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Needs Analysis for the Development of a Balanced Literacy Approach Model for Beginning Reading in Elementary Schools

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to identify the needs for developing a Balanced Literacy Approach (BLA) model to improve beginning reading instruction in elementary schools. The research was conducted in three public elementary schools in Sentolo District, Kulon Progo, involving 15 lower-grade teachers, Grade II students, and instructional documents used in the schools. Using a descriptive method within the preliminary phase of the Borg & Gall R&D model, data were collected through document analysis, classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, interviews, and an early reading test. The findings indicate that instructional documents were still general in nature and not tailored to the specific needs of early literacy development. Classroom practices were dominated by lecture-based activities and round-robin reading, with limited use of shared reading, guided reading, or independent reading. Teachers reported challenges in guiding students to understand texts and identified the lack of engaging reading materials such as Big Books. Students showed low reading interest, and test results revealed disparities between technical decoding skills and reading comprehension. These results highlight the urgent need for a structured, engaging, and applicable instructional model. The Balanced Literacy Approach is considered relevant to provide systematic, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate reading experiences for early grade learners.

1. Introduction

Early literacy had been shown to play a significant role in long term academic success (Solang et al., 2024; Valcárcel et al., 2024). Beginning reading instruction enabled children to develop the ability to understand information, process ideas, and participate in learning at the next grade levels. During early childhood, literacy served as the foundation for language development and critical thinking. Without a strong foundation in reading, children were at risk of encountering learning

difficulties in subsequent grades. Therefore, the overall success of education was strongly determined by the quality of reading instruction in the early grades.

International data indicated that the literacy achievement of Indonesian students remained low, as reported in PIRLS 2011 and 2021. This low performance reflected a gap between the expected reading competencies in the curriculum and actual classroom practices in elementary schools. Contributing factors included limited exposure to meaningful literacy experiences, insufficient reading materials, and a lack of varied instructional strategies. This situation suggested that reading instruction had not been managed in accordance with students' developmental needs (Agung et al., 2024). Thus, efforts to improve beginning reading instruction were urgently required.

Research on child development indicated that early grade students needed constructive, contextual, and sequential learning experiences to master beginning reading (Tompkins et al., 2018). However, in many schools, reading instruction was still carried out mechanistically through drilling, turn taking, or teacher centered approaches. Such methods hindered students from constructing meaning, as they were not provided with enough opportunities for exploration and interaction. The lack of instructional variety made it difficult for students to process information naturally. This condition indicated the need for a more holistic and interactive instructional approach.

Problems in elementary reading instruction were exacerbated by the challenges faced by teachers, as seen in findings showing that innovative literacy strategies had not been widely applied in early grade classrooms (Apriliana et al., 2022; Kurniastuti et al., 2023). Teachers often relied on traditional methods without differentiation, causing students with lower abilities to receive insufficient support. In addition, limited training and the scarcity of reading materials hindered teachers from designing engaging and meaningful lessons. Teachers' lack of readiness to adopt new literacy strategies became one of the main reasons for low reading outcomes. This situation reinforced the need for a systematic and practical instructional model.

Research also showed that emotional factors played a significant role in students' reading success (Kamma & Yusuf, 2024; Khalidin, 2021). Many early grade students exhibited fear of making mistakes when reading aloud or attempting to comprehend complex texts. This condition led students to avoid participating in literacy activities and reduced their confidence. Learning environments that did not provide emotional safety further weakened students' motivation to read. Therefore, beginning reading instruction required a supportive and enjoyable approach that encouraged student confidence. The impact of national literacy programs had not been optimal because many elementary schools lacked adequate leveled reading materials (Amanda, 2023). The absence of texts that matched students' reading levels caused literacy activities to become unfocused. Teachers were often forced to use texts that were too difficult or too simple, resulting in uneven reading development. This situation demonstrated that the availability of reading materials was an essential component that needed to be addressed through an effective

instructional model. Without appropriate materials, even well designed literacy strategies would not be implemented effectively.

Teacher student interaction also played a crucial role in literacy development, and numerous studies confirmed that intensive scaffolding strongly supported students who struggled with reading (Karolina & Queiroz, 2023; Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). However, classroom instruction was often conducted in a whole class format without consideration of individual differences. Students who experienced reading difficulties did not receive the support they needed, causing them to fall further behind. Teachers' inability to implement differentiation highlighted the need for a flexible and responsive instructional model. This emphasized that reading instruction required an approach that enabled individualized support.

