

THE EFFECT OF LETTER CARD MEDIA ON THE BEGINNING READING ABILITY OF GRADE I STUDENTS AT STATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 69 BANDA ACEH

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received : Jan 17, 2024

Revised : Feb 28, 2024

Accepted : Mar 29, 2024

Available : Mar 30, 2024

Kata Kunci:

Media kartu huruf, membaca permulaan, siswa sekolah dasar, kemampuan membaca

Keywords:

letter card media, beginning reading, elementary school students, reading ability en.

ABSTRAK

Kemampuan membaca permulaan merupakan salah satu kemampuan dasar yang penting dikuasai siswa sekolah dasar pada kelas rendah. Kemampuan tersebut menjadi dasar bagi siswa untuk mengikuti proses pembelajaran pada tahap selanjutnya. Namun, masih terdapat siswa kelas I yang mengalami kesulitan dalam mengenal huruf, membedakan bentuk huruf, menyuarakan huruf, serta membaca kata. Salah satu media yang dapat digunakan untuk memberikan stimulasi terhadap kemampuan membaca permulaan adalah media kartu huruf. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh penggunaan media kartu huruf terhadap kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa kelas I SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif

dengan jenis penelitian eksperimen dan desain one group pretest-posttest. Sampel penelitian berjumlah 32 siswa kelas IB SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi kemampuan membaca permulaan sebelum dan sesudah penerapan media kartu huruf serta dokumentasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan persentase dan uji t. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa sebelum penggunaan media kartu huruf memperoleh persentase sebesar 51,63% dengan kriteria cukup, sedangkan setelah penggunaan media kartu huruf meningkat menjadi 87,25% dengan kriteria sangat tinggi. Hasil uji hipotesis menunjukkan nilai t hitung sebesar 22,501 lebih besar daripada t tabel sebesar 1,697 pada taraf signifikansi 0,05. Dengan demikian, H_a diterima dan H_0 ditolak. Hasil tersebut menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media kartu huruf berpengaruh terhadap peningkatan kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa kelas I SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh.

ABSTRACT

Beginning reading ability is one of the basic skills that elementary school students in the lower grades need to master. This ability becomes an important foundation for students to participate in learning at the next level. However, some first-grade students still experience difficulties in recognizing letters, distinguishing letter forms, pronouncing letters, and reading words. One of the media that can be used to stimulate beginning reading ability is letter card media. This study aimed to determine the effect of using letter card media on the beginning reading ability of first-grade students at SD

Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. This research employed a quantitative approach with an experimental method using a one-group pretest-posttest design. The sample consisted of 32 students from class IB of SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observations of students' beginning reading abilities before and after the implementation of letter card media and through documentation. The data were analyzed using percentages and a t-test. The results showed that students' beginning reading ability before the use of letter card media obtained an overall percentage of 51.63%, categorized as sufficient, while after the implementation of letter card media, it increased to 87.25%, categorized as very high. The hypothesis test resulted in a t-count of 22.501, which was higher than the t-table value of 1.697 at a significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected. These results indicate that the use of letter card media had an effect on improving the beginning reading ability of first-grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a language skill that plays a crucial role in the educational process. Through reading, students acquire information, understand various knowledge, and develop thinking skills (Tarigan, 2008). Therefore, reading skills need to be taught from elementary school, especially in the lower grades. In the early stages of education, students are not only required to recognize language symbols but also to be able to connect these symbols with sounds and use them to read simple words.

One of the important stages in the development of elementary school students' reading skills is beginning reading. Beginning reading is the initial process when children learn to recognize letters, letter symbols, and sound out those symbols. This skill lays the foundation for students to progress to more complex reading skills. In addition to recognizing symbols, beginning reading also relates to students' ability to recognize letter sounds, arrange letters into syllables, read words, and understand the relationship between written form and language sounds.

