The Effectiveness of Word Card Media in Improving Early Reading Skills of Second Grade Elementary School Students

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Abstrak

Membaca merupakan salah satu keterampilan berbahasa yang paling fundamental dalam penguasaan bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa nasional. Kemampuan membaca permulaan menjadi dasar penting bagi siswa untuk menguasai keterampilan berbahasa lainnya. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui efektivitas penggunaan media kartu kata dalam meningkatkan kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa kelas dua sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain eksperimen semu (quasi-experimental design) dengan menggunakan tes kemampuan membaca sebagai instrumen pengumpulan data. Validitas instrumen didasarkan pada validitas isi, sedangkan reliabilitas diuji dengan metode split-half. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan uji t melalui perangkat lunak SPSS dengan tingkat signifikansi 0,05. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai signifikansi (2-tailed) sebesar $p < 0,05$, yang berarti terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan antara kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa yang belajar menggunakan media kartu kata dengan siswa yang belajar tanpa media tersebut. Dengan demikian, H0 ditolak, dan dapat disimpulkan bahwa penggunaan media kartu kata efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa sekolah dasar. Secara teoretis, temuan ini memperkuat pandangan bahwa penggunaan media konkret seperti kartu kata dapat membantu siswa mengenali simbol bunyi dan bentuk huruf secara lebih bermakna. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian ini memberikan implikasi bahwa guru dapat menjadikan media kartu kata sebagai alternatif pembelajaran yang menarik dan interaktif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa di sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci: Kemampuan Membaca Siswa, Media Kartu Kata

Abstract

Reading is one of the most fundamental language skills in mastering the Indonesian language as the national language. Early reading ability serves as an essential foundation for students to acquire other language skills. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of using word card media in improving early reading skills among second-grade elementary school students. This study employed a quasi-experimental design using a reading ability test as the data collection instrument. The instrument's validity was established through content validity, while reliability was tested using the split-half method. Data analysis was carried out using a t-test through SPSS software with a significance level of 0.05.

The results showed that the significance value (2-tailed) was $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant difference between the early reading abilities of students who learned using word card media and those who learned without it. Thus, H0 was rejected, and it can be concluded that the use of word card media is effective in improving early reading skills among elementary school students. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that the use of concrete media such as word cards can help students recognize sound symbols and letter forms more meaningfully. Practically, this study implies that teachers can utilize word card media as an engaging and interactive learning alternative to enhance students' early reading abilities in elementary schools.

Keywords: Students' Reading Ability, Word Card Media

INTRODUCTION

Primary education serves as a crucial foundation in shaping both the academic abilities and character of students. At the elementary school level, students begin to develop essential skills that will serve as the basis for further education. According to the structure of basic education in Indonesia, Grades I–II fall under Stage A, Grades III–IV under Stage B, and Grades V–VI under Stage C (Windarti et al., 2023). In the early stage, particularly Grades I and II, students are still in a transitional phase from play-based learning in kindergarten to more formal instruction in primary school. Therefore, during this stage, emphasis should be placed on mastering fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic (Afifah, 2017).

Reading ability is one of the fundamental skills that elementary students must acquire. According to the *Content Standards for Primary and Secondary Education*, the learning of Indonesian language and literature includes four main aspects: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Depdiknas, 2009). These four aspects are interrelated and form the foundation for the development of students' language proficiency. Thus, reading skills must be instilled from an early age so that students can comprehend information, develop critical thinking, and support the achievement of curriculum competencies (Rimshani, 2020).

Beginning reading is the initial stage in the process of learning to read. At this stage, students learn to recognize letters, pronounce their sounds, and combine them into simple words or sentences. According to Anderson (in Susanti, 2015), beginning reading is a complex process that involves both mental and physical activities, requiring intensive guidance for lower-grade students. Ayriza (2004) explains that mastery of simple consonant and vowel letters such as *a, b, d, e, i, k, l, m, o, p, s, t,* and *u* serves as an indicator of beginning reading ability. This skill forms the basis for advanced reading proficiency because if students fail to master this stage, they will face difficulties in understanding more complex texts (Astuti et al., 2022; Steinberg, 2018).

