

Dynamics Of Psychological Factors In Elementary School Students' Learning Difficulties

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of psychological factors underlying elementary school students' learning difficulties and to identify the types of difficulties experienced and teachers' efforts to address them. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences in the learning process. Participants consisted of students experiencing learning difficulties and classroom teachers involved in the learning process. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that students' learning difficulties are not only related to academic ability but are also influenced by psychological dynamics including low learning motivation, lack of interest in learning, difficulty maintaining concentration, low self-confidence, and anxiety when facing assignments and evaluations. These conditions appear to be interrelated and can affect student engagement and responses during learning. These findings suggest that understanding learning difficulties requires considering students' psychological aspects comprehensively. Teachers need to implement supportive learning approaches, provide positive reinforcement, and create a safe and responsive learning environment to students' needs. Future research can expand the study to a more diverse school context and student characteristics.

Keywords: Psychological Factors, Learning Difficulties, Elementary School Students, Learning, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties in elementary school students are an educational phenomenon that cannot be understood solely in terms of low academic achievement. Students' learning

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IJETER, Volume 04 Issue 04, 2026



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processes are influenced by the interaction between cognitive abilities, emotional states, motivation, self-beliefs, and the learning environment. Globally, attention to the psychological aspects of students is increasing, as mental health and well-being are seen as crucial for educational success. The OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills shows that social and emotional skills are related to various aspects of students' lives, including learning experiences, social relationships, and well-being (OECD, 2024). Therefore, learning difficulties need to be viewed as a phenomenon with a psychological dimension, not simply as a matter of mastery of subject matter.

In the context of basic education in Indonesia, these issues are crucial because students have diverse developmental characteristics, family backgrounds, learning experiences, and psychological needs. Learning difficulties can be manifested through various behaviors, such as poor concentration, low engagement in learning, reluctance to ask questions, lack of confidence when answering questions, giving up easily when faced with assignments, or showing a lack of enthusiasm for learning activities. These psychological conditions can be further complicated when students face academic demands and learning evaluations. A UNICEF report indicates that the mental health of children and adolescents is a critical issue that requires attention in educational settings, particularly because educational experiences can interact with students' psychological well-being (UNICEF, 2021). Therefore, identifying learning difficulties requires attention to students' subjective experiences and the psychological conditions that accompany their learning behaviors.

One relevant perspective for understanding this phenomenon is self-determination theory, which explains that learning motivation is related to the fulfillment of basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. When these needs are met, students are more likely to demonstrate positive motivation and engagement in learning (Ryan & Deci, 2021). Conversely, learning experiences that do not support students' psychological needs can be associated with low motivation and engagement. In addition to motivation, self-efficacy is also an important aspect because students' beliefs in their abilities can influence their choice of activities, effort, persistence, and responses when faced with difficulties (Honick & Broadbent, 2022). This perspective suggests that students experiencing learning difficulties need to be understood through the psychological processes that occur when they face learning demands, not solely through test scores or academic grades.

Psychological problems in learning are not always immediately apparent, so they can be overlooked in educational practice. Students who are passive, less engaged, or avoid tasks can exhibit a variety of psychological experiences, ranging from a lack of interest and motivation to





low self-confidence or anxiety about failure. Research on student engagement indicates that student engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement (Fredricks et al., 2021). This suggests that student behavior during learning needs to be understood based on the context and experiences that underlie it. A qualitative approach is relevant because it allows researchers to directly explore how students interpret learning difficulties, how they perceive them, and how they respond to support from teachers, peers, and the learning environment.

Although extensive research has been conducted on student motivation, self-efficacy, engagement, and well-being, there is still room for further research, particularly in understanding the dynamics of various psychological factors in an integrated manner in elementary school students' experiences of learning difficulties. Previous studies often positioned specific psychological factors as stand-alone variables and linked them to learning outcomes or student engagement. This approach provides important information about the relationships between constructs, but it does not fully explain how students experience, interpret, and respond to learning difficulties in the context of everyday learning. Psychological factors can, in fact, interact with each other; for example, experiences of failure can impact self-confidence, low self-confidence can reduce the courage to participate, and these experiences can subsequently influence learning motivation. Therefore, qualitative research is needed that places students' experiences and perspectives as the primary source for understanding this process contextually.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of psychological factors in elementary school students' learning difficulties. The focus of the study is directed at students' experiences in facing learning difficulties and the accompanying psychological factors, including motivation, interest, concentration, self-confidence, and emotional state. Through a qualitative approach, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how these psychological factors emerge, are interrelated, and shape students' experiences in the learning process. Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching perspectives on learning difficulties as a multidimensional phenomenon involving academic and psychological aspects. Practically, the research results can be used as considerations for teachers and schools in recognizing students' psychological needs and developing learning environments that are more supportive, inclusive, and responsive to students' learning difficulties.





