



The influence of teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on grade 1 students' reading and writing skills in Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is a learning approach that focuses on students' ability levels, not on their grade levels. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the TaRL approach in improving the reading and writing skills of grade I students at SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul. The research method used was classroom action research (PTK) with two cycles, which included planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through reading and writing skill tests, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers and students. The results showed that the application of TaRL significantly improved students' reading and writing skills. In the first cycle, there was an increased understanding of letters and syllables, while in the second cycle, most students could read and write simple words and sentences more fluently. In addition, students became more confident and motivated in learning as the approach provided developmentally appropriate learning. The findings indicate that the TaRL approach can effectively address the gap in reading and writing skills at the primary school level. Practically, the results of this study provide recommendations for educators to implement more adaptive and needs-based learning to improve literacy quality. In addition, this approach can also be used as a model in developing education policies that are more inclusive and oriented towards the gradual achievement of basic competencies.



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1. Introduction

Education is a crucial foundation that molds the future of individuals and communities [1][2]. An important aspect of education is literacy, especially reading and writing literacy. Reading and writing help students understand a learning concept through written text and can expand their knowledge, insight, and potential [3][4]. Reading and writing literacy skills are the foundation for students to obtain knowledge, understand information, and participate actively in social, cultural, and economic life. Given the importance of literacy in academic success and lifelong learning, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in improving students' reading fluency, comprehension, and writing accuracy. Specifically, this research will examine the impact of TaRL on students' ability to decode words, construct sentences, and engage in meaningful text interpretation. Meanwhile, the reality on the ground shows that there are still challenges in realizing adequate reading and writing literacy skills among students, especially at the Elementary School level. Many students face difficulties in understanding texts, deciphering the meaning of words, difficulties in writing essays, and building deep understanding. Based on the results of PISA 2022 issued by the OECD institution

in December 2023, it was announced that Indonesia recorded an average score of 359 for the subject of reading skills [5]. This score dropped 12 points from the previous PISA edition, even 117 points away from the global average score of 476. This decline in reading skill scores is the most significant subject score in the last five editions [6]. In addition, the 2011 PIRLS study showed that Indonesia scored 428, ranking 5th out of 48 participating countries [7]. This shows that Indonesian students' reading skills are below average [8][9].

PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) is an international study conducted by the OECD to measure the competency of 15-year-old students in reading, math, and science. PISA assesses the extent to which students can apply their knowledge and skills in everyday life rather than simply memorizing material. Therefore, PISA results are an important indicator in evaluating the quality of a country's education. The decline in Indonesia's reading literacy score indicates challenges in the education system that broadly impact students' literacy development. Low reading skills can hinder students' understanding of other subjects, as almost all aspects of learning require good literacy skills. Difficulties in understanding written text can also reduce interest in learning, make students less academically confident, and narrow their access to information and future opportunities. Furthermore, these low scores reflect fundamental problems in the learning system, such as the lack of critical comprehension-based teaching methods, the lack of access to quality reading materials, and the low reading culture in schools and families. If not addressed immediately, this could result in low competitiveness of future generations at the global level, especially in facing challenges in the digital era that increasingly demand high literacy skills. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the factors causing low reading literacy and formulate strategies that can improve the quality of learning in schools.

In addition, the real problem encountered in the field is that most students lack fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, which are essential for becoming good readers [10][11]. The interest in reading in Indonesia remains notably low. According to the World's Most Literate Nations research conducted in 2016, Indonesia was placed 60th out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest [12][13]. Then, in 2020, an unexpected challenge emerged, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the learning process, caused learning loss, and increased learning gaps. This can have an impact on students' reading and writing literacy skills, particularly at the Elementary School. According to the findings from observations and discussions with grade I teachers of SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul conducted on January 8-17, 2024, it shows that most of the grade I students from classes I A – I D can already read if expressed as a percentage, around 50% of the students are fluent in reading a full sentence. However, there are still some students who stutter when reading. As for writing skills, some students still cannot write neatly. Even some students in grade I were found to still not have memorized the alphabet and often got confused in determining the letters 'b' and 'd'. Students also had difficulty working on multiple-choice questions during the Final Semester Assessment because many still did not memorize the alphabet and its form. The school initially tested students' literacy skills during the MPLS (Masa Pengenalan Lingkungan Sekolah). However, after each student's skill level was known, the learning treatment given was limited to providing additional lesson hours for students with poor literacy skills. Many students find reading and writing dull when they lack the right strategies [14][15]. Therefore, an appropriate and effective approach is needed in teaching reading and writing literacy to overcome these challenges.