In the learning process in first grade of elementary school, beginning reading skills are one aspect that requires attention. Students who have not yet mastered beginning reading skills can experience difficulties in various subjects because most of the learning information is presented in written form. Therefore, beginning reading skills are not only related to learning Indonesian but also to student success in the overall learning process.

Early reading skill problems were also found among first-grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. Based on the research findings, some students still experience difficulties in recognizing and distinguishing letters, pronouncing letters, spelling, composing letters into words, and reading fluently. This situation indicates the need for learning that can

provide concrete, engaging learning experiences that are appropriate to the characteristics of lower-grade students.

In lower elementary school, the use of engaging learning media can help students understand the material. Learning media not only serves as a tool to assist teachers in delivering material but can also increase student attention and engagement in the learning process (Arsyad, 2017). One medium that can be used in early reading instruction is letter cards.

Letter cards are a simple tool that can be used to introduce letter shapes and symbols to students. They can be used flexibly to suit the learning material or theme. Letter cards allow students to directly see the symbols, name the letters, distinguish their shapes, and connect the symbols to their sounds. Using this tool can also create a more engaging learning environment, preventing students from getting bored easily.

Letter cards have the potential to help students improve their early reading skills because they can engage in concrete and repetitive learning activities. Students not only listen to teacher explanations but also directly participate in recognizing and arranging letters. This involvement can provide opportunities for students to learn through more active activities.

Several previous studies have also shown a relationship between the use of letter cards and improved early reading skills. For example, Dewi Bayu Utami's (2020) study demonstrated an improvement in first-grade students' reading skills after implementing letter cards. The study, conducted through classroom action research, demonstrated increased student activity and comprehension after using letter cards.

Research by Suparlan et al. (2016) on the use of letter cards for grade I/B elementary school students also showed an increase in reading ability. The study used classroom action research methods and demonstrated an increase in learning outcomes during the learning cycle.

Furthermore, Delfi Citra Utami et al.'s (2017) research used a quasi-experimental method with a non-equivalent control group design. The results showed a difference in early reading ability between the experimental and control classes. The t-test results obtained a calculated t-value of 7.748, while the t-table value was 2.048407 at a significance level of 5%, thus the research hypothesis was accepted.

Another study presented in the thesis is Maulida and Wiranti's (2022) study, which used a single-group pretest-posttest experimental design. The results showed an increase

in early reading ability after the implementation of letter cards, with an average posttest score of 88, exceeding the minimum threshold of 75.

The results of previous research indicate that letter cards have been used in various studies to help improve early reading skills. However, research on the application of this media remains important in different school contexts and with different student characteristics. This study was conducted specifically on first-grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh using a one-group pretest-posttest design.

Based on the description, this study was conducted to determine the effect of using letter cards on the beginning reading skills of first-grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. This study is expected to provide information regarding the use of letter cards as an alternative learning medium for beginning reading in lower-grade elementary school students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with an experimental approach. The quantitative approach was used because the research data consisted of measurements of students' beginning reading skills, which were then analyzed statistically. Experimental research was used to determine the effect of certain treatments on the variables studied. In this study, the treatment provided was the use of letter cards, while beginning reading skills were observed after the treatment.

The research design used was a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. This design used one group without a control group. Before receiving the treatment, students were given an initial observation or pretest. Next, students received the treatment in the form of learning using letter cards. After the treatment, students were given a final observation or posttest. The research design can be described as follows:

$$THE_1 \rightarrow X \rightarrow O_2$$

Information:

THE₁= initial observation before implementing letter card media

X = treatment in the form of applying letter card media

THE₂= final observation after applying letter card media

This design was used because the research aimed to determine changes in students' initial reading abilities before and after using letter card media.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh, located at Jalan Bayeun, Kopelma Darussalam, Syiah Kuala District, Banda Aceh City. The research population was

all 61 students in grades IA and IB of SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh, consisting of 33 female students and 28 male students. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Grade IB was chosen based on the teacher's consideration that more students in that class were not yet able to read. The number of samples was 32 students consisting of 17 male students and 15 female students.

