercial phonics program to teach letters and sounds only	3.40	Agree
16	I follow a commercial phonics program suggested sequence of letters introduction	2.70	Unsure
Mean Score		3.10	Agree

From the table served above, it can be concluded that all of the teachers at this center mostly used commercial phonics program to teach alphabetic knowledge to their students within citing a reason that they employ only parts of the programs that they felt relevant for their practice as well as their beliefs in appropriate early literacy teaching (statement 12b). Furthermore, the analysis result of the teachers' preferences in using a commercial phonics program showed that teachers at this center were working on this program beyond their classroom within the mean score showed in the range scale of 3.10 and it falls within the criterion scale of "agree".

Play-Based Literacy Learning Strategies Used by The Early Years Teachers

Given the benefit of play-oriented learning in prior-to school years, this study contributes to the discussion by investigating early childhood teachers' preferences on play-based literacy language learning strategies as the teaching phonics strategy for their young learner students. The evident of the teachers' responses are described on the table below:

Table 3. *Teachers Practices Using Play-Based Literacy learning*

Statement Item	Statements	Yes		No		Unsure	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
2	I do much incidental teaching about letters and sounds in the course of everyday activities	5	50%	2	20%	3	30%
4	I don't teach the alphabet in a structured way, but I do letter awareness indirectly, e.g. name cards	4	40%	1	10%	5	50%
8	I plan and teach with a balance of picture book reading, play based writing and letter/sound introduction	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%
23	I am currently using a commercial phonics program, but I would prefer not to use it	0	0%	4	40%	5	50%
20	I would never use a commercial phonics program	2	20%	3	30%	5	50%

In this part of the study, the researcher describes, on the other hand, the teachers' responses on the play-based literacy learning strategy as the strategy to teach alphabetic knowledge to the early years' students. This section determines how teachers at this center used play-based literacy learning strategies. From the table served above, it can be seen that the result suggests that the early years teachers at this center were teaching letter and sounds to their children in a way of child-centered practices, for example they teach the alphabetic knowledge through shared-reading book and play-based letters and sounds introduction (stat.8).

Table 4. *Early Years Teachers Practices on Play-Based Literacy Learning*

Statement Item	Statement	Mean	Range Likert Scale
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2	I do much incidental teaching about letters and sounds in the course of everyday activities	3.30	Agree
4	I don't teach the alphabet in a structured way, but I do letter awareness indirectly, e.g. name cards	3.40	Agree
8	I plan and teach with a balance of picture book reading, play-based writing and letter/sound introduction	4.00	Agree
23	I am currently using a commercial phonics program, but I would prefer not to use it	2.20	Unsure
20	Most of the children in my service can already read and write	2.30	Unsure
Mean Score		3.08	Agree

Based on the analysis result of the data questionnaire above, it is found that teachers at this center were preferred as well to use Play-based literacy learning as the strategy to teach alphabetic knowledge to their young learner students with the balance of adult-shared picture book reading and play-based writing and letter-sounds introduction. With the evidence showing that the mean score of the teachers' preferences on play-based literacy learning falls within the criterion scale of "agree" within the range score of 3.08.

Regarding early years teachers' preferences toward the strategies, there was a chart showing the comparison of both group:



Figure 1. *Comparison of Commercial Phonics Program and Play-based Literacy Learning Strategies Used by The Teachers*

Consider both groups of teachers' decisions in using commercial phonics programs and play-based literacy learning, the result emphasized that the commercial phonics program was highly being practiced by early years teachers at this center than other play-based literacy learning strategies.

However, the findings suggested that teachers at this center were employing both forms of teaching phonics strategies for their prior-to school students.

The Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Commercial Phonics Program

The following table was the mean score and range scale criterion of teachers' beliefs on commercial phonics program on a five-Likert scale using SPSS 21.0 descriptive analysis.

Table 5. *Early Years Teachers' Beliefs on CPP*

Statement Item	Statement	Mean	Range Likert Scale
3	Children need to have formal pre-reading instruction	2.80	Unsure
5	I like to use commercial phonics programs *A commercial phonics program is usually in a kit form and may have multiple elements e.g. charts, books, word cards, video, and audiotapes. Example of commercial phonics programmes include Letterland and Jolly Phonics	3.70	Agree
7	Parents want me to use a commercial phonics program	2.30	Unsure
19	The children in my service love using CPP	3.50	Agree
21	Without CPP children will not learn pre-reading skills	2.30	Unsure
22	There was a commercial phonics program already in place at the center when I started and I continued to use it	3.40	Agree
Mean Score		3.00	Unsure

Table 5 illustrated that the mean score of the teachers' beliefs on the commercial phonics program is 3.00 within the range scale criterion is "unsure". However, by contrast, there will be discrepancies happened to the mean score of the teachers act on commercial phonics program and to what teachers' beliefs on commercial phonics program. The discrepancies can be considered through the result of the mean score of each group, those are early years teachers practices on CPP with the mean score of 3.10 that is meant "agree" (table 4.2) and the early years teachers' beliefs on CPP with the mean score of 3.00 that is meant "unsure".

