Article

Enhancing Reading Skills in Malay: The Impact of the Easy Reading Module on Preschool Children

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Abstract: Within the Malaysian context, reading is a critical foundational skill in the learning process, particularly during the early childhood education stages where cognitive development is rapid. This study examines the implementation and overall effectiveness of the specifically designed Easy Reading Module in supporting preschool children who face persistent difficulties in acquiring Malay reading skills, emphasizing qualitative analysis as the primary method. The study was conducted in a preschool located in the Jelebu District, Negeri Sembilan, involving a purposive sample of one preschool teacher and the 25 preschool children who experienced reading difficulties. Data were collected over a comprehensive 12-week intervention period through semi-structured interviews with the teacher and non-participant classroom observations of children's engagement, confidence, and phonological awareness during their use of the Easy Reading Module. The findings indicate that the Easy Reading Module enhanced children's engagement, confidence, and phonological awareness, while also supporting more active participation in reading activities within the classroom. The study highlights how structured and developmentally appropriate instructional materials such as the Easy Reading Module can support early literacy acquisition and offers valuable implications for teaching practices, instructional design, and policy development in early childhood literacy education to improve long-term educational outcome. Ultimately, the module's success in improving literacy skills underscore the necessity of structure instructional materials for advancing earlier teaching practices policy.

Keywords: Early Malay Literacy Reading; Malay Literacy; Preschool

1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental aspect of knowledge acquisition and a strong predictor of future academic achievement. As a core component of literacy, it must be developed during early childhood, as it plays a critical role in supporting the learning of other subjects, including science, mathematics, and language. Reading facilitates children's early interpretation of print and meaningful symbols, helping them connect with the wider world [1]. The development of strong reading and writing abilities is closely associated with early literacy experiences between the ages of one and five [2], highlighting the need for high-quality language and literacy instruction during this period. Beyond its academic value, reading contributes significantly to a child's intellectual, social, and emotional development by enhancing vocabulary acquisition, supporting fluent communication, and fostering independent learning [3,4].

Evidence from existing literature indicates that early reading proficiency is strongly linked to later academic

success [5,6]. Children who acquire reading skills at an early stage are more likely to develop stronger language abilities, improved comprehension, and better performance across multiple academic domains [7]. In contrast, those who struggle with early reading are at greater risk of underperforming across subjects, often exhibiting lower confidence, motivation, and engagement in learning [8]. Reading also facilitates vocabulary expansion and comprehension, which are essential elements of linguistic proficiency [9,10]. Exposure to a rich vocabulary through reading enables children to express themselves with clarity and precision [11], supporting both cognitive and emotional growth across multiple developmental domains.

A variety of instructional approaches have been employed to support early reading development, including phonics-based instruction, whole-language methods, and integrated strategies [12–14]. Phonics instruction emphasises the systematic relationship between letters and sounds, equipping children with the skills to decode words through phonological awareness [15]. In contrast, whole-language approaches promote meaning-making by immersing children in context-rich texts. Integrated approaches blend both methods, providing a balanced and flexible framework that addresses the varied learning needs of young children [16]. Research further highlights that integrated pedagogical models enhance cognitive, social, and emotional development by combining explicit teaching with play-based learning, which has been shown to improve reading outcomes [17].

The importance of mastering reading skills during the preschool years is underscored by their strong association with vocabulary development, oral fluency, and overall language competence. Despite its importance, various challenges continue to hinder the development of early reading skills. These include limited access to reading materials, inadequate vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and low motivation or interest in reading [18–20]. Early childhood represents a critical period for acquiring foundational literacy skills due to rapid brain development [21]. Neuroscientific research shows that children exposed to literacy-rich environments exhibit positive structural brain changes in areas related to language and reading [22]. Conversely, excessive screen time and unsupervised use of digital devices may negatively affect language development [23]. Teachers therefore play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges through engaging, differentiated, and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies [24].