Data collection techniques were conducted through observation and documentation. Observations were used to obtain data on students' beginning reading skills before and after using letter cards. Observations were conducted using observation sheets prepared by the researcher. Documentation was used as supporting data to supplement the observation results.

Data analysis was conducted by calculating the percentage of observations of students' initial reading ability before and after treatment. Next, normality testing and hypothesis testing were conducted. Hypothesis testing was used to determine whether the letter cards media had an effect on improving students' initial reading ability. Based on research sources, decision-making was conducted by comparing the calculated t-value and the t-table at a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Initial Reading Ability Results Before Using Letter Card Media

Initial observations were conducted to determine students' beginning reading skills before being taught using letter cards. The results of the initial observations indicated that overall, students' beginning reading skills reached 51.63%. This percentage is in the sufficient category.

These results indicate that before receiving treatment, students' initial reading skills were not yet at an optimal level. This condition formed the basis for implementing learning using letter cards. The low initial observation results indicate that students still need stimulation and learning experiences that can help them recognize letter symbols, associate letters with sounds, and read words better.

In early reading instruction, first-grade students need concrete and repeated experiences. If instruction is conducted solely through verbal explanations, students who are still in the early stages of letter recognition may struggle to understand the relationship between symbols and sounds. Therefore, letter cards can be an alternative that helps clarify

letter shapes and provides students with the opportunity to interact directly with the material.

Results of Early Reading Ability After Using Letter Card Media

After students received instruction using letter cards, a final observation was conducted to determine changes in their early reading skills. The final observation showed an overall percentage of 87.25%, categorized as very high.

Compared to the initial observation of 51.63%, there was an increase of 35.62 percentage points. This improvement indicates a change in students' initial reading ability after learning using letter cards.

Table 1. Comparison of Beginning Reading Ability

Measurement Level	Percentage	Criteria
Initial observations	51,63%	Enough
Final observations	87,25%	Very high
Improvement	35.62 points	—

This improvement demonstrates that the use of letter cards has positively impacted students' early reading skills. Through letter cards, students gain the opportunity to visually recognize symbols and use them in learning activities. The concrete nature of the media also allows for more interactive learning activities.

The results of this study align with the research framework, which positions letter cards as a tool that can help improve early reading skills. Letter cards can be used in conjunction with the learning theme, expanding students' vocabulary, engaging their attention, and helping them avoid boredom while learning to read.

Hypothesis Test Results

To determine whether the increase indicates the influence of the use of letter card media, a hypothesis test was conducted. The research hypothesis consists of H_0 which states that letter card media does not have an effect on increasing early reading ability and H_a which states that letter card media has an effect on improving the initial reading skills of first grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh.

The calculation results show a calculated t value of 22.501, while the t table at a significance level of 0.05 with 30 degrees of freedom is 1.697. Thus, the calculated t is greater than the t table, namely $22.501 > 1.697$. Based on the testing criteria used in the study, H_a accepted and H_0 rejected.

These results provide statistical evidence that the use of letter card media has an effect on improving the initial reading skills of first grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh.

Discussion

The increase in initial reading ability from 51.63% to 87.25% shows that learning with letter card media can provide a more supportive learning experience for first grade students. The difference in results before and after treatment is not only seen in the increase in numbers, but also shows that concrete learning media can help students interact directly with letter symbols.

The use of letter cards provides an opportunity for students to observe letter shapes directly (Ernawati, et al. 2025; Aihena and Semarang, 2024; (McBride & Schumaker, 2025). In the early reading stage, the ability to recognize symbols is an important part because students need to understand that certain shapes represent certain sounds. When students get the opportunity to see, name, and use letter cards in learning, the process of recognizing symbols can take place more concretely (Sepriyana, B., 2023; Roberts, 2019).

Letter cards are also flexible. They can be used to introduce vowels and consonants, connect letters to words, and develop reading activities related to the material being studied. Research has shown that this medium can increase students' vocabulary and engage their attention during learning (Mustafa and Mandarani, 2025).

