

# Implementating 'Calistung' Clinic Program to Overcome Students' Reading Difficulty

Silvio Juliana Nabela<sup>1</sup>, Ali Mustadi<sup>2</sup>, Maulina Hendrik<sup>3</sup>, Romadon<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia; silviojuliana.2019@student.uny.ac.id

<sup>2</sup> Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia; ali\_mustadi@uny.ac.id

<sup>3</sup> Muhammadiyah University of Bangka Belitung, Indonesia; maulina.hendrik@stkipmbb.ac.id

<sup>4</sup> Muhammadiyah University of Bangka Belitung; Indonesia; romadonmp11@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

There were 8 children who had difficulty reading in first grade of elementary school, Pamulang. Every child had a different reading difficulty. This study aims to identify reading difficulties experienced by students and the application of the reading, writing, and counting skills (Calistung) clinic program in overcoming students' reading difficulties. This study used a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation followed by data triangulation. Data analysis was performed through data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Based on the results of the study, the reading difficulties experienced by students were recognizing letters such as pronouncing the letter incorrectly; distinguishing similar letters adversely; stuttering, connecting syllables, reading simple words and sentences; and difficulty in reading consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. Given these facts, students who have reading difficulties were assisted through the Calistung clinic program.

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### **Corresponding Author:**

Silvio Juliana Nabela

Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia; silviojuliana.2019@student.uny.ac.id

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four language skills. Then, language is one of the basic skills to be possessed by children (Tarigan, 2008). Besides, language is defined as a sound/sign symbolized by different letters in which each sound/symbol has a different meaning (Mulyati, 2016). Language is an orderly symbol system to convey various ideas and information consisting of visual and verbal symbols (Dhieni, 2012). Indeed, reading is not only pronouncing letters but also involves visual activities and thinking. As a visual process, reading is a process of translating written symbols (letters) into spoken words. As a thinking process, reading covers word recognition, literal understanding, interpretation, critical reading,

and creative understanding (Rahim, 2011). Reading activity stimulates brain development and gives more knowledge (Diarani & Syamsi, 2019). Through reading, the human brain tries to digest, understand, and interpret symbols so that reading activities can stimulate the brain to think and to understand the meaning contained in a series of written symbols (Muslimin, 2018).

Based on the international assessment of the reading domain conducted by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2011, Indonesia was ranked 45th out of 48 countries with a score of 428 out of a minimum average of 500 (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker., 2012). Besides, Indonesia is a part of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

During the participation in PISA, Indonesia's achievement in reading literacy was below the average minimum score at the international level. It is evident in Indonesia's last score in the reading domain in 2018 which reached an average reading score of 371 (OECD, 2019). This country carried out a similar program to PISA, namely the Indonesian National Assessment Program (INAP), in which one of the instruments is reading skills. Based on the results of the INAP, the national reading achievement of students reached 46.83% in the poor category, 47, 11% in the moderate category, and 6.06% in the good category (Puspendik, 2016). It indicates that the reading skill of Indonesian students is low.

Basic literacy has to be strengthened and instilled in the primary education level (Wiedarti & Laksono, 2016). Reading, writing, and counting skills (Calistung) are considered as 'opening the world' in which if the students master Calistung skills since primary school, they will have no difficulty in learning other fields of study in higher grades (Kuntarto, 2013). It in line with this research, if students haven't the ability to read, they will find difficulties to learn various subjects in higher grade (Utomo, 2018). In other words, language teaching and learning activities depart from the most fundamental skills such as understanding, spelling, reading and writing letters, when entering a higher grade language learning will be wider and deeper, the level of difficulty itself will improve (Gunawan & Suhardi, 2019).

Children in grades I, II, and III of primary school are oriented to pre-reading. The pre-reading or basic literacy skill is the ability to read at the basic level that is to change and pronounce written symbols into meaningful sounds (Kuntarto, 2013). Therefore, the student's admission in the 2018/2019 academic year, the Elementary School in Pamulang held a meeting for psychological and Calistung examiner to determine the learning readiness of the prospective students. Reading ability is prioritized because mastering reading skills enables students to easily participate in learning. On the other hand, those who cannot read might not be able to participate optimally in learning and will be left behind. This school targets to make all students able to read, write, and count within three months.

