

Early Detection of Slow Learner Children in Elementary Schools, Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow

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ABSTRACT

The new student admission system in elementary schools is not based on the results of academic ability selection for prospective students. In general, admission selection is based solely on the age of prospective students, namely a child who has reached seven years of age may be admitted to elementary school. The objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to determine the number and percentage of slow-learner students in elementary schools, 2) to determine the number and percentage of grade repetition experienced by slow-learner students, 3) to determine the number and percentage of subject-area difficulties experienced by slow-learner students, and 4) to identify the types of subject areas found to be difficult by slow-learner students. This study employed a descriptive research design. The population consisted of all students of Public Elementary Schools in the Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency.

The sample comprised 31 Public Elementary Schools with a total of 6,565 students; accordingly, the sample size was set at $20\% \times 6,565 \text{ students} = 1,313$ students, drawn from 6 public elementary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires and documentation, and were analyzed using a quantitative statistical

method based on percentage calculation. The results of the study indicate that: 1) in the Public Elementary Schools of Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency, 31 students (2.361%) of the sample were classified as slow learners; 2) among these slow-learner students, 19.355% (6 students) had repeated a grade once and 22.581% (7 students) had repeated a grade twice, although the majority (48.387%) had never repeated a grade; 3) most slow-learner students experienced difficulty in six and seven subject areas in roughly equal proportions, each accounting for 38.710% (12 students); and 4) the subject areas most frequently found difficult by slow-learner students were Pancasila and Civic Education (93.548%), Indonesian Language (83.871%), English (83.871%), Mathematics (80.645%), Physical and Health Education (77.419%), Science and Social Studies (67.742%), Religious Education (61.290%), and Arts and Culture (32.258%).

Keywords: detection, slow-learner children

INTRODUCTION

The new student admission system in elementary schools is not based on the results of an academic ability selection for prospective students. In general, admission selection is based solely on the age of the

prospective student, namely that a child who has reached seven years of age may be admitted to elementary school. In addition, some schools add other requirements, such as requiring prospective students to have previously attended kindergarten. A new-student admission system based only on the age of prospective students, as described above, allows heterogeneity in students' ability levels within a single class. It is possible that within one class there are children who are very bright (super normal), normal (average), and slow learners. This heterogeneity can hinder the smooth running of the teaching-learning process in the classroom, because children classified as very bright tend to feel pressured or bored when following lessons in class, while slow-learner children tend to experience difficulty following lessons in class. This is because the learning materials given in elementary schools are adapted to the ability level of children classified as normal or average. Samuel A. Kirk (1962) explained that slow-learner children generally have mental and academic abilities below their chronological age. Child (1981) stated that a slow learner, or slow-learning child, is a child whose educational performance is below the average expected of children of the same age.

This problem in the teaching-learning process can develop further, both for children classified as very bright and, even more so, for children classified as slow learners. Children who are very bright may cause disruption in the classroom, while slow-learner children may become discouraged in their learning. Parental involvement also remains very limited. Many parents have not yet recognized their child's condition and overlook the potential presence of specific learning barriers, often even blaming the child's failure on internal factors. Poor communication and coordination between schools and families worsen delays in intervention, even though collaborative support is precisely what is most needed. This is in line with Nabila & Harsiwi (2025), who state that without

adequate support, slow-learner children are at risk of facing frustration, losing motivation to learn, experiencing anxiety, and even potentially dropping out of school. Literature studies indicate various effective teaching strategies for slow learners, such as individualized approaches, adaptive media, cooperative learning, and early intervention combined with positive motivation (Aini & Suriani, 2024). In addition, mnemonic methods and repeated-practice approaches have been shown to help students master material gradually. A holistic assessment that takes social and emotional aspects into account is also strongly recommended so that educators can design appropriate interventions (Saragih et al., 2024).

