

## Research Paper

# The Application of Alphabet Cards to Improve Beginning Reading Skills for First Grade Students at State Elementary School

Binda Nitasari <sup>1,\*</sup>, Tasniatul Uyun <sup>2</sup>, Rakhmatul Ummah <sup>1</sup>, Ella James-Brabham <sup>3,4</sup> , Abel Mugenda <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Program Studi, Perguruan Tinggi STKIP Taman Siswa Bima, **Indonesia**, <sup>2</sup> Wali kelas/Guru kelas 1 SDN 47 Kota Bima, **Indonesia**, <sup>3</sup> Centre for Mathematical Cognition and Centre for Early Mathematics Learning, Loughborough University, **United Kingdom**, <sup>4</sup> Department of Mathematics Education, Loughborough University, **United Kingdom**, <sup>5</sup> RTI International, Nairobi Regional Office, Misha Tower, 3rd Floor, 47 Westlands Road, P.O. Box 1181 Village Market, 00621 Nairobi, **Kenya**.

✉ [bindasarinita@gmail.com](mailto:bindasarinita@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Early reading skills development in lower grades requires substantial teacher support. At this stage, students begin to recognize letters and syllables, making effective teaching crucial for mastering reading skills. This research addresses the challenge of low early reading skills among first-grade students at State Elementary School (SDN) 47 Kodo Kota Bima, as identified through previous assessments. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Alphabet Card media in improving these early reading skills. Using a classroom action research (CAR) approach, the research employs the Kemmis and McTaggart model, with the researcher conducting the teaching and the teacher and colleagues observing. Subjects are first-grade students at SDN 47 Kodo Kota Bima, with a focus on their early reading skills. Data collection methods include observation, interviews, and tests, analyzed descriptively and presented in tables and graphs. Results show a notable improvement in early reading skills. In the first cycle, the average percentage of improvement was 66.7% (good category), which increased to 73.5% (good category) in the second cycle. These findings suggest that Alphabet Card media effectively enhances early reading skills in students. The study concludes that Alphabet Card media is a beneficial tool for improving early reading skills and can positively impact learning outcomes for first-grade students.

**Keywords:** Medium of Instruction, Student Performance, Secondary Schools, Hargeisa District, Somaliland.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of education, the government continuously introduces various innovations through programs and activities aimed at ensuring that education in Indonesia keeps pace with modern developments [1], [2]. Particularly in 21st-century learning, the educational system focuses on student-centered learning, which is implemented through three main aspects: character, skills, and literacy. Literacy encompasses six types [3]: reading and writing literacy, numeracy literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, scientific literacy, and cultural literacy. Literacy is a crucial skill that includes the six basic literacies mentioned earlier [4]. It serves as the key to continuous learning and improving competencies, preparing students to advance to higher levels of education [5]. Literacy refers to the ability to read and write sufficiently to engage in an advanced society or to possess a good understanding, known as a literate society [6]. Literacy goes beyond mere reading activities; students need to read with focus to understand and grasp important information from the text they are reading. Students with good reading literacy skills can analyze, critique, and reflect on the information they obtain [7]. Therefore, literacy practice encompasses a wide range of abilities that are crucial to a child's development. From this statement, it is clear that reading and writing literacy is the most important part in demonstrating a person's quality to communicate with broad insights and knowledge to solve everyday problems.

A person's reading activity begins with recognizing letters as references for sounds or other punctuation marks. In line with Elimelech and Aram [8] opinion, reading is an integrated activity that involves several processes, such as recognizing letters and words, associating them with sounds, and then drawing conclusions about the purpose of the text. Meanwhile, according to Sermier Dessemontet et al. [9], reading is a very complex activity; no one can read without learning how. The

current challenge facing all educators is the implementation of reading instruction. Learning to read, especially at the initial stage, should be conducted through play to motivate children to learn to read [10]. The process of learning to read at the initial stage, particularly in lower grades or first grade, requires full guidance from a teacher.

At this phase, lower-grade students begin to recognize letters and syllables, making the teachers role in guiding students crucial for mastering reading skills [11]. Mastery of the initial reading stage is vital because accuracy and success at this stage significantly impact the improvement of subsequent reading abilities. This is also supported by the statement of Akgün and Akçamete [12], who assert that the primary goal of initial reading instruction is to introduce letters to children at an early age, assist them in distinguishing the pronunciation of words they learn, and prepare them for more advanced reading stages.

