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Research article

Education

EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SERANG BANTEN

雪蘭莪萬丹小學學生的早期閱讀評估

Ade Husnul Mawadah^a, John Pahamzah^b

^aDepartment of Indonesian Language Education, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University
Banten, Indonesia, adehusnulmawadah@untirta.ac.id

^bDepartment of English Education, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University
Banten, Indonesia, jhon.pahamzah@untirta.ac.id

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Abstract

This article describes new strategies in teaching reading skills to primary school students based on the finding of Early Grade Reading Assessment instruments implemented in primary schools in Serang Banten, Indonesia. The authors describe the obtained results of the students' skills in reading components. For example, we illustrate the proposed technique of teaching reading to primary school students. Our method shows that improvement in the students' reading ability is moderate; the children are less able to recognize words; meaningless words are still hard to spell; and the students can understand the story well. The new strategy's effectiveness in evaluation is confirmed by calculating how the students recognize letters with a low reading speed of about 2.24 minutes for 100 letters. They could read 30 meaningful words in 3 minutes, but when reading something meaningless the students only read difficult 15 words in 15 minutes. General student reading was good at 86 percent, with only a few students who could not read the text. The students could understand 78 percent of the content of the reading by listening to the story and retelling the story orally. The children who were guided by parents or brothers or sisters had better reading skills. Another finding pertained to the availability of reading books besides textbooks for their reading sources. The new research results develop the students' reading skills and can be used for developing the strategies in teaching student reading skills.

Keywords: Early Grade Reading Assessment, Reading Skill, Teaching Reading, Reading Text, Reading Material

摘要 本文根據在印度尼西亞實龍省萬丹（西冷万丹）小學實施的早期閱讀評估工具的發現，介紹了向小學生教授閱讀技能的新策略。作者描述了學生在閱讀組件方面的技能所獲得的結果。例

如，我們舉例說明了向小學生教授閱讀的建議技術。我們的方法表明，學生的閱讀能力有所提高；孩子們識字的能力較弱；無意義的單詞仍然很難拼寫；學生可以很好地理解這個故事。通過計算學生如何識別 100 個字母的低閱讀速度（約 2.24 分鐘）來確認新策略在評估中的有效性。他們有能力在 3 分鐘內閱讀 30 個有意義的單詞，但是當閱讀無意義的內容時，學生在 15 分鐘內只能閱讀 15 個單詞。普通學生的閱讀率達到 86%，只有少數學生無法閱讀課文。通過聽故事並口頭講故事，學生可以理解閱讀內容的 78%。在父母，兄弟姐妹的指導下，孩子的閱讀能力更高。另一個發現與閱讀書籍的來源有關，除了課本之外還有閱讀書籍。新的研究結果可提高學生的閱讀能力，並可用於製定教學策略。

关键词: 早期阅读评估, 阅读技巧, 阅读教学, 阅读课文, 阅读材料

I. INTRODUCTION

The Early Grade Reading Assessment, better known as EGRA, is an assessment tool used by various organizations engaged in increasing literacy globally for primary schools. The EGRA contains five sections: reading letter sets, reading 30 meaningful words in 3 minutes, reading meaningless words, reading text and answering questions about the text, and listening to a story and answering comprehension questions.

Based on the release provided by UNESCO, more than 60 countries have performed at least one EGRA between 2007 and mid-2014. The program includes a reading skill assessment that requires about 15 minutes per assignment per child. For example, the children are asked to read letters aloud, then the completion time and the number of letters read is calculated. Then the child is asked to read meaningful words, as well as reading "words" that have no meaning. In addition, primary school students are expected to read a given text passage and answer questions related to the text. In the final stage, the child listens to the text of the story, then answers questions from the orally-related story [1].

The EGRA is implemented using standard procedures that meet its implementation criteria: the availability of an EGRA toolkit or booklet containing a set of assessment materials, and details of the assessment process and procedure. In addition, there are additional support tools, including assessment materials, and information about human resources and physical support devices (such as assessment space or buildings), and reading materials or games for students waiting for their turn to be assessed.

In principle, the EGRA must be done as humanely and naturally as possible, so that children do not feel trapped or pressured. In addition, the assessor's communication must

make the child feel comfortable in completing the EGRA assessments (as described prior).

This research aims to determine the reading skill level of primary school students by implementing this reading assessment. The EGRA contains five sections: reading letter sets, reading 30 meaningful words in 3 minutes, reading meaningless words, reading text and answering questions about the text, and listening to a story and answering comprehension questions.

