

EFFORT TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING MATH THROUGH INDIVIDUAL GUIDANCE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses a case study of a fifth grade student identified by the initial A and an in depth literature review regarding the suspected causes of learning difficulties and possible solutions through individual guidance. The data were obtained through classroom observations and interviews with the homeroom teacher. The findings indicate that A experiences difficulties in following multiplication and division lessons, is easily distracted by surrounding activities, sometimes fails to complete assignments, and requires considerable time to answer mathematics questions. According to the teacher, A can follow several other subjects more effectively, suggesting that the reported difficulties are more apparent in mathematics learning. The literature review suggests that these difficulties may be associated with inconsistent attention and engagement during learning activities, as well as a possible lack of mastery of multiplication and division concepts. These factors may influence A's ability to understand mathematical material, complete assignments, and respond to questions confidently and efficiently. Based on the identified problems, individual guidance using concrete learning media and gradual exercises is proposed as a relevant approach to support A's learning process. Concrete media can help make abstract mathematical concepts easier to understand, while gradual exercises can provide opportunities for repeated practice and improved mastery of basic operations. In addition, collaboration between teachers and school counseling staff may support the implementation of short structured exercises, concrete learning materials, positive feedback, and regular progress monitoring. These strategies are proposed as supporting actions rather than confirmed interventions. This article integrates classroom observation findings, the teacher's perspective, and individual guidance plans within a case description while clearly distinguishing existing evidence from proposed educational actions. The discussion is expected to provide useful insights for addressing mathematics learning difficulties among elementary school students.

Keywords: difficulties in arithmetic; elementary school; multiplication; division; individual guidance

1. INTRODUCTION

Counting skills are an important foundation for learning and everyday life. Multiplication and division form the basis for future math topics, so students need to understand the concepts and how to use them in real-life situations. Asriyanti and Purwati (2020) state that learning difficulties in math are also often found in elementary schools, while Putra (2015) explains that learning difficulties are conditions that hinder students from effectively participating in learning activities. Every student has different learning speeds and needs; some require visual examples, concrete objects, step-by-step practice, or guidance. Therefore, teachers need to pay attention to learning behavior, the types of tasks that are difficult, and the learning conditions that come with them.

This article talks about a fifth-grade student, referred to as A, at an elementary school in Palembang. According to the homeroom teacher, A has trouble focusing during math lessons, sometimes doesn't turn in assignments, and struggles with multiplication and division. Observations noted that A plays with small objects while the teacher is explaining and takes a long time to answer questions. The teacher mentioned that A can do better in some other subjects. These findings can't be considered as proof of a specific disorder or a sign that the student is lazy. The behavior observed suggests that A might need extra learning support and closer monitoring.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties are obstacles in receiving, understanding, processing, or applying information, making it harder to achieve learning goals. Hidayah et al (2025) explains that this condition requires efforts to overcome the barriers that arise. Learning difficulties don't always mean a student has low ability, because every child has different characteristics, learning speeds, and needs. According to Asriyanti and Purwati (2020) learning difficulties can be influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include understanding basic material, concentration, motivation, and information processing skills. External factors can involve teaching methods and media, classroom environment, family support, and the learning environment. These factors can be interconnected, so the cause of learning difficulties can't be determined from just one symptom. Fatmasari and Bahrodin (2022) also link learning difficulties to skills like listening, reading, writing, having dialogues, and reasoning. In elementary school, learning difficulties can show up when students read, write, do math, follow instructions, remember information, or complete tasks. Fatmasari and Bahrodin (2022) explain that these difficulties can affect learning outcomes. Students might need more time, make mistakes, or require repeated explanations.

