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## Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School

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**ABSTRACT:** This research aims to analyse the reading ability of second-grade students at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City, and to identify the difficulties they face in early reading. The type of research used is qualitative with a descriptive approach, focusing on data quality and providing a detailed explanation of the results. The participants in this study consisted of 25 individuals: 17 second-grade students who were given the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) test to analyse their reading ability, 7 parents of students with reading difficulties, and 1 class teacher. The test results showed that 7 students had difficulties in early reading. Data were then collected through interviews with students and the teacher to identify the factors causing these difficulties. The results revealed that the main factors causing reading difficulties among students were a lack of attention and guidance from parents in supporting their children's reading ability at home, low student interest in learning, limited study hours at school, and the insufficient emphasis in the curriculum on developing students' reading skills.

**KEYWORDS:** early reading, reading difficulties, EGRA test.

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### INTRODUCTION

In every educational activity at school, reading is one of the fundamental skills that students must master. Reading ability is considered a determining factor in the success of students in their educational journey. This is because all subjects require understanding of concepts and theories that can be gained through reading. Good reading skills will greatly support student success in learning; conversely, if reading ability is low, it can become an obstacle to achieving success in their education.

According to Burns, reading is extremely important in an educated society because it is the beginning of an individual's learning process. Reading books is also crucial for a child's future (Hasanah & Lena, 2021). From this understanding, it can be concluded that reading plays a very vital role in a person's life. Therefore, reading instruction during the early educational stages should receive special attention. This attention, especially from teachers, needs to be given when students are in their early years (grades 1 and 2) (Rahmah & Amaliya, 2022). Success and accuracy in the learning process (Ainna Al Firdausi et al., 2021) at this stage will have a significant impact on the students' learning development in the future. Thus, teachers in early grades bear a significant responsibility for determining the success of their students' reading ability at this stage.

In early reading, there are several indicators that students need to achieve. Accuracy, clarity of voice, and fluency are aspects that need to be observed during instruction. However, in practice, students often face difficulties in learning to read and seldom receive attention from the teacher. Sunaryo Kartadinata emphasized that some teachers or educators involved in the teaching process tend not to fully understand students with learning difficulties (Hasanah & Lena, 2021).

If reading difficulties are not addressed by the teacher, these issues can worsen and hinder students' learning process. Therefore, efforts from teachers, parents, and adults around the children are needed to provide assistance and support so that the children can receive proper intervention. One of the steps that can be taken is to analyse the early reading difficulties faced by each student. Through this analysis, it is possible to identify students who are facing difficulties and the specific challenges they face. This analysis needs to be carried out promptly during the early grades so that proper intervention can be provided without delay, preventing the students from falling behind in their learning process.

Previous research has shown that reading difficulties are the most common type of learning difficulty experienced by students in the early years of elementary school. About 85% of students in early grades face learning difficulties related to reading and language skills (Pendidikan et al., 2025). This indicates a serious problem in education at the elementary school level, namely the high prevalence of reading difficulties among students. Students with reading difficulties typically face problems in reading letters, words, or sentences, not due to factors such as intellectual disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, motor disorders, or

## Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School

emotional disturbances. These reading difficulties are related to (1) reading habits, (2) errors in word recognition, (3) errors in comprehension, and (4) other symptoms (Afrianti & Marlina, 2020).

Based on interviews with the second-grade teacher at SDN 04 Kajai, it was found that most of the students in this class are not yet fluent in reading. Students who are not fluent in reading often experience difficulties, particularly due to a lack of ability to recognise letters. This finding prompted the authors to analyse the early reading abilities of students, the difficulties they face during the learning process, and the factors causing these difficulties. The results of this analysis are expected to help teachers identify specific cases of students experiencing early reading difficulties, allowing them to provide appropriate and tailored interventions to each student.

### METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method, where data are collected directly from sources and analysed in accordance with their original conditions. The aim of the descriptive qualitative method is to describe the various phenomena found in the field, whether natural or engineered, by focusing more on the characteristics, quality, and relationships between activities (Rukminingsih et al., 2020).

