

## **THE STUDY OF MULTISENSORY AS TEACHING PHONICS APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS' DECODING SKILL**

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Received: February 7, 2025 Revised: March 22, 2025 Accepted: May 19, 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

*The kindergarten students of TK Adicita Mulia require a learning achievement to fulfill their phonics reading skills. However, the students have consistently struggled to recognize the decoding concept as the fundamental learning in reading phonics. Therefore, the study aimed to determine the improvement of students' decoding phonics using a multisensory teaching approach for kindergarten students of the K1 level at TK Adicita Mulia. The method used in this research is Classroom Action Research (CAR). The multisensory approach involved the students' auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile senses to understand better decoding concept instruction in recognizing individual sounds and combining them into Consonant, Vowel, Consonant (CVC) words. The improvements focused on the learning outcome of developing decoding skills as the fundamental stage for reading readiness. This research also observed the students' engagement during the learning process to be attracted to the learning media such as Play-Doh, sand, and flashcards as the interactive learning style for the students. Also, it observed the students' disruptive behavior, such as uncontrolled behavior, impatience, and lack of focus in the classroom. The results showed that 60% of the students who did not initially improve could demonstrate notable progress in the second cycle. The learning media also generated great enthusiasm during the learning process and positively influenced the change of disruptive behavior into controlled behavior during phonics learning.*

**Keywords:** *Multisensory, Phonics, Decoding Skill, Kindergarten Students*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Decoding for kindergarten students has always found some existing problems, such as difficulty understanding the decoding concept in phonics. Decoding skill is a fundamental reading concept especially in phonics as one of the English language learning for kindergarten students. It is a code used to figure out how to say a word by segmenting it into smaller part and blending sounds. Decoding is a concept that translates written words into spoken form by recognizing and blending individual sounds or letter patterns. Therefore, it is supposed to be the learning achievement students must master to concentrate on decoding skills, particularly decoding concepts. According to Paris (2019), decoding is sometimes hard to learn because of the difficulty of understanding the concept. Decoding is a challenging cognitive process involving interpreting symbols to create or determine what they mean, indicating the use of a language for communication and expressing

thoughts. Based on Debataraja et al., (2023), developing children's early language and literacy skills is crucial for future reading success. Early literacy skills in identifying the alphabet and pronouncing its sounds help kindergarten students develop decoding skills.

Meanwhile, according to TK Adicita Mulia school teachers, some factors influenced the students' phonics decoding skills. The problems are the inability to comprehend the decoding concept, lack of awareness, and lack of confidence in using English as a required language in a bilingual school. Also, students' negative behaviors in the classroom include lack of focus, disruptive actions, daydreaming, and others. It negatively impacted the quality of the learning process. Therefore, the learning instruction taught to the students seems difficult to understand, and most students cannot focus, reducing student motivation during the learning process.

In the phonics instruction used in this school, the important part is that the students should be able to master the fundamental lesson by recognizing the individual sounds (phonemes) of the written symbol (graphemes). When the students can identify each sound, they start to link or combine the individual sounds to decode the CVC (Consonant, Vowel, Consonant) words consisting of three phonemes in one syllable. For example, for the word "can," /c/ is the consonant, /a/ is the vowel, and /n/ is the consonant. For instance, the students were introduced to some words with ending sounds, and one of them is /an/. Then, they learned to combine with the first consonant letter sound of /c/. Afterward, they know how to break down (segment) words into their component sounds and connect those sounds to letters to spell words to be c + an, which becomes "can." However, these blending sound instructions cause the students notable problems comprehending the decoding concept. Most students still cannot recognize the basic individual sounds and have low interest in them during the learning process. Not to mention, the students' focus is still divided and hard to handle because there are some special need students in the classroom, and learning phonics decoding concepts is very difficult for the students to comprehend.

