

Improving Beginning Reading Abilities Through Experience-Based Learning Using Visual Media For Grade II Students Of Sdn 12 Betung, Banyuasin Regency

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading proficiency is widely recognized as a fundamental literacy skill that determines students' academic success and lifelong learning. At the elementary school level, beginning reading serves as the foundation for acquiring higher-order literacy competencies because it enables students to decode written symbols, construct meaning, and access knowledge across disciplines. Students who fail to master beginning reading skills often experience persistent learning difficulties that affect their overall academic performance and participation in classroom activities (Soleha et al., 2022; Nurani et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, Indonesian language is a compulsory subject designed to develop students' ability to communicate effectively using standard language conventions in both oral and written forms. Beginning reading instruction in lower elementary grades focuses on helping students recognize letters, decode syllables, read words fluently, and comprehend simple texts before progressing to more advanced reading competencies (Muammar, 2020). Because reading functions as the gateway to learning in all school subjects, inadequate beginning reading skills may hinder students' cognitive and academic development (Prayogo & Citrawati, 2023).

Previous studies have identified numerous factors influencing beginning reading achievement. Rofi'i and Susilo (2022) reported that students often encounter difficulties in recognizing letters and connecting graphemes with corresponding sounds, resulting in slow decoding ability. Likewise, Gading et al. (2019) demonstrated that visual learning media such as picture cards and flashcards can significantly improve students' attention and reading motivation by providing concrete representations of abstract language symbols. Meanwhile, Anggraini et al. (2022) found that integrating experiential activities into literacy instruction creates more interactive learning environments and positively affects students' literacy development.

Although these studies provide valuable evidence regarding visual media and active learning, they generally examine each component independently. Most research emphasizes either the effectiveness of instructional media or students' reading outcomes without explaining how direct learning experiences combined with visual representations facilitate cognitive construction during beginning reading. Consequently, the interaction between experiential learning principles and visual media in improving early reading skills remains insufficiently explored, particularly in Indonesian elementary school contexts. This indicates a significant research gap that requires further empirical investigation.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Experiential Learning Theory proposed by Kolb (1984), which argues that learning is a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Through this cycle, learners construct knowledge based on direct experiences rather than passive information transfer. In literacy instruction, experiential learning allows students to actively engage with language through authentic activities, while visual media provide meaningful stimuli that support symbol recognition and comprehension. International studies have consistently shown that experience-based learning promotes deeper understanding, higher engagement, and improved literacy achievement because students actively construct meaning from

contextualized experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Morris, 2020). Furthermore, multimedia learning theory suggests that combining verbal and visual information enhances cognitive processing and memory retention, making learning more effective than verbal instruction alone (Mayer, 2021).

Empirical evidence from internationally indexed studies also supports the integration of experiential approaches with visual learning resources. For instance, experiential literacy activities have been found to improve students' reading comprehension and motivation through active participation and contextual learning, while visual instructional materials facilitate dual coding processes that strengthen vocabulary acquisition and decoding ability. These findings suggest that combining experiential learning with visual media may provide a comprehensive pedagogical approach for enhancing beginning reading skills in elementary education.

Preliminary observations conducted in Grade II at SDN 12 Betung, Banyuasin Regency, revealed that students' beginning reading ability remains below the expected learning achievement criteria. Many students still experience difficulties in recognizing letters, decoding syllables, reading simple words, and understanding short texts. These limitations also affect their learning performance in other subjects because reading is the primary medium through which knowledge is acquired. Classroom instruction is predominantly teacher-centered and provides limited opportunities for students to engage in meaningful learning experiences supported by interactive visual materials.

Based on the identified theoretical and empirical gaps, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing experiential learning assisted by visual media in improving the beginning reading skills of second-grade elementary school students. Scientifically, this research contributes to the development of literacy pedagogy by integrating experiential learning theory with visual media in beginning reading instruction, thereby extending previous studies that have tended to examine these approaches separately. Practically, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for elementary school teachers in designing more interactive and meaningful literacy learning environments that effectively support students' early reading development.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design. The mixed methods approach was selected because improving beginning reading skills requires not only quantitative evidence of students' learning achievement but also qualitative understanding of classroom interactions, student engagement, and teacher performance during the instructional process. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of experiential learning assisted by visual media.

