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Contextual Teaching And Learning For Early Reading Among Speech Impaired Students: Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran Kontekstual Untuk Membaca Permulaan Siswa Tunawicara

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Abstract

General Background Foundational literacy heavily dictates academic success throughout primary education, yet conventional instructional methodologies often fail to integrate written symbols with contextual, real-world meanings. **Specific Background** Fifth-grade students with expressive and receptive communication delays struggle extensively with early reading components, specifically confusing similar letters and struggling to decode basic consonant-vowel syllables. **Knowledge Gap** Although visual aids are recognized for assisting typical learners, there is limited empirical evaluation regarding the combined application of constructivist pedagogical frameworks and specific multimodal visual media to address the unique literacy barriers of speech-impaired primary students. **Aims** This Classroom Action Research investigates how integrating real-life experiential instruction with visually contextualized vocabulary media alters letter recognition and syllable decoding accuracy in two fifth-grade pupils exhibiting severe communication and literacy delays. **Results** Utilizing a two-cycle instructional sequence, visual and quantitative assessments demonstrated that individual reading mastery escalated dramatically; one subject's proficiency surged from a 20% baseline to 100%, while the second progressed from 0% to 80%. Concurrently, this multimodal intervention resolved letter confusion and significantly elevated classroom participation, learning motivation, and conversational self-confidence. **Novelty** This study provides direct empirical evidence on how synthesizing constructivist real-world instruction with tangible visual vocabulary interventions actively mitigates specific phonemic and decoding barriers for speech-impaired learners. **Implications** Primary educators must transition toward customized, multimodal, and contextually relevant literacy strategies to ensure equitable reading acquisition and sustained academic engagement for communication-delayed demographics.

Highlights

- ♦ Combining constructivist instruction with visual vocabulary interventions resolves severe foundational literacy barriers.
- ♦ Visual-auditory instructional media accurately mitigates letter confusion and improves consonant-vowel syllable decoding.
- ♦ Contextual reading interventions actively elevate learning motivation and conversational self-confidence among speech-impaired pupils.

Keywords

Early Reading Skills; Speech Impairments; Contextual Teaching And Learning; Visual Instructional Media; Primary Education

INTRODUCTION

The early reading skills are one of the most basic skills affecting the academic achievement of the students through the primary education. Early reading is more than just the ability to recognize letters. It involves the association of symbols with sounds, the recognition of syllables, the reading of simple words, and the understanding of the meaning of written material. Students with speech impairments often experience difficulty with early reading skill acquisition due to limitations in their verbal communication abilities (i.e., expressive and receptive language skills). The limitations hinder their development of meaningful relationships between spoken words, written symbols, and the meanings of words which hinder the development of reading skill (Directorate General of Special Education, 2019). Teaching methods for speech-impaired students are usually concrete, visually supported, repetitive and relevant to the context. They rely so much on visual information and real-life experience that they thrive in learning environments that clearly link written words to familiar objects and everyday situations. These students may have reading difficulties such as inaccurate letter and letter sound recognition, word decoding, vocabulary retention, comprehension of written texts, reading fluency, and motivation and confidence in literacy activities. Learning difficulties are defined as “deficits in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing and mathematical abilities” (Grigorenko et al., 2020, p. 2). Lima Giacobbo et al. (2019) also found that learning difficulties can be caused by internal factors, such as cognitive functioning, sensory impairments, emotional disorders, and underdeveloped academic abilities.

The traditional teacher-led instruction usually involves abstract ideas that do not relate learning materials to students' real-life experiences and therefore is often not sufficient for supporting the development of early reading skills among students with speech impairments. Hence the need for adaptive, multisensory, individualized, and continuous instructional strategies. Snow et al. (2005) suggested that learning interventions for students with reading difficulties should be customized to their cognitive profiles, such as attention, working memory and information processing speed. In this regard, teachers have a significant role to play in identifying the learning needs of the students and designing suitable interventions. Teachers also give immediate feedback and are constantly assessing reading growth. The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model is a teaching strategy that can be very effective in improving early reading skills of speech-impaired students. CTL is a teaching methodology that joins academic content with the real-life experiences of students, thereby making learning more meaningful and applicable. Johnson (2002, p. 2) defines CTL as a holistic and brain-compatible instructional model that enables learners to construct knowledge through meaningful experiences, collaboration, reflection, critical thinking, and transfer of knowledge. This perspective is consistent with Piaget's constructivist perspective which highlights that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through their interaction with the environment. Similarly, Dewey thought that education must be closely related to the real life experiences of learners to produce meaningful and practical learning.