Therefore, the basic teaching technique commonly used to teach phonics is still challenging for the students to understand. The researcher's idea is to use the multisensory approach by using Play-Doh to learn the code. The code segments the words and uses sand to rewrite the letters to strengthen letter cognition. It provides

another variety of teaching methods to attract the students' interest and improve their decoding skills. Hence, the researcher focused on solving the students' problems by improving their decoding skills based on phonics with the support of a multisensory teaching approach, which has become the purpose of this research.

Mitak et al., (2023) explained that the multisensory approach to decoding is commonly used to develop skills in students who struggle with decoding letters through auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic elements. It is also very effective for young learners to improve their fundamental learning for decoding. According to Maliki & Yasin (2017), through the stimulation of auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic senses, the multisensory approach teaches the student to master the fundamentals of decoding instruction. The stronger the students' comprehension of the letter symbol derived from a notable experience, the more the sensing is activated. Moreover, Baines (2012) explained that these approaches typically entail showing a word to students, having them trace the letters with their fingers, and then having them try to pronounce the word using their knowledge of letter sounds.

More precise relationships between the acoustic and other sensory inputs emerge spontaneously from the available correlations between sensory dimensions as the number of stored multisensory representations increases. Children learn to decode by combining kinesthetic activities (tracing the word), auditory stimuli (pronouncing the word), and visual cues (the written word). Additionally, according to Obaid (2012), the concept that learning through all senses is beneficial in supporting memory has a long history in teaching. Educators have used a variety of multisensory strategies to enrich and motivate students' learning since the first teaching guides. The phrase refers to any learning activity that uses two or more sensory techniques to acquire or express knowledge. Multisensory approaches have shown particularly useful in literacy and language learning, such as links between sound and sign, word identification, and the use of tactile methods like tracing on rough or soft surfaces.

Therefore, this approach helps the students to find their decoding skill concept at an early age, especially for 4 to 5-year-old students, to avoid confusion in comprehension. Besides that, multisensory provides an activity that involves some of their senses to strengthen their memory of the learning concept. The senses can be influenced by their sense of sight, sense of hearing, sense of taste, sense of

touch, sense of smell, and motor skills to reach the cognitive level. Apart from that, this approach can also reduce the burden of students' learning difficulties by creating a learning perception in a fun way so that it can change the learning response of students who are not motivated to learn to decode.

There are some existing researches related to multisensory and teaching phonics with this research. Research by Patria (2023) found that the problem of diminished student motivation in acquiring phonics skills was attributed to implementing traditional teaching approaches, which resulted in disinterest and inadequate involvement. A demanding curriculum and a poor learning environment worsened the absence of enthusiasm. Then, Novena et al., (2021) addressed the issue of the students' struggle with word recognition and spelling due to insufficient phonics abilities. The problem originated from difficulties in acquiring phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and proper handwriting, which had a negative effect on their overall spelling and literacy progress.

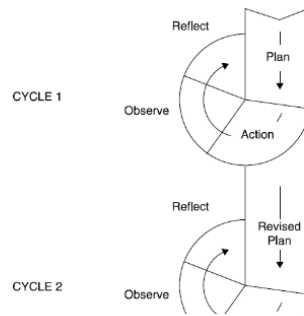
Meanwhile, Myréen (2017) found that conventional language courses may not effectively engage adult learners and may not effectively improve their motivation and language learning. Many learners face motivation and cognitive engagement challenges in traditional educational environments, resulting in less-than-ideal language acquisition results. The project sought to investigate the potential of using multisensory features to enhance these qualities by establishing a more captivating and nurturing learning environment.

These existing studies addressed the problems of improving the students' skills in various ways, and the teaching strategies have been explored as a solution for specific problems, including the multisensory approach. However, this study stands out by specifically examining the use of multisensory materials, such as Play-Doh and sand, to promote decoding skills in blending sounds. This study takes a distinct approach by using tactile and sensory materials to improve phonics learning in a kindergarten setting in contrast to earlier studies that focused on general methods or varied settings. This application is important to solve decoding difficulties and increase student involvement. It offers a unique addition to use multisensory as a teaching approach for early literacy.

