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Early Reading Profile of Slow Learner Students in Inclusive Schools in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reading abilities of slow learner students in inclusive elementary schools, focusing on their strengths and weaknesses in accuracy, fluency, vocabulary (receptive and expressive), and comprehension (listening and reading). A quantitative descriptive approach was employed, involving 25 slow learner students (n=25) from inclusive elementary schools in Yogyakarta with IQs ranging from 70 to 88. Data were collected through adapted reading assessment instruments and IQ tests using the Binet and WISC scales. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The findings reveal that most slow-learner students were male and were more easily identified at higher grade levels. In lower grades (grades II and III), students demonstrated strengths in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension but faced challenges with expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension. In contrast, higher-grade students (grades IV to VI) showed improvements in receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension but continued to struggle with reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of complex texts. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions. For lower-grade students, enhancing reading accuracy and fluency is crucial, while for higher-grade students, the focus should shift to improving reading comprehension. Early and tailored support is essential to help slow learner students overcome reading barriers and achieve their academic potential, ensuring their inclusion in educational progress.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Slow learner students are those who have a borderline intelligence level (IQ 70-90) based on standardized tests below average but are not included in the category of intellectual disabilities (Cooter & Cooter, Robert B, 2004; Kaznowski, 2004; Krishnakumar, Jisha, Sukumaran, & Nair, 2011; Marlina, 2019; Yusuf, 2020). They are the group of students with special needs most often found at the elementary school level (Mumpuniarti, Handoyo, Pinrupitanza, & Barotuttaqiyah, 2020). However, physically no different from normal students, cognitive limitations cause them to learn more slowly and take longer to understand abstract or symbolic academic material such as reading, writing, and

arithmetic (Ardianti, Wanabuliandari, & Wijayanti, 2021; Kaur, Singh, & Josan, 2015). This makes them in dire need of special support to be able to follow the learning process at school. Inclusive education, which offers equal opportunities for students with special needs to learn with regular students, is expected to be a solution to accommodate these needs. Based on Law Number 8 of 2016 (Indonesia, 2016) concerning Persons with Disabilities and Government Regulation Number 13 of 2020 (Indonesia, 2020) concerning Appropriate Accommodation, the education system in Indonesia regulates that people with disabilities, including slow learners, get access to education that suits their abilities, both in regular and special schools (Garnida & Sumayyah, 2015) . This approach creates better opportunities for slow learner students to develop, although its implementation in the field often faces significant challenges.

Slow learner students often face difficulties in understanding the subject matter, which requires repetition and a longer time to remember the information that has been taught. This also has an impact on their ability to adapt to social life, where they often have difficulty interacting with peers and experience problems with self-confidence (Hasibuan, Syamsuri, Santosa, & Pamungkas, 2020; Pratama & Setyaningrum, 2018). These factors indicate that in addition to academic support, slow learner students also need special attention in their social-emotional aspects. Limitations in time management and communication also add to the burden of participating in learning activities at school. Therefore, different and more personalized teaching strategies are needed so that slow learner students can compensate for their lag compared to regular students and can function optimally in inclusive schools.

However, the main academic challenge faced by slow learners is reading, which is a fundamental skill for academic success. Reading is a skill that underlies many other subjects and is often the biggest obstacle in their learning (Eissa, 2014). Reading difficulties become more apparent when we consider that limitations in basic aspects of reading, such as word recognition, vocabulary, reading fluency, spelling, and reading comprehension, affect their ability to understand the subject matter as a whole (Panel, 2000; Snow, 2006). Therefore, reading difficulties experienced by slow learners not only affect their reading ability itself but also affect their understanding of other subjects, making it even more difficult for them to catch up academically. Rasinski & Young (2017) emphasizes that problems in early reading can affect advanced reading skills and overall text comprehension. Therefore, limitations in reading skills can significantly affect the entire learning process of slow learner students, because reading is a basic skill that underlies almost all subjects.

