

The Effectiveness of the Phonics Method on Second-Grade Students' Reading and Writing Literacy Skills

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Abstract

Low reading and writing literacy skills among elementary school students remain a serious educational issue, particularly in early grades where students are still developing basic literacy foundations. At SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, many second-grade students experienced difficulties in recognizing letters, identifying letter sounds, and forming words, which affected their overall learning process. Although previous studies have shown the effectiveness of the phonics method in early literacy instruction, limited research has examined its implementation in the context of elementary schools in Sorong Regency. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas. This study employed a quantitative pre-experimental design using a One Group Pretest-Posttest Design. The participants consisted of 22 second-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through literacy tests and questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' literacy achievement after the implementation of the phonics method. The average score increased from 57.09 in the pretest to 76.09 in the posttest, with a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the phonics method effectively strengthened students' understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds, which contributed to better reading accuracy and writing ability. In addition, students became more active, confident, and enthusiastic during the learning process. The study highlights the practical contribution of the phonics method as an effective instructional strategy for improving early literacy skills, particularly for lower-grade elementary students in contexts with limited literacy achievement.

Keywords: Phonics Method; Reading and Writing Literacy; Early Literacy Instruction

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Introduction

Reading and writing literacy is one of the most essential skills that students must develop in elementary education because it becomes the foundation for understanding learning materials and participating in classroom activities. Students with good literacy skills are generally able to understand instructions, express ideas, and follow lessons more effectively. In contrast, students with limited literacy skills often experience difficulties in recognizing letters, understanding words, reading sentences, and writing simple texts. These difficulties may affect their academic development in other subjects because reading and writing are closely related to all learning processes in school (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, literacy remains a serious educational issue, particularly at the elementary school level. According to PISA data, Indonesia still ranks relatively low in reading literacy achievement compared to many other countries (Tohir, 2019). This issue is also found in Eastern Indonesia, including Papua, where students still face challenges in developing basic reading and writing skills. Literacy not only refers to the ability to read and write but also to the ability to process, understand, evaluate, and use information effectively in daily life (Halim, 2017). Therefore, strengthening literacy skills from an early age is important to support students' academic achievement and lifelong learning skills.

Reading and writing literacy skills are especially important for lower-grade elementary students because this stage represents the beginning of formal literacy development. Students in early grades are

still learning to recognize letters, understand letter sounds, combine syllables, and form words and sentences. Students who fail to master early literacy skills often experience difficulties in understanding learning materials in higher grades. Therefore, effective instructional methods are needed to help students develop literacy skills systematically and meaningfully.

Based on preliminary observations conducted on August 29, 2025, at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, the researcher found that the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students were still low. Out of 22 students, 12 students experienced difficulties in recognizing letters, identifying letter sounds, reading simple words, and writing basic sentences. Some students were unable to identify letters shown by the teacher or pronounce simple words correctly. These problems affected students' participation and confidence during classroom learning activities. The findings indicate that students need more structured and engaging literacy instruction to improve their reading and writing abilities.

One instructional approach that can be used to address this problem is the phonics method. The phonics method emphasizes the relationship between letters and sounds, helping students recognize, pronounce, and combine sounds into words. Through phonics instruction, students learn reading and writing gradually by understanding sound patterns and spelling structures. According to Try Evelina et al. (2024), phonics supports students in developing early literacy skills because it trains them to connect sounds with written symbols systematically. Similarly, phonics instruction improves students' ability to decode words, recognize spelling patterns, and increase reading fluency through structured sound-letter activities (Algamal & Altairi, 2024). Albaloooshi (2024) also explains that phonics instruction is effective for improving reading comprehension and pronunciation accuracy because students learn to recognize language patterns more clearly.

In addition, recent studies continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of phonics instruction in elementary literacy learning. Ayuningtyas (2025) found that the integration of phonics instruction with interactive learning media improved students' early reading achievement and classroom participation. Similarly, Ndijuye (2025) reported that systematic phonics instruction significantly supports foundational literacy development, particularly among students with limited literacy exposure. These findings indicate that phonics instruction remains a relevant and effective strategy for improving literacy skills among young learners.