This research explores teaching phonics to kindergarten students and engaging their motivation to provide positive learning behavior which is also one

of the issues that have been identified as contributing to the difficulty of comprehending the concept of reading. Specifically, this research designed the teaching approach to observe the students' progress and find the improvements in a multisensory approach to simplify the concept that is meaningful for phonics decoding skills in the long term.

## METHOD



*Figure 1. CAR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart adapted by Burns (2010)*

This research used Classroom Action Research (CAR). This method focuses on solving learning challenges and offering solutions based on instructional strategies that can improve students' learning achievement in reading phonics. According to Burns (2010), the main concept of CAR is to purposefully step in to address the problematic behavior to bring about improvements in practice and, even better, changes. This research analyses the improvement of students' decoding skill based on multisensory as a teaching approach in phonics. This method focused on implementing the lesson for the decoding concept in phonics by using a multisensory approach to support the learning method in the classroom. This method also solved the students' problem in decoding skill, which tracked their improvements until they reached their proficiency in decoding phonics.

Classroom action research used cycles as the procedure to do this research. The cycle observed the students' improvement in the class by following the teacher's teaching approach to solve the students' problems in the learning process. The observation is supported by multisensory activity as the teaching approach to help them problem-solve their decoding skill based on phonics concepts. The cycle continues to cycle II if the result in the first cycle did not give a notable result, such as the teaching approach's success in improving each student's decoding skill. The subject of this study is the students of TK Adicta Mulia from Kindergarten 1 level, which consists of 20 students in the classroom. The average age of the students is 4

to 5 years old, and the students have started to enter the fundamental concept of decoding as an initial stage before starting to read.

### Planning

In planning the cycle, the researcher creates the lesson material for the teacher to introduce the individual sounds to be recognized as the fundamental concept and some CVC words with 14 ending sounds in phonics, such as:

*Table . CVC (Consonant, Vowel, Consonant) words*

ENDING SOUNDS	CONSONANT	VOWEL	CONSONANT	VOCABULARIES
-an	m	a	n	Man
	v	a	n	Van
-am	h	a	m	Ham
	j	a	m	Jam
-at	c	a	t	Cat
	m	a	t	Mat
-ap	g	a	p	Gap
	t	a	p	Tap
-ag	b	a	g	Bag
	w	a	g	Wag
-ed	b	e	d	Bed
	r	e	d	Red
-eg	l	e	g	Leg
	b	e	g	Beg
-in	f	i	n	Fin
	p	i	n	Pin
-og	l	o	g	Log
	d	o	g	Dog
-op	m	o	p	Mop
	t	o	p	Top
-ot	h	o	t	Hot
	d	o	t	Dot
-ub	r	u	b	Rub
	t	u	b	Tub
-up	p	u	p	Pup
	c	u	p	Cup
-ug	r	u	g	Rug
	b	u	g	Bug

The students try to combine the ending sounds with the first sound to decode the CVC words. The decoding concept is helped by using the multisensory approach with some properties that involve the students' visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile senses, such as flashcards, Play-Doh, and sand, that are used for the students to decode the words. For example, the Play-Doh is used as a code to segment the CVC words by putting a ball of Play-Doh on each sound, and then pulling the balls to each other as the code to blend the first and the ending sounds. The students are seen through their decoding performances to evaluate whether they can follow the decoding concept in a multisensory approach.

### Action

There are three meetings in a cycle where the teacher reviews the individual sounds through properties such as sand and Play-Doh to support the multisensory activity. The students try to rewrite the symbol of the individual sounds on the sand and create a similar shape of the graphemes symbol with Play-Doh for the first meeting. In the second meeting, the students combined and decoded the CVC words

in phonics by using Play-Doh, which is used to create small circles for each letter to segment the word and one long shape for the students to pull the as the concept for combining the sounds. Then, the students try to rewrite the CVC words on the sand, the properties of which are to strengthen their memory by involving some of the senses simultaneously with the properties of the multisensory approach.