2.2 Arithmetic Instruction

Learning arithmetic helps students understand numbers and operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. This skill isn't just about getting the right answer, but also about understanding the process and concepts. In daily life, arithmetic is used to count things, figure out prices, group items, and divide things evenly (Sihombing, Syahril, & Manurung, 2023). Multiplication is related to repeated addition or grouping items in equal amounts, while division is about splitting a total into equal groups or parts. Students who haven't grasped the basic concepts might struggle with choosing the right operation and steps to solve problems. Sihombing et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of understanding multiplication and division. Struggling with questions or making calculation mistakes needs closer examination; it's not enough to immediately conclude dyscalculia (Iftayani & Ratnaningsih, 2018). Therefore, the basic concepts need to be mastered before students work on more complex problems. Difficulties in calculation can be related to concentration, understanding of prerequisite material, motivation, as well as methods, media, and study support. Jayanti et al. (2021) discuss students' views of mathematics as a difficult subject, while Nuryati et al. (2023), as referenced in the discussion, talk about motivation, teaching quality, and the learning environment. Teachers need to consider various factors and not immediately label students as lazy or incapable.

2.3 Alternative Solutions

Handling difficulties in arithmetic needs to be adjusted to the student's needs and not just rely on repeating problems. Syah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of recognizing factors related to learning difficulties, while Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025) discuss innovative methods, contextual learning, interactive media, and remedial strategies. Alternative solutions that can be considered include:

1. Using Concrete and Interactive Learning Media

Concrete media like popsicle sticks, buttons, bottle caps, straws, or number cards can help students understand arithmetic operations. For multiplication 4×3 , for example, students make four groups with three objects in each group. This approach helps students grasp the meaning of multiplication, not just memorize the answer. Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025) explain that physical teaching aids and interactive media can make the learning experience more concrete. Teachers can start with real objects, move on to pictures, and then math symbols so that understanding develops step by step.

2. Applying Contextual Learning Related to Daily Life

Contextual learning connects math with everyday activities, like counting stationery, prices of items, or sharing objects. For example, students divide 24 pencils evenly among 6 people to understand the concept of division. According to Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025), contexts that are close to students' lives help link math concepts to real-life situations. This way, students can understand why a certain operation is used and practice choosing the right operation in word problems.

3. Applying Interesting and Varied Learning Methods

Teachers can use educational games, quizzes, multiplication cards, discussions, or simple problems so that students actively try and explain how they got the answers. Syah et al. (2025) emphasize using engaging strategies and media, while Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025) remind us that learning that only focuses on memorization doesn't really help with deep understanding. Learning activities should give students the chance to try, discuss, and explain their thinking.

4. Providing Remedial Teaching and Practice According to Students' Abilities

Remedial teaching helps students relearn material they haven't mastered through simple explanations, different media, and practice suited to their level of difficulty. Students who haven't understood multiplication can start with repeated addition; students who struggle with division can practice dividing objects evenly. Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025) suggest reteaching, extra practice, and continuous evaluation. Syah et al. (2025) also emphasize adjusting exercises to fit students' abilities. So, the form of remedial teaching should be determined based on assessment results, not just giving the same assignments over and over.

5. Identifying Difficulties and Providing Individual Guidance

Teachers need to identify difficulties through observation, talking with students, checking their work, and simple diagnostic exercises. This step helps to figure out whether the hurdle is in understanding concepts, multiplication facts, calculation procedures, word problems, or choosing the right operation. Syah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of structured identification, while Nurhaswinda and Parisu (2025) suggest guidance tailored to individual needs. Similar mistakes can have different causes, so the results of identification become the basis for choosing the right kind of support.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a case study and literature study using a descriptive method. The study aims to describe the difficulties in learning math experienced by a student identified as A in the fifth grade of elementary school, specifically on multiplication and division topics, the suspected causes, and

possible solutions that can be provided through tutoring services. Data was collected through interviews with the class teacher and observations of the student's learning behavior during the learning process. Interviews were conducted to get information about the types of difficulties students face in math, their learning behavior in class, the factors suspected to influence these difficulties, and the efforts teachers have made to help students. Meanwhile, observations were done to directly see students' concentration, engagement, and abilities during math lessons, especially when working on multiplication and division problems.