Reading is universally recognized as a core area of educational policy and teaching for every nation (Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Hooper, M., 2017). In general, the purpose of reading is to find and obtain information, understand the meaning of reading, get pleasure, obtain details/facts/main ideas or sequences of story, conclude, assess, evaluate, and compare reading objects (Tarigan, 2008). Meanwhile, pre-reading aims to cultivate and develop the ability to understand how to read correctly; recognize letters; change letters into sounds; introduce and practice reading according to certain techniques; understand words that are read, heard, and remember them; and establish a specific meaning of a word in a context (Kuntarto, 2013). Reading fluency is an important developmental step in grade I that can mediate basic alphabetic skills (Mesmer & Williams, 2014).

Differences in learning ability in the classroom became one of the factors in designing the Calistung clinic program. Students who have mastered the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic feel bored with repeated activities, while children who have difficulty reading need more intensive assistance in order to participate in learning. That's why, this elementary school initiated a learning program for reading, writing, and arithmetic (Calistung) called the Calistung clinic program. Calistung clinic is designed and developed in a special curriculum in schools, and focuses on students who have the ability to read. Students with reading difficulties are enrolled by the school and required to join the Calistung program. In addition, schools provide special books on the implementation of the Calistung clinic and teachers are required to fill out reports on the implementation of the Calistung clinic to

facilitate children's reading development. Therefore, this study seeks to identify, what difficulties do students experience when reading? How is the Calistung clinical program implemented in overcoming reading difficulties?

## 2. METHODS

This study used the qualitative method with Miles and Huberman data analysis model. The results of this study were in the form of qualitative data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation followed by data triangulation. After data collection, the next step is data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Data were collected purposively and snowball, triangulation techniques, inductive data analysis and emphasized the meaning of generalization (Sugiyono, 2018).

This research was conducted at Elementary School in Pamulang, South Tangerang. This research was conducted in the new academic year of 2018/2019 in the first semester of first grade. The subjects in this study were 8 students who had reading difficulties at the Calitung clinic, 1 teacher in grade I, 1 principal, 1 vice principal, 1 coordinator Calitung clinic program 2017, and 6 parent students who had reading difficulties at the Calitung clinic. The students with reading difficulties were listed by the school and required to attend the Calistung program both at school and outside of school.

The interview guidelines used were 1) reading difficulties, 2) the Calistung clinic program, 3) the teacher's efforts to overcome reading difficulties through the Calistung clinic program. Data was collected through interviews using audio recordings and notes. Observations were carried out for one month to see the students' reading development. Teachers are required to report the reading progress of students at the Calistung clinic every week to the vice principal for the curriculum. Then the researchers analyzed the reports of students' reading progress at the Calistung clinic. After the data from interviews, observations, and documentation were collected, the next step was triangulation of data and sources. Furthermore, the data in this study were analyzed using data reduction techniques, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

This study tried to analyze and describe the reading difficulties experienced by students and the implementation of the Calitung clinic program in overcoming students' reading difficulties in first grade elementary school. Calitung clinic is a program for students to get special guidance in overcoming difficulties in reading, writing, and counting. The Calitung clinic was held every day during break and after school hours for three months.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study, the reading difficulties experienced by students were recognizing letters such as pronouncing the letter incorrectly; distinguishing similar letters adversely; stuttering, connecting syllables, reading simple words and sentences; and difficulty in reading consonants, vowels, and diphthongs.

### Reading Difficulties

A total of 8 children who had reading difficulties in first grade elementary school. Each of them had a different reading difficulty. Some were unfamiliar with letters, unable to distinguish quite similar letters, stuttering (in reading, connecting syllables, reading simple words and sentences). Ms. NEH, the teacher of this class stated that "4 out of 8 children need special guidance and 4 others need more practice and habituation. Some child had difficulty distinguishing letters (b and d), frequently repeating words, deleting words, inserting words, hesitating, and stuttering in reading. Further, she added that the most found difficulties are recognizing letters, stuttering in reading, connecting syllables, and reading simple words and sentences."

The Calitung clinic program was conducted for 4 weeks and recorded in the curriculum. The results of learning activities in this program in Grade I, Pamulang are described based on the level of development of each child. The beginning of the first week, ZPM did not recognize letters, and at the

end of the week, ZPM began to recognize letters. At the beginning of the second week, ZPM was still learning to recognize letters and at the end of the week, ZPM was able to mention letters even though in stuttering or incorrectly. At the beginning of the third week, ZPM started learning to read each syllable even though in stuttering, and at the end of the week ZPM was still learning to read syllables. At the beginning and the end of the fourth week, ZPM was still stuttering in reading the syllables. ZPM has difficulty in remembering and connecting letters.