### **Observation**

The researcher observes the students' decoding performance to determine whether the students can recognize the individual sounds as the strong point to start the lesson before the decoding concept. If the students can recognize the individual sounds, the researcher tries to observe the students' decoding concept performance in combining the sounds into the CVC words.

### **Reflection**

The researcher and the teacher evaluate the planning and the action to determine whether the cycle is successfully progressing. Suppose there is a gap during the activity, such as the students not showing notable improvements in recognizing the individual sounds, combining concepts, or following the teacher's instruction well during the activity. In that case, the gap should be revised and replanned for the next cycle with a new design of planning and action.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Cycle 1**

Based on the result of cycle 1, there were 16 students did not get their improvements in cycle 1 because most of them still had problems in the second session, which made it difficult to focus on the activity, and they tended to focus on the playing time with the media rather than the learning sessions. Therefore, the students could not absorb the learning concept by playing and studying with the multisensory activity in this cycle because they first got interested in playing with the media rather than studying.

In the fundamental progress of being able to recognize individual sounds. 13 students have mastered the individual sounds, 5 students started to recognize the individual sounds, and 2 students did not show improvements in recognizing the individual sounds. Most students were quickly taught to recognize the individual sounds in the first decoding progress. The teacher kept reviewing the sounds with the students by making them sing, dancing, and reshaping the letters with the media.

The students were very playful when they tried to reshape the letters with Play-Doh and rewrite them on the sand as the learning media during the first progress of recognizing the individual sounds. However, 2 of the students had difficulty focusing on following the activity and the instruction, making it difficult to improve in recognizing the individual sounds. The research in this first stage indicated that the students can move on to the next stage, adding that some students still need support for the following stage.

In the next stage of decoding the ending sounds, the students could not understand the code of the segmenting concept through the Play-Doh. From what they showed, they still got guidance on where to put each sound and which one to pull the Play-Doh to combine the sounds. It is indicated that the students were clueless while using Play-Doh to segment the word. The students could not understand the code of the segmenting concept through the Play-Doh. From what they showed, they still got guidance on where to put each sound and which one to pull the Play-Doh to combine the sounds. It is indicated that the students were clueless while using Play-Doh to segment the word. The students tried to decode the ending sounds with the first sound. For example, they were confused about which to segment first in the word “man”. The students were supposed to decode the ending sounds, which is /an/, as the first decoding process. However, they were confused, and the teacher needed to ask them to repeat the decoding for the ending sounds only at least 3 times to make them understand that they were supposed to decode the ending sounds first.

In the next stage of blending sounds, the students did not sound out each sound while segmenting the word through Play-Doh, which started from the first try on decoding the first word, such as “man”. They were too busy and distracted by how fun the Play-Doh is used in the activity without trying to sound out each of the sounds, such as /m/, /a/, /n/, and segment the ending sounds of /a/ + /n/ = /an/ and the first sound of /m/ to blend it as the word “man”. Most students did not sound out the blending sounds because they were busy using the media instead of trying to sound all of the letters. The students remained silent and busy with the media, so the teacher had to ask them to repeat the blending part at least 3 times to make them understand that they also had to sound out the letters while pulling the Play-Doh as the code of the blending sound.



Lastly, the students' behavior during cycle 1 in the classroom could not manage their focus well. The students were clueless in comprehending the segment code through the media because 15 students could not pay attention while doing their visual attention to focus on the flashcards or the writings of the words. Also, 16 could not show their auditory response to listening to the teacher's instruction or explanation about the sounds, which failed them to recognize the code for the concept through Play-Doh.

Visual attention and auditory response were prominent as the first step before doing the kinesthetic and tactile participation during the multisensory activity. The students failed to manage the focus on visual and auditory in this cycle, which is always a problem in the classroom even before the multisensory is used as the teaching approach. Therefore, the students were confused about how to do the activity when they tried to use their kinesthetic and tactile participation. Although they could not comprehend the code concept and use the Play-Doh correctly, they developed their interest and enthusiasm to attract the main media used during the activity, such as Play-Doh and sand. They showed good engagement to motivate themselves to participate in using the media because they looked very curious to try to play with the Play-Doh and rewrite the word on the sand.

