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The Role of Teachers in Improving Basic Reading Skills among First Grade Students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal

Nur Halimah[1], Muslihan[2], Fatia Rahmanita[3]
[1,2,3]Institut Agama Islam Hamzan Wadi Pancor, Indonesia

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Abstract
This study is motivated by differences in beginning reading abilities among first-grade students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal. Some students continue to experience difficulties in recognizing and distinguishing letters, combining letters into syllables, and reading simple words. These challenges highlight the importance of teachers' active involvement in providing guidance and creating engaging reading instruction tailored to students' abilities. This study aims to describe teachers' roles in improving first-grade students' basic reading skills, identify the instructional methods and media employed, and examine the supporting and inhibiting factors, as well as the strategies used to address difficulties in beginning reading. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with the first-grade teacher and the head of the madrasah, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data trustworthiness was established through source and methodological triangulation. The findings indicate that teachers play four key roles in improving students' basic reading skills. As guides, teachers provide individual assistance and additional instruction. As motivators, they offer praise and rewards to encourage students' enthusiasm and confidence. As facilitators, they provide instructional media and a reading corner. As evaluators, they monitor students' reading progress. The instructional methods combine the alphabetic method and the syllabic method, supported by letter cards, illustrated word cards, and reading aids. Supporting factors include students' enthusiasm and the head of the madrasah's support. Inhibiting factors include differences in students' initial reading abilities, limited concentration, and insufficient reading support at home. These challenges are addressed through educational games, additional guidance, and communication with parents. In conclusion, teachers' comprehensive involvement and family support are essential to fostering the development of beginning reading skills among first-grade students.

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Corresponding Author:
Nur Halimah
Institut Agama Islam Hamzan Wadi Pancor, Indonesia
Email Coresspondent: halimah973899@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the fundamental skills in the educational process, particularly at the primary education level. Reading ability provides the foundation for students to understand information, acquire knowledge, and participate in learning across various subject areas. In the early stages of education, reading skills involve not only recognizing letters and pronouncing words but also laying the groundwork for literacy development and academic achievement at subsequent educational levels. Therefore, beginning reading instruction

requires particular attention, especially for first-grade students at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah (MI), an Islamic elementary school.

Teachers play a strategic role in developing beginning reading skills through structured, engaging instruction that is appropriate to students' developmental characteristics. In practice, teachers do not merely act as instructors who deliver learning materials; they also serve as guides, motivators, facilitators, and evaluators. As guides, teachers provide individual assistance to students who experience reading difficulties. As motivators, they foster students' interest and self-confidence through encouragement and rewards. As facilitators, they provide instructional media and a supportive learning environment, while as evaluators, they monitor each student's reading progress. These roles are essential because first-grade students differ in their initial abilities, learning pace, and readiness to develop reading skills. (Nur'aini et al.,2024)

Challenges in beginning reading instruction have also been identified at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal. According to the research draft, some first-grade students continue to experience difficulties recognizing and distinguishing letter shapes, such as *b* and *d*, combining letters into syllables, and reading simple words. In addition, some students lack self-confidence and easily lose concentration during reading activities. Differences in students' initial reading abilities and the lack of optimal reading support at home also present challenges for teachers in implementing reading instruction. These conditions highlight the importance of adaptive teaching strategies and continuous guidance to ensure that every student has the opportunity to develop their reading skills.

In addressing these challenges, the use of appropriate instructional methods and media is an essential component of teachers' efforts to improve students' reading skills. The alphabetic method and the syllabic method can help students understand the relationships between letters, sounds, and word formation. Meanwhile, letter cards, illustrated word cards, reading aids, and a reading corner can provide more concrete and engaging learning experiences. The implementation of these methods and media should be accompanied by individual guidance, motivational support, progress assessment, and communication with parents. Thus, beginning reading instruction should not focus solely on the acquisition of technical reading skills but also on creating a supportive learning environment that accommodates the needs of every student. (Waridah et al.,2023)

