

## Improving Early Reading Skills Using Illustrated Syllable Cards among First-Grade Students

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### Abstract

Initial reading skills are basic skills that must be mastered by elementary school students because they are the foundation for acquiring knowledge at the next level of learning. The results of initial observations in grade I of SDN 110 Saele, East Luwu Regency show that students' initial reading ability is still low, characterized by difficulty recognizing letters, pronouncing syllables, and stringing syllables into simple words. This research aims to improve students' initial reading ability through the use of illustrated syllable card media. The research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) method with the Kemmis and McTaggart models which is carried out in two cycles, each including the stages of planning, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection. The research subjects were 18 students in grade I of SDN 110 Saele. The data collection technique was carried out through observation and initial reading tests, while the data was analyzed descriptively quantitatively. The results of the study show that the use of illustrated syllable card media is able to improve students' initial reading ability as shown by increasing student activity during learning, better learning implementation, and increasing the completeness of learning outcomes to achieve the set success indicators. Thus, the medium of illustrated syllable cards is effectively used as an alternative learning medium to improve the initial reading ability of elementary school grade I students.

### Keywords

Grade 4 Action Research; Illustrated Syllable Card; Initial Reading Ability; Learning Media



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## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the language skills that has an important role in supporting the success of the learning process in elementary school. Reading skills are not only related to the recognition of language symbols, but also involve the ability to understand, interpret, and process the information contained in a reading. Therefore, reading is the main foundation in the development of thinking skills, expansion of insights, and mastery of knowledge in various fields of learning. Pramayshela et al. (2023) stated that reading is a language skill that must be mastered by every individual because it plays a role in enriching experience, improving reasoning skills, and being a provision for the development of science and technology. In line

with this opinion, Suparlan (2021) explained that reading is a complex activity that involves visual processes, thinking, language understanding, and the ability to interpret the meaning of written symbols.

Reading skills need to be developed from the elementary school level through early reading learning. Beginning reading is the initial stage that emphasizes the mastery of letters, sounds, syllables, words, and simple sentences as the basis for understanding more complex readings. At this stage, students are required to be able to recognize language symbols, connect letters with their sounds, then combine letters into meaningful syllables and words (Suleman et al., 2021). According to Dalman (Sari et al., 2022), the mastery of early reading is the basis for students' success in participating in learning at the next level. Therefore, initial reading skills must be mastered from the lowest grade so that students do not have difficulties in understanding learning materials in various subjects (Nuraeni et al., 2025).

Facts in the field show that students' initial reading ability is still a problem at the elementary school level. Based on the results of initial observations carried out on October 14, 2025 in grade I of SDN 110 Saele, East Luwu Regency, it was found that most students were not able to recognize letters well, pronounce syllables correctly, and string letters into simple words. The results of interviews with classroom teachers showed that out of 18 students, 11 students were still having difficulty reading at the beginning, while only 7 students were able to read according to the Learning Goal Achievement Criteria (KKTP). This condition shows that students' initial reading ability still needs improvement efforts through the use of learning media that are able to increase students' motivation and involvement in the learning process.

One alternative that can be used to overcome this problem is the medium of illustrated syllable cards. This media combines visual elements in the form of images with syllables to help students recognize the relationship between symbols, sounds, and meanings in a more concrete way. Pagarra et al. (2022) explained that learning media is a means that functions as an intermediary in the delivery of information so that the learning process becomes more effective. This opinion is strengthened by Nurfadhillah (2021) who states that learning media helps teachers convey material in a more interesting and easy-to-understand way for students. Meanwhile, Tanjung and Anas (2023) stated that syllable cards are learning media that contain pieces of letters or syllables used to practice reading skills, while Soro and Awe (2025) emphasized that picture word cards are able to help students recognize vocabulary, strengthen memory, and improve language skills through a more interactive learning experience.

The use of illustrated syllable card media is also supported by the theories of behaviorism and constructivism. According to B.F. Skinner's theory of behaviorism, learning is the result of a relationship between stimulus and response that is strengthened through practice and reinforcement (Wedanthi et al., 2025). In this study, the illustrated syllable card functions as a visual stimulus that encourages students to respond in the form of reading syllables correctly. On the other hand, J. Piaget's constructivist theory explains that elementary school students are at a concrete operational stage so that learning will be more meaningful if they use media that can be observed directly (Nerita et al., 2023). Therefore, the use of picture syllable cards allows

students to build reading comprehension through a concrete and fun learning experience.

