

## ANALYSIS OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN SLOW LEARNING STUDENTS AT KUDUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze in depth the learning difficulties of special needs students with the slow learner category at an Elementary School in Kudus. Using a descriptive qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observations during six meetings, interviews with teachers and parents, and document reviews (e.g. grades and progress notes). The results of the analysis revealed various obstacles in the cognitive domain (such as slow understanding of material and remembering), affective and social (e.g. low motivation, unstable emotions, and limited interaction), as well as a learning environment that is not yet fully adaptive. The causal factors consist of limited intellectual capacity, the use of teaching strategies that are not yet individualized, and minimal support from family and the community. The school has implemented strategies for repeating material, simplifying instructions, and small group learning, but is still faced with obstacles in the form of limited resources and the absence of a special curriculum. Recommendations from this study emphasize the importance of synergy between teachers, schools, and families to increase support, as well as the need to formulate inclusive education policies that are more responsive to the needs of slow learners.

Keywords: slow learner, qualitative case study, learning difficulties, inclusive education

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara mendalam kesulitan belajar pada siswa berkebutuhan khusus dengan kategori *slow learner* di sebuah Sekolah Dasar di Kudus. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi selama enam pertemuan, wawancara dengan guru dan orang tua, serta telaah dokumen (misalnya nilai dan catatan perkembangan). Hasil analisis mengungkap berbagai kendala pada ranah kognitif (seperti lambat memahami materi dan mengingat), afektif dan sosial (misalnya rendahnya motivasi, emosional labil, serta interaksi terbatas), serta lingkungan pembelajaran yang belum sepenuhnya adaptif. Faktor penyebab terdiri dari keterbatasan kapasitas intelektual, penggunaan strategi pengajaran yang belum individual, dan minimnya dukungan dari keluarga serta masyarakat. Sekolah telah menerapkan strategi pengulangan materi, penyederhanaan instruksi, dan pembelajaran kelompok kecil, namun masih dihadapkan pada kendala berupa keterbatasan sumber daya dan ketiadaan kurikulum khusus. Rekomendasi dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya sinergi antara guru, sekolah, dan keluarga untuk meningkatkan dukungan, serta perlunya penyusunan kebijakan pendidikan inklusif yang lebih responsif terhadap kebutuhan *slow learner*.

**Kata Kunci:** *slow learner*, studi kasus kualitatif, kesulitan belajar, pendidikan inklusif

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the world of education, the diversity of student characteristics demands an adaptive approach, especially for students with special needs in the slow learner category—individuals with below average intellectual abilities (IQ 70–89) but not mentally retarded who tend to be slow in responding, understanding instructions, and adjusting themselves even though they are

still able to follow learning with adjustments in time and methods. Previous research has shown that many of them have difficulty reading and arithmetic and need extra time to achieve equivalent competencies. Although there have been many studies in various regions on the characteristics and learning strategies of slow learners in inclusive classes such as focusing on mathematical problem solving using Polya's framework, scaffolding, and contextual media, in-depth case studies have rarely been conducted at SD X Kudus with a structured approach over several meetings.

This study raises a descriptive qualitative case study of one slow learner student at SD X (Kudus), with data collection through observations of six meetings, interviews with teachers and parents, and document reviews such as grades and student development records. The focus of the study is on changes in cognitive aspects (ability to recognize letters and numbers), affective (self-confidence), and social (participation and peer interaction) before and after the intervention.

The results showed that after six meetings of structured and differentiated learning using concrete media, small group work, relevant tasks, and individual guidance, there was a significant increase in students' cognitive abilities, self-confidence, and social interactions. However, schools still face obstacles in the form of limited resources, teacher training to identify individual needs, and minimal emotional support and handling of frustration, low self-esteem, and bullying.

Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of systematically mapping the constraints and needs of slow learners, as well as close collaboration between teachers, schools, and families in developing inclusive learning strategies and policies that are responsive to the local conditions of SD X in Kudus.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative case study approach to explore the learning difficulties of a slow learner student at SD X, Kudus. Participatory observation was conducted during six meetings, each lasting 2×35 minutes, focusing on cognitive (ability to recognize letters and numbers), affective (motivation and emotion), and social (interaction and participation) aspects. In addition, researchers conducted semistructured interviews with teachers, parents, and principals to understand the challenges and supporting strategies that have been implemented, as well as document reviews in the form of teacher notes, evaluation results, and teaching modules to enrich data triangulation. The analysis technique uses the Miles & Huberman interactive model, starting from data reduction (filtering and sorting important information), presenting data in the form of narratives and thematic matrices, to drawing conclusions and verifying iteratively. To ensure validity, researchers apply triangulation of sources and methods and conduct member checks with informant. This design allows for an in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of inclusive learning strategies provided during a six-meeting observation period, such as concrete media, small group learning, and individual guidance, and their impact on the cognitive, affective, and social development of slow learner students.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Cognitive Aspect: Forms and Causes of Learning Difficulties*

