

The Use of Letter Cards to Improve Students' Reading Skills in Grade II of Muhammadiyah 01 Elementary School, Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study centers on enhancing students' reading abilities through the utilization of letter card media, implemented in Indonesian language instruction for second-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan. The subjects of this study comprised all 23 students of class II-D. The research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, conducted through a sequence of stages beginning with a pre-test, followed by two cycles of intervention, namely Cycle I and Cycle II. Data collection techniques included oral testing and observation sheets aimed at both teachers and students. Throughout the course of the intervention, a notable improvement was identified in students' active engagement in the learning process. Evidence of this progress was reflected in the observation data for the Indonesian subject using the letter card media. In Cycle I, only 4 students (17.39%) met the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC), while 19 students (82.60%) did not reach the expected standard. Conversely, in Cycle II, there was a significant increase, with 22 students (95.65%) achieving mastery and only 1 student (4.34%) still falling short. Overall, student participation in Cycle II demonstrated achievement that met the success indicators as defined by the MMC.

Keyword: Learning Media; Letter Card Media; Students' Reading Ability

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in preparing future generations to be qualified, competitive, and capable of facing the challenges of an ever-evolving world. Education is a conscious and systematic process, jointly supported by families, communities, and the government through various forms of guidance, learning, and training conducted within school environments throughout life. The main objective of this process is to prepare students to adapt and actively participate in various life contexts in the future.

However, in practice, learning the Indonesian language at the elementary school level is often perceived as challenging by many students, particularly in the area of early reading. This issue is evident from the low ability of students to recognize letters and spell words fluently, as observed at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan, where most students have not yet achieved the minimum reading standards.

Based on the identified problem, one relevant strategy to improve students' reading ability is the application of an appropriate and targeted approach in Grade II at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan. Enhancing the quality of learning requires the use of effective, student-centered instructional media that can optimally support the transformation of students' literacy skills. One alternative that can be utilized in Indonesian language learning is the use of letter card media.

The success level in achieving competence in a subject is influenced by multiple factors. One of the common obstacles is the lack of active student participation during the learning process. In addition, the limited use of instructional media by teachers contributes to the creation of monotonous classroom environments, which fail to promote meaningful learning interactions and hinder the growth of students' knowledge (Elfrianto et al., 2020). The use of appropriate media is expected to help students read fluently, as learning tools designed by teachers aim to foster a conducive learning environment and facilitate students' comprehension of the material being delivered during educational interactions between teachers and students.

According to Yusufhadi Miarso, as cited in Nurrita (2018), instructional media are defined as all types of devices or media used to deliver information to students, enabling active engagement and stimulating cognitive, affective, and motivational aspects such as thinking, emotions, attention, and enthusiasm for learning. Thus, media play a strategic role in supporting a systematic, structured, and consciously designed learning process. Media not only serve as channels for message delivery but also act as supporting tools in implementing classroom teaching and learning interactions. Any tool or resource that can be used to stimulate students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains has the potential to create a more effective learning process (Sipahutar et al., 2023). The use of letter card media is considered highly appealing to students and is easy to apply in reading instruction.

Based on an observation conducted at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan on May 23, 2024, it was found that several students still face difficulties in distinguishing and recognizing alphabet letters correctly. The lack of variety in the use of instructional media may lead to student boredom during lessons, and some students remain passive during learning sessions due to the use of less appropriate teaching methods. The following section presents the results of students' daily evaluation scores, which indicate that many have not yet achieved the expected minimum mastery criteria, based on the researcher's findings.

Table 1. Daily Evaluation Results

No	Number of students	Mark	Percentage	Information
1.	8	≥ 75	34,78%	Completed
2.	15	≥ 75	65,22%	Not Completed
Total	23		100%	

Referring to the data presented in the previous table, out of a total of 23 second-grade students, only 8 students (34.78%) achieved the minimum learning mastery standard, while the remaining 15 students (65.22%) were categorized as not yet achieving mastery based on the applicable criteria. The benchmark used as the minimum competency standard (KKM) set by SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan is 75.

