# Learning Difficulties of Slow Learner Students

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#### Abstract

This study aims to describe learning difficulties in children with special needs of slow learner type, especially in mathematics, through a systematic review of previous research, not based on classroom observations. The type of research used is library research with the Systematic Literature Review method. The data collection technique used is document study, while data analysis is carried out using qualitative content analysis approach. The results of this study reveal that students, including those with special needs of slow learner type, face various difficulties in the learning process at school. This progress is influenced by internal and external factors. Each student faces challenges in understanding concepts, applying principles, and solving verbal problems. This study also shows that students with special needs of slow learner type have difficulty in understanding mathematics lessons, one of which is seen from the level of student intelligence. Further research is needed to identify the factors that cause learning difficulties in students with special needs of slow learner type, so that solutions can be found to overcome obstacles in learning and improve their learning outcomes, especially in mathematics learning.

Keywords: learning difficulties, slow learner, systematic literature review

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## INTRODUCTION

A child's learning difficulties can be understood as a situation where they face unique challenges in the learning process to achieve the desired results (Ismail, 2016). In English, "Learning disability" is defined as the inability to undergo the learning process (Lilianti et al., 2020). Kambey et al., (2018) explained that one of the causes of students' inability to learn is a low understanding of the material being taught. However, this situation is influenced by various external and internal factors. In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 Article 5 Paragraph 2, it is stated that "citizens who have physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and social disabilities have the right to receive special education", while Paragraph 4 emphasizes that "citizens who have the potential for intelligence and special talents have the right to receive special education" (Indonesia, 2003). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020), the population of children with disabilities in Indonesia has reached 1.6 million children. According to the 2018 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018), the population of people with severe and moderate disabilities in Indonesia reached 30 million people, while based on the Intercensal Population Survey (Supas) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2015), it was 21 million people. Meanwhile, according to the 2020 running data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of people with disabilities in Indonesia reached 22.5 million people or around five percent of the population (Lafiana et al., 2022). According to statistics, the disability rate in children aged 5-19 years reached 3.3%. In 2021, the total

population in this age range was 66.6 million people, so it is estimated that there are around 2,197,833 children with disabilities. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture as of August 2021 shows that the number of students registered in SLB or inclusion is 269,3908 children. "Thus, the percentage of Children with Special Needs who attend formal education is only around 12.26, which means it is still very small compared to the number that should be served," he said (Kalalo et al., 2022). This is not in line with the law regarding students with speacial needs (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003) which regulates the national education system and affirms the right of every citizen to receive quality education.

Poerwadarminta (2007) defines difficulty as a difficult situation. Learning difficulties can be interpreted as a situation where a person has difficulty in changing knowledge, understanding, attitudes, behavior, habits, and other aspects after interacting with the environment. Blassic and Jones (Irham & Wiyani, 2016) state that learning difficulties indicate a gap between academic achievement and the reality achieved. Meanwhile, Sabri (2007) stated that learning difficulties are students' difficulties in receiving lessons at school, which arise when taking lessons or assignments from teachers. Irham and Wiyani, (2016) added that the diagnosis of learning difficulties does not only focus on symptoms or causes, but also on determining the assistance that may be provided by teachers or other parties. Likewise, the difficulties faced by slow learner students in the learning process in the classroom. Fakhiratunnisa et al. (2022), identified several types of students with special needs, including blind, deaf, mentally disabled, emotionally disabled, Specially Intelligent and Talented Children (CIBI), physically disabled, autistic, speech disabled, multiple disabled, children with learning difficulties, and slow learners.

Etymologically, slow learner consists of the word "slow", referring to the difficulty of understanding lessons that make students need more time to understand the material, even though the material is relatively easy. While "learner" means student, which is interpreted as someone who finds out about a subject. Cooter & Cooter Jr (2004) and Sukma et al. (2021) explain that Slow Learners are individuals with below average achievements, although they are not classified as mentally retarded children with an IQ score between 70 - 90. Rakhmawati (2017) states that slow learner students learn far below average, so adjustments are needed in teaching methods. Based on various research results, first, inclusive education is seen as an approach that supports all children, including those with special needs such as slow learners. Research published in the Journal of Educational Research by Yogyakarta State University explains that inclusive education aims to meet the learning needs of all students, including slow learner students, by providing educational services that are equal to other children in public schools (Nurfadhillah, 2022).