Based on the reading development of HW at the beginning of the first week, HW could not read syllables, but at the end of the week, HW began to read syllables in stuttering. At the beginning of the second week, HW was still stuttering in reading the syllables but then able to read the syllables at the end of the week. At the beginning of the third week, HW began to read words in stuttering, and then at the end of the week, HW began to read sentences in stuttering. At the beginning and the end of the fourth week, HW was still stuttering in reading the sentences. HW has difficulty in reading more than two syllables.

The reading development of EZ showed that at the beginning of the first week, EZ was still stuttering in reading the syllables, but at the end of the week, EZ was able to read words. At the beginning of the second week, EZ could read words and at the end of the week, EZ could read sentences. Then, at the beginning and end of the third and fourth week, the EZ could read the sentences fluently.

The reading development of FR showed that at the beginning of the first week, FR was still stuttering in reading syllables and still stuttering in reading words at the end of the week. At the beginning of the second week, FR was still stuttering reading words, but able to read words at the end of the week. At the beginning of the third week, FR could fluently read words and could read sentences at the end of the week. At the beginning and the end of the fourth week, FR was able to fluently read sentences.

The reading development of NAK showed that at the beginning of the first week, NAK was still stammering in reading the syllables, but able to read the syllables at the end of the week. At the beginning of the second week, NAK was still stuttering in reading words but learned reading sentences in stuttering at the end of the week. In the third and fourth weeks, NAK could fluently read sentences.

The reading development of SAK showed that at the beginning of the first week, SAK could not read syllables but then was able to read syllables in stuttering at the end of the week. At the beginning of the second week, SAK was still stuttering in reading the syllables. At the beginning and the end of the third week, SAK could read syllables but sometimes incorrectly mentioned letters. At the beginning of the fourth, SAK could read syllables and SAK could read words at the end of the week.

The reading development of ZD showed that at the beginning of the first week, ZD was stuttering and incorrectly mentioning letters, but able to read words at the end of the week. In the second to the fourth week, ZD was able to read sentences.

The reading development of KB showed that at the beginning and the end of the first week, KB was still stuttering and confused in mentioning letters. At the beginning and the end of the second week, KB was still stuttering in reading syllables. At the beginning of the third week, KB could read words and KB could read sentences at the end of the week. At the beginning and the end of the fourth week, KB could speak fluently in reading sentences.

The data on the children's reading development after receiving treatment in the Calitung clinic in first grade elementary school, Pamulang. The data obtained from the Calitung clinic report data made by the teacher and then analyzed, can be seen in the following table.

**Tabel 1.** Reading Development

Subject's Initial	Week	Conditions at the beginning of the week	Conditions at the end of the week
ZPM	1	Have not recognized letters	Starting recognizing letters
	2	Still learning to recognize letters	Stuttering/incorrectly mentioning

			letters
HW	3	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	4	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	1	Unable to read each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	2	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Able to read each syllable
EZ	3	Stuttering in reading words	Stuttering in reading sentences
	4	Stuttering in reading sentences	Stuttering in reading sentences
	1	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Able to read words
	2	Able to read words fluently	Able to read sentences
FR	3	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	4	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	1	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	2	Stuttering in reading words	Able to read each syllable
NAK	3	Able to read words	Able to read sentences
	4	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	1	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Able to read each syllable
	2	Stuttering in reading words	Stuttering in reading sentences
SAK	3	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	4	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	1	Unable to read each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	2	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
ZD	3	Able to read each syllable	Able to read each syllable but incorrectly mention letters
	4	Able to read each syllable	Able to read words
	1	Incorrectly mention letters	Able to read words
	2	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
KB	3	Able to read each syllable	Able to read sentences
	4	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences
	1	Incorrectly mention letters	Incorrectly mention letters
	2	Stuttering in reading each syllable	Stuttering in reading each syllable
	3	Able to read words	Able to read sentences
	4	Able to read sentences	Able to read sentences

(source: calistung clinic report 2018)

