Improving Early Reading Skills through Montessori Method Assisted with Movable Alphabet for Grade I Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to improve the quality of the process and learning outcomes of early reading skills through the Montessori Method assisted by the movable alphabet of class I at State Elementary School (SDN) Gondowangi I. This research is classroom action research (CAR) applying Kemmis and Mc. Taggart research design. The research subjects are 16 grade I students of SDN Gondowangi I. The data were collected using a test and through observation and documentation, and analyzed using the descriptive qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. The result shows that the early reading skills of grade I students improved with the Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media. The improvement is shown through the reading test results in Cycle I reaching an average score of 74.3 with 11 students achieving the mastery level while five students had not achieved the mastery level. Cycle II reading test results increased with an average score of 80.6 with 14 achieving the mastery level and two students not achieving the mastery level. The mastery of students' initial reading skills in Cycle I reached a percentage of 68.75% and increased by 18.75% in Cycle II to 87.5%.

Keywords: early reading skills, montessori method, movable alphabet

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is organized by developing a culture of reading, writing, and arithmetic for the whole community as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System in Article 4 Paragraph 5. This indicates that at all levels of education, students are required to develop reading, writing, and arithmetic skills to facilitate understanding of learning concepts at a higher level. These skills are things that must be learned to make it easier for students to acquire the knowledge they need. So education at the elementary school (SD) level has a goal so that students have the knowledge, understanding of concepts, and basic skills that are useful for continuing their studies and life in society (Depdiknas, 2006). Teaching reading skills in elementary schools is carried out in low and high classes. Theaching to read in the lower grades is known as teaching beginner reading. Reading at the beginner level is the earliest stage of reading skills that must be mastered by students in the early grades before learning advanced reading skills. Reading at the beginner level is an integrated learning activity to recognize written language. In learning early reading skills, the emphasis is placed on technical aspects for students to be able to recognize letters, pronounce letter sounds, read syllables, and words, and read simple sentences clearly, correctly, and fluently (Rahman & Haryanto, 2014).

Mastery of beginner reading skills will make it easier for students to follow the learning process where learning information is often presented in various textbooks and other written learning resources (Pratiwi & Ariawan, 2017). Students who experience reading difficulties will experience obstacles in following the learning process in class. Previous research studies revealed that students who experience reading difficulties tend to experience difficulties when participating in the learning process (Kumara et al., 2014). The lack of fluency in reading experienced by students will result in the level of success in learning, one of which is determined by reading skills. Reading skills that are not simple for early-grade students should be taught in a way that is fun and does not burden students. Efforts to improve student's abilities in beginner reading are inseparable from the characteristics of early-grade students who are still in the concrete operational thinking stage and still enjoy learning while playing (Asmonah, 2019). Based on this, teaching early reading which is carried out by determining a method that is appropriate to the characteristics of early-grade students has the opportunity to achieve effective and optimal results.

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted on 2-13 August 2022 in class I at SDN Gondowangi I, Sawangan District, it was found that there were 16 students in class I with a previous educational background, namely kindergarten. The teaching process carried out placed an emphasis on training students' skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. When students were asked to read, it was found that there were students who could not read fluently. This highlighted the not-yet-optimal reading ability of first-grade students at SDN Gondowangi I. The number of students who were not yet fluent in reading was nine out of 16 students. Most of the students who were not fluent in reading were able to recognize letter shapes and the correct pronunciation of letters, but other students were found to still have difficulty distinguishing letter shapes that looked similar so the pronunciation of letter sounds was wrong. For example the letter /b/ was pronounced as the letter /d/, the letter /d/ was pronounced as the letter /p/, and the letter /p/ was pronounced as the letter /b/. Students were also still stammering in spelling and reading words so it took longer to read one simple sentence in its entirety. Students' reading intonation was also not quite right, reading pronunciation was not clear, and their fluency in reading was not optimal.

