

Improving Fluent Reading Skills for Slow Learner Students in Grade VII Through the Implementation of Guided Reading

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Abstract

This study aims to improve the fluent reading skills of a seventh-grade slow learner student at SMP Negeri 3 Malinau Kota through the guided reading method assisted by "Story Calendar" (Kalender Cerita) media. The subject's main problems included low reading ability, high learning anxiety, passivity, and visual-spatial disorientation regarding twin letters (b-d and p-q). This type of research is Classroom Action Research (CAR), which was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting stages. The subject of this research was one student with slow learner difficulties. Data were collected through teacher and student activity observation sheets, as well as reading learning outcomes performance tests. Data analysis techniques were carried out using qualitative descriptive analysis for the learning activity observation results and quantitative descriptive analysis to measure individual learning outcomes based on the average score formula. The results showed a highly significant increase in each stage. In the initial condition (Pre-Cycle), the subject's learning mastery percentage was only 31.25% (very poor category). After interventions were provided in Cycle I using the Picture Walk technique, Whisper Reading, finger navigation, and Level 1 differentiated writing (copying sentences), the subject's score increased to 56.25%, but had not yet reached the minimum process target of 75%. In Cycle II, through the reinforcement of individual scaffolding, color-coding for twin letters, directed dictation techniques, and Level 2 differentiated writing (arranging word fragments), the subject's ability surged drastically to achieve a mastery percentage of 93.75% (excellent category). Psychologically and affectively, the subject transformed from a passive, anxious, and withdrawn individual into a focused, enthusiastic student who was bold enough to read aloud with proper intonation, and capable of writing full-structured sentences (S-P-O) using 100% correct punctuation mechanics on time. The conclusion of this study is that the implementation of the

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Guided reading method with a tiered individual guidance (scaffolding) approach is empirically proven to be effective in alleviating cognitive, fine motor, and psychological barriers in slow learner students within an inclusive classroom.

Keywords: *Guided Reading, Slow Learner, Fluent Reading*

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the National Education System Law (Undang-Undang No 20 Tahun 2023) plays a highly crucial role in ensuring the fulfillment of every student's right to obtain quality education, including slow learner students. Education is a holistic pedagogical process where reading skills become the main foundation for children to train reasoning, independence, and responsibility in understanding the world critically (Rahman, 2022). Furthermore, according to Driyarkara's thought in Guritno (2018), education is a process of hominization and humanization, positioning reading not merely as a technical spelling skill, but as an existential medium for students to recognize their identity and assert their independence. With good literacy mastery, students are expected to be able to hone the analytical skills and creativity inherent within themselves (Akhmad, 2020).

However, for slow learner students, this literacy process often encounters serious obstacles. The main characteristics of slow learner students lie in their limited short-term memory capacity and slow information processing speed (encoding and decoding). They possess an IQ score between 70-90, placing them in the borderline category (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021). Consequently, they tend to be slow in observing and reacting to stimuli in their surroundings due to low brain processing speed in managing sensory information (Chauhan, 2011). This cognitive barrier causes an excessive working memory load; they require much more time to associate letter symbols with sounds, frequently leaving them trapped in a stuttering spelling stage, which ultimately makes it difficult for them to pour ideas into systematic writing (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021).

Based on a careful analysis conducted in grade VII at SMP Negeri 3 Malinau Kota, a phenomenon requiring serious attention was discovered. Daily grade documentation data shows that the score acquisition of slow learner students is dominated by grades below the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM). The main issue in the learning process is the implementation of a classical and one-size-fits-all instructional pattern, dominated by a teacher-centered method. This method creates a massive barrier in knowledge transfer because it fails to accommodate the diversity of



learning styles—Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic—which are desperately needed as the right stimulation for slow learners (Anita et al., 2021). Without intensive and specific guidance, slow learner students fall further behind, experience frustration, and lose motivation.

Reading itself is a unique skill (Iskandarwassid, 2008) and a complex activity involving the coordination of physical (visual) and psychological (cognitive) capabilities, requiring the utilization of cognitive and imaginative aspects through observing and remembering activities (Soedarso, 2010). Broadly speaking, there are two important aspects in reading (Tarigan, 2022).

Table 1. Low-Level (Mechanical) and High-Level (Comprehension) Skills

Skill Aspect	Main Focus (Indicators)	Appropriate Activities
1. Mechanical	1. Recognition of letter shapes. 2. Mastery of linguistic elements (phonemes, words, phrases, clauses). 3. Relationship between spelling and sound patterns. 4. Reading speed at a slow rate (precision).	Reading Aloud & Vocalized Reading (Focus on pronunciation and accuracy).
2. Comprehension	1. Understanding meaning (lexical, grammatical, rhetorical). 2. Capturing significance or core message. 3. Evaluation and critical assessment of text content. 4. Flexible reading speed (according to need).	Silent Reading (Focus on cognition and meaning interpretation).