One approach that has shown potential in improving reading and writing literacy skills is the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. TaRL focuses on adjusting learning according to the student's level of understanding. The TaRL approach evaluates students' traits according to their abilities [16][17]. This approach divides students into groups or groups based on their learning skill levels and tests periodically [18][19]. In classroom implementation, TaRL is a teaching approach that uses straightforward assessment tools to evaluate students and group them based on their learning level relative to their age or grade [20][21]. The goal is to ensure that students are in the learning zone that suits their abilities, enabling them to develop a solid understanding and enhance their literacy skills. Previous studies conducted by Lakhman & Samyukta [22] showed results related to the application of the TaRL approach in improving reading skills, such that children could read fluently in just 50 days with the application of TaRL. Similar research from Adha [23] also shows that successfully applying TaRL enhances students' reading and writing skills and intelligence. Several of these studies showed notable

advancement in reading skills, increased student motivation and interest in literacy, and improved text comprehension and vocabulary.

2. Method

Quantitative is this type of research and is based on a pre-test and post-test control group design. This study uses experimental research to determine the conditions before and after treatment (learning). The population of this study was all first-grade students of SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul in the 2023/2024 school year consisting of 4 classes (I A, I B, I C, I D) with a total of 119 students. This research was conducted approximately 3 weeks after the first day of school in the new school year, with the duration of the research being conducted for almost 2 weeks. Because the research was conducted quite early (only 3 weeks after the first day of school), the students at that time had not received too much intervention from the teacher. Therefore, when this study was conducted, both the researcher and the class teacher could see the effect of the conventional learning approach and TaRL on students' reading and writing skills and how significant the effect was. A simple random sampling technique was used to take the sample. The student population of the four classes will be sampled randomly, namely, 2 sample classes, each of which will be used as an experimental class and a control class; class I D, with a total of 31 students, will serve as the experimental class, while class I B with a total of 30 students served as the control class. The selection of classes used as experimental and control classes is seen from the number of students who are almost the same in number. In addition, each class has the same ability in the school, and there is no superior class.

The data collection techniques used were tests consisting of oral tests of students' reading ability and written tests of students' writing ability, observation of the components of the implementation of learning with the TaRL approach, and documentation presented in the form of photographs of activities. The aspects assessed in reading and writing skills are early reading skills and early writing skills. The skills assessment focuses on letters, syllables, words, and simple sentences. For reading skills, the ability assessment indicator focuses on recognizing letters, which is assessed by whether students can pronounce the letters they see, pronounce syllables, read words correctly, and read simple sentences fluently or stammer. For writing skills, the ability assessment indicators focus on the ability to write the letters A correctly, write one's name, nickname, and full name, complete a word by writing the right letter, and arrange several random letters provided into a correct word. Data analysis was conducted using normality tests and paired sample t-tests facilitated by the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) program.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Result

This study was conducted on August 12-29, 2024, at SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul. The aim was to assess the influence of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on the reading-writing skills of grade I students of Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School. This study utilized a Pretest-Posttest Control Group design, with 31 students in class I D as the experimental class and 30 students in the class I B as the control class. The "experimental" received instruction using the TaRL approach; meanwhile, the "control" was taught using a common learning approach.

1) Learning in Experimental Class

Learning with the TaRL approach in this experimental class was carried out in 4 meetings, where the first two meetings focused on reading learning, and the next two meetings focused on writing learning. The application of TaRL in this learning was emphasized on the completion of LKPD (*Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik*), where the LKPD was adjusted to the abilities of each student, so not all students got the same LKPD questions. During the learning process, it was found that students experienced an increase in their reading and writing abilities. These results were known after students completed the follow-up assessment. The results of the follow-up assessment of reading skills showed that out of a total of 31 students in the class, 22 students had increased their skill level. Meanwhile, the results of the follow-up assessment of writing skills showed that out of a total of 31 students in the class, 21 students had increased their skill level.

2) Learning in Control Class

The learning implementation in the control class was carried out without the TaRL approach. The learning approaches used during teaching in the control class were more conventional approaches and had often been done before, whereas in this study, the teacher used an expository approach. The learning implementation in the control class was also carried out for four meetings, and all meetings used the same approach, namely expository.