II. RELATED WORKS

A. Reading Assessment for Early Grade Students of Primary School

Reading Assessment for Early Grade Students of Primary School is inspired by the process of reading itself, which is a gradual process that begins with the familiar phrase, and ends with the reading phase. The stages that underlie this EGRA are that concepts of understanding and fluency must be taught together through text reading skills [2]. The most important thing in EGRA understands, even though the reading bias is also a factor that influences the reading comprehension. For example, the use of time in assessing children's reading indicates that time is an important factor for children to begin and end the reading process. This means that time is considered to measure this reading process. Finally, children are limited by time in showing their skills and understanding in reading the text. Components in EGRA testing consist of: (1) pronouncing letters, (2) reading meaningful words, (3) reading words that have no meaning or meaningless, (4) reading comprehension, and (6) understanding texts oral. The most important thing that is emphasized for children in EGRA is how the child understands the text either implicitly or explosively of the questions given is based on the text being read.

There are at least a few things that underlie EGRA. Two of them are complexities that greatly affect the length of time a student learns to read and second, the EGRA instrument or measuring instrument itself and its development. The process of acquiring reading skills or learning to read takes a very long time which goes through various phases and is closely related to written and oral language. The existence of these differences in the reading assessment of early grade students has the same phase and adjusted for input and carrying capacity in the process of having early reading skills.

The EGRA device consists of pronouncing alphabet letters, reading meaningful words, reading meaningless words, reading texts, and listening to texts.

B. Student Reading Achievement

This EGRA reading assessment is used by various countries in the world as a national program for diagnostic reading assessments. Many countries use EGRA as an early indicator of student ability, especially at the primary level, to develop their reading skills as a trigger to learn other skills [3].

Almost all countries in the world have initiated EGRA for elementary schools. This is part of the efforts made to promote educational campaigns for all and to achieve the goals of the global development of the United Nations in 2015. This participation is marked by the number of primary schools in developed countries that have conducted EGRA. Other evidence is the increase in primary schools by 91 percent in developing countries in 2020. In addition, the number of children dropping out of school at the elementary school level around the world has been reduced almost by half during the same period.

Regarding children's reading skills, understanding simple texts are fundamental for learning and sharpening reading skills, and enhance these skills with routine, intensive practice. Armed with this basic skill, children are then better equipped to learn other related subjects. There are many elementary school students in various countries that cannot read simple texts or even recognize letters. Therefore this initial stage for children to develop their reading skills is very important for the development of advanced skills that depend on reading skills [4].

Literacy skills are fundamental abilities needed by children to learn in other fields of study. Children can then read and transfer the

knowledge in the text to apply to other learning. As an example, mathematics uses language as the explanatory medium, so students need reading skills to understand and learn subjects in these books. Therefore, reading skills are very important to study life outside the classroom, so that elementary school children can grow more academically mature [5].

This article was inspired by the USAID Prioritizing Reform, Innovation, and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia's Teachers, Administrators, and Students (USAID PRIORITAS) project, which is engaged in improving reading skills for students in the early grades of primary school in Serang Banten. In an effort to improve the quality of primary school teachers in teaching reading skills to early grade students, USAID PRIORITAS conducts an assessment of early grade reading skills using the EGRA evaluation instrument (Reading measurement for early grade students). Then, the authors conducted a similar program in another area to obtain a baseline data reading ability for early grade students. This data is very important to determine strategies and steps for strengthening the teachers in the learning process, especially in the area or university partner schools [6].

EGRA can diagnose the difficulties experienced by children in early grades in reading. With the known difficulties faced by children in reading, then a program can be arranged to help them. EGRA has also been proven valid to collect preliminary data that can be used to compile a program to improve reading skills in early grades. As of 2010, EGRA has been implemented in 50 countries in 30 different languages. This widespread use shows that EGRA is a good instrument for describing children's reading skills in early grades [7].

EGRA tests include (1) reading letters, (2) distinguishing initial sounds (phonemes), (3) reading meaningful words, (4) reading meaningless words, (5) reading fast and understanding reading, and (6) listening to readings. Aside from reading skills, EGRA can also show a child's reading speed and understanding of the reading content [8].

III. METHODS/MATERIALS

This research was conducted with quantitative research methods by applying survey research designs. This study took samples from the primary school population in

Serang Banten Regency in two primary schools in partner districts and two comparison districts. The district decided from the cluster project of strengthening the primary school in the reading project. The school schools used was four partner schools and four comparison schools. With eight schools, each school was taken with a random sampling of 20 students so that 160 students were elementary students in the early grades.

This study took samples from the primary school population in Serang Banten Regency in two primary schools in partner districts and two comparison districts. The school schools used were four partner schools and four comparison schools. With eight schools, each school was taken with a random sampling of 20 students so that 160 students were elementary students in the early grades.

