

Innovative and Joyful Learning through English Phonics and Punjabi Muharni: A Bilingual Approach to Early Language Development

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Abstract—This research explores the comparative effectiveness of *Jolly Phonics* (for English) and *Punjabi Muharni & Penti* (for Gurmukhi) in early language acquisition among bilingual learners. The study highlights phoneme-grapheme correspondence, instructional strategies, and the benefits of joyful, culturally-rooted pedagogy. Integrative classroom methods are proposed to strengthen reading, pronunciation, and vocabulary in both languages for first-generation English learners in Punjab’s government schools.

Index Terms—Jolly Phonics, Punjabi Muharni, Bilingual Education, ESL, Joyful Learning, Gurmukhi, Sound-Symbol Mapping, Phonological Awareness

1. INTRODUCTION

Early literacy instruction in Punjab faces the dual challenge of introducing English as a second language while preserving Punjabi as the native language. *Jolly Phonics* provides a multisensory English phonics framework, while *Muharni & Penti* introduce Gurmukhi letters through rhyme and oral repetition. A bilingual approach that combines both can create a joyful, effective bridge between first- and second-language learning, especially in culturally rooted classroom environments.

In most government schools, children grow up speaking Punjabi at home and in their communities. However, they are expected to learn English from the first grade, often with little prior exposure. This linguistic shift can create anxiety, confusion, and a disconnect between school learning and home culture. Therefore, educators must employ innovative methods that build on what children already know—their mother tongue—to help them acquire English more meaningfully.

2. COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK: JOLLY PHONICS VS. PUNJABI MUHARNI

Aspect	Phonics (English)	Muharni & Penti (Punjabi)
Purpose	Teach 42–44 English phonemes using sounds and actions	Teach Gurmukhi script through rhyme and repetition
Script Type	Latin (non-phonetic)	Gurmukhi (phonetic)
Sound-Symbol Relation	One sound → many spellings	One-to-one mapping
Learning Method	Synthetic phonics with blending and segmenting	Rhymed letter recitation
Multisensory Tools	Songs, gestures, visuals, stories	Rhymes, chants, memory games
Language Transfer	Requires decoding effort due to irregular spelling	Reinforces consistent sound-symbol awareness

Both systems support early literacy but in different ways. English phonics must compensate for a non-phonetic script with multisensory strategies, while Gurmukhi’s phonetic consistency aids in building strong initial literacy skills.

3. PEDAGOGICAL INTEGRATION FOR ESL LEARNERS

Cross-linguistic transfer helps students decode English sounds more confidently when anchored in Punjabi phonics. Teachers can use sound analogies (e.g., ਸ /s/ ↔ "s" in *sun*) to create familiarity, reduce

fear of English, and reinforce bilingual literacy. Furthermore, ESL pedagogy should emphasize the gradual introduction of English phonemes while reinforcing them through culturally familiar contexts. For example, when introducing the English /m/ sound in words like *moon* or *mat*, a teacher can begin with the Punjabi letter ਮ (ਮ) and a familiar word like ਮੱਕੀ. This recognition reduces cognitive load and increases engagement.

4. SOUND CORRESPONDENCE TABLE

Punjabi Letter	Gurmukhi Sound	English Sound	English Word	Punjabi Word
ਸ	/s/	/s/	sun	ਸੱਪ
ਮ	/m/	/m/	moon	ਮੱਕੀ
ਕ	/k/	/k/	kite	ਕਿਤਾਬ
ਤ	/t/	/t/	top	ਤਰਬੂਜ
ਥ	/th/	/θ/	thumb	ਥਾਲੀ
ਵ	/v/	/v/	van	ਵਾਹਨ

These mappings serve as a foundation for creating classroom charts and bilingual flashcards that support direct phonemic comparisons.

