

Analysis Of Beginning Reading Difficulties Among Second-Grade Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT : This study aimed to analyze the beginning reading skills of second-grade students, identify the difficulties they encountered, and describe the efforts undertaken to address those difficulties. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving a second-grade teacher and students as research participants. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Data analysis consisted of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data credibility was established through source, method, and time triangulation. The findings indicated that the students' beginning reading skills were generally at a moderate level. Most students were able to recognize letters, produce letter sounds, read syllables and words, and read simple sentences. However, some students continued to experience difficulties distinguishing visually similar letters, reading fluently, reading without spelling out words, and demonstrating confidence when reading aloud. The main challenges included low interest in reading, limited self-confidence, insufficient parental assistance and support at home, limited instructional media, and insufficiently varied teaching methods. To address these challenges, the teacher provided targeted support, implemented a staged reading approach, utilized instructional media and educational games, conducted regular reading practice, involved parents, and provided praise and encouragement. The study concludes that beginning reading skills are influenced by both internal and external factors. Therefore, sustained collaboration among teachers, students, and parents is essential to optimize the development of students' foundational reading skills.

Keywords: Beginning Reading Skills, Elementary School Students, Reading Difficulties, Teacher Efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill that elementary school students must acquire because it underpins knowledge acquisition and participation in learning across subject areas. Reading serves not only as a means of obtaining information but also as an essential skill that supports the development of thinking, communication, and lifelong learning. Strong reading proficiency from an early age enables students to understand instructional content more effectively and contributes to academic success at subsequent levels of education. Therefore, reading instruction in elementary school, particularly in the early grades, requires serious attention from both teachers and parents. The development of reading ability is also closely related to students' academic achievement because reading competence enables students to

access, process, and understand information presented in learning materials (Saputra et al., 2025).

Beginning reading is the initial stage of learning to read and emphasizes recognizing letters, producing letter sounds, reading syllables and words, and reading simple sentences. This stage provides the foundation for more advanced reading abilities, including reading comprehension, critical reading, and extensive reading. According to Habibi (2018), beginning reading involves recognizing written symbols, associating letters with their corresponding sounds, and understanding simple meanings. Brodin and Renblad (2019) further explain that beginning reading skills play an important role in expanding vocabulary, strengthening language proficiency, and supporting students' cognitive development. Thus, beginning reading is a fundamental competence that elementary school students must master. The development of these skills is also closely connected to linguistic development because students need to understand the relationship between symbols, sounds, words, and meanings in the learning process (Ummah et al., 2025).

Improving beginning reading skills is a major concern in Indonesian elementary education. Nevertheless, various problems persist, particularly among students in the early grades. Some students still struggle to recognize letters, distinguish letters with similar visual forms, read words fluently, and understand the meaning of simple texts. These difficulties hinder their participation in classroom learning because nearly all school-based learning activities require reading. Low interest in reading, limited instructional media, insufficient parental support, and insufficiently varied teaching methods are among the factors that influence students' reading development. The use of appropriate instructional media is therefore important because media can provide concrete and engaging learning experiences that support students in recognizing letters, syllables, and words. The development of flashcard media, for example, represents one effort to support beginning reading instruction through visual learning stimuli appropriate for elementary school students (Tittinganur et al., 2025).

Previous studies have shown that beginning reading skills are influenced by both internal and external factors. Pratiwi and Ariawan (2017) found that low beginning reading proficiency was associated with psychological factors, including limited interest in learning to read and low self-confidence, as well as environmental factors such as insufficient parental attention and guidance. Hasanudin and Puspita (2017) likewise demonstrated that reading is a foundational skill that makes a substantial contribution to learning success at the elementary level. In addition, Afrianti and Wirman (2020) emphasized that collaboration among schools, teachers, and parents is essential for supporting children's reading development from an early age. Students' interest and motivation are also important aspects of reading instruction because

students who are interested and motivated tend to participate more actively in learning activities. The use of attractive and interactive learning media, including game-based media, can support students' motivation and engagement in Indonesian language learning (Satriadin et al., 2025).

The development of beginning reading skills should also be understood as part of the broader process of language and literacy development. Linguistic competence enables students to understand the relationship between symbols, sounds, words, sentences, and meaning. Consequently, difficulties in beginning reading may affect students' broader linguistic development and their ability to participate in learning activities across subject areas (Ummah et al., 2025). The importance of reading ability also extends beyond the early stages of literacy development. As students progress through elementary school, reading competence becomes increasingly important for understanding more complex texts and developing higher-order reading abilities. The relationship between critical reading ability and Indonesian language achievement demonstrates that reading competence is closely associated with students' academic performance (Saputra et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of identifying and addressing reading difficulties from the earliest stages of elementary education.