The initial reading skills of grade I students are not yet optimal, as evidenced by the results of the initial reading assessment on Indonesian language content. The specified minimum mastery score is 75 with the class average score obtained being 70.9. The results showed that there were seven students or 43.75% who had achieved the minimum mastery score and the class average score. While as many as nine others or 56.25% had not achieved the minimum mastery score and class average score. Based on the interviews, the grade I teacher revealed that to train students' reading skills in class they applied the alphabetic method, the syllable method, and the word method. In the observations during the observation, it could be seen that when students were guided to read together, there were students who were less focused on following along, joking with friends nearby, and observing the atmosphere outside the classroom. Preliminary reading media in the classroom were still limited and was not used optimally.

Based on the explanation of the problems above, efforts are needed to overcome the not-yet-optimal reading skills of grade I students of SDN Gondowangi I. According to Asmonah (2019) and Ernawati (2021) it is revealed that in order to train students' initial reading skills to achieve effective and optimal results , teachers can determine teaching strategies that are tailored to the needs of the class. The application of teaching strategies can be done by determining teaching methods and media for teaching reading in the early grades. One method and teaching media that can be applied is the Montessori Method assisted by moveable alphabet media.

The Montessori Method is a method initiated by Maria Montessori, which can be applied to students in early grades which are structured based on the theory of child development (Azkia & Rohman, 2020). This method emphasizes activities displayed by children with the help of media or supporting tools that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Media movable alphabet is a Montessori educational media in the form of a compartment box containing movable letters of the alphabet. A movable alphabet as a concrete medium can help children to correlate letter sounds and letter symbols. Given the importance of reading skills as the main skill for students to be able to follow the learning process well, efforts to improve the initial reading skills of grade I students of SDN Gondowangi I need to be made.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Types of research

This research is classroom action research (CAR). According to Arikunto (2019: 4), CAR is research that describes the causes and effects of treatment, and what happens when the treatment is given. The purpose of CAR is to improve or increase the quality of learning in the classroom through the provision of teaching actions different from usual ones.

2.2. Time and Place of Research

The research was conducted in class I at SDN Gondowangi I Magelang which is located in Bedogan Hamlet, Gondowangi Village, Sawangan, Magelang. It was conducted in an odd semester of the 2022/2023 school year, from November to December 2022.

2.3. Research subject

The subjects of this study are 16 first-grade students of SD Negeri Gondowangi I, consisting of nine female students and seven male students.

2.4. Research Model

This research uses a model developed by Kemmis & Mc Taggart, who view components as steps in a cycle so that the acting and observing components are one unit (Kusumah & Dwitagama, 2010: 20). The definition of a cycle in action research is a round of activities consisting of planning, action and observation, and reflection.

2.5. Data collection technique

Data collection aims to collect information and data needed in research. Data collection in this study was done through observation and documentation, and by using a test.

2.6. Research Instruments

The data collection instruments used in the research were observation sheets, performance test, and document.

2.7. Data analysis technique

Analyzing data is a process for processing and interpreting data with the aim of presenting various information so that it has a clear meaning and meaning in accordance with the research objectives (Sanjaya, 2011: 106). This research uses descriptive quantitative analysis and qualitative descriptive analysis.

2.8. Action Success Criteria

Criteria for the success of the action become a benchmark for determining the effectiveness of giving action in research. The criteria for the quality of the learning process are categorized as successful as seen from 1) students becoming more focused in participating in the learning process, and 2) students being more active in reading activities with observations showing good or very good criteria. The success criterion in terms of results is that the class average score increases with a minimum mastery criterion of 75 and a minimum achievement percentage of 80% of the total number of students.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Description of Initial Condition

The research was conducted at class I SD Negeri Gondowangi I. The research subjects were all 16 grade I students. Based on the results of observations, the initial reading skills of the students were classified as not optimal, as evidenced by several findings at the time of observation including that there were students who stammered in spelling and reading, students who were not yet fluent in reading, some students were able to recognize letters but they had difficulty distinguishing similar letter shapes such as the letters /p/, /d/, and /b/, and students had difficulty reading words or sentences that contained double vowels or consonants.

3.2. Description of Cycle I Actions

Referring to the classroom action research model developed by Kemmis & Mc. Taggart, there are three important components in each action cycle, namely planning, action and observation, and reflection.