Previous studies have shown that the cognitive limitations of slow learner students greatly affect their reading ability. As expressed by Tortorelli (2018) and Bendak (2018) shows that slow learner students have problems in reading accuracy, spelling, reading fluency, and text comprehension. Noor, Khairudin, Sulaiman, & Ng (2022) also found that slow learners often read three times slower than regular learners and struggle to comprehend texts in depth. Limitations in vocabulary and reading fluency further impair their reading comprehension, which ultimately affects their ability to follow other subjects well.

The increasing number of slow learner students globally, including in Indonesia, has become a pressing concern. Cooter and Cooter (2004) reported that in the United States, an average of three to four slow learners can be found in every classroom of 25 students. Similar prevalence rates have been observed in India (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2016) and Indonesia (Salim, 2013). In Indonesia, 85.19% of all students with special needs have been identified as slow learners (Salim, 2013). Despite this significant percentage, many teachers and parents face challenges in accurately assessing the reading abilities of slow learner students and devising effective teaching strategies. Addressing this issue requires further research to profile the reading abilities of slow learners, enabling the design of targeted interventions. Noor et al. (2022) emphasize that a deeper understanding of slow learners' reading skills can empower educators to create personalized interventions tailored to each student's unique strengths and weaknesses.

Inclusive schools provide opportunities for students with various learning needs to thrive alongside regular students. However, a major challenge arises in understanding the reading ability profile of slow learners and adjusting teaching methods accordingly. Some students may have good receptive vocabulary skills but struggle with reading accuracy and fluency, while students in higher grades may have more developed vocabularies but still be weak in reading comprehension. A multisensory-based approach, which involves using multiple senses to help slow learners remember and understand material, can be a very effective solution. Ahmad, Ludin, Ekhsan, Rosmani, & Ismail (2012) found that a multisensory approach can improve students' reading comprehension by activating the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses, thereby strengthening the relationship between letters, sounds, and words.

This study aims to analyze the reading ability profile of slow learner students in inclusive elementary schools in Yogyakarta. The focus of this study is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students at various grade levels in terms of vocabulary, reading accuracy, fluency, and reading comprehension. The results of this study are expected to provide insight for teachers and parents in developing appropriate teaching strategies and helping slow learner students achieve optimal development in an inclusive school environment.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive method to analyze the reading ability profile of slow learner students in inclusive elementary schools in Yogyakarta. This approach was chosen to identify patterns and trends in students' reading abilities, offering a comprehensive understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Data collection took place between March and May 2023 across nine inclusive elementary schools. The research population included all students identified as slow learners in these schools, and the sample was selected using purposive sampling.

The sampling criteria required students to have an IQ score between 70 and 90, as determined by a school psychologist using the Binet and WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) scales. Additionally, the students were identified as slow learners through academic evaluations that highlighted difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic. A total of 25 students met these criteria and were included in the study, providing valuable insights into the reading ability profiles of slow learners in inclusive educational settings.

The reading assessment instrument was adapted from " *An Early Reading Assessment Battery for Multilingual Learners in Malaysia* " (Lee et al., 2020), and adapted into Indonesian. The adaptation process involved an expert review to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. This instrument consists of four main components: reading accuracy, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Reading accuracy is measured by 10 questions to assess accuracy in reading words and spelling; reading fluency is evaluated based on the number of words read per minute from the adapted text; vocabulary consists of 20 questions for expressive and receptive vocabulary; while comprehension includes listening comprehension with 3 questions and reading comprehension with 5 questions.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics through Microsoft Excel and SPSS, to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution. This aims to describe the pattern of students' reading ability in each component. This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the geographical scope of this study is limited to Yogyakarta, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other areas with different social and cultural conditions. Therefore, the results of this study may not fully represent the conditions of slow learner students outside Yogyakarta. Second, the sample size used in this study consisted of 25 students, which is relatively small and may affect the representativeness of the findings for the slow learner student population as a whole. However, this sample size was chosen considering the limited time and resources available, as well as with the aim of providing deeper insight into the reading ability profile of slow learner students. Third, this study relies on standardized tests, such as IQ tests conducted using the Binet and WISC scales, to measure students' intelligence. Although these tests are widely used in identifying slow learner

