

IMPROVING BEGINNING READING SKILLS OF FIRST GRADE ELEMENTARY LEARNERS THROUGH *WORD PUZZLE* MEDIA

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the low initial reading ability of first-grade learners of SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan, Plered District, Cirebon Regency. The research aims to determine the planning, implementation, and improvement of early reading learning using word puzzle media, specifically focusing on the process of saving words. The subjects of this research were 25 first-grade learners. The method used in this research is classroom action research (CAR) with the Kemmis & McTaggart model. This research was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of one meeting, and was divided into four stages: planning, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection. The results showed that the initial reading ability of learners increased from 68% to 98%. This indicates an increase in the initial reading ability of learners through word puzzle media, such as saving words.

Keywords : Beginning reading skills; Word Puzzle media; Learners

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh rendahnya kemampuan membaca permulaan siswa kelas I SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan Kecamatan Plered Kabupaten Cirebon. Penelitian bertujuan untuk mengetahui perencanaan, pelaksanaan dan peningkatan pembelajaran membaca permulaan menggunakan media *word puzzle* menabung Kata. Subjek penelitian ini adalah peserta didik kelas 1 yang berjumlah 25 peserta didik. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah penelitian tindakan kelas (PTK) dengan model Kemmis & McTaggart. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan 2 siklus yang terdiri dari 1 kali pertemuan setiap siklusnya melalui 4 tahapan berupa perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan membaca permulaan peserta didik meningkat dari 68% menjadi 98%. Hal ini menunjukkan terjadi peningkatan kemampuan membaca permulaan peserta didik melalui media *word puzzle* menabung kata.

Kata Kunci: Kemampuan Membaca Permulaan; Media *Word Puzzle* Menabung Kata; Peserta Didik

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Introduction

At the elementary school level, reading is a crucial basic skill because it forms the foundation of the learning process. During this phase, children acquire knowledge about letters, words, and sentences, which can help them understand what they are reading. Reading is one of the four basic language skills and a key component of written communication. In written communication, the sound symbols of language are changed into written symbols or letters. At the initial reading level, the process involves fostering, mastering, and carrying out this change in childhood, especially in the early years of school (Harianto, 2020). Reading skills in elementary schools are divided into two categories: beginning reading or basic reading, and advanced reading (Sukirno, 2009). Teachers teach beginning reading to learners in grades 1 and 2, while teachers teach advanced reading starting in grade 3 (Rahma & Dafit, 2021). Initial reading is the reading carried out in grades I and II, beginning with reading letters, words, and simple sentences that aim to enable students to read discourse fluently (Hadiana et al., 2018). Initial reading begins at the initial stage of the reading process. Initial reading is the process of translating written symbols into sounds. Namely, children recognise letters as sound symbols

through a visualisation process. Beginning is the ability of students to identify the form of language symbols (letters), which are seen visually with the pronunciation or sound of letters into a single sound syllable, word, until it becomes a sentence (Futihat et al., 2020). The initial reading ability has stages, namely recognizing the forms of the letters of the alphabet A-Z, which can be seen by learners being able to recognize the difference between the letters b and d. Learners can understand the difference between vowels and consonants. In addition, learners can write their own names correctly. Indicators of early reading skills include stages of reading syllables, words, and sentences. Specifically, learners can accurately read syllables within sentences, as seen in a new book. After the sentence has been read correctly, learners can read it word by word, namely, book and new. Then from the word, it is made into syllables, namely, book new. Reading with correct pronunciation and intonation is demonstrated when learners can read sentences clearly and correctly, and use the correct intonation in sentences that contain exclamation marks or command sentences, such as "put the book on the table!" (Dalman, 2017). Based on the opinion above, reading is a process of reciting a written message by spelling or repeating it through the letters of the alphabet.