The results of this study are in line with the research of Dewi Bayu Utami (2020) which shows that the application of letter cards media can improve the reading ability of first grade students. The study showed an increase in student activity and student understanding results from the first cycle to the second cycle. The results of this study are also in line with the research of Suparlan and colleagues who showed an increase in student reading ability through the use of letter cards media. The study found an increase in learning outcomes in the implementation of the learning cycle. Furthermore, the research of Delfi Citra Utami and colleagues also strengthens the findings of this study. The study used a quasi-experimental approach and found a difference in initial reading ability between the experimental group and the control group. The calculated t value of 7.748 is greater than the t table of 2.048407 so that the research hypothesis is accepted.

Maulida and Wiranti's (2022) study, which used a one-group pretest-posttest design, also showed an improvement in early reading skills after using letter cards. The average posttest score reached 88, exceeding the minimum score of 75. This finding aligns with the

current study, indicating an improvement in reading skills after students received treatment using letter cards.

In addition to supporting cognitive reading skills, the use of letter cards can also provide a more engaging learning experience. Research discussed in this thesis indicates that the use of cards can make students more engaged, enthusiastic, and confident in participating in learning. This media also helps motivate students to recognize letters, syllables, and sentences. Therefore, the improvement in early reading skills in this study can be understood as a result of the use of media that can make letter symbols more concrete for students. Letter cards also allow teachers to create more varied learning activities so that students do not simply receive information passively.

Although the results showed a positive effect, this study used a one-group pretest-posttest design and therefore did not include a control group. Therefore, the improvements found in this study indicate changes in student abilities after the treatment, but their interpretation still needs to be based on the characteristics of the pre-experimental design used.

Overall, the results of the study indicate that letter card media can be an alternative learning media to support the initial reading skills of first grade students. The final observation results reached 87.25% and the results of the hypothesis test which showed $t_{count} 22.501 > t_{table} 1.697$ strengthen the conclusion that there is an influence of the use of letter card media on improving the initial reading skills of first grade students of SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh.

The magnitude of the increase also suggests that letter cards are particularly suitable for the developmental characteristics of first-grade students. At this stage, students are still building associations between visual symbols and spoken language. A letter card presents one symbol in a clear and manageable form, allowing attention to be directed to the shape and sound of a letter before students combine it with other letters. Repeated activities such as identifying, naming, comparing, arranging, and sounding out letters can strengthen these associations. This interpretation is consistent with Roberts, Vadasy, and Sanders (2019), who emphasize the importance of explicit experiences with letter names and sounds in early literacy instruction. Thus, the effectiveness observed in this study can be understood not merely as the result of using an attractive object, but as the result of providing repeated opportunities to connect orthographic symbols with their corresponding sounds. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that explicit

instruction in letter names and sounds strengthens alphabet knowledge and supports early literacy development (Piasta & Wagner, 2010).

The findings further indicate that letter cards can support a gradual transition from letter recognition to word reading. Beginning readers do not immediately move from recognizing individual letters to fluent reading; they need opportunities to combine letters into syllables and simple words. Because the cards can be moved and rearranged, teachers can demonstrate how a change in one letter produces a different syllable or word. This flexibility is important for students who still confuse similar letter forms or have difficulty spelling. It also enables the teacher to adjust the level of difficulty according to students' responses during instruction. In this way, letter cards function not only as visual aids but also as manipulatives that encourage students to participate actively in constructing written forms. Such active involvement helps explain why the post-treatment observation reached the very high category. Letter-name knowledge is also widely recognized as an important predictor of later reading development because it supports the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and phonological processing (Foulin, 2005).

