Reading Problems in Grade II Elementary School Students

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A B S T R A K

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1. INTRODUCTION

The key to a successful learning is reading ability. Reading is regarded as a crucial activity to acquire information and messages (Paige et al., 2021; Tahmidaten & Krismanto, 2020). Reading is also perceived as a basic skill that every student should be mastered at the elementary school level, thus facilitating the learning process based on the determined goals (Cain & Hattie, 2019). Reading is able to...
increase the insight of individuals and assist them in finding out previously unknown information (Sari, 2020; Handayani et al. 2020).

To develop reading skills, students should be taught early about the alphabet. Students will be able to read at ease, if they are proficient to recite the alphabet. Because the reading text to be read is made up of a series of sentences with groups of words (Cain & Hattie, 2019; Nelawati et al., 2019). In the early stages of the reading process, students should be introduced to the letters of the alphabet from A to Z (Westhis, 2019; Pratiwi & Ariawan, 2017). This means that letter recognition is important to enable students to read the text. Students’ reading ability can be assessed through two crucial aspects, including aspects to determine early-stage reading abilities (mechanical) and aspects to determine higher reading abilities (comprehension). Aspects of early-stage reading abilities consist of letter recognition aspect, linguistic elements recognition aspect (phonemes, words, phrases, clause patterns, and sentences), and recognition aspect of the relationship between spelling and sound patterns, as well as the speed reading aspect (Artati, 2008).

However, the reading ability of elementary school students in Indonesia is still relatively low. The results of the PISA study in 2012 indicated that the literacy level of the Indonesian people was ranked 64th out of 65 countries (Harini, 2018). Moreover, referring to the results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) research for elementary school students, the reading literacy achievement of Indonesian students was found to be relatively low (Suryaman, 2015). The results of a survey of an international institution engaged in education, the United Nation Education Society and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also stated that reading abilities and habits in Indonesia were not higher than other countries (Saepudin, 2015). In line with this statement, the results of the further study of PISA reported that 25% to 34% of students in Indonesia were classified in the very low literacy category with -1 points. Moreover, these results refer to the category of early-stage reading. In addition, the survey results from UNESCO also implied that the reading level of the people in Indonesia was amounted to 0.0001, meaning that only 1 person out of 1000 residents was interested in reading (Pradana, 2020).

Poor reading ability is caused by various factors, specifically the low interest in reading and students’ reading habits (Wahyuni, 2015). Furthermore, factors that contribute to the low reading ability of students include lack of letter recognition, difficulty in spelling syllables, word-by-word reading, and non-fluency in reading (Yunita et al., 2020; Saputri et al., 2020). Low reading abilities were also found in grade II students of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District. Referring to the results of interviews and observations with grade II teachers at SD Negeri 1 Pohsanten, several problems were likely to be encountered in the learning process, particularly those related to reading. These problems included students who were not able to spell words and were not able to read fluently. However, studies on the level of students’ reading ability and its contributing factors have not been widely carried out.

Having regard to these problems, a study to fully describe the ability of students to read various reading texts in grade II of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District was highly required to be conducted. The problems that would be examined in this study included the ability of grade II elementary school students about the alphabet, and the ability to read various reading texts, the obstacles encountered by students in recognizing the alphabet and reading various texts, and the teachers’ efforts to improve the students’ ability to recognize the alphabet and read various texts. By conducting this study, solutions to address students’ difficulties in reading could be significantly found. Thus, this study was intended to explore the problematic phenomenon of reading in grade II students of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District, specifically the students’ ability to read, the obstacles encountered by students in reading, and the efforts that have been made by teachers to improve students’ reading ability.

2. METHOD

This study was conducted in grade II of SD Gusus I Airlangga, which is located in Mendoyo Sub-District, Jembrana Regency. This study was categorized as a descriptive study with a qualitative descriptive design, because this study was conducted with the aim of identifying and describing the reading ability of grade II students of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District as it is. Descriptive study is regarded as study that is able to obtain more information or insight from the phenomenon being examined (Fidan, 2021; Hood et al., 2021; Karkdijk et al., 2018). In other words, descriptive studies require exploratory activities to explore deeper understanding and knowledge. Furthermore, descriptive studies do not aim to find new theories from the data that have been collected (Riastini, 2021). In this matter, descriptive studies are utilized to explore and find deeper knowledge of existing theories. The objects in this study included the ability of grade II students of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District about the alphabet and in reading various texts, the obstacles encountered by grade II students of SD Gusus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District.
in recognizing the alphabet and reading various texts, and teachers’ efforts to improve students’ ability to recognize the alphabet and read various texts at grade II of SD Gugus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District.