This study was conducted at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City, focusing on second-grade students. The research was carried out over three months during the odd semester, from October to December 2024. Participants in this study included one second-grade teacher and 13 second-grade students from SDN 04 Kajai. Data were collected through various techniques, including tests, interviews, and documentation.

The first step in the field was to conduct an early reading assessment with the students using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) test. This test aims to identify each student's early reading ability. EGRA, developed by Research Triangle International, is designed to help countries systematically measure the extent to which children in early grades have mastered reading skills. EGRA is based on the principle that learners in all languages go through the same stages and levels in early reading. Based on this principle, EGRA designs assessments that are tailored to reading proficiency levels (Oktaviyanti et al., 2022). This assessment is capable of diagnosing various reading difficulties faced by students in early grades. The EGRA test is conducted individually and takes about 15 minutes per student. It includes the following aspects: (1) letter recognition, (2) word reading, (3) reading nonsense words, (4) fluency in oral reading and comprehension, and (5) listening comprehension.

After obtaining the test results, the data were analysed using non-statistical analysis calculations through several steps:

1. Assigning scores for each correct answer per test item from the participants.
2. Calculating the percentage of scores obtained.
3. Assigning ratings for each aspect based on predetermined categorisation.
4. Calculating the average percentage of each reading aspect.

Based on the assessment results, students with early reading difficulties can be identified. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with seven students who were found to have reading difficulties to explore the causes of these difficulties. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the parents of the students to gather more information regarding the factors affecting the students' reading difficulties. The collected data were then analysed using the interactive data analysis model from Miles and Huberman (Pradnyani et al., 2021), which involves data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (verification). To strengthen the research findings, documentation techniques such as notes and students' score data provided by the class teacher were also used.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the test results administered to 13 second-grade students at SDN 04 Kajai, their early reading abilities are summarised in the following table:

**Table 1. Summary of Early Reading Ability Data for Students**

No	Name	Score (1%)				
		Aspect 1	Aspect 2	Aspect 3	Aspect 4	Aspect 5
1	ARZ	90	40	45	37,5	50
2	AAS	95	60	45	45	50
3	AA	85	40	30	20	60
4	AMR	100	100	100	100	100
5	AFD	100	20	25	0	50
6	ACS	100	100	100	100	100

## Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School

7	ASK	75	40	35	25	50
8	CAH	100	100	100	100	100
9	DS	100	85	85	100	100
10	AZZ	100	100	100	100	100
11	KSA	95	55	50	62	100
12	LIP	95	95	65	100	75
13	MA	100	65	50	87	75
14	MRAF	95	95	65	100	75
15	RP	100	85	85	100	100
16	AZ	90	40	45	37,5	50
17	NMR	90	60	65	7,5	50

Keterangan:

**Aspect 1:** Letter recognition

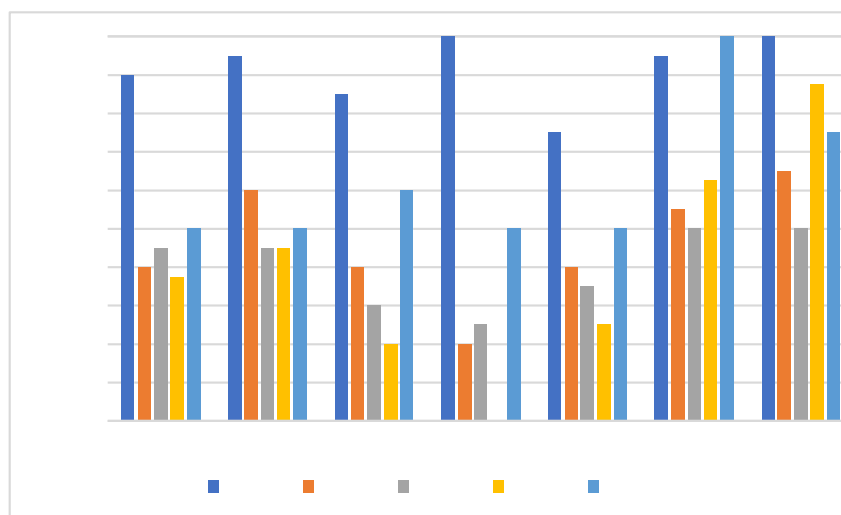
**Aspect 2:** Word reading

**Aspect 3:** Reading meaningless words

**Aspect 4:** Fluency in oral reading and comprehension of the text

**Aspect 5:** Listening comprehension (understanding the text)

From the reading test results, seven students were identified as having difficulties with early reading. A comparison of these results can be seen in the following diagram:



### Reading Difficulties of Students

The following is a description of the reading difficulties experienced by several second-grade students at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City, based on the results of reading assessments and interviews with the students and their parents.

#### 1. ARZ (Male, 7 Years Old)

ARZ experiences difficulties in several reading aspects. Although his letter recognition score is quite good, he struggles with word reading and reading comprehension. The main issue identified is his confusion in distinguishing letters such as "b" and "d", as well as "p" and "q". ARZ also frequently omits the final letter in words ending with consonants. In addition, he finds it challenging to read words containing digraphs. According to the interview, ARZ rarely practices reading at home and is not very interested in reading lessons. ARZ's parents admitted that they seldom provide reading guidance at home.

#### 2. AFD (Male, 7 Years Old)

AFD shows difficulties in reading aloud and understanding the text. He hesitates while reading and often omits letters in words, such as pronouncing "mempunyai" as "mempunya" and "belakang" as "bekang". AFD revealed that he does not enjoy reading and finds reading lessons difficult. His parents also mentioned that AFD prefers to play rather than study at home, and the reading guidance at home is still lacking.

#### 3. MRAF (Male, 7 Years Old)

MRAF scored low in the aspects of reading aloud and reading comprehension. While he can recognise letters well, MRAF often stumbles while reading and makes mistakes, such as omitting or reversing letters. MRAF enjoys reading lessons at school but

## **Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School**

rarely practices at home. His parents admitted that they seldom provide reading practice at home and often struggle to get him to study.

### **4. AA (Female, 7 Years Old)**

AA shows significant difficulties in word reading and reading comprehension. Although she can recognise all the letters well, her score is very low in word reading and reading aloud. She even gives up when asked to read a text. Her parents admitted that they rarely provide reading guidance at home due to work commitments. Additionally, they do not have any reading learning materials at home to support AA's learning process.

### **5. DS (Female, 7 Years Old)**

DS experiences difficulty recognising several letters and reading sentences. She struggles to differentiate letters such as "b" and "d", as well as "v" and "f". DS's lowest score was in reading aloud and reading comprehension. At home, DS rarely studies on her own and receives minimal guidance from her parents. Her parents mentioned that DS prefers playing to studying, and her learning difficulties at home were further exacerbated by the pandemic, which limited face-to-face learning.

### **6. NMR (Female, 7 Years Old)**

NMR has difficulty reading sentences and recognising some letters properly. Her lowest score was in reading aloud. NMR often gets distracted during lessons and rarely practices reading at home. Her parents revealed that NMR spends most of her time looking after her younger siblings and helping with household chores, which reduces her reading practice time. Nevertheless, they have provided reading books to support her reading learning process at home.

### **7. LIP (Female, 6 Years Old)**

LIP scored well in letter recognition, but she struggles in reading words, both meaningful and meaningless. Nevertheless, her ability to read aloud is quite good. LIP rarely practices reading at home and receives little guidance from her parents. Her study time is limited as she spends more time helping her parents and taking care of her younger siblings. Reading books are available at home, but she mostly practices reading at night.

## **Early Reading Ability of Second-Grade Students at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City Letter Recognition Aspect**

This aspect measures the student's ability to identify letters. Students are asked to name the letters randomly arranged on the test sheet provided. The majority of students are fluent in identifying these letters. However, some students still face difficulties, such as ARZ who is confused by the sounds of "p" and "q", MRAF who hesitates when pronouncing "d" and "b", and DS who struggles to distinguish "m" and "n" along with other letters.