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of psychological factors related to learning difficulties in elementary school students in a natural learning context. Case studies were chosen because the research was not directed at measuring relationships between variables statistically, but rather to comprehensively explore the experiences, conditions, and interactions underlying students' learning difficulties as they occur in the school environment (Rashid et al., 2021). The study was conducted at SDIT Alhusnayain Panyabungan in August 2026. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that informants had experience and information relevant to the research focus. Primary informants consisted of elementary school students who showed indications of learning difficulties based on teacher information and learning observations, while supporting informants consisted of class teachers and, if necessary, parents of students. Student criteria included: (1) experiencing obstacles or difficulties in participating in learning; (2) showing symptoms such as low concentration, motivation, interest, self-confidence, or academic anxiety in the learning context; and (3) willing to participate with the approval of the school and parents/guardians. The selection of informants was carried out in stages until adequate data was obtained and no new substantive information was found.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' experiences regarding learning motivation, interest in learning, concentration, self-confidence, emotional responses, and experiences when facing difficult tasks or materials. Interviews with teachers were directed at identifying student learning behaviors, classroom interaction patterns, learning strategies, and psychological factors evident during the learning process. Direct observations were conducted of learning activities to obtain data on student engagement, attention, responses to instructions, interactions with teachers and peers, and behavior when completing assignments. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of learning outcome notes, teacher notes, learning tools, and school documents relevant to the research focus. Data collection was carried out repeatedly and flexibly according to the development of field findings. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and method triangulation, namely comparing information from students and teachers and matching interview results with observations and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by reconfirming the researcher's summary of information or interpretation with relevant informants to ensure appropriateness of meaning. The research process is also documented through an audit trail, in





the form of records of the collection process, coding, category changes, and analytical decision-making so that the research process can be traced systematically (Campbell et al., 2021; Korstjens & Moser, 2021).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, conducted systematically from the beginning of the data collection process. The analysis phase included familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, initial coding of relevant statements or behaviors, grouping codes into categories, examining relationships between categories, generating themes, and reviewing and naming themes that represented key data patterns. The themes developed focused on the dynamics of psychological factors such as learning motivation, interest, concentration, self-confidence, emotional state, and student responses to learning demands, while remaining open to the possibility of new themes emerging from the field data. The analysis was conducted iteratively, comparing data between informants and between methods to ensure interpretations were not based solely on a single source of information. The results of the analysis were then presented in descriptive-interpretive form, supplemented by proportional quotations from informants to strengthen the findings. The thematic analysis approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to systematically identify patterns of meaning from participants' experiences while maintaining the context of the phenomenon being studied (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data indicate that elementary school students' learning difficulties are not only related to mastery of learning materials, but are also influenced by the dynamics of psychological factors that arise during the learning process. Data analysis produced several main themes, namely (1) fluctuating motivation and interest in learning, (2) easily distracted concentration, (3) self-confidence in participating in learning, and (4) students' emotional conditions when facing academic demands. These four themes do not stand alone, but are interrelated and emerge in the context of student interactions with teachers, peers, learning characteristics, and the learning environment at school. Observation results show that students who experience difficulties understanding the material tend to take longer to complete assignments, ask for help more often, or choose to wait for teacher direction before continuing their work. Documentation findings in the form of teacher notes and student work results also show differences in the level of engagement and task completion between students.

The first theme is fluctuations in motivation and interest in learning. Interview data





shows that student interest in learning is influenced by the type of activity, the teacher's delivery of the material, and the difficulty level of the assignments. Students tend to show higher engagement when learning uses concrete, visual activities, or involves interaction with peers. Conversely, when learning is monotonous or the material is perceived as difficult, some students show a decrease in attention and desire to complete assignments. One student, for example, said, "If learning involves pictures or practice, I prefer it, but if it's just reading, I get bored quickly." (Marwah, interview, [August 3, 2026]) This statement is supported by observations that show students are more active in responding when teachers use learning media and activities that directly involve students. The teacher also stated that "children are usually more enthusiastic when learning activities are varied, but if there is a lot of assignments, some start to not want to do them" (Ummi Kalsum, interview, [August 3, 2026]). This pattern shows that motivation and interest in learning are dynamic and can change according to students' learning experiences.