students, these standardized tests only measure part of the student's cognitive abilities, and do not cover other factors that may also affect their academic performance, such as social and emotional abilities. These limitations may affect the results of the study because standardized tests may not fully reflect students' comprehensive abilities in the context of learning in inclusive schools. Nevertheless, these findings remain relevant in designing effective learning interventions in inclusive schools.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This study was conducted in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta to examine the reading ability profiles of slow learner students. The sample comprised 25 students with IQs ranging from 70 to 88, categorized by gender, age, grade level, and various aspects of reading ability, including accuracy, fluency, receptive and expressive vocabulary, and listening and reading comprehension. Data were collected using a reading ability test, with the results analyzed and presented separately for lower-grade students (grades II and III) and higher-grade students (grades IV to VI). This approach provided a detailed understanding of the students' reading abilities across different developmental stages.

3.1.1 Characteristics of Research Samples:

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Samples

Characteristics Sample	Frequency	%
Gender		
a. Male	20	80
b. Women	5	20
Amount	25	100
Age		
a. 8-9 years	5	20
b. 10-11 years	10	40
around 12-13 years old	10	40
Amount	25	100
Class		
1	0	0
2	1	4
3	2	8
4	6	24
5	6	24
6	10	40
Amount	25	100
intellectual intelligence (IQ)		
70-88	25	100
Amount	25	100

The majority of students in this study were male (80%), with females comprising only 20% of the sample. The students' ages ranged from 8 to 13 years, with the 10–11 and 12–13 age groups each representing 40% of the total sample. The youngest age group, 8–9 years, accounted for only 20% (5 students). Regarding grade levels, the identification of slow learner students increased with grade progression, with the highest representation in grade VI, comprising 40% of the sample. Grades II through V showed a more even distribution, with frequencies ranging from 4% to 24%, while no slow learner students were identified in grade I. IQ test results confirmed that all participating slow learner students had IQs within the 70–88 range.

3.2 Ability Read Based on Class Level

The evaluation of students' reading abilities encompassed several components: accuracy, fluency, vocabulary (receptive and expressive), and comprehension (listening and reading). The findings are presented separately for lower grades (grades II and III) and higher grades (grades IV to VI) to provide a detailed analysis of their reading performance.

Table 2. Reading Ability of Slow Learner Students in Lower Grades

		Descriptive Statistics				
Reading components	**Reading aspects**	**Number of Students (N)**	**Lowest Value**	**The highest score**	**Average Score of all students**	**Standard Deviation (SD)**
Accuracy	Word Reading Accuracy	3	50	80	63.33	15.275
	Spelling	3	50	60	53.33	5.774
Fluency (Words/Minute)	Fluency in reading words	3	4	16	9.33	6.110
	Fluency in reading text	3	8	130	57.33	64.260
Vocabulary	Expressive Vocabulary	3	14	19	17.33	2.887
	Receptive Vocabulary	3	20	20	20.00	0.000
Understanding	Listening comprehension	3	2	3	2.67	0.577
	Reading Comprehension	3	40	60	46.67	11.547
	Valid N (based on list)	3				

Lower-grade slow learner students (grades II and III) demonstrated strengths in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension but faced challenges in expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension. For instance, in receptive vocabulary, students exhibited remarkable consistency, with a mean score of 20.00 and a standard deviation of 0.000, indicating a uniformly strong ability to understand words passively. Conversely, expressive vocabulary showed more variability, with a mean score of 17.33 and a standard deviation of 2.887, suggesting that some students still struggle to express words fluently.