Second, slow learner students face major challenges in learning mathematics, especially in arithmetic skills and memorizing formulas. Several factors that contribute to this difficulty include low interest in learning, ineffective study habits, and low concentration levels (Safitri & Jusra, 2021).

Third, according to Saleh et al. (2021), there are several indicators of learning difficulties, namely difficulties in understanding concepts, principles, and verbal aspects. Mathematical difficulties in slow learner students generally appear as obstacles in expressing quantitative and spatial relationships. Research shows that students experience various types of difficulties: some have difficulty in determining the appropriate method or formula because they do not understand the concept, some can solve problems correctly using their own way of thinking but without applying the right

principles, and some succeed in using the correct method or formula but have difficulty in explaining the results of their work verbally. Based on the various studies mentioned earlier, researchers are interested in further researching learning difficulties in mathematics learning, especially those experienced by slow learner students in inclusive schools.

The focus of this study is on children with special needs, slow learner type, aiming to provide an overview of learning difficulties from various aspects, including interests, habits, concentration, physical, mental, intellectual, social, personality development and the learning process carried out at school and at home in terms of student intelligence also includes observations of the learning process in class, where slow learners show difficulty in understanding basic mathematics material and lack of concentration during learning.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This type of research is library research with the Systematic Literature Review method, which is research conducted by collecting information and data from various document sources and conducting discourse text analysis activities on document sources (Snyder, 2019). The purpose of this study is to determine the difficulties faced by students, especially slow learner students in inclusive schools based on the results of several previous studies. The data analysis technique in this study is content analysis with a qualitative approach.

The data collection technique in this study is the document study technique. The stages in data collection are:

1. Determining Data Sources

In this study, data collection uses secondary data sources, namely research articles on learning difficulties in special needs children of the slow learner type in inclusive schools.

2. Search Process

The process of searching for data sources uses a search engine on the Google Scholar website. The keywords used in the search for the learning process of slow learner students in inclusive schools, difficulties in learning mathematics, and students' intelligence abilities.

3. Article Selection Criteria

The criteria for selecting articles are as follows:

- a. Open access, so that it is easily accessed in full text.
- b. Articles in international journals indexed by Scopus, articles in national journals indexed by SINTA, GARUDA and DOAJ, and articles in proceedings presented at national seminars.
- c. Published from 2015 to 2025.
- d. The subjects of the research were junior high school students in grade VIII.
- e. Research focus on articles that discuss the components of mathematics learning difficulties, slow learner students, and students' intelligence abilities.





The stages of analysis involve (1) indentifying relevant articles based on specific criteria, (2) evaluating article quality and relevance, (3) coding and categorizing findings based on difficulties, and (4) synthesizing themes into a visual distribution. Figure 1 was developed based on thematic coding of the 10 selected articles.

## Table 1. List of Research Articles

No	Author Name	Article Title (Year and	Journal or
		Subject of Research)	Proceedings' Name
			(Indexing)
1	Fida Rahmantika Hadi	Mathematics Learning Process for Slow Learners (Slow Learners) (2016, Mathematics Teacher)	Premiere Educandum: Journal of Elementary Education and Learning (SINTA S2, GARUDA)
2	Imam Tantowi Afan, Wikan Budi Utami, and Eleonora Dwi Wahyuningsih	Analysis of Mathematical Understanding Ability in Slow Learner Students (2021, Grade V Elementary School Students)	Journal of Mathematics Education Innovation (JIPM), (SINTA S5, GARUDA)
3	Sept Nurfadhillah, Amalita Aziah Septiarini, Mitami, and Dewi Isnania Pratiwi	Analysis of Learning Assistance for Slow Learner Special Needs Students at Cipete 4 Elementary Schools (2022, Elementary School Students)	Journal of Islam and Educational Sciences (SINTA S5, GARUDA)
4	Tri Murdiyanto, Dwi Antari Wijayanti, Anny Sovia	Identify Slow Learners in Mathematics: Case Study in Rural Schools	International Journal of Interactive Mobile Techonologies (Scopus)