The Classroom Action Research was conducted collaboratively between the researcher and the classroom teacher following the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart, consisting of four cyclical stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The study was implemented in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two instructional meetings.

During the planning stage, lesson plans based on experiential learning principles were prepared, visual media were developed, observation sheets and reading tests were validated, and learning scenarios were designed. In the action stage, experiential learning activities assisted by visual media were implemented in the classroom. Students were encouraged to interact directly with pictures, flashcards, and contextual learning materials while practicing beginning reading skills through concrete learning experiences.

The observation stage involved systematic recording of teacher performance and student participation using structured observation sheets completed by collaborating observers. Quantitative data regarding students' reading achievement were collected through reading tests administered at the end of each cycle. Finally, during the reflection stage, the researcher and collaborator analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional process, identified obstacles encountered during implementation, and developed improvements for the subsequent cycle. This cyclical process ensured continuous refinement of instructional practices until the predetermined success criteria were achieved.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at SDN 12 Betung, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra Province, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year (July–September 2025). The school was selected because it represents the researcher’s teaching environment, allowing continuous observation and implementation of classroom action research.

The participants consisted of 28 second-grade students, comprising 15 boys and 13 girls, aged 7–8 years. The participants were selected through total sampling because all students in the class experienced varying levels of beginning reading difficulties. Preliminary observations indicated that many students had difficulty recognizing letters, decoding syllables, reading simple words fluently, and understanding short reading passages. These characteristics made the class appropriate for implementing interventions aimed at improving beginning reading skills.

Mixed Methods Rationale and Data Integration

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously during each research cycle, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation.

Quantitative data were obtained from beginning reading tests to measure improvements in students’ reading achievement, whereas qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and documentation to describe student engagement, teacher instructional practices, and classroom dynamics during experiential learning activities.

Data integration occurred through triangulation and comparison of findings. Improvements in quantitative test scores were interpreted alongside qualitative evidence regarding student participation and instructional implementation, allowing comprehensive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning assisted by visual media. Data Collection Techniques. Three data collection techniques were employed.

Observation

Observation was conducted using direct participatory observation during classroom learning activities. Structured observation sheets were used to record teacher performance and student participation.

The observation aimed to:

1. evaluate students’ engagement during beginning reading activities;
2. assess the implementation of experiential learning assisted by visual media;
3. identify classroom interactions and learning dynamics throughout the intervention.

Teacher activities and student activities were assessed using observation indicators developed according to the stages of experiential learning.

Reading Test

Reading achievement was measured using beginning reading tests administered before the intervention (pre-test) and at the end of each action cycle (post-test).

The test assessed several indicators:

1. letter recognition;
2. syllable decoding;
3. word reading accuracy;
4. sentence reading fluency; and
5. comprehension of simple reading texts.

Several test items were adapted to the visual learning media used during instruction to ensure alignment between learning activities and assessment.

Documentation

Documentation was used to support observational findings through photographs, lesson plans, students’ worksheets, attendance records, and field notes documenting classroom implementation. These documents served as complementary evidence for evaluating the learning process.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data from beginning reading tests were analyzed descriptively by calculating students’ average scores and learning mastery percentages. The classroom action was considered

successful when at least 85% of students achieved the Minimum Learning Achievement Criteria (KKTP) and the class average showed improvement in each cycle.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from observations and documentation were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of:

1. Data reduction, by selecting relevant information related to experiential learning implementation and beginning reading activities;
2. Data display, by organizing observational findings into descriptive narratives and tables; and
3. Conclusion drawing and verification, by identifying patterns and validating findings across research cycles.

Data Triangulation

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed method triangulation and source triangulation. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing findings obtained from observation, reading tests, and documentation. Source triangulation was performed by comparing information obtained from students, classroom teachers, collaborating observers, and classroom documentation.

The integration of quantitative improvements in reading scores with qualitative evidence regarding classroom engagement and instructional implementation strengthened the validity of the conclusions regarding the effectiveness of experiential learning assisted by visual media in improving beginning reading skills.

3. RESULTS

Pre-Cycle Results

A pre-cycle assessment was conducted to identify students' initial beginning reading abilities before implementing the classroom action. The assessment measured students' performance in letter recognition, word pronunciation, reading fluency, intonation, and comprehension of simple texts. The results served as baseline data for evaluating the effectiveness of experiential learning assisted by visual media in subsequent action cycles.

Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Cycle Reading Achievement

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' beginning reading achievement during the pre-cycle stage.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Cycle Beginning Reading Skills

Variable	Value
Number of students	30
Mean score	(insert mean score)
Median	(insert median)
Standard deviation	(insert SD)
Highest score	80
Lowest score	15 (<i>or actual score</i>)
Learning mastery (KKTP \geq 70)	16 students (53.3%)
Not yet achieving mastery	14 students (46.7%)

The descriptive statistics indicate that students' beginning reading performance was still relatively low and heterogeneous. The mean and median scores suggest that the overall reading ability had not yet reached the expected level of mastery, while the standard deviation reflects considerable variation among students' reading competencies. This finding demonstrates that students entered the intervention with diverse literacy abilities, requiring differentiated instructional support.

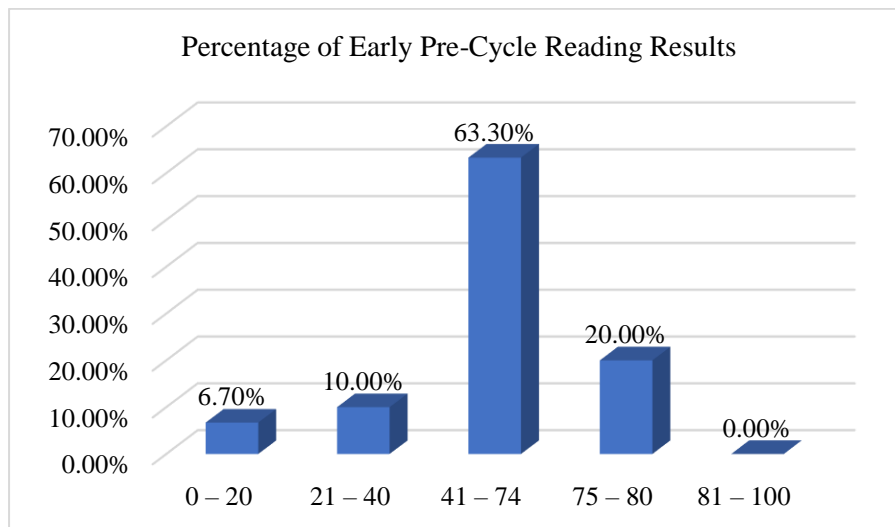
Distribution of Beginning Reading Ability

The frequency distribution of students' beginning reading ability is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Beginning Reading Ability in the Pre-Cycle Stage

Score Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
81–100	Excellent	0	0.0%
75–80	Good	6	20.0%

41–74	Fair	19	63.3%
21–40	Poor	3	10.0%
0–20	Very Poor	2	6.7%

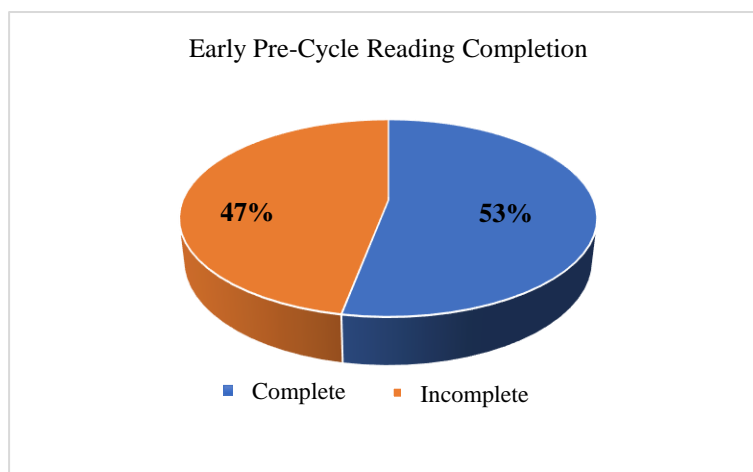


The results indicate that the majority of students (63.3%) were classified in the fair category. These students demonstrated basic abilities in recognizing letters and reading simple words but still experienced difficulties in reading fluently and understanding text meaning. Although they possessed foundational decoding skills, their reading performance remained inconsistent and required further instructional support.

Only six students (20.0%) achieved the good category, indicating relatively fluent reading performance with only occasional pronunciation or intonation errors. These students demonstrated greater confidence during oral reading activities and were generally able to comprehend simple texts.

