THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT MODEL OF EARLY STAGE READING ABILITY BASED ON THE WHOLE LANGUAGE LEARNING AT THE FIRST GRADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DKI JAKARTA PROVINCE

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop an assessment model of early stage reading ability based on the Whole Language learning at the first grade elementary school students in DKI Jakarta province. The research was expected to give the teachers a guide in assessing the students’ early stage reading ability based on the whole-language learning. In addition, through this model, it was expected that the first grade elementary school students could recognize letters, syllables, words, and sentences so that they can read a discourse fluently. The method used in the research was Borg and Gall’s research and development model. The data were collected through (1) questionnaire, (2) observation, (3) documentation, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) started from January to August 2017. The findings of the study have indicated that: (1) the teachers need a tool to measure the students’ early reading ability as a basis for them to assess the ability, (2) the media and the material experts validation showed that the early reading ability assessment model was feasible and appropriate for measuring the students’ early stage reading ability, and (3) the effectiveness test on the assessment model of early reading ability has demonstrated differences in the outcomes of pretest and post-test of the first grade elementary school students in DKI Jakarta Province, Indonesia.

Keywords: Assessment Model, Early Stage Reading Ability, and Whole Language.

INTRODUCTION

In general, Indonesian language learning in the elementary school (SD) level aims to enable students to master various language skills that include listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As one of the language skills, reading is a difficult and complex skill to be mastered by students. This is similar to what delivered by Tarigan (1991); Okorie etc (2015) suggesting that reading is an active thinking process of understanding the author's ideas, connecting them with what is already known, and organizing those ideas so that they can be remembered and utilized. This statement implies that reading is a process undertaken to understand a text which is the author's ideas. This is can be performed by an engagement in the thinking activities in order to connect ideas, experiences, feelings, and so forth through the written language. Furthermore, reading is a process that rises to higher order thinking potentials (Karademir & Ulucina, 2017).
The reader also needs a cognitive process because they have to predict, interpret, and memorize information sequentially to decode messages (Cassany, 2006; Grabe and Stoller, 2002; and Weir, 1993).

Based on the aforementioned opinions, thus, reading is something that is very important to be mastered by anyone including elementary school students. Learning to read in elementary school level is divided into two parts: (1) learning to read at the beginning level and (2) learning to read at the continuing level. Initial stage reading is an activity undertaken by teachers and students in the hope that students are able to read by way of pronouncing symbols or letters with a loud voice. Meanwhile, continuous stage reading is an activity undertaken by students with no voice in order to understand a text.

As an important part of reading in elementary school, reading at the beginning stage is a crucial need that is systematically reflected. A research (Juel's, 1988) found that if the initial reading is not given, it is likely that 80% of first graders of elementary school will lack of ability in reading when they are in the fourth grade. This is similar to that delivered by Adam (1990) who states that for students who are unable to master the early stage reading ability in their early grades of elementary school may face the risk to fail in higher classes. To confirm this, a study by Snow (1998) asserted that initial reading abilities has become important to be mastered in the early class as a basis for mastering other new knowledge. Furthermore, many findings of numerous studies over the past 20 years have revealed the importance of building the initial reading skills for the first 3 years of elementary school (Torgesen 1998).

In relation to the description above, learning to read in Indonesia especially reading at the early stage is still difficult and far from success. The result of elementary school students' reading ability in Jakarta has showed that most of the group B children have been able to recognize the letters (grade average 88% or good criteria), but still difficult to read the word (grade 58% or "less criteria"). Meanwhile, the average score of students in reading sentence was 47% or "less criteria" (Laely, 2013). The identified reasons for this low reading ability are teachers incompleteness in teaching the initial reading skill at early grades, particularly at the first grade elementary school. That is, there are still many students who have not the ability to read smoothly. Consequently, it possibly affects the students' reading skill or ability, comprehension, and understanding.

Those findings are in harmony with Kompas's rubric (2013) saying that the
PISA test results in mathematics, science, and reading has shown that the ability of Indonesian children aged 15 years in the field of mathematics, science and reading are very low compared to other children in the world. The results of the program for international Student Assessment show that Indonesia is ranked at 64th out of 65 countries that excel in reading tests.

In addition, another data from Ruhaenah’s survey conducted in Indonesia has indicated that 17 elementary schools in Yogyakarta and Sleman city were found to have 12% out of the 170 first and second grade elementary students who have not yet able to read simple sentences smoothly (Ruhaeah, 2008).

