

Teaching at the Right Level: Approaches and Implementations to Improve Secondary School English Student Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in improving student learning outcomes. TaRL is a teaching strategy that adapts instruction to students' actual ability levels, rather than their formal grade levels. This research method uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. The study sample consisted of 39 high school students who were divided into intervention and control groups. English test for pre and post-test. The results showed that students in the TaRL group experienced significant improvements in their English sentence construction and pronunciation skills compared to the control group. These findings indicate that the TaRL approach can be an effective strategy in improving learning outcomes, especially for students with learning gaps.

Keywords: Teaching, Approaches, Learning Outcome

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INTRODUCTION

The gap in academic achievement is a major challenge in education, especially in developing countries. Many students face learning difficulties because teaching methods are not tailored to their ability levels. Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is a pedagogical approach that adapts instruction to students' actual level of understanding, enabling them to learn more effectively. TaRL was first developed by the Pratham organization in India and has been implemented in various countries with positive results (Banerjee et al., 2017). With this approach, students are grouped based on their abilities, rather than their formal classes, so that the learning process is more tailored to their needs. In the Indonesian context, this approach is very relevant considering the challenges in the education system, such as disparities in the quality of education between urban and rural areas and gaps in learning outcomes. This study aims to evaluate the impact of the TaRL approach on the learning outcomes of secondary school students (MTs), especially in literacy. English as one of subject studied in the curriculum need to be mastered. Therefore, the researchers focus on the English students learning outcome. Since the English learning outcome still below teachers expectation, then, teachers should continuously find the best way to help students. By understanding the effectiveness of this approach, it is hoped that better solutions can be found to improve the quality of learning in Indonesia. At the Instructional level or learning in the classroom, the TaRL Approach starts by conducting tests on students with simple questions. The test results are then used as a basis for grouping students, not by class and age. After that, teachers must organize various interesting learning activities so that students' motivation to participate in learning increases. In essence, teachers must focus on the competencies they want to achieve, not just the demands of the formal curriculum.

Review of literature***Principles of the TaRL Approach***

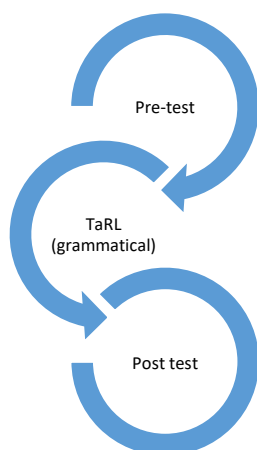
The **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)** approach is a learner-centered educational strategy developed by Pratham in India to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy skills among children. It begins with an initial assessment to identify each student's current level of reading, writing, and arithmetic, rather than relying on age or grade as a proxy for ability. Based on this assessment, students are grouped according to their skill levels. This enables teachers to provide targeted instruction that directly addresses each learner's needs and learning gaps (Banerjee et al., 2016; Pratham, 2023).

After grouping, instruction is adapted to suit each level through engaging, activity-based learning. Teachers use context-appropriate reading materials, interactive exercises, and tailored pedagogical strategies to make learning accessible and effective. Progress is continuously monitored through regular assessments, and students receive feedback to guide their improvement. Research has shown that this adaptive model significantly improves learning outcomes, especially in low-performing or under-resourced classrooms (Banerjee et al., 2017; Muralidharan et al., 2019).

Another key strength of the TaRL model lies in its emphasis on **collaborative teaching and problem-based learning**. Teachers are encouraged to work together, sharing strategies and learning materials to enhance their teaching practices. Moreover, the approach fosters real-world application of skills by involving students in solving practical problems, helping them see the value and relevance of what they are learning. Numerous studies and program evaluations have affirmed the effectiveness of TaRL in improving foundational learning, including randomized controlled trials and large-scale implementations across India and Sub-Saharan Africa (Teaching at the Right Level Africa, 2023; World Bank, 2020).

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative method with an experimental design approach. This method was chosen to allow a more systematic analysis of the impact of the TaRL approach on student learning outcomes. The study was conducted for one month with interventions applied consistently. In this study, the experimental group received a pre-test, treatment (Grammatical) and post-test. This experimental design allows for more accurate measurements of the effectiveness of TaRL in improving the ability to construct sentences, Part of Speech and pronounce them.

**Research Subjects**

The research subjects consisted of 39 students at the Duratul Ilmy al Islami Islamic Boarding School, equivalent to MTs level. The schools chosen were schools whose students came from various elementary schools, this was done to ensure the diversity of the samples sought. The students were grouped based on the results of the initial pre-test to determine

their level of ability in constructing sentences and pronouncing them. After that, students in the experimental group were given instructions tailored to their level of ability based on the TaRL approach.

This study utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments to gather comprehensive data on the effectiveness of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. The Vocabulary Test served as a key tool to measure students' reading and composing abilities before and after the intervention, adapted from the standard LKS book used at the PDDI Institute. Classroom observations were conducted to evaluate student engagement and the effectiveness of teaching strategies in real time. To gain deeper insights, teacher interviews were carried out to explore the practical implementation of TaRL and how female teachers adapted their teaching strategies within the classroom. Additionally, a student questionnaire was used to assess learners' motivation and perceptions regarding the instruction they received.