In this century, elementary school teachers face complex and significant challenges. If the teaching and learning methods remain unchanged, this challenge will persist for the next 30 years, necessitating development that is closely aligned with literacy (Dianasari, 2019). Conventional learning, which is still centered on teachers, can make learners less independent and less initiative, causing them to become passive. As a result, learning is not alive, and learners easily give up if they have not been able to master the lesson. Efforts to overcome this can be made through the School Literacy Movement (Labudasari & Rochmah, 2019).

According to a 2022 survey by the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*, the *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)* ranked Indonesia five places higher than in 2018. However, Indonesia still ranks 11th out of 81 countries surveyed (Fahrianur et al., 2023). The main factors contributing to this are the lack of a strong reading culture in society, limited access to quality reading resources, and a predilection for visual entertainment such as television and social media over reading. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of education also impacts reading habits, particularly in areas lacking adequate educational facilities.

Teachers play a crucial role in helping learners overcome reading difficulties by utilizing learning media tailored to their individual characteristics. Learning media can provide direct experiences, making the learning process more varied, clarifying information or messages in learning, and increasing the effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning activities in schools (Daniyati et al., 2023). Researchers have developed a solution that serves as a reference for teaching reading in lower grades, utilizing *word puzzle learning media* to help learners memorize words. According to *puzzle games*, they can stimulate creativity and memory in learners, as they give rise to the urge to solve problems (Ratnayanti, 2021). The use of *word puzzle* media that has been carried out has found results in the form of the development of learners' reading abilities (Irsandi, 2024). Learning that utilizes *puzzles* as its medium can provide benefits, including increased student activity, creativity, and curiosity. This puzzle media can encourage students to think critically and solve the *puzzle* by assembling it into a complete unit. Students become active by engaging in various activities that increase their curiosity, resulting in high learning motivation as they find the process interesting and enjoyable (Safitri & Suwartini, 2021).

In addition, *puzzle games* are considered fun for children because they can be played repeatedly. So when *puzzles* are used in learning, they can improve learners' creativity and critical

thinking skills. Syllabic *word puzzles* help learners better understand how syllables can combine to form words, which in turn can be used to form sentences. In this way, learners learn to recognize syllable patterns, which can improve their overall reading skills. Children will find it easier to read new words by breaking them down into syllables, rather than just seeing them as a single, difficult word unit. Learners create *word puzzles* to save syllables, hoping to save syllables from *the word puzzle*. *Word puzzle* media to save words is a learning medium made from pieces of letters that will form a word, and then the word is changed into syllables. Learners save the words arranged in *the word puzzle* by writing them on *post-its* and sticking them in their books.

Based on interviews and observations conducted with first-grade teachers at SDN 1 Pangkalan on October 10, 2024, thirteen first-grade learners were unable to read fluently in the Indonesian language subject regarding syllables. Of the thirteen learners, ten were male and three were female. Therefore, the use of *word puzzle* media to overcome reading difficulties in grade 1 of SDN 1 Pangkalan is expected to be effective. This study aims to “Improving Beginning Reading Skills Of First Grade Elementary Learners Through *Word Puzzle* Media”

Research Methods

The research used by the researcher is classroom action research (CAR). The researcher chose the CAR method for this study because it is suitable for addressing the problem of low initial reading skills directly in the classroom. The subjects in this study were 25 first-grade learners. Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a research activity in the classroom carried out by teachers to solve learning problems, create new things in learning, and improve the quality and learning outcomes (Widayati, 2008). This classroom action research is carried out systematically, from planning to assessment, to evaluate the effectiveness of real actions in the classroom or learning activities in addressing learning problems (Prasetyo, 2021). Research Design, according to Kemmis and McTaggart, consists of four stages. Stage 1 involves developing a plan that will be implemented during the action phase (*Planning*). To plan a study, researchers must create a list of questions so that during the study, they can directly ask questions related to the research. Stage 2 is implementing the action (*Action*). At this stage, researchers implement the plan's contents related to the action in the classroom. Stage 3 is observation (*Observation*). This activity is carried out simultaneously with the implementation phase, where the teacher acts while observing what happens in the classroom. Stage 4 is reflection (*Reflection*). After carrying out the action and observation, research data is obtained. Then, reflection is carried out by analyzing the data to determine whether the objectives and results of the study have been achieved perfectly or not (Arikunto, 2015). The research instrument used was a teacher interview sheet regarding learners' initial reading skills after using *the word puzzle media* to save words, as well as teacher and learner activity sheets during the implementation of initial reading learning. Assessment criteria for initial reading include knowledge of the letter forms A-Z, pronunciation of vowels and consonants, and fluency in reading words, syllables, and sentences.

