

Literature Study: Analysis of Causative Factors and Strategies for Handling Early Reading Difficulties in Elementary Students in Elementary School

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the causative factors and strategies for handling early reading difficulties in elementary school students. The method used is a literature study with a descriptive qualitative approach, analyzing 15 scientific journal articles published from 2017 to 2025 which were selected through the PRISMA guidelines and analyzed using content analysis techniques. The results of the study showed that initial reading difficulties were caused by intellectual, environmental, and psychological factors, with the type of difficulty that included the inability to recognize letters, read syllables, and sentences in their entirety. Strategies implemented by teachers to overcome this include tutoring, motivation, and the use of alphabet methods, letter cards, spelling, and dictation. These findings show that systematic and collaborative interventions between teachers, parents, and schools are essential in effectively improving students' basic literacy skills.

1. Introduction

Reading is the process of absorbing knowledge which will then be used for survival. Reading begins is one of the skills for children to absorb an idea and pour it back into real knowledge (Pratiwi & Ariawan, 2017). In line with that, Curtain et al. (2016: 23) said that the ability to read is closely related to the skill of writing an idea. According to Tarigan (2008:7), an integrated procedure is followed so that readers get the message that the author wants to convey to his readers through words/writing. Thus, reading is the process by which an individual obtains knowledge or messages from what the author communicates to others through written media.

Early reading skills have an important role in building an academic foundation for elementary school students. Reading is not just a communication skill, but it is also the main key in understanding various subjects. Anderson et al. (1985) revealed that children who have good reading skills from an early age tend to achieve higher academic achievement than those who have difficulty reading. This is due to the high relationship between reading and almost all learning activities in schools, such as understanding lesson texts, working on problems, and accessing information from various sources. If a student experiences obstacles in reading from the beginning, then he or she is likely to face difficulties in understanding other subject matter.

The research conducted by Pratiwi (2020) also explains the factors that affect the difficulty of early reading in low-grade students, namely (1) environmental factors: this factor leads to a family environment that is less supportive of children's motivation to learn, and (2) psychological factors: the psychological factor is that students do not have an interest in reading. Almost the same as the previous two studies, Widyaningrum & Hasanudin (2019) also explained several factors that affect the difficulty of low-grade children in early reading, namely (1) the age of students who are forced to enter elementary school even though they do not meet the requirements for entering elementary school affects the initial difficulty of reading and writing. State regulations state that elementary school must begin at about the age of 7, (2) some students still prefer to play in the classroom rather than study. This is because the teacher is not proactive in giving instructions and advice to students (3) lack of attention from the parents and the closest people of the student, (4) students prefer to be busy and make a fuss with their friends rather than paying attention to their teacher during the lesson. This is because teachers do not introduce fun learning models and students become bored,

and (5) students only study at home if they are given assignments by the school or what is often called Homework (Homework). Students tend not to want to study unless they are given homework.

This can have a significant impact on the learning achievement of elementary school students, because reading is a basic skill that supports comprehension in various subjects. According to Chall (1983), students who have difficulty reading tend to lag behind in understanding the subject matter, especially in subjects that rely on text comprehension such as Mathematics, Science, and Social Sciences. The inability to read fluently can also reduce learning motivation, lower confidence, and cause students to feel frustrated in the learning process. In addition, Stanovich (1986) explains that reading difficulties can trigger the effect of "*Matthew Effect*," That is, children who are behind in reading will find it more difficult to catch up, while children who are proficient in reading will be more superior in academics. Therefore, early intervention is needed so that reading difficulties do not develop into a bigger obstacle in student learning achievement.

Effective coping strategies are indispensable to help students who have difficulty reading at the beginning, so that they can develop good reading skills and improve their academic achievement. According to Lyon et al. (2001), early intervention with appropriate teaching methods, such as phonetic approaches, the use of engaging learning media, and intensive guidance from teachers and parents, can help children overcome barriers in reading. In addition, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) emphasized the importance of a supportive learning environment, such as access to reading books that are appropriate to the child's level of development and parental involvement in getting children used to reading at home. The multisensory approach, which involves a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, has also been shown to be effective in helping children understand letters and words better. With the implementation of the right and sustainable strategies, students who have difficulty reading can be given the opportunity to catch up and develop stronger literacy skills.

