

Analysis of Early Reading Difficulties Among First-Grade Students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency

Gusti Eva Rosanti*, Irni Cahyani

Universitas PGRI Kalimantan, Indonesia

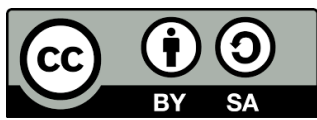
Email: evagustysty123@gmail.com*, irnicahyani08091987@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Early reading ability is a fundamental skill that supports students' learning achievement in elementary school. However, some first-grade students still experience difficulties in recognizing letters and reading syllables, words, and simple sentences, which may hinder their academic development. This study aimed to identify the forms of early reading difficulties experienced by first-grade students, analyze the factors contributing to these difficulties, and describe teachers' efforts to address them. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency. The participants consisted of nine first-grade students, with the classroom teacher and principal serving as supporting informants. Data were collected through individual reading tests, observations, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with source and technique triangulation applied to ensure data credibility. The results showed that seven out of nine students experienced early reading difficulties, while two students demonstrated fluent reading ability. The difficulties included spelling-based reading, letter confusion, difficulties with closed syllables and consonant clusters, and limited letter recognition. These difficulties were influenced by internal factors, such as motivation, readiness, maturity, and individual conditions, as well as external factors, including limited family support, parental educational background, gadget use, and restricted learning time. Teachers addressed these challenges through gradual reading instruction, letter-based learning media, individual guidance, peer tutoring, parental involvement, and daily reading activities. The findings highlight the importance of differentiated early reading instruction based on students' difficulty profiles and collaboration among teachers, schools, and families to strengthen literacy development.



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INTRODUCTION

Basic education is an important foundation for the development of learners' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. In elementary school, one of the skills that greatly determines learning success is reading ability because almost all subjects are presented in written texts that students must understand (Agustin, 2020). Reading is not only a process of reciting words but also a primary means of acquiring broader information and knowledge. If students' reading skills are weak, the learning process in the classroom may be hindered, and learning outcomes tend to decline. This indicates that reading mastery in the early grades requires serious attention (Kemendikbudristek, 2021).

In general, reading is understood as a cognitive activity involving the process of understanding and interpreting written symbols. According to (Ayyub et al., 2026), reading is a cognitive activity and process aimed at obtaining information and engaging in thought processes to understand the content of a text (Alpian & Yatri, 2022). During reading, readers are required to interpret a series of letters, symbols, or written forms so that the message conveyed by the author can be understood effectively. Thus, reading is not merely the process of spelling words but also involves complex cognitive processes (Musoffa & Amelia, 2025).

In elementary school, students are first introduced to beginning reading. Beginning reading is the initial stage of learning to read that emphasizes the recognition of simple letters, sounds, syllables, words, and sentences (Azkiya & Ridhuan, 2023). According to (Risdaiani et al., 2024), beginning reading is a skill that must be learned and mastered by readers, starting with the recognition of alphabetical forms from A to Z, which are then pronounced and memorized according to their sounds. Therefore, beginning reading represents the process through which children initiate reading activities by recognizing letters as sound symbols that are subsequently combined into simple words and sentences (Ainun Nikmah & Nova Estu Harsiwi, 2024).

If initial reading ability is not achieved adequately, students may experience difficulties in absorbing information from various written learning resources. Experts distinguish between merely being able to read and reading fluently. Reading fluency is an important bridge between decoding skills and reading comprehension. It includes the ability to read accurately, automatically, and with appropriate intonation. (Sari, 2023) explained that reading fluency consists of three main components: accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, which together support better understanding of meaning. Another study emphasized that reading fluency is not only measured by the ability to pronounce letters but also by the quality of the reading process, including accuracy, speed, and intonation that reflect comprehension.

Difficulty achieving reading fluency directly affects reading comprehension. (Kusumaningtyas et al., 2025) explained that reading delays are among the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding texts. (Jadmiko et al., 2024) added that difficulties in recognizing letters and words accurately and quickly can hinder students' ability to identify syllables, resulting in inaccurate reading and impaired comprehension. Therefore, beginning reading difficulties in the early grades of elementary school not only affect Indonesian language learning but also influence achievement in other subjects.