The samples in this study were determined by means of a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is referred to as a sampling technique that aims to find in-depth and specific information from a study, by considering the objectives that have been formulated (Suri, 2011). In addition, purposeful sampling can be interpreted as a sampling technique used to obtain in-depth information from interesting phenomena (Palinkas et al. 2016). This study involved 5 grade II students of SD Gugus I Airlangga as the study samples. After obtaining the results of these observations, this study was continued with interviews with students who were unable to read. Therefore, the total test subjects in this study were amounted to 40 students.

Data were collected by utilizing the methods of observation, interview, and document study. Observation is a technique of collecting data directly on the object under study (Buonincontro & Anderson, 2018; Formosinho & Passos, 2019). This study used participant observation type. The data taken through observation consisted of data on students’ abilities related to the alphabet and also the reading ability of grade II elementary school students in general. Moreover, this study adopted a semi-structured interview technique, which was conducted on grade II elementary school students. In addition, interviews were used to collect data by asking respondents directly to obtain the required detailed information (Fitriana et al., 2020; Saadati & Sadli, 2019). The data obtained through interviews were data on the alphabet recognition and reading abilities of grade II elementary school students. Subsequently, document study was conducted by asking the teacher to attach documents related to the topic. Documentation study aims to find data related to written records and archives, either pictures or videos that can provide data for study needs (Pratama, 2019; Vortuna et al. 2018). The data derived from the documentation included data on students’ weaknesses in recognizing the alphabet and reading various texts. Furthermore, the study data were collected by means of several instruments, including observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documentation sheets.

There are two important aspects in reading, namely aspects to determine early-stage reading abilities (mechanical) and aspects to determine higher reading abilities (comprehension) (Artati, 2008). However, this study was more focused on aspects of early-stage reading abilities (mechanical). There are four aspects that would be investigated for observation, interviews, and document studies, including letter recognition aspect, linguistic elements recognition aspect (phonemes, words, phrases, clause patterns, and sentences), and recognition aspect of the relationship between spelling and sound patterns, as well as the speed reading aspect. The instruments used were observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documentation sheets. There were 15 questions asked in the interview, and 15 statements that were used as guidelines for observation. In addition, the document study was adapted to the documents attached by the teacher and adapted to the topic. This study was conducted by utilizing non-test instruments.

The data in this study were then analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis techniques can be used to find and explain in-depth data from a phenomenon found (Heriyanto, 2018; Morris, 2020; Thomas, 2019). Data analysis was initiated by copying the verbal data that had been collected. Moreover, the data were analyzed and identified continuously to determine the unit of each meaning. Furthermore, the units of meaning contained were then summarized and re-identified to explore the similarities and differences. The same units of meaning were categorized into themes, and the themes were then reported (Riastini et al., 2021).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Reading problems in grade II elementary school students were caused by various obstacles, which specifically arise from the student’s personality or were influenced by situations outside of the student. Based on the results of the analysis, these obstacles included the weakness of students’ early reading abilities, lack of peer support for students, lack of teachers’ support to fully guide students to read, low student independence to improve reading skills, high self-anxiety of students to carry out reading activities, and lack of family support to teach and assist children to read. Reading problems in grade II elementary school students were caused by various obstacles, which specifically arise from the student’s personality or were influenced by situations outside of the student. Based on the results of the analysis, these obstacles included the weakness of students’ early reading abilities, lack of peer support for students, lack of teachers’ support to fully guide students to read, low student independence to improve reading skills, high self-anxiety of students to carry out reading activities, and lack of family support to teach and assist children to read.
Referring to the study results, reading problems for grade II students of SD Gugus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District were presented in several themes, including the weakness of students’ early reading abilities, lack of peer support, lack of teachers’ support, low student independence, high self-anxiety, and lack of family support. In line with the findings of this study, children who were not able to read were influenced by their lack of letter recognition, both mentioning letter symbols, showing letter symbols, and grouping letters. Consequently, students were not able to engage in learning well. Students who were less proficient in recognizing letters would constantly have a hard time in adjusting themselves during the learning process. The findings also showed that students had not been able to distinguish and pronounce the letters b and d. Furthermore, students were also not able to recognize some letters, such as the letters J, M, N, Q, F, H, X, P, and V. The inability of students to recognize letters is influenced by factors such as the inability of students to learn letters at home and the lack of guidance from someone who teaches at home. Another reading problem identified was the lack of confidence in reading. The students’ lack of self-confidence was associated with their peers who had not been able to accept the students’ lack of reading fluency. Students who were able to read fluently tended to mock other students with poor reading skills. This caused students who were less proficient in reading to be less confident in spelling and reading in front of the class. As a result, students’ willingness and courage to read would not significantly develop, so they would not be able to read in a long period of time.