5	Aminah Nurfajri Al Saleh, Andi Husniati, Abdul Gaffar	Analysis helps to solve mathematical problems on number pattern material reviewed from gender differences of eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 34 Makassar (2021, eighth grade students)	Journal of Mathematics Education (SINTA S4, GARUDA)
6	Alfian Nur Aziz, Sugiman, Ardhi Prabowo	Analysis of the Mathematics Learning Process for Slow Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Classes of SMP Negeri 7 Salatiga (2015, Junior High School Students)	Journal of Creative- Innovative Mathematics (SINTA S2, GARUDA)
7	Savitri Wanabuliandari, Jayanti Putri Purwaningrum	Mathematics Learning Based on Local Wisdom Gusjigang Kudus on Slow Learner Students (2018)	EduMa: Mathematics Education Learning and Teaching (SINTA S3, GARUDA)
8	Ratika Nengsia, Abdul Malika, Andi Fadilah A Natsir	Analysis of Slow Learner Student Behavior (Case Study at MTsN Makassar) (2021, MTsN Students classified as slow learners)	Education and Learning Journal (SINTA S4, GARUDA)
9	Karina Pramitasari, Budi Usodo, Sri Subanti	Mathematics Learning Process for Slow Learner Students in Inclusive Classes of SMP Negeri 7 Klaten Class VIII (2015, Class VIII Students)	Electronic Journal of Mathematics Learning (Proceedings)
10	Rima Aksen Cahdriyana, Rahayu Setyorini	The Level of Creativity of Slow Learners in Solving Mathematical Problems (2019)	KALAMATIKA Journal of Mathematics Education (SINTA S3, GARUDA)

The data source was limited to Google Scholar due to accessibility and relevance to the Indonesian educational context. Most articles reviewed were published in Indonesian journals indexed in SINTA, GARUDA, or DOAJ, ensuring contextual relevance to inclusive education in Indonesia.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study resulted in a study of the difficulties in learning mathematics faced by slow learner students obtained from the analysis of 10 research articles that have been obtained based on the results of the search process. The profiles of the 10 articles are presented in Table 1.

Based on the analysis of ten selected articles, various obstacles were found that slow learner students faced in understanding mathematical concepts.

1. Mathematics Learning Strategies for Slow Learners (Hadi, 2016)

This study discusses the approaches used by teachers in teaching slow learner students. The results show that individual and visual-based teaching methods are more effective in improving student understanding.

2. Analysis of Slow Learner Students' Mathematical Understanding Ability (Afan et al., 2021)

This study found that slow learner students in grade V of elementary school still have a low level of mathematical understanding, especially in the aspects of abstract thinking and problem solving.

- 3. Analysis of Slow Learner Students' Learning Difficulties at Cipete 4 Elementary School (Nurfadhillah et al., 2022) This study revealed that slow learner students have difficulty in understanding basic mathematical concepts, especially related to basic arithmetic and logic operations.
- 4. Identification of Slow Learner Students in Mathematics in Rural Schools (Murdiyanto et al., 2023)

This study highlights the characteristics of slow learner students in rural environments and the challenges faced by teachers in adjusting learning methods.

5. Analysis of Difficulties in Solving Number Pattern Problems Based on Gender (Saleh et al., 2021)

The results of the study showed that although there were no significant differences based on gender, the strategies for solving mathematics problems between boys and girls tended to be different.

 The Process of Learning Mathematics for Slow Learner Students in Inclusive Classes (Aziz et al., 2015)
This study found that in inclusive learning teachers had difficulty in a direction

This study found that in inclusive learning, teachers had difficulty in adjusting teaching methods to suit the needs of slow learner students.

- Mathematics Learning Based on Local Wisdom of Gusjigang Kudus (Wanabuliandari & Purwaningrum, 2018)
  This study emphasizes that the integration of local culture in mathematics learning can help improve the understanding of slow learner students.
- Analysis of Slow Learner Student Behavior in Learning (Nengsia et al., 2021) This study found that slow learner students tend to show passive behavior in class and require more intensive guidance.
- Mathematics Teaching Strategies for Slow Learner Students in Inclusive Classes (Pramitasari et al., 2015) The results of the study indicate that teachers need to apply a more flexible

The results of the study indicate that teachers need to apply a more flexible approach to improve the effectiveness of learning in inclusive classes.

10. Slow Learner Students' Creativity Level in Solving Mathematical Problems (Cahdriyana & Setyorini, 2019)

This study identified that although the creativity of slow learner students is lower than that of regular students, exploration-based learning methods can help improve their abilities.