Various studies also showed that teachers needed concrete and applicable instructional guidelines to manage reading lessons effectively (Dixon & Oakhill, 2024).. Teachers required a model that provided examples of activities, clear instructional steps, intervention strategies for struggling readers, and authentic assessment techniques. When structured instructional models were unavailable, teachers tended to rely on habitual practices that were not always effective. The availability of a needs-based model could help improve the quality of reading instruction. Therefore, providing a comprehensive instructional model became essential for strengthening early literacy.

The Balanced Literacy Approach had been proven to provide structured, coherent, and relevant reading experiences for early grade students (Apostolou, 2023; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). Through the integration of read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading, students received support that aligned with their individual reading levels. This approach enabled differentiation and fostered active student engagement. Its effectiveness in improving fluency, comprehension, and reading motivation had been demonstrated across various educational contexts. These advantages made the Balanced Literacy Approach relevant for implementation in Indonesian elementary schools.

The relevance of the Balanced Literacy Approach was strengthened by its alignment with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasized flexibility and student centered learning (Azmy & Fanny, 2023). Approaches that allowed differentiation became essential in literacy instruction in elementary schools. Integrating the Balanced Literacy Approach into curriculum implementation enabled teachers to provide meaningful reading experiences that reflected students' needs. Thus, this approach was not only pedagogically appropriate but also aligned with national educational directions. This confirmed the urgency of developing a Balanced Literacy based instructional model. Needs analysis served as a critical initial stage in developing an instructional model because it ensured that the model addressed actual conditions and challenges in the field (Borg & Gall, 1983). This analysis enabled in depth identification of learning conditions, teacher challenges, student readiness, and available literacy resources. Without accurate needs analysis, instructional models risked being ineffective when implemented. Therefore, the development of a Balanced Literacy Approach

required a thorough understanding of elementary school needs. This stage became the essential foundation that could not be bypassed.

The overall issues presented indicated an urgent need to develop a Balanced Literacy Approach model for beginning reading instruction. This model was expected to address instructional challenges, enhance early grade students' reading abilities, and support the effective implementation of the curriculum. Needs analysis became a vital step to ensure that the model developed was relevant, practical, and impactful. Thus, this study aims to be the basis for developing a learning model that supports the initial reading skills of elementary school students.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a Research and Development approach by adapting a simplified form of the Borg and Gall model (Borg & Gall, 1983). The focus of this article was the preliminary research stage, which functioned as the foundation for developing an appropriate instructional model. The preliminary stage consisted of a literature review and contextual analysis, an analysis of instructional documents, classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, teacher interviews, and an early reading assessment for students. These components were essential for identifying the actual conditions of beginning reading instruction in the field. The design was selected because it enabled a systematic examination of instructional practices and provided empirical evidence needed before constructing the Balanced Literacy Approach model.

Research Location and Subjects

The study was carried out in three public elementary schools located in Sentolo District, Kulon Progo Regency, namely Sentolo 1 Public Elementary School, Sentolo 2 Public Elementary School, and Sentolo 3 Public Elementary School. The research subjects included fifteen lower grade teachers, Grade II students who participated in the early reading test, and the instructional documents used in the three schools. These subjects and units of analysis were selected to represent the real instructional conditions in early grade classrooms and to obtain comprehensive information for the needs assessment (see in Table 1).

Table 1. Research Subjects and Units of Analysis

No	Subject or Unit of Analysis	Total	Type of Data
1	Grade I to III teachers	15 teachers	Questionnaires, interviews
2	Grade II students	Varied by school	Early reading test
3	Instructional documents	3 schools	Lesson plans, textbooks, worksheets, curriculum
4	Classroom activities	3 classes	Observations

Types and Sources of Data

This study used both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure the validity and completeness of the needs assessment. Qualitative data were obtained from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and instructional document analysis. These data provided detailed descriptions of instructional practices, teacher constraints, and contextual conditions of literacy instruction. Quantitative data were obtained from teacher questionnaires and the early reading test administered to Grade II students. These data provided measurable indicators of teacher needs and students reading ability levels (see in Table 2).