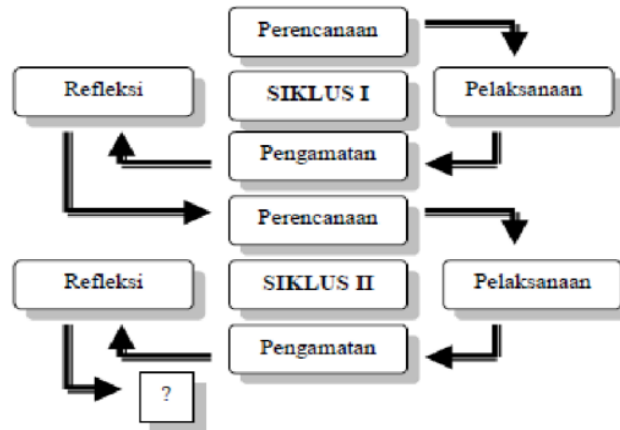


Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Design
Source: Arikunto (2015)

Results and Discussion

This research was conducted in May 2025 at SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan. The research consisted of two cycles: Cycle I and Cycle II, each consisting of one meeting. Each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Cycle I was held on Friday, May 9, 2025. Learning lasted for 2 x 35 minutes. In cycle I, the teacher conducted Indonesian language learning activities on syllable material with words starting with the letter "l" through *word puzzle media* saving words using the *Problem Based Learning model* which consists of five syntaxes, namely student orientation to problems such as learners are given a picture on *word puzzle media* in the form of a picture of a fly then learners must arrange the letters in the picture then organize learners such as asking learners individually to solve the problem after that presenting the results of work such as learners who can complete the arrangement of letters in the picture will come forward to arrange the letters and analyze and evaluate the problem-solving process such as learners read letters that have become arranged words in *word puzzle media* and save the word by writing the word in *word puzzle media* on *post-it paper*. There are only 17 learners who can recognize the shape of the letters AZ. There are also only 17 learners who can distinguish the letters b and d, namely the learners who write the word 'dolphin' correctly on a *Post-it paper*. Learners can also recognize and differentiate vowels from consonants. Then, learners can read sentences, words, and syllables correctly in *word puzzle media*, such as when one of the learners is asked to come forward to arrange the letters of the word "Dolphin." After the word has been arranged, the teacher and learners read the word together. However, to assess the learners' reading ability, an individual oral test was also conducted on 25 learners, asking them to read words that begin with the letter "l". This research was conducted in May 2025 at SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan.