Based on observations at State Elementary School (SDN) 47 Kodo Bima City in first-grade students, the initial reading literacy skills are varied. Some students can read, while others cannot read at all. Some students recognize letters but struggle with pronunciation, some cannot differentiate between pictures and the words they read, some are fluent with vowels but struggle with consonants, some cannot distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters, and three students cannot read at all [13]. These issues are caused by the ineffectiveness of the teaching strategies designed by the teacher, particularly the lack of effective and varied use of media. The use of media in the learning process, especially in the Indonesian language subject, is often limited to textbooks that show pictures, and students are asked about these images. Although most students respond and answer, some do so because the images are familiar to them. However, they are unable to write the words or names associated with these images in their books. It can be concluded that students are still struggling with reading due to the lack of varied and effective media use.

Based on the problem description above, it is essential for teachers to address this issue, as they are the primary factor determining the success of the learning process. In the teaching process, the presence of media plays a very important role; using media can help teachers broaden students' horizons [14]. Therefore, innovative learning media are needed to improve students' beginning reading skills. The use of alphabet cards is one factor that can be utilized to enhance the beginning reading skills of first-grade students. Reading instruction in first grade is an initial or beginning stage of reading. This aligns with Sunde et al. [15] states, beginning reading is the initial stage of learning to read in lower grades. One stage in beginning reading is word reading, which involves the ability to combine letters into syllables and eventually into words, provided that students are familiar with all the letters of the alphabet from A to Z and can pronounce them correctly [16]. The reading skills acquired at this stage will form the foundation for learning in subsequent grades.

Therefore, in beginning reading instruction, it is not sufficient to use just one medium, but rather several media, such as pictures, letter cards, syllable cards, word cards, sentence cards, and labeled objects around the students. This will make the learning process more engaging, which in turn can increase students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn. According to research by Anggraeni and Maryanti [17], the use of alphabet card learning media positively affects students' beginning reading skills. Similarly, research by Sunde et al. [15], shows that the use of letter cards is highly effective in improving students' reading abilities. Based on the explanation above, the researcher aims to update the way teachers teach to enhance the beginning reading skills of first-grade students by applying alphabet card media.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. Classroom Action Research involves observing learning activities that are intentionally introduced and occur collectively in a classroom [18]. CAR is chosen because the issues to be addressed stem from classroom teaching practices, aimed at improving instruction and enhancing students' abilities. CAR is often used by teachers because it can solve problems in the learning process, correct mistakes, and improve

students' skills [19]. CAR is conducted as a problem-solving strategy by implementing real actions and then reflecting on the outcomes of those actions. This research is carried out to increase students' learning activities and improve beginning reading skills using Alphabet Card media. According to Hunt et al. [13], CAR consists of four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection.

The first stage, planning, involves preparing and designing a prototype of the learning media that will be used in the study. The selection of media is aligned with the objective of improving beginning reading skills, and assessment instruments are prepared for both teachers and students. The implementation stage follows, where the developed or planned media is applied. The researcher, with the teacher's consent, conducts the teaching, beginning with activities that stimulate students' thinking, providing an overview, communicating the learning objectives, and then teaching students to read and sing alphabet songs. The instruction continues with the use of letter cards with pictures, after which students learn with the media and engage in activities such as matching pictures with letters. The final activity involves evaluation and an end-of-lesson test.

The third stage, observation, involves filling out observation sheets on the activities of the teacher and students during the action process, noting any challenges faced by the researcher-teacher during the lesson, and documenting the learning process with Alphabet Card media. The observation sheets for students are filled out by peers, while the teacher's observation sheets are filled out by the subject teacher. The final stage, reflection, involves reflecting on the teaching process and evaluating areas that may need improvement for the next lesson. This study was conducted in a first-grade class with nine students, chosen because three of the students were struggling with reading due to a lack of effective media to enhance beginning reading skills. Data collection techniques in this study included direct observation, where observations were made of both the teacher (researcher) and the students, as well as interviews and tests for the students, aligned with questionnaires prepared for both the teacher and students.