Several previous studies in Indonesia have also reported positive results regarding the implementation of the phonics method in literacy learning. Lestari (2022) found that game-based phonics instruction improved students' reading and writing skills significantly in elementary school classrooms. Hasanudin et al. (2023) also reported that phonics learning improved students' literacy achievement and classroom participation at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency. In addition, Maharani and Susanto (2024) concluded that the phonics method effectively enhanced early reading ability among first-grade elementary students. These studies demonstrate that phonics instruction contributes positively to students' literacy development.

However, most previous studies mainly focused on general reading ability or early literacy improvement without specifically examining reading and writing literacy skills together in the context of second-grade students in Sorong Regency. In addition, limited studies have investigated the implementation of the phonics method in SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, where students still experience significant difficulties in recognizing letters and sounds. This gap highlights the need for further research to examine how the phonics method can support literacy development in this specific educational context.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical contributions for teachers in selecting effective literacy teaching strategies and to support the improvement of elementary students' literacy achievement, particularly in lower-grade classrooms.

Literature Review

a. Reading and Writing Literacy

Reading and writing literacy refers to the ability to read, write, understand, process, and communicate information effectively in various contexts. Literacy is not only limited to recognizing letters and words but also involves the ability to interpret meaning and express ideas through written language (Halim, 2017). In elementary education, reading and writing literacy becomes the foundation for students to understand learning materials and participate actively in classroom activities. Students with good literacy skills tend to achieve better academic performance because they are able to comprehend instructions, analyze information, and communicate their ideas effectively. Early literacy development is particularly important for lower-grade elementary students because this stage forms the basis for future learning. At this stage, students begin learning letter recognition, phonological awareness, word decoding, and sentence construction. According to Kurniawan et al. (2020), students who fail to develop basic literacy skills at the early stage often encounter learning difficulties in higher grades. Therefore, teachers need to implement effective instructional strategies that support students' literacy development systematically and meaningfully.

b. The Phonics Method

The phonics method is an instructional approach that teaches the relationship between letters and sounds to help students read and write more effectively. Through phonics instruction, students learn how sounds are represented by letters and how letters can be combined to form syllables and words. This method helps students decode unfamiliar words and improves their reading fluency and spelling ability. According to Try Evelina et al. (2024), phonics instruction helps students connect sounds with written symbols systematically, making the reading process easier for beginning learners. Similarly, Algamal and Altairi (2024) explain that phonics instruction strengthens students' decoding ability, pronunciation, and spelling accuracy because students learn language patterns directly through sound-letter relationships. Albaloooshi (2024) also states that phonics-based instruction improves students' reading comprehension and word recognition because learners become more familiar with phonological patterns in language. The phonics method is considered effective because it introduces literacy skills gradually, starting from letter recognition to word formation and sentence reading. Students not only memorize letters but also understand how sounds function in written language. In addition, phonics activities are often delivered through engaging strategies such as sound games, picture cards, songs, and word exercises, which help increase students' participation and motivation during learning.

c. Previous Related Studies

Several previous studies have investigated the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving students' literacy skills. Lestari (2022) examined the use of game-based phonics instruction among second-grade elementary students and found that students' reading and writing achievement improved significantly after the implementation of phonics activities. The study emphasized that interactive phonics learning helped students recognize words more accurately and increased classroom engagement. Similarly, Hasanudin et al. (2023) conducted research at SD Muhammadiyah Malawili, Sorong Regency, and reported that phonics learning improved students' reading literacy achievement and classroom participation. The study found that students became more active and confident during literacy learning because phonics instruction provided systematic guidance in recognizing sounds and letters.