Interactive literacy practices such as story prediction, retelling, and shared reading have been proven effective in enhancing children's engagement and comprehension [25,26]. These strategies encourage active participation and foster a deeper connection between young learners and the text, thereby improving understanding and motivation to read [27,28]. When children predict or retell stories, they develop critical thinking and expressive language abilities that strengthen overall reading comprehension [29]. Thus, incorporating interactive literacy techniques into early childhood classrooms is vital for cultivating foundational reading skills.

In alignment with 21st-century learning principles, student-centred teaching positions educators as facilitators of learning [30]. Effective early literacy instruction requires strong pedagogical knowledge, creative practices, and consistent professional growth. Studies indicate that children's reading difficulties often stem from limited phonemic awareness, confusion between letter forms, and insufficient parental support at home [31,32]. Strengthening home–school collaboration and establishing consistent reading routines are, therefore, essential for sustainable literacy development. Nevertheless, reading remains a particularly challenging skill for many preschoolers. Recent reports reveal that more than 170,000 school children in Malaysia lack reading proficiency [33], while preschool dropout rates increased from 17.1% in 2019 to 26.9% in 2021, presenting further barriers to early literacy development.

At this stage, a detailed explanation is required regarding the rationale for selecting and implementing this module to improve reading and literacy skills, including a critical discussion of its key strengths and advantages. In addition, this article should clearly state the research questions or hypotheses upon which the study is based.

Despite various instructional efforts, there remains a lack of structured and developmentally appropriate reading modules specifically designed to address early reading challenges among Malaysian preschoolers. Existing practices often rely on fragmented approaches that do not sufficiently integrate phonics, syllable awareness, and meaningful reading activities in the context of the Malay language. In light of this gap, the present study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the Easy Reading Module in enhancing preschool children's reading abilities through a systematic, engaging, and developmentally appropriate instructional framework. This module aims to provide structured, phonics-based learning experiences that align with the National Preschool Standard Curriculum while fostering enjoyment and motivation in reading among young learners. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

(1)   How does the Easy Reading Module influence preschool children's engagement in reading activities?

(2)   How does the module support the development of children's confidence in reading?

(3)   How does the module enhance preschool children's phonological awareness?

2. Literature Review

Reading is a cognitive process that involves decoding written symbols to construct meaning. It extends beyond the mere recognition of letters and words to include comprehension, interpretation, and response to the text being read. This process requires the integration of visual recognition, phonological processing, and semantic understanding all of which are essential for interpreting and making sense of text [34]. The act of reading engages multiple domains of cognitive development, including attention, memory, and language processing, making it a complex yet fundamental skill in early education [35]. As children learn to decode print, they progress from simple word recognition to fluent reading, enabling deeper comprehension and critical thinking [36]. This developmental progression underscores the importance of providing structured and developmentally appropriate reading instruction during the preschool years. Reading thus integrates language skills, prior knowledge, and critical thinking in a dynamic cognitive process.

In the educational context, reading is considered one of the core components of language literacy, defined as the fundamental ability to read and write in a given language. According to Ismail and Jamaludin [37], reading is a complex process that integrates visual, phonological, syntactic, and semantic skills in the effort to comprehend written information. Drawing on Rosenblatt's transactional theory, Johnson et al. [38] emphasized that reading involves an interaction between the reader and the text, through which meaning is dynamically constructed. In the context of preschool education, early reading skills encompass children's emerging abilities to recognise letters, manipulate phonemes, link sounds to graphemes, and derive meaning from simple words and sentences. These foundational literacy skills are critical, as empirical evidence indicates that emergent literacy components such as letter knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and rapid naming are strong predictors of later word reading achievement among preschool children [39]. Consistent with this perspective, Idris et al. [40] emphasised that early reading instruction should be developmentally appropriate and progressively structured to align with children's cognitive and emotional growth. Collectively, these perspectives highlight the importance of systematic and engaging early reading approaches that support both skill development and meaningful interaction with text.