Figure 2. Learners Assembling a *Word Puzzle*

After implementing learning using this *puzzle media*, student engagement during learning can be increased. This is by the opinion of Salmawati et al., (2024) who stated that *puzzle media* has advantages including that puzzle media is easy to use and play even if you need tools and materials to make *puzzles* can be obtained from the surrounding environment such as used cardboard, cartons and others, can increase student interest and involvement in the teaching and learning process in the classroom so that learners become more active when the teacher explains the material and can train fine motor skills in learners or other intelligences so that it can affect the cognitive and motor development of learners. Researchers found several problems in cycle I, such as (1) Learning using *word puzzle media* has been implemented well. Learners are actively involved in reading activities, although not entirely 2. There are still some learners who do not know the letter '3'. Arranging letters is not correct 4. There are still learners who remain passive during the learning process and require additional guidance. Then, researchers made improvements in cycle II. In cycle II, the teacher carried out Indonesian language learning activities on syllables with words beginning with the letter "m" through *word puzzle media* to build words using the STAD type of cooperative learning model which consists of 6 syntaxes, namely conveying learning objectives and motivating learners, then presenting information in the form of explaining lesson materials, forming small heterogeneous study groups between boys and girls. Group activities such as each group being given a Student Worksheet (LKPD) to work on, working on evaluation questions orally to determine learners' reading abilities and giving awards to groups that have answered correctly. After that, learners save the words by writing them on a Post-it paper in the *word puzzle media*. Learning to read beginnings using word puzzle media can be done individually or in groups. This aligns with the opinion of Assubaidi & Ritonga (2023), who stated that the process of solving *puzzle* games can encourage learners to think creatively, analyze, and work independently or in groups.

Based on research conducted with first-grade learners of SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan, Plered District, Cirebon Regency, on learning to read using *word puzzles*, there was an increase. Furthermore, the learning can attract learners' interest and attention. The presence of *word puzzles* makes learners more interactive and the learning atmosphere more enjoyable. This is evident from the learning outcome data obtained from the initial reading ability tests administered to learners in each cycle, starting with Cycle I and Cycle II.



Figure 3. Beginning Reading Test

Through oral tests, teachers can directly assess learners' abilities in identifying letters, pronouncing letter sounds, and arranging letters into simple words. This assessment can help teachers identify difficulties or obstacles that learners experience, allowing them to provide targeted assistance to improve their reading skills. Thus, oral test assessments become an effective tool for monitoring the development of learners' reading skills. The data on the results of the student reading ability test. After conducting the initial reading test on learners, the results of the initial reading ability scores were obtained, which are referred to in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1 Reading Ability Results Data per Cycle %

Information	Cycle I	Cycle II
Sum of All Values	1690	2030
Average	67.6	81.2
Learners complete	17	23
Learners do not complete	8	2
Percentage completion	68%	98%
Percentage of incomplete	32%	2%

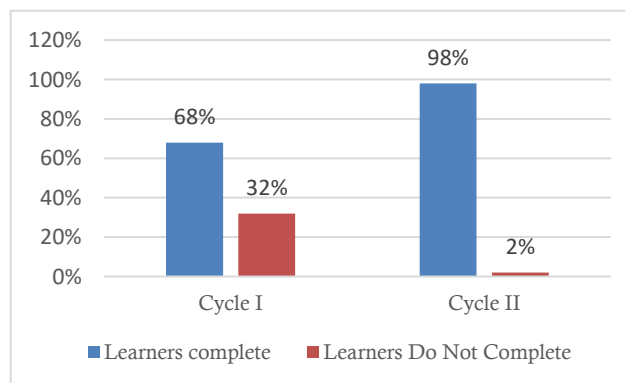


Figure 4. Percentage Data Per Cycle

Based on Table 1 and Figure 4, it can be concluded that in Cycle I, the total score was 1690 with an average of 67.6. Still, it had not yet reached the minimum completion criteria (KKM) set by the school, which was 70, and had not yet reached the predetermined success level. Then, in Cycle II, there was a substantial, with a total of 2030, and an average score of 81.2. Thus, the number of learners who completed Cycle II was 23, and the number of learners who completed Cycle I was 17. Meanwhile, the number of learners who had not completed Cycle I was eight, and in Cycle II, it decreased to two learners. The application of *word puzzle* media to help learners learn to read in the beginning grade has shown a substantial. Based on the results of two learning cycles, there has been a striking increase in the number of learners who

achieved the Minimum Competency (KKM). In Cycle I, 17 learners, or approximately 68% of the total learners, completed the KKM.

