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# DEVELOPMENT OF A LETTER-TRACING LEARNING MEDIA TO IMPROVE THE BEGINNING READING SKILLS OF SECOND-GRADE STUDENTS

# PENGEMBANGAN MEDIA PEMBELAJARAN JEJAK HURUF UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KEMAMPUAN MEMBACA PERMULAAN SISWA

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**Abstract**

This study aims to develop a letter-tracing learning medium to improve the early reading skills of the second-grade students at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan. The study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach using the ADDIE model. Data were collected through observation, interviews, teacher- and student-response questionnaires, and validation sheets. The results of the study indicate that the developed letter-tracing learning media met the feasibility criteria, as evaluated by subject-matter and media experts. In terms of practicality, this media received positive feedback from both teachers and students, making it highly useful for instruction. Regarding effectiveness, letter-tracing media were shown to significantly improve students' early reading skills. These findings imply that the development of activity-based learning media can help address students' low early reading proficiency.

***Keywords:*** *Tracing Letters, Learning Media, Learning to Read*

***Abstrak***

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan media pembelajaran jejak huruf sebagai upaya meningkatkan keterampilan membaca permulaan siswa kelas 2 SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan R&D dengan model ADDIE. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, angket respon guru dan siswa, serta lembar validasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media pembelajaran jejak huruf yang dikembangkan telah memenuhi kriteria kelayakan berdasarkan penilaian ahli materi dan ahli media. Sisi kepraktisan, media ini mendapat respons positif dari guru maupun siswa sehingga dikategorikan sangat berguna untuk digunakan dalam pembelajaran. Sisi efektivitas, penggunaan media jejak huruf terbukti mampu meningkatkan keterampilan membaca permulaan peserta didik secara signifikan. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa pengembangan media pembelajaran berbasis aktivitas dapat menjadi solusi dalam mengatasi rendahnya kemampuan membaca awal siswa.*

***Kata Kunci:*** *Jejak Huruf, Media Pembelajaran, Membaca Permulaan*

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching of Indonesian is considered an important topic in Indonesia (Lusianti, Gaja, Sari, & Dalimunthe, 2024). Indonesian language instruction is recognized as a subject that teaches students to communicate in Indonesian. Reading is an important part of the learning process for elementary school students (Ain & Ain, 2024). Students

learning Indonesian must master four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students must master these four skills gradually (Ginayah, Iswara, & Karlina, 2024). The promotion of a culture of reading and writing is mandated by Act No. 20 of 2003 on the national education system. This regulation emphasizes the importance of improving low reading levels in schools through consistent practice.

Beginning reading refers to the initial stage of reading acquisition in which students learn to recognize letters, associate letters with sounds, blend syllables, and read simple words fluently. According to Azizah, Febriati, & Wildana (2024), beginning reading serves as the foundation for the development of higher-order reading comprehension skills because students must first master basic decoding processes before they can understand the meaning of written texts. Therefore, strengthening beginning reading skills at the elementary level is essential for students' future academic success. Reading proficiency plays a crucial role in supporting students' cognitive development and learning achievement by enabling them to access, understand, and evaluate information effectively (Faridah & Rozy, 2025). Furthermore, students with strong reading skills tend to achieve better learning outcomes, broader vocabulary, and stronger language skills (Supriyadi & Olpisrianasro, 2024).

Despite its importance, reading literacy remains a major educational challenge in Indonesia. According to the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, Indonesia's reading literacy score declined from 371 points in 2018 to 359 points in 2022, placing Indonesian students below the OECD average (OECD, 2023). This finding indicates that many students still experience difficulties understanding written texts, identifying information, and applying reading comprehension skills across contexts. The decline in reading performance underscores the urgency of strengthening literacy instruction, particularly at the early reading stage, as early reading skills serve as the foundation for more advanced literacy development (Rahmadhani & Dahlan, 2023).

This issue was also identified at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan. Preliminary observations and interviews with second-grade teachers revealed that 7 of 21 students (33.3%) had not yet met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) for beginning reading skills. These students experienced several difficulties, including recognizing visually similar letters, blending syllables into words, and reading fluently. The average pretest score was 57, indicating that students' initial reading ability remained relatively low. These findings suggest the need for instructional interventions that support students in developing beginning reading skills in more engaging and systematic ways.