Early exposure to print-rich environments and language-based interactions plays a vital role in developing strong reading foundations. Research consistently demonstrates that children exposed to print-rich and language-rich environments develop stronger emergent literacy skills, including print awareness, vocabulary, and phonological sensitivity [41,42]. Engagement with books, symbols, and spoken language in meaningful contexts supports cognitive and linguistic growth essential for reading acquisition. Interactive experiences, such as dialogic reading and shared storytelling, further enhance children's comprehension, motivation, and enjoyment in reading [43]. Family involvement, particularly parental engagement in home learning activities, reinforces early literacy development by fostering motivation and providing consistent support, which leads to greater reading progress compared to children with minimal family involvement [43]. Early exposure to appropriate reading materials also contributes to children's attention span, imagination, and creativity. These findings highlight the importance of integrating structured reading activities both at home and in early childhood education settings, underscoring the need for curricula and pedagogical practices that prioritize the development of early reading skills [44].

However, despite the extensive body of international research on early reading development, limited attention has been given to how these findings are applied within the Malaysian preschool context. Much of the existing literature draws heavily from Western pedagogical frameworks, which may not fully align with the linguistic characteristics and orthographic structure of the Malay language. The syllable-based nature of Malay, for instance, requires a distinct instructional emphasis compared to alphabetic languages like English. Furthermore, previous studies tend to isolate aspects of reading such as phonics, vocabulary, or comprehension rather than integrating them within a cohesive, developmentally appropriate framework suited for young learners. There is also a lack of research that combines structured phonics instruction with engaging, meaningful reading experiences tailored to the cognitive and motivational needs of Malaysian preschoolers. This gap underscores the necessity for a localized, structured reading module that effectively bridges phonological awareness, syllable recognition, and reading comprehension within the Malay language context.

Easy Reading Module

The use of learning modules has become increasingly common in Malaysian preschools, demonstrating that modular-based instruction is not a novel concept within the national early childhood education system. The Easy Reading Module was developed as an instructional tool to support preschool children in acquiring foundational reading skills. Designed for use by both teachers and learners, the module aims to facilitate structured, engaging, and developmentally appropriate reading instruction in the classroom. The content of the Easy Reading Module was developed in alignment with the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum of Malaysia. The National Preschool Standard Curriculum comprises six main strands, namely, (i) Communication, (ii) Spirituality, Attitudes and Values, (iii) Humanity, (iv) Personal Competence, (v) Physical and Aesthetic Development, and (vi) Science and Technology.

However, Easy Reading Module study focused specifically on the Communication Strand in the Malay Language component. Within this strand, eight skills were selected, namely, (i) CV + CV words, (ii) CV + CV + CV words, (iii) CVC words, (iv) V + CV words, (v) V + CVC words, (vi) CV + CVC words, (vii) CVC + CV words, and (viii) CVC + CVC words, where "C" denotes consonants and "V" represents vowels. The Easy Reading Module includes sample daily lesson plans and structured classroom activities tailored to the developmental stages of preschool learners. Each activity is designed to target specific reading skills while fostering a playful and stimulating learning environment through games, edutainment, puzzles, and other interactive methods. These resources are intended to support teachers in delivering more effective and student-centred literacy instruction. Each skill component within the Easy Reading Module comprises six interactive elements, namely (i) Guess Who I Am, (ii) Spell and Pronounce, (iii) Read Simple Passages, (iv) Spell Words, (v) Spell Words Pronounced by the Teacher, and (vi) Name the Picture and Spell. These activities aim to reinforce phonological awareness, decoding, and early word recognition in an engaging and age-appropriate manner.

For the *Guess What This Is?* activity, children will identify and say the name of the image shown in the module. This activity aims to assess how well the children recognize the objects or images presented. Indirectly, it also encourages two-way communication between the children and the teacher during the activity. In the *Spell and Say* activity, children will spell out each word and say it aloud, with guidance from the teacher if they have difficulty spelling. Each word in this section is accompanied by an image to support their understanding. The next activity is *Read a Simple Passage*, where children read short and simple texts that have been provided. In the *Spell the Word* activity, children will spell out words without any accompanying images, helping to strengthen their spelling skills independently. This is followed by *Spell the Word Said by the Teacher*, in which the teacher will randomly say a word, and the children are expected to spell it correctly. The final activity for each skill is *Name the Picture and Spell It*, where children will first identify and name the picture, and then proceed to spell the word. The teacher will act as a facilitator, assisting children who may struggle with either identifying the picture or spelling the word.