Furthermore, Maharani and Susanto (2024) investigated the effectiveness of the phonics method on first-grade students' early reading ability. Their findings revealed that phonics instruction significantly improved students' decoding skills and reading fluency. The study concluded that phonics is particularly beneficial for lower-grade students who are still developing foundational literacy skills.

Recent international studies also support the effectiveness of phonics instruction. Ayuningtyas (2025) found that integrating phonics instruction with interactive learning media improved students' early reading achievement and participation in literacy activities. Meanwhile, Ndijuye (2025) reported that systematic phonics instruction effectively supports foundational literacy development among students with limited literacy exposure. Although these studies consistently show positive results, most of them focus mainly on reading ability rather than examining reading and writing literacy skills together.

In addition, previous studies were generally conducted in broader elementary school contexts and rarely focused specifically on students in Sorong Regency, particularly at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas.

Most studies also emphasized general literacy improvement without examining the specific difficulties experienced by second-grade students in recognizing letters, sounds, and word formation. Therefore, this study differs from previous research because it specifically investigates the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving both reading and writing literacy skills among second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. This study also contributes to the existing literature by focusing on a local educational context where students still experience significant early literacy challenges.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. Quantitative research was selected because it allows the researcher to measure students' learning outcomes numerically and analyze the effectiveness of the instructional treatment statistically. The research used a pre-experimental design with a One Group Pretest–Posttest Design. In this design, one group of students was given a pretest before the treatment and a posttest after the treatment. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to identify changes in students' reading and writing literacy skills before and after the implementation of the phonics method. However, this study also recognizes the limitation of the pre-experimental design, particularly the absence of a control group. Without a comparison group, the improvement in students' scores cannot be fully attributed only to the treatment because external factors such as students' prior learning experiences, classroom environment, or individual learning differences may also influence the results. Despite this limitation, the design was considered appropriate for preliminary classroom-based research aimed at examining the practical effectiveness of the phonics method in a real educational setting. This study consisted of one independent variable and one dependent variable. The independent variable was the phonics method applied during literacy instruction, while the dependent variable was students' reading and writing literacy skills. The study was conducted from September 25 to October 6, 2025, at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. The population of this study included all second-grade B students of SD Muhammadiyah Aimas during the 2025/2026 academic year, consisting of 22 students. Because the total number of students was relatively small, all students were selected as the research sample using a total sampling technique. Therefore, the sample of this study consisted of all 22 students in class II B.

Data were collected through literacy tests and questionnaires. The literacy test was used to measure students' reading and writing literacy skills before and after the implementation of the phonics method. The test consisted of 10 items administered in both the pretest and posttest. The questions focused on students' ability to recognize letters, identify sounds, read simple words, and write basic sentences. Meanwhile, the questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale consisting of 10 closed-ended statements to identify students' responses and engagement during the learning process. Before being administered, the research instruments were validated through expert judgment involving university lecturers and elementary education practitioners. The validation process aimed to ensure that the test items and questionnaire statements were appropriate, relevant, and understandable for second-grade students. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS analysis. The instrument was considered reliable if the reliability coefficient exceeded 0.60. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores of students' pretest and posttest results to identify the overall improvement in literacy achievement. Before conducting hypothesis testing, a normality test was performed using the Shapiro–Wilk test to determine whether the data were normally distributed. After the data met the normality assumption, a paired sample t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores after the implementation of the phonics method. The hypothesis was accepted if the significance value (p) was less than 0.05, indicating that the phonics method significantly improved students' reading and writing literacy skills.

Result

Before conducting the main analysis, the researcher tested the validity and reliability of the research instruments to ensure that the data collection tools were appropriate and consistent. The

validity test was conducted through expert judgment involving lecturers and elementary literacy practitioners. Based on the validators' evaluation, several items were revised to improve clarity and suitability for second-grade students. After revision, all items were declared valid and appropriate for measuring students' reading and writing literacy skills.