Reading is a foundational skill essential for academic success. Early reading skills are crucial in supporting students' comprehension across subjects. Numerous studies highlight the impact of reading difficulties on students' broader learning outcomes. However, existing literature still lacks focused discussion on the specific challenges and interventions within the Indonesian elementary school context. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the causative factors and strategies for addressing early reading difficulties in Indonesian elementary students.

Although prior studies have acknowledged environmental and psychological contributors to reading issues, few have thoroughly examined these factors in combination with intellectual challenges specific to early literacy acquisition. Furthermore, the current research is grounded in constructivist theory, which posits that children actively construct knowledge through interactions with their environment. Supporting this, reading acquisition theories such as Chall's stages of reading development and Stanovich's Matthew Effect underline how early difficulties, if not addressed, compound over time. By embedding these theoretical perspectives, this study offers a structured lens to analyze the effectiveness of various pedagogical strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review shows that the difficulty of early reading in elementary school students is influenced by three main factors, namely intellectual, environmental, and psychological. Intellectual factors are related to the weakness of basic skills in recognizing letters and spelling. Environmental factors include a lack of support from family and a lack of reading habits at home. Meanwhile, psychological factors include low motivation, reading interest, and emotional instability of students. To overcome these difficulties, teachers apply various strategies, such as tutoring, motivation, and the use of alphabetical methods, letter cards, spelling, and dictation. The use of interactive media such as learning applications and software has also been proven to be effective in improving students' reading skills. In this case, teachers have an important role as facilitators and motivators who arrange learning according to the needs of students and work together with parents and schools in building a literacy culture.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive literature review methodology, selecting 15 peer-reviewed journal articles from 2017 to 2025 using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. The selection process included keyword-based searches in databases such as Google Scholar and SINTA, followed by title and abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment. Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) research focus on early reading difficulties among elementary students, (2) empirical studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, (3) studies that discuss teacher strategies or learning interventions. Content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, with coding guided by reading difficulty types (e.g., phoneme recognition, syllable reading) and instructional strategies. NVivo software was employed to facilitate systematic coding and ensure consistency in identifying thematic patterns. Data validity was reinforced through source triangulation and peer debriefing among researchers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Based on the literature studies that have been conducted, various research results were found that reveal the form of initial reading difficulties in elementary school students. Each study shows a variety of problems experienced by students, ranging from difficulty recognizing letters, reading words, to reading sentences in their entirety. To give a clearer picture, here is a summary of the results of several related studies:

Tabel 1

Researchers	Research title	Research results
(Sari & Dwi, 2022)	Analysis of Early Reading Difficulties in Grade I Students of SD Negeri 101884 Limau Manis	This study shows that the reading obstacles faced include problems in reading aloud, understanding text, recognizing and stringing letters, replacing words, flipping letters, omitting letters in words, mispronouncing words, reading stuttering, not paying attention to punctuation, not understanding the content of the text, and difficulty concentrating.
(Kurniawan et al., 2020)	Problems and Strategies in Indonesian Language Learning in Elementary School Lower Grades	The results of the study show that students' reading difficulties are focused on not being fluent in reading so they have to spell one by one, lack of concentration of students while reading, and lack of vocabulary mastery.
(Nurani et al., 2021)	Analysis of Early Reading Difficulties in Elementary School-Age Children	The results of the study found that reading difficulties commonly experienced by students include difficulty reading syllables with three or more letters, difficulty distinguishing letters, reading syllables with double consonants, reading syllables ending in consonants, combining letters and syllables into words, exchanging several letters in words, reading with stuttering, and improper pronunciation.