The use of picture word cards as instructional media can improve the implementation of CTL. Picture word cards are visual representations accompanied by written symbols such as letters, syllables and words. They help students make connections between written language and concrete objects and everyday experiences. According to Arikunto (2019), picture word cards can help students to understand the relationship between written symbols and their meaning through concrete visualization. In the same line, Birsh and Carreker (2018) expressed that multisensory instructional media activate visual, auditory and kinesthetic pathways of learning simultaneously, hence they are especially beneficial for students with reading disabilities. Students with speech impairments can use picture word cards to learn letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable identification, simple word reading, and short sentence reading. The visual illustrations add value contextual support that allow the students to comprehend the word meanings better. Written words help us learn to recognize written symbols gradually. The more vocabulary that is linked to familiar objects, everyday activities, and real-life experiences, the more contextualized and comprehensible the reading instruction will be. Tomlinson (2017) also noted the importance of responsive and inclusive learning environments that respond to individual learning needs. Hence, the CTL model with picture word cards as media is considered as an effective strategy to improve early reading skills of students with speech impairment.

In the early classroom observations in Grade V, two students with speech impairments were identified as being below the expected level of early reading proficiency. These students had difficulty recognizing letters, distinguishing letter sounds, identifying syllables and reading simple words. These limitations had a negative effect on their participation in the classroom, their motivation to learn, their self-esteem, and their overall academic performance. These findings underscore the need for instructional interventions that are concrete, visually supported, and contextually meaningful to support more effective literacy development, given that reading is a fundamental skill for learning across all school subjects.

Previous research results have proved that the CTL model and picture word card media can improve the reading skills of students who experience learning difficulties. Siti (2020) found that CTL was able to significantly improve the students' reading skills by connecting instructional materials and real life learning experiences. Budi (2021), likewise, found that picture word cards are effective in developing word recognition in students with speech impairment. However, there are very few empirical studies that integrate the application of CTL models with picture word card media to promote early reading skills in primary school students with speech impairment. Therefore, the current study is unique in the literature in that both instructional components are combined in a comprehensive intervention to improve early reading skills for students with speech impairments. The purpose of this study was to improve early reading skills of students with speech impairment through the application of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model assisted by picture word card media. The early literacy skills in this study are letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable recognition, and reading simple consonant-vowel patterned words. The results are expected to add theoretically to the development of literacy instruction for students with special educational needs and offer teachers an effective, contextual and inclusive instructional strategy for improving early reading achievement.

METHOD

This research was Classroom Action Research (CAR) with spiral model from Kemmis and McTaggart which has four stages, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. A one-group pretest–posttest design was used to explore the changes in students' early reading skills after the intervention was implemented. This research was conducted in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year in one of the public elementary schools in East Kutai Regency, Indonesia. Two fifth-grade students with speech impairments were purposefully selected for classroom observations because of ongoing difficulties with letter recognition, phonemic awareness, blending syllables, and reading simple words. The intervention was implemented in two action cycles, each comprising four instructional meetings (eight learning sessions in total). The learning activities were carried out by the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model integrated with picture word card media, so that meaningful and contextual literacy learning was created. The CTL learning sequence guided each lesson through knowledge construction, contextual exploration, collaborative learning, reflection, and transfer of knowledge. The picture word cards contained letters, syllables, and simple words with contextual pictures that helped students make meaningful connections between written symbols and real objects. They gradually developed letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding of syllables, and simple word reading skills.

