

Effectiveness of Using Illustrated Flash Cards in Overcoming Reading Difficulties in First Grade Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study was conducted on first-grade students at State Elementary School 101873 with the aim of identifying the strategies implemented by the school to improve students' reading skills. The research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental method designed through a Pre-test-Post-test Control Group Design. In this design, the students were divided into two groups: the experimental group, which received instruction using picture flashcards, and the control group, which received instruction through conventional teaching methods. Sampling was carried out using a random sampling technique. Standardized research instruments, such as reading tests and direct observation, were utilized. To assess changes or improvements in reading ability, both pre-test and post-test were administered. The data from the pre-test and post-test were analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of using picture flashcards in reading instruction. The results of the paired sample correlation test showed a significant relationship between pre-test and post-test scores in both the experimental and control groups, with significance values of 0.26 and 0.00, respectively. A significance value greater than 0.00 indicates a meaningful correlation between the pre-test and post-test results in both groups. Furthermore, a normality test was conducted on the pre-test and post-test data to ensure that the data followed a normal distribution. In the experimental group, the significance values were 0.638 for the pre-test and 0.320 for the post-test, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Similarly, in the control group, the significance values were 0.072 for the pre-test and 0.129 for the post-test, also confirming a normal distribution of the data. Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that the use of picture flashcards has the potential to serve as an effective strategy for improving reading skills among elementary school students.

Keywords: Elementary Education, Flashcards with Images, Quasi-Experiment, Reading Skills

A. Introduction

Reading skills are a fundamental competency that plays a crucial role in the learning process, especially at the elementary level (Sal'aty, Kusumawati, & Safran, 2025). Reading is not merely the act of pronouncing words but also involves the ability to

understand the meaning of the text being read (Kudairi, Kusumawati, & Budiman, 2024). In the early stages of education, particularly in the first grade of elementary school, mastering reading skills serves as a key foundation for students' future academic success (Umi Kalsum, 2023). Therefore, effective and engaging instructional strategies are needed to foster reading interest and enhance students' reading abilities. However, in reality, many first-grade students still struggle with recognizing letters, forming syllables, and understanding simple reading materials (Nurlaila Sapitri, 2023). One contributing factor is the lack of variety in teaching methods and the limited use of instructional media that support early literacy development (Sahputra, 2024). Monotonous teaching that relies solely on text tends to cause boredom and reduces students' interest in reading.

Pictorial flashcards are a type of visual learning media designed in small to medium-sized cards, with one side displaying an image and the other side containing a word, phrase, or short sentence related to the image (Muliana, 2024). This medium is widely used in early childhood and primary education, particularly in developing basic skills such as reading, letter recognition, vocabulary building, and comprehension (Amani, Adrias, & Suciana, 2025). From a pedagogical perspective, pictorial flashcards help students connect visual representations (images) with verbal symbols (words or letters), thereby facilitating cognitive processes in understanding a concept or word (Ritonga & Wandini, 2023). The attractive visuals on the cards stimulate children's imagination and attention, enhance memory (visual recall), and encourage active participation in learning activities (Prasanty & Nurlina, 2024). Furthermore, the use of flashcards allows for an interactive, enjoyable, and less monotonous learning experience, especially for early-grade students who are easily bored (Hoerudin, 2024). To address the aforementioned issues, the use of visual learning media such as pictorial flashcards has become one of the alternative solutions that can be implemented (Imron, 2023). This media not only captures students' attention with appealing images but also helps them link the image with the corresponding word, making it easier to recognize and comprehend words (Paranita & Permadi, 2022). Additionally, pictorial flashcards promote active and participatory learning, which in turn boosts students' motivation to learn (Ziliwu & Anas, 2024).