In the field, early detection of slow learners is often delayed because the community and teachers judge them to be physically "normal," even though they learn slowly, particularly when dealing with abstract material (Budi et al., 2018). In addition, the school system's lack of readiness — with minimal assessment and limited teacher training — means that identification does not proceed optimally. As a result, these students are often regarded as lazy or lacking motivation, when in fact they genuinely experience difficulties with memory and concentration (Baker, 1975). Every child has unique learning potential and characteristics, so in elementary schools this diversity of ability requires an adaptive and inclusive approach. One group that is often overlooked is slow-learner students, who have an IQ slightly below average, generally between 70 and 90 (Child, 1981). The absence of early stimulation and an unsupportive environment can also cause a slow-learning child's condition to worsen (Baker, 1975; Payne et al., 1983). In most cases, a slow-learning child's condition is not caused by a single factor alone. The interaction of several factors can be classified under organic and non-organic hypotheses, or psychoenvironmental hypotheses (Schwartz, 1985).

Based on observations and interviews conducted by the researchers at a school in

Dumoga, the phenomenon of slow-learner students was also found in elementary schools in that area. The subjects studied reflect the common pattern of slow-learner children, namely: difficulty following lessons, slow comprehension of instructions, and never having undergone a psychological assessment by either the school or their parents. Without professional intervention from an early stage, they are at risk of falling further behind (Budi et al., 2018).

In light of these issues, research on slow-learner children in elementary schools is needed so that action can be taken as early as possible. Based on the background described above, the problems addressed in this study are as follows: (1) What is the number and percentage of slow-learner students found in elementary schools? (2) What is the number and percentage of grade repetitions experienced by slow-learner students in elementary schools? (3) What is the number and percentage of subject-area difficulties experienced by slow-learner students in elementary schools? (4) In which types of subject areas do slow-learner students in elementary schools experience difficulty?

The objectives of this study are: (1) to determine the number and percentage of slow-learner students in elementary schools; (2) to determine the number and percentage of grade repetitions experienced by slow-learner students; (3) to determine the number and percentage of subject-area difficulties experienced by slow-learner students; and (4) to identify the types of subject areas found to be difficult by slow-learner students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive research design, that is, research designed to obtain information about the status of a phenomenon at the time the research was conducted. This study was directed at describing, as they actually are, the conditions of students at Public Elementary Schools in the Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency.

This descriptive research method was chosen because it suits the purpose of the study, namely to depict or describe, as they actually are, the conditions of students at Public Elementary Schools in Dumoga. This is consistent with the aim of descriptive research, which is to capture the variables or conditions of “what exists” in a given situation. The research was carried out as follows: (1) Identifying slow-learner children. To identify slow-learner children, a questionnaire instrument and documentation were used. The procedure was as follows: recording students suspected of being slow learners (report-card scores below the class average), then distributing questionnaires to students identified on the basis of report-card scores (scores below the class average). (2) Calculating the number of slow-learner children. (3) Calculating the number of difficult subject areas. (4) Calculating the percentage of types of difficult subject areas. And (5) calculating the percentage of grade repetitions.

Population and Research Sample

The population of a study is the entire group intended to be investigated (Sutrisno Hadi, 1984). In this study, the population consisted of all students of Public Elementary Schools in the Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency. The sample was drawn from the population using the Quota Random Sampling technique, with the sample size set at 20% of the population. Because Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency, has 31 Public Elementary Schools with a total of 6,565 students, the sample used was $20\% \times 6,565 \text{ students} = 1,313 \text{ students}$. This sample of 1,313 students was drawn from 6 public elementary schools. The sampling stages were as follows: (1) Dumoga Subdistrict has 31 Public Elementary Schools (6,565 students); (2) 20% of these 31 schools were designated as the research sample, so the research sample was $20\% \times 6,565 \text{ students} = 1,313 \text{ students}$, drawn from 6 Public Elementary Schools; and (3) a

lottery technique was used to determine the 6 schools referred to above.

Research Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect data in this study: (1) Documentation. Documentation was used to identify children suspected of being slow learners. This was done by reviewing and recording students whose academic achievement fell below the class average in at least half of all subjects. This data can be seen in students' report cards. To fill in the difficulty field, all achievement scores/report-card grades below the class average were recorded. (2) Questionnaire. This instrument was used to determine whether a child was classified as a slow learner or not. The questionnaire used in this study was indirect, with classroom teachers as respondents. It captured information about the child's condition, including the child's activity level during the teaching-learning process, memory, creativity, attentiveness, discipline, and tidiness/cleanliness. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of 12 items. Each item provided three answer choices: a, b, and c. Respondents were asked to select the answer choice that best matched the child's condition by marking a, b, or c. Each answer choice carried a different score: answer a scored one point, answer b scored two points, and answer c scored three points. Whether a child was classified as a slow learner or not was determined by summing all scores obtained from the questionnaire, using the following criteria: children who obtained a score below 29 were not classified as slow learners.