3) Description of Research Data Results

- **Description of Implementation Observation Results:** The observation results of the learning implementation showed that nearly all the components required for teaching with the TaRL approach were met, starting from the first to the fourth. The only exception was the absence of diagnostic assessments in the second and fourth meetings. This was because the focus of the material in the second meeting was the same as the first, which was reading, and the focus in the fourth meeting remained the same as in the third meeting, which was writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the TaRL approach was effectively implemented throughout the learning process in the experimental class.
- **Reading Skill Data Description:** Comparing the pre-test and post-test results, [Table 1](#) displays the descriptive statistical data of the experimental class's reading abilities. Students make up the sample size for both assessments. Progress was indicated by the mean score rising from 68.87 in the pre-test to 76.77 in the post-test. The mode went from 85 to 100, and the median climbed from 75 to 80, indicating a greater concentration of pupils receiving top marks. The maximum score stayed at 100, and the minimum score increased from 25 to 40. Furthermore, following the intervention, students' performance became more consistent, and their score variability decreased, as seen by the standard deviation dropping from 22.461 to 17.490.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Data of Experimental Class Reading Skill

Statistics	Value	
	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>
Sample	31	31
Mean (average)	68.87	76.77
Median	75	80
Mode	85	100
Minimum Value	25	40
Maximum Value	100	100
Standard Deviation	22,461	17,490

Comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, [Table 2](#) displays the descriptive statistical data of the reading abilities of the control group. Thirty students make up the sample size for both assessments. From 63.33 in the pre-test to 66 in the post-test, the mean score increased somewhat, suggesting little progress. While the mean somewhat declined from 55 to 50, the median also rose from 57.50 to 62.50. While the maximum score stayed at 100, the minimum score increased from 10 to 25. Furthermore, the standard deviation dropped from 25.842 to 23.393, indicating a minor decrease in score variability; nonetheless, the control class's total performance increase was only marginally greater than that of the experimental class.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Data of Control Class Reading Skill

Statistics	Value	
	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>
Sample	30	30
Mean (average)	63.33	66
Median	57.50	62.50
Mode	55	50
Minimum Value	10	25
Maximum Value	100	100
Standard Deviation	25,842	23,393

Fig. 1 shows the results of pre-test and post-test reading skill scores and highlights differences in average scores between the control and experimental classes. The experimental class achieved a pre-test average of 68.87, while the control class scored lower, averaging 63.33. This indicates that the control class's pre-test scores were below the experimental class's. Additionally, the post-test results showed a significant difference, with the experimental class obtaining an average score of 76.77 compared to 66 in the control class, resulting in a notable gap of approximately 10.77 points. This demonstrates that the control class's post-test scores were lower than the experimental class's.