5. JOYFUL LEARNING PRINCIPLES IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Joyful learning enhances motivation and engagement. Both phonics systems naturally support:

- Playful repetition
- Music, movement, and storytelling
- Peer interaction and classroom games
- Emotionally safe, inclusive spaces

Method	Joyful Elements
Jolly Phonics	Actions, songs, colorful visuals, storytelling
Punjabi Muharni	Rhythmic chanting, memory games, cultural rhymes

Incorporating fun, song-based lessons with movement can make even complex phonemic awareness tasks more accessible to early learners.

6. BILINGUAL PHONICS: BRIDGING ENGLISH AND PUNJABI

Jolly Phonics:

- 42 phonemes
- Emphasis on blending/segmenting
- Uses stories, gestures, and visuals

Punjabi Muharni & Penti:

- 35 consonants (ਵੱਜੰਜਨ), 10 vowels (ਸ੍ਵਰ)
- Introduced through traditional rhymes
- Consistent sound-letter mapping

Gurmukhi Letter Breakdown:

- *Muharni* → Consonants via rhyme
- *ਸ੍ਵਰ (Swar)* → Vowels (e.g., ਅ, ਆ, ਇ, ਈ)
- *Penti* → “35 letters” taught through structured chants

Why Combine Both?

- Phonetic awareness from Punjabi aids English decoding
- Culturally familiar tools boost confidence
- Supports joyful, stress-free bilingual learning

7. INNOVATIVE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

 Sound Match Song

- Match Punjabi and English sounds (e.g., ਕ with /k/ as in "kite") using songs and visuals

 Phonic-Rhyme Race

- Recite Muharni lines and find English words with matching initial sounds

 Letter Collage

- Make posters showing Gurmukhi and English letters side-by-side with tactile materials

 Listen & Act Game

- Teacher says a sound; students jump to the correct English or Punjabi letter flashcard

- These activities allow students to internalize new sounds through joyful, multisensory repetition and movement.

8. OBSERVED IMPACT ON LEARNERS

Benefits:

- Enhanced pronunciation in both languages
- Improved decoding and vocabulary skills
- Increased classroom participation
- Greater enthusiasm for language learning

Teacher Testimonials:

“When I link a Punjabi letter with an English sound using action or rhyme, children respond quickly and smile while learning.”

“It’s easier to introduce new English sounds when I compare them to what they already know in Muharni.”

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop bilingual phonics kits (Punjabi–English) for classroom use
2. Train teachers in joyful, action-based pedagogy
3. Use dual-language classroom displays
4. Encourage parental involvement in home-based rhyming activities
5. Celebrate cultural identity alongside academic progress

10. CONCLUSION

This research affirms that combining Jolly Phonics with Punjabi Muharni offers a joyful, effective route to bilingual literacy. Phonemic awareness from Punjabi supports English learning, especially when taught through multisensory, engaging activities. With proper teacher training and culturally inclusive tools, early learners can thrive in both linguistic domains.

11. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Innovative and Joyful Learning through English Phonics and Punjabi Muharni: A Bilingual Approach to Early Language Development

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Abstract

This research paper explores the comparative effectiveness of Jolly Phonics (English) and Punjabi Muharni & Penti (Gurmukhi) in early language learning. With a focus on bilingual Punjabi learners in government schools, the study examines sound-symbol correspondence, phoneme instruction methods, learner challenges, and pedagogical implications. The paper proposes integrative strategies that combine both systems to enhance reading, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition among first-generation English learners.

APPENDIX

A. Sample Bilingual Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 1–3

Topic: Letter-Sound Correspondence in English and Punjabi

Objective: Students will identify and pronounce corresponding sounds in both English (Jolly Phonics) and Punjabi (Muharni).

