



Analysis of Reading Learning Problems for Third Grade Elementary School Students

Aprince Blesia¹, Muhammad Faizin², & Desti Rahayu³

¹²³ Department of Elementary School Teacher Education, Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sorong, Southwest Papua Province, Indonesia

*Correspondence: apriablesia725@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17 January 2026
Revised: 13 March 2026
Accepted: 1 April 2026
Published Online: 26 June 2026

Keywords:

Beginning reading;
reading difficulties;
elementary school;
qualitative research; early
literacy

ABSTRACT

This study investigates beginning reading learning problems among Grade 3 students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, Southwest Papua, Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative field-based design, with data collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving the school principal, homeroom teacher, ten students, and one parent. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that 30% of students were categorized at the fair or poor reading levels, exhibiting difficulties including limited working memory, errors in letter articulation and substitution, insufficient attention to punctuation, and visual impairment. Six interrelated causal factors were identified: heterogeneous foundational abilities, low reading motivation, conventional instructional methods, unsupportive learning environments, reading comprehension deficits, and socio-emotional barriers. The classroom teacher responded with multi-faceted remedial strategies incorporating varied instructional media, motivational support, empathetic engagement, structured remedial programmes, and a daily 15

minute literacy routine. These findings underscore the urgent need for differentiated, evidence-based beginning reading instruction and multi-stakeholder collaboration to improve early literacy outcomes in elementary schools.

How to Cite: Blesia, A., Faizin, M., Rahayu, D. (2026). Analysis of Reading Learning Problems for Third Grade Elementary School Students. *Primary Education Journal*, 2(3), 1-15.

© The Author(s) 2026

INTRODUCTION

Language constitutes the primary instrument through which human beings communicate, think, and express ideas. In the context of elementary education, linguistic competence serves as an essential foundation for students' academic success across all subject areas. Among the various language skills, reading, particularly beginning reading (*membaca permulaan*), occupies a fundamental role in the development of learners' academic capabilities (Chall, 1983; Ehri et al., 2001). Reading is not merely the recognition of letters or words; it involves the comprehension of meaning and the interpretation of written content. Accordingly, the early mastery of reading skills is a critical determinant of students' long-term academic achievement.

Beginning reading instruction is typically introduced from Grade 1 through Grade 3 of elementary school, as students during this period are transitioning from pre-literacy to foundational literacy. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children aged 7 to 9 years are in the concrete operational stage, during which they begin to comprehend symbols and engage in elementary logical thinking (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). In the context of reading, this developmental stage implies that students are beginning to recognise letters, combine syllables, and comprehend simple sentences. However, empirical evidence and classroom observations indicate that approximately 50% of third- grade students continue to experience difficulties in beginning reading, a phenomenon observed not only in remote areas but also

in urban schools such as SD Muhammadiyah Aimas in Sorong Regency (Faizin et al., 2025).

Several factors contribute to beginning reading difficulties. Internal student factors include low reading motivation, limited vocabulary, reduced concentration capacity, and inter-individual differences in linguistic intelligence (Snowling & Hulme, 2021). External factors encompass instructional methods and teaching strategies, the availability of learning media, the home learning environment, and parental support in guiding children's reading activities (Wasik & Hindman, 2020). Curricular and infrastructural factors include the limited availability of children's reading materials, inadequate use of interactive media, and the prevalence of teacher-centered learning approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

At SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, teachers have attempted to employ syllabic reading methods, oral reading, and letter recognition exercises; however, outcomes remain suboptimal. This suggests that the instructional methods in use may not yet be appropriately aligned with the learning characteristics and needs of Grade 3 students. Furthermore, the limited use of instructional media, predominantly printed textbooks, has contributed to reduced student motivation and engagement (Tafonao, 2018; Mayer, 2021). These conditions have a significant impact on students' overall academic performance, as nearly all subject matter in school is presented in written form. If left unaddressed, these difficulties will impede students' academic achievement and impair the development of their literacy skills in the future (OECD, 2021).

Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of beginning reading learning problems in Grade 3 of SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, is necessary. The present study aims to: (1) identify the specific forms of reading difficulty experienced by students; (2) analyze the factors causing these difficulties; and (3) evaluate the remedial efforts undertaken by classroom teachers. The findings of this study are expected to provide concrete contributions towards improving the quality of beginning reading instruction.

serving as an evidence base for refining instructional methods, informing curriculum development, and strengthening parental and familial involvement in supporting children's reading development at home.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a field-based approach, analyzed theoretically in accordance with the naturalistic research tradition. Qualitative research is fundamentally grounded in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data in narrative and visual forms, aimed at acquiring an in-depth understanding of specific phenomena under observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological approach emerged in response to paradigm shifts in the way researchers perceive and engage with reality, phenomena, and social symptoms. It is frequently referred to as naturalistic research because inquiry is conducted in natural settings, meaning that the researcher engages directly with the field without manipulating or artificially controlling the research object (Moleong, 2019).

In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the primary instrument, overseeing data collection, meaning interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Data collection was conducted through triangulation, combining observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure data validity and credibility. Data analysis followed an inductive process, constructing patterns and interpretations from field data without pre-established theoretical frameworks. The results of qualitative research place greater emphasis on deep meaningfulness than on statistical generalization (Susanto, 2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study was conducted in Grade 3 of SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, West Papua Province, Indonesia. This location was selected based on the observable prevalence of beginning reading difficulties among Grade 3 students, rendering it an appropriate and relevant research site. The study was carried out over one month during the Odd Semester of the 2025 Academic Year. Research informants were selected purposively and consisted of

the school principal, the Grade 3 homeroom teacher, ten Grade 3 students, and one student's parent. These informants were chosen on the basis of their direct knowledge of the reading learning difficulties and classroom conditions under investigation.

Data collection was carried out through observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were conducted to directly examine beginning reading learning activities and student behavior during instruction. Interviews were used to elicit in-depth information from the school principal, homeroom teacher, students, and parents regarding the nature of reading difficulties, contributing factors, and remedial strategies. Interview guidelines were developed to focus questioning on student reading engagement, teachers' instructional methods, factors influencing reading ability, institutional constraints, parental involvement, and conditions conducive to supporting students' reading progress.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved the systematic selection of relevant data and the elimination of extraneous information to produce a structured dataset aligned with the study's objectives. Data display was presented through narrative description to facilitate the researcher's understanding of findings and inform subsequent analysis. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, was conducted iteratively to ensure the validity and credibility of conclusions based on empirical field evidence (Miles et al., 2014)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Beginning Reading Learning Problems in Grade 3 Students

The findings of this study reveal that a significant proportion of Grade 3 students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas continue to experience difficulties in the beginning reading learning process, particularly in the areas of letter recognition, word decoding, sentence fluency, and reading comprehension.

These difficulties were evidenced by students' limited accuracy in recognising letters, their inability to read words and sentences fluently, and their insufficient comprehension of simple reading texts. Teachers reported that certain students still read by spelling out each syllable, are unable to read sentences with correct intonation, and encounter considerable difficulty when responding to questions related to reading passages.

The reading ability profile of Grade 3 students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas demonstrates considerable heterogeneity. Approximately 40% of students were categorized at the Good level and 30% at the Very Good level, indicating that a majority of students are able to read fluently and comprehend texts at the expected level. Nevertheless, 20% of students were categorized at the fair level and 10% at the poor level, highlighting the persistence of significant reading difficulties that necessitate targeted intervention through more effective and structured instructional strategies. This distribution aligns with research by Fuchs et al. (2021), who found that approximately 20–30% of elementary students in diverse educational settings exhibit persistent reading difficulties requiring additional support.

Several specific forms of reading difficulty were identified among students. First, visual impairment at a distance was observed in one student (initials: CTR), who experienced rapid eye fatigue when reading, particularly when attempting to read text from the blackboard. This condition is consistent with findings by Fifin (2020), who noted that students frequently encounter difficulties reading from a distance, especially when teachers rely predominantly on the blackboard as the primary instructional medium. Second, limited working memory was identified in students with initials CT, GL, JOK, and INR, whose easily distracted concentration impaired their capacity to retain previously learned content. Ronald (2020) affirmed that memory capacity significantly influences learning outcomes, as the ability to store and retrieve information is critical to successful reading comprehension.