By the end of cycle 1, the researcher and teacher tried to discuss the failures experienced by students in this first cycle because almost all students did not show notable changes under the decoding improvement standards. The teacher and the researcher discussed during the reflection session after the teaching process to analyze the problem faced in cycle 1 and find some additional strategies for cycle 2 to make them focus more and be able to do the play and study simultaneously with the multisensory approach.

## **Cycle 2**

The result in cycle 2 showed that the 20 students finally improved under the decoding standard. Sixteen students showed prominent improvement in cycle 2 after they could not comprehend the decoding concept and use the media correctly in the previous cycle. After having an additional meeting for multisensory instruction about using Play-Doh as the code to segment the word, the students finally showed progress and comprehension in using the Play-Doh and sounding out the letters simultaneously. They could finally recognize individual sounds,

which becomes the fundamental part of phonics learning and can lead them to the concept of blending. The students could identify the individual sounds by shaping the letter with the Play-Doh, motivating them to strengthen their sound and letter cognition.

After showing their ability to recognize the individual sound, they could finally segment the ending and the first sound. On the first try to decode “man”, they still showed little confusion when segmenting the word through the media. However, they could finally try to sound out each sound while attempting to decode the word. But, it only happened on the first try on the word “man” because it looked like they tried to review and remember the multisensory instruction taught the day before. After attempting the first try of the word “man”, they could try to segment and blend the rest of the vocabulary. They involved all of their senses during cycle 2, in which the prominent part is the visual attention and the auditory response as the fundamental step of the multisensory approach. It was so hard to get their visual attention and auditory response before. However, in cycle 2, they could fully pay attention by participating in their visual and auditory to respond to the teacher actively. They could answer or guess the sound the teacher was trying to attract and engage their response. For example, when the teacher wrote the sound of /m/ on the whiteboard and asked the students to sound it, they enthusiastically answered it by sounding the letter /m/. Also, they could guess when the teacher tried to imitate the characteristics of the elephant’s nose to give them the clue to describe the initial sound of the word “elephant,” which is /e/. It means they progressed in responding and participating in their visual and auditory senses during this session.

Afterward, they were ready to segment the words independently with minimal guidance from the teacher. They successfully segmented each of the endings sounds, such as: -an, -am, -at, -ap, -ag, -ed, -eg, -in, -og, -op, -ot, -ub, -up, -ug, which indicate the ending sounds of the CVC (Consonant, Vowel, Consonant) words. They showed the decoding concept through multisensory instruction using the Play-Doh, which was well executed. The students could not blend the ending and first sounds into words in the previous session. In cycle 2, they were finally able to comprehend the blending concept and segment the word correctly, such as when they tried to combine the ending sound of /op/: sounding the /o/, sounding the /p/, then sound and blend it into /op/ as the last combination of ending sound. Then,

they also successfully combine the ending and the first sound, such as sounding the ending sound of /op/ and blending to the first sound of /m/, which becomes the word “mop.”

They also fully participated in involving their kinesthetic and tactile senses in cycle 2, such as understanding where to put a ball of Play-Doh on each ending sound, placing a ball of Play-Doh under the sound of /e/, and squishing it. Then, put a ball of Play-Doh under the sound of /g/ and squished it, which became the ending sound of /eg/. Then, they comprehend the code to blend the ending sound, such as pulling the ball of Play-Doh under the sound /e/ into the ball of Play-Doh under the sound /g/ as the code of blending sounds. Most students showed their ability to blend the ending sound, making it more accessible to blend the ending sound of /eg/ to the first sound of /b/. They placed one ball of Play-Doh under the first sound of /b/ and the other under the ending sound of /eg/. Then, they confidently pulled the ball under the first sound until it reached the second ball under the ending sound as the code of the final blending, which became the word “beg”.