At the end of each skill section, there is a children's assessment form provided to evaluate their progress while using the Easy Reading Module in mastering reading skills. This form is used to gain an overview of a child's learning performance in a particular subject or learning activity. The assessment activities are carried out continuously. The purpose of conducting assessments in the classroom is to obtain a clear picture of each child's learning performance throughout the process.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach that involved interviews and observations to generate in-depth data. This qualitative component enabled the researcher to understand the experiences, perspectives, and real-life contexts that influence children's learning. In this study, the school administration had predetermined the class placement of preschool children during registration, making random allocation impossible.

3.2. Research Participants

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with one research participant, namely the preschool teacher who implemented the Easy Reading Module throughout the study. Although only a single teacher was interviewed, this purposive sampling was justified because the teacher had direct, comprehensive experience with

the module over the entire 12-week intervention. Her insights provided rich, in-depth qualitative data on the implementation process, children's responses, and instructional challenges, which is consistent with qualitative research approaches that prioritize depth and contextual understanding over large sample sizes. In addition to the interview, the researcher also carried out observations involving 25 preschool children that consisted of 11 boys and 14 girls who used the Easy Reading Module in the classroom. These observations were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the module in terms of its actual implementation, the children's interaction with the learning materials, and their behaviours during reading activities. The information obtained through these observations enabled the researcher to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the module's effectiveness in helping children master reading skills.

3.3. Research Instruments

The interview protocol was designed to elicit preschool teachers' perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of the Easy Reading Module in supporting children with reading difficulties. The interviews were guided by key questions focusing on:

(1)   Teachers' perceptions of the module's suitability for preschool children;
(2)   Observed changes in children's reading engagement and abilities;
(3)   Challenges encountered during the implementation of the module;
(4)   Suggestions for improving the module to better support children's mastery of reading skills.

The interview findings were used to inform continuous improvements to the module throughout the intervention period. In addition to face-to-face interviews, relevant information was also collected through communication via the WhatsApp application between the researcher and the participants. All WhatsApp interactions were systematically documented by saving chat transcripts and relevant messages as textual data. These messages were analyzed thematically alongside interview and observation data to provide supplementary insights, clarify ambiguities, and ensure continuity in the data collection process. All interviews were conducted after school hours to ensure that participants were able to complete their official teaching responsibilities without disruption.

Observation was employed as a complementary qualitative data collection method to support and validate the interview findings. A non-participant observation approach was adopted, whereby the researcher observed classroom activities without interfering with the participants' behaviour. The researcher acted solely as an observer, monitoring, listening, and recording behaviours as they naturally occurred during teaching and learning sessions. Observations were conducted during the implementation of the Easy Reading Module in the classroom over the intervention period. The observation focused on predefined aspects, including:

(1)   Children's engagement and participation while using the module;
(2)   Children's confidence and responses during reading activities;
(3)   Phonological awareness behaviours demonstrated by the children;
(4)   The teacher's implementation and utilisation of the module during instruction.

Two observation sessions were conducted each week during classroom teaching and learning activities. Prior to the implementation of the module, the researcher provided guidance to the preschool teacher regarding the objectives, procedures, and instructional use of the module to ensure consistent and effective application. Each observation was conducted systematically, with a clear focus and specific purpose, and was recorded accurately through detailed field notes. These observation data served as an important source of evidence for identifying behavioural changes, validating interview responses, and determining potential issues encountered during the reading sessions.

3.4. Credibility and Trustworthiness

The credibility of this study was established through a systematic and rigorous qualitative procedure aimed at enhancing the accuracy and validity of the findings. Data were collected using multiple sources, specifically semi-structured interviews with a preschool teacher and classroom observations of children during the implementation of the Easy Reading Module (ERM). All interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile device and transcribed verbatim by the researcher to ensure data accuracy. To strengthen credibility, member checking was conducted whereby

interview transcripts were returned to the participant after three weeks for verification. The participant confirmed that the transcripts accurately represented their views and experiences, thereby enhancing the authenticity and credibility of the data.