Conversely, five students (16.7%) were categorized as poor or very poor readers. They experienced substantial difficulties in recognizing letters, decoding syllables, pronouncing words correctly, and maintaining reading fluency. Frequent hesitation, mispronunciation, and inappropriate intonation were commonly observed, suggesting the need for intensive instructional intervention.

Notably, none of the students reached the excellent category, indicating that no participant had fully mastered all beginning reading competencies expected at the second-grade level.



Learning Mastery Analysis

Based on the predetermined Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP) of 70, only 16 out of 30 students (53.3%) achieved mastery, while 14 students (46.7%) failed to meet the expected standard. These findings indicate that nearly half of the students still demonstrated inadequate beginning reading skills, particularly in pronunciation, fluency, and reading accuracy.

The relatively low mastery level suggests that the conventional instructional practices previously implemented were insufficient to address students' literacy needs. Classroom observations revealed that learning activities were predominantly teacher-centered and relied mainly on lecturing and shared reading without integrating interactive visual media or meaningful experiential learning activities. Consequently, students had limited opportunities to actively construct reading skills through authentic learning experiences.

Data Visualization

To facilitate interpretation of the pre-cycle findings, the distribution of students across reading ability categories and learning mastery levels should be presented using bar charts rather than pie charts. A bar chart enables clearer comparison among ability categories and provides a more effective visualization of changes across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II.

Furthermore, comparative graphs illustrating the progression of mean scores, mastery percentages, and category distributions across research cycles will enable readers to observe the effectiveness of the intervention more comprehensively.

Reflection of the Pre-Cycle

The pre-cycle findings demonstrate that students' beginning reading skills remained below the expected learning outcomes, with substantial variation in reading ability across participants. The absence of students in the excellent category and the relatively low mastery percentage indicate that instructional improvement was necessary.

These baseline findings provided the rationale for implementing experiential learning assisted by visual media in Cycle I. The intervention was designed to create a more student-centered learning environment through direct experiences and visual support, thereby improving letter recognition, pronunciation accuracy, reading fluency, and overall beginning reading competence. The effectiveness of this intervention is evaluated by comparing students' achievement, learning mastery, and reading ability categories across Cycle I and Cycle II, including percentage increases and gain scores obtained throughout the classroom action research process.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this classroom action research demonstrate that the implementation of experiential learning assisted by visual media effectively improved the beginning reading skills of second-grade students at SDN 12 Betung. The improvement was reflected not only in the increase in average reading scores but also in the percentage of students achieving the Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP). Classical mastery increased from 53.3% in the pre-cycle to 67.0% in Cycle I and further to 90.0% in Cycle II, while the mean score improved from the pre-cycle condition to 70.03 in Cycle I and 76.57 in Cycle II. These findings indicate that the intervention produced continuous and meaningful improvements throughout the action research process.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that learning occurs through a cyclical process consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. During the learning activities, students did not merely memorize letters and words but actively interacted with visual media, observed concrete objects, reflected on their reading experiences, and applied newly acquired knowledge through repeated reading practice. Such learning experiences enabled students to construct understanding more meaningfully than conventional teacher-centered instruction.

The findings also align with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with learning environments rather than passively received from teachers. The use of visual media provided contextual representations that facilitated letter recognition, word decoding, and comprehension, allowing students to connect abstract written symbols with meaningful experiences. Consequently, students demonstrated greater engagement, confidence, and motivation during reading activities.

The improvement observed in this study is consistent with previous research. Gading et al. (2019) reported that visual instructional media effectively enhance students' motivation and reading performance by providing concrete learning experiences. Likewise, Anggraini et al. (2022) found that

experiential learning creates a more interactive classroom environment that positively influences literacy development. Furthermore, international studies by Kolb and Kolb (2017) and Mayer (2021) suggest that combining experiential activities with visual representations promotes deeper cognitive processing and improves learning retention through multimodal engagement. However, unlike previous studies that primarily examined visual media or experiential learning independently, the present study demonstrates that integrating both approaches simultaneously produces complementary effects that substantially improve beginning reading performance.