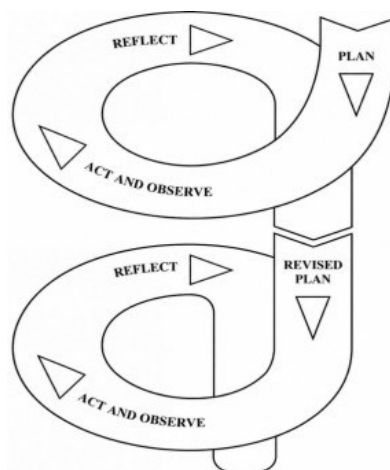
The effectiveness of illustrated syllable card media has been proven by several previous studies. Nenu et al. (2025) reported that the use of illustrated syllable card media was able to increase the initial reading ability of grade II students of the Wolomeli SDK from 38% in the first cycle to 71% in the second cycle. Research by Soro and Awe (2025) also showed an increase in the average reading ability of students from 54.5% to 76.5% after the application of picture word card media. In addition, Siregar (2024) found that the illustrated syllable card media was effective in improving early childhood reading skills with a completeness rate of 94.73%. The results of the study show that the medium of illustrated syllable cards has great potential to improve initial reading ability, although its application still needs to be studied in different student characteristics and school environments.

Based on this description, this study aims to improve the initial reading ability of grade I students of SDN 110 Saele, East Luwu Regency through the use of illustrated syllable card media. This research is expected to provide an effective alternative learning media in improving initial reading skills, enrich the study of the use of visual media in Indonesian language learning in elementary schools, and contribute to teachers in creating more active, interesting, and meaningful reading learning.

## METHODS

This study uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach which aims to improve the learning process while improving students' initial reading skills through the use of illustrated syllable card media. PTK was chosen because it provides opportunities for teachers and researchers to make continuous learning improvements through systematically designed actions (Azizah, 2021).

The research was carried out in grade I of SDN 110 Saele, Burau District, East Luwu Regency, in the even semester of the 2025/2026 Academic Year with 18 research subjects consisting of 7 male students and 11 female students. The research design refers to the Kemmis and McTaggart model which consists of four stages, namely *planning, acting, observing, and reflecting*, which are carried out in two cycles until success indicators are achieved. Data collection techniques include observation and tests. Observation was used to obtain data on the implementation of learning and student activities during the learning process, while tests were used to measure students' initial reading ability after the application of illustrated syllable card media. The research instruments are in the form of observation sheets on learning implementation, observation sheets on student activities, and initial reading tests. The data was analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis by calculating the percentage of learning implementation, student activities, and completeness of initial reading ability in each cycle. The study was declared successful if at least 75% of students achieved the Learning Goal Achievement Criteria (KKTP) with a score of  $\geq 75$ , thus showing that the use of illustrated syllable card media was able to improve students' initial reading skills.



**Figure 1.** Model Kemmis and Mc. Taggart  
 Source: Arikunto (Tyas et al., 2024)

The research framework begins with the identification of problems in the form of low initial reading ability of grade I students of SDN 110 Saele. These problems are followed up through the application of illustrated syllable card media as an action to improve learning. The implementation of actions is carried out following the PTK cycle which includes the planning stage, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection. The results of reflection in each cycle are used as a basis for refining actions in the next cycle until an improvement in students' initial reading ability is obtained according to the indicators of research success. The research framework can be presented in the form of a concept map or research flow diagram as shown in figure 1 above

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This research was carried out in grade I of SDN 110 Saele, East Luwu Regency with 18 research subjects consisting of 7 male students and 11 female students. The research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) model which is carried out in two cycles. Each cycle includes the stages of planning, implementation of actions, observation, and reflection. Research data was obtained through observation of learning implementation, observation of student activities, and initial reading ability tests.

The results of initial observations show that students' initial reading ability is still relatively low. Of the 18 students, only 7 students (39%) have achieved the Learning Goal Achievement Criteria (KKTP), while 11 students (61%) have not achieved completeness. This condition shows the need for the application of more interesting and interactive learning media to improve students' initial reading skills.

**Table 1.** Pre-Action Students' Initial Reading Ability Results

Yes	Remarks	Frequency	Percentage%
1	Students achieve KKTP	7	39
2	Students have not reached KKTP	11	61
	Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary data after acquisition (2026).