Table 2. Types of Data and Data Collection Techniques

Type of Data	Source of Data	Technique	Output
Qualitative	Teachers, documents, class	Observations, interviews, document analysis	Descriptions of instructional needs
Quantitative	Teachers, students	Questionnaires, reading test	Scores of needs and reading abilities

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through five major procedures to ensure that the needs analysis captured different aspects of instructional problems and classroom realities. Document analysis was conducted to examine the structure and completeness of lesson plans, textbooks, worksheets, and curriculum guides used in the schools. Classroom observations were conducted to describe the actual instructional practices and teacher student interactions during reading lessons. Teacher questionnaires were used to gather quantitative information regarding teacher needs, perceptions, and challenges. Interviews were conducted to obtain in depth qualitative explanations about the difficulties experienced by teachers. Finally, an early reading test was administered to assess students reading fluency, decoding skills, and comprehension (see in Table 3).

Table 3. Data Collection Procedures

Stage	Technique	Data Focus	Output
1	Document analysis	Lesson plans, textbooks, worksheets, curriculum	Profile of instructional documents
2	Observation	Teacher and student activities	Description of instructional practices
3	Questionnaire	Teacher perceptions and needs	Quantitative teacher data
4	Interview	Constraints, needs, and teaching experiences	In depth qualitative data
5	Reading test	Students reading abilities	Reading ability scores

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study included a classroom observation sheet, a document analysis sheet, a teacher needs questionnaire, an interview guide, and an

early reading test instrument. The following are the questions used in this study (see in Table 4).

Table 4. Interview Question Item

No.	Aspect	Interview Question Item
1	Instructional Practices	How do you usually conduct beginning reading instruction in your class?
		What daily routines do you apply in reading lessons?
		Which reading components (phonics, fluency, comprehension) do you focus on the most? Why?
		How do you encourage student participation during reading activities?
		What reading activities do students enjoy the most in your class?
2	Use of Reading Strategies	Which reading strategies do you commonly apply?
		How do you model reading skills to students?
		What challenges do you encounter when applying interactive reading strategies?
		How do you help students construct meaning from text?
		How often do you integrate speaking and writing activities in reading lessons?
3	Literacy Resources & Materials	What types of reading materials are available in your classroom?
		Are the reading materials suitable for different student ability levels? Explain.
		Do you use additional media such as Big Books or picture books? How effective are they?
		What reading materials do students prefer the most?
		What resources do you still need to support beginning reading instruction?
4	Assessment & Learning Progress	How do you assess students' reading fluency and comprehension?
		How often do you conduct assessment during reading instruction?
		What indicators do you use to monitor early reading development?
5	Learner Differences & Support	How do you provide support to students with lower reading abilities?
		Are you familiar with the Balanced Literacy Approach? Would you apply it if training is provided?

Each instrument was developed based on theoretical foundations and contextual characteristics of the participating schools. The development of these instruments ensured that the data collected were relevant, reliable, and appropriate for mapping the needs of beginning reading instruction in the early grades.

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative data were analyzed using the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which consisted of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These steps made it possible to organize qualitative information systematically and interpret emerging patterns related to instructional needs. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the calculation of percentage scores, mean values, ability classifications, and the distribution of teacher needs. The integration of qualitative and quantitative

findings allowed the researchers to construct a comprehensive needs analysis to serve as the foundation for developing the Balanced Literacy Approach model.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

The results of the need assessment described the factual conditions of beginning reading instruction in three public elementary schools in Sentolo District, Kulon Progo. The findings were obtained through document analysis, classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, in depth interviews, and an early reading assessment. Overall, the results showed that beginning reading instruction had not yet operated optimally due to limitations in instructional documents, teaching methods, reading materials, and students reading skills.