Several factors contribute to students' reading difficulties. Internal factors include learning motivation, reading interest, cognitive readiness, and individual learning abilities, whereas external factors include family support, school environment, instructional strategies, and the availability of learning media. Among these factors, instructional media play a significant role in facilitating learning and improving students' reading skills (Prayudha & Kusumawati, 2025). Instructional media function as tools that facilitate the delivery of learning messages and stimulate students' attention, interest, and participation during the learning process. Arsyad (2019) stated that learning media help transform abstract concepts into concrete learning experiences, making it easier for students to understand instructional content. In elementary education, where students tend to learn more effectively through visual and hands-on activities, the use of interactive learning media becomes particularly important. Learning media serve as tools that help teachers communicate learning content effectively and create meaningful learning experiences for students (Hafiedz & Nurhamidah, 2023). In elementary education, the use

of appropriate learning media is particularly important because students tend to learn more effectively through concrete, visual, and interactive experiences (Ayundari & Manalu, 2024; Nanda & Wandini, 2024).

From a literacy development perspective, early reading skills are gradually developed through continuous interaction with written language and meaningful learning experiences. Mubarroroh (2025) argued that emergent literacy develops through holistic interaction among children, facilitators, and literacy-rich library environments, where storytelling, read-aloud activities, and educational games play important roles in fostering early literacy development. Consequently, instructional support and appropriate learning resources are necessary to facilitate students' literacy growth during the early years of schooling.

To address these challenges, this study developed a letter-tracing learning medium called *Jejak Huruf*. The medium was designed around a chessboard-inspired concept that integrates letter recognition, syllable formation, simple word reading, and challenge-card activities into a single learning tool. The medium includes visual illustrations, letters of the alphabet, syllables, simple words, and game-based tasks that encourage active participation in learning. Students use the medium by tracing pathways, identifying letters, combining syllables, and reading words as instructed. The chessboard concept was selected because it enables learning activities to be conducted in a sequential, interactive, and enjoyable manner while promoting students' visual, auditory, and psychomotor engagement. Such characteristics are expected to help students strengthen their letter recognition skills and improve their ability to decode words more effectively (Sakdah & Anas, 2023).

The development of learning media that align with students' characteristics is essential for creating effective learning environments (Saputri, Munir, & Wiranti, 2025). Previous studies have reported that visual learning media such as flashcards and picture-word cards can improve students' memory retention and support beginning reading instruction. Melisya, Murjainah, & Praseihammi (2023) found that picture-word cards help strengthen students' memory and facilitate reading development, while Maeswaty, Mulyasari, & Rahmawati (2023) reported that flashcards increase students' interest and understanding during reading instruction. Similarly, Nurhikmah, Isnaeni, & Sulistriorini (2023) demonstrated that digital media for learning the alphabet can improve reading literacy and letter recognition among elementary school students.

Although previous studies have shown the benefits of visual learning media, most of them focus on a single aspect of beginning reading instruction, such as letter recognition or vocabulary acquisition. In addition, many existing media offer limited opportunities for students to engage actively in a structured sequence of reading activities. There is still a lack of learning media that integrates letter recognition, syllable blending, word formation, and game-based interaction within a single instructional medium. Therefore, further innovation is needed to develop learning media that can support the entire process of beginning reading development in a more comprehensive and engaging way.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a chessboard-based letter-tracing learning medium that combines visual learning elements, tracing activities, challenge cards, and progressive reading tasks into a single integrated instructional tool. Unlike conventional flashcards or word cards, the developed medium allows students to move through structured stages of reading activities, beginning with letter identification and progressing to syllable blending and word formation. This interactive design

encourages active participation and provides a more contextual learning experience for elementary school students. Based on the identified problems, research gaps, and the potential contribution of innovative learning media, this study aims to develop a letter-tracing learning medium and examine its validity, practicality, and potential effectiveness in supporting the beginning reading skills of the second-grade students at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan.

## 2. Research Method

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach to develop a letter-tracing learning medium to improve the beginning reading skills of the second-grade students. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan and involved 21 second-grade students as research participants. The development process in this study adopted the ADDIE model, comprising five stages: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The ADDIE model was selected because it provides a systematic, flexible, and iterative framework for developing instructional products.

