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The Teacher's Role in Developing Beginning Reading Skills through Picture Storybooks in Elementary School

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Abstract: Beginning reading is a foundational competence that supports children's access to classroom texts and later learning, yet third-grade students may still display heterogeneous profiles in word recognition, fluency, prosody, comprehension, and reading confidence. Previous studies often examine reading performance, learner factors, or instructional media separately. This study analyzes these dimensions together by examining students' beginning reading profiles, the internal and external factors associated with those profiles, and the teacher's roles when picture storybooks are used as instructional support. A qualitative descriptive design was conducted in a third-grade class at SDN Ciganjur 01 Pagi, South Jakarta. One classroom teacher and ten purposively selected students representing varied reading profiles participated. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, reading observations, and documentation, and were analyzed through data condensation, display, and conclusion verification. The findings show differentiated needs in decoding, accuracy, fluency, prosody, comprehension, and confidence. The teacher acted as planner, facilitator, reading model, motivator, guide, and evaluator. Picture storybooks functioned most effectively as visual scaffolds when teacher questioning, text evidence, repeated reading, and differentiated follow-up were integrated.

Keywords: Beginning Reading, Picture Storybooks, Teacher's Role, Elementary Literacy, Instructional Scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning reading is more than the ability to pronounce written symbols. In the elementary grades, children must progressively coordinate alphabetic knowledge, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, prosody, and meaning construction. The Indonesian Phase B language curriculum similarly expects students in Grades III and IV to read increasingly fluent texts and understand information conveyed through written language (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan [BSKAP], 2024). When one component remains fragile, classroom reading can become slow and effortful, reducing the cognitive resources available for comprehension.

Contemporary reading research supports a multidimensional view of early literacy. Castles et al. (2018) emphasize systematic development of the alphabetic principle and word-reading processes, while Duke and Cartwright (2021) argue that reading development also depends on

bridging processes such as fluency, vocabulary, and cognitive flexibility together with motivational and self-regulatory processes. This perspective is important for Grade III because students who can identify letters may still read word by word, misread longer words, ignore punctuation, or struggle to retell a short text. In other words, apparently similar classroom difficulties may originate from different underlying needs.

Instruction must therefore be adaptive rather than uniform. Effective comprehension instruction combines foundational skills, vocabulary, background knowledge, text discussion, strategy modeling, meaningful reading volume, and opportunities to write or talk about texts (Duke et al., 2021). Differentiated support is particularly relevant in classes where some students already read simple sentences independently while others continue to need assistance with letter-sound mapping, syllable blending, or automatic word recognition. The challenge for teachers is to provide enough support for struggling readers without reducing participation, confidence, or independence.

Picture storybooks provide a potentially productive context for this work because written language and visual representation are presented together. Illustrations can clarify characters, settings, actions, emotions, and event sequences, while the text provides the linguistic evidence that readers must decode and interpret. Research on paper and screen reading indicates that design features and adult mediation influence comprehension rather than the medium operating automatically (Furenes et al., 2021). Shared picture-book reading has also been associated with vocabulary and story comprehension when adults actively guide attention and language (Tunkiel & Bus, 2022; Zheng et al., 2022).

The instructional value of picture storybooks depends on how adults structure interaction around them. Dialogic book-sharing research shows that joint attention, questioning, elaboration, links to children's experiences, and emotionally supportive exchanges can strengthen language learning and engagement (Murray et al., 2022). Teacher questioning during shared-book reading also shapes how children respond to text and connect textual information with prior knowledge (Fu et al., 2025). Consequently, pictures should serve as scaffolds for meaning making, not as substitutes for attending to print.

A practical risk is visual guessing. Beginning readers may infer a plausible answer from an illustration without confirming it in the written text. This issue is especially relevant when readers have limited decoding automaticity because the image offers an easier route to a response. A productive instructional sequence therefore moves between image, oral language, and print: children predict from illustrations, read or listen to the text, locate words or sentences that confirm or revise their predictions, and then retell or discuss the story. This process can turn visual support into a bridge toward textual evidence.

Previous Indonesian studies have reported positive uses of picture storybooks for interest, reading comprehension, and classroom participation (Apriatin, 2021; Putri & Nurhasanah, 2023). Other studies have emphasized the role of teachers and families in early reading development. However, these strands are frequently examined separately. Less attention has been given to how reading profiles, internal and external influences, and multiple teacher roles operate together during picture-supported reading within one natural classroom context.