Various studies have shown that early reading difficulties remain prevalent in elementary schools. Research by Nikmat Ramadan et al. revealed that in several elementary schools, the proportion of students experiencing beginning reading difficulties remains relatively high, with contributing factors categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors include low learning motivation and reading interest, whereas external factors are associated with less supportive family environments (Ramadan, 2025).

Similar conditions were also observed among first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency, which served as the context of this study. Based on initial observations, the class consisted of nine students, and approximately one-third of them still experienced beginning reading difficulties. The observed symptoms included students incorrectly spelling words during reading activities; for example, the word "fashion" was read as "be-ubu-sa-sa-na," causing the reading process to become slow and less fluent. In addition, the principal stated

that several years earlier, the school experienced a shortage of teachers, which affected the learning process, including early reading instruction. Furthermore, the educational backgrounds of some parents, including those who did not complete elementary school, were considered potential limitations in supporting children's reading activities at home.

The findings above indicate that beginning reading difficulties among first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency, represent a problem that requires further investigation. These difficulties may be associated with students' internal factors, such as cognitive ability, motivation, and self-confidence, as well as external factors, including family environments and teachers' instructional strategies. This is consistent with the findings of (Winarno et al., 2025) and (Lestari & Ramadan, 2024) which stated that factors affecting early reading development may include intellectual factors, students' motivation and interests, as well as family and school environmental factors.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of beginning reading difficulties among first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency, an in-depth case study is required. A case study approach is considered appropriate for understanding the experiences of a small group of learners within a real classroom context. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and Poth (2018), case study research aims to explore a bounded system (case) in a real-life context through detailed and in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information (Lubis et al., 2024).

Early reading ability is essential as a foundation for learning success, while preliminary findings indicate that some first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency, continue to experience inaccurate spelling during reading activities. This condition indicates the presence of beginning reading difficulties that require further investigation (Suriati et al., 2023). These difficulties are also related to literacy support at home and learning practices that may not yet provide specific interventions for students experiencing reading challenges. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify beginning reading difficulties, examine the contributing factors, and describe teachers' efforts to address these difficulties among first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency.

METHOD

Approaches and Types of Research

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The approach was used to explore early reading difficulties among first-grade students in a natural educational context. The researcher served as the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis process, allowing an in-depth understanding of students' reading difficulties, contributing factors, and teachers' efforts to address these challenges.

The case studied was the early reading difficulties experienced by first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency. Data were collected through multiple sources, including observations, interviews, and documentation, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Sinaga, 2025).

Data Source

Data in qualitative research are generally in the form of words, actions, and documents, not statistically processed numbers. Sinaga (2025) explained that in the data and data sources section, researchers need to describe the types of data collected and their sources, both from

informants, events, and documents, which are related to the focus and subfocus of the research. In this study, the main data is in the form of descriptions of the initial reading difficulties experienced by Class I students, data on the factors that cause these difficulties, and data on teachers' efforts in overcoming them.

The data sources in this study are differentiated into primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data sources include all Class I students of SDN Belawang 2 totaling nine people, with special attention to students who show the most obvious symptoms of early reading difficulties, as well as grade I teachers and principals. The main subjects are Class I students, while the class teacher and principal act as key informants to complement the point of view of the case being studied. Information about family conditions and students' reading habits at home was explored through the classroom teacher's information, not through direct interviews with parents, so that the research focus remained on students' reading difficulties and teachers' efforts to overcome them. Secondary data sources include supporting documents such as Indonesian grade lists, teacher records, school profiles, and official letters related to the research implementation.

In more detail, the data of this study includes: first, data on how students read simple texts, including pronunciation accuracy, speed, fluency, and the presence of excessive repetition or pause; second, data on students' learning backgrounds and conditions, both at school and at home, including reading habits and family support; third, data on the beginning reading learning strategies used by teachers in Class I, as well as the steps taken by teachers to help students who have difficulty reading at the beginning; fourth, data on Indonesian language learning outcomes related to reading ability.

