An Analysis of Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Reading to Young Learners

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates the challenges teachers encounter when teaching reading to young learners at SD N 2 Way Dadi. The research was prompted by observed difficulties in delivering effective reading instruction to early-grade students, with the primary aim of identifying and analyzing specific pedagogical obstacles. Grounded in Aryana and Apsara's theoretical framework, the study examines critical aspects of reading instruction including instructional media utilization, teaching strategies, material selection appropriateness, teaching technique efficacy, classroom conditions, textbook quality, and technological resource availability. These interconnected factors collectively influence reading instruction quality and were systematically explored through a descriptive qualitative methodology. Data collection employed in-depth interviews with English teachers and structured classroom observations, while analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model's three-stage process: data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that teachers face multifaceted challenges predominantly stemming from five key areas: limited access to suitable learning media, ineffective instructional strategies, suboptimal classroom environments, inadequate teaching materials, and insufficient technological support. These constraints collectively hinder optimal reading instruction delivery and student literacy development. The study's significance lies in its contextual examination of reading instruction barriers within a specific educational setting, contributing empirical evidence to the discourse on early literacy education. The identified challenges suggest urgent needs for: targeted teacher training programs, improved resource allocation, and strategic interventions to enhance reading pedagogy. These findings offer valuable insights for educational policymakers and school administrators seeking to improve early reading instruction outcomes. Furthermore, the research highlights potential areas for future studies, particularly regarding innovative solutions to resource limitations in developing educational contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government has established English as the principal foreign language in school curricula, requiring its instruction from primary through tertiary education (Eni, 1967). Embedded across all educational levels, English plays a pivotal role in preparing students for a globalized world. Although not the most commonly spoken language globally, it holds official status in 53 nations and is used by around 400 million people. Beyond facilitating communication with native speakers, English serves as the dominant second language worldwide, unlocking academic and professional opportunities (Ilyosovna, 2020).

Given English's significance, teaching methodologies warrant careful consideration. Among these, the instructional approach is a fundamental tool for educators in facilitating classroom learning. However, teaching reading—particularly at the elementary level—poses a considerable challenge. Multiple factors influence students' reading proficiency, and the process involves not only delivering content but also employing targeted strategies to enhance comprehension. A key obstacle is that many teachers lack sufficient command of the language they are instructing in (Ranico et al, 2023).

Young learners, generally between five and twelve years old, possess a natural aptitude for language acquisition through imitation. Early exposure to English enhances cognitive development, communication skills, and confidence, providing long-term academic benefits (Zulianti et al. 2024). Cultivating reading habits from an early age is crucial for language mastery and scholastic achievement.

Reading extends beyond rote memorization; it fosters critical and creative thinking, shaping perception and practical application of knowledge. Thus, early literacy development is essential for building a strong knowledge base and sustaining lifelong learning. Educators play a vital role in addressing reading difficulties, as proficiency in reading is foundational to student growth.

Grabe and Stoller (as cited in Punkasirikul, 2020) describe reading as a dynamic, multi-faceted process requiring efficiency, interaction with the text, and strategic comprehension. Similarly, Rumelhart emphasizes that meaning is not passively absorbed but actively constructed through engagement with written material. Shatilov further defines reading as a receptive skill aimed at extracting information from text (Punkasirikul, 2020). Synthesizing these perspectives, reading can be understood as an individualized process of interpreting written symbols to derive meaning.

At SD N 2 Way Dadi, a diverse elementary school, teaching reading presents unique challenges. Students exhibit varying levels of readiness, socioeconomic disparities, and delayed literacy development. Limited parental involvement, linguistic differences between English and students' native language, and a lack of technological resources further hinder progress. Additionally, the classroom environment often prioritizes play over structured reading, complicating instructional efforts.