Data collection is done by classroom observation, early reading achievement test, field notes and documentation. Students' participation and implementation of the instructional process were evaluated using observation sheets, and four components of early reading skills were assessed using pretests and posttests: letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable recognition, and simple word reading. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively in the form of percentages and mean scores to study students' learning progress in cycles. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was applied to assess the statistical significance of the improvement in early reading performance, given the small sample size and paired data. Students were deemed to have been successful in the action if they demonstrated 80% mastery of the early reading indicators that were assessed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Intervention Results

Pretest results showed that both students with speech impairments were functioning at a very low level on early reading skills. Student MC got 1 of 5 (20%), student NN got 0% (did not get any items correct). Neither participant achieved the pre-determined mastery criterion of 80%, which indicated that their early reading skills required intensive instructional intervention at the beginning of the study. Classroom observations showed that both students had difficulty identifying letters, discriminating phonemes, and reading simple consonant-vowel (CV) and consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (CVCV) patterned words. The most common types of errors were: substitution of /b/ by /d/; failure to associate written symbols with their sounds and low attention to reading tasks. The findings suggest that the traditional teaching method is not sufficient in meeting the learning needs of students with speech disorders. Therefore, the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model with picture word card media is needed to establish meaningful connections between written symbols and visual contexts.

Cycle I Results

The first cycle was conducted in four instructional meetings by using the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model supported by picture word card media. The learning activities were carefully designed to build up the early reading skills of the students starting with the recognition of consonant-vowel (CV) syllables through children songs, then the picture word card games, picture assisted word reading and the repeated reading practice. The instructional materials were based on the simple words with consonant-vowel (CV) and consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (CVCV) patterns including the letters /b/ and /d/ that had been previously identified as the students' main area of difficulty. Students were encouraged, during the implementation, to associate written words with pictures in context and everyday objects, in order to strengthen the link between the written symbols and the meanings.

The classroom observations showed that the students' participation and early reading behaviours progressed slowly in the first cycle. In the first session, the student MC still had difficulty differentiating /b/ and /d/, as they looked similar. The teacher used visual cues to help the children overcome this challenge by saying the "stomach" of the letter b faces the front, while the "stomach" of d faces the back. Through repeated exposure and guided practice MC was eventually able to differentiate between the two letters, but still needed the occasional prompt from his teacher. By the second meeting, with the teacher's support, MC was beginning to make meaningful words out of consonant-vowel syllables like ba and ju. By the third and fourth meetings MC could accurately identify pictures, match pictures with corresponding picture word cards and read several familiar words with more confidence. Student NN had a different learning experience. NN had great difficulty in remembering letters and so only introduced two new syllables at a time initially. In the second session, NN actively engaged in the picture word card game and showed more motivation, but responded with trial-and-error responses. In the third and fourth meetings, NN could correctly identify familiar pictures and match them with the respective written words. Yet, teacher's guidance was still needed in all reading activities.

The end-of-Cycle I post-test showed gains in students' early reading achievement. Student MC scored 3 out of 5 (60%) an increase of 40 percentage points compared with the pre-intervention score of 20%. Also student NN scored 2 out of 5 (or 40%) in the posttest, compared to 0% during the pretest. The assessment results indicate significant growth in letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable decoding and reading simple words, although neither student met the pre-

determined mastery criterion of 80%. The gains suggest that the repeated presentation of activities involving contextual learning and picture word card media helped the acquisition of basic reading skills in both participants.

Comparison of pre-intervention and Cycle I results also showed positive learning progress. Before the intervention both students had ongoing difficulties in letter recognition, in discriminating the phonemes /b/ and /d/, in decoding consonant-vowel syllables and in reading simple CVCV words. Both students showed improved reading accuracy, an increased ability to relate pictures to print and increased participation in classroom activities after four lessons. Students were also more ready to answer teachers' questions, to read in groups and to do learning tasks by themselves. These behavioural changes were associated with improvements in quantitative achievement, with MC's reading performance increasing from 20% to 60% and NN's performance increasing from 0% to 40%. Despite these promising results, the first cycle had not reached the expected level of mastery of learning. The reflection showed several challenges that were persistent including the limited duration of each instructional session, the requirement for more extensive repetition to consolidate letter recognition and decoding skills, and the propensity of students to speed up the reading tasks leading to reading inaccuracies. There were some planned improvements for Cycle II, such as expanding opportunities for guided practice, increasing the intensity of contextual reading activities, and providing more individualized help so that both students could reach the targeted mastery level of 80%.