Data Collection Procedure

Tests

The test is carried out to directly measure the initial reading ability of each Class I student, so that the type of difficulty experienced can be identified more precisely. The test is given individually in the form of oral reading which includes four levels, namely recognizing letters, reading syllables, reading words, and reading simple sentences. The use of this kind of individual reading test is in line with the practice of early grade reading assessment recommended by the government (Kemendikbudristek et al., 2022).

During the test, the researcher listened to the students' reading and recorded the accuracy and patterns of difficulties that appeared, such as still spelling, omitting or replacing letters, and stuttering reading. The test results are the basis for determining students who have difficulty reading at the beginning, as well as the main material in interviews with classroom teachers about the causative factors and strategies for handling them.

Observations

Observation was carried out to directly observe the initial reading ability of Class I students in learning activities. According to Spradley in (Sugiyono., 2022) , the object of observation in qualitative research is called a social situation that includes places, actors, and activities. In this study, the place is Class I. The perpetrators include students, teachers, and the patterns of interaction between them. The activity observed was the initial reading learning process. Observations were carried out in several meetings so that researchers could see the stability of students' reading skills under various learning conditions.

During observation, the researcher paid attention to the way students read the text prepared by the teacher and/or researcher, and recorded symptoms of initial reading difficulties such as still spelling letters, making mistakes in certain syllables, or often stopping and repeating when reading. Each indicator item on the observation sheet is marked visible or invisible so that indicators that do not appear can be distinguished from the indicators that are missed observed. The researcher also noted the way the teacher gave reading instructions, the form of guidance given to students who experienced difficulties, and the classroom atmosphere when the reading activity took place. The results of the observations were written in detailed field notes as further analysis material.

Interview

The interviews were conducted to dig deeper into the difficulties of beginning reading from the perspective of the classroom teacher and the principal. In qualitative research, interviews are seen as an important data collection technique because they allow researchers to obtain richer and more in-depth data about the informant's experiences and views. The interview in this study uses a semi-structured interview form, which is an interview that is guided by a question guideline, but still gives the informant the freedom to explain his experience more broadly.

Interviews with Class I teachers focused on teachers' responses to students' reading test results, the difficulties that often arise, and the learning strategies that have been used to help students who have difficulty reading at the beginning. The interview with the principal aims to obtain information about the condition of the school, learning policies, and the impact of the shortage of teachers on the initial reading learning process.

Documentation

Documentation was carried out by collecting and reviewing documents related to students' reading ability and early reading learning at SDN Belawang 2 Barito Kuala Regency. Sinaga (2025) places documents as one of the important data sources in qualitative research that can be used to complement the data from observations and interviews. Data from the documentation was used to corroborate the findings from observations and interviews, for example by matching the observed students' reading ability with Indonesian language scores and teachers' notes in the grade book.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in qualitative research is carried out from before the researcher enters the field, while in the field, until after the data collection is completed. The data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model cited by Sugiyono (2022), which consists of three main activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. This activity takes place interactively and repeatedly until the data obtained is considered saturated.

Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and organizing raw data obtained from the field. In this study, data reduction was carried out by re-reading observation field notes and interview transcriptions, then grouping data according to categories such as the form of initial reading difficulties, causative factors, and teachers' efforts.

The presentation of data is carried out by compiling data that has been reduced into an organized form, making it easier for researchers to understand the overall findings. The presentation of data can be in the form of narrative descriptions, tables, or charts that illustrate

the relationships between categories. In this study, the presentation of data was carried out in the form of a narrative description of the student's profile and the type of initial reading difficulties experienced.

After that, the researcher draws conclusions and verifies. Conclusions are drawn by looking for patterns, relationships, and meanings from the data that has been presented. The conclusions were initially temporary, then verified by comparing them with field data, triangulating, and confirming to informants. If the conclusions produced are consistent with the existing data, then the conclusions are considered credible. This continuous analysis process is expected to produce a clear picture of the difficulties of early reading in Class I of SDN Belawang 2 Barito Kuala Regency, the factors that affect it, and the teachers' efforts to overcome it.