The present study addresses this gap by examining three connected questions: (1) What characterizes the beginning reading profiles of Grade III students in the observed class? (2) What internal and external factors are associated with differences in their reading performance? (3) How does the teacher use picture storybooks while acting as planner, facilitator, reading model, motivator, guide, and evaluator? The novelty of the study lies in treating these teacher roles as an interconnected instructional system and in showing that picture storybooks become pedagogically useful when visual scaffolding is explicitly tied to print, repeated practice, formative assessment, and differentiated follow-up.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine beginning reading performance and classroom instructional practices in their natural setting. The design was selected because the purpose was to describe patterns of ability, contributing conditions, and teacher actions rather than to test the effect of an experimental treatment. The study was conducted at SDN Ciganjur 01 Pagi, Jagakarsa District, South Jakarta, in 2026.

The classroom context consisted of 31 Grade III students. The main adult informant was one classroom teacher, coded G1, with approximately six years of teaching experience. Ten students were selected purposively to represent variation in reading performance. Five students, coded A1 to A5, demonstrated relatively stronger reading performance, while five students, coded B1 to B5, required more intensive support. These categories were used for analytic organization rather than fixed labels.

Primary data were obtained through non-participant classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with the teacher, and direct observation of student reading. Secondary evidence included lesson materials, picture stories, accessible progress notes, student work, and classroom documentation. Observation focused on letter and word recognition, reading accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, intonation, punctuation, basic comprehension, motivation, and confidence. Interview prompts addressed student needs, instructional planning, text selection, modeling, guided practice, evaluation, family communication, barriers, and follow-up actions.

Data analysis followed an interactive process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Field evidence was coded and grouped into themes concerning reading profile, internal factors, external factors, teacher roles, picture-storybook use, instructional barriers, and follow-up. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, persistent observation, and maintenance of an analytic trail. Student identities are reported only through codes and the evidence is interpreted within the scope of this classroom.

Table 1. Research Focus, Indicators, Data Sources, and Techniques

Focus	Main indicators	Data sources	Techniques
Beginning reading skills	Letter/word recognition, accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, intonation, punctuation, comprehension, confidence	Teacher, students, reading performance	Observation, interview, documentation
Internal and external factors	Interest, motivation, concentration, confidence, practice, family support, reading materials, literacy environment, instructional strategy	Teacher, students, documents	Interview, observation, triangulation
Teacher roles	Planner, facilitator, reading model, motivator, guide, evaluator	Teacher and classroom activity	Interview and observation
Picture storybooks	Pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading, benefits, barriers, follow-up	Teacher, students, reading materials	Observation and documentation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Beginning Reading Profiles

The evidence showed substantial variation in beginning reading performance. Students in the relatively stronger group generally recognized letters and common words, read simple sentences with greater continuity, and responded more confidently to literal questions. Students requiring more support displayed different combinations of difficulty. Some could identify letters but blended syllables slowly, some guessed words from initial letters or pictures, and others read accurately enough at the word level but had difficulty maintaining pace, attending to punctuation, or retelling the text.

Reading errors included substitutions, omissions, additions, reversals, repetitions, and self-corrections. Self-correction is pedagogically meaningful because it indicates emerging monitoring of whether spoken output matches print. At the same time, frequent corrections and long pauses suggest that word recognition is not yet automatic. These patterns align with the view that reading development progresses from deliberate decoding toward increasingly efficient word recognition, freeing attention for meaning construction (Castles et al., 2018).

Prosody also differentiated readers. Students who were still allocating substantial attention to decoding often read with long pauses and inconsistent intonation. Punctuation marks had been introduced, but their functional use in oral reading was uneven. This finding supports the idea that fluency is a bridging process rather than a simple measure of speed. Accurate phrasing, appropriate pausing, and expressive reading can signal that word-level processing and comprehension are becoming better coordinated (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

Comprehension was strongest for explicit information such as identifying characters, settings, and visible sequences of events. More demanding tasks, including causal explanation and coherent retelling, often required teacher prompts. Illustrations helped students organize events, but teacher questions were needed to move from naming visible elements to explaining relationships among events. This pattern is consistent with research showing that comprehension develops through explicit interaction with text structure, vocabulary, questioning, and discussion rather than emerging automatically from fluent oral reading (Duke et al., 2021).

Internal and External Factors Associated with Reading

Internal factors included reading interest, motivation, concentration, confidence, vocabulary, and practice intensity. Students who found the story theme familiar or attractive were more willing to attempt unfamiliar words, answer questions, and correct themselves. Students who feared making mistakes tended to read more quietly or avoid volunteering. The findings suggest that motivational conditions interact with skill development. A child may require decoding practice, but the effectiveness of that practice also depends on whether the classroom offers psychological safety and achievable participation.