Methodological triangulation was further employed to corroborate findings across data sources. Interview data were triangulated with observational data to provide complementary evidence and to ensure that interpretations were grounded in multiple forms of empirical data. Observations focused on the effectiveness of the Easy Reading Module in supporting preschool children's reading development as well as the classroom learning environment. Data collection was conducted repeatedly across different sessions to achieve consistency and strengthen the robustness of the findings. The convergence of evidence across interviews and observations enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and reduced the likelihood of biased or isolated interpretations.

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through adherence to the four established criteria of qualitative rigor: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Transferability was addressed through the provision of detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and implementation procedures of the Easy Reading Module, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar preschool settings. Dependability was ensured by systematically documenting the research design, data collection procedures, and analytical processes, thereby establishing a transparent and auditable research process. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive practices and the maintenance of an audit trail, ensuring that interpretations were derived from empirical data rather than researcher assumptions. Collectively, these strategies enhanced the methodological rigor of the study and ensured that the findings are credible, transparent, and trustworthy.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Research Procedure

The study was conducted following approval from the Ministry of Education Research Ethics Committee. All research procedures complied with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants and were conducted in accordance with the Declaration. In addition, written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Negeri Sembilan State Department of Education, and the headmaster of the participating school. These approvals covered the implementation of teacher training activities and the use of the Easy Reading Module as instructional material in Malay language learning activities in the preschool classroom. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers and from the parents or legal guardians of the preschool pupils prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Following the receipt of all approvals and consent, authorisation was obtained from the school administrators to access preschool class timetables to ensure that the research activities did not disrupt the regular educational process. The study plan was also shared and discussed with the teachers to secure their agreement and to facilitate smooth implementation.

The second phase is teacher training activities. This training was conducted in one day, one-to-one, and aims to guide the teacher on the Easy Reading Module. In this training session, the researcher explains the content of the module, the components, the activities and the materials. Furthermore, the researcher also explains the pedagogical approaches, strategies, and appropriate techniques for delivering the module effectively. This is crucial to ensure that teachers implement the module in the way it should be implemented. During this training session, the researcher also allows the teacher to ask questions regarding the subject. One week after the first training session, the second training session was conducted. The second training session aims to familiarise the teacher with the usage of easy reading assessment to ensure both teachers have the same understanding in assessing reading skills.

The third phase is data collection activities. The data collection activities were carried out for twelve weeks. The intervention process was started in the third week of August 2024. During this period, the teacher carried out Malay learning activities using the Easy Reading Module. After ten weeks of intervention, the intervention process was completed in the third week of October 2024.

To ensure the fidelity of treatment implementation throughout the 12-session intervention, a series of systematic monitoring procedures were employed. The researcher developed a comprehensive implementation manual to guide the delivery of each session in accordance with the prescribed steps and activities outlined in the Easy Reading Module. Prior to the commencement of the intervention, the teacher received a detailed briefing and initial

training to ensure a clear understanding of the instructional procedures and intended learning outcomes. Furthermore, periodic classroom observations were conducted by the researcher to verify the consistency of instructional delivery and adherence to the module's procedural framework. Each reading skill introduced to the preschool children was accompanied by an assessment checklist to be completed by the teacher, allowing for systematic tracking of children's progress and mastery of reading competencies. Teacher feedback was collected after each session to document implementation experiences, challenges encountered, and any instructional adjustments made during the process. These combined monitoring measures served to strengthen the reliability, validity, and overall consistency of the intervention throughout the 12-session implementation period.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data from the preschool teacher to identify needs for developing the Easy Reading Module. Interviews were scheduled in advance, and the participant was briefed on the study's purpose, duration, and recording procedures. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were returned to the participant for member checking to ensure accuracy. Data were organised and coded using NVivo. The analysis followed an inductive approach, beginning with Open Coding, in which the researcher identified meaningful units of data (e.g., statements about children's engagement, confidence, or challenges with reading activities). These initial codes were then grouped through Axial Coding into broader categories such as Module Usability, Children's Engagement, and Instructional Support. Finally, Selective Coding was used to integrate these categories into overarching themes, including:

– Enhanced Engagement in Reading Activities;
– Improved Confidence in Reading;
– Development of Phonological Awareness.

