

Analysis Of Factors Causing Low Reading Ability In Grade I Students At SDN 1 Andalan

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Abstract

Low reading ability in first-grade elementary school students is a serious problem that impacts the overall learning process. This research was motivated by initial findings at SD Negeri 1 Andalan showing that out of 23 first-grade students, only 5 were fluent readers, 15 experienced difficulties, and 3 had disabilities. This study aims to describe the reading ability of first-grade students, identify the factors causing low reading ability, and analyze its impact on students' learning processes at SD Negeri 1 Andalan in the 2025/2026 Academic Year. The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The subjects included 23 first-grade students, the class teacher, and the principal. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation from May 21 to June 12, 2026. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model and validated through source, technique, and time triangulation. The results showed that 15 students faced specific difficulties such as not knowing letters, difficulty distinguishing b-d/p-q/m-n, difficulty combining letters, and failing to understand text meaning. Internal causal factors include low interest and motivation, immature cognitive development, and low concentration. External factors include a lack of parental attention (mostly laborers), negative influences of TV and gadgets, playmate influences, limited teaching methods, and inadequate facilities. The impacts involve impaired understanding of materials, slow task completion, decreased class participation, and learning dependency. These findings imply that low first-grade reading ability in this rural setting is primarily an ecological problem rather than a purely individual cognitive deficit, so that effective intervention requires the school to combine classroom-based remedial reading media with structured, ongoing collaboration between teachers and parents, rather than relying on classroom teaching methods alone.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for developing high-quality, adaptive, and competitive human resources in the modern era. Through education, individuals are expected to develop their potential, develop critical thinking skills, and adapt to the dynamics of modern development. One of the basic skills that every individual must possess from an early age is reading ability [1]. Reading ability serves not merely as a mechanical tool for recognizing written symbols, but rather as a complex cognitive process that requires individuals to understand, interpret, and analyze the information contained in a text [2]. Within the national education

framework, developing solid reading skills at the elementary school level is a strategic pillar because it acts as a catalyst for the development of higher-order thinking skills, mastery of various disciplines, and the formation of lifelong learning habits.

At the elementary school level (SD), especially in the lower grades (grades I and II), reading is a fundamental skill that is a prerequisite for successful learning in subsequent grades. First-grade students are at a critical stage known as "beginning reading." According to [3], students need to master this initial reading stage, as accuracy and fluency in this phase have a lasting impact on future reading literacy skills. Students who fail to develop reading skills at this stage are certain to experience substantial academic difficulties in participating in subsequent learning activities [4].

However, empirical reality in the field often shows a gap between curriculum expectations and actual student achievement. A common phenomenon is the persistently high number of first-grade students experiencing reading difficulties [5]. These difficulties manifest in various forms, ranging from an inability to recognize letters precisely, difficulty combining consonants and vowels into syllables, to confusion in stringing words together into meaningful sentences. This low reading ability does not arise in a vacuum, but rather is the accumulation of various factors, both internal (originating within the student) and external (originating from the environment) [6]. Internal factors generally include the student's level of reading interest, intrinsic motivation, cognitive maturity, and concentration. On the other hand, external factors are strongly influenced by the child's environment, particularly family parenting patterns and the quality of the school environment.

Previous research conducted by [7] emphasized that limited vocabulary mastery and weak phonological skills are the main determinants of low early reading skills. Weak phonological skills make it difficult for students to recognize letter sounds and differentiate sounds that sound similar auditorily, thus hindering the decoding process. Similar findings by [8] indicate that a lack of home learning support and monotonous teacher-centered teaching methods exacerbate students' reluctance to practice reading.

In the context of the current digital era, the development of gadget technology has contributed to the polarization of children's literacy skills. According to [9], uncontrolled exposure to gadgets tends to shift children's interests from textual literacy activities to consuming instant visual content (such as short videos and online games). If this is combined with minimal parental attention—as expressed by [10], where busy working parents have little time to supervise and accompany their children in learning—then the process of acquiring written language in children will be significantly hampered.