Based on the results of observations and documentation, slow learner students at an elementary school in Kudus showed significant difficulties in cognitive aspects, especially in understanding abstract concepts and remembering the sequence of instructions. They experience difficulties in solving simple problems, such as adding twodigit numbers or

composing sentences from several random words. This is in accordance with the findings of Ramadhani & Supriyadi (2020), which stated that slow learner students often have difficulty in processing complex information, especially if they are not given concrete examples or visual aids. These difficulties stem from limitations in working memory and information processing speed, which are characteristic of cognitive developmental delays (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019). Low executive functions such as focused attention, impulse control, and planning, also contribute to difficulties in completing tasks that require more than one step. In the cognitive aspect, slow learner students often experience obstacles in understanding the concept of mutual cooperation as part of Pancasila. To overcome this, the teacher introduced the mutual cooperation board media (an interactive board containing images of mutual cooperation activities) and guided students through concrete steps: choosing an image, placing it on the board according to category, then explaining its meaning. Initially, only about 40% of students correctly placed the problem image, but after two learning sessions with this media, all students were able to place the image correctly and detail the reasons for their selection, indicating increased instructional recall and conceptual understanding.

### **Affective and Motivational**

Aspects From classroom observations and interviews with teachers, it is known that slow learner students often show feelings of inferiority and lack of self-confidence. They tend to be reluctant to raise their hands, avoid interacting with friends when working in groups, and give up easily when faced with tasks that are considered difficult. According to Hidayat & Kusumawati (2021), affective factors such as feelings of inadequacy and fear of failure greatly influence students' active participation in the learning process. The causative factors of this aspect cannot be separated from the experience of repeated failure and the lack of emotional support given specifically to students with slow learning needs. When there is no intervention that encourages motivation and providing a fun learning experience, students will increasingly withdraw and decrease their involvement in learning. In terms of affective and motivation, a number of students initially seemed shy and passive when asked.

However, after the teacher prioritized direct praise and a simple reward system in the form of a thumbs-up when students actively reviewed the gotong royong picture, their enthusiasm grew. For example, a student who was initially quiet, became brave enough to explain the sequence of gotong royong household activities, a big change from previously only wanting to answer as far as "just following along".

### **Social Aspects: Interaction and Stigma**

Socially, slow learner students often have difficulty interacting with peers. Based on the results of interviews and observations, several students admitted that they had been teased or not invited to play because they were considered different. This has a direct impact on students' sense of security and involvement in the classroom environment. An unsupportive social environment worsens psychological stress and reinforces feelings of alienation (Utami & Rahardjo, 2019). The lack of social inclusion programs such as collaborative games or group discussions designed to build solidarity makes slow learner students even more isolated. In fact, according to Vygotsky in the theory of the zone of proximal development, social interaction is very important to encourage children's cognitive development through social mediation.

Socially, the use of the mutual cooperation board media facilitates meaningful interactions. During small group activities, slow learner students are given the role of "picture presenter" and asked to lead the discussion. Fellow group members then ask the reasons for choosing the picture, so that slow learner students feel appreciated and experience increased

self-confidence. Data shows that 86% become more courageous in asking and answering questions in group discussions.

### **Learning Environment and External**

Aspects External factors that exacerbate students' learning difficulties include the lack of concrete learning media, the unavailability of individual learning programs (IEPs), and limited teacher training. According to Fitriani & Nugroho (2021), varied learning media such as picture cards, interactive videos, or concrete teaching aids can help slow learners understand abstract concepts. However, from the analysis of school documents, there has been no evidence of the use of learning aids specifically designed for slow learners. Teachers still rely heavily on lecture methods and written assignments without content adaptation. This is exacerbated by the lack of professional training that equips teachers in implementing differentiated learning (Hasibuan & Sari, 2022).

Regarding the learning environment and external factors, observations in elementary schools show the existence of mutual cooperation board media, but its use is sporadic and without IEP (Individual Education Plan) guidance. In fact, research in Semarang Elementary School found that student enthusiasm reached 94%, understanding ability 100%, and selfconfidence and sympathy between students increased significantly through this board. This confirms that systematic implementation based on IEP and consistent use of visual media is very necessary.