3.2.1. Cycle I Planning

Cycle I planning includes determining research time, developing teaching modules, and preparing assessment instruments. The research time for Cycle I was November 2, 2022 and November 9, 2022. Based on discussions with the class teachers, it was agreed that the material to be compiled into the teaching modules was the Indonesian language subject in CHAPTER 3 "Beware of Germs!"

3.2.2. Implementation of Cycle I Actions and Observations

The first meeting was held on Wednesday, November 2, 2022 with an allotted time of 3×35 minutes or three hours of lessons. The first meeting in Cycle I discussed the material of maintaining personal hygiene and health from germs, reading and writing the syllable *ku-*, and reading words that begin with the letter *k*. The second meeting was held on Wednesday, November 9, 2022 with an allotted time of 3×35 minutes or thee hours of lessons. The second meeting in Cycle I discussed material on how to maintain personal hygiene and health, reading and writing the 3rd syllable, and reading words starting with the letter *k*.

The results of observing the actions in Cycle I are as follows.

3.2.2.1. Observation Results of Beginner Reading Skills Learning Process

The results of the learning process in this study can be seen from the activities of teachers and students during the learning process of beginner reading skills through the Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media. The application of this method shows an increase in student focus in learning to read. Students become more active in reading and become more enthusiastic about the presence of movable alphabet media. Aspects of students' pronunciation and clarity of voice also improve, although the aspects of intonation and fluency still need to be improved. In Cycle I, the first meeting, the score obtained from observations of student activity was 56.6 and

increased in the second meeting to 64.5. The observed scores of student activities did indeed increase from the first meeting to the second meeting, but the average student activity score obtained in Cycle I was only 53.9. which was considered low. Therefore, the score of student activity still needed to be improved.

3.2.2.1. Results of Students' Preliminary Reading Skills Performance Test

The results of the initial reading skills test are based on aspects of pronunciation accuracy, intonation, fluency, and clarity of voice. The results of the initial reading skills performance test for each aspect at each meeting showed an increase.
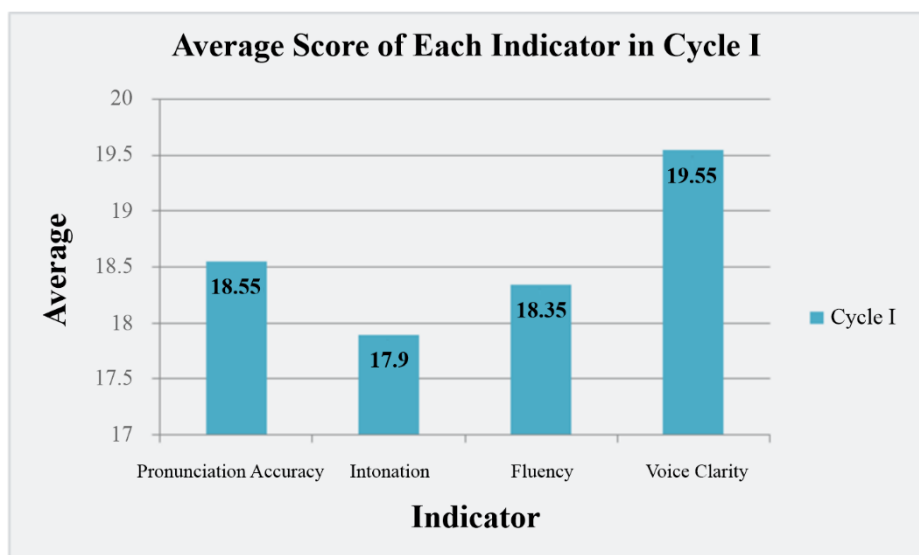
Figure 1. The average score of each indicator of reading skills at the beginning of Cycle I

The following is a description of the results of the initial reading skills assessment for each indicator.

a. Pronunciation accuracy when reading in Cycle I. In general students could pronounce words correctly without changing the words/sentences they read. However, there were still students who mispronounced words they considered difficult, especially in words containing double consonants such as the word "tangan" which was read as "tagan". The pronunciation accuracy indicator obtained an average of 18.55.

