

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of study

Reading has been one of the skills that is expected to be mastered from a very young age. Marima (2016, 207) argues that reading is considered as a fundamental base to acquire language and furthermore promote high academic performance. Indonesian famous quote goes like this “*membaca adalah jendela dunia*” meaning reading is a window to the world really hits the spot. By reading, not only we can get a lot of information, but also it can widen our way of thinking. Reading to children plays an important role in developing their language as well as building their critical thinking skills. One of the studies done by Niklas et al. (2016, 2) suggests that parents can start reading to their kids as early as possible. In the study, most participants read to their children even before they were 6-month-old. By reading as early as possible, it can create a comfortable home literacy environment for the children. Moreover, the study shows as early as it can be, reading is able to support the child’s vocabulary and literacy development. Gathumbi (2008, 46) further argues that reading helps learners to widen their vocabularies, and exposes them to ideas as well as the sentence structures that will be used in the future daily life. The habit of reading has to be started at home. Parents have to work together to create a nice home literacy

environment that can support children's learning. At school, educators can even further expose children to various kinds of book and reading materials.

In Taiwan, Wu (2005, 18), the former Minister of Education encouraged all schools to employ picture books as a tool to promote reading and develop the habit of reading since a very young age. Chiong and DeLoache (2012, 226) argued that books cannot be separated from children's lives. Parents as the first teachers use the books as a mean of teaching since their children are still very young. Rideout et al. (2003, 9) stated that as many as 96% of American parents believe that books help them develop their children's intellectual skill and most of them (79%) actively engaged in book reading on a daily basis. Parents use traditional books to read to their children due to the concept and appearance. The elements in the books: language, illustrations, socio-emotional aspects and genre play a great role in shaping books as suitable tools to start the early literacy program (Deitcher et al. 2017, 2). Just like at home, picture books are essential in preschools as well. They can be found everywhere with different sizes and colors. They are the front liner tools that introduce children to the world of reading (Hsiao and Chang 2016, 1). Picture books are critical tools to grab children's interest during circle time as well as promoting their critical thinking skills. In order to utilize these books to their maximum potential, preschool teachers have to understand the relevant teaching strategies as well as criteria to choose the suitable picture books to each student age level.

One of the popular reading strategies used frequently in an early childhood setting is shared book reading. People might get confused about what is the difference between shared book reading and interactive reading. Shared book reading is

basically an interactive reading activity between students and teachers. The researcher will use the term interactive reading to avoid confusion. Interactive reading has been a focus for research for a long time. In the past years, the focus of the research is more towards the outcomes that young children can get from interactive reading specifically on their emergent literacy skill. Furthermore, Teale (2003, 116) stated that a lot of researches focus on the way teachers read so that their students can improve their vocabularies and their comprehension. These days more researches show that how teachers read to their students and what kind of questions they ask to their students, also need more attention.

The main purpose of reading in preschools is to develop children's early literacy skill which will be essential for later conventional literacy skill (Shanahan 2012, 3). This is a really important issue because reading skill holds the key to master other skills such as writing. Even though parents and teachers start noticing the importance of early literacy skill, reading to preschoolers is still often left behind (Osei, Liang, Natalia & Stephen 2016, 35). Reading to a bunch of children who cannot sit still, cry all day long and do not respond can be time-consuming and tiring. That is the reason why reading as early as possible still becomes a difficult thing to do. Speaking about early literacy skills, there are some main skills that emerge in early preschooler years. Swanson, Trainin, Necochea & Hammill (2003, 408) mentioned that these skills have the strongest relations with future reading skill:

1. Alphabet recognition

Children are able to recognize random letters shown or in order. They are able to produce the sound as well.

2. Phonemic awareness

Children are able to manipulate and analyze the sound structure. For example, realizing that “cat” starts with “c sound”.

3. Concepts about print

Children are able to flip the book through, differentiate between pictures and text, and understand that prints convey messages.

4. Love for reading’

Children show interest in the reading activity.

To be able to read, a child has to master not only one but numerous different skills. According to The National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health and Development (2000, 19), there are 5 essential areas for developing effective reading instruction: phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and phonemic awareness. All areas are interconnected hence mastering 1 area will not guarantee a child to be able to read. Children will learn how to read as they grow. Generally, children will follow a similar pattern in developing their reading skill. First, they will start developing print awareness from the books. Followed by the phonics recognition which includes able to recognize the beginning, middle and ending sound of a word. The next step will be word recognition where children start recognizing some familiar words or high-frequency words (Brown 2014, 42).