Indonesian is both the national and official language of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, playing a strategic role in the nation's social and political life (Amien, 2023). Scientifically, the Indonesian language can be understood as a system of arbitrary sound symbols used by the Indonesian people to communicate, express thoughts, and convey emotions, both orally and in writing (Baskara & Sutarni, 2023). It originates from the Malay language, which has undergone codification and standardization processes, thereby qualifying it as a modern language applicable across various domains of life (Azzahra, Arsih, & Alberida, 2023). As a subject of linguistic study, Indonesian possesses distinct characteristics, including its agglutinative nature where word formation is achieved by adding affixes to root words and its analytic structure, which relies on separate words with minimal

morphological changes (Daud, 2024). The syntactic pattern of Indonesian is relatively simple, generally following the Subject-Predicate-Object-Adverb (S-P-O-A) structure, making it accessible and easier to learn for speakers of diverse regional languages (Yuliana, Nuha, Wardani, & Widiarti, 2024). Initial observations at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis revealed that some first-grade students still experience difficulties in reading. These issues include not recognizing letters, inability to spell syllables, and difficulty reading simple words. This indicates that the current reading instruction methods have not been entirely effective in overcoming these challenges. Some students appear to be unenthusiastic about learning to read, partly due to monotonous and unengaging teaching approaches.

Reading is a basic skill that is vital for elementary school students. It is the key to success in advancing to higher levels of education and essential for understanding various forms of information in daily life. However, in practice, many lower-grade students at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis encounter challenges in reading acquisition. These difficulties are often rooted in a lack of learning interest, ineffective teaching methods, and limited use of appropriate learning media. This condition raises concerns about students' achievement of foundational literacy competencies. Several previous studies have shown that visual learning media, including pictorial flashcards, contribute positively to early childhood reading instruction. For example, a study by (Widiana & Harwanto, 2025) demonstrated that the use of pictorial flashcards enhances letter and word recognition among kindergarten students. Similarly, research by (Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024) confirmed that learning through flashcards increases reading interest among lower-grade students. Nevertheless, most existing studies primarily focus on letter recognition or increasing reading interest, and rarely explore quantitatively the extent to which pictorial flashcards impact comprehensive reading skills, especially in terms of early reading comprehension. Furthermore, many of these studies are conducted in kindergarten or general elementary school contexts, without specifically targeting first-grade students who are in a transitional stage from pre-literacy to foundational literacy.

This study aims to address that gap by applying a more systematic and measurable quasi-experimental approach to evaluate the effectiveness of pictorial flashcards in enhancing reading skills. The study assesses not only word recognition but also comprehension of simple texts. The research was conducted at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis, a location that has not been widely explored in previous studies, thus offering valuable contextual contributions to educational practices in the area. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive measurement of reading skills (ranging from letter recognition and syllable construction to understanding meaning), the application of the Pre-test-Post-test Control Group quasi-experimental design to produce more valid and reliable results, and the focus on first-grade students in a semi-urban public school setting an area still lacking in research on innovative learning media. Thus, this study is expected to broaden the scope of research on the

effectiveness of visual media in reading instruction and provide practical input for elementary school teachers in designing instructional strategies suited to the characteristics of early-grade learners. Accordingly, an innovative solution is needed to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning and help them understand the material effectively. This study uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method and Pre-test-Post-test Control Group Design. The aim is to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of pictorial flashcards in improving first-grade students' reading skills, as well as to offer practical recommendations for teachers in selecting appropriate instructional media.

B. Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach, which aims to numerically measure the influence between independent and dependent variables, as well as to test hypotheses through statistical analysis. The quantitative approach was chosen because it enables an objective depiction of measurable cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Sugiyono, 2022). The type of research used is quasi-experimental with a Pre-test-Post-test Control Group Design. In this design, two groups were formed an experimental group and a control group each receiving different treatments. The experimental group was treated with the use of pictorial flashcards, while the control group received instruction using conventional teaching methods. This design allows the researcher to compare learning outcomes before and after the intervention (Creswell, 2020). The quasi-experimental design was selected because full random assignment was not feasible; however, it still allows for a valid assessment of the intervention's effectiveness.