The reliability test was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS. The analysis showed a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.961$, which was higher than the minimum reliability criterion of 0.60. This result indicates that the instrument had a very high level of internal consistency, meaning that the test items consistently measured students' literacy skills. Therefore, the instrument was considered reliable for use in this study. The results of the reliability test are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Interpretation
0.961	10	Very High Reliability

Source: Output of SPSS version 25 (data processed by the researcher, 2025)

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test to determine whether the data were normally distributed before performing parametric statistical analysis. The results showed that the significance value of the pretest was 0.617 and the posttest was 0.522. Since both significance values were higher than 0.05, the data were considered normally distributed. This finding indicates that the dataset met the assumptions required for conducting the paired sample t-test. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Normality Test

Variable	Significance Value	Criterion	Interpretation
Pretest	0.617	> 0.05	Normally Distributed
Posttest	0.522	> 0.05	Normally Distributed

Source: Output of SPSS version 25 (data processed by the researcher, 2025)

Improvement of Students' Reading and Writing Literacy Skills

The results of the paired samples statistics showed a significant improvement in students' reading and writing literacy skills after the implementation of the phonics method. The mean score of the pretest was 57.09, while the mean score of the posttest increased to 76.09. This increase demonstrates that students achieved better literacy performance after participating in phonics-based learning activities. The results of the paired samples statistics are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics

Test	Mean Score	Number of Students
Pretest	57.09	22
Posttest	76.09	22

Source: Output of SPSS version 25 (data processed by the researcher, 2025)

The improvement in scores indicates that the phonics method helped students develop stronger understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds. Students became more capable of recognizing letters, reading simple words, and writing basic sentences correctly. In addition, the increase in posttest scores suggests that students were not only memorizing letters but were also able to apply phonological understanding during reading and writing activities.

The findings also revealed changes in students' classroom participation and learning behavior. During the implementation of the phonics method, students appeared more active and enthusiastic in literacy activities. Interactive phonics practices such as sound recognition, pronunciation exercises, and word games encouraged students to participate more confidently in classroom learning. These classroom observations support the statistical findings that the phonics method positively influenced students' literacy development.

Hypothesis Testing

To determine whether the improvement was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The analysis showed a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001, which was lower than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. The results of the paired sample t-test are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

Variable	Sig. (2-tailed)	Significance Level	Interpretation
Pretest – Posttest	0.001	0.05	Significant Difference

Source: Output of SPSS version 25 (data processed by the researcher, 2025)

This result indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores after the implementation of the phonics method. In other words, the phonics method had a significant positive effect on students' reading and writing literacy skills. The statistical findings confirm that phonics instruction effectively improved students' ability to recognize sounds, read words, and write correctly in early literacy learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the phonics method significantly improved the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. The improvement can be seen from the increase in the mean score from 57.09 in the pretest to 76.09 in the posttest, as well as the significance value of 0.001, which indicates that the improvement was statistically significant. However, beyond the statistical results, the findings also show that the phonics method helped students develop a better understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds, which is essential in early literacy learning.

The improvement in students' literacy skills occurred because the phonics method provides systematic instruction in recognizing sounds, combining syllables, and decoding words. Through repeated exposure to sound-letter relationships, students became more familiar with phonological patterns and were able to read and write more confidently. This finding supports the view that phonics instruction strengthens students' phonological awareness, which plays an important role in developing reading fluency and spelling ability (Ehri et al., 2001; Try Evelina et al., 2024). Students were not only memorizing letters but were also learning how sounds function within words and sentences. As a result, students became more capable of identifying words, pronouncing them correctly, and writing simple sentences accurately.

Another important finding is that the phonics method positively influenced students' classroom participation and learning motivation. During the learning process, students appeared more active and enthusiastic because the activities involved interactive practices such as sound games, pronunciation exercises, and word recognition tasks. These activities created a more engaging learning environment for young learners who are still in the early stages of literacy development. Increased participation and motivation likely contributed to the improvement in students' literacy achievement because students became more willing to practice reading and writing activities. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Ayuningtyas (2025), which found that phonics instruction integrated with interactive activities increased students' engagement and literacy performance in elementary classrooms.