Discussion

Letter recognition is believed as the basis of the learning process. Students who are not capable of recognizing letters will definitely not be ready to learn to read and write. In the early stages of reading, children should be able to recognize letters from A/a to Z/z (Westhisi et al., 2019; Pratiwi & Ariawan, 2017). Children’s ability to recognize letters is highly necessary to be developed (Sari et al., 2020; Vortuna et al., 2018). This is perceived as the basis for children’s readiness to learn, particularly reading and writing. Therefore, letter recognition can be stated as an ability that must be possessed by students to be ready to read. Children’s reading ability is not only influenced by interest in reading, and family environment, but can also be influenced by children’s health, specifically dyslexia. Dyslexia is commonly known as a disorder in the neurological function of the brain that affects a person’s memory (Johnston, 2019; Utami & Irawati, 2017). Dyslexia may lead to children having a hard time in learning, especially increasing inability to read and write (Livingston et al., 2018; Kearns et al., 2019). Children with dyslexia will likely have problems in the brain, resulting in the child not being able to concentrate fully (Livingston et al., 2018; Widodo et al., 2020). Children with dyslexia will tend to have problems in phonology related to aspects of letters and sounds, thereby causing children not to be able to recognize letters properly (Widodo et al., 2020).

Self-confidence is an attitude that should be possessed by everyone in every activity. Lack of self-confidence will result in students having a hard time to adjust to learning activities, including reading activities. Students with less self-confidence to practice reading, will definitely not be able to read fluently. A person who does not have self-confidence will likely encounter problems in every activity performed (Amri, 2018). Children with low self-esteem will likely have a hard time to engage in learning and are often ostracized by their peers (Putri, 2018; Udhiyansari, 2019). Ostracism behavior may greatly affect a child’s learning process, because it is referred to as bullying. Bullying is an aggressive behavior of a person or group of people with the aim of hurting someone physically or psychologically (Amanda et al., 2020; Aristya, 2020; Flowers et al., 2020; Verasammy & Cooper, 2021). Bullying is able to reduce students’ desire to go to school (Utami & Astuti, 2019; Wakhid et al., 2019). The decrease in students’ desire to go to school will significantly affect children’s learning achievement. This is in line with the study conducted by Verasammy & Cooper, (2021), which stated that bullying behavior could affect students’ academic performance.

Having regard to the findings in the study, the act of bullying frequently encountered in elementary schools is verbal bullying. Verbal bullying is an act of hurting someone by using inappropriate words (Feijoo et al., 2020; Putri, 2018; Rizky et al., 2021). The findings showed that students tended to do verbal bullying by mocking and ostracizing students who were not able to read fluently. Students, who did bullying, had uncomfortable feelings with friends’ phonological disorders who were not fluent in reading. As a result, the bullied students did not have the courage to read in front of the class. Bullying, which is not immediately addressed, will certainly affect all activities carried out. As educators, teachers can address bullying by imposing a light, moderate, and severe punishment system for students with bullying behavior (Konishi et al., 2021; Samsudi & Muhid, 2020).

In line with the results obtained, students’ problems in spelling words were not only associated with their inability to remember some letters, but also because they were unable to connect vowels and consonants. This was due to students not being able to remember some letters. Another contributing factor was teachers who were not capable of paying full attention to all students who were not proficient in remembering letters. If the teacher only focuses on certain constrained students, the learning process will
likely be delayed. In the learning process at school, the teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating children’s learning, especially reading, because the teacher has a role as a facilitator in learning, particularly in literacy. (Andrianti, 2018). Teachers can facilitate students’ learning by facilitating students to write, read, and find the right reading books (Safitri & Daft, 2021). Teachers should be able to assist students in recognizing letters, understanding letters, writing letters, and mentioning letter symbols (Ningsih et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicated that the teachers had not been able to fully facilitate students to spell, because learning was considered to be delayed if the teacher only focused on students who were not able to read fluently. Based on this, teachers were expected to be more efficient in managing the class, thus students can still be facilitated to practice reading without worrying about delays in learning. In this specific matter, the teachers are highly required to improve their pedagogical and professional competences. Pedagogical competence is the competence of teachers in managing learning and understanding students (Shah et al., 2019; Rafi & Sabrina, 2019; Faridah et al., 2020; Fitrianovia, 2020). Meanwhile, professional competence is the competence of teachers in mastering learning material deeply (Faridah et al., 2020; Fitrianovia, 2020). Teachers should be able to improve both these competencies, resulting in a more effective learning process. This is in line with Faridah et al. (2020), who stated that teachers with high pedagogical competence and professional competence, will be able to manage learning properly.