The distribution of students' initial reading ability in the pre-action stage shows that most students are still in the categories of sufficient, lacking, and very poor. This condition indicates that students still have difficulty in recognizing letters, reading syllables, and stringing simple words.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Pre-Action Students' Initial Reading Ability

Value Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
85-100	Excellent	0	0
75-84	Good	7	39
55-74	Pretty Good	5	28
46-54	Not Good	5	28
0-45	Very Less	1	5
	Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary Data after processing (2026)

Based on these results, the learning action using illustrated syllable card media was then applied in Cycle I and continued to Cycle II as an effort to improve students' initial reading skills. The results of each cycle showed an increase in learning activities, learning implementation, and completeness of initial reading skills to achieve research success indicators.

### Results of Cycle I

The implementation of actions in Cycle I showed an increase in initial reading ability compared to pre-action conditions. The average score of students' initial reading ability reached 66, but the success indicators of the research have not been met because only 9 out of 18 students (50%) have achieved the Learning Goal Achievement Criteria (KKTP), while the other 9 students (50%) have not achieved completeness. Therefore, the action was continued in Cycle II by making improvements based on the results of reflection.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Initial Reading Ability of Cycle I Students

Value Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
85-100	Excellent	1	6
75-84	Good	8	44
55-74	Pretty Good	4	22
46-54	Not Good	4	22
0-45	Very Less	1	6
	Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary Data after processing (2026)

**Table 4.** Percentage of Reading Ability Completion at the Beginning of Cycle I

Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Finished $\geq 75$	9	50
Incomplete $< 75$	9	50
Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary data after processing (2026)

In addition to the test results, the implementation of learning and student activities also increased during Cycle I. The average learning implementation reached 71% with the Good category, while the average student activity reached 71% with the Active category. However, these results have not met the success indicators, so corrective actions are needed in the next cycle.

**Table 5.** Recapitulation of Observation Results of Cycle I

Aspects	Average	Category
Implementation of Learning	71	Good
Student Activities	71	Active

Source: Primary data after processing (2026)

## Results of Cycle II

The improvement of learning carried out in Cycle II provides more optimal results. The average initial reading ability increased to 76 with the High category. A total of 14 students (78%) have achieved KKTP, while 4 students (22%) have not achieved completeness. Thus, the success indicators of the study have been achieved because more than 75% of students obtained a minimum score of 75.

**Table 6.** Distribution of Reading Ability for Beginning Cycle II Students

Value Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
85-100	Excellent	5	28
75-84	Good	9	50
55-74	Pretty Good	3	17
46-54	Not Good	1	5
0-45	Very Less	0	0
	Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary Data after processing (2026)

**Table 7.** Percentage of Reading Ability Completion at the Beginning of Cycle II

Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Finished $\geq 75$	14	78
Incomplete $< 75$	4	22
Quantity	18	100

Source: Primary data after processing (2026)

The results of the observation show that the quality of learning has also improved. The average learning implementation reached 82% with the Very Good category, while the average student activity reached 82% with the Very Active category. This increase shows that the use of illustrated syllable card media is able to create more interactive learning so that students are more active in following the reading learning process.

**Table 8.** Recapitulation of Observation Results of Cycle II

Aspects	Average	Category
Implementation of Learning	82	Good
Student Activities	82	Active

Source: Primary data after processing (2026)

Overall, the results of the study showed an increase in students' initial reading skills from the pre-action stage to Cycle II. The percentage of learning completeness increased from 39% in pre-action to 50% in Cycle I, then increased again to 78% in Cycle II. These results show that the use of illustrated syllable card media is effective in improving the initial reading ability of grade I students of SDN 110 Saele.

### **Discussion**

The results of the study showed that the use of illustrated syllable card media was able to improve the initial reading ability of grade I students of SDN 110 Saele. The increase can be seen from the percentage of student learning completeness that has gradually increased, namely from 39% in pre-action to 50% in Cycle I, then increased to 78% in Cycle II. In addition, the implementation of student learning and activities has also increased from the Good category in Cycle I to Very Good in Cycle II. These findings show that the media of illustrated syllables not only has an impact on improving learning outcomes, but is also able to create a more active, fun, and student-centered learning process. The improvement in initial reading skills occurred because the illustrated syllable card media presented learning material in a concrete manner through a combination of pictures and syllables. Visual presentation of the material makes it easier for students to recognize the relationship between letters, sounds, syllables, and meanings so that the reading process becomes easier to understand. This condition is in line with the opinion of Pagarra et al. (2022) who stated that learning media functions as an intermediary in conveying information so that the learning process becomes more effective. This opinion is strengthened by Nurfadhillah (2021) who explains that the use of learning media can increase students' attention, motivation, and understanding of the material learned.