Classroom observations were conducted using video recordings provided by the preschool teacher during teaching and learning sessions. Prior to implementation, teachers received guidance on module use to ensure clarity of instructions. Observation data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in teaching practices, module utilisation, and children's responses. Examples of observation codes included children raising hands to answer, participation in group activities, and correct identification of letters and syllables.

Interview and observation findings were triangulated to enhance the credibility of the results. Codes and categories derived from the teacher's interview were cross-checked against observed behaviours in the classroom to confirm patterns related to engagement, confidence, and phonological awareness. This combined approach allowed the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of how the Easy Reading Module functioned in real classroom settings.

5. Result

5.1. Children's Engagement in Reading Activities

The Easy Reading Module was used during Malay language lessons over a 12-week period. The teacher reported that she reviewed the module content in advance to ensure that activities were appropriate for the children's developmental level. She described the module as easy to use and stated that the children enjoyed it very much. While no issues were reported regarding the module itself, she noted that the children were extremely active, sometimes even competing with one another to participate. "*The module itself posed no difficulties, but managing the children's enthusiasm was the main challenge*," she explained.

To address this, the teacher repeated questions and activities as needed to ensure that all children were ready to respond and attempt the tasks provided. She observed that the module's use of visuals, graphics, and progressive levels of difficulty kept the children engaged and helped guide their learning effectively. According to her, the inclusion of quizzes, riddles, crosswords, and story-reading activities successfully made reading sessions fun and motivating: "*The children were always excited to participate in the activities; they loved the quizzes and stories.*"

The teacher also highlighted that the module's design features such as vibrant colors, clear visuals, and age-appropriate text contributed to engagement. She stated, "*The colors and layout of the module are cheerful, which*

not only attracts the children but also motivates me as a teacher to use it during lessons." The sample lesson plans provided in the module were flexible, allowing her to select activities suitable for the children's abilities. Assessment sheets were straightforward and helped her track children's reading progress effectively.

For improvement, the teacher suggested adding more activities to accommodate highly active children: *"The current activities are not sufficient for some of the more energetic children in the class."* Overall, she affirmed that after 12 weeks of using the module, the children showed positive changes in engagement, confidence, and reading skill development.

Based on classroom observations conducted over the 12-week intervention, preschool children demonstrated consistently high levels of engagement during the implementation of the Easy Reading Module. Children actively participated in all planned activities, including identifying letters, combining syllables (KV + KVK), naming pictures, and responding to questions posed by the teacher. They were enthusiastic and motivated, often competing with peers to answer or complete tasks.

The children's engagement was particularly evident during group activities, where all children, regardless of age, were involved without exclusion. Even when some initially hesitated to share or cooperate, teacher guidance encouraged participation, leading to effective collaboration and active involvement. Their facial expressions and body language indicated excitement and enjoyment, reflecting intrinsic motivation to participate in reading activities.

Observations also revealed that children were eager to respond even when unsure of the correct answers, demonstrating boldness and confidence in engaging with the tasks. Interactive elements of the module, such as visual cues and picture-based activities, effectively captured their attention and sustained focus throughout the sessions. Classroom management remained effective despite the lively and competitive atmosphere, allowing children to remain engaged and actively involved in the learning process.

5.2. Children's Confidence in Reading

The preschool teacher reported that the Easy Reading Module helped build children's confidence in reading over the 12-week implementation. She observed that even children who were initially hesitant to participate gradually became more willing to answer questions, attempt tasks, and engage in group activities. *"Some children were shy at first, but after a few sessions, they were eager to answer questions and share their ideas without fear of making mistakes,"* she noted.

The module's progressive structure, starting from simple tasks and moving to more challenging ones, allowed children to experience small successes early, which reinforced their confidence. The teacher also highlighted that children were willing to try activities independently and persisted even when they made errors: *"They were bold in attempting the exercises, even if their answers were not correct, and they kept trying until they succeeded."*

Interactive elements, such as quizzes, riddles, and picture-based activities, also motivated children to participate actively, fostering a sense of achievement and self-assurance. According to the teacher, these activities encouraged children to collaborate with peers, take initiative, and feel capable in their reading abilities. She affirmed that the children demonstrated noticeable improvements in confidence, which in turn enhanced their willingness to engage with reading tasks and participate in classroom learning.