Previous studies on beginning reading instruction have examined the use of letter cards, illustrated word cards, and various instructional methods to help students develop reading skills. However, based on the research gap identified in this study's draft, further context-specific research is needed to explain how teachers' multiple roles are interconnected in addressing differences in students' reading abilities in the Madrasah Ibtida'iyah context. Studies focusing solely on a particular method or instructional medium may not provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers integrate guidance, motivation, facilitation, and evaluation into everyday teaching practices. Therefore, this study at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal seeks to examine the implementation of teachers' roles comprehensively, including the challenges they encounter and the strategies they employ to overcome them. The proposed research gap should be substantiated with relevant previous scholarly articles in the final manuscript.

Based on these issues, this study aims to describe teachers' roles in improving the basic reading skills of first-grade students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal, identify the instructional methods and media used, and analyze the supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and solutions implemented in beginning reading instruction. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of beginning reading instruction, particularly by strengthening teachers' roles and fostering

collaboration between the madrasah and families to support students' literacy development from an early age.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' roles in improving the basic reading skills of first-grade students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal. The study focused on teachers' roles as guides, motivators, facilitators, and evaluators; the use of instructional methods and media for beginning reading; and the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered by teachers, along with the strategies implemented to address these challenges.

The study was conducted at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal. The research participants and sources of information included the first-grade teacher as the primary informant, the head of the madrasah as a supporting informant, and first-grade students, who were observed during reading instruction. The research site was selected because some first-grade students experienced difficulties in developing beginning reading skills. In this study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument and was directly involved in the data collection and interpretation processes.

Data were collected using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation involved directly examining reading instruction in the first-grade classroom, including teacher–student interactions, the use of instructional methods and media, the provision of motivation, and the assessment of students' reading abilities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the first-grade teacher and the head of the madrasah to obtain information about teachers' roles, instructional strategies, challenges encountered, and efforts to address students' reading difficulties. Documentation was used to supplement the data by collecting relevant materials, such as the madrasah profile, photographs of learning activities, instructional documents, and records of students' reading progress.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises three stages. First, data condensation involves selecting, focusing on, and simplifying data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation in accordance with the research focus. Second, data display involves systematically organizing information in narrative form to facilitate an understanding of patterns and relationships among the findings. Third, conclusion drawing and verification involves interpreting the research findings and examining their consistency with the collected data (Riswan & Zamsiswaya, 2026).

Data trustworthiness was assessed through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the first-grade teacher, the head of the madrasah, and other relevant data sources. Methodological triangulation involved comparing the findings from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure the consistency of the information. Through these procedures, the study was expected to produce a systematic and accountable description of teachers' roles in improving the basic reading skills of first-grade students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Findings

a. The Role of Teachers in Improving Basic Reading Skills

The findings at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal indicate that the first-grade teacher performs four main roles in improving students' basic reading

skills: guide, motivator, facilitator, and evaluator. These four roles are implemented to help students develop beginning reading skills, ranging from recognizing letters and distinguishing their shapes and sounds to combining letters into syllables and reading simple words.

As a guide, the teacher provides individual assistance to students who have not yet developed adequate letter recognition or who continue to experience difficulties combining letters into syllables. This assistance is provided during classroom instruction, with additional time allocated to students who require further support. This approach demonstrates the teacher's efforts to adapt instruction to differences in students' initial abilities. As a motivator, the teacher offers praise, applause, and recognition when students successfully read letters or words correctly. These forms of appreciation are intended to enhance students' learning motivation and self-confidence. The teacher also strives to create an enjoyable learning environment so that students do not easily feel afraid or embarrassed when encountering reading difficulties.