Analysis of the assessment indicators reveals that voice clarity and reading confidence showed the most significant improvement across the research cycles. During the pre-cycle, many students hesitated when reading aloud and produced voices that were difficult to hear. Following the implementation of experiential learning activities supported by visual media, students became more willing to participate in oral reading and demonstrated increased confidence during classroom practice. Pronunciation and intonation also improved considerably because repeated exposure to visual stimuli helped students associate written symbols with correct sounds and expressions.

Although reading fluency also improved, this aspect developed more gradually than the others. Several students continued to experience hesitation when reading unfamiliar vocabulary and occasionally paused while decoding multisyllabic words. This finding suggests that reading fluency requires sustained practice and repeated exposure beyond the duration of the intervention. Therefore, while experiential learning effectively enhanced foundational reading competencies, continued instructional support remains necessary for students with persistent decoding difficulties.

Reflection after Cycle I identified several limitations in the implementation. Although students showed increased participation compared with the pre-cycle, some remained passive during learning activities and depended heavily on teacher guidance. Visual media had been introduced; however, learning activities were still relatively structured, providing limited opportunities for collaborative exploration and repeated reading practice. In addition, teachers observed that several low-achieving students required more individualized assistance to maintain attention and correctly pronounce words.

Based on these reflections, several improvements were implemented in Cycle II. Learning activities became more interactive by increasing students' opportunities to manipulate visual media directly, participate in collaborative reading tasks, and engage in guided practice with immediate teacher feedback. Additional reinforcement was provided for students experiencing reading difficulties, while classroom activities encouraged peer interaction and repeated reading exercises. These modifications created a more supportive learning environment that accommodated differences in students' reading abilities and learning pace.

Table 3. Comparison of Beginning Reading Achievement Across Research Cycles

Indicator	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement (Pre-C1)	Improvement (C1-C2)	Improvement (Pre-C2)
Number of students	30	30	30	–	–	–
Mean score	63.20*	70.03	76.57	+6.83	+6.54	+13.37
Standard deviation	(calculate)	(calculate)	(calculate)	–	–	–
Highest score	80	85	92	+5	+7	+12
Lowest score	20	20	21	0	+1	+1
Classical mastery (%)	53.3%	67.0%	90.0%	+13.7%	+23.0%	+36.7%
Students achieving KKTP	16	20	27	+4	+7	+11
Students not achieving KKTP	14	10	3	–4	–7	–11
Normalized Gain (N-Gain)	–	0.19 (low)	0.36 (medium)	–	–	–

The comparison across research cycles demonstrates a consistent improvement in students' beginning reading achievement following the implementation of experiential learning assisted by visual media. The class mean increased from the pre-cycle condition to 70.03 in Cycle I and further improved to 76.57 in Cycle II. Similarly, classical learning mastery increased from 53.3% in the pre-cycle to 67.0% in Cycle I and reached 90.0% in Cycle II, exceeding the predetermined success criterion.

The overall improvement of 13.37 points in the class mean and the 36.7% increase in classical mastery indicate that the intervention produced a substantial positive effect on students' beginning reading skills. Based on the normalized gain analysis, the learning improvement reached the medium category, suggesting that experiential learning supported by visual media effectively enhanced students' literacy development through meaningful learning experiences and active classroom participation.

5. CONCLUSION

Banyuasin Regency with the title "Improving Beginning Reading Skills through Experience-Based Learning Using Visual Media in Grade II Students of SDN 12 Betung, Banyuasin Regency", several things can be concluded as follows.

1. Students' beginning reading skills significantly improved after implementing experiential learning using visual media. In the pre-cycle phase, the average student score was only 62.67 with a completion rate of 53%, increasing to 70.03 (67%) in cycle I, and reaching 76.57 (90%) in cycle II. This demonstrates that the interventions were effective in improving students' beginning reading skills.
2. Aspects of beginning reading skills such as pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and clarity gradually improve. Students become more able to pronounce words correctly, read with appropriate intonation, fluency, and confidence when reading in front of the class.
3. Experiential learning using visual media has been proven to increase student engagement in reading. Students are more enthusiastic and motivated because they learn through direct experience and engaging images that are relevant to everyday life.
4. The teacher's role as a facilitator is enhanced. Teachers are able to effectively manage learning, use media creatively, and provide motivation and positive reinforcement to students. This creates an interactive and enjoyable learning environment.
5. Thus, the application of an experiential learning model combined with visual media can significantly improve students' initial reading skills, both in terms of learning outcomes, attitudes, and learning motivation.

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