b. The students' reading intonation in Cycle I was still not quite right. Students did not pay attention to punctuation when reading so the intonation when reading tended to be flat even though the teacher had given examples of reading with the correct intonation. The intonation indicator obtained an average of 17.9.

c. The students' reading fluency in Cycle I was still lacking as evidenced by the presence of students who were still stammering and spelling with long pauses so that they needed teacher guidance to spell and read. The fluency indicator obtained an average score of 18.35, in which most students still needed the teacher's guidance to read words and sentences.

d. The clarity of students' voices when reading in Cycle I was quite good and loud. Most of the students' voices were clear, loud, and audible. However, for some students, when they found a difficult word, the sound became low so the student's voice when reading became unstable. The sound clarity indicator obtained an average of score of 19.55.

The results of the reading skills test in Cycle I were obtained from individual reading tests. The minimum specified mastery is 75. The results of the initial reading skills test in Cycle I are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results of Reading Test Scores at the Beginning of Cycle I

No.	Student Name	Score		Score in Cycle I	Category
		P1	P2		
1.	DAS	75	77	76	Completed
2.	MA	83	85	84	Completed
3.	AM	50	53	51.5	Not Completed
4.	AR	53	57	55	Not Completed

No.	Student Name	Score		Score in Cycle I	Category
		P1	P2		
5.	REES	80	82	81	Completed
6.	PA	81	85	83	Completed
7.	ASAR	79	81	80	Completed
8.	RRAB	70	72	71	Not Completed
9.	SNA	75	78	76.5	Completed
10.	SUA	81	84	82.5	Completed
11.	NAR	68	71	69.5	Not Completed
12.	ADAG	67	68	67.5	Not Completed
13.	ANA	80	81	80.5	Completed
14.	MPA	78	80	79	Completed
15.	RDS	73	77	75	Completed
16.	SNR	75	79	77	Completed
Total		1168	1210	1189	
Average		73	75.6	74.3	
Number of students achieving mastery level					11
Number of students not achieving mastery level					5
Percentage of classical mastery					68.75%

3.2.1. Reflection of Cycle I

In general, students are able to pronounce words correctly without adding letters or changing the words/sentences they read. However, there were still students who mispronounced words they considered difficult. Especially in words that contain double consonants. Emphasis on words that are difficult for students to read, especially on words that contain double consonants. The intonation used by students was mostly still not quite right. This was also proven through the acquisition of reading test scores where the aspect of intonation got the lowest average among other aspects. Student intonation tended to be flat and paid little attention to punctuation. The percentage of success in learning to beginner reading through the Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media in Cycle I was 68.75%. This percentage does not meet the criteria so it can be concluded that based on the achievement of the percentage of classical mastery in Cycle I, the criteria for the success of action research was not achieved.

3.3. Description of Cycle II Actions

3.3.1. Cycle II Planning

Cycle I planning includes determining research time, developing teaching modules, and preparing assessment instruments. The specified time for the research in Cycle II was November 16, 2022 and November 23, 2022.

3.3.2. Implementation of Actions and Observations of Cycle II

The first meeting was held on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 with an allotted time of 3×35 minutes or three hours of lessons. The first meeting in Cycle II discussed the matter of maintaining cleanliness around, compiling and reading random word combinations into short sentences. The second meeting was held on Wednesday, November 23, 2022 with an allotted time of 3×35 minutes or three hours of lessons. The second meeting in Cycle I discussed material about disposing of trash, completing the gap sentences using word choice, and reading it.

The results of observing the actions in Cycle II are as follows.

### 3.3.2.1. Observation Results of Beginner Reading Skills Learning Process

In the first meeting in Cycle II, the learning process went well and smoothly. The teacher was able to condition the class better. Several aspects of observing teacher activities also received a maximum score of 4, such as the aspect of giving examples of how to read with the right pronunciation, voice, and intonation to the implementation of the stages of the method that were coherent. In the second meeting of Cycle II, students had a better ability to read words and short sentences with the right pronunciation, intonation, and sound. The teacher also emphasized words that were difficult for students to read so that at this meeting students' ability to read words that were difficult to read increased.