(Aprilia et al., 2021)	Analysis of Initial Reading Difficulties for Grade I Students	The results of this study revealed that grade I students faced difficulties in reading initially, such as distinguishing letters that are almost similar in shape, reading consonant letter combinations, and reading a combination of one consonant letter with one vowel.
(Rohman et al., 2022)	Analysis of Initial Reading Difficulties in First Grade Students in Elementary School	The results of the study showed that the reading difficulties experienced were difficulties distinguishing letters, difficulty connecting one word, difficulty forming an entire phrase, difficulty spelling, difficulty identifying letters and letter deletion, inability to pronounce phonemes, difficulty reading diphthongs, double vowels, and double consonants, not being able to read complete sentences, not recognizing letters, and stuttering when reading.
(Nurul Azkiya, 2023)	Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Initial Reading Difficulties for Grade III Students of Sdn DuriI Kepa 03 West Jakarta	This study shows that some third grade students of SDN Duri Kepa 03 have difficulty reading at the beginning due to internal factors (interest in learning, intelligence, awareness) and external factors (family and school support). These difficulties have an impact on students' achievement, social interaction, and psychology. Teachers address these problems through tutoring, special attention, as well as alphabet, letter card, spelling, and dictation methods, which have been shown to be effective in improving students' reading skills.
(Ramadhan & Tarmini, 2022)	Difficulties in Beginning Reading in Grade I Students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah	The results showed that teachers used several strategies to overcome initial reading difficulties. First, the teacher provides special guidance, such as letter recognition and pronunciation during break hours, as well as additional hours. Second, teachers pay attention to students' situations individually, helping them write and pronounce almost identical letters, such as 'p' and 'f'. Third, teachers use fun learning media, such as pictures, to help dyslexic students recognize letters and discuss similar letters, such as p, b, and d.

(Sinha Setyastuti et al., 2021)	Teachers' Efforts in Overcoming Difficulties in Early Reading in Grade I Students of Sdn 1 Munggung	The results of the study identified several methods for teaching students beginning reading, including alphabet, letter card, spelling, and dictation methods. The alphabet method introduces letters and sounds from A to Z, while the letter card method uses picture and written cards to help students recognize letters. The spelling method involves teaching reading and writing by stringing letters into syllables, and the dictation method requires students to write words dictated by the teacher. All of these methods aim to improve students' reading skills effectively.
(Yuni Yati, Sutarna, 2022)	Interactive Media Model Articulate Storyline to Foster Initial Reading Independence for Elementary School Students	From the results of the research that has been conducted, it is concluded that the interactive media Articulate Storyline is considered feasible in terms of content and purpose by colleagues. In addition, the technical evaluation by two raters also placed it in the very feasible category. Therefore, it can be concluded that Android-based interactive media with the help of the Articulate Storyline software can be considered suitable as a learning tool to improve early reading skills in elementary school students.
(Hasanudin & Puspita, 2017)	Increasing Motivation and Initial Reading Skills of Grade I Students through the Bamboedia Bmgames Apps Application Media	Research shows that the use of the Bambomaedia <i>BM Games Apps</i> application in early reading learning in grade I of MI Muhammadiyah 27 Geger, Kedungadem, Bojonegoro, is effective in increasing students' motivation and skills. Indicators of increased motivation include students' attention to the material, activeness in learning, and student involvement. Indicators of skill improvement include correct pronunciation, clear voice intonation, and reading fluency.

Based on studies and research results from the discussion of early reading difficulties in elementary school students, it is shown that the factors that affect this difficulty are very diverse. Based on research that has been conducted, some of the main factors that affect reading difficulties in students include intellectual, environmental, and psychological factors. Intellectual factors are related to the lack of knowledge about how to teach reading, while environmental factors are related to the lack of support from the student's family or closest people. On the other hand, psychological factors are related to weak motivation, emotional instability, as well as a lack of interest in reading.