Referring to the data above, it is necessary for the role of elementary school teachers to develop reading skills for the elementary students. However, before starting to read, the students must be prepared first in terms of their development (Center, 2005). Readiness is a period when children are close to reading preparation activities and when an instruction can be started (Jana, 2007). Readiness is also known as the first level in learning reading ability. The term is used to indicate a general stage of maturity of development and readiness in which a child can learn to read easily and proficiently in regular classroom settings when getting good teaching (Norma, 2011). Furthermore, readiness in reading needs to be performed as a basis to prepare children mentally, physically, and socially-emotionally, as a provision in getting the experience to read in the future. (Okario, 2015; Yangin, 2009). This is in line with the results of a study conducted by O’Conner et al. (2005a) who found that early identification and intervention of reading failure will reduce the prevalence of reading failure at a later stage. This has happened in the United States from 1960 to 2010 where literacy is influenced by the changing demographics of the nation’s children, literacy experience, including media exposure, children’s book availability, and time spent (Hiebert etc, 2015).

Moreover, the students are truly suggested to read well as their next provision in reading more complex texts. For this reason, a teacher must know the stages of reading development which are divided into The Emergent Reader (4-5 years), The Early Reader (6-7 years, The Transitional Reader (7-8 years), The Self-Extending Reader (8-9 years), and The Advanced Reader (Caravette, 2011; Weininger, 2010). Downing (1979) proposes three phases in the acquisition of reading skills: the cognitive phase in which the child becomes aware of the tasks required to become skilled, the mastering phase where skills are practiced
until mastery is achieved, and the automatic phase where learners practice until the skills can be performed without conscious attention.

Additionally, the teachers need to understand the stages of reading development as well as the Whole Language Approach. Whole Language approach has recently become a very popular and important trend in the development of children's language education (Huang, 2014). According to Stahl and Miller (1989) "It appears that Whole Language approach is an important approach in the process of reading. Siregar (2004) mentions that the Whole Language learning model is a model of language learning that is packed in one thematic package (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

Nevertheless, teachers are not skilled in the application of integrated language learning (whole language approach). This can be seen from the teacher action during teaching the initial reading ability. They tend to teach it separately to other language skills such as writing, listening, and speaking. Whereas the concept of language learning believes in that someone will master a language if these four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing can be taught in an integrated way.

The results of this study were expected to positively contribute in improving the knowledge, insight, and skills of teachers in order to be able to carry out an assessment of the early stage reading ability of elementary school students. This is in line with what has been done by Singaporeans who have developed a preliminary reading assessment to help their educational and policy introductions and innovations as well as to improve the teacher capacity by providing reading assessment (Kohl & Scott, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used Borg and Gall's Research And Development (R & D) procedure. "Research and Development in a development in an industry-based development model in which the factories are field-tested, evaluated, and refined until they meet the specified criteria of effectiveness, quality, or similar standards" (Borg & Gall, 2007). Research development aimed to produce an assessment to measure the initial reading ability of grade 1 elementary school students. Through this research, it is expected that teachers would have guidance in determining how far the ability of students in the beginning reading stage. In addition, this research is also expected to minimize the diversity of reading ability in grade 1 elementary school students. The
research stages in developing the assessment model of initial reading ability are (1) analysis using questionnaires; (2) validation of media and material experts on the initial reading assessment model; (3) an empirical validation test of the initial reading assessment model; and (4) the effectiveness test of the model. The subjects involved in this research were the first graders of elementary school in the area of DKI Jakarta.

**Table 1. Media expert validation result**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Validation Media Expert</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Suitability with the student's understanding level</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The demands and integrity of the thinking Flow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Typography of media content</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contents Reflection</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the table 1 above, there are five aspects of the assessment of the learning media. Those assessed aspects are (1) suitability with the students' understanding level, (2) communicative, (3) the demands and integrity of the thinking flow, (4) typography of media content, and (5) content reflection. The total validation of media expert has the mean score of 4.63 with good category.

**Material Expert Validation**

Material expert validation results conducted by the 2 material experts can be seen in the table 2 below.

**Table 2. Material Expert Validation**
Based on the table 2 above, there are four aspects of expert assessment of instructional media. The assessed aspects are (1) learning or instructional design, (2) learning content, (3) language, and (4) communication aspects. The total scoring of the qualification test of the media experts I and 2 are 4 and 7 with very good category.