The findings also found that the character of independence had not been possessed by students in reading activities. Students were not willing to read in front of the class alone, but with their peers. The students’ lack of courage to read independently was influenced by their fear of making mistakes. For students, reading errors were considered unnatural and capable of inviting laughter from their peers. The lack of independence of children may provide a negative impact on their ability to read. Children’s lack of independence caused children not to have the courage to read various reading texts. Independence is a character that must be developed in students. Independence in learning, especially reading, is defined as a sign of readiness for students to engage in learning activities. Students with a high level of independence will less likely face difficulties in completing their assignments (SuryahadiKusumah & Dedy, 2019; Labudasari & Rochmah, 2019). Independence is referred to as a person’s attitude and behavior without depending on others, whether it is energy, thought, time, or ideals. (Ekawati et al., 2019). Independence is the most important character to be possessed by students (Macleod et al., 2020; Rizkyani et al., 2020).

In further investigation, students who were anxious and afraid of making reading errors assumed that their friends would laugh at them if they made spelling or reading errors. Moreover, they tended to perceive that their teacher would provide any punishment, and were afraid if their friends complained to their parents at home. In addition, students also assumed that they would not have friends at school if they were not proficient in reading. This will certainly affect student development if it is not addressed immediately. Anxiety greatly affects students’ reading ability. High student anxiety is able to increase students’ reading errors. Anxiety is defined as excessive feelings of worry, anxiety, and fear as a response to a person’s external and internal stimuli, resulting in a sense of emotion and having an impact on behavioral changes that will lead to one’s discomfort (Utami & Astuti, 2019). Anxiety is a person’s feeling of physical tension and is a state of anticipating the possibility of a threat or danger (Judaniastuti & Edwina, 2019). Excessive anxiety will contribute to children’s mental health, especially in reading activities. High student anxiety will be more likely to increase depression.

The findings of this study indicated that parents of students were mostly less involved in children’s learning activities, which was mainly caused by the tendency of parents to go to work, the increasing number of children who do not have a complete family (broken home), lack of ability or knowledge of parents, and there were some parents who surrender their children completely to the school. Family is the first place for children to be educated. Prior to children receiving formal education at school, children will initially learn in the family environment, namely at home. Parents have a very important role in growing children’s interest and motivation in reading. In learning to read (Werdinginsih, 2021; Padmadewi et al. 2018). Parents are required to always participate in teaching children to read at home and always facilitate children’s learning at home, because parents are the first teachers for children. Family participation will greatly affect student learning interest (Kurniati et al., 2020; Pradana, 2020). Low family participation will definitely cause great problems for students. Education will not be able to be implemented effectively without the participation of the student’s family. Schools and families should have a very close relationship to improve the quality of education. If the family does not have an interest in participating in all school programs, the school will not be able to develop properly. The quality of education will not be improved effectively and efficiently, without moral, material, and spiritual support from the community, especially parents of students (Sumarsono et al., 2019; Apiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020). Furthermore, student success in learning is strongly influenced by the relationship between parents and teachers (Riastini et al., 2021). Referring to
that matter, it was found that parents were unable to fully charge the success of students' learning at school. Cooperation between schools and parents is urgently needed to prevent obstacles in the learning process, and children are further able to achieve success in learning.

4. CONCLUSION

Having regard to the purpose and discussion of the findings in this study, reading problems in grade II elementary school students of Gugus I Airlangga, Mendoyo Sub-District were found to be caused by the weakness of early reading abilities, lack of peer support, lack of teachers' support, low student independence, high self-anxiety, and lack of family support. Based on these findings, a collaboration with various stakeholders is highly required to overcome students' reading problems. In this matter, teachers need to develop and improve their competencies, including social competencies, pedagogical competencies, professional competencies, and personality competencies. Furthermore, to overcome these reading problems, it is necessary to develop a reading application, such as an android application. The android application will be very effective to use as a reading application, because the android application can be used flexibly. Moreover, nowadays students tend to prefer using smartphones with Android systems in their daily activities. In addition, the use of android applications will be able to increase student motivation, student participation, and create a more enjoyable reading learning situation.

5. REFERENCES