This study examines the obstacles educators face in teaching reading to young learners at SD N Way Dadi, where many students struggle with foundational skills such as syllable recognition, word decoding, and sentence comprehension. These challenges stem from insufficient pre-literacy knowledge, low motivation, minimal reading interest, and inadequate support from parents and teachers. The research aims to identify these difficulties and explore effective pedagogical strategies to enhance reading instruction, ultimately improving literacy outcomes for young students.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is characterized by its naturalistic methodology, as it is conducted in real-world settings without manipulation (Sugiyono, 2020). Qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data, emphasizing narrative collection and analysis to gain in-depth insights into specific issues and potential solutions. Common qualitative techniques include focus groups (structured discussions among selected participants), in-depth interviews (detailed explorations of subjects), and participant observation – where researchers engage in and document ongoing processes (Sugiyono, 2020).

As Creswell (2002) explains, research is a systematic process of inquiry that involves formulating questions, gathering information, and deriving conclusions. In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach is used to thoroughly investigate and interpret phenomena, providing a detailed account of their characteristics and contextual factors. This method allows for an exploration of complexities and variations within the subject matter, prioritizing participant perspectives and deeper meaning.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary data collection methods in this study were interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were selected as the key instrument to gather detailed accounts of teachers' challenges in instructing young learners in reading at SD N 2 Way Dadi. These structured conversations aimed to uncover the specific difficulties educators face in this context. Additionally, observations were conducted to examine teaching practices in real time, providing supplementary insights into instructional challenges.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis involves systematically organizing and interpreting collected data to enhance understanding and facilitate meaningful conclusions (Rijali, 20180. Following Miles and Huberman's framework (Sugiyono, 2019), data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously throughout the research process until theoretical saturation was achieved.

RESULT

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the challenges educators encounter when teaching reading to young learners at SD N 2 Way Dadi. Using a triangulation of methods - including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis – the research gathered comprehensive data on instructional practices. The collected data underwent systematic analysis following qualitative research protocols, with findings presented through descriptive narrative.

Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Reading to Young Learners
a. Instructional Media and Strategies

Educators encounter significant challenges in selecting appropriate instructional media and strategies for teaching reading to young learners. While printed books and videos were previously utilized, current constraints—particularly limited technological resources—have led to a predominant reliance on school-provided textbooks. Multimodal learning strategies, such as video-assisted instruction, have proven effective in enhancing reading skills but remain underutilized due to inadequate infrastructure.

Teachers report that the restricted availability of diverse media diminishes student engagement, necessitating greater creativity in developing alternative teaching methods. Additionally, heterogeneous reading levels within a single classroom complicate strategy implementation, making it difficult to cater to all students effectively. The absence of systematic evaluation tools further hinders teachers' ability to assess the efficacy of their chosen methods.

b. Suboptimal Material Selection

The appropriateness of reading materials significantly impacts learning outcomes. Poorly selected content—whether overly complex or insufficiently challenging—impedes comprehension and dampens student motivation. Teachers emphasize the need for materials aligned with competency standards and students' developmental levels. Currently, elementary reading instruction focuses on vocabulary and narrative texts, which, while age-appropriate, may lack adaptability to individual needs.

Inadequate materials not only hinder literacy development but also compromise teaching quality. Educators stress the importance of carefully curated resources to foster engagement and ensure academic progress.

c. Ineffective Pedagogical Techniques

Traditional, teacher-centered approaches to reading instruction often result in disengagement and limited comprehension. Passive methods, such as one-directional reading without student interaction, fail to sustain attention or deepen understanding. Effective techniques, conversely, involve guided reading sessions where teachers model pronunciation, encourage choral repetition, and facilitate text-based discussions.

Interactive strategies—including collaborative interpretation and Q&A sessions—promote active participation. However, inconsistent application of these methods, coupled with insufficient student motivation, remains a persistent barrier to literacy development.

d. Classroom Environment

A conducive learning environment is critical for effective reading instruction. Disruptive behaviors, such as inattentiveness or peer interactions, frequently detract from lessons. Teachers note that classroom management strategies—such as structured seating arrangements (e.g., U-shaped configurations) and clear behavioral expectations—improve focus and interaction.