A key challenge for lower-grade students lies in reading fluency and text comprehension. The high standard deviation for reading fluency (64.260) reflects significant differences in students' ability to read quickly and smoothly, highlighting that many students face difficulties in achieving fluency. Similarly, the high standard deviation for reading comprehension (11.547) indicates considerable variation in their ability to understand texts, with some students struggling significantly. These findings underscore the need for focused attention and structured learning approaches to improve reading fluency and comprehension skills in lower-grade slow learner students.

Table 3. Reading Ability of Slow Learner Students in High Class

Descriptive Statistics						
Reading components	**Reading aspects Reading components**	**Number of Students (N)**	**Lowest Value**	**The highest score**	**Average Score of all students**	**Standard Deviation (SD)**
Accuracy	Word Reading Accuracy	22	0	100	88.18	25,002
	Spelling	22	0	100	69.32	35,933
Fluency (Words/Minute)	Fluency in reading words	22	0	59	24.68	13,830
	Fluency in reading text	22	0	152	70.09	41,369
Vocabulary	Expressive Vocabulary	22	16	20	18.64	1.136
	Receptive Vocabulary	22	18	20	19.64	0.658
Understanding	Listening comprehension	22	0	3	2.18	1.140
	Reading Comprehension	22	0	80	46.36	29.203
	Valid N (based on list)	22				

Slow learner students in higher grades (grades IV to VI) demonstrated stronger abilities in receptive and expressive vocabulary, as well as listening comprehension. For instance, in receptive vocabulary, the students achieved a mean score of 19.64 with a standard deviation of 0.658, indicating consistent vocabulary understanding across the group. Similarly, expressive vocabulary showed improved and more uniform abilities, with a mean score of 18.64 and a standard deviation of 1.136, reflecting enhanced proficiency in expressing words. In listening comprehension, most students effectively understood orally conveyed information, as evidenced by a mean score of 2.18 and a standard deviation of 1.140, indicating minimal variation in this skill among students.

Despite these strengths, significant weaknesses persist in reading accuracy and fluency. For example, the reading accuracy component exhibited a high standard deviation of 25.002, reflecting substantial disparities in students' ability to read words correctly. Similarly, text fluency displayed considerable variation, with a standard deviation of 41.369, suggesting that while some students can read fluently and quickly, others still face challenges in achieving these skills.

In summary, lower-grade slow learner students excel in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension but struggle with expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension. Meanwhile, higher-grade slow learners demonstrate stronger receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension but continue to require targeted support to improve reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension. These findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions to address specific weaknesses at each grade level.

Discussion

This study revealed that slow learner students in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta face significant challenges in reading skills, with notable variations based on grade level. A majority of the identified slow learners were male, aligning with findings from previous studies by Amelia (2016) and Arnez & Ishartiwi (2021), which indicate that male students are more likely to be slow learners than females. This disparity can be attributed to biological and socio-cultural factors, such as hormonal and brain structural differences, as well as societal gender roles. These factors influence how male students process information and acquire learning skills (Wanabuliandari, Ardianti, Gunarhadi, & Rejekiningsih, 2021).

One of the important findings in this study is that the higher the class, the more students are identified as slow learners. This phenomenon is in accordance with Raharjo's (2012) research which shows that slow learner students are more easily identified in classes with more complex material (grades IV to VI). In lower grades, such as grades II and III, the material is simpler, so the characteristics of slow learner students are not yet clearly visible. However, as academic demands increase in higher grades, students' reading difficulties become more visible. Ridha (2022) also emphasized that slow learner students are often not detected in lower grades because physically and behaviorally they are not much different from other students, even though they have actually begun to show the characteristics of slow learner students.

In terms of reading ability, this study supports the results of Tortorelli's (2018) study which found that slow learner students in lower grades tend to experience weaknesses in reading accuracy, spelling, and text comprehension. In addition, this study also shows that there is a large variation in reading fluency in both lower and higher grades. This is supported by research by Noor et al. (2022) which found that slow learner students often have much slower reading speeds and have difficulty understanding written texts compared to students in general. In addition, this study shows that slow learner students in lower grades have advantages in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension, but lag behind in expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, reading fluency, and text reading comprehension. In contrast, students in higher grades show better abilities in receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, and listening comprehension, but still need improvement in reading accuracy, reading fluency, and text comprehension. This finding is consistent with Bendak's (2018) which also found that slow learner students often have difficulties in reading fluency and text comprehension and have slower reading speeds than students in general.