In this study the researchers used EGRA tests such as (1) reading letters, (2) distinguishing initial sounds (phonemes), (3) reading meaningful words, (4) reading meaningless words, (5) reading fast and understanding reading, and (6) listening to readings. Aside from reading skills, EGRA can also demonstrate a child's reading speed and understanding of the reading content.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers conducted the tests with four assessors assigned to each school and two schools tested in a day—in total, eight schools in four days. The duration of the EGRA test was about 20 minutes for the main procedures. Afterwards, the researchers analyzed the results by computing the summary for each section of the test.

The first section was spelling letters of the alphabet (see Table 1). It was found that students had difficulty pronouncing as many as 100 random letters of the alphabet within 3 minutes—the average speed was 2 minutes 24 seconds. This is caused by the fact that the process of learning to read is not based on letters but words.

The second part involved reading meaningful words. It was found that students were good at reading meaningful words within 3 minutes—the average was 30 words. This is due to the fact that children learn to read words, especially meaningful words

Table 1.
Spelling alphabet

| Number of alphabet/ letters | Students' speed | Notes |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 100 | 2.24 | 100 letters per 3 minutes |

| | | |
|-----|------|---------------------------|
| 100 | 2.24 | 100 letters per 3 minutes |
|-----|------|---------------------------|

Table 2.
Reading meaningful words

| Number of words | Students' speed | Notes |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 30 | 3' | 30 words per 3 min. |

The third section was reading meaningless words. It was found that students had difficulty reading meaningless words within 3 minutes, with the average being 15 words. Again, this is due to the fact that children learn to read the words, especially the meaningful words (Table 3).

Table 3.
Reading meaningless words

| Number of words | Students' speed | Notes |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 30 | 3' | 15 words per 3 min. |

The fourth section was reading comprehension. Based on the findings, it was found that students were good at reading comprehension. The average child has good skill in reading a text and comprehends the content of the text by answering five questions related to the text implicitly or explicitly. 86% of the students answered correctly (Table 4).

Table 4.
Reading comprehension

| Number of questions | Percentage of student | Notes |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 5 | 86 | Answering 5 questions in a text correctly. |

A specific finding based on the data of the children being asked questions when they began their process of EGRA assessment shows that the children who were guided by their parents or siblings were better at reading. Another finding was that the availability of reading books in addition to textbooks for their reading sources was useful in assessing their reading skill. It was proved that learning skills show children's literacy skills: from birth to grade 1, the elementary concept of writing, being able to show the direction of writing, the concept of words or other basic knowledge about writing, and awareness of pronunciations. They can identify the initial sounds/rhythm, and the letter segmentation.

They are expected to be able to identify the initial or final sound of a word, or separate words into letters (words spoken aloud by the assessor).

Beginning of Class 1: Recognition of letters, names, and/or sounds; mentioning the name/sound of lowercase and uppercase letters, which are randomly presented; naming syllables; recognizing randomly presented syllables correctly; reading non-words; being able to identify non-words from syllables that are randomly presented; reading common words; reading a list of words taken from a collection of common words that are randomly presented; confirmation and fluency.

End of class 1 to end of class 3: Reading aloud (reading paragraphs) and understanding narrative text or information accurately without difficulty at sufficient speed, and being able to answer both literal and veiled questions about the writing they are reading. Dictating: Translating sound into writing and spelling it correctly. Puzzle or completing sentences. Reading sentences without making a sound and looking for missing words correctly (in the case of puzzles, various options are provided) [9].

Children who do not learn to read in the early grades have difficulty developing further skills, which are generally obtained by reading. Because they cannot understand written information, follow written instruction, or communicate well through writing, these children risk falling further behind than their peers who can read effectively in subsequent classes without intervention. The gaps between children who can read well and those who cannot will become wider [10].

Children who can read well absorb more written information, develop vocabulary and improve understanding, while children who are less able to read will lose motivation, can only read some information, and are unable to understand more complex information [11].

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the students had a low letter-reading speed, with 2.24 minutes for 100 letters, but were good at reading meaningful words, with 30 words in 3 minutes. However, they had difficulty reading meaningless words, with only 15 words in 3 minutes. Meaningless words were still hard to spell [12]. Most students (86%) were good at reading in general. They understood the story well and had good reading comprehension. The majority of students (78%) could retell the contents of the

reading after listening to it. Those guided by parents or brothers or sisters had better reading skills. Another finding concerned the availability of reading books besides textbooks for their reading sources.

The study found that teachers need to adjust learning-to-read techniques to cater to children's reading skills. Also, the reading material needs to be tailored to the level and interests of each child, so that the child's reading ability improves and is used to learn other subjects [13].

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