Teachers' Motivations in Their Decision of Using Commercial Phonics Program

Given that there were discrepancies happened to the teachers practices and their beliefs on commercial phonics program, this study aims to explore what motivates early years teachers in using commercial phonics program to their prior-to school students and to find out whether or not they reported beliefs on explicit teaching phonics strategies that could contribute to later children's literacy development. Teachers motivations in using CPP are now will be discussed as follows:

1. Higher management decision.

The shreds of evidence are illustrated in the following statements:

I use this program just because when I start to work at this center, management had decided to employ this program to teach the alphabetic knowledge to their students, so as I follow their instruction (A)

I think, there will be no choice of me to choose what program is to teach alphabetic knowledge to my students. I do not know the way of teaching phonics so I just follow the management decision (C)

All the participants reported that they use commercial phonics programs because the higher management had decided to buy and employ this commercial phonics programs (Letterland Program) to teach letters and sounds to their student. They stated that they just follow the instruction of how to teach the letters and sounds to their students that had been being instructed to them. Most of the participants reported that they had no choice in to what strategies they must be adapted in teaching literacy to their beginner students because they had no sufficient knowledge in teaching literacy for the young learners students and how it should be applied.

2. Children's interests and enjoyment.

This is evident in the following statement:

I think this program is easy for use, comprehensive because, in all of its elements, Letterland include interesting media like the cartoon, storytelling as well as the song. I am sure that this program very well knows about what the children need even it is explicitly and directed teachers learning but they never skipped components that make children enthusiast in learning. (A)

Based on the result of the data interview above, it is showed that all of ten participants reported that they decided to use this program because they felt that this program support children's interest and enjoyment in learning phonics because it provides many interactive and enjoyment resources for children such as stories, interactive videos, interactive games, song, dance, and picture books.

3. Personal preference for using a program

Here are the evidence showed in the following statements:

Letterland provides everything I need to teach my students about sounds and letters, or other, I think this program created by researchers and literacy genius. so, I don't have to. You just can buy them. (J)

I like that there are learning resources for it (Letterland). Because there will be a lot of the time the teachers can be making learning resources all the time, well, why do we need to do that when there are already resources there? So, let's use the resources already out there. (L)

You get the posters, and you get the information, you get the books, you get everything! (H)

Besides of this program provides many children's interests and enjoyment in its resources, commercial phonics programs, furthermore, this program could reduce the teacher's workload. Seven of the ten teachers stated that they use a commercial phonics program because it provides many resources, such as teacher manuals, literacy, lesson plans, alphabet flashcards, alphabet CDs, songs, picture books, games and worksheets for duplication, which they would otherwise need to create for themselves.

These statements reveal several assumptions about literacy development. First, the teachers see 'learning resources' as playing a central role in children's emergent literacy development. The evidence showed by the statement revealed on the point one by the teacher stated that letterland program provided everything that the teacher needs to teach literacy to their students. Secondly, there was a report suggested that commercial phonics program can reduce the teachers' workload because everything that they needed as the learning materials had been provided completely in this program so that they did not need to create by themselves.

The interview finding will now be explored:

Teachers' Inability to Define Phonic, Phonics Instruction, Phonemic Awareness, and the Alphabetic Principle Are

It is claimed that commercial phonics programs teach reading through an explicit focus on phonics. During the interviews, it became clear that some teachers who have chosen to use commercial phonics programs (Letterland Program) were not able to articulate what phonics, phonological awareness,

phonemic awareness, and the alphabetic principle are and why they are foundational for subsequent reading and writing in the conventional sense of the word. The following statements are typical when they asked to clarify what phonics was:

Phonics is about the sounds in words. (B)

Phonics is about sounding the letters. (A)

The teachers then explained that they had relied on the manuals provided by the programs, in-service training conducted by partner and management representatives, or watching others engaged in lessons using commercial phonics programs for their understanding of phonological awareness. The following comments are typical:

Some of my teachers have never been introduced to Letterland or any other commercial phonics program, so I have got to teach them how our program works, and so only depending on the training program at this center. (F)

We've done in services (in-service training) about it (phonics) about Letterland. We had a Letterland training program in Jakarta by the management. (G)

I have no background in phonics, English is not my background area, I am from Education Psychology and there was no teaching phonics knowledge, I just know the teaching phonics strategy recently when I started working at this center. (H)

This indicates that some teachers may be making decisions about the use of formal didactic methods with very young children without a proper letter and sound knowledge base about how literacy is learned and how they can support children's understanding. This suggests that these early childhood teachers have a general lack of knowledge about early oral language and literacy development and need a greater understanding of phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and phonics, and how these concepts should be taught to young children.

The Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Play-Based Literacy Learning

The following table was the mean score and range scale criterion of teachers' beliefs on play-based literacy learning on a five-Likert scale using SPSS 21.0 descriptive analysis.

Table 6. *Early Years Teachers' Beliefs on Play-Based Literacy Learning*

Statement Item	Statement	Mean	Range Likert Scale
1	Children learn letters and sounds incidentally	2.80	Unsure
6	It is not appropriate to teach letters and sounds in my context as they will learn them at school	2.70	Unsure
17	One of the ways children learn letters and sounds is by sharing picture books with adults	4.10	Strongly Agree
13	Sometimes children can recite the letters of the alphabet but don't know what it is meant	3.70	Agree
11	Some parents at my service take their children to after-school pre-reading tutoring services	3.10	Agree
24	Children in my service can already read and write	2.30	Unsure
Mean Score		3.06	Agree

Table 6 illustrated that the mean score of the teachers' beliefs on the commercial phonics program is 3.06 within the range scale criterion is "Agree". Here, there is a correlation between the mean score of teachers' beliefs on play-based literacy learning and their practices in this strategy. The correlation can be realized through the result of the mean score of each group, those are early years teachers practices on play-based literacy strategy with the mean score of 3.08 means "agree" (table 4.4) and the early years

teachers' beliefs on play-based literacy learning with the mean score of 3.06 which also falls within the range scale criterion of "agree".

Early Years Teachers' Motivations in Play-based Literacy Learning

With finding what motivates early years teachers at this center working with play-based literacy learning strategy to teach phonics to the young learners' students, two key themes emerged from the interview are being described as follows:

1. Teachers' considerable in some deficiencies of the commercial phonics program to teach alphabetic knowledge to young learners' students

The evidences in statements are as follow:

As long as I am teaching at this center, the main resource is from the Letterland itself, but in a fact, we can not only depend on this program, because in some cases, this program can cause boring for children as they have to watch, pay attention to the LCD, and listen to the materials through the whole time. (A)

I am sure that this program is very well known about what the children need even it is for learning but they never skipped components that make children enthusiast in learning. The difficulty is only in the vocabulary, there are some words or vocabulary that no presence in our country. In this case, I feel difficult to grow up their imagination. (B)

Throughout the interviews, the most deficiency happened to what the participants reported about the Letterland program typically employed by commercial phonics programs are in the stories provided in the program. The stories are considerable highly initiated to ask children on keeping the focus on the stories, listening to the stories on very long duration and then make the children get bored.

2. Early years teachers' awareness of play are considered being the central mechanism of children's learning and fundamental to early childhood development learning

A teacher, for example, commented that:

We as a teacher also need to consider what the children needs, they need to move, maybe dancing, sing-along, then considering these things we create substantial resources that are linked to some activities like in a play, music, and art. A is for Apple. At that time, I taught phonics to my students in a play class so I have to think to integrate the learning material, in this case, we say A, in such a play activity. We are integrating the letter A into a sociodramatic play experience in a classroom playing with an Apple. (A)

Whilst, the teachers at this center reported that they used commercial phonics program to their young learner students, they described a range of teaching phonics and phonics instruction aligned with holistic, child-centered view and play-based approach. Results of the interview showed that although early years teachers at this center were using explicit systematic directed teachers teaching phonics, teachers reported that they consider the use of commercial phonics program based on the children needs and situation. They were realized that playing is a central mechanism of children's learning process. Furthermore, Teachers at this center reported that they integrate teaching phonics in to what activities that the children interested in such as in play, music and art activities for children.