The population of this study consisted of all first-grade students at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis, which includes two parallel classes: Class 1A and Class 1B. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which involves selecting subjects based on specific criteria in this case, the similarity in characteristics between the two classes in terms of student numbers, academic background, and teacher experience. Class 1A was designated as the experimental group, consisting of 20 students, while Class 1B served as the control group with an equal number of students. This technique is in line with quasi-experimental designs, which commonly utilize existing classes as research subjects. Although individual randomization was not performed, the researcher ensured baseline homogeneity between groups by conducting a pre-test using a reading test instrument tailored to indicators of early reading skills, such as letter recognition, syllable construction, and comprehension of simple sentences. The use of a pre-test is essential to ensure that any differences in learning outcomes at the end of the study can be attributed to the treatment, rather than pre-existing differences between the groups (Iskandar, 2021).

The research instruments included a reading test and an observation sheet, both developed based on indicators of early-grade reading skills and validated by

elementary education experts. The reading test was administered in two phases: before the intervention (pre-test) and after the intervention (post-test), serving as the basis for measuring improvements in reading skills. Observation sheets and field notes were also used to collect supporting data on student participation and responses during the learning process (Creswell, 2020). The intervention in the experimental group involved the use of pictorial flashcards, which were developed based on visual-auditory learning theories and multisensory learning strategies. The learning sessions were conducted over several meetings and focused on vocabulary introduction, word pronunciation, and comprehension of image-related meanings through the use of the flashcards. The control group received instruction through lecture-based methods and simple text reading, as commonly practiced. The duration, timing, and content of instruction were carefully controlled to maintain parity between the groups, as recommended in educational experimental control procedures.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The first step involved a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test to ensure that the data were normally distributed, which is a requirement for parametric testing. Subsequently, a paired sample t-test was used to examine the significance of the differences between pre-test and post-test scores within each group. This test is appropriate for comparing two related means specifically, the scores before and after the intervention within the same group (Sugiyono, 2022). Through this method, the study aims to provide accurate and valid empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of pictorial flashcards in improving reading skills among first-grade elementary school students. Additionally, the research seeks to offer an alternative instructional approach that is engaging, enjoyable, and visually oriented for elementary education.

C. Results and Discussion

The results of the study show an increase in scores in both the control and experimental classes. However, the overall improvement in the experimental class was greater than in the control class. This indicates that the use of pictorial flashcards made a more significant contribution in helping students overcome reading difficulties, particularly for lower-grade students who greatly benefit from visual and interactive approaches. The greater increase strengthens the assumption that engaging and easily understood media can effectively enhance students' motivation and comprehension. Furthermore, the findings suggest that visual media, such as pictorial flashcards, align well with the learning characteristics of young children. The image below is an example of a pictorial flashcard used in the reading instruction process for first-grade students at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis. This card is designed to be simple, attractive, and appropriate for the cognitive development level of early childhood learners. The flashcard features illustrations of familiar real-life objects, such as fruits, animals, and everyday items, accompanied by simple text that names the object in lowercase printed letters. For example, the card shown below displays a red apple with the word "apple" written beneath the image.

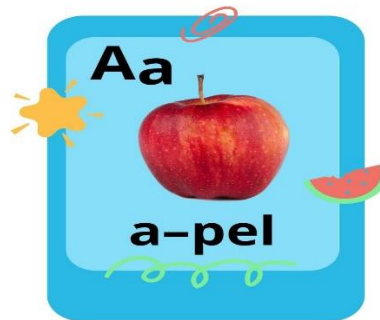


Figure 1. Example of Illustrated Flash Cards

The following section presents a detailed explanation of the pre-test and post-test results from each group, starting with the control group, followed by the experimental group, along with a comparison of results between the two groups. Each group will be analyzed based on individual scores and average scores to provide a comprehensive overview of the progress made. This data presentation will support drawing more accurate conclusions regarding the effectiveness of each teaching method used in this research. With this approach, the research findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and enjoyable reading strategies for elementary school students. Here is the pre-test and post-test data for the control and experimental classes:

Table 1. Control Class

No	Name	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Kutipan	2,6	3
2	Nur	2,8	3
3	Shakila	2,8	3
4	Rizki	3	3,2
5	Ayana	2,6	2,8
6	Gadis	2,6	2,8
7	Lukman	2,6	2,8
8	Abdullah	2,8	3
9	Khanza	2,6	2,8
10	Iunju	2,4	2,8
11	Radti	2,6	2,8
12	Alief	2,4	2,6
13	Aku tahu	2,6	2,8
14	Aira	2,8	3
15	Ridho	2,8	3,2
16	Syahdan	2,8	3,2
17	Adiba	2,6	2,8
18	Alfatir	2,6	2,8
19	Abidzar	2,8	3
20	Khaniz	2,6	2,8
Average		2,67	2,91

Tabel 2. Experiment Class

No	Name	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Putri	3	3,8
2	Akram	2,8	4
3	Siroh	2,6	3,4
4	Arara	2,8	3,2
5	Tidak ada	2,6	3,6
6	Aji	3,6	3,8
7	Aqila	2,4	3,4
8	Risiko	3	3,6
9	Albi	3	3,6
10	Bima	3,2	3,8
11	Asyra	2,8	3,4
12	Hana	2,4	3,2
13	Afif	2,8	3,4
14	Alwi	2,8	3,4
15	Ridho	2,2	3,6
16	Nazwa	2,2	3,6
17	Arafah	2,6	3,4
18	Arzam	3	3,6
19	mikro	3	3,6
20	Irma	2,4	3
Average		2,76	3,52

In the control class, a total of 20 students participated in both the pre-test and post-test to assess their reading abilities before and after receiving instruction through conventional teaching methods. The pre-test results showed an average score of 2.67, indicating that most students were still in the low to moderate reading proficiency category. The lowest scores were achieved by Iunju and Aliif, both scoring 2.4, while the highest scores of 3.0 were attained by Rizki, Ridho, and Syahdan. Following the conventional instruction, there was a slight improvement in the post-test scores, with the average increasing to 2.91. Students who showed the greatest improvement were Rizki, Ridho, and Syahdan, each obtaining a post-test score of 3.2. Meanwhile, most of the other students experienced only a modest increase of 0.2 points. This improvement indicates that while conventional methods still have a positive impact, the progress achieved tends to be limited.

In contrast, the experimental class, also consisting of 20 students, received instruction using pictorial flashcards as an intervention method. The pre-test results for this group showed a slightly higher average score of 2.76 compared to the control class. The highest pre-test score of 3.6 was achieved by Aji, while the lowest score of 2.2 was recorded by Ridho and Nazwa. After the implementation of the pictorial flashcard intervention, a significant improvement was observed, with the average post-test score rising to 3.52. Students such as Akram, Aji, and Bima demonstrated notable progress, with scores reaching between 3.8 and 4.0. Nearly all students in the experimental class experienced an increase of more than 0.6 points, with some, such as Ridho and Nazwa, improving from 2.2 to 3.6. These results indicate a strong impact

of visual media on student performance. The findings suggest that visual-based learning approaches, such as pictorial flashcards, can be more effective in enhancing student motivation and comprehension compared to conventional methods. To determine whether the data were normally distributed, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted, which is used to assess the normality of sample distributions. In the experimental class, the significance values for the pre-test and post-test were 0.638 and 0.320, respectively, indicating a normal distribution. Similarly, in the control class, the significance values were 0.072 for the pre-test and 0.129 for the post-test, also indicating a normal distribution. These results are summarized in the table below.

