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Efforts to Improve Reading Literacy and Comprehension of Fourth Grade Students Through the Implementation of an Active Learning Approach Based on the Context of Daily Life in an Inclusive Elementary School

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Abstract

The background of this research is motivated by the phenomenon that reading comprehension ability remains one of the main challenges in education, particularly within inclusive school environments that accommodate students with diverse backgrounds, abilities, alongside learning needs. Many students, both those with special needs and those without, are only capable of reading texts orally without understanding the meaning, content, or messages contained within them. This problem is further compounded by the utilization of learning methods that tend to be conventional, teacher-centered, alongside instructional materials that are frequently detached from students real-world experiences and surroundings, which results in learning that feels abstract, boring, and difficult to comprehend. The method used in this study was Classroom Action Research conducted in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. The research subjects were fourth-grade students consisting of various characteristics and abilities, including students with special needs. Data were collected through observation, reading comprehension tests, interviews, alongside documentation techniques, which were subsequently analyzed using qualitative and quantitative descriptive approaches. An active learning approach based on daily life contexts was implemented by connecting reading materials with students personal experiences, living environments, daily activities, as well as problems they frequently encounter. Learning activities were designed so that students were actively involved through group discussions, direct observations, educational games, and real-world problem solving, so that reading is no longer merely spelling words, but

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rather a process of searching for meaning and understanding information. The results of the study indicate a significant increase in students reading comprehension literacy skills after the implementation of this approach. In the initial cycle, most students are only able to answer simple questions whose answers are explicitly written in the text. However, in the final cycle, students are capable of identifying main ideas, summarizing reading content, connecting text content with prior knowledge, alongside responding to reading content with their own opinions. Students also appear more enthusiastic, confident, and courageous in expressing opinions, including students with special needs who previously tended to be passive. This approach proves effective because it makes reading materials relevant, meaningful, and easy to understand, while simultaneously accommodating the differing learning styles and abilities of each student in accordance with the principles of inclusive education. The conclusion of this study is that an active learning approach based on daily life contexts is an appropriate as well as effective strategy to improve the quality of reading comprehension learning in inclusive elementary schools. This approach not only improves students academic abilities, but also develops critical thinking skills, communication, and curiosity. This study suggests that teachers should more frequently integrate real contexts into learning, as well as develop varied and contextual teaching materials to support the success of literacy learning for all students without exception.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension Literacy, Elementary School, Active Learning Approach

INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy ability is a fundamentally important basic competency in education, specifically at the elementary school level. This ability is not merely limited to recognizing letters or words, but encompasses deep comprehension, critical evaluation, alongside the capacity to apply information from texts in daily life (UNESCO, 2021). Strong reading literacy serves as an educational quality indicator and a foundation for developing 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication abilities (OECD, 2019). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) international survey results consistently indicate that Indonesian students' reading literacy abilities remain below the global average, specifically concerning text comprehension, information deduction, as well as connecting reading content with daily experiences (OECD, 2019; Kemendikbud, 2020).

Riani et al. (2021) explain that reading comprehension is a complex process involving

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interaction between the reader and the text. This aligns with the interactive model of reading proposed by Rumelhart (1977), which elaborates that readers are not passive information receivers, but rather actively utilize their possessed knowledge and experiences to comprehend the main ideas of the reading material. Sri Wahyuni and Rini Sartini (2019) detail that reading ability consists of interrelated elements: recognizing letters and words, comprehending meaning, capturing explicit and implicit information, as well as critically interpreting reading content. Pressley (2006) asserts that reading comprehension is an active process involving cognitive and metacognitive strategies, where readers draw conclusions, monitor their own understanding, and evaluate reading content.

Low reading literacy is frequently caused by the implementation of passive learning methods, such as the dominance of lectures and exercise questions. According to Johnson (2017), passive learning methods result in limited active student involvement within the learning process. Difficulties in reading comprehension from an early age can lead to long-term academic difficulties and decrease learning motivation (Slavin, 2014). In inclusive elementary schools, the implementation of appropriate approaches becomes increasingly critical but also requires adjustments. Teachers must be capable of designing learning strategies that can fulfill the diverse needs of students, including those with special needs (Ainscow, 2016). Difficulties in fluent word recognition, frequently experienced by students with special needs, directly impact low reading fluency and reading comprehension (Snow et al., 1998).