Enhancing student motivation requires various efforts, one of which is the use of diverse instructional media. The application of varied media can serve as a stimulus to capture students' attention and foster a joyful and student-friendly learning environment. One effective alternative for increasing student engagement is the use of letter card media in the learning process. According to Fajriati in Koro et al. (2022), letter cards are small-sized cards containing images, text, or specific symbols that serve as tools to direct and remind students of concepts or objects related to the illustrations presented. Similarly, Salawati and Suoth in Muhammad Asrul Sultan and Nur Ilmi (2022) describe letter cards as rectangular-shaped paper sheets containing elements of letters or the alphabet, functioning as learning aids.

Letter cards possess both strengths and limitations. Hermanawan in Widyasari et al. (2023) notes several advantages of letter card media, including portability, ease of use, ease of memorization by students, and effectiveness in fostering a cheerful learning atmosphere. Nevertheless, this medium also has drawbacks, such as relying solely on visual perception, thus engaging fewer sensory modalities, and its relatively small size, which may reduce its effectiveness in large-group learning settings.

The benefits of using letter cards, as outlined by Suyanto in Harlianty and Sjamsir (2022), include assisting children in recognizing and reading letters from an early age, enhancing memory retention, improving concentration skills, and expanding vocabulary. Thus, this medium plays a vital role in supporting the development of basic literacy skills in students.

Given these considerations, the researcher is interested in utilizing letter cards as instructional tools in the Indonesian language subject. This study aims to explore the use of letter card media to facilitate students' understanding of lesson content more effectively and to improve their existing skills, particularly reading ability. This medium helps students grasp the concepts presented by the teacher more clearly and enjoyably. Additionally, the visually appealing and colorful nature of letter cards can enhance students' focus and concentration during classroom learning activities. Based on these considerations, the researcher formulates the study title: "The Use of Letter Card Media to Improve the Reading Skills of Second-Grade Students at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan" as the focus of this research.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, implemented through a series of systematic steps involving cycles and pretests. The procedure consisted of a pretest and two rounds of action, namely Cycle I and Cycle II. The pretest was administered to assess the students' initial reading abilities prior to the intervention. Cycle I was conducted to observe changes or improvements following the pretest, while Cycle II aimed to further examine the students' progress by comparing the results from the pretest and Cycle I.

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan, located at Jalan Demak No. 03, Sei Rengas Permata Subdistrict, Medan Area District, Medan City, North Sumatra Province. The population of the study included all second-grade students in the academic year 2024/2025. Class II D was selected as the research sample, comprising a total of 23 students, including 9 boys and 14 girls. The object of this research was the utilization of letter card media as a learning tool, which served as an instructional strategy to enhance the reading literacy of second-grade students.

The main instrument used to collect data was a test sheet, designed to assess students' cognitive abilities related to the mastery of the subject matter. The test administered was an oral test, delivered verbally by the researcher to the students. The test consisted of a number of questions asked verbally and answered directly through students' oral responses, in order to determine the extent of their mastery in specific aspects of reading.

The reading skills indicators assessed in this study included:

1. Intonation
2. Pronunciation
3. Fluency
4. Clarity of voice

In addition, the research also utilized an observation sheet, which served as a tool to conduct systematic and direct assessments of student behavior and performance. This instrument was used to record and observe the reading learning process in a structured and objective manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The method employed in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR), which aims to observe improvements in students' reading abilities through the implementation of instructional interventions in a gradual manner—namely in Cycle I and Cycle II. The main focus of this research is to strengthen students' reading skills through the use of instructional media in the form of letter cards. Each cycle within the research process involves four key stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

A. *Planning Stage*

This stage involved collaboration between the researcher and the Indonesian language teacher to design the instructional framework that would be applied during the learning process. The main focus of Cycle I was to encourage students to develop better concentration during lessons and to understand how to use letter cards to form simple sentences. The planning emphasized the use of letter card media, as the researcher intended to observe students' reading abilities and their engagement during learning activities, with the ultimate goal of increasing active participation and improving learning outcomes.