Although many studies have examined beginning reading difficulties among elementary school students, most have focused primarily on identifying reading barriers. Relatively few studies have comprehensively investigated students' reading abilities, the difficulties they encounter, and the efforts undertaken to address those difficulties. The present study therefore contributes a comprehensive account of second-grade students' beginning reading skills by analyzing their reading performance, the factors that impede it, and the strategies employed by the teacher to strengthen their reading skills. This focus is important because efforts to improve beginning reading should not be limited to identifying students' weaknesses but should also consider the availability of appropriate media, students' motivation, linguistic development, and the instructional strategies implemented by teachers.

Preliminary observations and an interview with the second-grade teacher at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency, indicated that most students could recognize letters and read syllables, words, and simple sentences reasonably well. However, several students still had difficulty distinguishing visually similar letters, read hesitantly, spelled out words, and lacked confidence when asked to read in front of the class. Low interest in reading, limited instructional media, and insufficient learning support at home also constrained the development of their beginning reading skills. These conditions indicate that students' beginning reading abilities are not uniform and that individual differences in reading development require attention through

appropriate instructional support. The use of engaging media and learning activities may therefore serve as an important strategy for increasing students' interest and participation while supporting the development of reading skills (Titingganur et al., 2025; Satriadin et al., 2025).

Against this background, this study aimed to describe the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency; identify the difficulties they encountered; and describe the efforts undertaken to address those difficulties. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of beginning reading instruction in elementary schools, provide teachers with a reference for strengthening students' reading skills, and inform schools and parents in supporting optimal reading development. More broadly, the study is expected to reinforce the importance of early literacy development as a foundation for students' linguistic competence, academic achievement, and continued participation in learning across the elementary education curriculum (Saputra et al., 2025; Ummah et al., 2025).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because it enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon in its natural setting, particularly students' beginning reading abilities, the difficulties they encountered, and the efforts undertaken by the teacher to address those difficulties. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling, whereby informants were determined based on their relevance to the research focus and their ability to provide information related to the phenomenon under investigation. The participants comprised the second-grade teacher and second-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency. The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through observations and interviews with the teacher and students, while secondary data were obtained from relevant documentation, including the student roster, reading assessment results, instructional materials, and other documents related to students' beginning reading development.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine students' beginning reading skills during classroom learning activities, including their ability to recognize letters, read syllables, words, and simple sentences, and demonstrate appropriate reading fluency. Semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher and selected students

were conducted to obtain information concerning students' beginning reading abilities, the difficulties they experienced, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the efforts undertaken to improve their reading skills. Documentation was used to supplement the primary data through activity photographs, instructional materials, observation records, reading assessment results, and other relevant documents. The researchers served as the primary research instrument (human instrument), supported by observation guides, interview protocols, documentation sheets, an audio recorder, and a camera.

Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data collection was conducted continuously through observation, interviews, and documentation. The collected data were subsequently reduced by selecting, focusing, organizing, and simplifying information relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then displayed in descriptive and narrative forms to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and meanings. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the emerging findings and continuously verified throughout the research process.

Data trustworthiness was established through source, method, and time triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the classroom teacher and students. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. Time triangulation involved collecting data at different times to examine the consistency of the information obtained. The use of these triangulation procedures was intended to strengthen the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

A. Beginning Reading Skills of Second-Grade Students

Findings from observations, interviews, and documentation indicated that the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at the research site were at a moderate level. Most students were able to recognize letters, produce letter sounds, and read syllables, words, and simple sentences. However, several students continued to experience difficulties in distinguishing letters with similar visual forms, reading fluently, and reading without spelling out words. Some students also demonstrated hesitation when reading simple sentences in front of the class. These findings were established through triangulation of information obtained from the classroom teacher, students, and direct classroom observations.

The observations showed that most students had mastered letter recognition as a basic component of beginning reading. Nevertheless, several students still

experienced difficulty distinguishing the letters **b, d, p, and q**, which frequently resulted in errors during reading activities. The teacher explained that students' reading abilities varied considerably and that students experiencing difficulties required more individualized assistance.

Regarding letter-sound production, most students were able to articulate vowel and consonant sounds correctly. However, some students still confused the sounds of particular consonants, which affected their reading fluency. Interviews with students also indicated that several students had not yet fully mastered the association between letter forms and their corresponding sounds.

Table 1. Observation Results for Beginning Reading Skills

No.	Beginning Reading Skill	Research Findings	Level
1	Letter recognition	Most students could recognize letters well, although several still had difficulty distinguishing b, d, p, and q.	Fair
2	Producing letter sounds	Most students correctly articulated vowel and consonant sounds.	Good
3	Reading syllables	Most students could read syllables without teacher assistance.	Good
4	Reading words	Some students still spelled out words and read hesitantly.	Fair
5	Reading simple sentences	Some students read fluently, whereas others still lacked confidence.	Fair

Students' ability to read syllables showed relatively good development. Most students were able to combine letters into syllables without direct assistance from the teacher. However, several students still read slowly and experienced difficulty with particular combinations of letters. This condition was associated with limited reading practice at home and relatively low interest in reading activities.