Data Validity Testing

The validity of data in qualitative research can be tested through four criteria, namely credibility, diversion, dependability, and confirmability (Sinaga, 2025). Credibility relates to the extent to which the research findings can be trusted from the participant's point of view. To increase credibility, the researcher took several steps, including extending observations, increasing diligence, triangulation, and member checks. Extended observations are carried out by the researcher returning to the field to recheck the data that has been obtained, conduct re-interviews if necessary, and ensure that the data collected truly reflects the actual situation.

Increased diligence is done by observing carefully and repeatedly, as well as reading various relevant references so that researchers have a strong theoretical foundation in interpreting the data. Triangulation is carried out by utilizing various sources, techniques, and time to check the validity of data (Sinaga, 2025). Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from the test results of students, class teachers, and principals. The technique triangulation was carried out by comparing test results, observations, interviews, and documentation on the same theme. Time triangulation is done by collecting data at different times to see the consistency of the data. Member checks are carried out by confirming the summary of the interview results and provisional findings to the class teacher or other informants, to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the intention of the informant.

Redirectness is related to the extent to which research results can be applied to other similar contexts. For this reason, the researcher seeks to present a detailed, clear, and systematic description of the research context, so that readers can judge for themselves whether the results of this research are relevant to other contexts. Dependency is related to the robustness of the research process, which can be tested through an audit of the entire research process, from planning, data collection, analysis, to drawing conclusions. Confirmability is related to the extent to which the results of the research are a function of the process carried out and the data collected, not just the desire or prejudice of the researcher. The confirmability test is carried out by tracing back whether the research results are consistent with the data footprint and procedures taken by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis Results

Initial Reading Difficulties Students Experience

The results of triangulation between tests and observations showed that out of 9 Class I students, as many as 7 students had difficulty reading at the beginning with different levels and forms, while 2 students, namely MAM (1) and HA (2), had read fluently. These difficulties can be grouped into two large groups according to the stage of reading development.

The first group is students who already know some of the letters but are not fluent in stringing and reading, namely MFM (3), HY (4), and NH (5). Forms of difficulty that appear in this group include reading by spelling letters or syllables one by one, flipping or replacing letters that are similar in shape, difficulty reading closed syllables and consonant clusters, and reading stammerically and slowly. This difficulty shows that the group's ability to parse and read fluently has not developed optimally, even though letter recognition has been partially mastered.

The second group is students who are new to vowels and have not been able to read consonants, syllables, and words, namely DR (6), AAA (7), AK (8), and MRA (9). The form of difficulty in this group is not knowing most of the consonant letters, mistakes in distinguishing letters that are similar in shape, and a tendency to be silent when asked to read. The difficulty of this group is at a more basic stage, namely the recognition and differentiation of letters, so that students have not yet arrived at the ability to string together syllables. Especially AK (8), the condition of a child with special needs is a factor that needs to be considered in interpreting his difficulties.

To strengthen the validity of the findings, the results of tests, observations, and interviews were triangulated as presented in Table 4.8. The three data sources show a mutually reinforcing tendency in each reading ability profile.

Table 1. Triangulation of Initial Reading Difficulties Data per Profile

Profile	Test Findings	Observational Findings	Interview Description
Smooth (MAM, HA)	Complete all test items	No difficulty indicator found	Already reading fluently
Transisi (MFM, HY, NH)	Mastering letters and some words, not yet mastering closed syllables and some words	Reading with spelling, stuttering, misspelled similar letters	Can spell but is not fluent in stringing
Letter level (DR, AAA, AK, MRA)	Only mastering vowels	Not knowing certain letters and tend to be silent	Not able to read yet; one of the students with special needs

Source: Test results, observations, and interviews (2026).

Based on Table 4.8, the three data collection techniques produce a consistent picture. The test results that showed low achievement in closed syllables and words were strengthened by observations that recorded stuttering and reading behavior, as well as by teacher information about students who were not able to unite letters into words. This consistency between sources shows that the research data has an adequate level of validity.

Factors Causing Early Reading Difficulties

Based on the results of interviews with Class I teachers and school principals, the factors that cause initial reading difficulties in Grade I students of SDN Belawang 2 can be grouped into internal factors and external factors.