External factors, including home environments, further influence students' readiness to learn. Without structured routines, maintaining an orderly classroom becomes challenging, underscoring the need for proactive disciplinary measures.

e. Textbook Limitations

Textbooks serve as foundational tools for reading instruction, offering structured content aligned with curricular standards. Their systematic presentation of vocabulary and critical thinking exercises supports literacy development. However, reliance on outdated or poorly designed textbooks may restrict instructional flexibility. Educators highlight the importance of selecting materials that balance rigor and accessibility to meet diverse learner needs.

f. Technological Constraints

While technology enhances engagement through interactive media (e.g., educational videos, apps), limited access to digital tools forces teachers to depend on conventional methods. Students' familiarity with smartphones presents untapped potential for blended learning yet concerns about misuse and distractions necessitate careful oversight.

Innovative workarounds, such as teacher-created multimedia resources, are often constrained by infrastructural gaps. Strategic integration of technology—coupled with parental monitoring—could mitigate these challenges, fostering more dynamic reading instruction.

Teaching Strategies Used by The Teachers to Overcome the Difficulties.

Teachers employ several effective strategies to enhance reading instruction for young learners. Guided reading techniques form a foundational approach, where teachers first model fluent reading aloud, enabling students to hear proper pronunciation and intonation. This is followed by choral repetition, where the entire class reads together, and finally individual practice, which reinforces both decoding skills and comprehension. To maintain student engagement, educators incorporate gamification by transforming lessons into interactive activities; these game-based learning experiences effectively reduce monotony while increasing active participation. Another motivational strategy involves integrating musical elements into lessons - teachers use songs and rhymes tied to curricular content, which not only boosts enthusiasm but also enhances phonological awareness and aids in memory retention of key concepts. Classroom management plays an equally crucial role, with teachers implementing strategic seating arrangements like U-shaped configurations that optimize visibility and interaction while minimizing distractions. This physical setup is complemented by clearly established behavioral expectations and consistent consequences, creating a structured environment conducive to focused learning. Together, these multifaceted approaches address various learning styles and needs, creating a comprehensive framework for effective reading instruction.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading to young learners at SD N 2 Way Dadi and to identify the strategies employed to address these challenges. The research focused on one English teacher and utilized classroom observations and interviews as primary data collection methods. The findings revealed that the teacher encountered several difficulties, particularly in managing young learners' attention and engagement during reading lessons. Among the internal factors contributing to these difficulties were the ineffective selection of teaching materials, limited instructional strategies, and insufficient variation in teaching techniques. External challenges included a noisy classroom environment, overreliance on textbooks, and the limited availability of technological teaching aids. These factors were consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Aryana and Apsara, who categorized teaching challenges into internal and external domains.

The study found that the teacher often relied on printed books and occasionally used video media, which were not sufficient to maintain students' interest. A significant challenge was the implementation of appropriate reading strategies due to students' low concentration, limited vocabulary, and lack of reading comprehension skills. To overcome these issues, the teacher integrated a combination of strategies to enhance reading instruction. The primary strategies included reading aloud, repeated reading, the use of educational games, singing activities, and improved classroom management. Reading aloud

helped students grasp proper pronunciation, intonation, and expression, while repeated reading supported vocabulary development and reading fluency. These methods, when combined, gradually built students' reading confidence and comprehension.

To address students' boredom and promote active participation, the teacher used games such as word-guessing activities in groups, which not only engaged students but also encouraged collaborative learning. Singing familiar English songs like the ABCD song also proved effective in refreshing students' attention and supporting language acquisition through enjoyable activities. Classroom management played a critical role in minimizing distractions and maintaining a conducive learning environment. The teacher arranged the students' seats in a U-shape to facilitate better monitoring and interaction and implemented firm but constructive disciplinary actions, such as assigning students to sing in front of the class when they were inattentive (Nurchurifiani et al., 2025).