Reading skills do not develop naturally but must be cultivated through appropriate activities and media. Instructional media play a vital role in helping students grasp concepts concretely and in increasing their learning motivation. One effective medium for teaching beginning reading is word card media. According to Sadiman (2020), word card media are visual aids consisting of cards containing words or pictures used to deliver learning messages. This medium encourages students to actively recognize letters and words through educational games, such as arranging words into sentences or matching pictures with words (Akmalia et al., 2020).

The advantages of word card media compared to other learning tools lie in their simplicity, visual appeal, and ease of repetitive use. This medium not only enhances students' cognitive abilities in recognizing letters and words but also strengthens memory through visualization (Herawati in Rimshani, 2020; Hartawan, 2018). Previous studies have also shown that the use of word cards can significantly improve learning motivation and beginning reading skills (Hidayah & Rizki, 2019; Safitri, 2020). However, most previous research has focused primarily on learning outcomes rather than on the process of improving beginning reading skills in lower grades through the systematic application of word card media.

Based on observations and interviews with the second-grade teacher at SDN Madugundo, it was found that students' beginning reading ability remains low. Some students are still unable to recognize letters correctly and struggle to distinguish between alphabet shapes. Educational report data show an 11.76% decrease in reading proficiency from 2023. This condition is caused by a lack of engaging learning media and limited instructional materials that support beginning reading skills. In addition to media-related factors, internal factors such as insufficient practice and external factors such as a lack of parental support also influence students' reading abilities. Therefore, this study is important to examine the effectiveness of using word card

media in improving the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SDN Madugundo.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a Nonequivalent Control Group Design, involving two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received treatment using illustrated word card media, while the control group received conventional instruction without the media. This design was chosen because it was not feasible to assign students to groups randomly; however, both groups were relatively homogeneous based on the results of an initial equivalence test of their abilities.

The research population consisted of 44 first-grade students at SDN Madugondo, divided into two classes. The research sample comprised 22 students, selected randomly from the two classes while considering the representativeness of student ability characteristics. Homogeneity between the classes was confirmed through the results of the initial ability test conducted before the treatment was administered.

The research instrument was a reading test developed based on the analysis of basic competencies and the content of the Indonesian Language textbook for Grade I. The instrument development process included theoretical review, item construction, and pilot testing on another class not included in the study sample. The pilot test results were analyzed to determine the validity and reliability of the instrument before being used in the main study.

Data were collected through pretests and posttests. The pretest was administered to determine students' initial reading abilities in both groups, while the posttest was conducted after the treatment to measure improvements in reading skills.

To control potential bias and extraneous variables, several measures were implemented:

- Controlling the learning environment conditions, such as the time of implementation, duration of instruction, and using the same teacher for both

groups to avoid differences other than the use of the media.
- Setting identical learning materials and objectives for both the experimental and control groups.
- Using identical evaluation instruments for both groups to ensure objective comparison results.
- Conducting a homogeneity test on students' initial abilities to confirm group equivalence before treatment.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to present the mean scores of the pretest and posttest, while inferential analysis was used to examine the significant differences between the two groups. These differences served as the basis for assessing the effect of using illustrated word card media on the reading abilities of first-grade elementary school students.

RESULTS

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of using picture word card media on early reading ability among second-grade students at SDN Madugondo. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with two groups: an experimental group (using picture word card media) and a control group (learning without media).

1. Pretest Results

Before the treatment, both groups were given a pretest to measure their basic early reading skills. The independent sample t-test results indicated no significant difference between the two groups (sig. > 0.05). This finding demonstrates that both groups had relatively equal baseline abilities, ensuring that any differences found later could be attributed to the treatment given.

Descriptive results showed that the experimental group obtained an average score of 56.67, while the control group scored 55.50. The majority of students in both groups fell into the

low category, indicating that their early reading skills still needed improvement through more engaging and interactive learning media.

Table 1. Pretest Results of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean Score	Category	Description
Experimental Group	56.67	Low	Students showed limited recognition of letters and basic words.
Control Group	55.50	Low	Students demonstrated similar basic reading ability, without major variance.