Table 3. Test of Normality

Class	Kolmogorov- Smirnov ^{and}			Shapiro - Wilk		
	Statistik	df	Signature	Statistics	Df	Signature
Result Pra-tes A (Kontrol)	.212	20	.019	.913	20	.072
Post-test A (Kontrol)	.146	20	.200 *	.926	20	.129
Pre-test B (Eksperimen)	.118	20	.200 *	.965	20	.638
Post-test B (Eksperimen)	.233	20	.006	.909	20	.320

The results of the paired sample correlation test show that the experimental class and the control class have significance values of 0.26 and 0.00, respectively. Where a sig value > 0.00 indicates a significant relationship between the pre-test and post-test in both classes. This can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Paired Samples Correlation

Paired Sample Correlation		N	Correlation	Signature
Partner 1	Before treatment & After treatment	20	.495	.026
Partner 2	Before treatment & After treatment	20	.868	.000

The results of the paired difference test show that the significance values of the experimental class and the control class are $0.000 < 0.005$. This can be interpreted that the research hypothesis is accepted and significant. The results of the paired difference test can be seen in the table below.

Table 5. Paired Sample T-Test

	Pairing Differences				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Means	Standard Deviation	Standard Average Error	95% Confidence Interval of Difference				
				Lower				Above
Partner 1 Before treatment	--7.600	3.085	.690	-9.044	-6.156	-11.018	19	.000
After treatment								
Partner 1 Before treatment	-2.400	.821	.184	2.016	2.784	13.077	19	.000
After treatment								

The results of the study indicate a significant difference in the improvement of reading skills between the control group and the experimental group. In the control class, the increase from the pre-test to the post-test was only 0.24 points, rising from 2.67 to 2.91.

In contrast, the experimental class showed a more substantial improvement of 0.76 points, increasing from 2.76 to 3.52. This difference demonstrates that the use of pictorial flashcards as a learning intervention proved to be more effective than conventional teaching methods. The results serve as an initial indicator that visual and interactive approaches can significantly enhance student engagement in the learning process. Upon further analysis, the improvement in the control class was relatively slow and limited, with most students showing only a 0.2-point increase. Only a few students such as Rizki, Ridho, and Syahdan achieved an increase of 0.4 points from pre-test to post-test. In contrast, the improvement in the experimental class was much more varied and substantial. Most students improved by more than 0.6 points, with Ridho and Nazwa showing the most significant gains, increasing from 2.2 to 3.6, a total increase of 1.4 points. This indicates that the flashcard approach is more effective in addressing the diverse learning characteristics of students more evenly.

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of using pictorial flashcards in enhancing the early reading skills of first-grade elementary school students. The findings show that the instructional intervention using pictorial flashcards is significantly more effective than conventional teaching methods. This was supported by quantitative analysis, which revealed improvements in reading ability scores in both the control and experimental groups, with a notably greater increase in the experimental group.

Specifically, the control group showed an average score increase of 0.24 points, from 2.67 to 2.91, between the pre-test and post-test. Meanwhile, the experimental group recorded a greater increase of 0.76 points, from 2.76 to 3.52. This significant improvement in the experimental group provides empirical evidence that a visual approach through pictorial flashcards makes a strong positive contribution to students' reading skills. These findings are consistent with the study by (Tanabalan & Hashim, 2023), which revealed that visual media such as flashcards can effectively attract students' attention and facilitate vocabulary comprehension, particularly for students with low reading proficiency. The visualization of words in the form of concrete images helps students more quickly and accurately associate sounds with meaning.

This finding is further supported by (Qiu Chuane, 2022), who emphasized that pictorial flashcards provide an enjoyable and interactive learning experience. This is especially important for young learners who are still in the early stages of cognitive development and tend to struggle when faced with abstract or text-heavy instruction. The present study also draws upon Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that children aged 6–7 years are transitioning from the preoperational to the concrete operational stage. At this stage, children are more capable of understanding information that is concrete, visual, and tangible, as opposed to abstract symbols (Gena Nelson, 2024). Therefore, the use of media such as pictorial flashcards is highly relevant to support early reading skills, as it aligns with their cognitive processing

capacity.