B. *Acting Stage*

In this stage, the researcher and the Indonesian language teacher collaboratively implemented the instructional strategies that had been designed during the planning stage, specifically by integrating letter card media into the teaching and learning process. The learning activities were conducted as follows:

- a. The class began with greetings and a collective prayer, in accordance with religious values and students' personal beliefs.
- b. The teacher checked student attendance.
- c. The teacher reviewed key points from the previous lesson.
- d. The teacher introduced the topic by inviting students to reflect on morning activities through the children's song "Bangun Tidur". Students were then encouraged to identify morning-related terms and list them on the board.
- e. Students read the listed words together as a class.
- f. Students were divided into discussion groups.
- g. Working in groups under the teacher's guidance, students used letter cards to form simple sentences.
- h. The teacher reviewed the group results to ensure correct word formation.
- i. Students collaborated to assemble syllables from individual letters.
- j. The teacher evaluated the accuracy of the syllable arrangements.
- k. As vocabulary reinforcement, students engaged in a game to form words by arranging letter cards.
- l. Each student was given the opportunity to independently arrange words from letter cards based on given instructions, with direct guidance from the teacher.
- m. The teacher conducted a reflection session with the students.
- n. The class concluded with a collective prayer.
- o. The teacher formally ended the lesson.

C. *Observing Stage*

The third stage involved observation, which was conducted by an appointed observer. The aim was to monitor the implementation of the intervention—both in progress and post-implementation—to evaluate

students' improvements in reading skills. In addition to real-time observation, the observer documented significant occurrences during the learning activities.

D. Reflecting Stage

The fourth stage focused on reflection, which entailed analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented actions. The goal of this reflection was to assess the interim outcomes of using letter card media and to adapt strategies for Cycle II in order to further enhance students' reading abilities.

Based on the two implemented cycles, the collected data indicated noticeable improvements in students' learning achievements. The use of letter card media served as a pedagogical strategy aimed at stimulating students' reading development. The results of student assessments during Cycle I and Cycle II are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Comparison of Student Scores in Cycle I and Cycle II

Student Observation Results		
Cycle I	Cycle II	Criteria
4 Student (17,39%)	22 Student (95,65%)	Completed
19 Student (82,60%)	1 Student (4,34%)	Not Completed

Referring to Table 2, an improvement in student performance was recorded during the transition from Cycle I to Cycle II, indicating progress in students' reading achievements throughout the learning process. Observations of student engagement during Indonesian language learning using letter card media in Cycle I showed that only 4 students (17.39%) met the minimum mastery criteria, while 19 students (82.60%) had not yet achieved the expected learning outcomes. Overall, student performance in Cycle I remained below the classical mastery threshold.

In contrast, the results in Cycle II were significantly more optimal. A total of 22 students (95.65%) successfully achieved the learning outcomes in accordance with the established minimum mastery criteria (KKM), with only 1 student (4.34%) not reaching the threshold. In general, student learning activities in Cycle II were found to meet the required KKM standard.

Based on these outcomes, the researcher concluded that the instructional strategy implemented during the second cycle was sufficient, and thus, no further cycles were deemed necessary. The improvement in students' reading abilities was evident in the test results obtained across both Cycle I and Cycle II, as elaborated in the following section:

Table 3. Reading Ability Test Score Data for Each Cycle

Description	Cycle I	Cycle II
Total Score	1,094	1,899
Average Score	47.56%	82.56%
Highest Score	90	97
Students Meeting KKM	6	22
Students Not Meeting KKM	17	1
Mastery Percentage (%)	26.08%	95.65%

Based on the findings of the research conducted, it was revealed that student learning outcomes in the Indonesian language subject experienced a significant improvement through the use of letter card media. This improvement is reflected in the increase in students' average scores from 47.56 in Cycle I to 82.56 in Cycle II. The data show that in Cycle I, only 6 students (26.08%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM). Meanwhile, in Cycle II, the number of students who reached mastery increased drastically to 22 students, equivalent to 95.65% of the total number of participants.