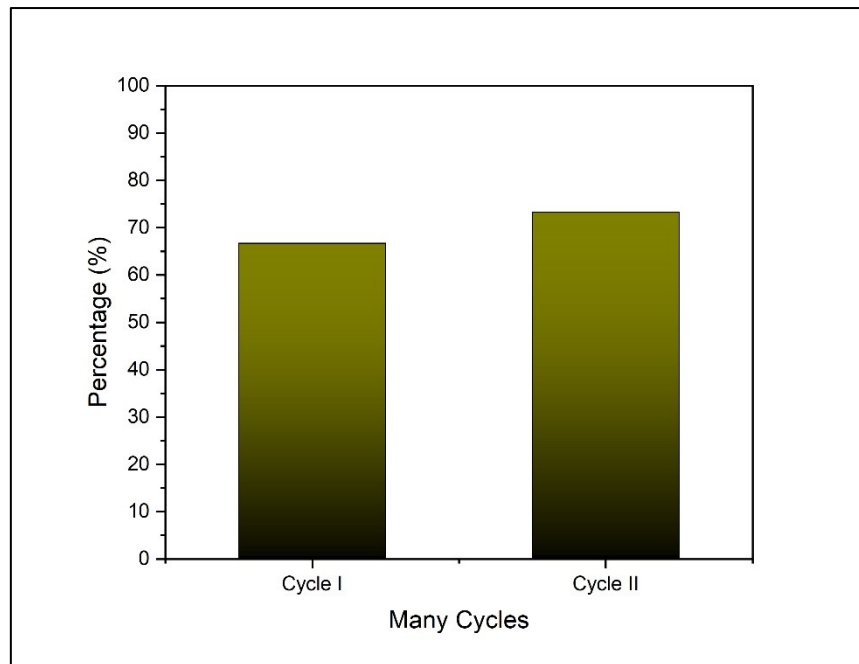
The criteria for the study were as follows: if students met all indicators and questions in the questionnaire, they would score 5, categorized as "very good"; if they met most of the questionnaire content, they would score 4, categorized as "good"; a score of 3 would indicate "sufficient"; a score of 2 would indicate "insufficient"; and a score of 1 would indicate "not met." The data obtained in this study were analyzed using descriptive percentage techniques, with a formula provided by Sugiyono [20]. The results of the study and data analysis will serve as the basis for determining the impact of Alphabet Card media on improving beginning reading skills in first-grade students.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research conducted at SDN 47 Kodo Kota Bima in the first grade, with a total of 9 students, was carried out over 4 meetings. The data obtained shows that the students' initial reading skills improved. The improvement in initial reading skills was observed by applying the Alphabet Card media. Comparison of the percentage of beginning reading skills using Alphabet Card media can be explained in **Figure 1**. Based on the percentage results above, it is evident that using the Alphabet Card media can improve students' skills. In Cycle I, the percentage was 66.7%, categorized as Good; however, there were some challenges in the implementation of the Alphabet Card media during Cycle I, indicating the need for improvements in Cycle II. The improvements made included reinforcing students' confidence to express their opinions and answer questions, encouraging students to pay close attention to whoever is speaking, motivating students to participate actively by giving praise or rewards, providing opportunities for students to freely express their thoughts, and offering more intensive guidance from the teacher.

The researcher and the teacher discussed the instructional steps that had not been fully implemented. After these improvements, there was an increase in Cycle II, reaching 73.5% with a Good category. The observation results showed a 6.8% improvement in initial reading skills from Cycle I to Cycle II. The improvement in students' initial reading skills was evident from the

evaluations conducted in Cycle I and Cycle II. The observation results of students' initial reading skills achievement in Cycle I are presented in **Table 1**.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of initial reading skills in cycle I and cycle II

**Table 1.** Achievement of students' Initial Reading Skills in Cycle I

No	Indicators of students' reading skills	Percentage (%)
1	Letter recognition ability	71%
2	Initial reading accuracy	64%
3	Word reading	57,8%
4	Ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds	73%
5	Understanding basic reading concepts	62%
Average child achievement		66,7%

Based on the observation results of the actions in Cycle I, as shown in Table 1, the students' letter recognition skills reached 71%, their accuracy in initial reading reached 64%, their word reading skills reached 57.8%, their ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds reached 73%, and their understanding of basic reading concepts reached 66.7%. From these results, it can be concluded that the average initial reading skills of students in Cycle I reached a score of 66.7%, which falls under the Good category. The observation results of students' initial reading skills achievement in Cycle II are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Achievement of Students Initial Reading Skills in Cycle II