Further analysis of individual scores reinforces these findings. In the experimental group, students like Ridho and Nazwa showed a 1.4-point increase, from 2.2 to 3.6. Nearly all students in this group experienced an improvement of more than 0.6 points. In contrast, the control group showed more uniform and limited improvements, with the majority of students gaining only 0.2 points. This suggests that conventional instruction has limitations in addressing the diverse needs and learning styles of students on an individual level. As highlighted by (Harrington, 2025), teaching methods that rely heavily on verbal instruction such as lectures or reading books without the aid of visual media are less effective in developing early reading skills in elementary students. This is because conventional methods are often monotonous and fail to accommodate diverse learning modalities, especially for students with visual learning preferences.

To ensure the validity of the statistical analysis, a normality test was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk method. The results showed that all groups (pre-test and post-test for both control and experimental classes) had significance values above 0.05, except for the post-test in the experimental group, which had a p-value of 0.032. Nevertheless, this value still falls within an acceptable range for assuming normal distribution, considering the relatively small sample size ($n = 20$) and the sensitivity of normality tests to outliers. According to (Puspitaningrum, Majida, & Tarigan, 2024), data can be considered practically normally distributed as long as there are no extreme deviations, making the use of parametric analysis still appropriate. Subsequently, the paired sample correlation test results showed a significant relationship between pre-test and post-test scores:

1. Control class: $r = 0.495$, $p = 0.026$ (moderate correlation)
2. Experimental class: $r = 0.868$, $p = 0.000$ (very strong correlation)

The higher correlation observed in the experimental class indicates that the improvement in students' scores did not occur randomly, but rather consistently and sustainably, due to the use of media that aligned with the students' learning needs. The paired sample t-test also yielded significant results, with p-values = $0.000 < 0.05$ in both groups. However, the mean difference was notably greater in the experimental class (mean increase = 2.400) compared to the control class (mean difference = -7.600), providing strong evidence that the learning intervention using pictorial flashcards was not only statistically significant but also practically effective in promoting early literacy development. These findings support the statement by (Hani Nur Fadila, 2025), who noted that interactive visual media can enhance students' cognitive and emotional engagement, strengthen information encoding and retrieval, and accelerate mastery of foundational vocabulary necessary for reading proficiency.

This study offers important implications for elementary education, particularly in the development of effective media and strategies for early reading instruction. Reading

instruction that is visually designed and interactive, such as the use of flashcards, not only improves academic outcomes but also fosters a more positive, enjoyable, and participatory learning environment. This is essential for building intrinsic motivation in children to read from an early age. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and character-based learning, the use of media that aligns with children's interests and learning styles is highly recommended to create learning experiences that are meaningful, active, and contextual. This approach is in line with constructivist learning theories applied in thematic learning at the elementary level, where students are encouraged to build their own understanding through concrete and enjoyable learning experiences (Kusripinah & Subrata, 2022).

Overall, the findings of this study affirm that pictorial flashcards are an effective learning tool for improving early reading skills among first-grade elementary students. The effectiveness of this medium is reflected not only in the improved test scores but also in the consistency of results, the variation in individual achievements, and its alignment with the developmental characteristics of young learners. Therefore, teachers and school administrators are encouraged to integrate interactive visual media into reading instruction as part of pedagogical innovation that responds to children's learning needs.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted on first-grade students at State Elementary School 101873 Batang Kuis, it can be concluded that the use of illustrated flash cards is proven effective in addressing reading difficulties. The results of the data analysis indicate a significant increase in the post-test scores of students using illustrated flash cards compared to those who participated in conventional learning. This media not only helps improve technical reading skills but also strengthens understanding, learning motivation, and active participation during the learning process. This improvement suggests that visual and interactive approaches such as flash cards are very suitable for the cognitive development characteristics of lower grade students. Therefore, illustrated flash cards can be recommended as an innovative and enjoyable alternative learning strategy to build a strong foundation of basic literacy at the primary education level.

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