By doing every step of the segmenting and blending code through the Play-Doh correctly, they finally progressed under the standard of decoding skill. At the end of the observation, the teacher asked the students to decode the words without using the media of the multisensory activity. The result showed that 4 students could read the word without trying to decode the word, and 16 showed notable improvement in decoding the word without using the media anymore. They showed that they could decode the word without hesitation and were very confident in trying to decode each of the given CVC words. In conclusion, all of the students can understand the decoding concept in phonics, especially the CVC words, and they have to recognize the individual sounds, decode, and blend the sounds into the CVC word. Having this skill means they can finally decode simple vocabulary in phonics using a multisensory approach.

## **DISCUSSION**

It is revealed that multisensory learning can improve students' decoding phonics skills by comprehending the concept of blending based on segmenting sounds into words. The involvement of the senses in the decoding phonics activity was very meaningful in strengthening their memory to make it easier to understand the concept. The multisensory approach has been used as a teaching strategy in the

classroom to help the students understand a learning concept in a subject more easily. The approach facilitates the students' need to find a solution to reduce their learning difficulty and improve their skills in decoding the phonics lessons. In the first cycle of the study, only 20% of students achieved a passing grade of 75 in decoding skills, while 60% did not pass. This result highlighted that the initial media use was less effective, revealing a need for improvement in the teaching approach. In response to these findings, the second cycle implemented a more robust multisensory approach. The results were notably better, with 100% of students achieving a passing grade of 75. This improvement underscores the effectiveness of multisensory learning in enhancing students' phonics skills by reinforcing memory and understanding through repeated sensory engagement.

The multisensory approach aligns with the theories of Quak et al., (2015) and Sarudin et al., (2019), who emphasize that integrating multiple sensory modalities enhances knowledge processing and reinforces learning. By actively involving sight, hearing, touch, and movement, this approach creates a dynamic and engaging learning environment. This method is consistent with Parra G., (2021), who found that multisensory strategies foster a positive learning atmosphere, boost motivation, and lead to better learning outcomes. Similarly, Aja et al., (2017) support the use of multisensory methods to achieve optimal educational results.

Additionally, the multisensory approach positively impacted classroom behavior. In the first cycle, 15 students exhibited negative behaviors, such as distraction and lack of focus. By the second cycle, these behaviors decreased significantly. Students showed improved concentration, engagement, and enthusiasm during multisensory activities. This behavioral improvement aligns with Wilar (2022), who advocates for using effective strategies to foster a positive learning environment and prevent boredom and distraction. It also supports findings by Hartina (2019) and Theresia et al., (2021), which suggest that multisensory approaches can transform negative behaviors into positive learning outcomes.

Despite these positive results, the study faced limitations, including overlapping school activities and reliance on simple questions from young students, which may have affected data collection. Future research should address these issues by better scheduling observations around school activities and conducting more detailed interviews with teachers. Additionally, incorporating supplementary

documentation such as photos or videos could provide a clearer view of each student's progress and learning environment. In conclusion, the multisensory approach significantly improves phonics decoding skills by engaging multiple senses, enhancing memory, and making learning more enjoyable. It also fosters better classroom behavior and motivation. Addressing the study's limitations can help refine the approach and further validate its effectiveness in educational settings.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of the previous chapter, it was revealed that the novelty of improving the students' decoding phonics skills by using the multisensory was clear from integrating several learning modalities, which has not been commonly used in phonics training. This approach delivered a more comprehensive learning experience and fit different student learning styles, resulting in a more inclusive and effective approach. This study contributed notably to discovering instructional strategies that can improve foundational literacy skills in kindergarten students by demonstrating that a multisensory approach is an attractive alternative to more limited common teaching approaches. It can be concluded from the research results that students get extraordinary improvements with the learning process carried out in 2 cycles. With a multisensory approach, most students finally succeeded in recognizing the concept of decoding by combining sounds into words independently and providing an interesting and enjoyable learning experience, which positively increased students' learning motivation, which increased very rapidly. In this way, this research concludes its success in overcoming the problem of learning comprehension difficulties for Adicita Mulia Kindergarten students.

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