In analyzing the data, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied. Descriptive analysis focused on tracking students' learning progress through average pretest and post-test scores. To determine the statistical significance of the intervention, a paired t-test was employed, comparing results from experimental and control groups. Meanwhile, qualitative data from teacher interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, instructional challenges, and adaptive strategies used during the TaRL implementation. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a well-rounded understanding of both the measurable outcomes and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of the learning intervention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the 3 research questions, the following data was obtained from the tests given to participants:

Table 1. Result of the Test

No. Score	Pre-Test	Score Post-Test
1	65	70
2	72	77
3	58	63
4	81	86
5	69	74
6	74	79
7	63	68
8	77	82
9	85	90
10	70	75
11	66	71
12	79	84
13	68	73
14	71	76
15	64	69
16	73	78
17	76	81
18	62	67
19	80	85
20	67	72
21	75	80

No. Score	Pre-Test	Score Post-Test
22	78	83
23	82	87
24	61	66
25	84	89
26	59	64
27	83	88
28	60	65
29	86	91
30	57	62
31	88	93
32	55	60
33	87	92
34	56	61
35	89	94
36	54	59
37	90	95
38	53	58
39	91	96

Through Graphic, the researcher can show the development of student learning outcomes based on the average pretest and posttest scores, where every students got. This evidents again support that Teaching at The Right Level using Grammatical for junior High School at MTs Duratul Ilmy still needed.

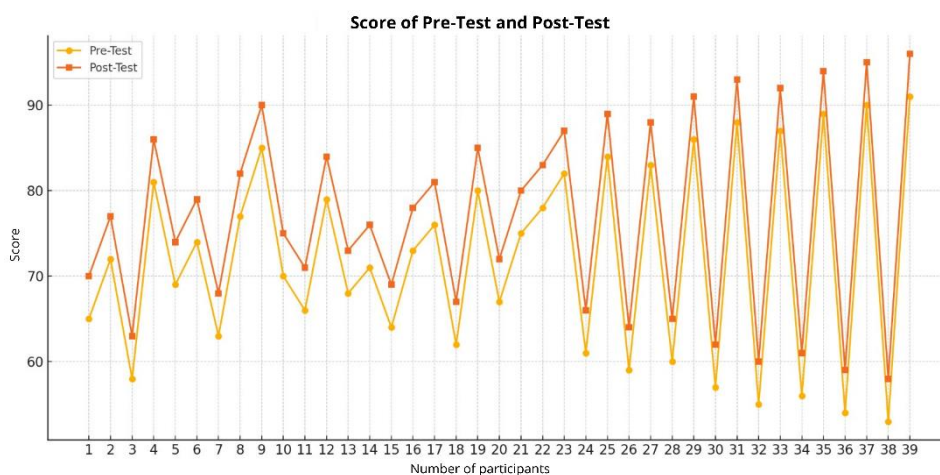


Figure 1. Score of pre-test and post test

From above data, the researcher got some informations as follows:

Table 2. The Statistic result

Metrik	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	70.23	75.23
Median	71	76
Modus	none	none
Standar Deviasi	11.02	11.02
Range	38	38

The results of this study demonstrate a consistent increase of 5 points in students' post-test scores compared to pre-test scores. This uniform improvement indicates a positive impact of the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on students' learning outcomes. However, since the difference between pre- and post-test scores was the same for all participants, the standard deviation of the difference scores was 0, making it impossible to conduct a paired sample t-test due to the absence of variance (Field, 2013). This statistical limitation does not diminish the implication of the results, as the consistent increase itself supports the effectiveness of TaRL in enhancing student understanding through appropriately leveled instruction.

Regarding teacher perceptions of TaRL, qualitative findings from classroom observations and interviews revealed several positive responses. Teachers acknowledged that TaRL enabled more accurate identification of students' initial ability levels, thus facilitating targeted instruction (Pratham, 2023). Some teachers reported that although the method required additional preparation time, they perceived it as more effective than conventional teaching. These findings are in line with previous studies which state that TaRL helps shift teaching from curriculum-based to competency-based learning, resulting in improved engagement and comprehension (Banerjee et al., 2016; Teaching at the Right Level Africa, 2023). Students themselves expressed greater motivation due to the material being adjusted to their level – an essential factor in sustaining engagement and reducing learning anxiety (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

However, this study also found several implementation challenges in the Indonesian context. These include limited resources, lack of structured teacher training, and resistance to changing traditional methods. These challenges mirror findings in other contexts, where successful scaling of TaRL has depended heavily on ongoing professional development and systemic support (World Bank, 2020; Muralidharan et al., 2019). To address these issues, the study recommends that teachers and educational institutions prioritize capacity building through targeted training on diagnostic assessment, flexible instructional design, and differentiated learning. In addition, the use of diagnostic tools is essential to accurately classify learners and tailor interventions effectively (Unesco, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The Teaching at the Right Level approach has proven effective in improving English student learning outcomes, especially in literacy. By grouping students based on their abilities, this method allows for more targeted and individualized learning. The English students are more enjoy learning with the circle or community which is in the same level of knowledge. Recommendations from this study include the need for teacher training in implementing this method as well as policy support that ensures the sustainability of TaRL implementation at various levels of education in Indonesia. Suggestions for future researchers include adding open-ended questions to explore teachers' opinions more deeply and using a Likert scale (1-5) to measure the level of difficulty, satisfaction, and effectiveness of TaRL.

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