

Improving the Beginning Reading Ability of Class I Students at State Elementary School 35 Barru Using Letter Card Media

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Abstract

This study aims to improve the early reading skills of first-grade students at SD Negeri 35 Barru using letter card media through a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach. The research was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. Letter card media was utilized to introduce letters, pronounce letter sounds, and construct simple words interactively. The results showed a significant improvement in students' reading abilities. In the first cycle, only 59% of students met the Minimum Competency Criteria (MCC). Challenges such as difficulty recognizing letters and low student motivation were addressed in the second cycle by incorporating interactive activities like word games and paired reading exercises. By the end of the second cycle, 88% of students achieved the MCC. This study concludes that the use of letter card media is effective in enhancing students' early reading skills. The media not only aids students in recognizing letters and reading words but also increases their motivation and participation in the learning process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a process that aims to develop individual potential as a whole, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and character. As the basis for community development, education not only functions as a medium for transferring knowledge, but also as an important means of forming individuals who can make positive contributions to social, economic and cultural aspects. Formal education carried out in schools plays a major role in building basic skills and understanding needed in everyday life. Getting an education is very important for everyone, because education is one of the provisions that everyone needs to achieve success in life. Everyone has the right to education, regardless of age. Education is a process that lasts throughout life, from the beginning of life (at birth) until we grow old (Herlina, 2019).

At the basic education level, especially grade I elementary school (SD), early reading learning is one of the main focuses. According to Susanti, (2022) Reading is a language skill that occupies the third position in the order of development, after listening and speaking skills. Reading activities not only involve the process of understanding writing, but also involve various aspects such as visual activities, thought processes, psycholinguistics, and metacognitive abilities. As a receptive activity, reading allows a person to absorb new information, knowledge and experiences. Apart from that, reading can also improve thinking skills, broaden one's horizons, and sharpen one's view of various things.

According to Munthe & Sijinjak (2018) beginning reading is the first step in learning to read, especially for elementary school students. At this stage, students are taught to recognize letters and the sound of each letter. By understanding letters and sounds, they can put words together, assemble words into words, and understand the meaning of the words. With their ability

to put words together, they can also compose sentences so that they can understand the content of the reading well.

Beginning reading is the level of the learning process of reading to master the writing system as a visual representation of language. This level is often referred to as the level of learning to read (*learning to read*). Beginning reading can be divided into two stages, namely learning to read without a book and using a book starting after getting to know the letters well and being introduced to the written symbols written in the book. Beginning reading is given in stages, namely pre-reading and reading. At the pre-reading stage, we are taught good sitting posture when reading, how to place a book, how to hold a book, how to open and turn the pages of a book, see and pay attention to the writing (Ariyati, 2015).

Beginning reading ability is a very important basic skill for grade I elementary school students. These skills are not only the main foundation in the teaching and learning process at school, but also play an important role in developing students' literacy skills in the future. Reading is the initial gateway for students to understand various information, broaden their horizons, and develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, efforts to improve reading skills from an early age are very important.

Beginning reading ability is the initial stage in the literacy process, where a reader learns to recognize and understand the relationship between alphabetic symbols and the sounds they represent. In this stage, the main focus is on mastering the alphabetic code, which includes several important aspects, namely recognizing letters, recognizing phonemes, combining phonemes (Kusmayanti, 2019). This stage is very important as a foundation for more complex reading skills, such as reading with comprehension. If mastered well, beginning reading skills help readers process words automatically, allowing them to focus on the meaning of the text.

However, not all students have the same level of reading ability when entering primary education. These differences in ability are influenced by various factors, including family environment, pre-school experiences, and learning approaches applied at school. Students who come from environments with limited access to books or a lack of literacy stimulation often show greater difficulty in learning to read. This is a big challenge for teachers, especially in the early grades, to create learning methods that are able to accommodate the various needs of students.

At SDN 35 Barru, some class I students showed difficulty in recognizing letters, pronouncing letter sounds, and combining them into words. This problem not only hinders students' reading ability, but also affects their self-confidence in learning. Teachers are faced with the important task of finding learning approaches that are not only effective, but also interesting for students. One solution that can be implemented is the use of interesting and interactive learning media.

Learning media is something that is used to channel messages so that it can stimulate children's attention, interest, thoughts and feelings in learning activities to achieve learning goals (Ramadanti & Arifin 2021). Apart from that, according to Ismail (2020), learning media are all forms of physical equipment designed in a planned manner to convey information and build interaction. According to Munawaroh et al (2021) Learning media is a means used to clarify the information conveyed to students, and help them understand the learning message better. Apart from functioning as a tool, media can also motivate students to understand learning more effectively. Because the material presented is no longer abstract, the use of learning media makes the teaching and learning process easier for students.

According to Dony et al (2021) Learning using letter cards can help improve the ability to recognize letters, so that students can compose basic words from those letters. Apart from that, students are also taught how to solve problems through games that use letter cards. According to Veryawan (2020), media cards are small cards that contain pictures, ideas, questions or symbols that help children recognize or remember things related to the lesson they are studying.

Letter cards are alphabet cards that contain pictures, letters, symbols, which increase or guide children in relation to these symbols (Pangastuti & Hanum, 2017). Apart from that, according to Sunarti (2018) Letter cards are letters written on pieces of media, whether cardboard,

paper or blackboard (triplex). The letter pieces can be moved around according to the wishes of the creator of syllables, words or sentences. The use of these letter cards really attracts students' attention and is very easy to use in teaching beginning reading. Apart from that, letter cards also train students' creativity in arranging words according to their wishes.