Internal factors are related to the condition of the student. These factors include differences in learning interests and motivations, unequal readiness and maturity between students, limited ability to remember and connect letter sounds, and special conditions in one student who is a child with special needs. This difference in readiness explains why at the same age and class, students' reading achievement can differ greatly, ranging from those who have read sentences to those who are new to vowels.

External factors are related to the conditions outside of the student, especially the family, school, and technological environment. External factors identified include the lack of learning support at home, the family's socioeconomic background that is substandard, the relatively low level of parental education, the influence of gadgets and social media that reduce reading interest, and limited learning time at school. According to the Principal, some parents do not have adequate awareness to accompany their children to study at home, so the burden of reading learning mostly rests on the school. This combination of internal and external factors affects students' initial reading achievements.

These internal and external factors do not stand alone, but affect each other. Limited support at home can weaken students' motivation and readiness to learn, while low interest in reading makes students less likely to take advantage of the learning opportunities available at school. Thus, efforts to overcome early reading difficulties need to consider both groups of factors simultaneously, both through strengthening learning at school and increasing family involvement at home.

Teachers' Efforts in Overcoming Initial Reading Difficulties

The results of the analysis show that Class I teachers have made various efforts to overcome students' initial reading difficulties. These efforts can be grouped into four forms, namely the use of methods and media, individual guidance, peer involvement, and partnerships with parents.

In the aspect of methods and media, teachers apply the TBUN method which emphasizes letter recognition through the relationship of letters with pictures, as well as utilizing books and homemade letter media. Learning is carried out in stages from letter to syllable and word. In the aspect of individual guidance, teachers approach students who are not fluent in particular, pay extra attention, and apply writing techniques before reading to strengthen students' memory of letters. In the aspect of peer involvement, teachers use students who are fluent in helping their friends. In the partnership aspect, teachers communicate to parents to accompany children to read at home. All of these efforts are strengthened by the school's policy in the form of reading habits every morning. This analysis shows that teachers have tried to provide different services to students who are not fluent in their studies, although the form of adjustment can still be further developed according to the type of difficulty of each student.

The analysis of teachers' efforts also shows that teachers have realized the differences in needs between students and are trying to provide different services, especially for students who are not fluent in it. This awareness is an important capital to develop more differentiated learning. However, the form of adjustment made is still general, namely in the form of

additional attention and repetition, so there is still room to adjust the method more specifically according to the difficulty stage of each student.

Discussion

Initial Reading Difficulties Students Experience

The findings of the study show that the initial reading difficulties of Grade I students of SDN Belawang 2 appear in various forms, ranging from reading by spelling letters and syllables one by one, flipping and replacing letters that are similar in shape, difficulty reading closed syllables and consonant clusters, reading in stuttering, to not knowing most of the letters. These forms of difficulty consistently appear in both test results and observations, thus illustrating that the reading achievement of most students is not in accordance with the expected developmental stage at the end of Class I.

This finding is in line with the view of (Abdurrahman & Nugroho, 2024) who states that errors that are often found in children who have reading difficulties include the omission of letters or words, additions, replacements, reversals of letters that are similar in shape, mispronunciation, not knowing words, and stuttering reading. These patterns of error were evident in the study subjects; for example, MFM (3) which mistakenly distinguishes the letters v and y, and HY (4) which is confused between the letters V and U. Thus, the form of difficulty found in the field is in accordance with the theoretical framework that is the basis for the preparation of test instruments and observation sheets in this study.

The mistake of distinguishing letters with similar shapes, such as v and y in MFM (3) and V and U in HY (4), is a common form of difficulty for beginning readers. Letters that have a visual resemblance require perceptual accuracy that has not yet fully developed in Class I children. This finding is in line with previous research that found that Class I students often find it difficult to distinguish almost identical letters and read consonant combinations, so the process of deciphering words is hampered. Therefore, strengthening the ability to distinguish letters needs to be given early so that it does not develop into a persistent mistake and hinder the next stage of reading.