In terms of word reading, most students were able to read simple words. Nevertheless, some students continued to spell out words, repeat certain words, or read hesitantly. These difficulties affected their reading fluency and, consequently, their ability to understand the meaning of the text effectively.

Students' ability to read simple sentences was also relatively good, although their performance varied. Some students were able to read simple sentences fluently and confidently in front of the class. Other students, however, continued to read slowly and hesitantly and had not yet fully understood the content of the sentences they read.

B. Challenges in Beginning Reading Skills

The findings identified several challenges that affected students' beginning reading development. These challenges included low interest in reading, limited self-confidence, insufficient parental support at home, limited instructional media, and insufficiently varied teaching methods. These factors were interrelated and influenced the development of students' reading abilities.

Table 2. Challenges in Beginning Reading Skills

No.	Challenge	Finding
1	Low interest in reading	Students showed limited enthusiasm for reading activities.
2	Limited self-confidence	Students were reluctant to read in front of the class.
3	Insufficient parental support	Students rarely practiced reading at home.
4	Limited instructional media	Available reading media were limited.
5	Insufficiently varied teaching methods	Reading instruction was still dominated by conventional methods.

Low interest in reading was reflected in students' limited enthusiasm for reading activities. Some students preferred other activities, which reduced the time and opportunities available for reading practice. Several students also appeared shy and lacked confidence when asked to read in front of the class.

Insufficient parental support was another challenge affecting students' reading development. Some students rarely practiced reading at home because they received limited assistance or supervision from their parents. As a result, the reading practice obtained at school was not always reinforced through regular activities at home.

The limited availability of instructional media also affected the learning process. Reading instruction was not always supported by varied and attractive media, which made some students less interested in participating in reading activities. In addition, the continued use of conventional teaching methods limited opportunities for students to engage in more active, enjoyable, and interactive reading activities.

C. Teacher Efforts to Address Challenges in Beginning Reading

The teacher implemented several efforts to improve students' beginning reading skills. These efforts included providing targeted support for students experiencing reading difficulties, implementing a staged reading approach, using instructional media, incorporating educational games, conducting regular reading practice, involving parents, and providing praise and encouragement.

Targeted support was provided outside regular classroom activities through individual and small-group assistance. Through this approach, the teacher was able to

provide more intensive guidance to students according to their individual reading difficulties.

The teacher also implemented a staged reading approach that began with letter and letter-sound recognition and gradually progressed to syllables, words, and simple sentences. This approach enabled students to develop their reading skills systematically from basic competencies toward more complex reading abilities.

In addition, the teacher used letter cards, syllable boards, pictures, and educational games to make reading activities more engaging. These media and activities were intended to increase students' attention and interest while providing opportunities for repeated practice.

Regular reading practice was also conducted to strengthen students' mastery of letters, syllables, words, and simple sentences. The teacher maintained communication with parents regarding students' reading development so that reading practice could continue at home. Praise, encouragement, and other forms of positive reinforcement were also provided to strengthen students' confidence and encourage them to participate more actively in reading activities.

Table 3. Teacher Efforts to Address Challenges in Beginning Reading

No.	Teacher Effort	Implementation
1	Targeted support	Individual and small-group assistance.
2	Staged reading method	Letters → syllables → words → sentences.
3	Use of instructional media	Letter cards, syllable boards, and pictures.
4	Educational games	Engaging reading games for students.
5	Regular reading practice	Reading activities conducted regularly.
6	Parental involvement	Communication about students' reading development.
7	Motivation and praise	Positive reinforcement to strengthen self-confidence.

Overall, the findings indicated that students' beginning reading skills varied. Most students had mastered basic reading skills, particularly letter recognition, letter-sound production, and syllable reading. However, several students continued to experience difficulties in distinguishing similar letters, reading words fluently, reading simple sentences, and demonstrating confidence when reading aloud. These challenges were addressed through targeted guidance, staged reading instruction, the use of instructional media and educational games, regular reading practice, parental involvement, and continuous motivational support.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency, were generally adequate, although several students continued to experience difficulties in recognizing letters, distinguishing visually similar letters, reading words fluently, and reading simple sentences with confidence. This finding is consistent with Habibi's (2018) view that beginning reading represents an initial stage of literacy development that emphasizes the recognition of written symbols, the association between letters and their corresponding sounds, and the ability to read simple words and sentences. The findings also demonstrate that students' beginning reading abilities develop at different levels, indicating the importance of providing instruction that is responsive to individual differences in students' reading development.