External factors included family support, reading routines at home, availability of books, instructional strategy, classroom time, feedback, and the broader literacy environment. Several stronger readers had additional literacy experiences such as preschool exposure, family assistance, tutoring, or regular use of the reading corner. The pattern should not be interpreted deterministically. Rather, it suggests that cumulative opportunities to interact with language and print may support reading development, while schools need to provide compensatory opportunities for students whose home literacy experiences are less consistent.

The interaction between internal and external factors argues against a single remedial method for all struggling readers. A student who confuses letters needs different support from a student who reads accurately but lacks comprehension, and a student who is technically capable but reluctant to read aloud may require a smaller-group context and confidence-building feedback. Differentiated instruction therefore begins with formative diagnosis and continues through flexible grouping, varied text difficulty, repeated reading, and targeted questions.

Teacher Roles in Picture-Supported Beginning Reading

As a planner, the teacher selected stories with clear illustrations, familiar themes, manageable sentence length, and vocabulary that could be explained. Planning also involved deciding when to introduce key words and what questions to use before, during, and after reading. This role is critical because visual attractiveness alone does not determine instructional value. The linguistic complexity of picture books varies substantially, so teachers need to

consider vocabulary, syntax, narrative density, and the relationship between text and image when matching books to readers.

As a facilitator, the teacher provided access to the main Indonesian language textbook, picture stories, a projector, literacy activities, and a reading corner. Reading took place through whole-class, paired, turn-taking, and small-group formats. These formats increased opportunities to encounter text, although students with persistent difficulty still required more frequent and shorter guided practice than a weekly literacy period could provide.

As a reading model, the teacher demonstrated pronunciation, pacing, pausing, intonation, and expression. Students were asked to notice how the teacher stopped at punctuation and then imitate selected portions. Modeling made normally invisible reading decisions observable. This is consistent with layered comprehension instruction in which explicit modeling is followed by guided practice and gradual transfer of responsibility to students (Duke et al., 2021).

As a motivator and guide, the teacher used praise, encouraging prompts, visual interest, sound cues, syllable segmentation, vocabulary explanation, and guiding questions. Support was gradually reduced when students became more independent. For some students, the teacher provided approximately fifteen additional minutes after class, worksheets, or small-group assistance. The pattern resembles scaffolding in dialogic book-sharing, where adult prompts are adjusted to the child's current response and then extended to promote more independent language use (Murray et al., 2022).

As an evaluator, the teacher monitored accuracy, fluency, punctuation, and comprehension through individual or turn-taking reading, questions, reflection, and retelling. The findings indicate that this role would be strengthened by more systematic individual progress records that document error types, fluency, comprehension, and next instructional steps. Assessment is most useful when it changes subsequent teaching rather than merely assigning a general judgment of whether a child can read.

Picture Storybooks as Visual Scaffolds Rather than Visual Answers

Picture storybooks were used in pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Before reading, the teacher displayed covers, titles, and illustrations, activated prior experiences, introduced words, and asked students to predict the story. During reading, the teacher modeled selected passages and students read together, in turns, or in small groups. After reading, students answered questions, sequenced events, and retold the story with visual support.

This sequence clarifies why the picture storybook itself should not be treated as the intervention. Its educational effect emerges from teacher-child interaction, task design, text quality, and the relationship between illustration and print. Studies of shared-book reading similarly show that adult prompts, elaboration, and responsiveness are central to language benefits (Murray et al., 2022; Tunkiel & Bus, 2022). Teacher questions can either remain at the level of naming what is visible or move students toward inferencing, explanation, and evidence from text (Fu et al., 2025).

A recurrent instructional risk was that some students could give plausible answers from the picture without reading the relevant words. The teacher addressed this by asking students to locate the word or sentence that supported an answer. This move is particularly important for beginning readers because it connects visual interpretation to orthographic attention. Pictures can reduce cognitive load and activate background knowledge, but print referencing ensures that the central literacy task remains reading.

The findings also support graded selection of picture books. Students requiring stronger support benefit from short texts, repeated language patterns, clear image-text alignment, and high-frequency vocabulary. More fluent readers can work with longer stories, less redundant images, richer vocabulary, and retelling that requires causal and inferential explanation. A large-scale lexical analysis of children's picture books likewise indicates substantial variation

in vocabulary exposure across books, reinforcing the need for deliberate text selection rather than treating all picture books as equally accessible (Cowan et al., 2024).

Instructional Barriers, Follow-up, and System Support

The main barriers were wide differences in reading ability, limited time for individual guidance, uneven access to suitably leveled books, and inconsistent home practice. Some students also lost attention when stories were too long or when they waited too long for a reading turn. These conditions suggest that class-wide instruction needs to be supplemented with flexible groups and texts at different levels of difficulty.