The observations further indicated that while the teacher maintained good discipline, punctuality, and time management, challenges persisted due to the monotonous use of textbooks and a lack of supporting technological tools. Teachers were often limited to using printed materials due to the absence of LCD projectors or other multimedia resources, which made it difficult to deliver dynamic and engaging reading lessons. The teacher made efforts to adapt textbook content to students' needs by simplifying complex material and aligning it with the curriculum. Nonetheless, technological limitations remained a significant barrier to effective instruction.

The findings of this study align with previous research emphasizing the importance of innovative learning media and strategies to overcome students' learning difficulties. For example, Sari (2022) highlights the value of multimodal learning, such as instructional videos, in increasing student motivation and comprehension. However, the limited technological infrastructure in elementary schools like SD N 2 Way Dadi remains a major barrier to the effective implementation of such approaches.

Moreover, the use of interactive strategies such as reciprocal questioning has proven effective in improving students' reading comprehension. In the context of teaching narrative texts at the secondary level, this method significantly improved learning outcomes (Sari, Lipta, & Marlinda, 2024). With appropriate adaptation, this strategy could be beneficial for young learners as well.

Another critical challenge is the inadequacy and misalignment of teaching materials with students' actual needs. Sari and Yuliana (2022) found that English modules designed based on learners' needs and incorporating local wisdom can significantly enhance content relevance and student engagement. Similar principles could be applied in the selection and development of reading materials for young learners.

In terms of teacher competence, it is crucial to empower educators with the skills to create and use technology-based learning media. Sari et al. (2022) conducted training that taught teachers how to create instructional videos using Kinemaster, resulting in increased teacher confidence and improved classroom technology integration.

In relation to reading development, foundational language skills such as grammar are also essential. In a grammar textbook development study, Sari (2018) noted that students struggled due to materials that did not match their learning level or style, underscoring the need for curriculum designers to consider learner diversity when developing resources.

Finally, students' personality traits also play a role in their learning strategies. Sari et al. (2023) found a significant correlation between the Big Five Personality Traits—particularly conscientiousness and openness to experience—and self-regulated learning strategies among university students preparing for TOEFL. While their context was higher education, these insights imply that understanding students' personality dimensions can inform more personalized and effective instruction, even at the primary level.

In conclusion, the research highlighted that teacher at SD N 2 Way Dadi face multifaceted challenges in teaching reading to young learners, encompassing both pedagogical and infrastructural constraints. To address these issues, the teacher employed a variety of creative and student-centered strategies such as reading aloud, repeated reading, games, singing, and careful classroom management. These approaches helped improve students' reading skills and maintain engagement, despite the limitations of available resources. The study emphasizes the importance of varied instructional methods, well-managed classroom environments, and the need for adequate technological support to enhance the effectiveness of reading instruction for young learners.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data presented in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes this study by summarizing the key findings on the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English reading to young learners at SD N 2 Way Dadi. This research identified several factors contributing to these difficulties. First, the use of inappropriate media and ineffective teaching strategies has led to low student achievement in reading. Poor selection of teaching materials negatively affects students' reading comprehension, while ineffective teaching techniques hinder the development of essential reading skills. Additionally, a non-conducive classroom environment makes it hard for students to concentrate and creates challenges for teachers in delivering the material effectively. The reliance on textbooks that do not align with the educational curriculum further complicates the teaching process. Another significant issue is the limited availability of technology, which restricts the development of students' literacy skills and their preparedness for future learning challenges. As a result, teachers often depend heavily on printed books as their primary instructional resource.

To address these challenges, teachers have adopted a scaffolding strategy, which provides structured support tailored to students' needs. This approach has proven effective in facilitating reading instruction. Among the specific strategies employed are reading aloud, repeated reading, incorporating games, singing activities, and improved classroom management. These methods help maintain student engagement, support vocabulary development, enhance reading fluency, and create a more dynamic learning environment. Overall, this research not only answers the research questions posed but also offers valuable insights into the real-world challenges of teaching reading to young learners and highlights practical strategies that can be implemented to overcome these challenges.

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