At the analysis stage, classroom observations, teacher interviews, curriculum analysis, and assessments of students' initial reading abilities were conducted to identify learning needs and problems related to beginning reading. The findings indicated that several students experienced difficulties in letter recognition, syllable blending, and reading simple words fluently. These results served as the basis for designing the learning medium. During the design stage, the conceptual framework of the letter-tracing learning medium was prepared, including its content, learning activities, visual components, and supporting research instruments. In the development stage, a prototype of the learning medium was produced and validated by a subject-matter expert and a media expert. The validators assessed content quality, curriculum relevance, language appropriateness, visual design, readability, and usability. Revisions were made based on the experts' suggestions before implementation in classroom learning.

The implementation stage involved using the developed medium in learning activities. To measure its effectiveness, students were given pretests and posttests to assess their beginning reading skills before and after using the medium. The evaluation stage was conducted to determine the overall quality of the product in terms of validity, practicality, and effectiveness.

The instruments used in this study consisted of: (1) a subject-matter expert validation sheet, (2) a media expert validation sheet, (3) a teacher response questionnaire, (4) a student response questionnaire, (5) an observation sheet, and (6) a beginning reading test administered as a pretest and posttest. The validation instruments were developed based on indicators derived from theories of instructional media and beginning reading instruction. The expert validation sheets used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent).

The validity of the developed product was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{\sum X}{\sum X_i} \times 100\%$$

where P represents the validity percentage, $\Sigma X$ represents the total score obtained, and $\Sigma X_i$ represents the maximum possible score. The validity criteria are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Media Suitability Validation Levels

| Percentage (%) | Validity Criteria | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 81% – 100% | Highly Valid | Highly suitable for use without revisions |
| 61% – 80% | Valid | Suitable for use with minor revisions |
| 41% – 60% | Moderately Valid | Fairly suitable, requires revisions |
| 0% – 40% | Invalid | Not suitable for use |

Source: (Sugiyono, 2018)

The practicality of the medium was measured using teacher and student response questionnaires. Teacher responses assessed ease of use, instructional suitability, and classroom applicability, whereas student responses evaluated attractiveness, ease of understanding, and engagement. The effectiveness of the medium was analyzed using the normalized gain (n-gain):

$$g = \frac{\text{Posttest} - \text{Pretest}}{\text{Maximum score} - \text{Pretest}}$$

The n-gain criteria were categorized as high ($g > 0.70$), moderate ($0.30 \leq g \leq 0.70$), and low ($g < 0.30$). Quantitative data obtained from validation sheets, questionnaires, and test results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and validator comments were analyzed descriptively to support the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

#### 3.1.1 Analysis Stage

The analysis stage was conducted through classroom observations, interviews with second-grade teachers, curriculum analysis, and an assessment of students' initial reading abilities. The findings indicated that several students experienced difficulties at the beginning of reading activities, particularly in recognizing letters, blending syllables, and reading simple words fluently. Of the 21 students enrolled in second grade, 7 (33.3%) had not yet met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) in reading instruction. The average pretest score for students before the intervention was 57, indicating that their initial reading ability was still relatively low.

Three major difficulties were identified during the observation process: (1) students had difficulty distinguishing visually similar letters, (2) students struggled to combine syllables into meaningful words, and (3) students demonstrated slow reading fluency and frequently mispronounced words. These findings highlighted the need for an instructional medium that supports beginning reading development through engaging, structured learning activities.

#### 3.1.2 Design Stage

Based on the results of the needs analysis, a letter-tracing learning medium was designed to facilitate letter recognition, syllable blending, and simple word reading. The medium adopted a chessboard-inspired layout consisting of alphabet letters, syllable cards, word cards, challenge cards, visual illustrations, and user instructions. The design process also included preparing research instruments, including subject-matter expert

validation sheets, media expert validation sheets, teacher response questionnaires, student response questionnaires, observation sheets, and beginning reading achievement tests. These instruments were developed to evaluate the validity, practicality, and potential effectiveness of the developed product.

### 3.1.3 Development Stage

At the development stage, the initial prototype of the letter-tracing learning medium was produced and subsequently evaluated by a subject-matter expert and a media expert.

Figure 1. Design of the *Jejak Huruf* Media

The material expert evaluated the medium based on curriculum relevance, content accuracy, language appropriateness, instructional objectives, and suitability for beginning reading instruction. The overall validation score obtained from the material expert was 75%, indicating that the medium met the validity criteria and was suitable for classroom use with minor revisions.