The general reading development of children at the Calitung clinic is presented in Table 2. At the beginning of the first week, 3 children needed guidance in recognizing letters and 5 other children need guidance in reading syllables. Then, at the end of the first week, 2 children still needed guidance in recognizing letters while 3 other children needed guidance in reading words. On the other hand, 3 children were able to read syllables. At the beginning of the second week, it showed 1 child needed guidance in recognizing letters; 3 children were able to read syllables; 3 children were able to read words; and 1 child was able to read sentences. Then, at the end of the second week, 2 children still needed guidance in recognizing letters; 2 children were still practicing reading syllables, 1 child was able to read words; and 3 children started to read sentences. At the beginning of the third week, 2 children were still practicing reading syllables; 3 children were able to read words; and 3 children were able to read sentences. Then, at the end of the fourth week, 2 children still needed guidance in recognizing letters and 6 children were able to read sentences. At the beginning and the end of the fourth week, 1 child could read syllables; 1 child could read words; and 6 children could read sentences.

**Table 2.** General Reading Development of Children in the Calitung Clinic

Notes		Recognizing letters	Reading syllables	Reading words	Reading sentences
Week-1	Beginning of the week	√√√	√√√√√		
	End of the week	√√	√√√	√√√	
Week -2	Beginning of the week	√	√√√	√√√	√
	End of the week	√√	√√	√	√√√
Week -3	Beginning of the week		√√	√√√	√√√
	End of the week	√√			√√√√√
Week -4	Beginning of the week		√	√	√√√√√
	End of the week		√	√	√√√√√

Note: √ = Reading development of children

Each child has different reading difficulties. The reading difficulties experienced by students in this study were unfamiliar with letters, difficulty distinguishing similar letters (such as b, d, p, q, m, n, v, w), difficulty in connecting (syllables, words and simple sentences), difficulty in reading consonants (ba-pa), double vowels (ia, oi, ua), and diphthongs (ny,ng). Besides, students who have reading difficulties make mistakes such as deleting letters/words, pronouncing words incorrectly, and pay less attention to punctuation. That makes them hesitant and stuttering in reading so that sometimes children make the effort to correct themselves to correct their spelling.

Children in grades I-III of primary school are in the pre-reading level. Reading is a language skill that is receptive because it obtains information through written media (Kharisma & Arvianto, 2019). They are trained and taught to recognize letters and to read syllables, and simple words and sentences (Dalman, 2017). The initial reading/decoding phase in which typically developing readers reach by 6 or 7 years of age (Snel, Terwel, Aarnoutse, & Van Leeuwe, 2012). The initial teaching alphabet can be initiated simultaneously with the presentation of the sound, adding tactile and kinesthetic reinforcement to traditional auditory-visual methods (Ward & Beauchamp, 1965). The recording and decoding processes are known as pre-reading. Recording refers to associating words and sentences with the sounds according to the writing system used (Rahim, 2011). Meanwhile, decoding requires the association of visual input (printed words) with verbal output (spoken words), and learning visual-phonological associations through repeated exposure both explicitly and implicitly (Garcia, Tomaino, & Cornoldi, 2019).

Knowledge of letters, phonological awareness, and sentence repetition were carried out to identify early children at risk for reading disabilities (McIlraith, 2016). Knowledge of the alphabetic principle depends alternately on letter knowledge and phonemic awareness. Letter knowledge is the ability to recognize and manipulate the letters of the alphabet, including letters in different fonts and cases. Phonemic awareness is the conscious ability to recognize and manipulate the phonemic units of spoken words (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). Alphabet knowledge refers to children's competence in accurately and quickly identifying printed letter names and letter sounds (Roberts, Vadasy, & Sanders, 2019). Letter knowledge is essential to development of an effective literacy processing system (Kaye & Lose, 2019). Therefore, Pre-reading includes recognizing letter, linguistic elements, spelling, and correspondence of letter sounds and spelling patterns (the ability to voice written material), and slow reading speed (Dalman, 2017). The first milestone in the reading development of children in the first grade is a solid (near perfect) command of letter/sound knowledge along with phoneme awareness (Mesmer & Williams, 2014). However, children sometimes experience a failure to develop alphabetical principles, correspondence of letter sounds, and spelling patterns (DiLorenzo, Rody, Bucholz, & Brady, 2011).