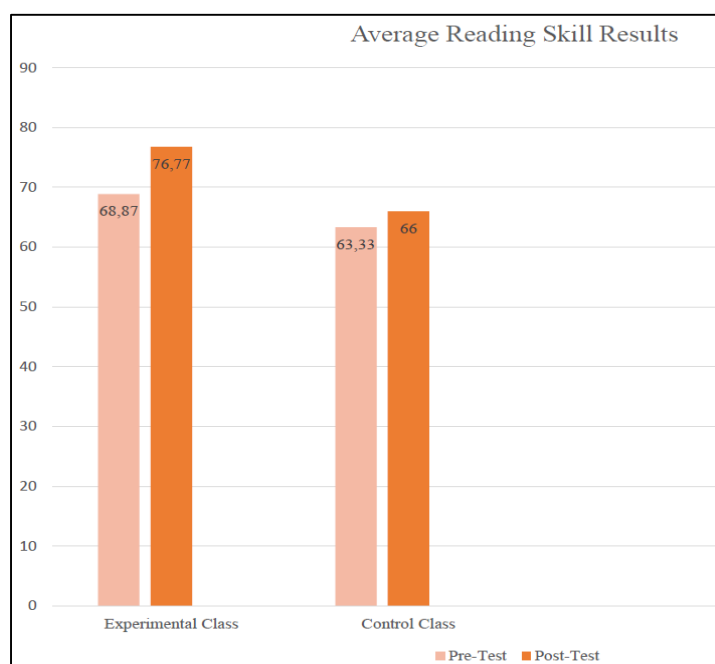


Fig. 1. Average Reading Skill Results

- **Writing Skill Data Description:** Comparing the pre-test and post-test results, [Table 3](#) displays the descriptive statistical data of the writing abilities of the experimental class. Thirty-one students make up the sample size for both assessments. Significant development was shown by the mean score, which increased from 74.84 in the pre-test to 83.39 in the post-test. While the mode somewhat dropped from 85 to 80, the median also rose from 80 to 85. While the maximum score stayed at 100, the minimum score significantly improved from 35 to 55. Furthermore, following the intervention, the standard deviation dropped from 15.994 to 12.341, indicating a decrease in score variability and a more stable performance among students.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistical Data of Experimental Class Writing Skill

Statistics	Value	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Sample	31	31
Mean (average)	74.84	83.39
Median	80	85
Mode	85	80
Minimum Value	35	55
Maximum Value	100	100
Standard Deviation	15,994	12,341

- Comparing the pre-test and post-test findings, [Table 4](#) displays the descriptive statistical data of the writing abilities of the control group. Thirty students make up the sample size for both assessments. The control class's mean score dropped from 75.83 on the pre-test

to 71.67 on the post-test, demonstrating a loss in overall performance compared to the experimental class. Similarly, the mean fell from 70 to 60, and the median fell from 72.50 to 70. While the maximum score stayed at 100, the minimum score decreased from 40 to 35. Furthermore, the standard deviation rose from 16.352 to 17.827, indicating a higher degree of variation in the performance of the pupils. According to these findings, the control group's writing abilities somewhat declined rather than improved.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistical Data of Control Class Writing Skill

Statistics	Value	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Sample	30	30
Mean (average)	75.83	71.67
Median	72.50	70
Mode	70	60
Minimum Value	40	35
Maximum Value	100	100
Standard Deviation	16,352	17,827

Fig. 2 shows the pre-test and post-test results for writing skills revealed differences in average scores between the experimental and control classes. The experimental class had an average pre-test score of 74.84, while the “control” scored slightly higher at 75.83, indicating that the experimental class started with a lower pre-test average. However, the post-test outcomes showed a significant difference, with the experimental class achieving an average score of 83.39 compared to 71.67 in the control class, marking a substantial gap of 11.72 points. These results demonstrate that the “experimental” outperformed the “control” in the post-test.

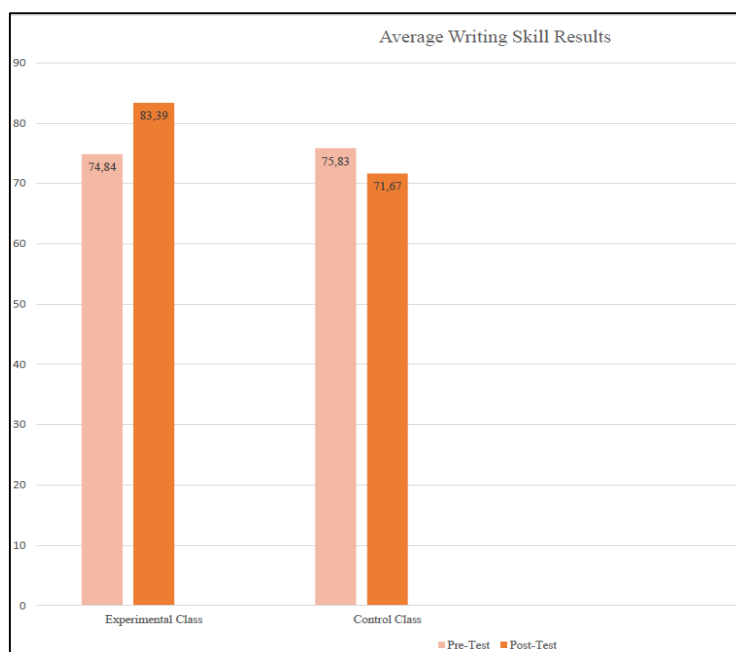


Fig. 2. Average Writing Skill Results

4) Normality Test

Data is normally distributed if the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05 (>). The normality test used is the Shapiro-Wilk test and is calculated using the SPSS series 26 application.