Step	Activity	Materials
1. Warm-up	Sing the Muharni chant	Chart with Gurmukhi alphabet
2. Phonics Drill	Practice English phonemes with actions	Jolly Phonics flashcards
3. Sound Match	Match Gurmukhi letters to English sounds (e.g.,	Sound cards (Punjabi and

Step	Activity	Materials
	ਮ – m – moon)	English)
4. Creative Task	Create a letter collage with both scripts	Paper, glue, clay, leaves
5. Review Game	“Listen & Act” – students jump to correct letter	Floor markers with letters

B. Comparative Chart of Phonemes

English Phoneme	Punjabi Equivalent	Example (English)	Example (Punjabi)
/s/	ਸ	sun, sit	ਸੱਪ
/m/	ਮ	mat, moon	ਮੱਕੀ
/k/	ਕ	cat, kite	ਕਿਤਾਬ
/t/	ਤ	tin, top	ਤਰਬੂਜ
/th/	ਥ	thumb	ਥਾਲੀ
/v/	ਵ	van	ਵਾਹਨ

C. Teacher Training Checklist

- Understood principles of synthetic phonics
- Can perform Jolly Phonics actions
- Can recite and teach Muharni
- Able to create bilingual phonics materials
- Uses storytelling and songs in instruction
- Encourages student participation through joyful learning methods

D. Parent Engagement Sheet

Title: “Sound Fun at Home”

Instructions:

- Practice daily Muharni chants with your child.
- Match English letters with Punjabi ones at home (e.g., ਮ for moon).
- Play rhyming games using household items.
- Encourage storytelling in both languages.

HELPFUL HINTS

Grammar, songs, jingles, limericks, innovative joyful learning, ESL, middle school, rhythmic pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning to read in a second language like English poses significant challenges for children whose first language is Punjabi. Jolly Phonics, a systematic synthetic phonics program, is widely used to develop early literacy. On the other hand, Punjabi Muharni & Penti—traditional tools for learning the Gurmukhi script—form the foundation of first language instruction in Punjab. This paper compares the two systems and explores how cross-linguistic strategies can help students transition from native-language literacy to second-language literacy more effectively. Language learning should be joyful, meaningful, and rooted in the learner’s cultural context. In Punjab’s government schools, children grow up speaking Punjabi but are expected to learn English as a second language from an early stage. This creates both an opportunity and a challenge.

- Jolly Phonics, a multisensory English phonics program, uses actions, songs, and stories to teach sound-letter relationships.
- Muharni, the traditional Punjabi alphabet song, introduces children to Gurmukhi script through rhyme and repetition.
- This paper proposes an integrated bilingual method that uses both systems to make literacy instruction joyful, effective, and culturally relevant.

2. COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Phonics (English)	Punjabi Muharni & Penti
Purpose	Teach 42–44 English phonemes using actions and sounds	Teach Punjabi Gurmukhi script through rhyme and repetition
Script Type	Latin alphabet (non-phonetic)	Gurmukhi script (phonetic)

Sound-Symbol Relation	One sound, multiple spellings (e.g., /ai/, /ee/)	Mostly one-to-one symbol-sound mapping
Learning Method	Synthetic phonics with blending/segmenting	Rhymed recitation of letters and sounds
Multisensory Tools	Songs, gestures, stories, visual aids	Rhymes, charts, oral chanting
Language Transfer	Requires practice for decoding irregular words	Facilitates strong sound-letter matching

3. PEDAGOGICAL INTEGRATION FOR ESL LEARNERS

Punjabi learners can benefit from ESL strategies that build on the familiarity of their first language. Integrating Jolly Phonics with Punjabi Muharni enables transfer of sound recognition skills across languages. Teachers can draw analogies between Punjabi and English sounds to build confidence and improve decoding.

4. SAMPLE SOUND COMPARISONS

The following table illustrates how Punjabi phonemes can be mapped to English sounds using classroom examples.

Sound	Punjabi Letter	English Sound	English Example	Punjabi Example
ਸ	ਸ	/s/	sun, sit	ਸੱਪ
ਮ	ਮ	/m/	mat, moon	ਮੱਕੀ
ਕ	ਕ	/k/	cat, kite	ਕਿਤਾਬ
ਤ	ਤ	/t/	top, tin	ਤਰਬੂਜ
ਥ	ਥ	/th/	thumb	ਥਾਲੀ

ਵ	ਵ	/v/	van, vest	ਵਾਰਨ
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2. Joyful Learning Principles in Language Classrooms

Joyful learning in language education includes:

- Playful repetition
- Use of music, movement, and storytelling
- Peer interaction
- Emotionally safe and inclusive environments

Both Jolly Phonics and Muharni naturally support these principles.