Students were more conditioned and conducive. Their ability to read also increased as seen from the indicators of accuracy of pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and clarity of voice. The reading indicator had increased compared to the first cycle. Students' responses in participating in learning were also better marked by students who were more focused on carrying out existing activities in learning. In addition, the teacher also gave action to students who were less focused in the previous cycle to occupy seats in the front row. In Cycle II, students were more independent and

agile in carrying out learning activities and using movable alphabet media. The class atmosphere was also orderly, although occasionally there were students who invited their friends to joke, the teacher could handle this well. In Cycle II of the first meeting, the acquisition of scores from observations of student activity was 80.3 and increased at the second meeting to 90.8. The average score of student activity obtained in Cycle II was 85.5 and was categorized as very good. Thus, the student activity observation score had reached the success criteria.

3.3.2.2. Students' Preliminary Reading Skills Performance Test

Based on the results of the assessment of the initial reading skill test for each aspect in Cycle II, there was an increase compared to the results in Cycle I. The following is a diagram of the results of the assessment for each indicator.
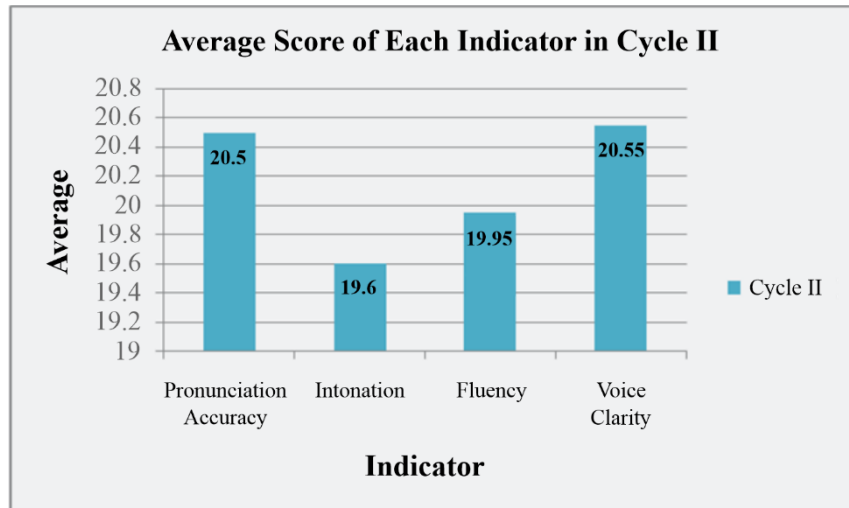
Figure 2. The average score of each indicator of reading skills at the beginning of Cycle II

The following is a description of the results of the initial reading skills assessment for each indicator.

a. The accuracy of reading pronunciation increased in Cycle II because the teacher emphasized words that were considered difficult so that in Cycle II students were able to recite the reading correctly without adding or subtracting letters. The aspect of pronunciation accuracy in the first cycle obtained an average of 18.55. increased by 1.95 in the second cycle to 20.5.

b. Students' intonation when reading increased in Cycle II. Students began to understand the function of punctuation marks as explained by the teacher so that the reading intonation became better than in the previous cycle. This is evidenced by an increase in the average intonation indicator score of 1.7 to 19.6 in Cycle II.

c. Students' reading fluency increased in Cycle II, marked by students being able to read words fluently even though there were still students who spelled. Students also did not often ask the teacher for help to read spelled words. The smoothness aspect in the first cycle obtained an average of 18.35. increasing from 1.6 to 19.95 in the second cycle.

d. The clarity of the voice when reading increased in Cycle II as indicated by the students' voices being more stable when reading from beginning to end. Aspects of sound clarity in Cycle I obtained an average of 19.55 and increased by 1 in Cycle II to 20.55. Hilda Hadian et al., (2018) state that voice clarity is needed so as not to cause misunderstandings to listeners.