Another important implication concerns students' attention and participation. The initial condition described in this study showed that several students had difficulty recognizing and distinguishing letters, pronouncing letters, spelling, arranging letters into words, and reading fluently. When these difficulties are addressed only through verbal explanation, learning can become abstract for beginning readers. Letter cards provide a visible object that students can point to, select, compare, and arrange. These actions can make classroom interaction more varied and give teachers immediate opportunities to observe errors and provide correction. The findings therefore support Arsyad's view that learning media can help convey material while increasing learners' attention and involvement. They also correspond with Mustafa and Mandarani (2025), who reported benefits of alphabetic flash cards for alphabet-related learning activities. More broadly, systematic instruction in sound-symbol relationships has been shown to facilitate early reading acquisition, especially when instruction is explicit and well structured (Ehri et al., 2001).

From a pedagogical perspective, the results imply that the value of letter cards depends on how they are integrated into instruction. Simply displaying cards is unlikely to produce the same learning experience as systematically using them for recognition, pronunciation, combination, and reading practice. Teachers can begin with familiar letters, continue with vowels and consonants, and then guide students to form syllables and words

related to the learning theme. Repetition should remain meaningful rather than mechanical, for example by asking students to find a requested letter, match a letter with its sound, arrange cards into a word, or read the word that has been formed. This sequence allows the same simple medium to serve different levels of beginning reading practice while maintaining student engagement.

Nevertheless, the size of the observed improvement should be interpreted carefully. The one-group pretest-posttest design demonstrates that the same group obtained higher scores after the treatment, and the t-test indicates that the difference was statistically significant. However, because the study did not use a control group, the design cannot fully separate the effect of the letter cards from other factors that may have occurred during the learning period. Students may also have benefited from repeated exposure to reading tasks, teacher guidance, or increasing familiarity with the observation activities. This limitation does not negate the improvement found in the study, but it means that the causal interpretation should remain consistent with the pre-experimental design. Future studies using a comparison or control group would provide stronger evidence regarding the specific contribution of letter cards.

The study also has practical significance for early-grade classrooms because letter cards are relatively simple and adaptable. They can be prepared according to the letters, syllables, and vocabulary needed in a lesson and can be reused in different activities. For students with lower initial ability, teachers may provide more repetition and smaller sets of letters, while students who progress more quickly can be challenged to form longer words or read combinations independently. This differentiated use is relevant because beginning reading ability within one class is not always uniform. Therefore, letter cards can be positioned as one component of responsive reading instruction, in which the teacher observes students' needs and adjusts the activity rather than applying exactly the same task to every learner.

Taken together, the descriptive increase of 35.62 percentage points and the hypothesis-test result of $22.501 > 1.697$ provide complementary evidence. The descriptive result shows the practical change in the students' observed performance, whereas the statistical test supports the conclusion that the pretest and posttest results differed significantly under the testing criteria used in the study. When considered alongside previous findings by Dewi Bayu Utami (2020), Suparlan et al. (2016), Delfi Citra Utami et al. (2017), and Maulida and Wiranti (2022), the present results add evidence from the context of SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. The consistency across these studies suggests that

concrete letter-based media are a promising option for supporting beginning reading, although differences in research design and participant characteristics should be considered when comparing the magnitude of their results.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the use of letter cards has an effect on improving the initial reading ability of first-grade students at SD Negeri 69 Banda Aceh. This is indicated by the results of initial observations which obtained a percentage of 51.63% with a sufficient category, then increased to 87.25% with a very high category after the application of letter cards. The increase was 35.62 percentage points. The results of the hypothesis testing also showed a calculated t value of 22.501, while the t table was 1.697 at a significance level of 0.05. Because the calculated $t > t$ table, H_a accepted and H_0 rejected. Thus, letter card media can be used as an alternative learning media to improve the initial reading skills of first grade elementary school students.

Suggestion

Based on the research results, teachers can use letter cards as an alternative learning medium for beginning reading for lower-grade students. The media should be tailored to the students' initial abilities and the learning material to ensure engaging reading activities and active student engagement. Future research can expand the study with a broader sample size and a comparison group design to examine the effects of letter cards in greater depth.

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