Classroom observations revealed that preschool children exhibited high levels of confidence during reading activities using the Easy Reading Module. Children actively responded to questions posed by the teacher, named letters and pictures, and attempted to form KV + KVK words independently. Even when unsure of the correct answers, they were eager to participate and did not hesitate to contribute: some children competed with peers to answer questions, demonstrating boldness and self-assurance in their responses.

The progressive structure of the module supported confidence-building by allowing children to start with simpler tasks before advancing to more challenging activities. For example, during picture-combination exercises, children who were initially reluctant to collaborate with peers became more willing to participate after teacher guidance. Their willingness to engage cooperatively and persist through tasks reflected growing self-confidence in reading skills.

Observations also indicated that children were motivated to try new activities without fear of making mistakes. Even when activities involved movement or hands-on tasks, children remained focused and enthusiastic, demonstrating both independence and resilience. Facial expressions, body language, and verbal contributions all signaled

a positive sense of self-efficacy, suggesting that the module effectively fostered confidence alongside engagement.

5.3. Development of Phonological Awareness

According to the preschool teacher, the Easy Reading Module effectively supported the development of children's phonological awareness during the 12-week implementation. She noted that children were able to recognize letters, differentiate between vowels and consonants, and combine sounds to form simple words (KV + KVK). *"The children quickly learned to identify letters and match them with sounds, and they enjoyed blending syllables to form words,"* she explained.

The teacher highlighted that the module's progressive design, starting from simple exercises and gradually increasing in difficulty, allowed children to experience success early, which reinforced their phonological skills. She observed that children who initially struggled with certain letters or sounds gradually became more confident in attempting phoneme segmentation and blending activities.

Interactive and visually supported activities, such as picture-word matching and sound blending exercises, engaged the children and helped them practice phonemic discrimination and decoding skills. According to the teacher, the module's clear instructions and structured tasks allowed her to guide children effectively while enabling them to independently attempt exercises: *"Even the more hesitant children began to sound out letters and syllables by themselves, showing noticeable improvement over time."*

Classroom observations indicated that the Easy Reading Module effectively supported the development of preschool children's phonological awareness. Children were able to identify letters, differentiate between consonants and vowels, and combine sounds to form simple words (KV + KVK). During activities involving picture-word matching and syllable blending, children demonstrated increasing proficiency in recognizing phonemic patterns.

Even children who initially struggled with letter recognition or syllable combination showed progress through guided practice and repeated exposure. For instance, the teacher prompted children to sound out letters and syllables, and children actively attempted to blend them into meaningful words. Some children hesitated at first but gradually participated confidently, showing evidence of phonemic understanding and application.

The module's structured, progressive approach starting with simpler phonological tasks and advancing to more complex exercises helped scaffold learning. Observed behaviours included children spelling out words aloud, segmenting syllables in pictures, and collaboratively completing exercises with peers. These activities reinforced auditory discrimination, letter-sound correspondence, and early decoding skills.

6. Discussions

This study has demonstrated that the use of the Easy Reading Module enhances the reading skills of preschool children. The structured and developmentally appropriate design of the module contributed to improvements in phonetic awareness, letter recognition, and overall reading engagement among young learners. These findings reinforce the importance of using targeted instructional tools in early literacy education. The results are consistent with previous research that highlights the effectiveness of modular instruction in early reading [45]. Scholars reported that interactive reading modules increased children's interest and engagement, while improvements in phonetic skills and letter recognition were observed among preschoolers using similar resources [46–48]. In addition, structured teaching modules not only promote literacy acquisition but also build children's confidence in reading [49]. This alignment supports the idea that well-designed modules are an effective strategy in early childhood classrooms.