The results of the initial reading skills test assessment in Cycle II are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Results of Reading Test Scores at the Beginning of Cycle II

No.	Student Name	Score		Score in Cycle II	Category
		P1	P2		
1.	DAS	80	86	83	Completed
2.	MA	85	89	87	Completed
3.	AM	60	63	61.5	Not Completed
4.	AR	63	66	64.5	Not Completed
5.	REES	84	87	85.5	Completed
6.	PA	85	88	86.5	Completed

| No.	Student Name	Score		Score in Cycle II	Category
		P1	P2		
7.	ASAR	82	84	83	Completed
8.	RRAB	80	82	81	Completed
9.	SNA	81	83	82	Completed
10.	SUA	84	86	85	Completed
11.	NAR	80	82	81	Completed
12.	ADAG	79	83	81	Completed
13.	ANA	82	85	83.5	Completed
14.	MPA	81	84	82.5	Completed
15.	RDS	80	82	81	Completed
16.	SNR	81	83	82	Completed
Jumlah		1267	1313	1290	
Rata-rata		79.2	82.1	80.6	
Number of students achieving mastery level					14
Number of students not achieving mastery level					2
Percentage of classical mastery					87.5%

3.3.3. Reflection of Cycle II

Teaching in Cycle II was carried out based on Cycle I reflections and suggestions for improvement. Teaching beginner reading through the Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media helped students to be more active in participating in learning. Students' motor skills such as hand and eye coordination and student focus had increased with the application of the Montessori Method and movable alphabet media.

Table 3. Improvement of Students' Mastery and Beginner Reading Skills in Initial Conditions, Cycle I, and Cycle II

No.	Description	Initial Condition	Cycle I	Cycle II
1.	Number of students achieving an average score	7	11	14
2.	Number of students not achieving an average score	9	5	2
3.	Average	70.9	74.3	80.6
4.	Percentage of class mastery	43.75%	68.75%	87.5%

The following is a diagram of student mastery from the initial condition, Cycle I, to Cycle II
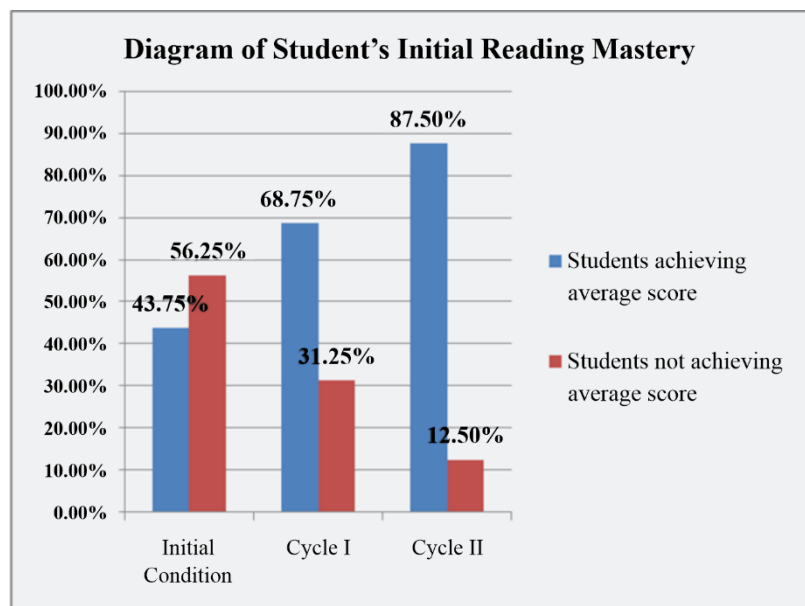
Figure 3. Diagram of Students' Initial Reading Mastery from Initial Condition, Cycle I, and Cycle II

Cycle II, which got an action success percentage of 87.5%, increased by 18.75% compared to Cycle I, which got a percentage of 68.75%. As many as 14 students out of 16 students in Cycle II achieved average scores compared to

Cycle I where there were 11 students who achieved average scores. The number of students who had not reached the average score in Cycle II decreased to two students. Initially, in Cycle I, there were five students who had not achieved the average score. The class average score also increased from 74.3 in Cycle I to 80.6 in Cycle II. The success of the research was measured if the percentage of classical mastery is equal to or more than 80%. So it can be concluded, based on the percentage obtained in Cycle II of 87.5%, the criteria for success of action research were achieved so that the research stopped in Cycle II.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Process of Learning Beginner Reading Skills through the Montessori Method Assisted by Movable Alphabet Media

Teaching beginner reading by using the Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media shows a good improvement in students' reading skills. Beginner reading is a reading stage for students in the early grades as argued by Purnanto & Mustadi (2018) who explain that initial reading and writing are at the discursive and technical stage in which reading activities direct students to be able to change and pronounce written symbols into meaningful sounds. According to Djiwandono (Rahman & Haryanto, 2014) and Slamet (2008), the teaching of beginner reading emphasizes technical aspects, namely the accuracy of pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and clarity of voice.