Constructivist Learning Theory (Bransford et al., 2000) posits that students actively construct their own knowledge based on prior experiences and possessed knowledge. Active learning encourages direct student involvement, thereby forming stronger comprehension (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Furthermore, the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach (Johnson, 2017) suggests that learning becomes more meaningful if connected to real situations in students' lives, subsequently increasing motivation and ease of material comprehension.

Research by Sari (2023) proves the effectiveness of the active approach, yet has not specifically combined it with daily life contexts. Research by Wijaya (2022) indicates that connecting reading materials with real experiences increases motivation and comprehension. Research by Rahman (2021) reveals that combining active approaches and the use of real contexts can overcome learning barriers for students with special needs, such as difficulties concentrating and understanding abstract words. Based on the aforementioned studies, research specifically combining both approaches to address reading difficulties in inclusive fourth-grade elementary school classrooms remains limited. Therefore, this research focuses on efforts to overcome

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reading difficulties and improve the reading comprehension literacy of fourth-grade students in an inclusive elementary school through the implementation of an active learning approach based on daily life contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which is a reflective research process conducted by teachers to solve problems and improve learning quality. The research was systematically planned and executed over a period of three months, from January to March 2026, comprising two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The intervention was implemented through a Project-Based Learning approach based on daily life contexts, designed to encourage active student involvement, develop deep material comprehension, and connect it meaningfully to real situations. Each cycle consisted of two meetings that facilitated students in building reading comprehension through project stages, such as problem identification, contextual reading activities, and summarizing findings.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 003 Mentarang Hulu, located in Lung Semamu Village, Mentarang Hulu Subdistrict, Malinau Regency, North Kalimantan. The subjects of this study were eight fourth-grade students, comprising three males and five females. Within this group, three students with learning barriers were specifically identified as experiencing difficulties in reading comprehension.

Data collection techniques employed in this research included observation, testing, and documentation. Observations were conducted by the researcher, acting as the teacher, using observation sheets with a checklist assessment to record students' reading comprehension progress during the learning activities. Tests were administered before and after the intervention to measure reading comprehension abilities, while documentation served as complementary evidence to support the observation and test data.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive and quantitative descriptive techniques. Observational data regarding student behavior during the learning process were scored and analyzed using percentages. Furthermore, numerical data from the reading comprehension tests were analyzed to determine the achievement scores, and the N-Gain was calculated to measure the improvement. The N-Gain results were interpreted into high (> 0.7), medium (0.3 < N-Gain < 0.7), or low (< 0.3) categories. The learning activities were declared successful if there was an 85% change at the end of each cycle, indicated by an improvement in

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students' reading comprehension abilities.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Results

The pre-cycle activities were conducted before implementing the intervention to obtain initial data regarding reading comprehension abilities and a general overview of the learning process at SD Negeri 003 Mentarang Hulu. The learning process was dominated by one-way lecture methods and written assignments. Reading materials were general, theoretical, and unconnected to the surrounding environment or students' real daily experiences. The classroom atmosphere tended to be passive and teacher-centered; students rarely asked questions, expressed opinions, or responded to teacher questions, and they appeared easily bored and lacked enthusiasm. Three students experienced severe difficulties, indicated by their inability to find main information from the text, draw conclusions, and connect text content with personal experiences. The average reading comprehension score was 42.5, which falls into the Poor category, with a learning completeness percentage of only 12.5%, representing just one student meeting the criteria.

Cycle I was planned based on these initial findings, utilizing the theme "Saving Energy at School" because the concept is close to the students' environment, easily observable, and highly relevant to their daily lives. The learning activities included direct observation of energy use at school (lights, fans, water, and electricity), group reading, discussing the text content, and compiling simple reports on energy-saving methods. The teacher circulated to provide general guidance but did not provide in-depth individual mentoring. Student active participation reached 65%, demonstrating a significant increase compared to initial conditions. However, two students remained passive and lacked active participation in group discussions. The reading comprehension test administered at the end of the cycle resulted in an average score of 68.75 (Fair category), with a learning completeness percentage of 62.5% and an N-Gain of 0.47 (medium category). Students began to find explicit main information, but their ability to draw conclusions and connect text content to personal experiences was not fully optimal, particularly for students with special needs who struggled with long sentences and uncommon terms.