Table 2. Material Expert Validation Results

| Assessment Aspect | Percentage | Category |
|---|---|---|
| Content relevance | 76% | Valid |
| Language appropriateness | 74% | Valid |
| Learning objectives alignment | 75% | Valid |
| Beginning reading suitability | 75% | Valid |
| Average | 75% | Valid |

The media expert evaluated the product on visual appearance, readability, layout design, attractiveness, and ease of use.

Table 3. Media Expert Validation Results

| Assessment Aspect | Percentage | Category |
|---|---|---|
| Visual appearance | 92% | Highly Valid |
| Layout design | 89% | Highly Valid |
| Readability | 90% | Highly Valid |
| Ease of use | 89% | Highly Valid |
| Average | 90% | Highly Valid |

The media expert validation resulted in an overall score of 90%, indicating that the developed medium was highly valid and suitable for implementation. Based on the validators' suggestions, several revisions were made before classroom implementation. These revisions included improving the clarity of usage instructions, enlarging several letter displays, adjusting visual layouts, and adding more examples of syllables and words to support beginning reading practice.

### 3.1.4 Implementation Stage

Following expert validation and product revision, the letter-tracing learning medium was implemented in a second-grade classroom involving 21 students. The practicality of the medium was evaluated through teacher and student response questionnaires. The results showed that both teachers and students responded positively to the developed medium.

The researchers administered pretests and posttests to 21 second-grade students at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan to evaluate the effectiveness of the letter-tracing exercise material in improving the children's early reading skills. The pretest was administered to the students before they used the letter-tracing material, and the posttest was administered after the media-based learning process was completed.

Table 4. Practicality Evaluation Results

| Respondent | Percentage | Category |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher Response | 97.0% | Very Practical |
| Student Response | 99.4% | Very Practical |
| Average | 98.2% | Very Practical |

The results indicate that the medium was easy to use, attractive to students, and supportive of classroom learning activities. To evaluate students' beginning reading performance, pretests and posttests were administered before and after the implementation of the learning medium.

Table 5. Practicality Evaluation Results

| Test | Mean Score |
|---|---|
| Pretest | 57 |
| Posttest | 82 |

Students' average score increased by 25 points after using the letter-tracing medium. The calculated n-gain score of 0.58 was categorized as moderate, demonstrating that the developed medium was reasonably effective in enhancing beginning reading skills.

### 3.1.5 Evaluation Stage

The evaluation stage was conducted by reviewing the results obtained throughout the development process, including expert validation, practicality assessments, classroom implementation, and student learning outcomes. Teacher feedback indicated that the medium helped students recognize letters and syllables more easily while increasing their participation during classroom activities. Students reported that the medium was enjoyable and helped them remember letters and words more effectively. Nevertheless,

teachers suggested adding more visual variations and expanding the number of syllables and word combinations available in the medium.

Overall, the findings indicate that the developed letter-tracing learning medium met the criteria of validity and practicality and demonstrated potential to support the improvement of beginning reading skills among second-grade students at SD Negeri 03 Tanjung Medan. However, because this study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a comparison group, the observed improvement should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of the medium's potential contribution rather than definitive proof of causal effectiveness.

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that the developed letter-tracing learning medium has the potential to support beginning reading instruction for second-grade students. The positive results from expert validation, classroom implementation, and students' learning outcomes suggested that the medium effectively addressed several reading difficulties identified during the needs analysis stage. More importantly, the findings provide insight into how activity-based instructional media facilitated the development of beginning reading skills among elementary school students.

One of the most notable findings of this study is the improvement in students' beginning reading performance following the implementation of the letter-tracing medium. This improvement may be attributed to the medium's design, which provides students with opportunities to actively engage in letter recognition, syllable blending, and simple word-reading activities. Rather than merely observing learning materials, students were required to interact directly with letters, syllables, and words through tracing and game-based activities. Such active engagement may help strengthen students' understanding of the relationship between written symbols and their corresponding sounds, which is an essential component of beginning reading development.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study support the view of Umarsana & Ngatmini (2025), who argued that beginning reading represents a fundamental stage of literacy development in early childhood, during which students learn to recognize letters, build basic vocabulary, and actively engage in the learning process through educational games. The difficulties identified during the analysis stage, including confusion between visually similar letters and challenges in blending syllables, reflect common obstacles experienced by students who have not yet mastered these foundational reading processes. Through repeated exposure to letters and syllables in meaningful learning activities, the developed medium appears to offer students opportunities to strengthen these essential literacy skills.