The results of this study also support the theory of behaviorism put forward by B.F. Skinner. In this theory, learning is seen as a behavioral change that occurs through a relationship between stimulus and response that is reinforced by repetitive practice (Wedanthi et al., 2025). In this study, the illustrated syllable card functions as a stimulus that encourages students to recognize letters, pronounce sounds, read syllables, and string words repeatedly. Exercises carried out continuously during the action process strengthen students' reading skills so that there is an increase in learning outcomes in each cycle.

In addition, the findings of this study are also in accordance with the theory of constructivism put forward by Jean Piaget. According to Nerita et al. (2023), elementary school students are at the concrete operational stage so that it is easier to understand concepts if learning uses media that can be observed directly. The medium of illustrated syllable cards provides a concrete learning experience through images that are close to students' lives. This experience helps students build an independent understanding of the relationship between language symbols and meanings so that their initial reading skills develop more optimally.

The increase in student activity during the learning process shows that the use of illustrated syllable card media is able to create more interactive learning. Students become more courageous to read in front of the class, actively compile syllable cards into meaningful

words, and enthusiastically participate in learning activities. Increased learning activities have a positive influence on initial reading skills as students gain more opportunities to practice reading in person. Thus, the use of interesting learning media can increase student involvement while improving the quality of the Indonesian language learning process in low grades.

The results of this study are in line with the research of Nenu et al. (2025) which reported that the use of illustrated syllable card media was able to increase the initial reading ability of grade II students of SDK Wolomeli from 38% in Cycle I to 71% in Cycle II. The similarity between the two studies lies in the use of illustrated syllable card media as an alternative to early reading learning which has been proven to increase student learning completeness through actions carried out in stages.

The findings of this study also strengthen the results of Soro and Awe's (2025) research which showed that the illustrated word card media was able to increase the average reading ability of students from 54.5% to 76.5%. Although the location of the study and the characteristics of the subjects differed, both studies showed that the medium based on picture cards provides an engaging learning experience so that students can more easily recognize vocabulary and improve reading fluency.

In addition, the results of this study are relevant to the research of Siregar (2024) which concluded that the use of illustrated syllable cards is effective in improving early childhood reading ability with a completeness rate of 94.73%. The difference in the percentage of completeness between this study and Siregar's (2024) research is influenced by differences in student characteristics, education levels, and learning conditions. However, both studies prove that the medium of illustrated syllable cards is an effective medium in helping students recognize letters, read syllables, and understand words gradually.

Based on the overall results of the study, it can be stated that the use of illustrated syllable card media has a positive impact on improving students' initial reading skills. This media is able to improve learning outcomes, student activities, and overall learning quality. Therefore, the media of illustrated syllable cards can be used as an alternative to learning Indonesian in elementary school elementary grades, especially in improving students' initial reading skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to improve the initial reading ability of grade I students of SDN 110 Saele, East Luwu Regency through the use of illustrated syllable card media. The results of the study show that the application of illustrated syllable card media is effective in improving students' initial reading skills. This increase is shown by the increase in the number of students who achieve the Learning Goal Achievement Criteria (KKTP), the increase in student learning activities, and the better implementation of learning in each cycle. These findings show that the use of media that combines visual and text elements can help students recognize letters, read syllables, string words, and understand simple reading more easily and fun. Thus, the

media of illustrated syllable cards can be used as an alternative media for learning Bahasa Indonesia, especially in the beginning of reading learning in the lower grade of elementary school.

Although this study showed positive results, the study was still limited to one class with a relatively small number of subjects and was carried out in two learning cycles. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the effectiveness of illustrated syllable card media at different levels, student characteristics, and school contexts, and combine it with innovative learning models or digital media to obtain more comprehensive information about improving initial reading ability. Further research can also examine the influence of illustrated syllable card media on other aspects of language skills, such as initial writing skills, vocabulary mastery, and reading comprehension, so as to make a broader contribution to the development of Indonesian language learning in elementary schools.

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