As a strategic step to bridge this gap, the Guided Reading method was chosen as a rational solution. Etymologically derived from terms meaning to drive, guide, and control (Echols and Shadily, 2003), guided reading is an educational approach designed to help students apply independent reading strategies through instructions in the form of questions that must be answered based on the reading content (Abidin, 2022; Ainun Harahap et al., 2022). In this method, the teacher acts as an observer and facilitator to help students understand the text's meaning and keep them focused (Hairuddin in Ainun Harahap et al., 2022), while utilizing patterned guidance



to maximize information delivery (Hisyam in Ainun Harahap et al., 2022).

Through Guided Reading, the teacher can break the class into small groups based on ability levels (ability grouping) and provide intensive guidance using texts adapted to the students' reading levels. This approach allows for gradual assistance (scaffolding) and necessary repetition to strengthen the students' short-term memory. The reading fluency formed through this method—which is the integration of accuracy, speed, and prosody (Hudson, Lane, and Pullen, 2005)—will reduce the students' cognitive load, enabling them to focus on automatic word decoding, which will directly impact their ease in constructing sentences independently and systematically.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study constitutes Classroom Action Research (CAR) adapting Kurt Lewin's collaborative model, executed in four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting within two repetitive cycles (Margono, 2014). Conducted from February to June 2026 at SMP Negeri 3 Malinau Kota, the research purposely focused on a single seventh-grade student specifically identified as a slow learner. The selection of this single subject was based on initial screening and teacher interviews confirming the student's limitations in short-term memory capacity, slow information processing speed, and severe visual disorientation distinguishing twin letters (b-d, p-q). Therefore, the success indicators were exclusively measured based on this individual's developmental improvement rather than the general class average.

The action scenario implemented a modified Guided Reading method tailored to mitigate the slow learner's short-term memory constraints through three main phases. The pre-reading phase utilized a large-scale "Story Calendar" (Kalender Cerita) media for visual exploration (Picture Walk) and early vocabulary priming to reduce cognitive load. During the reading phase, the intervention emphasized whisper reading and finger navigation to prevent word omission, accompanied by direct, on-the-spot teacher scaffolding whenever decoding barriers occurred. Finally, the post-reading phase involved linguistic consolidation, where the subject engaged in tiered writing tasks (differentiated instruction) ranging from copying to constructing structured sentences based on the text.

Data were collected simultaneously with the intervention using observations and performance tests (Sugiyono, 2019). Participatory observation, assisted by a peer collaborator, recorded the implementation of the guided reading syntax by the teacher and the behavioral responses, affective changes, and motoric focus of the slow learner student. Meanwhile,



performance tests were administered at the end of each cycle to objectively measure the subject's reading fluency—specifically accuracy, speed, and prosody—and the mechanical precision of their writing, including spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Data analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative descriptive techniques. Qualitative data from field notes and observation checklists were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles and Huberman, 2014) to evaluate process success, requiring at least 80% teacher implementation and 75% active student participation. Quantitative data from reading and writing tests were processed using the average score and mastery percentage formula (Sudjana, 2016). The action would be deemed successful and terminated if the subject achieved targeted individual improvements, namely reading without spelling letter-by-letter, less than 10% pronunciation error, and the proper application of writing mechanics.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Pre-Cycle

The research subject in this thesis is a seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 3 Malinau Kota identified as having slow learner barriers in the Indonesian Language subject. The subject's initial learning behavior characteristics demonstrated extremely low attention toward conventional reading texts presented monotonously, either on the whiteboard or in textbooks. When faced with long texts, the subject quickly lost focus, exhibited restless gestures, and frequently redirected attention outside the classroom window. This internal cognitive barrier was worsened by visual disorientation; the subject frequently experienced acute confusion in distinguishing twin consonants with similar spatial orientations, specifically the letters 'b' with 'd' and 'p' with 'q'. This inability to differentiate letter curve directions resulted in academic frustration that directly impacted their reluctance to participate in independent reading activities, causing the subject to tend to withdraw and remain passive during class hours.

Based on the quantitative data processing from the performance test in the pre-cycle stage, the baseline position of the subject's initial ability was at an extremely low level. The total learning outcome score collected by the subject was only 5 out of a maximum score of 16. When converted using the quantitative assessment formula, the actual final conversion percentage obtained by the subject was 31.25%.