When viewed from the concept of reading fluency, students in the transition group, namely MFM (3), HY (4), and NH (5), actually already have accuracy in some letters and words, but have not yet achieved automation, namely the ability to read quickly and spontaneously without spelling. As a result, their reading is still slow and stuttering, so the aspect of pronunciation fairness (prosodi) has not been fulfilled. This condition confirms that the fluency of reading is not only determined by the ability to recognize letters, but also by the speed and reasonableness of reading words and sentences. Referring to the Learning Outcomes Phase A of the Independent Curriculum which targets students to be able to read simple words and sentences fluently, the reading ability of this transition group has not met the expected standards.

Meanwhile, students in the letter level group, namely DR (6), AAA (7), AK (8), and MRA (9), experienced difficulties in the more basic aspect, namely letter recognition and distinction. This is in line with the view of (Tarigan, 2015) that beginning reading includes the recognition of letter forms and the relationship between spelling and sound as basic skills that must be mastered first. This finding also corroborates the results of previous research that found that Class I students often have difficulty recognizing letters and distinguishing letters that are almost similar in shape, so they are not able to read word for word. Thus, the difficulty of

beginning reading in Grade I students of SDN Belawang 2 is multi-tiered: some students are constrained at the fluency stage, while others are still constrained at the letter recognition stage.

The form of difficulty in the form of letter omission and replacement found in some students also shows that the letter recognition process is not fully established. When students do not have a strong representation of letters, they tend to guess or replace similar letters, so that the reading results deviate from the actual word. This shows the relationship between letter mastery in the early stages and the ability to read words in the later stages; weakness in the basic stage will have an impact on the higher stage.

The findings on the difficulty of reading consonant clusters and closed syllables provide important information that syllable patterns also determine the level of reading difficulty of Class I students. Therefore, difficulties in closed syllable patterns experienced by MFM (3), HY (4), and NH (5) are normal at the beginning stage, but still require special practice so that students can overcome them and achieve reading fluency.

Overall, this description of the tiered difficulties is in accordance with the view that initial reading takes place through successive stages, starting from recognizing letters, stringing syllables, reading words, to reading sentences. Each stage is a prerequisite for the next stage, so students who have not completed the letter recognition stage will experience multiple difficulties when required to read words and sentences. Understanding this stage is important so that teachers can put each student at the starting point of learning that suits their abilities.

The wide difference in achievement in one class also confirms that reading development takes place at a different pace in each child. Some students have passed the letter recognition stage and started reading words and sentences, while others are still in the earliest stages. This shows that the success of early reading cannot be measured solely by age or grade level, but rather by the extent to which each skill stage has been mastered. With this understanding, teachers can avoid demands that go beyond the student's ability level and focus more on strengthening unfinished skills.

Factors Causing Early Reading Difficulties

The results of the study show that students' initial reading difficulties are caused by internal factors and interrelated external factors. This finding corroborates the framework put forward by (Rahim, 2015) that students' reading ability is influenced by physiological, intellectual, environmental, and psychological factors.

In terms of physiological and intellectual factors, the difference in students' readiness and maturity is evident in the variation in reading achievements, including the condition of one student who is a child with special needs. Differences in the ability to remember and connect the sounds of letters also affect the speed of students in mastering reading skills. This factor explains why in the same class there is a very wide range of abilities, from students who have read sentences to students who are new to vowels.

In terms of environmental factors, family conditions are prominent external factors. Based on the Principal's statement, the family's socio-economic background is below standard and the parent's relatively low level of education causes learning support at home to be limited. These findings are in line with research by (Nuraini et al., 2022) which found that factors that inhibit early reading include a lack of parental role and guidance at home as well as the use of school facilities that are not optimal. These findings are also in line with the results of a study

that shows that parents' educational and work backgrounds are related to children's reading fluency levels.

In terms of psychological factors, students' interest and motivation to read that are not stable also affect reading difficulties. The principal highlighted the influence of gadgets, social media, and online games that make some children more interested in playing than reading. This is in line with the findings of Lestari and Ramadan (2024) which affirm that reading difficulties are influenced by a lack of interest and desire to read, lack of parental attention, environmental conditions, and the level of student intelligence. Thus, the difficulty of reading at the beginning in Class I of SDN Belawang 2 is not the result of a single factor, but the result of the interaction between internal factors of students and external factors from the family environment, school, and technological developments.