In addition, the types of initial reading difficulties that students face include difficulty recognizing letters, difficulty in reading words correctly, and problems in reading vowels and consonants. Some students also have difficulty reading syllables and sentences fluently, which hinders their reading ability. To overcome these difficulties, there are various strategies that can be applied by teachers. Some of the strategies that have been implemented include tutoring, providing attention and motivation, as well as the use of methods such as alphabet methods, letter cards, spelling, and dictation. The use of fun media and methods as well as giving individual

attention to students has been shown to be effective in helping to improve their reading skills. In addition, a holistic approach with support from the principal is also very important to create an environment conducive to reading learning.

Based on research conducted by various researchers, strategies implemented by teachers such as counseling guidance, the use of engaging learning media, and special attention to students with difficulties, show quite good results in overcoming initial reading difficulties. Through a systematic and continuous approach, students can overcome barriers to early reading and improve their reading skills significantly. Therefore, the development of a learning model that suits the characteristics of students and the application of the right strategies are indispensable to overcome the problem of this initial reading difficulty.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Factors That Can Affect Early Reading Difficulties in Elementary School Elementary Students

According to a study that has been conducted by Soleha et al, (2022) explains the factors that cause students to have difficulty reading in class students, including (1) intellectual factors, knowledge about how to teach children to read, (2) environmental factors contribute to the lack of support for students, and (3) psychological factors that include lack and weak student motivation, lack of interest in reading, Emotional instability where students cannot control themselves in completing reading. The research conducted by Pratiwi (2020) also explains the factors that affect the difficulty of early reading in students, namely (1) environmental factors: this factor leads to a family environment that is less supportive of children's motivation to learn, and (2) psychological factors: the psychological factor is that students do not have an interest in reading. Almost the same as the previous two studies,

Widyaningrum & Hasanudin (2019) explained several factors that affect children's difficulty in early reading, namely (1) the age of students who are forced to enter elementary school even though they do not meet the requirements for elementary school affect the initial difficulty of reading and writing. State regulations state that elementary school must begin at about the age of 7, (2) some students still prefer to play in the classroom rather than study. This is because the teacher is not proactive in giving instructions and advice to students (3) lack of attention from the parents and the closest people of the student, (4) students prefer to be busy and make a fuss with their friends rather than paying attention to their teacher during the lesson. This is because teachers do not introduce fun learning models and students become bored, and (5) students only study at home if they are given assignments by the school or what is often called homework (homework). Students tend not to want to study unless they are given homework.

Types of Student Difficulties in Reading Beginning Soleha et al (2022), based on their research, stated that students have difficulties in reading the beginning which include: still lacking in recognizing letters, still reading word by word, still unable to pronounce words, some students still omit words, reverse, make insertions, change meanings, make excessive movements, some students have difficulty reading consonants, Some students have difficulty reading vowels, and some students have difficulty reading clusters. Widyaningrum & Hasanudin (2019) also mentioned the types of early reading difficulties for students, namely: 1) Students cannot read fluently, and some are still unable to spell. 2) When students are reading, the pronunciation of vowels and consonants is unclear. 3) There are some students who forget the letters A-Z. 4) Some students have difficulty distinguishing some letters such as b, d, and p. Difficulties that students usually experience in reading the beginning include:

- Some

students have difficulty recognizing and reading vowels, especially small vowels such as "a" and "e". This difficulty often occurs due to weak visual memory, considering the shape of the letters is

similar but the stroke direction is different. In addition, the small letter "u" is also often confused due to students' lack of ability to visually distinguish letter shapes.

- Difficulty reading the whole word

Students often make mistakes in pronouncing words, causing differences in meaning. For example, they call "plant" to "garden," as a result of the change of letters in words. There are also students who omit some words, such as in the sentence "BOLA ANDI IS IN THE PAGE" only read "BOLA ANDI DI IN THE PAGE". It is not uncommon for students to mention words that are inappropriate and meaningless because they have not been able to recognize the form of the word in its entirety, even after being given time by the teacher.