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) conducted research to give teachers and parents some insights on how to help the children to be good readers. The result of NELP research shows that there are 6 key factors to be mastered for a successful

reading: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or numbers, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing and phonological memory (NELP 2008, 104). Furthermore, NELP mentioned 5 early literacy skills that most children have to be familiar with at the end of Kindergarten year: concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing. According to NELP research, children who do not master these factors generally fall behind their peers or do not meet the standard in each grade level. The Common Core Reading Standards: Foundational Skills (K-5) have also set some skills that children need to master before they can become fluent readers and understand what they read. The skills are focused on developing children's understanding and working knowledge of print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency (NGA and CCSSO, 2010).

Apart from the 4 skills above, picture books are proven to enhance children's vocabularies (Dickinson et al. 2010, 307). He argued that vocabulary is the core part of language itself as well as the strong predictor for the child's success in future reading skill and academic achievement. Using books and shared reading method will be an effective way to boost children's vocabularies (Biemiller and Boote 2006, 47). According to the studies there are two factors on why books and the respective method are able to enhance children's vocabularies: when the reader keeps repeating the words and when the reader elaborates the meaning of words found in the book (Penno, Wilkinson and Moore 2002, 25; Senechal 1997, 124)

Brown cited from the National Reading Panel (2000) stated that children are prepared to be a successful reader even before they enter the school. Therefore,

education in preschool plays a fundamental role in shaping and preparing children to successfully nail the reading part in the higher grade. Furthermore, through playing in preschool, children are introduced to early literacy through various kinds of picture books; it prevents the reading difficulties and prepares the children so they can transition to kindergarten in ease (Brown 2014, 45).

## **1.2. Problem Identification**

From the background, the researcher has found some important points about reading and its relation to young children's literacy skills. The researcher, however, finds her class to be lacking in literacy skills even though she has given many kinds of stimulus. From 16 students, 10 of them still have limited vocabularies, have a hard time recognizing alphabet letters and the phonic sound and do not seem to be interested in books. The teachers from Kindergarten level (4-5 years old) often complain that the students have a very difficult time in following the reading lesson. It is due to lack of knowledge in using resources such as picture books. The books in the classroom have become mere displays and not used effectively. Attempting to solve the problem, the researcher would like to make use of picture books to improve the literacy skills of her class. The picture books are used by the Kindergarten level but not on the Nursery level. The researcher intends to introduce the books earlier as an attempt to solve the problems.

### **1.3. Scope of the Study**

The researcher conducted action research which took place in her own class. The class consists of 16 students; 10 boys and 6 girls whose age ranged from 3,5 - 4 years old. The researcher used the picture books from Oxford Reading Tree provided at school. The researcher chose these books because of the availability and the stories that are relatable to children's daily life. Furthermore, the researcher's objectives for the research is improving students' emergent literacy skills: vocabulary, print awareness, alphabet recognition, phonic sound, and phonemic awareness.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

Key Research Questions:

1. How is interactive reading able to help children develop their vocabularies?
2. How is interactive reading able to help children improve their alphabets recognition?
3. How is interactive reading able to help children develop their print awareness?
4. How is interactive reading able to help children develop their phonemic awareness?
5. How is interactive reading able to help children develop their knowledge on phonic sounds?

### **1.5. Objective of the research**

The main objective of the research is to use interactive reading method with picture books to improve young children's emergent literacy skills. In detail, the researcher aims to use interactive reading to improve children's vocabularies, alphabets recognition, print awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonic sounds. Though picture books are common tools used by teachers in the class especially in a preschool setting, its effectiveness in enhancing children's literacy skill has to be further explained. The researcher wants to improve her students' understanding of the literacy area by trying to use interactive reading as a method.

### **1.6. Benefits**

This research is done specifically for preschool teachers who struggle with the class' achievement in literacy skill. We cannot deny that literacy skill is essential in early education and many preschool teachers including the researcher struggle to develop this certain skill due to many factors. This research offers an alternative teaching tool to be used in enhancing this skill. Not only for the teachers but also parents can benefit from this research. Parents as the first teacher often forget how important to read for their children. Hopefully, this research is able to give some insight for them.

## **1.7. Thesis Overview**

The first chapter of this research covers the introduction part. The researcher started the chapter by explaining the background of the study and identifying the problems that needed to be addressed then followed by the key research questions. The researcher explained further about the scope of the study as well as the objectives of the study.

The second chapter covers the literature review of all variables used in the research. The researcher included all theories and experts' point of views that support the research. To conclude the chapter, the researcher provided the theoretical framework to better picture the relation of all theories.

The third chapter covers the research method of the study. The researcher discussed the research design that she used. Moreover, the researcher provided information regarding the participants, date and time of the research, and how the data was collected. To sum up, the researcher explained on how the data was analyzed.

The fourth chapter covers the result of the research and the discussion. In this chapter, the researcher explained further about each cycle done in the research. Moreover, the researcher provided charts to explain the result of the study better.

The last chapter covers the conclusion of the research. The researcher further stated the hindrances and limitations of the research based on her experience in the class. To sum up, the researcher provided some recommendations for future research, school, parents, and also fellow teachers.