No	Student Reading Skills Indicators	Percentage (%)
1	Letter recognition skills	77.8%
2	Initial reading skills	70%
3	Word reading	62%
4	Ability to identify consonants and vowels	80%
5	Understanding basic reading concepts	71%
Average child achievement		73,5%

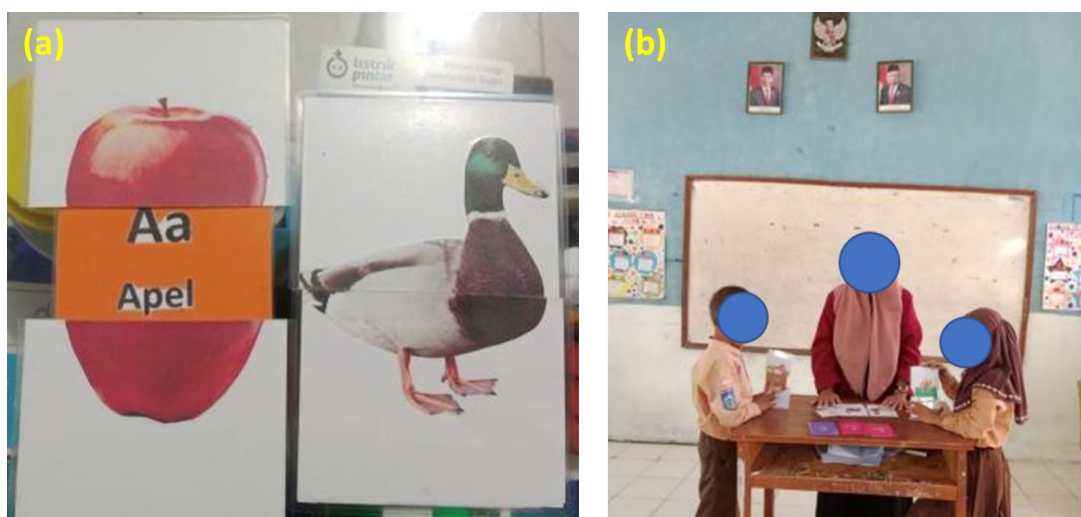
Based on the observations from Cycle II, as presented in Table 2, the letter recognition ability reached 77.8%, the readiness for initial reading reached 70%, the ability to read words reached 62%, the ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds reached 80%, and the understanding of basic reading concepts reached 71%. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the average initial reading skill of students in Cycle II reached a score of 73.5%, categorized as good.

From the data processed using simple percentage formulas in Cycle I, some students did not meet all the indicators. The percentages for each indicator are as follows: the first indicator, letter recognition ability, such as naming at least 10 letters of the alphabet and identifying matching letters in both uppercase and lowercase, was 71%; the second indicator, readiness for initial reading, such as the time taken for students to read a short sentence (3-5 words) and their ability to read syllables related to words in their surroundings, was 64%; the third indicator, reading words, where students could read words fluently, was 57.8%; the fourth indicator, ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds, where students could identify sounds in simple words and pronounce consonant and vowel sounds clearly, was 73%; and the last indicator, understanding basic reading concepts, such as identifying differences between words and pictures and showing the reading direction from left to right, was 62%.

In Cycle II, there was an improvement in each indicator: the first indicator, letter recognition ability, reached 77.8%; the second indicator, readiness for initial reading, reached 70%; the third indicator, ability to read words, increased to 64%; the fourth indicator, ability to identify consonant and vowel sounds, reached 80%; and the last indicator, understanding basic reading concepts, reached 71%. From these learning outcomes, it can be concluded that the use of Alphabet Cards can enhance students' initial reading skills. The results show that students, after the implementation of the learning, have met the established completion criteria.

Alphabet cards are aids used to teach children to read by allowing them to see and remember letter shapes as well as pictures accompanied by written meanings of those pictures on the cards [21], [22], [23], alphabet cards are alphabet cards that contain images, letters, and symbols that help children associate these symbols with their meanings. The alphabet cards referred to here are homemade cards shaped like rectangles made from white paper. One side of the card has letter cutouts, while the other side has pictures of objects with their corresponding written meanings.