Reading is widely acknowledged as a particularly challenging skill for preschoolers to master [50]. This study contributes to the field by offering a practical solution to this challenge through a resource that is both enjoyable and accessible to children. The close relationship between reading and writing skills further underscores the importance of early literacy interventions such as this module [51]. The development of the Easy Reading Module also aligns with national educational priorities. The Malaysian Ministry of Education has emphasized the importance of student centred and enjoyable learning experiences, particularly through the implementation of the Classroom Assessment framework at Level 1, which empowers teachers to plan, implement, assess, and report pupils' progress throughout the learning process [50]. By integrating play-based and student-centred approaches, the module addresses this policy direction, creating a stimulating learning environment that encourages active participation and

intrinsic motivation among young learners [51].

A key strength of the module lies in its design, which incorporates six thematic sections, namely, (i) What Is This? (ii) Spell and Say, (iii) Read Simple Passages, (iv) Spell Words, (v) Spell Words Spoken by the Teacher, and (vi) Name the Picture and Spell It. These sections are aligned with Malaysia's early childhood curriculum standards and support the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. They also encourage critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving competencies that are essential for holistic development.

However, the findings should be interpreted with some caution. One limitation of the study is the lack of long-term follow-up to assess the sustained impact of the module. Additionally, variations in children's baseline reading abilities may have influenced the outcomes, and future studies should consider a more detailed assessment of learners' initial skill levels. It is also crucial to examine how factors such as teacher training, classroom environment, and parental involvement may mediate the effectiveness of such modules.

For practitioners, the findings highlight the need for preschool teachers to adopt flexible and engaging teaching approaches. As children often struggle to sustain attention during lessons, instructional strategies must be dynamic and adaptive. The Easy Reading Module offers a practical tool that teachers and parents can use to make reading instruction more appealing and effective. To further support implementation, education authorities may consider offering professional development workshops to familiarise educators with the use of such modules in classroom contexts. Future research should explore the scalability of the Easy Reading Module across diverse educational settings, including rural and underserved communities. Comparative studies examining its effectiveness against other literacy interventions would also provide deeper insights into best practices for early reading instruction. In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence for the use of structured, interactive modules in supporting preschool children's reading development. The Easy Reading Module not only addresses key learning outcomes but also promotes enjoyable, student-centred instruction that aligns with national education goals. With proper implementation and ongoing support, such modules can play a critical role in enhancing early literacy outcomes.

7. Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relied on a small, single-site purposive sample, including only one preschool teacher and 25 children in Jelebu District, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study did not include a control group or quantitative pre- and post-assessments of literacy skills, making it difficult to measure the module's effects objectively. Third, the close interaction between the researcher and teacher both in classroom guidance and communication via WhatsApp may have introduced observer and social desirability bias, potentially influencing participant responses and behaviors. Finally, the 12-week intervention period limits the ability to assess long-term retention of reading skills or the transfer of learning to formal schooling contexts.

8. Conclusions

This study provides qualitative evidence that the Easy Reading Module effectively supports early literacy development among preschool children. Through classroom observations and teacher interviews, the findings highlight how children engage with reading activities, develop confidence, and enhance phonological awareness when using the module. The structured yet flexible design, incorporating age-appropriate materials, visuals, and interactive activities, facilitated active learning and motivation, particularly for children facing challenges in acquiring foundational reading skills.

The study underscores the important role of teachers in guiding and adapting instructional strategies to meet the diverse developmental needs of young learners. Practically, the Easy Reading Module can serve as a supplementary literacy tool in preschool classrooms, supporting both reading mastery and engagement. For curriculum developers, the findings emphasize the value of incorporating structured, developmentally appropriate, and interactive literacy components into preschool programmes. Future research could explore the module's effectiveness across different contexts or examine longer-term literacy outcomes. Overall, the study demonstrates the module's potential as a practical and evidence-based approach to enhancing early literacy, with insights drawn directly from teacher perspectives and classroom practices.

Author Contributions

Funding

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (protocol code: KPM.600-3/2/3-eras(16604) and date of approval: 09 June 2023).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all child participants prior to their participation in the study, with the children having informed their parents accordingly. All information provided by the participants was kept confidential. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the school to ensure the rights, safety, and well-being of all child participants were protected throughout the research process.

Data Availability Statement

All relevant data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript. Raw data are not publicly available to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the preschool participants.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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