This problem was specifically found at Andalan 1 Public Elementary School, located in Andalan Village, Bayan District, North Lombok Regency. Based on preliminary observations (pre-surveys) conducted by researchers in the 2025/2026 academic year, of the 23 students in grade I, the disparity in reading ability was very striking. Only 5 students were able to read fluently. Meanwhile, 15 students were still stuck in the spelling stage with varying degrees of difficulty (ranging from not yet memorizing the letters of the alphabet to confusion in distinguishing the letters b/d, p/q, m/n/w), and 3 students were identified as having disabilities that require special assistance. If not systematically intervened, these weaknesses will accumulate into chronic academic deficits in subsequent levels of education.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on a qualitative paradigm with a descriptive approach. The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the researcher's need to explore, understand, and describe the phenomenon of low student reading ability in a natural setting without variable manipulation [13]. The research design applied was a case study. The case study approach was deemed most relevant because the research focus highlighted a specific problem bound by time and place, namely the dynamics of first-grade students' reading ability at SD Negeri 1 Andalan. In this case study, the bounded "case" being examined is the reading-ability phenomenon within the entire

first-grade classroom as a single pedagogical and social unit, while the 23 first-grade students are positioned as embedded units of analysis within that case: each student's individual reading profile, difficulties, and experience were documented in depth, and these individual profiles were then synthesized together with the teacher's and principal's perspectives to construct a holistic, contextual understanding of the case as a whole, rather than functioning as a statistical sample intended for generalization to a wider population.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Andalan, located in Andalan Village, Bayan District, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This research was conducted for 23 effective days, starting from May 21 to June 12, 2026 (Even Semester of the 2025/2026 Academic Year). The research subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique, involving the entire first grade ecosystem. The main subjects were 23 first-grade students (12 boys and 11 girls, aged 6-7 years). Supporting subjects who acted as key informants included the first-grade teacher (Mrs. Sri Winarni, S.Pd) and the principal (Mr. Lalu Nika Sosiandi, S.Pd).

Data were collected from two main sources: primary data (obtained directly through field interactions) and secondary data (school documents). Data collection techniques adhered to qualitative methodology standards [14], including:

1. Participatory Observation: The researcher was present directly in class I during the reading learning process. The researcher observed teacher-student interactions, student responses during spelling, concentration levels, and the use of learning media. The instruments used were observation guidelines and field notes.
2. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with classroom teachers, principals, and student representatives. The interviews aimed to explore informants' perspectives on pedagogical barriers, family support, and students' psychological factors.
3. Documentation: Collect physical evidence in the form of school profiles, teacher syllabi/lessons, student reading ability assessment results, attendance lists, and photo documentation of teaching and learning activities.

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model [13], which consists of three simultaneous activity flows: (1) Data Reduction, namely selecting, summarizing, and focusing data from interviews and observations into specific themes (internal factors, external factors, impacts); (2) Data Presentation (Data Display), namely organizing the reduced data into narrative text and tables for easy understanding; and (3) Conclusion Drawing.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research data, the researcher applied triangulation techniques [15]. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from teachers with statements from students and the principal. Technical triangulation was conducted by cross-checking interview results with classroom observation findings and documentary evidence. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checks with class teachers to validate the interpretation of the compiled data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading Ability of First Grade Students at SDN 1 Andalan

Based on the results of in-depth observations over 23 days and interviews with the first-grade teacher (Mrs. Sri Winarni, S.Pd.), it was found that the reading ability maps of 23 students were very heterogeneous. Researchers categorized the students' reading ability profiles into three main groups:

1. Group of Students with Disabilities (3 Students): There are 3 children (Dedi Setiawan, Sanuri, Khairu Zadith Takwa) who have specific cognitive limitations. Based on an interview with the class teacher on May 21, 2026, these students actually require special handling (inclusive education/SLB) because their academic absorption capacity is very limited to follow the rhythm of the regular class.
2. Fluent Reading Student Group (5 Students): Students named Dita Ayu Syaukia, M. Firdaus J., Ahmad Gigih at T., Asmaq Asri N., and Putri Syahida B. have demonstrated excellent

initial reading skills. They can construct sentences such as "Mom went to the market" with precise pronunciation, correct intonation, and most importantly, are able to understand the essence of the text. They can proactively answer referential questions related to characters or events in the sentence.