- Reading Skill Normality Test: Table 5 shows that the significance value of the pre-test data for the “experimental” is $0.062 > 0.05$, indicating it is normally distributed. The post-test data for the “experimental” is $0.124 > 0.05$, indicating it is normally distributed. For the “control,” the significance value of the pre-test data is $0.056 > 0.05$,

indicating it is normally distributed. The post-test data for the “control” is $0.058 > 0.05$, indicating it is also stated to be normally distributed.

Table 5. Results of the Reading Skill Normality Test

Tests of Normality				
	Class	Shapiro Wilk		
		Statistics	df	Sig.
Reading Results	Experimental Class Pre-Test	0.936	31	0.062
	Experimental Class Post-Test	0.946	31	0.124
	Control Class Pre-Test	0.932	30	0.056
	Control Class Post-Test	0.933	30	0.058

- Writing Skill Normality: Table 6 shows the results obtained that the pre-test data significance value of the “experimental” is $0.081 > 0.05$, indicating that it is normally distributed. The post-test data of the “experimental” is $0.090 > 0.05$, indicating that it is normally distributed. For the “control,” the significance value of the pre-test data is $0.179 > 0.05$, indicating that it is normally distributed. The post-test data of the “control” is $0.433 > 0.05$, indicating that it is normally distributed.

Table 6. Results of the Writing Skill Normality Test

Tests of Normality				
	Class	Shapiro Wilk		
		Statistics	df	Sig.
Writing Results	Experimental Class Pre-Test	0.940	31	0.081
	Experimental Class Post-Test	0.941	31	0.090
	Control Class Pre-Test	0.951	30	0.179
	Control Class Post-Test	0.966	30	0.433

5) Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is done using paired sample t-test and through the help of SPSS series 26. Decision making in this test uses a two-tailed test, namely if the significance value (Sig.) is less than 0.05 (<), then H_A is accepted while H_0 is rejected, then if the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05 (>), then H_A is rejected while H_0 is accepted. The reading skills paired sample t-test findings are shown in Table 7, which compares the experimental and control classes' pre-test and post-test scores. The experimental class (Pair 1) showed a highly significant improvement in reading skills following the intervention, as evidenced by the t-value of -6.848 with 30 degrees of freedom (df) and the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000. With 29 degrees of freedom, a t-value of -2.719, and a significance value of 0.011, the control class (Pair 2) exhibits a statistically significant but less pronounced improvement than the experimental class. These findings imply that although both groups made some gains in their reading abilities, the experimental class's improvement was significantly greater and statistically significant.

Table 7. Paired Sample T-Test Results for Reading Skill

Paired Samples Test				
	Reading Skill	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Experimental Pre-Test – Experimental Post-Test	6,848	30	0.000
Pair 2	Control Pre-Test – Control Post-Test	2,719	29	0.011

Pair 1 reading skill output Table 8, it shows that the significance value (Sig.) obtained is 0.000 and in the writing skill output table, the significance value (Sig.) obtained is 0.000 where both are < 0.05, then H_0 is rejected and H_A is accepted. This indicates a significant difference in average experimental class students' reading and writing skills. While in the Pair 2 reading skill output table, a significance value of 0.011 is obtained, which is < 0.05, so H_A is accepted while H_0 is rejected. The results of reading skill in the control class, this shows a significant difference in the average reading skill. Then, in the Pair 2 writing skill output table, a significance value (Sig.) obtained is 0.238, which is > 0.05, then H_A is rejected while H_0 is accepted. For the results of writing skill in the control class, this shows

that the average difference in writing skill is not significant. From the data presented, it can be inferred that teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach influences reading and writing skills of grade I students at Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School.

Table 8. Paired Sample T-Test Results Writing Skill

Paired Samples Test				
	Writing Skill	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Experimental Pre-Test – Experimental Post-Test	-5.008	30	0.000
Pair 2	Control Pre-Test – Control Post-Test	1.205	29	0.238

3.2. Discussion

The research was conducted at Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School from 12 - 29 August 2024, with a total of treatments given in four meetings and two meetings each for pre-test and post-test. This study had the purpose of assessing the influence of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on grade I students' reading and writing in Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School. The sample used was class I D with 31 students as the experimental class and class I B with 30 students as the control class. Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design was used as research design by providing a pre-test to see students' reading and writing skills before the learning treatment with the TaRL approach was carried out, and a post-test was given afterward. The observation results of learning implementation showed that the treatment in the experimental class had used the TaRL approach. During the treatment for reading skills in the experimental class from 31 students, there were 22 students whose reading skill level increased, or as many as 70.9% of students experienced an increase in their reading skill level. Likewise, for writing skill in the experimental class from 31 students, there were 21 students whose writing skill level increased or as many as 67.7 % of students experienced an increase in their writing skill level. These results are consistent with Niingsyih research results [24] which stated that TaRL learning improves students' literacy skills with a percentage of 78% of students having experienced an increase in their skill level. Moreover, the results of this study are also in line with Fitriani [25] those who stated that the TaRL approach can improve students' reading skill, as evidenced by a higher percentage of students showing improvement compared to those whose skill level remains unchanged.