These findings suggest that early identification of slow learners is essential. The use of IQ tests such as the Binet scale and WISC can help identify students at risk of slow learning before they reach higher grades, so that appropriate interventions can be given earlier. For students in lower grades, interventions that focus on phonics methods, repeated reading practice, and multisensory methods are essential to help them improve their reading accuracy and fluency (Jamaris, 2014; Shaywitz, 2012) . Phonics methods focus on recognizing words through letter sounds, which helps students connect letters and sounds to recognize words they do not yet know (Ariyanti, 2022; Jamaris, 2014; Olugbeko & O., 2016) . Multisensory methods involving visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile are very helpful for slow learner students to build stronger relationships between letters, sounds, and words (Ahmad, Ludin, Ekhsan, Rosmani, & Ismail, 2012b; Albarqi & Ainin, 2019; Gharaibeh & Dukmak, 2022; Oakland, Black, Stanford, Nussbaum, & Balise, 1998) . By using multiple senses, this method facilitates faster and deeper understanding and learning for slow learner students.

In high grades, slow learners need intervention strategies that focus on text comprehension and reading accuracy. Teachers can provide more in-depth practice in reading more complex texts, as well as engage students in activities that require critical thinking skills. Reciprocal teaching strategies, in which students discuss and analyze texts collaboratively (Palinscar & L, 1984) , can help students improve their understanding of texts (Akhir, 2017; Sari, Ramadhani, & Belawati Pandiangan, 2023) . In addition, speed reading exercises are also important to help students improve reading fluency and accuracy.

This study highlights that slow learner students in lower grades excel in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension but struggle with expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, reading fluency, and text comprehension. Conversely, higher-grade students demonstrate stronger skills in receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension but continue to face challenges with reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension. These findings align with Bendak's (2018) research, which also identified difficulties in reading fluency and text comprehension among slow learners, including slower reading speeds compared to their peers.

The analysis of the early reading profile of slow learner students in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta provides valuable insights into their specific challenges and strengths in reading skills. This

understanding is essential for tailoring intervention strategies to address their unique needs. By aligning instructional strategies with the identified ability profiles, educators can implement more effective learning interventions, helping students overcome their difficulties. Such targeted support not only improves academic performance but also fosters the students' overall academic and social development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the reading profiles of slow learner students in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, offering valuable insights into their specific challenges and needs. Key findings reveal that the majority of slow learners are male, highlighting gender differences in the characteristics of these students. The identification of slow learners tends to increase with grade level, with most students falling into the 10–13 age range, suggesting that older students are more easily recognized as slow learners, particularly in reading skills. Students in this study had IQ scores between 70 and 88, below average but not classified as intellectual disabilities, emphasizing their academic potential despite learning barriers. Lower-grade students struggled most with expressive vocabulary, reading accuracy, fluency, and text comprehension, while higher-grade students required targeted interventions in reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of complex texts.

The findings underscore the importance of tailored teaching strategies and ongoing interventions to address specific weaknesses in reading. Teachers and policymakers should use these insights to design inclusive and adaptive learning environments, focusing on individual student needs. Parental and community support is also critical in fostering academic and social growth among slow learners.

This study has limitations, including its focus on a specific region and the lack of comparison with regular students. Future research should explore comparative studies between slow learner and regular students to better understand the differences and inform tailored teaching strategies. Additionally, reading abilities could serve as key predictors for early detection of slow learners, aiding in the development of specialized learning programs to address common weaknesses. These efforts will enhance inclusive education policies, empowering slow learners to reach their full academic and social potential.

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