Data Analysis

The data collected, both through documentation and the questionnaire, were analyzed using a quantitative statistical method based on percentage calculation. This percentage calculation was intended to determine the number of slow-learner children, the types of difficult subject areas, the number of difficult subject areas, and the

number of grade repetitions. Data analysis was carried out through the following stages: (1) Identification of Slow-Learner Children. At this stage, students suspected of being slow learners were recorded, namely students whose academic achievement (report-card scores) fell below the class average in at least half of all subjects taught. (2) Distributing the questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered only to students estimated to be slow learners (i.e., those with academic achievement below the class average). The questionnaire was distributed to teachers as respondents.

1. Calculation of the Percentage of Slow-Learner Children. Students whose questionnaire results yielded a total score between twenty-nine and thirty-six were classified as slow learners. Thus, the number of students classified as slow learners was calculated by summing the students whose questionnaire results had a total score between 29 and 36. Meanwhile, the percentage of slow-learner children was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{n}{N} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage of Slow-Learner Children

n = Number of Slow-Learner Children

N = Total Number of Students

2. Calculation of the percentage of the number of difficult subject areas

The number of difficult subject areas was determined by summing the subject areas found to be difficult by each slow-learner child. The percentage was then calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{m}{M} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage of the Number of Difficulties

m = Number of Difficult Subject Areas (Number of Difficulties)

M = Number of Slow-Learner Children

3. Calculation of the percentage of types of difficult subject areas

The types of difficult subject areas were determined by examining which subject areas each child scored below average in. The percentage was then calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{O}{n} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage of the type of difficult subject area

o = Type of difficult subject area

O = Number of slow-learner children

4. Calculation of the percentage of grade repetition

The number of times a slow-learner child had repeated a grade was determined by examining documentation records. The percentage of grade repetition was then calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{l}{L} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage of grade repetition

l = Number of grade repetitions

L = Number of slow-learner children

RESULT

This section presents the results of the study, consisting of two main parts: data presentation, and data analysis and interpretation.

A. Data Presentation

The raw data obtained in the field were processed and sorted according to the objectives of the study. From this data processing, the results were then arranged and presented in the form of the following tables:

1. Table 1: Number of Students Experiencing Learning Difficulties
2. Table 2: Number of Slow-Learner Students and Number of Grade Repetitions
3. Table 3: Number of Slow-Learner Students and Number of Difficulties
4. Table 4: Number of Slow-Learner Students and Types of Difficult Subject Areas.

The tables listed above are presented successively on the following pages.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

No. Seq. SDN	Total Student s	Number of students experiencing difficulty, by grade												Total	
		I		II		III		IV		V		VI			
		Total Students	With Difficulty	Total Students	With Difficulty	Total Students	With Difficulty	Total Students	With Difficulty	Total Students	With Difficulty	Total Students	With Difficulty		
1.	252	55	23	44	14	41	6	35	4	39	9	38	2	252	58
2.	234	40	14	36	5	36	4	45	5	39	6	38	1	234	35
3.	200	46	-	29	5	27	7	32	4	35	3	31	2	200	21
4.	192	31	10	38	9	35	5	30	7	29	-	29	-	192	31
5.	169	32	5	28	8	25	8	33	4	28	-	23	8	169	33
6.	266	48	14	48	13	46	9	41	-	47	14	36	2	266	52
Total	1313	252	66	223	54	210	39	216	24	217	32	195	15	1313	230

Note: Roman numerals I–VI indicate grade level

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF SLOW-LEARNER STUDENTS AND NUMBER OF GRADE REPETITIONS

No. SDN Seq.	Total Students	Number of Slow-Learner Students	Number of Grade Repetitions					
			0	1	2	3	4	5
1.	252	8	5	2	1	-	-	-
2.	234	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
3.	200	4	2	2	-	-	-	-
4.	192	6	3	-	2	-	-	1
5.	169	8	2	-	4	2	-	-
6.	266	4	2	2	-	-	-	-
Total	1313	31	15	6	7	2	-	1