Reading difficulties experienced by children in grade I, Pamulang cover recognizing letters. Many children have difficulty in recognizing letters consistently and automatically by looking at or connecting between the letter and the sounds (DiLorenzo et al., 2011). Besides, they have difficulty in distinguishing quite similar letters such as b, d, p, q, m, n, v, w. Some letters in the alphabet are confusing and quite

similar so that it is not easy for children (DiLorenzo et al., 2011). Other difficulties are stuttering in reading simple words and sentences; difficulty in connecting syllables; and difficulty in reading consonants (ba-pa), double vowels (ia, oi, ua), and diphthongs (ny, ng). Therefore, children who have reading difficulties often incorrectly recognize words which include omission, insertion, replacement, reversal, mispronunciation, changing places, not recognizing words, and stuttering (Abdurrahman, 2010). Sometimes children make corrective measures to correct mistakes or spelling by themselves or with the help of the teacher.

Children who have reading difficulties have limitations in visual, auditory, visual memory, analyzing words and understanding sound symbols, integrating vision with hearing, sorting words and letters, reading words, and thinking conceptually (Abdurrahman, 2010). They tend to have difficulty in recognizing letters, combining two letters into syllables, and combining syllables into words, or constructing words into sentences. Other difficulties are understanding words, recognizing letters incorrectly, eliminating words/syllables, guessing and adding words, reading repetition, slow reading, and capturing the contents of the reading (Sumantri, 2015). Besides, children who have reading difficulties make mistakes such as deleting words/letters, inserting and replacing words, pronouncing words incorrectly (different and same meaning, and meaningless), pronouncing words with the help of teachers, repetition, reversing words/letters, paying less attention to signs, self-correction, doubt, and stuttering (Abdurrahman, 2010). Children who master the alphabet tend to have better phonological awareness.

### **The Implementation of Calitung Clinic Program**

The Calitung clinic was conducted in 2017 to overcome students' reading difficulty in first grade elementary school, Pamulang.

Mr. ISW stated that *"the Calitung clinic is not a course as the children's parents are not required to pay. It is a school program to help children to read, write, and count. Children with reading, writing, and counting difficulties are provided with additional time to learn with the teacher's guidance."*

Mrs. SH, the coordinator of the Calitung clinic in 2017 stated that *"the Calitung clinic is a place to help children to have equal abilities in reading, writing, and counting."*

DZ explained that *"the Calitung clinic is a school program that had been planned and budgeted in the School Work Plan (RKS)."*

Then, Mr. ISW explained *"that this clinic is designed and planned under the supervision of the vice principal in the field of the curriculum with clear targets and levels so that it can be evaluated and accounted for. It is established based on evaluation and input from teachers of grade I, Pamulang to help children who have reading, writing, and counting difficulties. Through this program, teachers can focus more on children who have learning difficulties."*

The process of implementing the Calitung clinic program in first grade elementary school, Pamulang can be seen below. The teacher observes for 2 weeks to determine the students' learning readiness and lists the children who have reading, writing, and counting difficulties and then report it to the curriculum division. Students who have reading difficulties will be listed and required to participate in a school program called the Calitung clinic. This program is held in each class during the break and after school time for three months. If the children can read in less than three months, the learning is considered completed, unless it will be continued. The teacher is allowed to use books provided by the school or supplement with other teaching materials. The teacher is required to fill in the child development report at the Calitung clinic and the format has been provided by the curriculum division. The teacher is allowed to use any approach, strategy, and method suitable to support the needs of students. The following table describes the parents' perception of the application of the Calitung clinic program.

Based on the parents' opinion, it can be concluded that the Calistung clinic program helps children in reading after joining in the program. However, parents expect teachers to provide easier ways to learn reading, provide more interesting materials, improve teaching skills, rearrange the schedule, and to maintain and adjust the Calistung clinic program based on the children's reading development stage. Tabel 3 explains parents' responses to the Calistung clinic program.

