Using Cards to Improve the Alphabetical Recognition Ability of Early Childhood

[1] Ririn Mujiati, [2] Hendrik Siswono, [3] Muhammad Agus Sugiarto

[1,2,3] PGRI University of Argopuro, Jember, East Java, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: Children's reading ability is now the main basis for taking the next level of education. The level of reading ability becomes a priority scale for early childhood education, and it needs to be developed comprehensively. One effort to encourage these capabilities is to use representative media, such as letter cards. This research aims to improve the student's ability to recognize letters using letter cards. This is classroom action research. The research has taken place in group A aged 4-5 years Kartini II Kindergarten PGRI Rambipiju. There were 16 students involved in this research. This used tests and observation sheets with 1-to-4-star assessment criteria such as students being able to show letters, and students being able to order letters. The students should therefore get a minimum of three stars in aspects observed for individual completeness; and 75% of the total number of students for classical completeness. The data were then analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results show that 56% of the total number of students or 9 students completed cycle I and 87% or 14 students completed cycle II. Accordingly, the letter cards can improve the student's ability to recognize the alphabet.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of the ability to read explicitly can be referred to the first word of the revelation of the Qur'an, namely "*iqra*" which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The context of the word "*iqra*" which is positioned as a command word, is not only formally interpreted,

Editorial Address: Kampus STAI Auliaurrasyidin Tembilahan
Jl. Gerilya No. 12 Tembilahan Barat, Riau, Indonesia 29213
ash-shibyan@stai.tbh.ac.id

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but also interpreted as a process of understanding life. The meaning of *iqra*, which has *kauliyah* and *kauniyah* dimensions, is one of the keys to exploring knowledge (Masykur & Solekhah 2021). Through reading, humans can develop their intellectual abilities, so it is useful for mental stimulation and maturity, as well as expanding thinking (Patiung 2016).

Terminologically, reading has 5 meanings include seeing and understanding, spelling, pronouncing, knowing, and calculating or understanding that describe the thinking process. Reading is a receptive language ability for obtaining information, knowledge, and experience; it can strengthen thinking power and broaden insight (Purba, et al. 2023). Accordingly, efforts to improve children's ability to read are part of the child's language development aspect which is closely related to the ability to read, write, listen, speak and communicate (Ariyati 2015).

The basis of early childhood education that prioritizes the fun dimension of learning is certainly a necessity for teaching and learning activities to be able to be constructed in the frame of playing while learning (Partijem 2017). This context certainly cannot be separated from the definition of education itself, which essentially develops all the potential of students – like reading – which leads to the realization of skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state. It is trying to be further massively improved with various learning media used by educators such as flashcards, letter cards, letter balls, and others.

Reading ability is an essential aspect that must be developed optimally so that children have competencies that they can use as a tool to master science. Reading skill in children, in the first stage, is that children are able to recognize letters well. It can be seen when they can distinguish, mention, recognize, and match both the verbal and written letters. The development of children's ability to recognize letters can also be encouraged by interactions in daily life in the surrounding environment. Pangastuti and Hanum (2017) declare that talking with friends, and listening to friends or teachers mention and write letters can support children in the process of recognizing letters faster.

Although it seems simple, recognizing letters for children aged 4-5 years is essential as the first stage of having the ability to read (Vukašinović & Bacete, 2023). Alphabet letter recognition activities aim to train children's ability to recognize the characteristics of alphabet letters (Hayati, et.al., 2020). This process will have an impact on children's ability to recognize

alphabetic letters, which are characterized by being able to mention and imitate letters A-Z, mention and write letters, mention groups of pictures, recognize the meaning of a combination of several letters, and recognize changes in sound and meaning based on changes and position of letters (Amalia, 2020).