3. Early years teachers believe in play and literacy teaching curriculum for children cannot be separated but should be integrated into each other

Any widespread use of a commercial phonics program raises issues about the role of the teacher whereby teachers realized as they were a professional decision-maker. Some of the interviewees touched on this issue reporting that they used commercial phonics programs according to their own purposes and did not necessarily follow the programs exactly as suggested by the publishers, suggesting that they felt they had the autonomy to make their own pedagogical decisions as teachers expressed it to make their own pedagogical decisions as teachers expressed it:

I think it (Letterland) is quite flexible, but I think that it depends on the teacher. I think anything is adaptable if you can work out how to adapt it ... that is more on the teacher rather than the program.

Sometimes children were not ready to be delivered the materials we had been provided. We all teachers had created a lesson plan considering the time schedule of giving the learning materials. But as teachers, we need to pay attention to our children's attitude whether it will be possible for us to give materials directly without giving any children's specific time's needs.

At this center, every student has their own name tag, we play a game, I get them to take a name, by saying that there is a child whose names start with B and all the children know it. We may use another letter like A and all the children whose name starts with that.

All the teachers stated that they engaged in practices that would be congruent with an emergent literacy play-based pedagogy, including building explicit instruction about sound-letter into everyday activities, such as drawing attention to letters starting a child's name, decorating the letters and scribing on children's drawings.

As a result of the finding, then the researcher discusses the early years' teachers' strategies in teaching letter and sounds to their young learners' students and their reported beliefs in appropriate early literacy teaching strategies for young learner students. The first question of this research was asking about Alphabet knowledge and skills teaching strategies suggested by the early years teachers at this center to teach letters and sound to their prior-to schools' students. The result emphasized that the teachers at this center prefer working on the combined approach of teaching phonics to their young learner students in order to support their prior-to school students' early literacy development of English alphabetic principles.

This approach suggested the form of the way of teaching phonics in which both systematic explicit phonics instruction and contextual instructions are used. Furthermore, the teaching of letters and sounds and children's motor movement were integrated into one approach considered to the children's developmental and neurological needs within the teachers over largely focused on systematic explicit teaching phonics as their main learning resources to teach letters and sounds to their students then followed by children's playing activities after commercial phonics program within citing reasons in several number of grounds. This finding is aligned to what Ariati (2018) has been conducted previous study about early literacy development of Indonesian young learner students in one of kindergarten school in Denpasar found that the teachers at the center were desired to teach phonics to their young learners students using one of commercial phonics program names Jolly phonics as their main learning resources through variety of enjoyable and meaningful techniques for children.

In this case, phonics at this center was being taught by integrating a systematic-explicit directed-teacher teaching phonics which is adult initiated into a meaningful and authentic context in which the systematic-explicit teaching phonics strategies as the main teaching phonics curriculum and the playing activities follow. Thus, the teachers provide playing as an addition part activity for children instead of commercial phonics program. In addition, the letters and sounds are taught through meaningful experiences for children such as learning new vocabularies in the children's immediate interest and letters in the child's names, decorating the letter with the materials provided, identifying letters and sounds in a socio-dramatic play, singing, moving, and experimenting the print to help children become familiar with the form of letters and practice forming them using clay or dough. The combined approach employed by all of the teachers at this center also supported by some research such as researches conducted by Morrow & Doherty (2011); Arrow (2011) and Snow (2006) that claimed effective early literacy development occurs if there are a balance of componential-code breaking skills, academic instruction, together with child-centered, and meaning-focused instruction within culturally mediated learning environments. This view supporting early literacy involves both systematic teaching and a child-centered approach blended to create a comprehensive early literacy model.

Early childhood beliefs and knowledge are needed to be considered as crucial in early literacy teaching and important to be investigated as it is related to the teachers' practices. This study however, has sought to explore prior-to school teachers' beliefs in appropriate early literacy teaching as well as what motivates early childhood teachers in preferring those strategies. Further investigation also found that teachers have limited knowledge about phonics and phonics instruction, phonemes and phonological awareness, how it is learnt and how it is contributed to later reading and writing development.