The condition of children with special needs in one of the students, namely AK (8), emphasized the importance of physiological and psychological factors in early reading. Children with special needs generally need different time, approaches, and support to master reading skills. These findings show that reading difficulties are not always caused by a lack of effort, but can be related to student developmental conditions that require special handling and collaboration between teachers, parents, and competent parties.

School environment factors, although not as large as family factors, also play a role. The limitations of reading facilities such as reading corners and library management, as well as limited learning time, make students' opportunities to practice reading limited. This condition is in line with the findings of previous research which shows that the use of school facilities that are not optimal is one of the obstacles to early reading ability. Thus, providing a rich reading environment can be one of the efforts to support students' reading fluency.

The relationship between family background and reading ability is also seen in the study of Kusumaningtyas et al. (2025) which measured reading fluency through the number of words read correctly per minute and found that the level of education and work of parents are related to children's reading fluency. In the context of SDN Belawang 2, the level of education of parents who are mostly low and limited economic conditions make literacy support at home less than optimal. Children who do not receive reading assistance at home tend to be slower to master reading skills than children who receive adequate support. Thus, the reading difficulties experienced by students cannot be separated from the condition of the family as the child's first learning environment.

Teachers' Efforts in Overcoming Initial Reading Difficulties

The results of the study show that teachers' efforts in overcoming initial reading difficulties have shown the right direction. Teachers apply gradual learning from letter-to-word recognition through the TBUN method, provide individual guidance, utilize media and peer tutors, and involve parents. This effort is in accordance with the view that early reading learning is carried out gradually through methods such as the spelling method, the syllable method, and the synthetic analytical structural method (SAS) with the help of media such as letter cards, as well as the view of Tarigan (2015) that reading skills can only be mastered through gradual and continuous practice.

Giving extra attention and individual guidance to students who are not fluent is in line with Abdurrahman's (2012) idea of remedial teaching, which is learning specifically designed to improve learning difficulties through repetition and additional exercises tailored to the type

of difficulty of each student. Thus, the teacher's steps that approach students specifically, teach the letters more clearly, and use writing techniques before reading can be seen as an early form of remedial service in early reading learning.

However, the characteristics of the tiered students' difficulties require more specific method adjustments to each profile. This is in line with the direction of the Independent Curriculum which is strengthened through a deep learning approach with the principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, which emphasizes appreciation for each student's unique way of learning. For students in transition groups such as MFM (3), HY (4), and NH (5), reinforcement is directed at practicing stringing syllables from the consonant-vowel-consonant pattern to the consonant-vowel-consonant pattern, as well as repetitive reading exercises to improve speed and fluency. Practice on consonant groups and closed syllables needs to be given specifically because they are the most prominent points of difficulty in this group.

More concretely, syllable methods and synthetic analytical structural methods (SAS) can be suitable options for transition groups. Through the syllable method, students are trained to read syllables in their entirety, such as *ba*, *bu*, and *bi*, then combine them into words such as *ba-tu* into stones, so that students are used to reading per syllable and not fixated on one letter. The SAS method trains students to break down sentences into words, words into syllables, and syllables into letters, then reassemble them into meaningful units, so that students understand the relationship between the sections and the overall reading. The use of syllable cards and reading games can make the exercise more interesting and not burden students.

For students in the letter level group such as DR (6), AAA (7), AK (8), and MRA (9), reinforcement is directed at systematic letter recognition, phonemic awareness exercises to connect letters with their sounds, as well as multisensory approaches involving sight, hearing, and movement so that students can more easily remember the shapes and sounds of letters. The practice of distinguishing letters with similar shapes also needs to be emphasized. Especially for AK (8) who is a child with special needs, an individualized approach with a shorter learning duration, a supportive atmosphere, and close cooperation between teachers and parents, and if possible supported by appropriate follow-up assessments. Adjusting the method based on this difficulty profile does not replace the practice that the teacher has already done, but rather complements and strengthens it.