Cycle II

The second cycle was performed in four instructional meetings after reflections obtained from Cycle I. To improve the early reading achievement of students, a number of improvements were made, including more practice with contextual words, emphasis on learning activities with consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (CVCV) words, more intensive teacher guidance, and additional opportunities for independent reading practice. Learning activities still use the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model with the support of picture word card media through contextual reading exercises, small group games, picture-word matching, and guided writing activities. During the implementation, the participation of the students was more, there was enthusiasm and concentration compared to the previous cycle. Observations in the classroom indicated substantial gains in the learning behaviours of both participants. Student MC could successfully differentiate the letters /b/ and /d/ without the teacher prompts and could read CVCV words on the picture word cards independently. Furthermore MC showed more confidence by voluntarily reading aloud to the class, being actively involved in the picture word card games and blending syllables to form meaningful words accurately. Cycle II also made significant progress of Student NN. NN could recognize consonant-vowel syllables, form meaningful words with minimal syllable support, match pictures to words accurately, and demonstrated greater confidence and longer attention spans during classroom activities. Both students were more engaged and needed much less instructional support from the teacher in comparison to Cycle I.

The post-test given at the end of Cycle II indicated that both students achieved the expected level of mastery in early reading. Student MC obtained a perfect score of 100% which increased from 60% in Cycle I. Student NN achieved 80% which improved from 40% in the previous cycle. So both participants met the mastery criterion of 80%, with MC improving 40 percentage points from Cycle I to Cycle II and NN improving 40 percentage points as well. The results of this study indicate that there is a significant increase in the ability of students to recognize letters, phonemic awareness, decode syllables, and read simple words through repeated implementation of contextual learning activities with picture word card media. The intervention effectiveness is also reflected in a comparison of students' performance at all research stages. Student MC showed an increase from 20% at the pre-intervention assessment to 60% at Cycle I and finally 100% at Cycle II. Student NN also progressed from 0% at the pre-intervention stage to 40% in Cycle I and 80% in Cycle II. Classroom observations also revealed positive behavioural changes, in addition to the quantitative gains, such as increased motivation to learn, greater engagement in reading activities, improved concentration, increased self-confidence when reading aloud, and better cooperation during small group learning activities. These results indicate steady gains in the cognitive and behavioural components of early reading throughout the intervention.

The intervention was judged to be successful based on the reflection after Cycle II and was therefore terminated after the second cycle. Both participants met the pre-determined success criterion and there were no major learning barriers during implementation. Students were more actively involved in classroom activities and completed reading tasks with more accuracy and confidence, and demonstrated independent early reading performance. In summary, the application of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model assisted by picture word card media has resulted in optimal improvements in the early reading skills of students and successfully achieved the instructional objectives proposed in this classroom action research.

Discussion

The overall result showed that the use of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model supported by the media of picture word card significantly improved early reading skills of students with speech impairment. Before the intervention, both participants had very low reading abilities. Student MC achieved only 20% and student NN got 0% indicating that both participants had not mastered basic competencies in letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable decoding and simple word reading. MC's performance increased to 100% and NN's performance increased to 80% after Cycle II. Both participants increased by 80 percentage points. The results were above the established mastery criterion of 80%. This suggests that the instructional intervention was effective in improving students' early reading performance. The changes in the intervention were not only quantitative in achievement but were accompanied by significant behavioural changes in the learning process. Both students had persistent difficulties at the beginning of the study to visually discriminate between similar letters, especially /b/ and /d/, to identify sounds of letters, to combine syllables to form meaningful words, and to maintain concentration during reading activities. As a result of the intervention, students showed greater ability to

independently identify letters, accurately decode consonant-vowel (CV) and consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (CVCV) words, match written words to pictures in context, and read aloud with greater confidence. Furthermore, classroom observations confirmed an increase in students' motivation to learn, their attention span, their participation in instructional activities, and their willingness to engage in reading tasks independently. These results indicate a positive effect of the intervention on cognitive and affective early literacy learning.