Findings from interview data raise issues about teachers' motivations and beliefs toward commercial phonics programs as a strategy to teach phonics to the students in the age under five. The researcher found that the reasons given by early childhood literacy teachers at this center for using commercial phonics programs over declared on the teachers' needs and preferences rather than on the children's learning development. The commercial phonics program they had been used was valued as the learning resource that can save the teachers' time, reduce their workload, and the children's enjoyment in every learning process that the teachers' have been provided through this program. This finding is in line with the previous study conducted by Campbell (2015) that provided evidence that suggests early years teachers may be implementing commercial phonics program because of pragmatic reasons such as already in use in the center, teachers' preferences, and higher management. The children's' enjoyments, however, perceived values for the teachers to decide and keep on working with this program considered to this program includes several activities whereby, it would increase the children's participation in a learning process. The fact that the children enjoyments using this program has been declared as insufficient justification for the teaching and learning process as Campbell (2018, p.8) said that "...the children enjoy many things which would be seen as in appropriate early literacy teaching".

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that the early years teachers who were using commercial phonics, explicit-directed teaching phonics to early years students do not have provision knowledge about phonics, phonics instruction, early literacy and language development and how to teach literacy for their young learner students to enable the teachers to make their own decisions about whether or not they have to utilize this commercial phonics program and profit to explicit teaching phonics strategies when they were teaching literacy to their students. The fact that these teachers reported that they use this program because they felt that this program support children's interest and enjoyment in the learning process, though there were no beliefs reported by the teachers that commercial phonics program or explicit teaching phonics strategies can support children's school readiness or literacy development to grow. This finding is contradicted to that Campbell (2014) found in his study that prior-to schoolteachers who were adapting commercial phonics programs reported strong beliefs against phonics instruction, that commercial phonics program can support children's readiness and promote children's self-esteem in their later reading success.

Despite investigating what early years teachers' beliefs in commercial phonics program, this study furthermore sought to explore teachers' beliefs in play-based literacy learning strategies as the strategy being preferred as well by the teachers at this center to teach letters and sounds to their students. Three key themes emerged from the interview that motivates early childhood teachers at this center to apply play-based literacy learning strategies for their young learners' students. The teachers interviewed supported phonics instruction integrated into play-based learning. They endorsed a curriculum-generated play code model (Johnston, 2014), implementing phonics instruction over largely focused on commercial phonics program as their main learning resources and the play follows. The teachers' explanation about why they decided to teach phonics within integrating explicit systematic teaching phonics in a rich play activities made evident that they argued that despite the effectiveness and the efficiency of teaching

phonics in commercial phonics program to foster their students early literacy development, early years teachers at this center have, however, reported that this program was still needed to be adapted on the children's needs and responses in the whole learning literacy process.

Some of the interviewees touched on this issue, reporting that they used commercial phonics programs according to their purposes and did not necessarily follow the programs exactly as specified by the publishers, suggesting that they felt they had the autonomy to make their own pedagogical decisions. Based on the statements reported above, thus early years teachers at this center decided to combine systematic-explicit teaching phonics approach and play-based literacy learning strategy to teach letter and sound to their young learner students.

As a result, it was found that early years teachers at this center make beliefs that play, explicit, systematic, and intensive teaching literacy for children cannot be separated but should be integrated into each other. It was supported by the research suggested that there was no two children were the same and phonics teaching needs to be responsive to individual children. Both Synthetic and analytical phonics approaches, skill-based or child-centered views all play a part in the early year's classroom. It is a responsive and knowledgeable teacher who can ensure that every opportunity to develop children's code-related skills is met (MacNair., et al, 2006).

CONCLUSION

According to the above finding and discussion, it denotes that early years teachers' strategies in teaching alphabetic knowledge implementing curriculum-generated code play model defined by Johnson. This model of teaching phonics follows theorists in Morrow and Tracey that support early literacy teaching through systematic-explicit teaching phonics that is embedded in authentic, contextual and meaningful experiences for children over-focused on explicit teaching phonics as a strategy to teach phonics to the young learners' students. Through the research findings that have been discussed before, it is concluded that early years teachers at this center are highly preference on Commercial Phonics Program as the main learning resources in teaching phonics to their prior-to school students, then playing activities follows. Although teachers were following a more structured approach to teach phonics, including a commercial phonics program, they adapt the program when they considered it appropriate and relevant for children to do so.

Beliefs on the appropriate early literacy teaching also lead to the thematic analysis pattern. Teachers at this center believe that playing is a central tendency of children's development and it could not be separated in the teaching curriculum and every child learning process. Broadly speaking, they argued that phonics teaching needs to be responsive to individual children. However, there was no strong evidence reported by early years teachers at this center, claimed that systematically explicit teaching phonics may support further children's literacy development and give opportunities for their students' literacy to continue to grow. Further analysis of the result of this study also found that early literacy teachers at this center were not able to articulate what phonics, phonemics, and phonological awareness is and how it will support children's later literacy development.

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