Meanwhile, in Cycle II, the number of learners who achieved the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) increased to 23 learners, or approximately 98%. In Cycle II, learning has achieved the expected level of success and has reached the minimum completion criteria (KKM) set by the school. When viewed from the percentage of learners, which in Cycle I was 68%, then in Cycle II experienced a substantial of 98% of learners in the completion category. The learning of beginning reading for first-grade learners using *word puzzle* media to save words has increased.

Based on research conducted by Assubaidi & Ritonga (2023), it is stated that the implementation of puzzle media is efficacious in improving reading skills among first-grade learners. One of the learning media to help with problems in the MMP (Reading and Writing Beginning) material, which explains syllables into words, is the media in the form of syllable *puzzles* (Nevyanti et al., 2017). Word *puzzle* media is considered an adequate approach to overcoming reading difficulties, as noted by Tedy et al., (2023), who stated that the Letter *Puzzle* Media Reading technique is effectively implemented in elementary schools. If learners feel bored and tired during learning, the teacher can bring the class atmosphere to life by playing games, singing, or engaging in other activities. Another study conducted by Komang & Dewi (2022), stated that *puzzles* can improve the initial reading skills of first-grade learners at SD Negeri 6 Batur. This can be proven by the increase in learners' ability in Cycle I, from 69.9 to 87 in Cycle II. Another study conducted by Agustina et al., (2022), stated that using puzzle media has experienced an increase, this increase gradually using two cycles, before carrying out cycles I and II the researcher conduct an interview first with the homeroom teacher who can read only 45%, so researchers applied letter puzzle media to improve reading and in Cycle II there were no obstacles. It increased to 85% of learners who can read. The use of *word puzzles* makes learners more interactive and makes the learning environment more enjoyable. This is evident from the data obtained in each Cycle, starting from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Data shows that learners' reading ability has reached the minimum completion criteria (KKM). The use of *word puzzles has been proven* to improve learners' beginning reading skills.

The limitations of this study are that the study on improving the initial reading skills of first-grade learners through *word puzzle media* for saving words was only conducted in one class with a limited number of students so that the results obtained cannot be generalized to all first-grade learners in other schools, the study only focused on one type of learning media without comparing it with different media, so that its effectiveness cannot be compared comprehensively. Based on these limitations, future researchers are advised to conduct research involving a larger number of subjects and covering multiple schools to ensure more representative results. Future researchers could also compare the effectiveness of *word puzzles* with other learning media, such as word cards, picture series, or digital apps, to determine which is most appropriate. Developing variations in *word puzzle formats* is also necessary to make them more engaging and relevant to learners' developmental levels.

Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussions presented above regarding the improvement of learners' initial reading abilities in Class I at SD Negeri 1 Pangkalan through media *Word puzzles*, which involve saving words, the approach is carried out in two cycles. The good improvement in each cycle can prove this. Student activities in learning using puzzle

media become more active and creative. In addition to learning while playing, which makes learning more enjoyable by arranging pieces of letters into words, learners can also save words by writing them on *post-it notes* and then sticking *the notes* in their respective books.

It can also be seen from the test results data. Carried out orally on initial reading skills using *word puzzle media* to save words in the first cycle, it was discovered that there were 17 of the 25 children who achieved completion with an overall average (67.6) but this figure does not yet indicate that the learners have reached the KKM (70). There is a percentage result of 68%. Then it increases. In the second cycle, it was found that 23 out of 25 learners achieved the KKM (70) with an overall average of 81.2 and a percentage of 98%.

Furthermore, the number of learners who had not yet completed the course decreased in each cycle. In Cycle I, six learners had not yet completed the course, and in Cycle II, two learners had not yet completed the course. Reading ability, beginning with word puzzle media, has increased among grade I learners in saving words. Word puzzle media can serve as an alternative for teachers, providing a fun learning medium to improve learners' initial reading skills.

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