Third, difficulties in spelling were observed, particularly with consonant clusters or multi-syllabic words. Several students demonstrated halting,

error-prone reading, as evidenced by mispronunciations such as reading *'bermain'* as *'ber ma in.'* This finding is consistent with Fifin (2020), who reported that students frequently struggle with consonant spelling because they habituate syllable-by-syllable decoding, which impedes comprehensive reading. Fourth, difficulties in letter articulation constituted a significant barrier, as exemplified by the mispronunciation of *'dikeringkan'* as *'di ke iring ikan'*, indicating that students continued to struggle with the phonological assembly of letters into words. Fifin (2020) attributed this pattern to students' inability to articulate specific phonemes, particularly *r*, *q*, and *z*. These findings are also consistent with the phonological deficit hypothesis, which posits that deficiencies in phonological awareness constitute a primary source of reading difficulties (Snowling & Hulme, 2021).

Fifth, letter substitution errors were identified in students with initials CIT and JOK, who failed to attend carefully to letter detail during reading, resulting in substitutions such as *'berlari'* being read as *'rarinya'* and *'membawa'* as *'menggawak'*. Sixth, students demonstrated insufficient attention to punctuation, reading continuously without appropriate pauses or intonation. As David (2019) asserted, punctuation plays an essential role in guiding readers towards accurate interpretations of written meaning. Finally, students with initials CTR and JKO exhibited limited letter knowledge, particularly of specific alphabetic characters including *r*, *q*, and *z*, which was largely attributable to the absence of preschool education that would have provided foundational letter recognition skills. These findings are corroborated by Fifin (2020) and further supported by research demonstrating that alphabetic knowledge is a robust predictor of reading acquisition (Ehri et al., 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000).

Factors Contributing to Beginning Reading Learning Problems

The analysis of data identified six interrelated causal factors underlying reading difficulties among Grade 3 students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas. The first factor concerns students' heterogeneous foundational reading abilities, particularly in the domains of letter recognition, syllable blending, and vocabulary comprehension. A number of students had not yet developed

adequate phonemic awareness, causing them to struggle with the decoding of unfamiliar words, a condition likely resulting from insufficient reading stimulation in the home environment and at prior educational levels (Wasik & Hindman, 2020; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). The second factor is the low reading motivation demonstrated by many students, as evidenced by rapid disengagement during reading activities, limited focus, and a preference for play over literacy engagement. This diminished motivation was closely associated with the absence of a home reading habit and the scarcity of age-appropriate, engaging reading materials at school (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Schiefele et al., 2012).

The third factor relates to instructional methods and teaching strategies, which remained predominantly conventional, including turn-taking oral reading and text copying. These approaches proved insufficiently engaging and were misaligned with the active, visual, and play-based learning characteristics of elementary school-aged children. Furthermore, reading instruction was conducted in a whole-class format without adequate differentiation to address individual students' varying ability levels (Tomlinson, 2014; Pressley et al., 2001). The fourth factor pertains to the unsupportive learning environment, both at school and at home. The school library maintained a limited collection of books and was underutilized, while the majority of students' families had not established a conducive home reading environment and demonstrated limited involvement in accompanying and supporting their children's learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

The fifth factor concerns difficulties in reading comprehension, whereby students were capable of decoding words in sequence but were unable to derive holistic meaning from a passage. This indicates that students' reading processes remained at the mechanical decoding stage and had not yet advanced to the level of meaningful comprehension, a distinction central to models of skilled reading (Perfetti, 2007; Scarborough, 2001). The sixth factor encompasses social and emotional dimensions, including low self-confidence, reluctance to read aloud in front of peers, and fear of making errors, all of which negatively

affected students' learning motivation and willingness to engage in reading practice (Pajares, 1996; Bandura, 1997). These findings collectively affirm the multidimensional nature of reading difficulties and the necessity of holistic, multi-stakeholder intervention strategies.