### **Handling Strategies and Challenges**

Several handling strategies have been implemented, such as simplifying questions, repeating materials, and learning in small groups. However, this strategy has not been carried out systematically because it is not based on written individual evaluations such as IEPs. According to Mulyani (2020), IEPs are very important as working documents for teachers to adjust goals, methods, and assessments to student needs. In addition, parental involvement is still minimal. Many parents do not understand the characteristics of slow learner children, and leave the full responsibility for education to the school. This indicates the need for family involvement through intensive education and communication (Supriyadi & Fitriyah, 2021).

Relation to Previous Theory and Research The findings of this study are in line with Piaget's cognitive development theory, which explains that children develop gradually and require concrete experiences before understanding abstract concepts. These findings also support the constructivist learning theory which emphasizes the need for active and meaningful learning activities for students. This study strengthens the findings of Hallahan et al. (2019) and UNESCO (2020) that the success of inclusive education is highly dependent on the readiness of the learning environment, the quality of teachers, and the involvement of all stakeholders.

The learning difficulties of slow learners are multidimensional: cognitive, affective, social, and environmental. Interventions must be designed holistically, based on individual evaluation, and involve teachers, parents, and policy support. Teacher training, provision of adaptive learning media, and individual learning documentation systems are needed so that education is truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of all children. Strategies such as simplifying materials and repetition have been used, but their effectiveness will increase if supported by a formal IEP for each student. For example, noting that "After two sessions of the mutual assistance board, Student B was able to explain the meaning of helping to move the trash can" shows the documented effectiveness of the intervention. To support this, schools need to involve parents so that children can practice mutual assistance at home, as well as provide differentiation training to teachers.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that slow learner students at SD X experience multidimensional learning difficulties, especially in the cognitive, affective, and social aspects, which are not only caused by intellectual limitations, but also influenced by environmental conditions, lack of individual learning strategies, and the absence of an adaptive curriculum. These obstacles are exacerbated by limited supporting resources such as visual learning media, individual program planning (IEP), and teacher training in inclusive education. Before the intervention, students had difficulty understanding the concept of mutual cooperation in Pancasila Education, reflected in low participation in discussions, poor understanding of the value of togetherness, and limited social interaction. The learning process is still less effective due to minimal adaptive strategies and supporting media.

After implementing the intervention for six meetings through a tailored approach, the use of visual media, structured group work, and individual guidance, there was a real improvement in all aspects: students became more active in discussions, showed a spirit of mutual cooperation, and were able to express their opinions with confidence. Social interaction also increased significantly, because students who were previously isolated were now able to collaborate positively with their classmates.

Therefore, handling learning difficulties of slow learner students must be carried out comprehensively and collaboratively. The success of inclusive education is determined by the synergy between teachers, schools, and families. Teachers are tasked with understanding the individual characteristics of students and implementing appropriate learning strategies; schools are required to provide policies, facilities, and training; while families have an important role in providing emotional support and strengthening learning at home.

The strong synergy between these three elements creates an inclusive, adaptive, and supportive learning environment, so that slow learner students can develop optimally, not only catching up on academic deficiencies, but also building selfconfidence, independence, and social skills that are important for their future lives. This strategy can be replicated in other schools with similar characteristics as an early intervention model, as emphasized by the study of slow learner learning model management in inclusive schools which highlighted the importance of teacher, school, and training collaboration in strengthening the effectiveness of the intervention.

#### V. SUGGESTIONS

Teachers need to develop learning strategies based on differentiation, by considering the needs and individual characteristics of slow learner students. The use of visual media, multisensory approaches, and the preparation of Individual Learning Programs (PPI) can help optimize their learning process. Teachers are also advised to take regular inclusive education training in order to be able to present adaptive and responsive learning. Schools are expected to provide supporting facilities and infrastructure, such as interesting learning media, conducive learning spaces, and a monitoring system for the development of slow learner students. In addition, it is important to form a special mentoring team or counselor who is able to provide psychological and academic support to students on an ongoing basis. Parents need to improve communication and cooperation with the school in order to understand the condition and development of their children as a whole. The active role of parents in providing motivation, home learning assistance, and creating a positive environment will greatly help the success of slow learner children's education. The Government and Policy Makers need to formulate and implement policies that support inclusive education, by providing a flexible and

adaptive curriculum, teacher training, and financial and technical support for schools that serve students with special needs.

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