Students' beginning reading skills provide an essential foundation for the development of more advanced reading abilities. As Halimah (2019) noted, beginning reading underpins the later development of reading comprehension, rapid reading, and critical reading. The importance of reading competence also extends to students' academic achievement because the ability to read enables students to access and understand information presented across different learning subjects (Saputra et al., 2025). Accordingly, mastery of beginning reading skills requires sustained attention from both teachers and parents. Early difficulties in letter recognition, letter-sound association, syllable reading, and word reading need to be identified and addressed so that they do not develop into more complex literacy barriers at subsequent levels of education.

The findings also showed that low interest in reading, limited learning motivation, and insufficient parental assistance influenced students' beginning reading skills. These results are consistent with Pratiwi and Ariawan (2017), who reported that beginning reading difficulties are shaped by psychological and environmental factors. Psychological factors include low interest in reading and emotional maturity, whereas environmental factors include insufficient parental attention and guidance at home. These findings indicate that beginning reading development cannot be understood solely from students' academic abilities because motivation, confidence, reading habits, and the learning environment also contribute to the development of reading skills.

The availability and use of appropriate instructional media also represent important aspects of beginning reading instruction. The findings showed that limited instructional media constituted one of the challenges experienced in the learning process. In this context, the use of visual and concrete media can provide students with clearer representations of letters, syllables, and words. Titingganur et al. (2025)

demonstrated the relevance of flashcard-based media in supporting beginning reading instruction by providing visual stimuli that can help students recognize and associate written symbols. Thus, the use of appropriate instructional media may make beginning reading activities more engaging and provide students with additional opportunities to practice foundational reading skills.

In addition, students' motivation and engagement are important elements in supporting the development of beginning reading skills. Students who have limited interest and confidence may be reluctant to participate in reading activities, particularly when asked to read aloud in front of their peers. The use of engaging learning activities and interactive media can help create a more supportive learning environment and encourage students to participate more actively. The use of game-based learning media has also been associated with increased student motivation and engagement in Indonesian language learning (Satriadin et al., 2025). Therefore, reading instruction should not rely solely on repetitive exercises but should also incorporate activities that are appropriate to students' developmental characteristics and interests.

Furthermore, the teacher's provision of targeted support, repeated reading practice, and collaboration with parents helped students improve their beginning reading skills. This finding supports Afrianti and Wirman's (2020) assertion that children's reading development is strongly influenced by cooperation between schools and families. Targeted support enables teachers to address individual reading difficulties, whereas repeated practice provides students with opportunities to strengthen their mastery of letters, syllables, words, and sentences. Parental involvement further reinforces the reading activities conducted at school by providing opportunities for continued practice at home.

The findings also demonstrate that beginning reading development is closely connected to students' broader linguistic development. Students need to understand the relationship between letters, sounds, words, sentences, and meaning in order to develop effective reading abilities. Consequently, difficulties in beginning reading may influence students' broader language development and their participation in learning activities. The integration of linguistic perspectives in elementary education emphasizes the importance of developing students' language competence through meaningful and supportive learning experiences (Ummah et al., 2025).

Therefore, improving beginning reading skills requires coordinated support from teachers, schools, and parents. Through appropriate instruction, sustained practice, targeted assistance, the use of engaging instructional media, and effective collaboration with families, students' beginning reading skills can develop more fully. The findings further suggest that early intervention is important because beginning

reading competence serves as a foundation for the development of more advanced reading abilities, including critical reading and comprehension, which are closely related to students' academic achievement at subsequent levels of education (Saputra et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pasir Putih, Muna Regency, were generally adequate. Most students were able to recognize letters, produce letter sounds, read syllables and simple words, and read simple sentences. However, several students continued to experience difficulties in distinguishing letters with similar visual forms, reading fluently, avoiding the habit of spelling out words, and demonstrating confidence when reading aloud in front of the class.

The challenges affecting students' beginning reading skills were influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included low interest in reading, limited learning motivation and concentration, and low self-confidence. External factors included insufficient parental assistance with reading activities at home, limited instructional media, and differences in students' reading abilities. The interaction of these factors resulted in varying levels of beginning reading achievement among students.

To address these challenges, the teacher provided targeted assistance to students experiencing reading difficulties, conducted regular reading practice, implemented reading methods adapted to students' needs, used instructional media and engaging learning activities, provided motivation and positive reinforcement, and collaborated with parents to support reading practice at home. These efforts are important for strengthening students' foundational reading skills and supporting their development toward more advanced reading abilities.

The findings may serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and parents in developing more effective beginning reading strategies. Strengthening cooperation among these stakeholders, supported by appropriate instructional approaches and continuous reading practice, is essential for creating a learning environment that supports the development of elementary school students' reading abilities.

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