### **Word Reading Aspect**

This aspect evaluates the student's ability to read isolated words. Students are asked to read meaningful words fluently. Most students show good ability in reading these words. However, some students like MRAF and AA scored below expectations, falling into the categories of "satisfactory" and "poor".

### **Reading Meaningless Words Aspect**

This aspect is similar to the previous one, except that the words used in the test are meaningless. This aspect aims to measure students' phonemic awareness and orthographic understanding. Many students are able to read these meaningless words fluently. However, students like ARZ, FHR, MRAF, AA, NMR, and LIP experience difficulties in reading them. The difficulties are marked by hesitant reading, needing teacher assistance, omitting letters, and making errors in pronunciation.

### **Fluency in Reading Aloud and Reading Comprehension Aspect**

In this aspect, five students did not achieve the expected scores: AFD, MRAF, AA, and NMR. The mistakes they made include difficulties in reading words with a relatively large number of syllables, such as "mempunyai", "seekor", and similar words. Additionally, some of them also struggled to answer questions related to the content of the given reading material.

### **Listening Comprehension Aspect**

This aspect measures the student's ability to listen to and understand a simple story. The story used was not provided in the test sheet, but was read aloud by the teacher. Students are asked to listen carefully to understand the story's content and answer questions based on the story. Overall, almost all students performed this task well. However, some students like MRAF, AA, ARZ, AFD, and DS had difficulties writing answers on the answer sheet due to their low letter writing skills.

## **Mistakes Made in Early Reading by Second-Grade Students at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City**

Based on the previous analysis, it was identified that students with early reading difficulties face challenges in recognising letters, words, or sentences. These difficulties are not caused by main factors such as intellectual disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, motor problems, or emotional disturbances. The reading difficulties are more related to several aspects, namely: (1) underdeveloped reading habits, (2) errors in word recognition, (3) errors in comprehension, and (4) other varying symptoms (Abdurrahman, 2013).

## Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School

Rafika et al. (2020) stated that early reading difficulties are often associated with unusual reading habits, such as movements indicating tension, such as furrowing the brow, increasing voice rhythm, or biting the lips. Additionally, students may show reluctance to read, such as crying or resisting the teacher. Other emerging characteristics include repeating words or sentences, skipping lines while reading, turning the head to the left or right, occasionally resting their head on the book, and reading at a distance of less than 37.5 cm.

According to a comparison of three types of reading assessments conducted by Hargrove (Abdurrahman, 2013), it was found that students with early reading difficulties tend to make several mistakes. These mistakes include: (a) omitting words or letters, (b) inserting words, (c) replacing words, (d) mispronouncing words, (e) reading with the teacher's assistance, (f) repeating words or sentences, (g) reversing letters, (h) neglecting punctuation, (i) self-correcting, and (j) reading hesitantly and haltingly. The various mistakes made by second-grade students at SDN 04 Kajai with early reading difficulties can be seen in the table below.

**Table 2. Data of Mistakes Made by Students with Early Reading Difficulties**

No	Name	Mistakes									
		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
1	ARZ	√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2	AAS	√			√	√		√			√
3	AA	√			√	√	√	√		√	√
4	AFD	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
5	KSA	√				√	√				√
6	MA				√	√	√	√	√		√
7	NMR				√	√			√	√	√

Based on the table above, it can be seen that there are seven common mistakes made by second-grade students at SDN 04 Kajai who experience difficulties with early reading. These mistakes include: (1) omitting words or letters, (2) mispronouncing words, (3) reading with teacher assistance, (4) repeating words while reading, (5) reversing letters, (6) self-correcting their reading, and (7) reading hesitantly and haltingly. This is due to the students' limited ability to recognise all the letters and their lack of proficiency in reading syllables.