Analysis of Instructional Documents

The analysis of lesson plans, textbooks, student worksheets, and school curriculum documents showed that the instructional documents used by teachers were still standard in nature and did not specifically reflect the needs of beginning reading instruction. Teachers used lesson plans developed by the Teacher Working Group without modification to match student characteristics, and documents related to mapping students reading abilities were not available in the schools. In addition, the reading materials used were almost entirely limited to textbooks from the Ministry of Education, without leveled reading collections or storybooks appropriate to students ability levels. These findings indicated that the schools did not yet have a strong document foundation to support systematic beginning reading instruction (see in Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of Instructional Document Analysis

Aspect Reviewed	Document Findings
Lesson Plans	Followed the Teacher Working Group format; not self developed
Reading Materials	Limited to Ministry of Education textbooks
Curriculum	Used the Merdeka Curriculum and K13
Reading Ability Mapping	Not found

Classroom Observation of Reading Instruction

Classroom observations showed that reading activities were still predominantly teacher centered. The learning process was dominated by lecturing and turn taking reading, while activities that reflected a balanced literacy approach such as read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading were not observed. Student engagement in independent reading was also very low, as they tended to wait for teacher instructions rather than actively exploring texts. Furthermore, the instructional media used were limited to student textbooks without the support of visual aids such as Big Books. This condition indicated that reading instruction in

Sentolo remained mechanistic and did not provide adequate opportunities for students to develop fluency, comprehension, or reading interest optimally.

Teacher Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire administered to fifteen lower grade teachers revealed that most teachers viewed beginning reading instruction as still unsatisfactory. Teachers reported that instruction often progressed slowly and required new strategies to increase student participation. Although some teachers were familiar with various reading methods, their application remained limited to shared reading and oral reading, while more comprehensive strategies such as reading modeling and guided reading had not been used systematically. Teachers also reported difficulties guiding students in understanding longer texts and identifying main ideas. The assessments used were typically end of text questions that were general in nature and did not reflect the developmental stages of beginning reading. Moreover, the use of alternative reading materials was still limited because teachers relied heavily on textbooks as the main resource (see in Table 6).

Table 6. Key Findings from Teacher Questionnaires

Component	Findings
Quality of Instruction	Eighty six percent of teachers rated reading instruction as unsatisfactory
Methods Used	Shared reading, oral reading, turn taking reading
Instructional Barriers	Students struggled with longer texts; instruction was slow
Assessment	End of text questions; did not assess stages of early reading
Reading Materials	Ministry of Education textbooks were the primary source

Teacher Interview Results

The in depth interviews reinforced the questionnaire findings. Teachers stated that students reading interest remained low, with many students preferring to play during breaks rather than read. Based on interview results, only 46.67 percent of students showed interest in storybooks, while 53.33 percent demonstrated low engagement in reading activities. Teachers perceived this condition as being influenced by limited availability of attractive picture books and the absence of independent reading routines in the classroom. Teachers also expressed the need for a structured and engaging instructional approach, as well as the need for learning media such as Big Books to increase students visual engagement. Teachers had not yet developed a strong understanding of the Balanced Literacy Approach, indicating a need for training and guidance for implementation (see in Table 7).

Table 7. Summary of Interview Findings

Interview Focus	Findings
Students Reading Interest	53,33% percent low; 46,67 percent interested
Teacher Knowledge	Unfamiliar with the Balanced Literacy Approach
Instructional Needs	Need for Big Book media and more structured strategies

Early Reading Assessment

The early reading assessment was administered to map students basic reading competencies. The assessment included letter recognition, syllable reading, word reading, sentence fluency, and reading comprehension. The results showed variation in students performance, with a general tendency for technical decoding skills to be stronger than comprehension. Although detailed numerical data were not included in the document, the observed pattern indicated that students required intensive support in comprehension and reading fluency.

Discussion

The results of the needs analysis showed that the instructional documents used by teachers in Sentolo District were still administrative in nature and did not provide operational guidance for teaching beginning reading. This finding was consistent with the literature which stated that the quality of instructional documents strongly influenced the direction and effectiveness of the learning process, particularly in the early grade (Villocino & Villocino, 2025). Without structured documents, teachers tended to repeat traditional teaching patterns that did not always align with the developmental needs of early literacy. In many elementary schools, this phenomenon commonly occurred because teachers were more focused on meeting administrative requirements than designing contextual pedagogical strategies. This circumstance had a direct impact on the lack of innovation in reading instruction.

Classroom observations showed that reading activities were still dominated by lecturing and turn taking reading, which prevented students from experiencing rich and sequenced literacy practices. The literature indicated that beginning reading instruction required active engagement through structured reading experiences such as shared reading and guided reading (Altamimi & Ogdol, 2023; Wilt et al., 2019). Monotonous methods reduced students opportunities to build meaning connections and develop reading fluency. When reading activities were conducted only in mechanical ways, students tended to experience stagnation in their reading skill development. These observational findings reinforced the need for a more varied balanced literacy model that supported step by step learning processes.