Table 2. Quantitative Recapitulation Data of Pre-Cycle (Initial Condition)

Indicator	Score	Field Condition Description
Reading Fluency Skill	1	The student spelled letter by letter (not yet by syllable)
Writing Neatness Skill	2	Letter sizes were inconsistent, lacking neatness
Structure & Punctuation (Writing Mechanics)	1	Wrote words randomly without capital letters & periods
Reading Text Content Comprehension	1	Did not understand the reading content at all
Total Learning Outcome Score	5	-
Mastery Percentage	31.25%	Target Not Achieved

Cycle I Implementation

The action implementation in Cycle I began with the Picture Walk technique, inviting the subject to explore illustrations on the "Story Calendar" (Kalender Cerita) to build contextual predictions regarding the story's plot before reading the text. Next, the Whisper Reading technique combined with finger navigation was applied to train the subject's reading independence. The subject began to show positive behavioral developments on most activity indicators, starting to direct visual attention to the teacher's oral modeling and showing courage to spell difficult words thanks to scaffolding stimulation in the form of supportive sound prompts.

However, the subject still could not control fine motor coordination to maintain writing neatness, still displayed unconfident gestures, and frequently hesitated until their voice shrank when asked to read aloud alone. At the final evaluation stage of Cycle I, the subject scored 9 out of a maximum of 16, equivalent to a mastery percentage of 56.25%.

Table 3. Quantitative Recapitulation Data of Cycle I (First Action Implementation)

Indicator	Score	Progress Description After Intervention
Reading Fluency Skill	2	Read by spelling most words, occasionally pausing
Writing Neatness Skill	2	Letter sizes remained inconsistent, random spacing



Structure & Punctuation (Writing Mechanics)	2	Sentences were incomplete, did not use punctuation
Reading Text Content Comprehension	3	Capable of answering most formative worksheet questions
Total Learning Outcome Score	9	-
Mastery Percentage	56.25%	Target Not Achieved

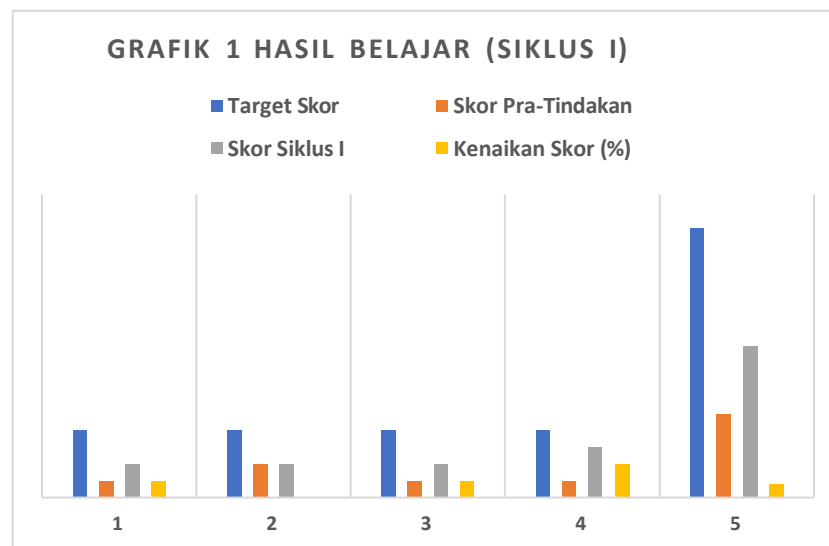


Figure 1. Comparison of Learning Outcomes (Pre-Cycle and Cycle I)

Cycle II Implementation

The corrective action in Cycle II was executed by increasing the complexity of the differentiated writing material from Level 1 (copying) to Level 2, which involved arranging randomized word fragments into a complete and logical sentence. The portion of individual intervention and personal approach from the researcher was intensified closely at the subject's desk.

The intensive activity of the teacher in overseeing the classical reading task execution is documented factually. Meanwhile, the provision of personal intervention (scaffolding) through deep, one-on-one individual guidance at the desk is recorded tangibly.

The subject demonstrated a massive, stable, and comprehensive leap in process activity

progress inside the classroom. The subject showed highly stable visual and auditory attention focus from the beginning to the end of the lesson, appeared very enthusiastic during independent reading activities, and bravely attempted to spell high-difficulty words independently without displaying any anxiety or fear of making mistakes as seen in the early cycles. In the final performance evaluation, the subject's total score reached 15 out of a maximum of 16, which converts to an actual final percentage of 93.75%.

Table 3. Cycle II Learning Outcomes

Assessment Indicator	Target Score	Pre-Action Score	Cycle I Score	Cycle II Score	Increase (Pre to C1)	Increase (C1 to C2)
Reading Fluency	4	1	2	4	100%	100%
Writing Neatness	4	2	2	3	0%	50%
Structure & Punctuation	4	1	2	4	100%	100%
Text Comprehension	4	1	3	4	200%	33.3%
Total	16	5	9	15	80%	66.7%