Table 1. Data on Scores and Completeness – Cycle I

No	Student Name	Score	Remarks
1	L	55	Incomplete

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2	S	60	Incomplete
3	M	65	Incomplete
4	R	70	Complete
5	P	72	Complete
6	G	58	Incomplete
7	H	63	Incomplete
8	J	75	Complete

The Cycle I actions did not fully meet the success criteria due to several identified weaknesses: reading texts had not been specifically adjusted for students with special needs, time allocated for discussions and Q&A was limited, and group divisions were not fully heterogeneous, preventing optimal peer assistance.

Cycle II implemented improvements based on these reflections using a new theme, "Maintaining Cleanliness of Home and School Environments". The teacher provided two versions of reading texts: a standard version for general students and a simplified version utilizing short sentences for students with special needs. Heterogeneous groups were formed to foster peer tutoring, an additional 15 minutes were allocated for Q&A and individual mentoring, and structured worksheets guiding the reading and comprehension steps were utilized. During the core activities, students were also asked to share personal experiences regarding maintaining cleanliness. Observation results showed student active participation increased sharply to 90%. Nearly all students actively engaged, independently found important information, formulated simple conclusions, and linked the reading contents to their daily experiences.

Table 2. Data on Scores and Completeness – Cycle II

No	Student Name	Score	Remarks
1	L	85	Complete
2	S	80	Complete
3	M	78	Complete
4	R	90	Complete
5	P	88	Complete
6	G	92	Complete
7	H	85	Complete
8	J	92	Complete

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The average score reached 86.25 (Very Good category), achieving 100% learning completeness with an N-Gain increase of 0.76 (high category). All success indicators were achieved and surpassed, leading to the conclusion of the research at Cycle II.

Table 3. Recapitulation of Individual Student Scores

No	Student Name	Pre-Cycle Score	Cycle I Score	Cycle II Score	Total Increase
1	L	40	55	85	45
2	S	45	60	80	35
3	M	42	65	75	36
4	R	50	70	90	40
5	P	48	72	88	40
6	G	35	58	92	57
7	H	38	63	85	47
8	J	42	75	92	50
Average		**42.5**	**68.75**	**86.25**	**43.75**

DISCUSSIONS

The highly significant increase from an average score of 42.5 in the pre-cycle to 68.75 in Cycle I and reaching 86.25 in Cycle II, along with classical completeness rising from 12.5% to 100%, empirically proves that the implementation of an active learning approach based on daily life contexts effectively overcomes reading difficulties and improves reading comprehension literacy among fourth-grade students in an inclusive elementary school.

These research results directly align with the constructivism theory proposed by Bransford et al. (2000), which states that students comprehend material more easily when actively building knowledge based on real experiences. This also corresponds with Johnson's (2017) perspective that learning relevant to daily life is more meaningful and long-lasting compared to mere lecture methods.

In the inclusive education context, material adjustments and peer tutoring proved to reduce learning barriers for students with special needs. This finding supports Rahman's (2021) research and Ainscow's (2016) principles, stating that social interactions and peer support facilitate material comprehension for students requiring special handling.

Beyond cognitive aspects, this approach increased students' motivation and courage to express opinions, corresponding with the views of Wijaya and Sari (2022). This dynamic supports

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Rumelhart's (1977) interactive reading model, wherein comprehension is formed through the interaction between the text and the knowledge and experiences possessed by the students.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of an active learning approach based on daily life contexts was carried out through the stages of planning, execution, observation, and reflection across two cycles. The learning process was conducted by presenting reading materials relevant to the students' environment, activating prior knowledge, and involving students in discussion, observation, and problem-solving activities. This approach proved effective for application in inclusive classrooms by adjusting learning materials and methods for students with special needs, which successfully overcame reading difficulties, improved reading comprehension literacy, and fostered learning interest and motivation for all students without exception.

Following this intervention, there was a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension abilities from the pre-action stage to the end of Cycle II. The students' average score increased from 42.5 to 86.25, and the classical completeness percentage rose from 12.5% to 100%. Furthermore, students became capable of pronouncing reading materials more fluently, finding main information, drawing conclusions, and actively connecting the reading contents with their daily experiences.

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