Challenges Faced by Slow Learner Students in Understanding Mathematics (Based on 10 Articles)

Figure 2. Distribution of Research Topics in Pie Chart

The pie chart in Figure 2 presents a visualization of the main challenges experienced by students with slow learning abilities in understanding mathematical concepts, based on ten selected research articles. Each segment of the diagram represents a different category of difficulties as described in the studies. The process of compiling this diagram was carried out through a coding stage, where each article was analyzed to identify the most dominant type of learning difficulties. The resulting themes were then classified and their frequencies were calculated, resulting in a percentage distribution reflected in the diagram.

1. Inappropriate Teaching Methods (30%)

This is the most prominent challenge, highlighted in three articles. Many slow learner students struggle due to teaching methods that are not adapted to their learning needs. Individualized, visual, and flexible approaches are often more effective but are not consistently implemented, especially in inclusive classrooms.

- Abstract Thinking & Problem-Solving Difficulties (10%) Slow learners typically find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts and solve complex problems. This points to the need for gradual, contextual learning strategies.
- Basic Mathematics Concept Difficulties (10%) Challenges in understanding fundamental concepts such as basic arithmetic and logic were noted. These foundational gaps hinder further mathematical learning.
- Teacher Limitations in Rural Areas (10%) In rural settings, teachers face challenges in identifying and adapting instruction for slow learners due to limited resources and training.
- Gender-Based Strategy Differences (10%) While no significant difference in outcomes was found, boys and girls tend to approach math problems differently, which may influence the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

- Lack of Local Culture Integration (10%) Integrating local cultural elements (e.g., the Gusjigang tradition) into lessons can aid comprehension, but such methods are underutilized.
- 7. Passive Classroom Behavior (10%) Slow learners often exhibit passive behavior and require more intensive guidance and encouragement to participate actively in class.
- 8. Low Creativity Levels (10%) These students show lower levels of creativity in solving math problems, though exploratory and open-ended learning methods can help enhance this skill.

The studies that have been reviewed also identify various factors that contribute to the learning difficulties of slow learner students and learning strategies that can be applied to help them.

- 1. Difficulties in Learning Mathematics for Slow Learner Students and Children with Special Needs
  - a. According to Piaget (1972), children's cognitive development greatly influences the ability to think abstractly and logically. Slow learner students who experience obstacles in cognitive development tend to have difficulty understanding abstract mathematical concepts.
  - b. Several studies (Afan et al., 2021; Utari et al., 2019) show that slow learner students have difficulty understanding basic mathematical operations and story problems because of their limited short-term memory.
  - c. In addition, research by Saleh et al. (2021) revealed differences in problem solving based on gender, although not significant.
- 2. Factors Affecting Learning Difficulties

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that social interaction and the learning environment play an important role in children's cognitive development. Factors that influence learning difficulties in slow learner students include:

- a. Peer and teacher support:
  - 1) Usup et al. (2023) stated that social support can increase the motivation and self-confidence of slow learner students in learning.
  - 2) Aziz et al. (2015) stated that inclusive learning strategies help slow learner students adapt more easily to regular classroom environments.
- b. Inappropriate teaching methods:
  - 1) Nurfadhillah et al. (2022) found that many schools have not implemented appropriate teaching methods for slow learner students.
  - 2) Fitriani et al. (2024) highlighted that deaf students also have difficulty in understanding mathematics because of lack in communication.
- 3. Effective Learning Strategies

Experts recommend several strategies to help slow learners understand mathematics concepts better:

- a. Multisensory learning (Dunn & Dunn, 1993): Using a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements in teaching.
- b. Scaffolding approach (Vygotsky, 1978): Providing gradual assistance tailored to students' needs until they can learn independently.
- c. Experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984): Providing real-world examples and hands-on exercises to improve understanding of mathematics concepts.

d. Utilization of technology in learning (Mayer, 2001): Interactive media such as educational games and learning videos can help slow learners understand mathematics concepts more easily.

#### CONCLUSION

This study concludes that slow learner students face significant challenges in learning mathematics, especially in conceptual understanding and problem-solving. These challenges are linked to cognitive limitations, inappropriate teaching methods, and lack of personalized support. Through this systematic literature review, it becomes clear that inclusive education must adopt more differentiated strategies, culturally relevant content, and multimodal teaching methods to enhance mathematics learning for slow learner students.

### DECLARATION

#### **Author Contribution**

All authors contribute in the research process, such as collecting the data, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

Both authors declare that they have no competing interests.

#### **Ethics Declaration**

We as authors acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms with the regulations of our institutions and that we have obtained the permission from the relevant institutes when collecting data. We support the International Journal on Emerging Mathematics Education (IJEME) in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.

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