3. Low Reading Student Group (15 Students): This dominant group was the focus of the research problem. The difficulties they experienced were multifaceted, ranging from basic confusion to obstacles in understanding meaning. Specifically, 3 students had not memorized the complete shape and sound of the alphabet; 4 students failed to combine letters into syllables (for example, spelling b-u-k-u but unable to pronounce 'buku'); and the majority read disjointedly. The highest cognitive obstacle observed was the very long delay between the mechanical spelling process and semantic understanding. When asked the meaning of the word 'ibu' after struggling to spell it, most students were silent or confused.

Factors Causing Low Reading Ability

Data analysis revealed that early literacy disability in the 15 students was represented by two poles of causal factors: internal (students' personal dispositions) and external (ecological environment).

A. Internal Factors

1. Immature Cognitive Abilities and Visual Perception: Many students experience spatial disorientation of letters. For example, in the case of Gian Arvy Farjana, he consistently interchanges the letters 'b' with 'd', 'p' with 'q'. According to [16], psychologically, the discriminatory visual perception of 6-year-old children is still in the maturation phase. Their brains are not yet trained to pay attention to the fine details that differentiate orthographic symbols (letters) that appear similar.
2. Weak Working Memory: Anisa Putri's case shows she easily forgets letters she learned the day before. Low working memory capacity prevents the association of letter shapes and sounds from being recorded in long-term memory [17].
3. Deficit of Interest, Motivation, and Concentration: M. Gempar Rizki and his friends consider reading to be a tiring cognitive burden. This deficit in intrinsic motivation manifests itself in distracting behavior in class, where they prefer playing with stationery or chatting to staring at the text on the board [18].

B. External Factors

1. Absence of Family Literacy and Limited Parental Time: This is the most massive root of the problem. Based on Andika Pratama and M. Albi's testimony, their parents mostly work as farm laborers, construction workers, or migrate. The workload from morning to night robs them of time and energy to support learning at home. This finding validates the theory in [4] that parental support is linearly correlated with students' learning responsibilities.
2. The Hegemony of Gadgets and Television: Digital penetration (cell phones and TV) provides instant gratification for children's brains. Students like Rivania Putri spend their free time on gadgets. Children's brains, accustomed to rapid visual stimulation (videos/games), tend to reject static reading activities because they are considered to not stimulate dopamine quickly [10].
3. Influence of Peer Play Environment: M. Amir H. spends more time playing outside the house with his friends to the point of forgetting his study schedule [19].
4. Pedagogical Constraints and Infrastructure Limitations: The class teacher, Mrs. Sri, confirmed that the large student population ratio and cognitive diversity made it difficult to implement differentiated learning. Furthermore, SD Negeri 1 Andalan had limited access to engaging leveled readers and manipulative media in the classroom [20].

The Impact of Low Reading Ability on the Learning Process

The inability to smoothly decode written language triggers a series of domino effects in daily learning [12]:

1. Restrictions on Comprehension: Reading is a cognitive gateway. When teachers write instructions on the board, low-skilled students are confused because the letters appear as meaningless strings of symbols.
2. Time Inefficiency: Observations (June 11, 2026) recorded that children with low reading ability spent twice as long on copying or answering questions. They were stuck in the 'spelling' process, wasting classroom operational time.
3. Erosion of Self-Efficacy and Dependence: Fear of negative labeling or peer ridicule causes children like MA to adopt a defensive mode—remaining silent and avoiding eye contact during Q&A sessions. They become passive individuals who are completely dependent on the teacher's help or cheating from their classmates.
4. Difficulty with Simple Analysis: The most concerning aspect is the failure to achieve literal comprehension. They fail to answer simple text-based questions (5W1H) because all brain energy is drained on the mechanics of pronunciation, leaving zero cognitive energy for grasping the substance [21].