Note:

- 0: Never repeated a grade
- 1: Repeated a grade once
- 2: Repeated a grade twice
- 3: Repeated a grade three times
- 4: Repeated a grade four times
- 5: Repeated a grade five times

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF SLOW-LEARNER STUDENTS AND NUMBER OF DIFFICULTIES

No. SDN	Total Students	Number of Slow-Learner Students	Number of Difficulties							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	252	8	-	-	-	-	-	5	1	2
2.	234	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
3.	200	4	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	-
4.	192	6	-	-	-	-	1	1	4	-
5.	169	8	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	2
6.	266	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	1
Total	1313	31	-	-	-	-	2	12	12	5

Note:

- 1: Experiencing difficulty in one subject area
- 2: Experiencing difficulty in two subject areas
- 3: Experiencing difficulty in three subject areas
- 4: Experiencing difficulty in four subject areas
- 5: Experiencing difficulty in five subject areas
- 6: Experiencing difficulty in six subject areas
- 7: Experiencing difficulty in seven subject areas
- 8: Experiencing difficulty in eight subject areas

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF SLOW-LEARNER STUDENTS AND TYPES OF DIFFICULT SUBJECT AREAS

No. SDN	Total Students	Number of Slow-Learner Students	Number of Difficulties							
			I	II	II	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
1.	252	8	6	6	8	5	8	7	5	3
2.	234	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	1	-
3.	200	4	4	4	3	4	2	2	3	-
4.	192	6	2	6	5	6	5	6	3	-
5.	169	8	5	8	7	6	4	7	7	4
6.	266	4	2	4	3	3	4	3	2	3
Total	1313	31	19	29	26	25	24	26	21	10

Subject Area Legend:

- I: Religious Education
- II: Pancasila and Civic Education
- III: Indonesian Language
- IV: Mathematics
- V: Physical and Health Education
- VI: English
- VII: Natural Science and Social Studies
- VIII: Arts and Culture

B. Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Percentage of Slow-Learner Students

Table 2 shows the number of slow-learner students at SDN No. 1 through SDN No. 6, namely: SDN No. 1 had 8 slow-learner students, SDN No. 2 had 1 slow-learner student, SDN No. 3 had 4 slow-learner students, SDN No. 4 had 6 slow-learner students, SDN No. 5 had 8 slow-learner students, and SDN No. 6 had 4 slow-learner students. Using the formula $P = \frac{n}{N} \times 100\%$,

the percentage of slow-learner children at each SDN can be calculated as follows:

- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 1 = $(8:252) \times 100\% = 3.175\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 2 = $(1:234) \times 100\% = 0.427\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 3 = $(4:200) \times 100\% = 2.000\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 4 = $(6:192) \times 100\% = 3.125\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 5 = $(8:169) \times 100\% = 4.734\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children at SDN No. 6 = $(4:266) \times 100\% = 1.504\%$

Overall, it can be concluded that out of the 1,313 students who made up the research sample, 31 students were classified as slow learners, equivalent to 2.361% of the sample.

2. Percentage of Grade Repetitions

Table 2 also shows that slow-learner students at SDN No. 1 through SDN No. 6 had repeated a grade once, twice, three times, and five times. To determine the percentage of grade repetitions, the formula $P = \frac{l}{L} \times 100\%$ was used. The results are as follows:

- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children Who Had Never Repeated a Grade = $(15:31) \times 100\% = 48.387\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children Who Had Repeated a Grade Once = $(6:31) \times 100\% = 19.355\%$
- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children Who Had Repeated a Grade Twice = $(7:31) \times 100\% = 22.581\%$

- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children Who Had Repeated a Grade Three Times = $(2:31) \times 100\% = 6.452\%$

- Percentage of Slow-Learner Children Who Had Repeated a Grade Five Times = $(1:31) \times 100\% = 3.226\%$

The data in Table 2 show that, of the 31 slow-learner students, the majority (15 students, or 48.387%) had never repeated a grade. The remainder had repeated a grade with varying frequency: 6 students (19.355%) once, 7 students (22.581%) twice, 2 students (6.452%) three times, and 1 student (3.226%) five times, while no students were found to have repeated a grade four times.