Practical follow-up includes short repeated-reading routines, targeted letter-sound or phrase practice, small-group conferencing, additional time for selected students, progress notes, and strengthened communication with families. Family communication is most useful when it includes specific, manageable actions, for example listening to a child read a short passage, asking one literal and one inferential question, and praising effort rather than demanding speed.

The study's central finding is that the teacher's six roles form a continuous instructional cycle. Planning determines whether the selected text fits the reader. Facilitation creates access and participation. Modeling makes reading processes observable. Motivation supports persistence. Guidance provides responsive scaffolding. Evaluation generates information for the next planning decision. Picture storybooks are most useful when embedded in this cycle. This integrated role structure is the study's main contribution because it explains how media, differentiation, formative assessment, and teacher interaction work together rather than as separate techniques.

Table 2. Summary of Reading Conditions and Instructional Needs

Reading dimension	Observed condition	Instructional need
Letter and word recognition	Some students were fluent; others hesitated with similar letters, syllables, and longer words.	Explicit letter-sound review, syllable segmentation, word cards, repeated encounters.
Accuracy and fluency	Substitutions, omissions, repetitions, long pauses, and unstable pace occurred among weaker readers.	Supportive correction, teacher modeling, echo reading, repeated reading.
Prosody and punctuation	Pauses and intonation were inconsistent when decoding required high attention.	Expressive modeling, phrase marking, punctuation-focused rereading.
Comprehension	Literal information was more accessible; causal explanation and retelling often needed prompts.	Graduated questions, sequencing, retelling, text-evidence prompts.
Confidence	Some students read very softly or avoided turns because they feared errors.	Small groups, effort-focused praise, choice of manageable passages.

Table 3. Integrated Teacher Roles in Picture-Supported Reading

Teacher role	Observed practice	Pedagogical implication
Planner	Selected themes, illustrations, sentence length, vocabulary, and staged questions.	Match linguistic and visual complexity to reader profiles.
Facilitator	Provided books, projector, reading corner, and varied grouping.	Increase access and frequency of meaningful reading.
Reading model	Modeled pronunciation, pace, pauses, intonation, and expression.	Follow modeling with guided and repeated practice.

Teacher role	Observed practice	Pedagogical implication
Motivator	Used encouragement, attractive illustrations, and effort-focused praise.	Build confidence without making rewards the primary reason to read.
Guide	Segmented words, provided sound cues, explained vocabulary, asked scaffolded questions.	Reduce assistance gradually as independence develops.
Evaluator	Observed oral reading, questioned comprehension, used retelling, and communicated with families.	Document individual error patterns and next-step instruction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Beginning reading performance in the observed Grade III class was heterogeneous across word recognition, accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, intonation, punctuation, comprehension, and confidence. The evidence indicates that reading difficulty should not be treated as a single category because students who appear similarly hesitant may require different forms of support. Reading development was associated with interacting internal factors, including motivation, concentration, confidence, vocabulary, and practice, and external factors, including family support, access to reading materials, instructional strategy, classroom time, and feedback. The teacher responded through six connected roles as planner, facilitator, reading model, motivator, guide, and evaluator. Picture storybooks supported attention, vocabulary, confidence, sequencing, and comprehension when illustrations were used to scaffold engagement with print. The most defensible instructional implication is to combine picture-supported reading with explicit text referencing, repeated practice, flexible grouping, and formative assessment rather than relying on visual appeal alone.

Limitations

The study is contextual and should be interpreted within the boundaries of one Grade III classroom, one primary teacher, and ten purposively selected student informants. The available documentation of longitudinal reading progress and individual assessment samples was incomplete, and parents and school leaders were not included as interview participants. The study therefore describes patterns and instructional processes rather than estimating causal effects or prevalence. Future verification using repeated reading measures, richer student work samples, and multiple classroom sites would strengthen transferability.

Recommendations

Teachers should use brief diagnostic records to distinguish decoding, fluency, prosody, comprehension, and confidence needs; organize flexible small groups; and select picture storybooks with differentiated linguistic complexity. Pre-reading predictions should be followed by print verification, while post-reading tasks should include sequencing, retelling, and explanation. Schools should expand graded reading collections and create regular teacher collaboration around guided reading and formative assessment. Future research should examine several schools, include family perspectives, document student progress over a longer period, and test whether the integrated six-role instructional cycle is associated with measurable gains in reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and reading engagement.

Author Contributions

Santanna Gabriela Vanesha Lado and Robiatul Munajah contributed to the conceptual development, interpretation of the findings, manuscript preparation, scholarly revision, and

final approval of the manuscript. The specific contribution statement should be checked and adjusted by the authors before submission to accurately reflect each author's role.

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