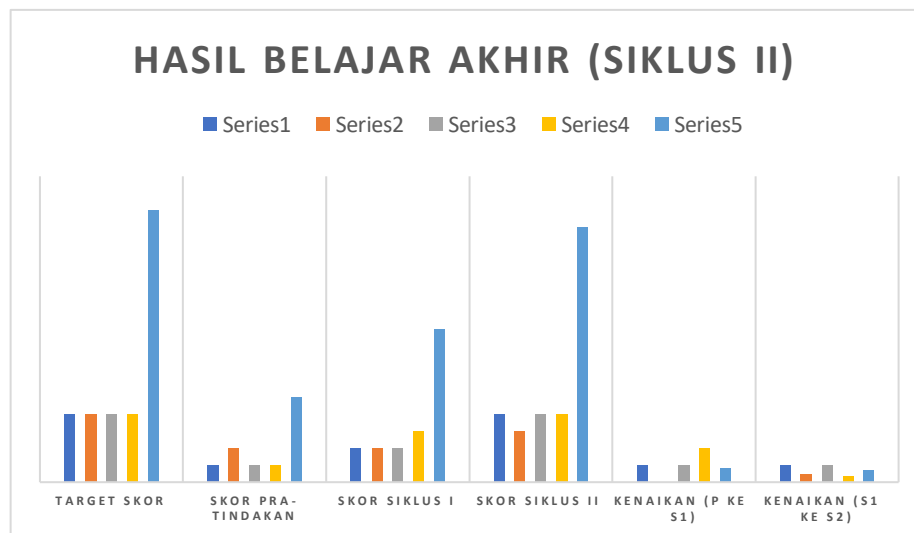


Figure 2. Comparison of Final Learning Outcomes (Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II)

DISCUSSION

Enhancement of Fluent Reading Skills Through the Guided Reading Method

The successful enhancement of the subject's fluent reading skills, which skyrocketed from an initial baseline score of 31.25% in the pre-cycle to drastically reach 93.75% at the end of Cycle II, provides concrete confirmation and empirically proves the efficacy of the modified Guided Reading method for slow learner students. The pre-reading stage applying the Picture Walk technique played a highly crucial role, acting as a strong cognitive bridge for the subject's thinking structure. Children with slow learner characteristics generally have limitations in processing abstract symbols in the form of letter sequences. By dissecting, discussing, and conceptualizing the visual illustrations on the "Story Calendar" media first, the subject obtained a contextual schema or meaning umbrella that helped predict the text's plot more easily before reading began. This aligns with findings emphasizing that the use of contextual visual media significantly improves reading comprehension in students with learning barriers (Wulandari & Budiman, 2022).

During the core reading stage, the combination of the Whisper Reading technique and the use of a finger-pointing tool proved significant in locking the subject's visual attention focus to prevent distraction. The use of the finger on the paper acted as a kinesthetic navigation anchor guiding the eyes' path, effectively preventing the subject's eyes from skipping lines, reading backward, or experiencing reading direction disorientation that often triggers boredom or dizziness. The specific barrier of chronic confusion in identifying spatially similar twin letters, such as 'b'-'d' or 'p'-'q', was gradually eliminated entirely through scaffolding intervention via articulation sound prompts. These sound prompts provided instant corrective feedback precisely at the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD), minimizing excessive cognitive load so the transition from stuttering spelling to flowing read-alouds could be achieved with accurate pronunciation and appropriate intonation.

Learning Behavior Changes and Psychological Impact of the Action

The positive impact of applying this Guided Reading method did not solely touch the cognitive and psychomotor domains but successfully completely overhauled the subject's affective domain and daily classroom behavior. Based on the comparative analysis of process observation sheet data tracked from the pre-cycle to the final evaluation, it was concluded that the subject experienced a highly significant reduction in learning anxiety. The creation of an inclusive, supportive, and non-judgmental learning environment through the "Story Calendar" media intervention successfully eroded the inferiority and low self-esteem that had imprisoned



the subject's potential. The subject, originally passive, developed into an active student with high courage to spell difficult words without being haunted by the fear of failure. This elimination of psychological tension unblocked the subject's cognitive pathways, reinforcing process success indicators and transforming the subject into a focused individual with solid self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles in grade VII at SMP Negeri 3 Malinau Kota, the implementation of the modified Guided Reading method using the "Story Calendar" media is empirically proven to improve the fluent reading skills of the slow learner subject. Through the application of the Picture Walk technique, Whisper Reading, and the use of finger navigation, visual disorientation barriers, such as the chronic confusion between the letters 'b' and 'd' or 'p' and 'q', were successfully eliminated.

The subject's learning outcome achievements surged drastically and gradually from an initial baseline score of 31.25% in the pre-cycle, increasing to 56.25% in Cycle I, and ultimately reaching a highly satisfactory mastery level of 93.75% at the end of Cycle II. This confirms that the implementation of the Guided Reading method combined with a tiered individual guidance (scaffolding) approach is empirically proven to be effective in alleviating cognitive, fine motor, and psychological barriers in slow learner students within an inclusive classroom.

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