Teachers' Efforts in Addressing Beginning Reading Difficulties

Based on the research findings, the Grade 3 homeroom teacher at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas has implemented several strategies to address beginning reading difficulties. The first strategy concerns the use of varied and effective instructional media. The teacher employed diverse media and instructional strategies to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning process, thereby motivating students and improving content comprehension. This practice is consistent with Tafonao's (2018) assertion that instructional media can increase learning motivation, stimulate writing and speaking activities, and activate students' imagination, rendering the learning process more effective and efficient. This view is further reinforced by Mayer's (2021) multimedia learning theory, which demonstrates that the combined use of visual and verbal representations significantly enhances students' information retention and comprehension.

The second strategy focuses on building students' self-confidence and providing sustained motivational support. The teacher actively encouraged students to attempt new tasks and perform in front of the class, thereby reducing reading anxiety. This approach aligns with the principle articulated by Kurniasih (2021), who argued that the development of students' self-confidence is achieved through habituation, positive reinforcement, and opportunities for independent performance. This principle is theoretically grounded in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, which posits that an individual's belief in their ability to perform a task is a determinant of their motivation and learning achievement. The third strategy involves empathetic understanding of students' individual characteristics. Rather than criticizing students for their reading difficulties, the teacher sought to understand the strengths and limitations of each learner. Udhiyanasari (2019) noted that many parents and teachers tend to

assign blame when children encounter reading difficulties, often due to a lack of understanding of the underlying learning challenges, whereas genuine support and comprehension of learning barriers are what are required.

The fourth strategy involves the provision of specialized remedial learning programs for students experiencing more severe reading difficulties. Remedial instruction was administered in the form of evaluation and follow-up activities conducted at the end of learning sessions, enabling students to address their difficulties gradually and independently. Udhiyanasari (2019) affirmed that remedial learning programs are essential as a targeted intervention for students with reading difficulties, enabling them to overcome reading challenges more effectively. These remedial approaches are consistent with contemporary evidence-based practices for reading intervention, including systematic phonics instruction and fluency training, which have been demonstrated to produce significant improvements in early literacy outcomes (National Reading Panel, 2000; Fuchs et al., 2021). In addition, the school implemented a daily literacy program requiring students to read for 15 minutes each morning, an initiative designed to cultivate a sustainable reading culture and progressively improve students' reading competencies.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified that a proportion of Grade 3 students at SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, continue to experience beginning reading difficulties, as evidenced by challenges in letter recognition, word spelling, sentence-level reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Data indicate that 30% of students were categorized at the fair and poor levels, necessitating targeted educational attention. The specific difficulties identified include limited working memory, errors in letter articulation and substitution, insufficient attention to punctuation, and visual impairment at a distance, collectively demonstrating the urgent need for more effective and differentiated instructional strategies.

The factors underlying reading difficulties were found to be multidimensional and interrelated, encompassing heterogeneous foundational abilities, low reading motivation, conventional instructional methods, unsupportive learning environments (both at school and at home), reading comprehension deficits, and socio-emotional factors such as reduced self-confidence. These factors mutually reinforce one another and cumulatively impede the development of students' reading competencies.

In response to these challenges, the classroom teacher implemented multiple remedial and preventive strategies, including the use of engaging and varied instructional media, the provision of consistent motivational support and confidence-building activities, empathetic engagement with individual student characteristics, and the delivery of structured remedial learning programs for students experiencing more severe difficulties. The school also promoted a daily literacy culture through a mandatory 15-minute morning reading program. Collectively, these efforts represent a constructive multi-pronged approach to improving beginning reading outcomes. Future research is recommended to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of specific instructional interventions and to explore the potential of technology-enhanced reading programs in similar educational contexts.

Acknowledgments

The researchers extend their sincere gratitude to the school principal, teachers, and Grade 3 students of SD Muhammadiyah Aimas, Sorong Regency, for their invaluable assistance and cooperation throughout the research process. Appreciation is also expressed to all institutional stakeholders who facilitated the data collection activities. The support extended by all parties was indispensable to the successful completion of this study.

Declarations

Author : Aprince Blesia: Conceptualization, Writing - Original
Contribution Draft, Editing; Desti Rahayu: Writing - Review &
Editing, Formal Analysis; M. Faizin: Validation, Data
Collection, and Supervision.