Introducing alphabetic letters to children can use learning media, such as letter cards. The use of media can deliver information effectively, and facilitate the interaction between teachers and students (Zaman & Hernawan, 2024; Ratumanan & Rosmiati, 2023). The process of interaction between teachers and students will certainly encourage the effectiveness of communication which has an impact on the process of implementing learning that is more communicative and provides a sense of comfort which realizes enjoyable teaching and learning activities. This is in line with the 5 levels of development of children's ability to recognize letters: the magical stage, self-concept stage, bridging reading stage, take-off reader stage, and independent reader stage (Laely, 2013). Accordingly, introducing alphabetic letters using cards belongs to the take-off reader stage. Teachers, in this stage, should not force students to read and mention letters perfectly. The dimension of forcing in this context is because letters and words are abstract for them, so they use graphophone, semantic, and syntactic at the same time in the process of recognizing letters (Widyastuti 2018; Hilaliyah 2016).

The use of letter cards in this study is more in the context of the simplicity of media that can be made individually with minimalist tools such as pieces of paper and stationery. Kristanto (2016) stresses that it is more accessible of ease of manufacture and use compare to the other similar media, such as flip charts or flipbooks. The use of them also considers the role of parents in supporting the development of their ability in recognizing alphabets at home, where parents can make them individually.

This research aims to distinguish the improvement of the students' ability in recognizing alphabetic letters using letter cards at Kartini II Kindergarten PGRI Rambipuji Jember. The medium is taken under several consideration such as the high level of accessibility, ease of use, interesting shapes, formats that meet the learning development, and a medium of problem-solving.

RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this research is how the letter cards can improve the students' ability in recognizing alphabetic letters. This is classroom action research that is completed through the positivistic paradigm. This was completed in group A of Kartini Kindergarten PGRI Rambipuji Jember. This was completed in two cycles, which each cycle includes 4 steps, Kemmis and Mc Taggart in (Setiadi, 2014), namely planning, doing, observing, and reflecting. Each student should get at least three stars as its individual success indicator, besides 75% of total number of students get 3 stars at its classically success indicator. The students will get a) 1 star, if they could not mention and show the letters; b) 2 stars, if they could mention and show the letters but still need any helping; c) 3 stars, if they could mention and show the letters without any helping; and d) 4 stars, if the they could mention and show, and sort the letters.

The cards used here have uppercase and lowercase letters, as shown below. Using such these cards is simultaneously to introduce the shape of both, so that students have more complete knowledge about alphabetic letters. Data in this research was gained through the use of test and observation. They then analyzed using both qualitatively and quantitatively.
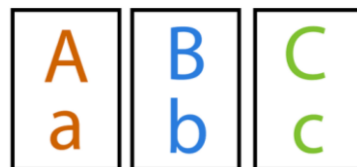
Picture 1. Letter cards

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the initial stage of the research, the pre-cycle, the researcher wrote several letters from A to G on the blackboard for students in Group A to read. The researcher asked the students to raise their hands if they recognized the letters. Based on the observations, only three of sixteen students (18.75%) were able to read them correctly. The diagram below illustrates the overall success rate from the pre-cycle observations.
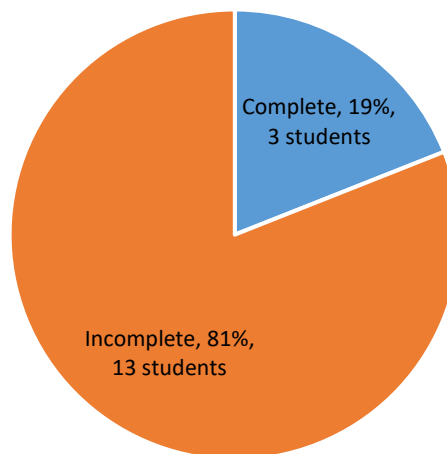
Diagram 1. The Number of Students Completion in the Pre-Cycle

The diagram shows that the students' ability to recognize letters was still very low, indicating a need for further interventions. Strategies and media that align with students' needs may help improve their letter recognition. One medium used was letter cards, and this intervention was organized over two cycles, with the results of each cycle informing the next steps.

The pre-cycle results (Diagram 1) were used to plan several strategies involving letter cards in Cycle I. This cycle involved both teaching sessions and testing. The interventions were conducted over two meetings, with a test in the third meeting.