These results indicate that the learning process in Cycle II has met the indicators of success, with the majority of students scoring ≥ 75 , which is the individual mastery threshold. In addition, observations of teacher activities in implementing the letter card media during the learning process in Cycle I and Cycle II are summarized in Table below:

Table 4. Comparison of Teacher Observation Results in the Implementation of the Letter Card Learning Model in Cycles I and II

Teacher Activity	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement
Score	65	96	31 Points
Criteria	Fair (C)	Excellent (A)	

Referring to Table 4, a significant improvement was observed in teacher activity when comparing Cycle I and Cycle II. During Cycle I, the teacher's activity score was 65, which falls into the "Fair" (C) category. This score increased notably in Cycle II to 96, classified as "Excellent" (A).

The classroom action research (CAR) was carried out in two sequential cycles. Between Cycle I and Cycle II, there was a substantial improvement: only 6 students (26.08%) met the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) in reading skills during Cycle I. However, in Cycle II, the number of students who achieved mastery rose sharply to 22 students (95.65%). This indicates a notable increase of 16 students (69.56%), reflecting a

substantial improvement in learning outcomes from Cycle I to Cycle II in terms of reading performance. The findings in the second-grade classroom at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan demonstrate that the use of letter card media successfully engaged students and contributed to this significant progress.

The development in teacher activity during the implementation of Cycle I and Cycle II also showed positive enhancement. In Cycle I, the recorded score was 65, categorized as "Fair (C)", while in Cycle II, the score rose to 96, which meets the "Excellent (A)" classification. Both results indicate that the teacher's instructional performance reached the predetermined success indicators. Moreover, student engagement in learning activities also improved significantly in each cycle, both in terms of skill development and achievement throughout the learning process.

Observation results on student participation during Indonesian language lessons using letter card media revealed that in Cycle I, only 4 students (17.39%) fulfilled the learning mastery criteria, while 19 students (82.60%) did not meet the KKM standard (≥ 75). However, in Cycle II, a marked improvement occurred, with 22 students (95.65%) achieving mastery and only 1 student (4.34%) falling short of the expected standard. This improvement indicates that the use of letter card media had a positive impact in capturing student attention and improving their reading skills during the learning process in grade II at SD Muhammadiyah 01 Medan.

These research findings are consistent with those of previous studies. A similar study was conducted by Diah Nazariah, titled "*The Use of Letter Card Media to Improve Early Reading Skills of Second Grade Students at MIN 9 Aceh Besar.*" The results demonstrated that teacher participation during the learning process in Cycle I reached 72.82%, which then increased to 93.47% in Cycle II, falling into the "excellent" category. Likewise, student activity improved from 64.13% in Cycle I to 86.95% in Cycle II. Furthermore, students' early reading test scores increased from 68.75% in Cycle I to 87.5% in Cycle II, also classified as "excellent".

In addition, a study by Rohati Hasibuan titled "*The Use of Letter Card Media to Improve Early Reading Skills of First Grade Elementary Students*" yielded similar results. The implementation of letter card media through a play-based approach at SD Negeri 0501 Hutanopan positively affected students' basic reading abilities. This was evidenced by a score increase of 57.8, with an average score of 3.4, reflecting considerable improvement. The study concluded that the use of letter card games contributed positively to enhancing students' early reading skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from observations, the implementation of actions, and data analysis, this study concludes that the use of letter card media in teaching Indonesian reading skills has proven effective in improving student performance and engagement. In Cycle I, only 6 students (26.08%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), whereas in Cycle II, the number increased significantly to 22 students (95.65%), indicating an improvement of 16 students or 69.56%. Furthermore, teacher involvement in the learning process also showed notable enhancement, with the activity score rising from 65 (categorized as "Fair") in Cycle I to 96 (classified as "Excellent") in Cycle II. Student participation similarly increased, as only 4 students (17.39%) achieved mastery in Cycle I, while 22 students (95.65%) met the standard in Cycle II. These results demonstrate that the integration of letter card media positively influenced the learning atmosphere and supported the development of reading skills among second-grade students.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that teachers continue to explore and apply interactive and visually engaging learning media such as letter cards, particularly in early grade literacy instruction. Such media not only enhance students' cognitive development but also foster greater enthusiasm and participation in the learning process.

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