Empiric Validation

The Appropriateenss of “One to One Try-Out” Trial

The “one to one try out” trial was conducted with a total of 15 respondents where the selection of respondents was selected with the characteristics and abilities of the different learners. The data acquisition table of the “one to one try out” on the development of assessment model of initial reading ability based on the whole language is described as follows:

Table 3. The of One to One Try-Out Trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Score Total</th>
<th>Total of Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>The instrument is appropriate to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Quality</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1387</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Small Group Try-outs

The following table 4 is the data acquisition of the small group try-out on the development of assessment model of initial reading ability that based on the whole language:

Table 4 The Eligibility Trial of Small Group Try-out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Score Total</th>
<th>Total of Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>The instrument is appropriate to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Quality</td>
<td>1174</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2289</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Large Group Trial (Field Try-out)
The following table 5 describes the data acquisition of the feasibility of a large group trial (field try-out) on the development of an assessment model of initial reading ability that based on the whole language:

**Tabel 5. The Large Group Trial (Field Try-out)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Score Total</th>
<th>Total of item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>Assessment model of initial reading ability is worth to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display</td>
<td>3372</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Quality</td>
<td>3815</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8619</strong></td>
<td><strong>2000</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.30</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effectiveness test of the model

In general, effectiveness is defined by Schemerhon (1984) as the achievement measured by comparing the results between before and after the implementation of the treatment. In this effectiveness stage, the researcher intended to know the effectiveness of the initial reading assessment model based on this Whole Language approach. The following test results of the difference of two average (t-test) Pretest and Post-test can be seen in table 6.

**Tabel 6. Test of Differences of Two Average (t-test) Pretest and Posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>-9.430</td>
<td>3,682</td>
<td>,368</td>
<td>-10,161 -8,899 -25,608 99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the table 6 above, it was obtained that the statistical price $t = -25,608$ with db 99 and significant number. Or, $p$-value $0.000 < 0.05$. In other words, $H_0$ was rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that there were differences in the initial reading results between before and after the use of initial reading assessment at the first-grade elementary school students.

**DISCUSSION**
The result of the research displays that the assessment model of the initial reading ability that based on the whole language was feasible to be used by teachers in assessing the students’ reading ability at the beginning stage. Also, the students’ reading ability need to be properly known and developed as early as possible in order to minimize the student's inability to read later. This is similarly stated by Hairstock (2002) which states that the ability to read is the most fundamental skill of children and will always be studied for the success of students in school, the world of work, and in life.

The initial stage of reading ability can be mastered properly if the teacher is able to apply the appropriate approach that matches the characteristics of the learning materials. One approach that can be used in teaching the beginning stage of reading is Whole Language. Shirley (1990) states that whole language is a philosophy that is a system about the nature of basic learning and how it can be grown in the classroom and school. The Whole Language approach works pretty well in improving the students’ reading ability (Moghadam & Adel, 2011).

Elementary school students’ readiness in reading is important to be known by the teacher as that will impact the success of the students’ future reading.

The initial reading activities in the early stages of the students learning process are conducted to let them know more about the visuals of letters and numbers. This is agreed by Syafii’i who states that there are three terms of basic reading components, namely: (1) recording, (2) decoding, and (3) meaning. The "recording" and "decoding" components are the processes that take place in the early grades of elementary school while the "meaning" is related to the understanding that goes on in the high grade of elementary school. This opinion can be interpreted that a child needs to understand the codes, sounds, and visuals as a preparation for themselves to understand the meanings contained in the text. By first mastering these basic components students will have the proper cognitive knowledge. The main cognitive knowledge is the students’ ability to recognize symbols, letters, and how to read letters, syllables, and sentences. This is nearly same with Sonawat & Francis (2007) statement saying that reading is a process of thinking that is an individual’s development process must be fostered as it comes from natural ability and can be learned through practical activities and exercises in the students’ learning process.

CONCLUSION
The development of assessment model of early-stage reading ability is useful to minimize the diversity of reading skills in the first-grade elementary school based on the Whole Language approach. The results of the research were (1) the validation of the instructional media experts showed an average of 4.63 that entered into very good category; (2) The validation results of the material expert had an average score of 4.71 which can be categorized as excellent; (3) the assessment results of the media and material experts indicated that the first-grade elementary school students’ early reading ability after the model implementation can be categorized as excellent; and (4) the result of the effectiveness test of this model using the t-test has revealed that there were differences on the pretest and the post-test results in the first-grade students’ early reading ability.

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