The improvement observed in this study can also be explained through literacy development theory. According to Nasma, Eliza, Yulsyofriend, & Mulyani (2025), early literacy develops through continuous interaction with written language and meaningful learning experiences that involve active participation. The letter-tracing medium encourages students to interact directly with literacy elements, including letters, syllables, and words, while engaging in structured learning tasks. Such experiences may contribute to the development of letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and word recognition, which are essential components of beginning reading skills. This is consistent with evidence showing that instructional approaches involving sustained interaction with written language can effectively support early literacy development.

Another important finding concerns the role of instructional media in facilitating learning. The positive responses from teachers and students indicate that the medium was perceived as attractive, easy to use, and supportive of classroom instruction. This finding is consistent with Arsyad's (2019) assertion that instructional media serve as communication tools that help teachers deliver learning content more effectively, thereby increasing students' attention and motivation. In elementary school settings, where students tend to learn more effectively through visual and concrete experiences, interactive media can make learning activities more meaningful and accessible.

The medium's effectiveness may also be explained by its visual and interactive features. The use of colorful visual elements, letter cards, syllable cards, challenge cards, and a chessboard-inspired layout provides students with multiple opportunities to interact with learning materials. These features may help reduce cognitive overload by presenting reading tasks gradually and in a structured manner. Students first identify letters, then combine syllables, and finally read simple words. This sequential learning process aligns with the developmental nature of beginning reading instruction and enables students to progress from basic to more complex reading tasks.

The findings of this study are generally consistent with previous research concerning the use of learning media to support beginning reading skills. Melisya, Murjainah, & Praseihammi (2023) reported that picture-word cards help improve students' memory and reading performance, while Maeswaty, Mulyasari, & Rahmawati (2023) found that flashcards increase students' interest and understanding during reading instruction. Similarly, Nurhikmah, Isnaeni, & Sulistriorini (2023) demonstrated that alphabet-learning media can support the development of reading literacy among elementary school students. These studies collectively suggest that visual learning media play an important role in facilitating reading acquisition among young learners.

However, the present study contributes additional insights beyond those reported in previous research. Most previous studies focused on the use of flashcards, picture-word cards, or digital alphabet media that primarily targeted letter recognition or vocabulary development. In contrast, the letter-tracing medium developed in this study integrates multiple components of beginning reading instruction within a single learning tool. The medium combines letter recognition, syllable blending, word formation, tracing activities, challenge cards, and game-based interaction. This integrated approach allows students to experience a more comprehensive, structured reading and learning process rather than focusing on a single reading skill.

The novelty of the developed medium lies not only in its instructional content but also in its learning mechanism. The chessboard-inspired design encourages active participation, movement, and interaction throughout the learning process. Students are required to follow pathways, complete reading challenges, and engage in collaborative learning activities. These features distinguish the medium from conventional flashcards and word cards, which are generally used more passively. As a result, the medium provides a more interactive, engaging, and developmentally aligned learning experience.

The findings also have several practical implications. For teachers, the developed medium can serve as an alternative instructional resource for beginning reading instruction, particularly for students who experience difficulties in letter recognition and syllable blending. For schools, the results demonstrate the importance of providing interactive and activity-based learning media to support literacy development. For educational media developers, the study highlights the value of integrating game elements and progressive learning tasks into instructional media designed for young learners.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's limitations. The product was implemented in only one school and involved a relatively small number of participants. Furthermore, the effectiveness evaluation employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a comparison group. Therefore, although the observed improvement suggests potential to support beginning reading development, the results cannot yet establish a definitive causal relationship between the use of the medium and students' learning gains. Future studies involving larger samples and experimental research designs are needed to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of the developed medium.

## 4. Conclusion

This study developed a letter-tracing learning medium *(Jejak Huruf)* using the ADDIE model to support second-grade students' beginning reading skills. The findings demonstrated that the developed medium met the criteria of validity and practicality and showed potential to improve students' beginning reading skills, as indicated by increases in posttest scores and a moderate n-gain. The integration of letter recognition, syllable blending, word formation, tracing activities, and game-based interaction within a single learning medium created a structured, engaging reading and learning experience. Nevertheless, further studies involving larger samples and more rigorous experimental designs are recommended to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of the developed medium.

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