The findings of this study are also consistent with several previous studies showing that phonics instruction effectively improves early literacy skills. Lestari (2022) found that game-based phonics instruction significantly enhanced elementary students' reading and writing achievement through interactive learning activities. Similarly, Hasanudin et al. (2023) reported that phonics learning improved students' literacy performance and classroom engagement in an elementary school in Sorong Regency. Maharani and Susanto (2024) also concluded that the phonics method effectively strengthened students' early reading ability. These studies support the current findings that systematic phonics instruction positively contributes to literacy development among lower-grade elementary students.

In addition, recent international studies also support the effectiveness of phonics instruction in literacy learning. Algamal and Altairi (2024) explain that phonics instruction improves students'

decoding ability and pronunciation accuracy because students learn sound-letter relationships systematically. Albaloooshi (2024) also states that phonics instruction enhances reading comprehension and spelling ability by helping students recognize language patterns more effectively. Similarly, Ndiujye (2025) found that systematic phonics instruction effectively supports foundational literacy development among students with limited literacy exposure. These findings strengthen the argument that phonics-based learning remains one of the most effective approaches for developing beginning literacy skills.

Although the findings of this study are similar to previous research, this study also provides a different contribution. Most earlier studies focused mainly on reading ability, whereas this research examined both reading and writing literacy skills simultaneously. In addition, previous studies were generally conducted in broader educational contexts, while this study specifically focused on second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, where students still experienced significant difficulties in recognizing letters, sounds, and basic word formation. Therefore, this study contributes contextual evidence showing that the phonics method can effectively support literacy development in elementary classrooms with low foundational literacy achievement.

The findings of this study are also relevant to literacy development theory, which emphasizes that early literacy instruction should provide systematic and meaningful learning experiences for children (Halim, 2017; Kurniawan et al., 2020). Phonics instruction helps students gradually connect sounds, letters, and words through structured practice, making literacy learning easier and more understandable for young learners. Furthermore, students who successfully develop early literacy skills are more likely to achieve better academic performance in higher grades because reading and writing skills become the basis for learning across subjects (Tohir, 2019).

Despite these positive findings, this study has several limitations. First, the study used a pre-experimental design without a control group, making it difficult to determine whether the improvement was caused solely by the phonics method. Second, the sample size was relatively small because the study only involved one class consisting of 22 students. Third, the duration of the treatment was relatively short, which may limit the interpretation of long-term literacy improvement. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies using larger samples, longer treatment periods, and experimental designs involving control groups to obtain stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of the phonics method. Future studies may also explore the integration of digital learning media, interactive games, or technology-assisted phonics instruction to create more engaging literacy learning experiences for elementary students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the phonics method is effective in improving the reading and writing literacy skills of second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency. The implementation of phonics instruction significantly improved students' ability to recognize letters, identify sounds, read simple words, and write basic sentences correctly. In addition to improving literacy achievement, the phonics method also increased students' classroom participation, confidence, and enthusiasm during the learning process. The findings indicate that systematic sound-letter instruction helps students develop foundational literacy skills more effectively, particularly for lower-grade elementary students who still experience difficulties in early reading and writing. This study also contributes practical evidence that the phonics method can be applied as an engaging and structured instructional strategy in elementary literacy learning, especially in contexts where students have limited literacy proficiency.

Practically, the findings of this study suggest that teachers should integrate phonics-based activities such as sound recognition, pronunciation exercises, word games, and guided reading practices into literacy instruction to create more interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Schools are also encouraged to support literacy development by providing appropriate learning media and literacy-focused classroom activities for young learners. Despite its positive findings, this study was limited by the use of a pre-experimental design without a control group, a relatively small sample size, and a short treatment duration. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve larger samples, longer instructional periods, and more rigorous experimental designs to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of the phonics method in improving elementary students' literacy skills.

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