The Montessori Method assisted by movable alphabet media results in an increase in student focus and activity during the teaching-learning process because the application of the Montessori Method provides students with freedom of exploration and independence to carry out learning activities. This is in line with the advantages of the Montessori Method expressed by Fajarwati (2017), that the Montessori Method emphasizes the principle of freedom and child activity in learning. Making children the center of their learning so that children can experience direct learning, and they become more focused in participating in the learning process. This is in line with the opinion of Alburaidi & Ambusaidi (2019) who reveals that in the Montessori Method, students are given freedom and the opportunity to choose, do, and work together so as to encourage their active role in learning activities.

4.2. Learning Outcomes of Beginner Reading Skills through the Montessori Method Assisted by Movable Alphabet Media

The results of this research show that the Montessori Method can improve students' beginner reading skills. This can be seen from the results of the assessment of each indicator of initial reading skills which have increased in each implementation cycle.

a. Pronunciation accuracy in Cycle I. Some students were able to pronounce words and sentences correctly, but there were still students who read words by adding or subtracting letters, especially when reading words that were considered difficult, such as words containing double consonants. The aspect of pronunciation accuracy then increased in Cycle II after the teacher corrected the action by emphasizing words that were difficult for students to read and repeating the stages of the Montessori Method according to Masyrofah's opinion (2017) which helped students understand well the lessons presented. The aspect of pronunciation accuracy is very important in line with the opinion of Hilda Hadian et al., (2018) which states that the use of appropriate speech and in accordance with what is read will affect the listener's understanding of the meaning of the text that is read. In addition, the better use of movable alphabet media improves students' ability to assemble language symbols into meaningful sounds. This is in accordance with Mustadi's opinion (2012) which states that the use of media in the teaching process can make it easy for teachers to explain learning concepts and make it easier for students to understand the teacher's explanation.

b. Students' intonation when reading also experienced an increase from Cycle I to Cycle II. The average intonation indicator in Cycle I was 17.9 and increased by 1.7 in Cycle II to 19.6. In Cycle I, students' intonation when reading tended to be flat and they paid little attention to punctuation. This was then corrected during Cycle II by emphasizing the importance of paying attention to punctuation when reading so that intonation and reading pauses were correct. This is in accordance with the opinion of Panjaitan et al., (2018), which states that intonation errors and the use of pauses when reading can result in changes in the meaning of reading and reading inappropriateness. Students can also imitate the reading intonation that the teacher exemplifies well.

c. In the fluency of students in Cycle I, some students read haltingly and spelled with rather long pauses. Some students at the time of reading also still needed the teacher's help in reading a few words in sentences. In Cycle II, students' fluency in reading was getting better marked by students who did not ask for the teacher's help or guidance in reading. The students were able to independently read texts fluently. This is in line with the opinion of Damiyanti et al., (2021) who state that word read spelling by providing long pauses affects the rhythm of students' reading fluency to slow down.

d. The clarity of students' voices while reading obtained an average score of 19.55 in Cycle I and increased by 1 in Cycle II to 20.55. In Cycle I, most students had good clarity of voice when reading, but some students with low reading skills still had low voices when reading. In Cycle II, the clarity of students' voices increased so that their voices when reading also got better. Their voices when reading were clear from beginning to end, no longer soft when they found words that they found it difficult to read. Increasing the clarity of students' voices is in accordance with the opinion of Hilda Hadian et al., (2018), which states that voice clarity is needed so as not to cause misunderstandings to listeners.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ali Mustadi and Amalia Dwi Kinasih conceived the presented idea. They also developed the theory and performed the computations, verified the analytical methods, investigated [a specific aspect], and supervised the findings of this work. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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