**Table 3.** Parents' Responses of Calistung Clinic Program

Questions	Answers
What difficulties do children have in reading?	"Not focus", "cannot spell or connect syllables", "difficult to read long sentences", "reversed in recognizing letters d, b, p", "still spelling", "read long words"
What factors affect children's reading difficulty?	"Lazy", "difficult in pronouncing letters such as (m, n, ng, r, l)", "not concentrate, lack of concentration, family and environment, age, environment"
Does the implementation of the Calistung clinic help children learn to read?	"Quite helpful", "very helpful", "quite helpful", "helpful", "helpful", "very helpful"
What do you think about the implementation of the Calistung clinic program on children's reading development?	"Quite helpful", "very helpful", "helpful", "very helpful", "very helpful, but it is better to be carried out not after the school hour", "very helpful"
How is the children's reading development after joining the Calistung clinic program?	"Developed", "developed from the previous condition", "quite helpful", "improved reading skills", "developed", "positive and children can read well"
Please provide constructive feedback about the Calistung clinic program!	"Provide more interesting materials", "provide easier ways to learn reading", "provide easier ways to learn reading", "improve the teacher's ability in teaching", "rearrange the schedule", "good but need to be adjusted to the children's reading development stage"

In overcoming children's reading difficulties, schools have prepared a special program called the Calistung clinic. Every child who has difficulty reading is guided intensively. The Calistung clinic program runs every day during the break and after school time. Each child will be directly guided by the teacher, so the child will focus more on learning. Children learn to read from the smallest units; namely letter recognition, reading syllables, reading words and simple sentences. However, when guiding children in reading, the teacher does not use letter spelling patterns (eg "Book": be ubu ka uku) but the child learns to connect syllables (eg "Buku": bu-ku). This is done so that children don't get confused in connecting letter sound with spelling patterns. Through tutoring at the Calistung clinic program regularly, intensively, and continuously, it can overcome reading difficulties for grade 1 elementary school students. Because, reading fluency develops gradually over time and through extensive, continuous reading practices (Kumara, 2014) and the reading skills can be developed through exercises (Wahyuningsih & Kiswaga, 2019). Based on analyses, students who received additional decoding practice with manipulate letters scored significantly better on phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition skills than students who received incidental decoding exercises (Pullen & Lane, 2014).

The teacher plays an important role in improving students' reading skills, this important role involves the role of the teacher as a facilitator, motivator, learning resource, and organizer in the



learning process (Rahman, 2014). Therefore, teachers need to understand how to assess and increase children's phonemic awareness, building blocks for decoding, and learn how to effectively teach alphabetic relation as part of the early literacy curriculum (Baker, 2007). The children's literacy development may face some difficulties and it is the teacher's job to consider and deal with those difficulties (Harmey, 2020). Reading difficulties are not only the responsibility of the teacher but a shared responsibility so that it will be easier to overcome together (Pratiwi & Ariawan, 2017). Therefore, teachers, curriculum division, and the school principal have to take part in overcoming children's reading difficulty. Based on research, using curriculum-based measurement in reading (CBM-R) to screen for at-risk readers, educators can quickly identify that problem exists before following up with additional assessment to determine the underlying skill deficit causing reading difficulties (January, Ardoin, Christ, Eckert, & White, 2019). It is in line with previous research that highlights the importance of being responsive to the needs of students in teaching literacy in the early school year (Ruotsalainen, Soodla, Rääkkönen, Poikkeus, Kikas, & Lerkkanen, 2020). In addition, literacy activities at home and teaching reading skills directly can improve children's reading development (Haney & Hill, 2004). Other research showed that, generalized increases in reading fluency in both high-word-overlap and low-word overlap passages as a function of parent tutoring (Bilgi, 2020).

Learning reading sometimes start from the smallest units such as phonemes, morphemes, words, and graphemes (Olson, 1965). Therefore, in this current study, the teaching method applied by the teacher started from reading the alphabet, syllables, words, and sentences. In the alphabet reading method, children were introduced to letters from a-z. Children memorized and pronounced the sound of the letter. The initial teaching alphabet using a multi-sensory approach are often successful in teaching reading to children who have primary learning disabilities (Ward & Beauchamp, 1965). Then, in the syllable reading method, the children were introduced to syllables such as ba, bi bu, be, bo. In the word reading method, the children learned to combine syllables into a word. Then, in the sentence reading method, children learned to read words into complete sentences. An effective way to improve the teaching of the alphabet is by integrating the letters with their sounds (Karimkhanlooei & Seifiniya, 2015).