As a facilitator, the teacher provides instructional media, including letter cards, illustrated word cards, reading aids, and a reading corner. These resources help students recognize letter shapes, associate written words with pictures, and practise reading through more concrete and engaging materials. Meanwhile, as an evaluator, the teacher monitors students' reading progress using a reading progress record. This monitoring helps identify students who continue to experience difficulties and require additional assistance or remedial instruction. Thus, evaluation is not only intended to assess students' reading abilities but also serves as a basis for determining appropriate follow-up instruction.

b. Methods and Instructional Media for Beginning Reading

The findings indicate that the teacher employs a combination of the Alphabetic Method and the Syllabic Method. The Alphabetic Method is used to introduce vowels and consonants along with their corresponding sounds. Students then practise combining letters into syllables and arranging syllables to form simple words. For example, students learn to recognize letter sounds, combine them into syllables, and then read words such as *batu* (stone). The Syllabic Method helps students practise reading by combining smaller units of sound and written language. Students who have not yet mastered these basic skills receive direct guidance from the teacher using reading books or beginning reading instructional aids.

The instructional media used include letter cards (*flashcards*), illustrated word cards, demonstration boards, and illustrated reading materials. Letter cards are used to develop students' ability to recognize letter shapes, while illustrated word cards help them associate written words with familiar objects from everyday life. The teacher also incorporates game-based activities, such as letter-guessing games, to make instruction more varied and engaging. These findings indicate that reading instruction is implemented through gradual practice that combines letter recognition, syllable formation, and the use of visual media. Instruction is also adapted to students' needs, particularly those who continue to require individual assistance.

c. Factors, Inhibiting Factors, and Strategies to Overcome Them

The study identified two main supporting factors in beginning reading instruction. First, students showed enthusiasm for game-based learning activities. Engaging activities provided opportunities for students to practise reading in a more enjoyable learning environment. Second, the head of the madrasah supported the provision of basic reading facilities and instructional media in the classroom. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors included differences in students' initial reading

abilities, limited concentration, and inconsistent reading support at home. Some students had acquired reading experience before entering the madrasah, whereas others still struggled to recognize letters. These differences required the teacher to provide different forms of assistance according to each student's needs.

In addition, first-grade students were relatively easily distracted and tended to become bored when reading activities were monotonous. Inconsistent parental support also posed a challenge because reading practice at school was not always continued at home. To address these challenges, the teacher implemented educational games, ice-breaking activities, and letter-guessing games. The teacher also provided additional guidance for students experiencing difficulties and maintained communication with parents through a reading communication notebook. These efforts aimed to connect classroom learning activities with the development of regular reading habits at home.

3.2. Discussion

a. The Teacher's Role in Supporting Beginning Reading Instruction

The role of teachers in improving basic reading skills extends beyond delivering instructional content. Teachers also provide individual guidance, build students' motivation, provide instructional media, and monitor students' progress. These four roles are interrelated because students who experience reading difficulties may require both academic support and emotional encouragement. Individual assistance is particularly important when students have different levels of initial reading ability. Students who have not yet learned to recognize letters need practice identifying letter shapes and sounds, while those who have mastered this stage can be guided to combine letters into syllables and read simple words. Therefore, teachers need to adapt learning activities to students' needs rather than applying the same practice pattern to every child.

Providing praise and appreciation also demonstrates teachers' attention to students' motivation. Students who feel appreciated when they succeed in reading may become more confident and willing to try again. However, appreciation should be accompanied by clear feedback so that students understand which skills they have mastered and which aspects still need improvement. These findings can be discussed within the framework of Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which is cited in the thesis draft. This framework emphasizes the importance of considering children's stages of cognitive development when designing learning activities. The use of concrete examples, pictures, and hands-on activities is consistent with the needs of instruction that does not rely solely on abstract explanations. However, the publication year and original source of the Piaget reference should be verified and completed using the thesis bibliography before the manuscript is published (Jiang, 2025).

b. The Suitability of Methods and Instructional Media to Students' Needs

The combination of the Alphabetic Method and the Syllabic Method indicates that beginning reading instruction at the research site is implemented gradually. Introducing letters and their sounds provides a foundation for students to understand the relationship between written symbols and speech sounds. Students then practise combining letters into syllables and arranging them to form simple words. The use of letter cards and illustrated word cards supports these activities because students can directly observe written forms and associate them with sounds or familiar objects. Visual media can also help teachers vary learning activities so that students do not merely listen to explanations but actively observe, identify, and read.