The second theme relates to concentration and attention during the learning process. Observations indicate that some students experience difficulty maintaining attention for relatively long periods of time, particularly when learning requires reading, listening to explanations, or working independently on assignments for a specific duration. Symptoms include shifting attention to peers, talking outside the context of the lesson, looking at surrounding activities, or stopping work before completion. However, these conditions do not occur consistently in the same students. During activities involving demonstrations, discussions, practice, or the use of media, students' attention tends to improve. Interview findings also indicate that students recognize difficulties maintaining attention when the material is perceived as difficult. One student stated, "Sometimes I want to pay attention, but if I don't understand, I get confused and look at my friends." (Salsabila, interview, [August 10, 2026]). From the teacher's perspective, this condition is seen when students experience difficulties understanding instructions or material, requiring repetition of explanations. Thus, concentration difficulties in this study are not solely understood as students' inability to pay attention, but are also related to their experience of understanding the material and meeting learning demands.

The third theme is self-confidence in participating in learning. The results of the study indicate a relationship between the experience of experiencing learning difficulties and students' courage to participate. Students who feel they do not yet understand the material tend to be more cautious when asked to answer questions, read their work, or express their opinions in front of the class. Some students choose to remain silent even though they actually have the answer, especially when they are worried about getting it wrong. One student said, "I actually





know a little, but I'm afraid of making a mistake if I answer in front of my friends." (Nadia Safira, interview, [August 10, 2026]). Observations show that students become more active when the teacher provides opportunities to answer gradually, provides reinforcement, and creates a classroom atmosphere that does not embarrass students when answers are not correct. The teacher also explains that some students need encouragement before they are willing to share their answers. These findings demonstrate that self-confidence is an important part of the dynamics of learning difficulties because students not only face obstacles in understanding the material but also consider social responses when demonstrating their academic abilities.

The fourth theme is students' emotional state when facing academic demands. Research data shows that difficulty understanding material or completing assignments can be followed by emotional responses such as confusion, disappointment, reluctance to continue, or asking for help. These emotional states are particularly evident when students are faced with assignments they perceive as difficult or when the results of their work do not meet expectations. In some situations, students re-engage after receiving help and reinforcement from their teachers. One student stated, "If the assignment is difficult, I sometimes don't know where to start." (Aliyra, interview, [August 10, 2026]). Observations indicate that teacher support through re-explanations, guiding questions, and individual guidance can help students re-engage in learning activities. Teacher notes also indicate that some students require more intensive guidance on certain materials than others.

Overall, the research findings demonstrate that student learning difficulties are a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. Motivation, interest, concentration, self-confidence, and emotional states interact with each other in the student's learning experience. Students who experience difficulty understanding material do not necessarily exhibit difficulties across all psychological aspects; these conditions can vary based on the characteristics of the material, learning methods, assignment formats, teacher support, and peer interactions. A school environment that provides opportunities for students to ask questions, try, seek help, and accept mistakes as part of the learning process appears to be an important context in shaping students' responses to academic difficulties. Thus, the research findings point to the understanding that identifying learning difficulties requires considering not only students' academic achievement but also the psychological experiences and interactional contexts that accompany the learning process.

CONCLUSION





This study shows that elementary school students' learning difficulties are a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon, not only related to their ability to understand the material but also influenced by students' psychological factors. The results identified four main themes: fluctuations in motivation and interest in learning, difficulty maintaining concentration, self-confidence in participating in learning, and emotional states when facing academic demands. These four aspects are interrelated and can change according to the characteristics of the material, the form of learning activities, the difficulty level of tasks, interactions with peers, and support provided by teachers. These findings reinforce the understanding that learning difficulties need to be viewed holistically by considering students' psychological experiences and the accompanying learning context.

Theoretically, this study contributes by demonstrating that understanding learning difficulties in elementary schools requires integrating academic and psychological dimensions simultaneously. Practically, the research findings imply the importance of teachers identifying changes in students' motivation, concentration, self-confidence, and emotional state as part of efforts to provide appropriate learning support. Interactive learning environments, providing opportunities for students to ask questions and try, and providing support when experiencing difficulties can be part of a pedagogical response to these conditions. At the school level, the research findings can be considered in developing support services and learning strategies that are more responsive to students' psychological needs.

Future research is recommended to broaden the context of the study by involving more schools, diverse student characteristics, and the perspectives of parents and other educators. Longitudinal research can also be conducted to understand changes in students' psychological factors over time. Furthermore, future research could more deeply examine learning intervention strategies or psychopedagogical support that can help students overcome learning difficulties. Thus, understanding learning difficulties goes beyond problem identification and can evolve toward developing learning practices that are more adaptive to students' academic and psychological needs.

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