Besides, descriptive language experts believe that in reading, children should be able to respond to language signals represented by written symbols (words) in the same way that they respond to the patterns of auditory shapes (Olson, 1965). The next process was an analytic activity in which children were invited to get to know the concept of words. Complete sentences were broken down into smaller language units called words. Decomposition was carried out until the smallest language unit, namely letters. In the last process, children were encouraged to synthesize (conclude). The language units that have been broken down into the smallest language units were rearranged into the original language units, from letters to syllables, syllables to words, and words to sentences. Children rediscover the original structural form, namely complete sentences through the synthesis process (Setyani, Suhartono, & Suyanto, 2012).

A previous study has compared the effectiveness of initial teaching alphabets vs. traditional orthography. Based on the covariance analysis, it showed a statistically significant difference in achievement that supports the initial teaching alphabet (Kresh, 1969). Another study has revealed that Itchy's Alphabet as an innovative approach to teaching letter-sound connections through multisensory cues combined with manipulative hands-on showed an improvement in children's language development (DiLorenzo et al., 2011). Based on an analysis of the effectiveness of the program for students with high or low reading readiness, there is no indication that any of the observed programs (basal programs, i/t/a programs, language experience approaches, linguistic programs, phonic/linguistic programs, and basal programs with supplementary phonics) was effective for children with low or high intelligence, low or high hearing discrimination ability, or low or high familiarity with the alphabet (Devault & Associate, 1967).

In learning, children need guidance, practice, and habituation to develop their ability gradually. Children who have learning difficulties will be guided routinely and gradually in the Calistung clinic

program. Based on research results, the students' reading skills develop through routine training and intensive guidance carried out in the Calistung clinic program.

Teachers can take the following measures to overcome the students' reading difficulties. First is reading the language unit by introducing letters through singing the A-Z alphabet song, introducing vowels and consonants, using pictures according to the alphabet, coloring letters, and reading syllables. Second is reading words by pairing syllables with the help of pictures (Kuntarto, 2013). However, based on research "relatively more visual attention to pictures of anthropomorphic figures interfered with learning letters and alphabet book sharing" (Vries & Bus, 2014). The third is reading simple sentences by combining words that the students already understand. Fourth is reading a short text consisting of two simple sentences. The fifth is reading the meaning of the language unit using the topics they enjoy. Any method that is applied has to be adapted to the needs and development of the child, such as basic methods, phonics, linguistics, SAS, alphabetic, and children's language experiences (Kuntarto, 2013). Besides, the use of strategies can mediate the relationship between letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, and word reading (Davis & Evans, 2020). Based on research results, beginning Finnish readers prefer to process polysyllabic words by syllables rather than letter by letter. However, hyphens at syllable boundaries disrupt polysyllabic word processing and alternate colouring didn't affect reading speed (Häikiö, Hyönä, & Bertram, 2014).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Reading difficulties experienced by children are recognizing letters such as the wrong pronunciation of letters; incorrectly distinguishing quite similar letters such as b, d, p, q, m, n, v, w; stuttering in reading, connecting syllables, reading simple words and sentences; and difficulty in reading consonants (ba-pa), double vowels (ia, oi, ua) and diphthongs (ny, ng). Therefore, sometimes children make mistakes in reading such as repeating words, omitting words/letters, inserting/replacing words, reversing words/letters, guessing words, hesitating, and stuttering. Learning at the Calistung clinic is intended for children who have reading difficulties in which one child is guided by one teacher. This program runs for 3 months during the break and after school time. However, if they can read in less than 3 months, learning will be stopped. Alphabet knowledge is important for obtaining phonological awareness (Elben & Nicholson, 2017) and as an initial ability in subsequent literacy development (Ecalte, Biot-chevrier, & Magnan, 2008). Reading is an important basis for lifelong learning and can affect other literacy levels, including individual education (Wildova, 2014). A proverb says "We learn to read in the first three to four years of school and we read to learn in subsequent years" (Mullis et al., 2017). Therefore, in order for children to be able to be literate, children must have the ability to read so that literacy must be instilled from an early age. Literacy education must be a special concern in the education and learning process. The use of supporting books in calistung activities is still less varied, the teacher is too focused on the goal of "children can read" but does not pay attention to fun learning methods. According to the researcher, learning in the Calistung clinical program should be held simultaneously at one time, for example at the hour before or after school. However, in fact the activities at the Calistung clinic are carried out on the sidelines of time such as during learning activities, resting and coming home from school, so that these conditions interfere with students' concentration in learning. Calistung clinic program still pays attention to the convenience of student learning, fun learning methods and a variety of books.

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