In the planning stage of Cycle I, the researcher prepared ready-made, colorful letter cards. The plan was to introduce a total of eight letters to the students over three sessions during Cycle I. During the first session of Cycle I, the researcher displayed the letter cards and pronounced each sound. The letters taught were from Aa to Hh. This activity was repeated several times, with the researcher and students practicing the pronunciation of these letters together. At the end of the session, the researcher encouraged the students to practice at home with their parents.

In the second session of Cycle I, before introducing new letters, the researcher reviewed the previously taught letters by testing the students with random questions. If the selected student answered correctly, others would follow. If the answer was incorrect, the researcher corrected it aloud, and all the students repeated it together. During this session, the researcher introduced letters from Ii to Pp. The teaching process was similar to that of the first session, except at the end when the researcher led the students in

repeating all the letters from Aa to Pp. The researcher encouraged students to review these letters at home.

In the third session of Cycle I, the researcher reviewed all previously taught letters, asking students to take turns identifying letters on the cards. At this stage, the number of letters introduced equaled the number of students in Group A. If a student could not answer, another student was invited to respond. After this review, the researcher introduced the remaining letters from Qq to Zz. This session followed a similar process, with the researcher showing and pronouncing each letter while the students repeated it together. In the end, the researcher reviewed all the letters from Aa to Zz with the students, concluding with a motivational message to practice the alphabet with their parents.

In the fourth session of Cycle I, the researcher again reviewed all letters, reinforcing students' knowledge. In this session, each student was asked to pronounce letters as they were shown. The researcher observed the students' progress in recognizing the alphabet. The results from the fourth session of Cycle I indicated some improvement in the student's ability to recognize the alphabet, although full mastery had not yet been achieved. The completion rate reached 56.25%, or nine students, as shown in the diagram 2 below.

The reflection activities identified areas for improvement: (a) Each student should bring letter cards to class, (b) letter card games could be included in the teaching process, (c) students should work in groups for letter card games, and (d) a star reward system could be introduced to observe progress more easily.
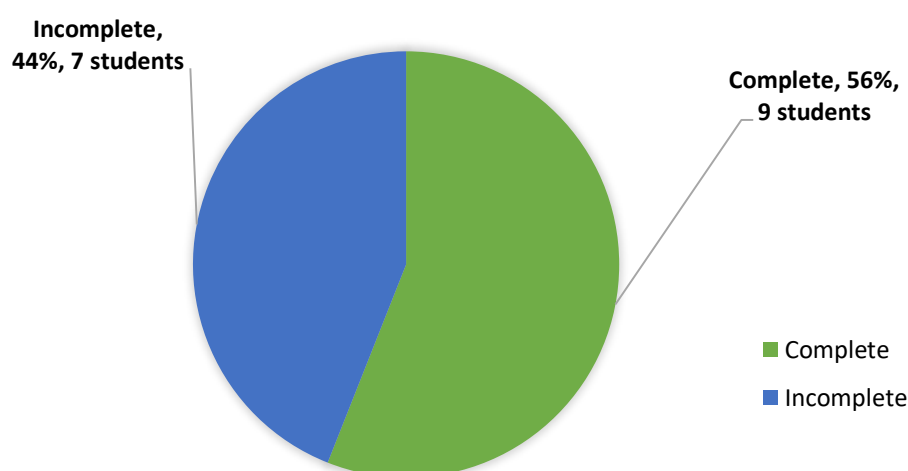

Diagram 2. The Percentage of the Cycle I Completion

Based on the reflections from Cycle I, the researcher prepared the following steps for Cycle II: creating a star symbol to represent each student's ability to recognize the alphabet, forming student groups for learning games, and providing each student with a set of letter cards.

In the first session of Cycle II, the researcher reviewed the alphabet by showing and pronouncing the letters, with the students following along. At the end, the researcher gave each student a set of letter cards. The session continued with an alphabet review, with students using their own letter cards. This activity was repeated until the session concluded, and the researcher motivated the students to practice at home, as a reward would be given to those who mastered the letters in the next session.