3. Percentage of the Number of Difficulties Based on Table 3, the number of difficulties experienced by slow-learner children at each SDN can be determined. Using the formula $P = \frac{m}{M} \times 100\%$, the percentage of the number of difficulties can be calculated as follows:

- Difficulty in Five Subject Areas = $(2:31) \times 100\% = 6.452\%$
- Difficulty in Six Subject Areas = $(12:31) \times 100\% = 38.710\%$
- Difficulty in Seven Subject Areas = $(12:31) \times 100\% = 38.710\%$
- Difficulty in Eight Subject Areas = $(5:31) \times 100\% = 16.129\%$

No slow-learner students were found to experience difficulty in only one to four subject areas. Difficulties first appear in the group experiencing difficulty in five subject areas, affecting 2 students (6.452%). The largest proportions were found in the groups experiencing difficulty in six and seven subject areas, each affecting 12 students (38.710%), while 5 students (16.129%) experienced difficulty in all eight subject areas. These findings indicate that students identified as slow learners generally face learning barriers that are comprehensive in nature, rather than limited to just one or two subjects.

4. Percentage of Difficult Subject Areas

Table 4 shows the types of subject areas found to be difficult by slow-learner children, from those at SDN No. 1 through SDN No. 6. To calculate the percentage of each difficult subject area, the formula $P = \frac{a}{b} \times 100\%$ was used. The results are as follows:

- a. Difficulty in Pancasila and Civic Education = $(29:31) \times 100\% = 93.548\%$
- b. Difficulty in Indonesian Language = $(26:31) \times 100\% = 83.871\%$
- c. Difficulty in English = $(26:31) \times 100\% = 83.871\%$
- d. Difficulty in Mathematics = $(25:31) \times 100\% = 80.645\%$
- e. Difficulty in Physical and Health Education = $(24:31) \times 100\% = 77.419\%$
- f. Difficulty in Natural Science and Social Studies = $(21:31) \times 100\% = 67.742\%$
- g. Difficulty in Religious Education = $(19:31) \times 100\% = 61.290\%$
- h. Difficulty in Arts and Culture = $(10:31) \times 100\% = 32.258\%$

These results show that slow-learner students experienced the highest level of difficulty in Pancasila and Civic Education, namely 29 of 31 students (93.548%). Indonesian Language and English followed with an identical percentage of 83.871% (26 students) each, followed by Mathematics at 80.645% (25 students) and Physical and Health Education at 77.419% (24 students). Natural Science and Social Studies were difficult for 67.742% of students (21 students), Religious Education for 61.290% of students (19 students), while the lowest level of difficulty was found in Arts and Culture, at 32.258% (10 students).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Conclusions

Based on the data analysis and interpretation presented in the Results section, the findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. At the Public Elementary Schools of Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, Bolaang Mongondow Regency, 31 children (2.361%) of the sample were classified as slow learners.

2. Among the slow-learner children at these schools, 19.355% (6 children) had repeated a grade once, and 22.581% (7 children) had repeated a grade twice, although the majority of them (48.387%) had never repeated a grade.
3. Slow-learner children at these schools most frequently experienced difficulty in six and seven subject areas in roughly equal proportions, each accounting for 38.710% (12 children).
4. The subject area most frequently found difficult by slow-learner children was Pancasila and Civic Education (93.548%), followed by Indonesian Language and English at 83.871% each, and Mathematics at 80.645%; while difficulty in the remaining subject areas ranged from 32.258% (Arts and Culture) to 77.419% (Physical and Health Education).

B. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. To the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen)
 - a. Given that students meeting the criteria for slow-learner identification were found in elementary schools, a system for early detection and intervention needs to be developed to help schools provide learning support suited to students' needs. Where necessary, students may be referred for a professional assessment to clarify their educational needs and the support required.
 - b. Placing/providing specialized teachers in elementary schools, namely teachers who have the competence to educate children with special needs (graduates of Special Education).
2. To Schools/Educational Institutions

Given that slow-learner students are present at the Public Elementary Schools of Dumoga Tengah Subdistrict, an educational system that can integrate slow-learner

students' needs to be developed. These efforts include:

- a. Providing/organizing special classes, namely classes specifically designated for children classified as slow learners.

Enhancing efforts in the teaching-learning process across all subject areas.

Declaration by Authors

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