Explanation: Table 1 shows that before treatment, both groups had nearly identical mean scores with a small difference of only 1.17 points. This similarity confirms that the two groups were comparable in terms of initial reading ability, validating the fairness of the experimental procedure.

2. Posttest Results

After one session using the picture word card media, a posttest was conducted to assess the improvement in early reading ability. The analysis showed that the experimental group achieved a mean score of 91.67, while the control group's average score remained significantly lower.

The t-test results revealed a significant difference between the two groups (sig. < 0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that the use of picture word cards had a positive effect on improving early reading ability. However, since the treatment was implemented only once, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and require further research with a longer duration and larger sample size.

Table 2. Posttest Results of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean Score	Category	Description
Experimental Group	91.67	High	Students showed marked improvement in word recognition and fluency.
Control Group	58.83	Low	Students' reading ability showed minimal progress without media intervention.

Explanation: Table 2 demonstrates that students in the experimental group experienced a substantial increase in their mean score—an improvement of 35 points compared to the pretest—while the control group's improvement was minimal. This suggests that visual and interactive learning media can significantly enhance students' reading motivation and comprehension.

3. Normality and Homogeneity Tests

Both pretest and posttest data showed significance values greater than 0.05 in the Shapiro–Wilk test, indicating that the data were normally distributed. In addition, the homogeneity test showed that variances between the two groups were equal, validating the use of the t-test to analyze differences in mean scores between groups.

Table 3. Summary of Normality and Homogeneity Test Results

Data Type	Test Used	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Pretest	Shapiro–Wilk	> 0.05	Normally distributed

Data Type	Test Used	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Posttest	Shapiro–Wilk	> 0.05	Normally distributed
Variance	Homogeneity Test	> 0.05	Homogeneous variance between both groups

Explanation:

The test results confirm that the dataset meets the assumptions of normality and homogeneity, meaning the statistical analysis conducted using the t-test is valid and reliable for determining the effect of the treatment.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that picture word card media effectively improved early reading ability among second-grade students. Those who learned using picture word cards showed greater improvement than students who learned without such media.

Picture word cards allow students to learn in a more visual and concrete way. The combination of images and words helps students associate letter symbols with word meanings, strengthening the cognitive process of recognizing and understanding letters and words. This finding aligns with Bruner's (1966) theory of representational stages of learning—enactive (through action), iconic (through images), and symbolic (through text). Picture word cards act as a bridge between the iconic and symbolic stages, assisting students in transitioning from visual recognition to symbolic reading.

From the perspective of Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), picture word card media provide both visual and verbal scaffolding, enabling students to develop reading skills with teacher support.

During card-based learning activities, students engage in naming, guessing, and matching pictures with words, which helps develop phonetic awareness and phonological sensitivity.

The significant improvement in posttest scores suggests that learning through concrete media such as word cards can motivate students to participate actively, enhance visual memory, and build reading confidence. This supports the findings of Asmonah (2019), who reported that word cards effectively stimulate the right hemisphere of the brain, improving image recall and vocabulary acquisition.

Nevertheless, this study has methodological limitations, including the small sample size (only six students per group) and the one-time treatment. Therefore, the results cannot yet be generalized to a broader population. Future studies should apply a longer intervention duration, involve larger samples, and include qualitative observations of the learning process to validate and enrich these findings.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of selecting appropriate instructional media suited to elementary school students' characteristics, especially at the early literacy stage. Teaching reading should not rely solely on conventional methods but should incorporate visual and engaging learning activities that foster both emotional and cognitive engagement (Zubaidah, 2013; Widarti, 2013).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Picture word card media were proven to significantly improve students' early reading ability in this study. However, due to the small number of participants and limited duration, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.The practical implication of this study is that teachers should consider incorporating visual media such as picture word cards in early reading instruction to help students recognize letters and words in a

more enjoyable and meaningful manner. Such approaches can foster stronger literacy foundations and create a more engaging classroom atmosphere for young learners.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies with a larger number of participants and over a longer period to validate and expand these findings. It would also be beneficial to explore the effectiveness of picture word card media across different age groups, learning contexts, and language backgrounds. Furthermore, combining picture word cards with other multimedia tools could provide deeper insights into how various forms of visual support contribute to the development of early literacy skills.

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