Based on the analysis using SPSS calculations, this study found a significant difference in students' reading and writing skills between the experimental class that applied the TaRL approach and the control class that did not. In terms of reading skills, the paired sample t-test results showed that the experimental class had a t-value of -6.848 with a significance level (p-value) of 0.000, while the control class had a t-value of -2.719 with a significance level of 0.011. Since both p-values are below 0.05, these results indicate that both the experimental and control classes experienced a significant improvement in reading skills. The t-test used in this study is a two-tailed test in which the alternative hypothesis (HA) is accepted if the absolute t-value is greater than the critical t-value in the table or if the p-value is less than 0.05. Although both groups showed significant improvement, the experimental class showed a stronger effect. This is evident from the larger absolute t-value (-6.848 compared to -2.719) and the significantly smaller p-value (0.000 compared to 0.011). In other words, the TaRL approach had a greater impact on improving students' reading skills than the method used in the control class, as it resulted in a more significant and consistent improvement in students' reading ability. Then, regarding the writing skill results, the experimental class obtained a t-count of -5.008 with a significance of 0.000, and the control class got a t-count of 1.205 with a significance of 0.238. The t-table value for the experimental class was 2.042, and for the control class, it was 2.045. From the two-tailed test, it is evident that there is a significant difference in the experimental class's average, whereas no significant difference is found in the control class. This indicates a substantial impact of the TaRL learning approach on grade I students' reading and writing abilities.

In addition, seen from the descriptive statistical data of reading skills, it is evident that the mean score of the experimental class in the pre-test was 68.87, and it rose to 76.77 in the post-test, as well as in writing skills, where the pre-test average was 74.84 then when the post-test

increased to 83.39. The study results are consistent with the research of Ahyar [26], which states that the application of the TaRL approach in learning can improve students' reading skills. Also, in line with research, Adha [23] states that TaRL successfully improves students' reading and writing skills. Reading and writing skills are important to students' learning activities at the elementary school level because without them, students can experience learning difficulties, both now and in the future [27][28]. Therefore, efforts are needed so that students' reading and writing skills can develop well. The study results show the positive influence of the TaRL approach on reading and writing skills. By dividing students based on their skill levels, TaRL optimizes individual potential and guarantees that every student receives resources customized to their specific requirements [29][30]. Therefore, this approach can be applied as an effort to develop literacy skills, especially for reading and writing students, which will later reduce the possibility of students experiencing learning difficulties, both now and in the future. From the findings and overall results presented, it can be inferred that the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach has an impact on the reading and writing skills of grade I students of Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul Elementary School. It is expected that the study results will serve as a guide for teachers in choosing an effective learning approach to honing students' reading and writing skills. This TaRL approach helps teachers focus on guiding students by providing learning that is appropriate to their skill level.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that implementing the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach contributes significantly to improving grade I students' reading and writing skills at SD Unggulan Aisyiyah Bantul. Compared to conventional learning methods, the TaRL approach allows students to learn according to their ability level, thus increasing the effectiveness of learning. The results of this study indicate that TaRL can be a solution to addressing the gap in reading and writing skills at the primary school level. Through the differentiation of materials and the use of Learner Worksheets (LKPD) tailored to students' abilities, this approach promotes more even development among students with different levels of understanding. In addition, the implementation of TaRL also creates a more inclusive and adaptive learning environment, allowing students to develop according to their potential. In the context of primary education, these findings confirm that learning strategies centered on students' needs, such as TaRL, can significantly improve the quality of learning. Implementing this model in primary schools helps improve reading and writing skills and builds students' confidence in learning. Therefore, the TaRL approach can be a recommendation for educators and policymakers in designing more effective learning methods to improve literacy at the primary level.

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