- Funding Statement : This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
- Conflict of Interest : The authors declare no conflict of interest.
- Additional Information : Additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. McGraw-Hill.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dalman. (2018). *Keterampilan membaca [Reading skills]*. Rajawali Pers.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>
- David, G. (2019). *Basic reading instruction: Phonics, fluency, and comprehension strategies*. Routledge.
- Djamarah, S. B., & Zain, A. (2020). *Strategi belajar mengajar [Teaching and learning strategies]*. Rineka Cipta.
- Ehri, L. C., Nunes, S. R., Willows, D. M., Schuster, B. V., Yaghoub-Zadeh, Z., & Shanahan, T. (2001). Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(3), 250-287. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.36.3.2>
- Fifin. (2020). *Metode pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia [Indonesian language teaching methods]*. Alfabeta.
- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2021). Responsiveness-to-intervention: A decade later. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 54(1), 3-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420958974>

- Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 403-422). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Inhelder, B., & Piaget, J. (1958). *The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence*. Basic Books. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10034-000>
- Kurniasih. (2021). *Teknik pembelajaran inovatif [Innovative instructional techniques]*. Kencana.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Lonigan, C. J., & Whitehurst, G. J. (1998). Relative efficacy of parent and teacher involvement in a shared-reading intervention for preschool children from low-income backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13(2), 263-290. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006\(99\)80038-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(99)80038-6)
- Mayer, R. E. (2021). *Multimedia learning* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316941355>
- Meliyawati, S. (2016). *Pembelajaran literasi di sekolah dasar [Literacy learning in elementary schools]*. Refika Aditama.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Moleong, L. J. (2019). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif [Qualitative research methodology]* (39th ed.). Remaja Rosdakarya.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- OECD. (2021). *Education at a glance 2021: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>

- Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(4), 543-578.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066004543>
- Perfetti, C. (2007). Reading ability: Lexical quality to comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 11(4), 357-383.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888430701530730>
- Pressley, M., Allington, R. L., Wharton-McDonald, R., Collins Block, C., & Morrow, L. M. (2001). *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first-grade classrooms*. Guilford Press.
- Rahim, F. (2019). *Pengajaran membaca di sekolah dasar [Reading instruction in elementary schools]*. Bumi Aksara.
- Ronald, G. (2020). *Foundations of education*. Pearson.
- Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 1, pp. 97-110). Guilford Press.
- Schiefele, U., Schaffner, E., Moller, J., & Wigfield, A. (2012). Dimensions of reading motivation and their relation to reading behavior and competence. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47(4), 427-463.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/RRQ.030>
- Senechal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73(2), 445-460. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00417>
- Snowling, M. J., & Hulme, C. (2021). Annual research review: The nature and classification of reading disorders -- A commentary on proposals for DSM-5. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(5), 593-607.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2011.02495.x>
- Susanto, P. C. (2025). *Konsep penelitian kualitatif: Tinjauan pustaka, studi*

kasus, pendekatan etnografi, informan, in-depth interview dan focus group discussion [Concepts of qualitative research: Literature review, case study, ethnographic approach, informants, in-depth interview and focus group discussion]. *Jurnal Inovasi Manajemen, Kewirausahaan, Bisnis dan Digital*, 2(2).

Tafonao, T. (2018). Peranan media pembelajaran dalam meningkatkan minat belajar mahasiswa [The role of instructional media in enhancing student learning motivation]. *Jurnal Komunikasi Pendidikan*, 2(2), 103-114. <https://doi.org/10.32585/jkp.v2i2.113>

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Udhiyanasari, K. Y. (2019). Dukungan orang tua dan kepercayaan diri terhadap kemampuan membaca siswa sekolah dasar [Parental support and self-confidence in relation to reading ability of elementary school students]. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*, 3(3), 362-369. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jisd.v3i3.19303>

Wasik, B. A., & Hindman, A. H. (2020). Improving vocabulary and pre-literacy skills of at-risk preschoolers through teacher professional development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 103(2), 455-469. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023067>