The effectiveness of the intervention can be explained by the characteristics of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach which emphasizes meaningful learning by linking instructional contents with students' real life experiences. CTL, as stated by Johnson (2002), supports students to construct knowledge by means of authentic experiences, cooperation, reflection and transfer of learning to real life situations. The picture word card media in this study functioned as a concrete visual so that students could associate the written symbols with objects that were familiar to them in the environment. In this context, the learning process here reduced the abstractness of reading instruction and allowed students to understand the relationship between letters, sounds and meanings. The findings are also consistent with Piaget's constructivist viewpoint that learners construct knowledge by interacting with their surroundings and with Dewey's philosophy of education that learning is more meaningful when it is connected to real-life experiences.

Image word card media also contributed greatly to the improvement of students' early reading skills by providing multisensory learning experiences. Simultaneously the visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning processes were ignited through visual illustrations, printed words, oral modelling on the part of the teacher and repeated practice of reading. According to Birsh and Carreker (2018), multisensory instructional methods have been shown to improve letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and decoding skills for students with reading difficulties. In the same vein, Arikunto (2019) asserts that picture word cards aid students in understanding the written symbols by providing them with tangible visual aids. In this study, students were always exposed to contextual picture-word associations which provide them the opportunity to learn gradually the recognition of letters, blend syllables into meaningful words, and improve reading fluency with less teacher assistance.

The findings here contribute to the existing body of evidence on literacy instruction for students with learning difficulties and speech impairments. According to Siti (2020), the CTL approach is effective in enhancing reading performance because the learning materials are associated with the students' daily experiences. Budi (2021) states that picture word cards significantly improve word recognition among students with speech impairments. The present study has expanded these findings by combining both instructional components into one intervention. It has shown that contextual instruction supported by visual media improves not only reading achievement, but also students' motivation, confidence, classroom participation, and learning engagement. These behavioural gains are highly significant, given that children with speech impairments also frequently experience communication difficulties, which hinder their participation in literacy activities (Directorate General of Special Education, 2019). The results showed that the application of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model supported by picture word card media was effective in improving early reading skills in students with speech disorders. The intervention was effective in enhancing students' mastery of letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable decoding and simple word reading as well as enhancing learning motivation, concentration and self-confidence. Thus, the research hypothesis that the CTL model assisted by picture word card media improves early reading skills in students with speech impairments is accepted. These findings indicate that literacy instruction that is contextual, visually supported, and student-centered is an effective pedagogical strategy to improve foundational reading skills of learners with special educational needs.

CONCLUSION

The results of this classroom action research indicated that the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model assisted by media picture word card could improve significantly early reading skills of students with speech impairments. The intervention resulted in sustained improvement in all phases of the research, with the average reading achievement of the students increasing from 10% in the pre-intervention assessment to 50% in Cycle I and further rising to 90% in Cycle II, surpassing the established mastery criterion of 80%. In addition to improving letter recognition, phonemic awareness, syllable decoding and simple word reading, the intervention also improved students' motivation, participation, concentration and self-confidence during literacy activities in the classroom. The results of this study suggest that the use of contextual learning through visual instructional media is a strategy to develop basic reading skills for learners with speech impairments in inclusive primary schools. Based on the results of this study, schools and teachers are advised to apply the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model assisted by picture word card media in early literacy learning for students with speech impairment and other students who have the same reading difficulties. Further studies should be conducted with larger sample sizes, extended intervention duration and varied educational settings to better investigate the effectiveness of this teaching approach and improve the generalizability of the findings across different contexts of inclusive education.

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