Letter card media has the following functions: (1) stimulate children to think creatively; (2) make children happy in playing; (3) increasing the child's cognitive ability to think and language skills when the child recognizes the letters a, b, c, d, e and so on (Munandar, 2005: 67). Children can use letter card media in learning activities. Letter card media is one of the developments in graphic media (writing and drawing). The functions of letter card media for children include: (a) creating a happy, happy, relaxed and happy learning atmosphere without any pressure; (b) develop children's memory because children will more easily remember objects they see directly, even if only a few letters.

Letter card media is useful for introducing children to letters and helping children stimulate their reading skills with phonics techniques. Playing using letter card media can be made in: (1) loose version aimed at identifying and increasing the richness of letters; (2) initial letter version to identify letters and cultivate children's morphophonemics; (3) letter-arranging version to develop syntactic abilities; (4) letter collection version to identify letters (Musfiroh, 2008).

Apart from that, the use of letter card media can also help overcome limited learning resources in schools. Letter cards can be made with simple materials, but have great potential to increase students' interest in learning. Through a combination of creativity and student involvement, learning to read can be a fun and effective process.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses Classroom Action Research (PTK). Classroom Action Research is a process of studying learning problems in the classroom through self-reflection in an effort to solve these problems by carrying out various planned actions in real situations and analyzing every influence of the treatment (Sanjaya, 2016: 22). Classroom Action Research in this study aims to improve the beginning reading skills of class I students at SDN 35 Barru by using letter cards as media. Classroom Action Research was chosen because it approaches identifying problems directly in the classroom, designing appropriate solutions, and evaluating the results through action cycles.

This research was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action implementation, observation and reflection stages:

Cycle I

- a. Planning: The researcher prepared a learning plan using letter card media. This plan includes preparing learning materials, making letter cards, and guidelines for implementing class activities.
- b. Action Implementation: Learning activities are carried out by introducing letter cards to students through activities to recognize letters, pronounce letter sounds, and compose simple words.
- c. Observation: Researchers recorded student activities, level of participation, and difficulties encountered during learning.
- d. Reflection: Observation results are analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the method applied. Improvements are formulated for implementation in the next cycle.

Cycle II

- a. Planning: Researchers revised the learning plan based on the results of cycle I reflection. The material was improved with a focus on strengthening the ability to read more complex words.
- b. Action Implementation: More varied learning activities, including word games using letter cards and group reading activities.

- c. Observation: The researcher again recorded the development of students' reading abilities and their activity during the learning process.
- d. Reflection: Researchers analyze the success of cycle II and conclude the research results.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (12 Pt)

This research involved 17 class I students at SD Negeri 35 Barru. The results of the research showed that there was an increase in students' initial reading abilities after implementing letter card media for two cycles.

Cycle I Results

In cycle I, the main focus is the use of letter cards and basic learning to recognize letters and letter sounds. Learning activities include recognizing the letters of the alphabet using cards, practicing saying letter sounds, and composing simple words. However, the test results at the end of cycle I showed that of the 17 students, only 10 students (59%) succeeded in achieving the minimum completeness criteria (KKM). Observations during the implementation of cycle I noted several obstacles, including: Students have difficulty remembering the shape of certain letters. Some students are not yet able to combine the sounds of letters into simple words. Student motivation in learning activities tends to be low. The results of the reflection show that learning methods require improvement, especially in terms of variations in activities and intensive assistance for students who have difficulty. Apart from that, it is necessary to add game elements to increase students' interest in learning.

Cycle II Results

In cycle II, the learning method was improved by adding word game activities, group competitions using letter cards, and pair reading practice. This activity is designed to more actively involve students in learning. The test results at the end of cycle II showed a significant improvement, where 15 out of 17 students (88%) succeeded in reaching the KKM. Only 2 students still need further assistance. In addition, observations noted an increase in student participation, with the majority of students showing high enthusiasm when participating in games and group activities. The obstacles experienced in cycle I were successfully overcome in cycle II through a more interactive approach and more intensive guidance. Previously passive students became more motivated to learn, and their ability to construct words improved significantly.

The results of this research indicate that the use of letter card media is very effective in improving students' initial reading abilities. In cycle I, students experienced difficulties mainly due to the lack of variety of activities and methods that did not fully interest them. However, through improvements in cycle II, more creative and interactive learning methods were able to increase students' overall motivation and reading ability. Overall, this research proves that letter card media is an effective solution for improving the beginning reading abilities of grade I students.

4. CONCLUSION

This research proves that the use of letter card media is effective in improving the initial reading ability of class I students at SD Negeri 35 Barru. In two action cycles, the results showed a significant increase in students' reading abilities. In the first cycle, only 59% of students achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM), with several obstacles such as difficulty recognizing letters and lack of student motivation. After improvements were made in the second cycle, in the form of adding interactive activities such as word games and paired reading exercises, results increased with 88% of students reaching the KKM. Student participation and enthusiasm also increased significantly. Through a more creative and interactive approach, letter card media not only helps students recognize letters and read words, but also increases their motivation and activity during the learning process. This media has proven to be an effective solution for improving students' initial reading skills.

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