The questionnaire results showed that most teachers perceived reading instruction as unsatisfactory because students struggled to comprehend longer texts and demonstrated low engagement. Previous studies emphasized that comprehension in early childhood developed through intensive interaction among children, texts, and teachers who acted as facilitators (Cardenas, 2020; Gillon et al., 2019). When such interaction was limited, children's comprehension skills developed more slowly even when they were technically able to read words. Another factor that slowed comprehension development was the limited variety of texts and minimal opportunities for students to practice independent reading. This condition aligned with field findings which showed teachers dependence on prescribed textbooks.

Teacher interviews revealed that students reading interest remained low and that most students preferred activities other than reading. This phenomenon was consistent with research indicating that reading interest was influenced by the quality of reading experiences and children's exposure to engaging texts (Astuti et al., 2022). When schools did not provide a rich literacy environment, children tended not to perceive reading as an enjoyable activity. The lack of visual media such as Big Books also reduced the attractiveness of reading activities in the classroom. This confirmed that increasing reading interest needed to be accompanied by the provision of appealing reading materials and meaningful reading experiences.

The absence of teacher experience in applying the Balanced Literacy Approach also became a barrier in beginning reading instruction. Balanced Literacy emphasized the balance between technical skills such as phonics and meaning making through a combination of various reading activities (Hansford et al., 2024). Numerous studies demonstrated that this approach was effective in improving children's reading abilities because it provided scaffolded support and facilitated simultaneous development of reading skills (Sari et al., 2025). Without training and clear guidelines, teachers found it difficult to translate this concept into concrete instructional steps. This indicated the need for a practical model that could be easily adopted by teachers.

The early reading assessment confirmed that students tended to perform better in technical aspects such as letter and syllable reading than in text comprehension. This condition had been widely documented in the literature, which noted that early grade students were often able to read mechanically without understanding what they read (Apriliana et al., 2022; Fatonah et al., 2024). The weakness in comprehension indicated an imbalance between phonics training and the development of contextual understanding. Guided reading strategies or text meaning discussions rarely appeared in instructional practices in Sentolo, preventing children from learning how to construct mental representations of the texts they read. This confirmed the need for an instructional model that emphasized the integration of fluency and comprehension.

Limited media and reading materials were among the main factors influencing the low quality of reading instruction. Studies showed that the availability of leveled texts and visually appealing media significantly increased children's literacy exposure and motivation to read (Bakhtiar, 2025; Chuang, 2023). When reading materials were limited to textbooks, children did not have opportunities to choose texts that matched their interests and ability levels. Media such as Big Books had been proven to enhance student attention, engagement, and comprehension because they presented large print and attractive illustrations (Maulinda & Nasution, 2025). These findings were highly relevant to the needs of schools in Sentolo.

Overall, the results of the needs analysis showed that beginning reading instruction in Sentolo District required comprehensive pedagogical reform. Students needed scaffolded, repetitive, and varied reading experiences, while teachers needed an

instructional model that was easy to implement and supported by adequate media (Anggito et al., 2021; Lidyasari et al., 2023). The combination of these factors provided a strong rationale for developing a Balanced Literacy Approach supported by Big Books. This study clearly indicated that a structured instructional model was necessary to significantly improve early literacy quality. Such a model was expected to contribute meaningfully to enhancing elementary students reading skills.

4. Conclusion

This study showed that beginning reading instruction in the public elementary schools of Sentolo District still required significant improvement in terms of instructional documents, teaching strategies, and the provision of literacy media. Classroom observations revealed the dominance of lecturing and turn taking reading, which prevented students from experiencing rich, purposeful, and sequential literacy activities. The questionnaire and interview results confirmed that teachers needed a more effective instructional model and media that could increase students reading interest, since most students demonstrated low engagement and preferred activities other than reading. The early reading assessment showed a discrepancy between technical reading skills and text comprehension, indicating that instruction had not emphasized a balanced development of phonics, fluency, and comprehension. Based on these overall findings, the development of a Balanced Literacy Approach became a relevant solution because it was able to provide varied, engaging, and systematic reading experiences. This model had the potential to support teachers in designing more meaningful learning and to help students improve their reading interest, fluency, and comprehension in a sustainable manner.

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