This is consistent with the use of the media in the 1st grade at SDN 47 Kodo Kota Bima, where the media was directly applied by the researcher. The students were very enthusiastic about the games included in the media, such as matching pictures with words. Before that, the researcher shuffled the cards and asked the students to come forward to match pictures with words or vice versa according to the instructions. The media created by the researcher was not just alphabet cards but also included pictures with letters and words corresponding to the letters and images. More details can be seen in the following **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2. (a) Media Alphabet Cards and (b) Process of Applying Media**

The use of alphabet cards in teaching to improve early reading skills makes learning enjoyable and effective, with students actively engaged in the learning process. The application of alphabet cards not only serves as a teaching aid for the teacher but also involves students actively through interactive games. This is evidenced by the data analysis showing that alphabet cards positively

affect early reading skills in 1st grade students. Initially, only some students could read correctly, but after introducing effective and interactive media, there was an improvement in reading ability. This is evident from the analysis of the first and second cycles.

The observed improvement in reading skills among 1st grade students after the application of the media confirms that the use of alphabet cards can modify the learning process, especially in early reading instruction. The results of this study are consistent with previous research, such as that by Istiqomah et al. [23], which found that the use of alphabet card media influences early reading skills. Furthermore, Ningtyas et al. [24] found that the use of alphabet cards with images was very successful in improving students' reading abilities. According to Ningtyas et al. [24], the development of the alphabet increased due to the stimulation provided by alphabet cards. Playing with alphabet cards made learning letters more enjoyable and allowed children to interact with the cards directly. In addition to recognizing letters, children could explore knowledge through images, colors, and shapes on the cards.

This research is also relevant to Alqahtani [25], who showed that the use of alphabet card media could improve reading skills in Indonesian language lessons for 1st grade students, both individually and in groups. This finding is supported by several other studies. For instance, Milankov et al. [11] reported a significant improvement in early reading skills with the help of alphabet card media. Thomas et al. [7] in their study lesson planning to improve reading skills using alphabet card media concluded that the aim of their research was to provide a series of plans that could enhance students' reading skills using alphabet cards. The use of alphabet cards allowed researchers to better understand students' responses and comprehension with the media. Additionally, Fairouz et al. [26] in their study emphasized the importance of delivering words or expressions according to children's understanding to avoid misunderstandings, as stated in Hadith Riwayat Bukhari. The study highlighted the need to create an active and enjoyable learning environment, incorporate music into the learning process, use VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) learning approaches, and consider individual differences in reading activities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research conducted over four sessions with 1st grade students, focusing on early reading skills, demonstrated improvement after using video learning media, as evidenced by the data obtained on students' early reading abilities in each cycle. The average percentage of early reading skills in the first cycle was 66.7% (good category). The implementation of Alphabet Cards in the first cycle had some shortcomings, which necessitated improvements in the second cycle. The improvements included providing reinforcement to encourage students to express their opinions and answer questions confidently, urging students to pay close attention to whoever was sharing their opinions, motivating students to be active by giving praise or rewards, and giving students the opportunity to freely express their thoughts. The teacher provided more intensive guidance. The researcher and teacher discussed the learning steps that had not been implemented. After these improvements, the average percentage of early reading skills in the second cycle increased to 73.5% (good category). The data from each cycle and its analysis reveal the impact of the Alphabet Cards on improving early reading skills in 1st grade students. This is evident from the comparison of student abilities between the first and second cycles, leading to the conclusion that the application of Alphabet Cards can enhance early reading skills for 1st grade students at SDN 47 Kodo, Kota Bima.

The researcher offers the following recommendations: (1) For the school, it should provide training for teachers to use varied and interactive learning media, such as Alphabet Cards, to create active and enjoyable learning environments that achieve optimal learning outcomes and improve early reading skills, particularly in lower grades. (2) For teachers, Alphabet Cards should be used as a variation in teaching models to enhance students' early reading skills. Teachers should consistently motivate and encourage students to be active in learning. (3) For future researchers, a more in-depth

study of the application of Alphabet Cards should be conducted and further developed to better improve students' early reading skills.

## 5. AUTHOR DECLARATION

**Author contributions and responsibilities** - The authors made major contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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**Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process** - During the preparation of this work the author did not use AI for writing, editing, or anything else related to the manuscript.

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