- Not able to read consonants correctly

Some consonants are often confusing for students due to their similar shapes, such as the letters "b" and "d", "p" and "q", "n" and "m", and "t" and "f". The difficulty of distinguishing the letters makes students often misread and have difficulty forming words correctly.

- Unable to read syllables fluently

Students still have difficulty in reading syllables that are more than two letters, for example in the words "kitchen", "house", and "room". In addition, they are also not able to read syllables that have double letters such as "ng" or "ny", which demands deeper phonetic training.

- Unable to read sentences and paragraphs

When reading sentences, students often forget certain letters, so they look hesitant and slow in reading. They also often ignore punctuation marks such as periods, commas, or exclamation marks, so sentence pronunciation sounds flat and less expressive. In addition, there are also

those who have difficulty pronouncing words that have similar sounds, such as calling "fantasy" to "deserve", due to a lack of phonetic sensitivity.

To overcome the difficulty of beginning reading in elementary school students, several joint efforts can be made between the students themselves, the teacher and the principal. Students are expected to increase their reading skills to improve their reading skills and students should have time to practice reading to grow their reading habits. For teachers, it is expected to give more opportunities for students to read independently and teachers are expected to be able to provide appropriate handling after knowing the location of each student's reading difficulties. For school principals, they should be able to provide a forum for reading activities in the form of a reading culture program by providing a time to read together and school principals need to support the learning process by providing the necessary facilities, for example optimizing library functions (Sintha Setyastuti et al., 2021).

Observing this, various factors that affect the difficulty of learning to read at the beginning need to find solutions through the development of further studies to stimulate learning difficulties in reading either with media, models or other approaches that can be used (Hermansyah et al., 2019; Widyowati et al., 2020; Yunita et al., 2017). The learning media that is systematically arranged adjusts the characteristics of students to the level of initial reading (Amini & Suyadi, 2020; Maula & Fatmawati, 2020). Through the results of this study, it is recommended that a new model, strategy or media is needed as an alternative means to help stimulate the difficulty of learning to read in elementary school. The results of this study only analyze the difficulties of learning to read at the beginning in terms of the activities and activities of the learning process and the need for teachers to help stimulate learning difficulties.

3.2.2 Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Initial Reading Difficulties

Teacher strategies are concrete steps taken in the teaching process using certain approaches that are considered the most appropriate, efficient, and effective (Jannah et al., 2022). This strategy serves as a solution in dealing with various learning challenges. Teachers have a central role in shaping and developing students' potential in order to achieve optimal educational goals. To carry out this role, a teacher needs to have adequate academic qualifications, including competence in designing learning strategies (Rosyid & Marwan, 2018). The strategies applied must also be adjusted to the character and conditions of students (Juhaeni et al., 2022). Based on literature studies, there are several approaches that teachers can apply in reducing initial reading difficulties, including:

1. Tutoring, This strategy is carried out by providing special assistance to students who have reading difficulties. Teachers create a conducive and fun learning atmosphere, so that students feel comfortable when practicing reading. In practice, teachers introduce letters, train students to spell, and carry out dictation activities as part of reading exercises. This guidance has been proven to help improve students' reading skills gradually.
2. Providing Attention and Motivation, This approach is carried out by giving special attention and encouragement to students who are not fluent in reading. Teachers take time, both during lessons and outside of class hours, to guide students. In addition, teachers also use media such as inspirational videos and convey motivational messages, such as assuring students that efforts will not betray results. This strategy is effective in fostering students' enthusiasm and interest in reading.

In addition to some of the strategies described above, the author also found several strategies used by teachers in teaching beginning reading to students. This strategy aims to help and facilitate students in learning to read initially. The initial reading strategy applied to students has several methods in it, including:

1. Alphabetical method

Applying the alphabet method, teachers introduce letter symbols first to students. The results of the analysis show that the alphabet method is one of the strategies carried out by teachers in overcoming students' initial reading difficulties, teachers recognize letter symbols and letter sounds from A to Z. This is so that students are able to recognize and remember letters well. Thus, in the application of this initial reading method, students are taught first to recognize the letters of the alphabet and pronounce consonant and vowel letters.