### Factors Contributing to Early Reading Difficulties Internal Factors

Based on interviews with the students and their parents, it can be concluded that most students with early reading difficulties have a low interest in reading activities. This is evident from the interviews with parents, who stated that it is difficult to engage their children in reading at home, and the students often refuse. Furthermore, observations during the test indicated that some students quickly became bored. Some students also mentioned that reading lessons are quite difficult for them and that they do not enjoy reading.

This presents a significant challenge for both teachers and parents to improve the students' interest in reading, especially since younger students tend to prefer learning methods that are interspersed with play. This requires the use of fun teaching methods and engaging materials. Unfortunately, reading learning materials at SDN 04 Kajai are still limited and not varied. A similar condition was found with the learning materials at home, where both students and parents have limited options for supporting learning.

### External Factors

#### Lack of Attention and Guidance from Parents at Home

Based on interview results, it was revealed that many students with early reading difficulties rarely receive reading guidance from their parents at home. The role of parents is crucial in enhancing their children's learning abilities. Without intensive guidance from parents, the development of the students' learning abilities, especially in reading, can be negatively affected. Most parents of the students mentioned that one reason their children are not yet fluent in reading is because they spend more time playing and are generally lazy to study at home. This is further influenced by the significant impact of mobile phone usage in their daily lives.

Similarly, the class teacher reported that the number of study hours for grades 1 and 2 is fewer than for other grades. The teacher has to rely on parents to continue the learning process. However, not all parents have the ability to teach their children effectively.

#### 1. Limited Learning Time for Lower Grades at School

According to the class teacher, the current learning schedule allows lower-grade students only four hours of learning per day (07:10–11:00 WIB). This poses a challenge for the teacher in maximising the learning process, as these four hours must cover all subjects that need to be taught.

## Student's Ability and Difficulty on Reading Indonesian Text at Elementary School

### 2. Lack of Curriculum Focus on Students' Reading Skills

The Merdeka Curriculum is considered to lack focus on reading ability in lower grades. This can be seen from the absence of specific sections in the thematic books that deeply discuss reading instruction. Unlike the previous curriculum, where learning materials were grouped separately, and reading skills, especially in Bahasa Indonesia, were given more focus. This statement is based on an interview with the second-grade teacher at SDN 04 Kajai, Pariaman City.

### LIMITATIONS

I acknowledge that this research has various weaknesses and limitations due to the constraints I faced. However, I have made every effort to ensure that the results were gathered optimally. Some limitations encountered include:

1. During the test, students had difficulty focusing because the EGRA test was conducted in the classroom amid ongoing lessons. The situation was that students took the test in turns at the back of the classroom, while the teacher continued lessons for the other students.
2. This study used tests, interviews, and documentation methods. I made efforts to gather information thoroughly through these methods to obtain valid results regarding the early reading ability of second-grade students. However, some weaknesses were encountered, such as some students' responses during the interviews not being relevant to the questions posed.
3. There were weaknesses in analysing and interpreting the data obtained, along with limitations in knowledge, references, manpower, and time, which led to this study still having many shortcomings. However, the data obtained cannot be considered invalid.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion of the data in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that students' reading abilities are interrelated across aspects, particularly in the letter recognition aspect. If a student experiences difficulties in one aspect, especially in letter recognition, it will affect their ability to complete the subsequent aspects of the test. It was found that out of 10 types of mistakes made by students, 7 mistakes were frequently made and were largely due to their incomplete mastery of letters.

Several factors affecting students' reading ability can be categorized into two groups:

#### 1. Internal Factors:

- a) Low student interest in learning early reading.
- b) The students' lack of interest in reading lessons, which causes them to be inactive in practising reading.

#### 2. External Factors:

- a) Lack of attention and guidance from parents at home: Parents do not always provide sufficient support to improve their children's reading ability at home.
- b) The shift to online learning due to the pandemic: Distance learning has affected the effectiveness of reading instruction, especially for younger students who require face-to-face teaching.
- c) Limited learning hours at school: Insufficient reading instruction at school is an obstacle for students to develop their reading abilities.
- d) The curriculum's insufficient focus on reading skill development: The current curriculum does not give enough attention to strengthening reading skills from an early age.

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