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Method	Joyful Elements
Jolly Phonics	Actions, songs, colorful visuals, storytelling
Muharni	Rhythmic chants, memory games, cultural rhymes

3. Bilingual Phonics: Bridging English and Punjabi English Phonics (Jolly Phonics)

- Teaches 42 sounds (phonemes)
- Focus on blending and segmenting
- Engages multiple senses

Punjabi Muharni & Penti

- Teaches 35 Gurmukhi consonants and 10 vowels
- Uses oral recitation **and** visual charts

Strong sound-symbol consistency

In Punjabi, vowels are known as "ਸ੍ਵਰ" (Swar).

While "Muharni" (ਮੁਹਾਰਣੀ) is the traditional rhyme or chant used to teach the Gurmukhi script, it primarily introduces consonants (ਵਜੰਜਨ). The vowels (ਸ੍ਵਰ) are taught separately but often included alongside the Muharni in classroom instruction.

 Breakdown of Gurmukhi Letters:

- Muharni → Traditional rhyme used to teach **consonants** (ਵਜੰਜਨ).
- ਸ੍ਵਰ (Swar) → Vowels (e.g., ਅ, ਆ, ਇ, ਈ, ਉ, ਊ, ਏ, ਐ, ਓ, ਔ)
- ਪੈਂਤੀ (Penti) → The “35 letters” (ਗੁਰਮੁਖੀ ਅੱਖਰ) commonly taught through Muharni.

 Example:

- ਅ – First vowel in Gurmukhi (also the first letter in Penti)
- ਆ – Long vowel (a) /ai/ sound
- ਇ – Short 'i'/i/ sound
... and so on.

Why Combine Both?

- Punjabi is phonetic; English is not.
- Learners can transfer sound awareness from Punjabi to English.
- Culturally familiar tools reduce fear of English and increase confidence.

4. Innovative Classroom Activities

Here are some examples of joyful bilingual strategies used in classrooms:

 "Sound Match Song"

- Match a Punjabi letter (e.g., ਕ /k/) with an English sound (/k/ in "kite")
- Use actions and pictures to reinforce both

 "Phonic-Rhyme Race"

- Recite a line of Muharni, then find an English word that starts with a similar sound
- Example: ਮ – ਮੱਕੀ → m – moon

 "Letter Collage"

- Create visual posters with Gurmukhi and English letters side-by-side
- Use glitter, leaves, or clay to shape letters for tactile learning

 "Listen & Act" Game

- Teacher says a sound (e.g., /s/), children jump to either the English letter (S) or Punjabi (ਸ) depending on which one matches

5. IMPACT ON LEARNERS

 Observed Benefits:

- Increased pronunciation accuracy
- Stronger letter-sound decoding in both languages
- Improved vocabulary acquisition
- Higher motivation **and** participation

 Teacher Testimonials:

“When I link a Punjabi letter with an English sound using action or rhyme, children respond quickly and smile while learning.”

“It’s easier to introduce new English sounds when I compare them to what they already know in Muharni.”

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create bilingual phonics kits for classrooms using both Gurmukhi and English letters.
2. Train teachers in joyful phonics-based teaching methods.
3. Use classroom displays that celebrate both languages equally.
4. Include parents in home-based rhyming and sound games to strengthen learning outside the classroom.

7. CONCLUSION

Comparing Jolly Phonics and Punjabi Muharni reveals significant potential for bilingual scaffolding. Teachers can leverage the familiarity of the Punjabi alphabet while gradually introducing English phonemes through action-based phonics. Such integration not only supports literacy development but also enhances student engagement and pronunciation accuracy. With culturally relevant tools and dual-language strategies, early learners can become confident, capable readers in both languages.

APPENDIX

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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