2. Huruf card method

Teachers also apply learning media in the form of letter cards as a tool for students to learn to read beginning by seeing and remembering letters and pictures as well as writing on cards (Pangastuti & Hanum, 2017). The results of the research analysis show that one of the strategies used in overcoming early reading difficulties in students is the letter card method. This strategy is similar to the alphabet method which introduces the letters of the alphabet from A to Z. In the process of implementation, teachers use learning media in the form of letter cards and picture cards that contain writing and the meaning of the pictures on the cards. This of course aims to make it easier for students to recognize and remember the shapes of the letters. Thus, the application of this method aims to minimize the difficulty of beginning reading in students and make it easier for students to remember and understand letters.

3. Spelling method

In the application of the spelling method, students are taught to read and write which begins with letters that are assembled and become syllables. The results of the research analysis showed that teachers applied the spelling method as a strategy in teaching students to read initially. The teacher applies the spelling method after the students are able to recognize the letters well. At this stage, the teacher applies it gradually and the most important thing for the teacher is that the

students are able to speak first. Thus, the teacher applies this method with patience and perseverance.

4. Dictation method

After students are able to recognize letters and spell well, then the teacher applies the dictation method in the strategy of teaching students to learn to read initially. The application of the dictation method requires full concentration and focus on the students to listen and write word for word spoken by the teacher correctly. This method is beneficial for students who have the ability to read and write quickly (Fauziah, 2018). The results of the research analysis showed that teachers applied the dictation method slowly after students were able to recognize letters and spell well. The application of this method requires full concentration for students in listening to the teacher dictate and write letters correctly. Thus, this method is applied to help and accelerate students in improving their reading skills.

The study identifies three dominant factors contributing to early reading difficulties: intellectual (e.g., letter and syllable recognition deficits), environmental (e.g., lack of parental support, minimal reading exposure), and psychological (e.g., low motivation, emotional instability). Students struggle with decoding, phonemic awareness, and fluency, often failing to recognize similar-looking letters or read complete sentences coherently.

While effective strategies are highlighted such as tutoring, letter card use, and dictation the review notes a lack of critical discussion on practical implementation barriers. Teachers in under-resourced schools often lack access to multimedia tools or training in differentiated instruction. Furthermore, family literacy environments play a significant but underexplored role. Many parents are either unaware of their role in literacy development or lack the time and resources to support at-home reading.

Notably, the article lists a variety of methods without comparing their relative effectiveness. For instance, multimedia-based interventions (e.g., Articulate Storyline, BM Games Apps) show promise in increasing motivation and fluency, especially for tech-savvy learners. In contrast, traditional methods like dictation are more effective for reinforcing phoneme-grapheme correspondence in structured classroom settings. Future analysis should assess which strategies are more context-sensitive, particularly in urban vs. rural schools. Lastly, a holistic perspective incorporating emotional and familial support mechanisms is crucial. Students from supportive homes demonstrate more rapid reading progress, indicating the need for parent-teacher collaboration and school-wide literacy programs that involve families as stakeholders.

3.3 Conclusion

This literature review reaffirms that early reading difficulties in elementary school students stem from a combination of intellectual, environmental, and psychological factors. Common challenges include confusion between similar letters, weak phonemic awareness, and reading disfluency. Teachers have implemented diverse strategies from individualized tutoring and motivational support to alphabet methods and multimedia tools with varying degrees of success.

To ensure more effective intervention, schools must address the practical barriers that hinder strategy implementation, such as resource limitations and teacher training gaps. Concrete steps include integrating low-cost interactive media in classrooms, designing structured peer tutoring programs, and launching school-based family literacy workshops. For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to track the impact of specific strategies over time, particularly in different socio-economic contexts. More experimental research comparing strategy efficacy would also enrich our understanding of context-specific best practices in early literacy instruction.

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