Discussion Based on Theoretical Perspective

Examining the phenomenon of the slow development of literacy in first-grade students at SDN 1 Andalan, Jean Piaget's cognitive theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework. Children aged 6-7 years are in the transition stage from preoperational to concrete operational, where they begin to represent the world not only with physical actions but also with symbols [16]. However, the abstraction of the 'letter' symbol is much more complex than the 'picture' symbol. Pictures are iconic; the silhouette of a cat is immediately identifiable to children because it represents a real cat in the physical world. In contrast, the letter 'k' is arbitrary—there is no logical connection between the shape of the 'k' stroke and the sound it makes.

Therefore, recognizing letters requires 'analytical attention' to detailed orthographic features, while recognizing images only requires 'global/holistic attention'. This theoretical account is consistent with the field data reported earlier in this study: Gian Arvy Farjana consistently interchanged the letters 'b' with 'd' and 'p' with 'q', a pattern that also recurred among several other students in the low-reading-ability group rather than appearing as an isolated case. Following the explanation offered in [6], when students confuse 'b' and 'd', this recurring pattern is more plausibly interpreted as an age-typical, still-maturing form constancy in visual perception rather than as a cognitive disability. However, since this study did not employ standardized neuropsychological instruments, this interpretation should be understood as a theoretically grounded contextual explanation rather than a clinical diagnosis, and it applies specifically to students in the low-reading-ability group rather than to the three students separately identified by the class teacher as requiring special assistance.

The problem worsens when these biological-cognitive constraints meet sociological realities (structural poverty) within the family environment. The majority of parents in Andalan Village are agrarian proletariats (farm laborers). Referring to Bronfenbrenner's theory of developmental ecology, the family microsystem here fails to support literacy because parents are trapped in economic survival, making supporting their children's learning a secondary priority [4]. This is exacerbated by the invasion of gadgets, which provide the illusion of passive entertainment. The accumulation of these microsystem deficits burdens pedagogical expectations within the mesosystem (school).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted at SD Negeri 1 Andalan, it was concluded that the reading ability profile of first-grade students in the 2025/2026 academic year was dominated by very low abilities (15 out of 23 students). The main obstacles centered on decoding failures (recognizing shapes and distinguishing similar letters) and semantic failures (spelling without understanding the meaning).

The factors contributing to this low level of competency stem from a synthesis of two elements. Internal factors include limited visual-analytical attention, poor memory, and low

intrinsic motivation. External factors are crucial, characterized by dysfunctional family support due to economic burdens (parents' work as laborers), the disruption of gadgets and television, and the lack of interactive learning media in schools. This series of conditions has a destructive impact on the learning process, manifesting in academic slowness, a crisis of self-confidence, learning passivity, and stagnant understanding of the subject matter.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed: (1) The Principal needs to design a 'School Literacy Policy' such as a 15-minute reading program before teaching and learning activities with adequate picture books (leveled reading) facilities; (2) Class Teachers are required to facilitate specific intervention programs (remedial reading) through concrete media/letter cards (not just lectures/whiteboards) to suit the concrete operational cognitive stages of children; (3) Schools must build proactive communication (parenting sessions) with parents to raise awareness of the dangers of excessive screen time and the importance of 10 minutes of storytelling/accompanying children at home every night; and (4) For further researchers, it is recommended to conduct development research (R&D) to create reading and writing learning media that integrate local wisdom to stimulate students' attention.

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