In the media aspect, the use of letter cards, syllable cards, and pictures can strengthen learning because it helps students associate letter shapes with sounds and meanings in a more concrete way. In addition, the repeated reading technique, which is to read the same reading material several times, can help students in the transition group improve their reading speed and fluency. The selection of media and techniques that suit the student's profile will make learning more meaningful and enjoyable, in line with the principles of meaningful and joyful learning in the Deep Learning approach.

In addition to structured exercises, teacher-guided reading activities can foster students' interest and confidence. The teacher reads a simple reading with clear pronunciation and intonation, then students imitate and read together, so that students get examples of fluent reading while feeling involved in the activity. For students who tend to be silent when asked to read, such as MRA (9), a fun, stress-free learning atmosphere can encourage the courage to try.

Teachers can also give simple rewards for each student's progress so that reading motivation is maintained, so that the learning process takes place in a positive and supportive atmosphere.

In addition to teachers' efforts, handling early reading difficulties requires support from schools and parents. School policies in the form of reading habits every morning, the provision of media and reading corners, as well as a plan to cooperate with parents and village officials to manage the use of gadgets are steps that support the success of reading learning. With the synergy between teachers, schools, and parents, the adjustment of methods for each student's difficulty profile is expected to run more effectively so that students can gradually achieve fluency in beginning reading according to their developmental stages.

Implications of the Findings on Early Reading Learning

The findings of this study have a number of implications for early reading learning in Class I. First, the presence of three different reading ability profiles in one class suggests that early reading learning cannot be treated uniformly for all students. Teachers need to recognize each student's profile and adjust the learning emphasis, from letter recognition for letter-level students to fluency exercises for transition students. This approach that respects the difference in learning methods and speed is in line with the spirit of Deep Learning in the Independent Curriculum.

Second, these findings confirm the importance of an initial assessment or a simple diagnostic assessment to map students' reading ability from the beginning of learning. By knowing the position of each student, teachers can determine the right form of guidance and monitor student progress periodically. The multi-level reading test instrument used in this study can be an example of a simple and easy to apply mapping tool for teachers in the classroom.

Third, the success of early reading learning requires synergy between teachers, schools, and parents. Teachers' efforts in the classroom need to be supported by school policies that foster a reading culture as well as by parental involvement in reading assistance at home. This synergy is becoming increasingly important considering that most of the reading difficulties found are closely related to family environmental factors and limited learning time at school. Thus, the handling of early reading difficulties should be seen as a shared responsibility that is carried out on an ongoing basis.

Fourth, handling early reading difficulties requires continuous evaluation and monitoring. Students' reading abilities develop gradually so it needs to be monitored over time to ensure that the reinforcement given is truly progressing. Through periodic monitoring, teachers can readjust teaching methods and materials according to student development, so that the initial reading learning process runs more on target. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to be a reflection material for teachers and schools in improving the quality of early reading learning in Class I.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that early reading difficulties among first-grade students at SDN Belawang 2, Barito Kuala Regency, occurred at various developmental levels. Of the nine students studied, seven experienced early reading difficulties, while two students had achieved fluent reading ability. The difficulties were categorized into two main groups: students who had recognized some letters but still experienced difficulties combining and reading words and sentences, characterized by spelling-based reading, stuttering, confusion between similar

letters, and difficulties with closed syllables and consonant clusters; and students who remained at the letter recognition stage and had not yet mastered consonants, syllables, or words. These difficulties were influenced by interconnected internal factors, including motivation, readiness, maturity, and individual conditions, as well as external factors such as limited family support, parental educational background, gadget use, and restricted learning opportunities. Teachers implemented several strategies, including gradual reading instruction, letter-based learning media, individual guidance, peer tutoring, parental involvement, and daily reading activities, highlighting the importance of differentiated instruction based on students' reading profiles.

Future research is recommended to involve a broader range of schools and participants to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of early reading difficulties across diverse educational contexts. Further studies may also examine the effectiveness of specific intervention programs, such as phonemic awareness training, multisensory learning approaches, digital literacy media, and differentiated reading instruction, in improving students' early reading skills. Longitudinal research is also recommended to monitor students' reading development over time and identify effective strategies for supporting learners with varying reading ability levels, including students who require additional educational support.

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