Nevertheless, this study is more appropriately understood as a description of how instructional methods and media are implemented in the classroom, rather than as experimental evidence that one method is more effective than another. This qualitative descriptive study does not present a comparison of test results before and after instruction or statistical measurements of instructional effectiveness. Therefore, the discussion focuses on the suitability of the strategies to students' learning needs and how teachers implement them. The implication is that teachers need to evaluate students' mastery regularly. If students still struggle to distinguish letters, letter-recognition exercises should be reinforced. If students can recognize letters but are not yet able to read words, exercises in combining syllables should be intensified. Such adjustments help ensure that instruction progresses in accordance with each student's developing abilities.

c. The Influence of the Learning Environment and Parental Involvement

The research findings indicate that reading instruction is influenced not only by the methods used by teachers but also by the learning environment and family support. Students' enthusiasm and the head of the madrasah's support help create conditions conducive to learning. Conversely, differences in students' initial abilities, limited concentration, and insufficient reading assistance at home present challenges that need to be addressed. Educational games and ice-breaking activities are used by teachers to maintain student engagement. These strategies are relevant to the needs of early-grade instruction, which requires varied learning activities. However, games should remain focused on learning objectives, such as recognizing letters, matching letters with their sounds, reading syllables, and reading simple words (Fitria, 2023).

Meanwhile, the use of a reading communication notebook demonstrates an effort to strengthen continuity between learning at school and at home. Regular reading practice at home provides students with opportunities to reinforce the skills they have learned in the classroom. Communication between teachers and parents can also help convey information about students' progress and the types of exercises that need to be continued at home. Therefore, responsibility for improving reading skills does not rest solely with teachers. Schools need to support the provision of literacy facilities, while parents can contribute through simple reading guidance and the development of reading habits at home. Such collaboration is an important aspect of building a sustainable literacy environment.

d. Implications of the Findings for Learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Overall, the research findings indicate that teachers' efforts to improve first-grade students' basic reading skills involve a combination of individual guidance, motivation, instructional methods and media, assessment, and communication with parents. These findings provide practical insights into how teachers address differences in reading abilities during the early stages of primary education.

In practical terms, teachers need to assess students' initial abilities, provide reading exercises progressively, utilize concrete instructional media, and monitor each student's progress. The madrasah can also strengthen its literacy culture by developing reading corners and providing reading materials appropriate for students' ages. At home, parents can provide support through short, regular reading activities. Nevertheless, the findings of this study are contextual because the research focuses on a single madrasah. Therefore, the findings cannot automatically be generalized to all Madrasah Ibtidaiyah institutions. Further research could examine students' reading development using more measurable data or compare the implementation of reading strategies across several madrasahs.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the teacher's role in improving the basic reading skills of first-grade students at MI Ijtihadil Islamiyah NW Karang Kendal is carried out through four main roles: guide, motivator, facilitator, and evaluator. As a guide, the teacher provides individual assistance to students who experience reading difficulties. As a motivator, the teacher offers praise and appreciation to enhance students' enthusiasm and self-confidence. As a facilitator, the teacher provides instructional media and a reading corner, while as an evaluator, the teacher monitors students' reading progress using a reading progress record and provides additional guidance according to their needs.

In practice, the teacher combines the Alphabetic Method and the Syllabic Method using letter cards, illustrated word cards, demonstration boards, and illustrated reading materials. These methods and media are intended to help students recognize letters, associate letters with their sounds, combine letters into syllables, and gradually read simple words. Supporting factors include students' enthusiasm and the head of the madrasah's support for providing reading facilities. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include differences in students' initial reading abilities, limited concentration, and inconsistent reading assistance at home. To address these challenges, the teacher implements educational games, ice-breaking activities, additional guidance, and communication with parents. Therefore, improving basic reading skills requires instruction that is gradual, engaging, and responsive to students' needs, supported by continuous assessment and collaboration among teachers, the madrasah, and families. This conclusion provides a contextual account of teachers' strategies for teaching beginning reading at the research site.

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