In the second session of Cycle II, the researcher divided the students into four groups of four. A game was introduced in which the researcher called out a letter, and students were to show the corresponding letter card. The planned reward of stars was postponed to allow students to become familiar with this new learning format. In the third session of Cycle II, the researcher formed the same groups, now as teams for the letter card game. Stars were awarded to track each student's progress in recognizing the alphabet. This activity continued until the end of the session, with students proudly displaying their earned stars. This reward system made the observation process more efficient.

The observation data showed a significant improvement in students' ability to recognize the alphabet using letter cards. Of the 16 students observed, 14 students (87.25%) earned at least three stars, while two students (12%) had not yet reached this level. This data is illustrated in the diagram below.
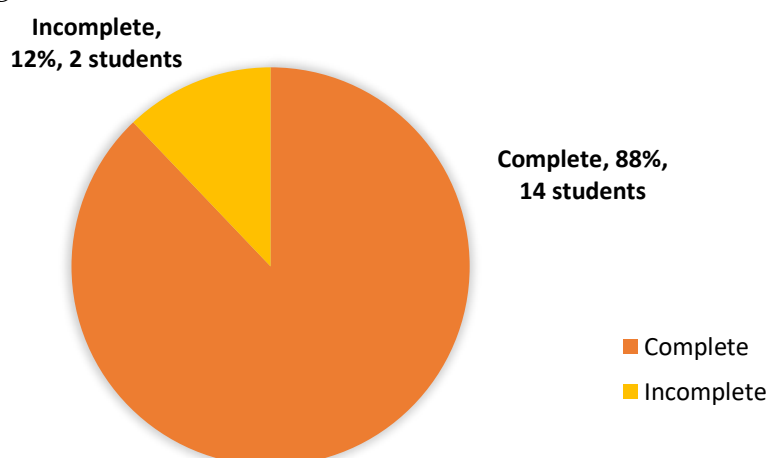

Diagram 4. The Percentage of the Cycle II Completion

Based on these results, overall mastery reached 87%, exceeding the target of 75%. This confirms that using letter cards effectively improved the students' ability to recognize the alphabet.

The classroom action research, conducted over seven meetings—four in Cycle I and three in Cycle II—achieved a mastery level of 87%, with students successfully learning the alphabet through letter cards. Integrating play in the learning process proved effective, and the star reward system positively influenced students' motivation to learn.

The research data clearly shows that using letter cards in teaching young children the alphabet significantly improved their recognition skills. Incorporating games into the learning process also helped meet the research's objectives. Learning through play fostered interaction between teachers and students (Rosarian & Dirgantoro, 2020) and encouraged critical thinking, creativity, and curiosity (Janius et al., 2023). Theoretically, learning through play aligns with fundamental learning principles (Harahap, 2022).

Psychologically, learning through play created a positive and comfortable environment, reducing boredom and resistance to learning (Wahyuni & Azizah, 2020), which led to increased student motivation (Salingkat, 2022). This approach resulted in a more conducive learning atmosphere, enhancing the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, learning through play encourages teachers to design more creative and engaging lesson plans (Indayanti, 2022).

The use of rewards, such as stars and letter cards, also contributed to achieving the research objectives. Rewards play a key role in motivating students by recognizing their efforts (Iskandar et al., 2021; Akmal et al., 2019), especially for young children who are still developing emotionally (Rizani et al., 2022; Miaw, 2023). In summary, the research data demonstrates that careful lesson planning, the selection of suitable teaching media, the integration of play, and the use of rewards are critical components of effective learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, using letter cards effectively improves students' ability to recognize alphabet letters. This is achieved by pronouncing and showing the letter cards for students to follow. The teacher then incorporates the learning process with a letter card game and

rewards students with stars for correctly pronouncing and identifying the letters. The research concluded with Cycle I showing a mastery level of 56%, which increased to 87% in Cycle II, indicating successful completion of the study.

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