From the results of interviews and observation findings, follow-up was carried out in the form of a literature study. The researcher conducted a literature study by reviewing relevant scientific sources regarding learning difficulties in arithmetic for the student with the initials A. The literature study was conducted to determine the suspected causes and possible handling alternatives that could be given. The proposed handling alternatives are presented in the form of an intervention plan, which is prioritized to be implemented at school.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Observation Results

Observation of A shows that the student's attention is easily distracted when the teacher is explaining math. A plays with small objects, like keychains, pens, and toys, and has not finished the math assignments given earlier. When asked to work on a problem on the board, A takes quite a long time and the answer isn't correct. These findings indicate difficulties in following lessons and solving arithmetic problems, but it doesn't pinpoint exactly which multiplication or division concepts haven't been mastered yet. The main finding from the observation is the difficulty in solving problems and inconsistent attention during math. This supports the need for a more focused check of counting skills and guidance according to needs. Gradual practice, concrete materials, and individual guidance are alternatives that can be tried, not interventions that have been proven to work.

4.2 Interview Results

According to the fifth-grade homeroom teacher, A has difficulties with multiplication and division and needs more time to complete problems. During math class, A sometimes doesn't pay attention to explanations and plays with objects around them. The teacher also mentioned that A has skipped finishing assignments a few times. A rarely asks questions when they don't understand the material, and when asked to solve problems in front of the class, A takes quite a while and struggles to find the correct answers.

According to the homeroom teacher, A can do better in several other subjects, like Science, Indonesian, and English. The difficulties seem to be more noticeable in math, especially multiplication and division. Interviews suggest that A needs study support, but the main cause of the difficulties hasn't been confirmed yet. Further observation and checking of A's calculation skills are needed to find out which material hasn't been mastered.

5. DISCUSSION

Observations and interviews show that A has trouble with multiplication and division. The signs include taking a long time to complete tasks, incorrect answers, being easily distracted, and not finishing some assignments. According to the homeroom teacher, A is better at other subjects, so the difficulties seem more noticeable in math. The suspected factors related to A's difficulties are an incomplete grasp of concepts and basic calculation skills, as well as inconsistent attention during lessons. The first suspicion is based on incorrect answers and the long time it takes to complete tasks; the second is supported by inattentive behavior and unfinished assignments. Sihombing et al. (2023) link multiplication and division difficulties to understanding concepts, counting skills, concentration, and motivation. Novianto et al. (2024) also talk about internal and external factors in math difficulties. However, the main cause for A can't be determined without further examination.

The problems that can be identified based on the data are A's attention and engagement in learning math, which are still inconsistent, along with difficulties in completing questions and assignments. Mastery of multiplication and division concepts still needs to be checked through work results and simple problems. Possible ways to handle this include step-by-step practice, concrete materials, contextual learning, games or varied methods, remedial sessions, motivation and positive feedback, as well as cooperation with parents. Valentina and Wulandari (2022) explain that innovative media can help calculation skills, while Syah et al. (2025) suggest interesting media, motivation, readiness checks, and practice according to ability. Individual guidance using concrete materials and step-by-step practice was chosen as the main solution. The teacher can use popsicle sticks or bottle caps to form multiplication groups and divide objects evenly, then connect these activities with pictures and math symbols. Practice starts with simple problems, adjusted to A's ability, and is accompanied by brief explanations and positive feedback.

Evaluation needs to compare practice results before and after mentoring, including answer accuracy, completion time, ability to explain steps, task completion, and attention during learning. If progress isn't enough, the mentoring should be adjusted. This individual guidance is still just a treatment plan; its success can only be assessed after it's carried out and evaluated.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the observations and interviews with the grade V homeroom teacher, it can be concluded that student A has difficulty learning math, especially multiplication and division. This is evident from the long time it takes to finish problems, incorrect answers, lack of focus during lessons, and some assignments not being completed. A's difficulties are more noticeable in math compared to some other subjects. The suspected causes are related to inconsistent attention and engagement in learning, as well as possibly not fully mastering the concepts of multiplication and division. However, mastery of these concepts still needs to be checked further to identify which material has not been mastered. Possible solutions include gradual counting practice, using concrete media like popsicle sticks or bottle caps, contextual learning, giving motivation and positive feedback, remedial teaching, and individual guidance.

Among these alternatives, one-on-one guidance using concrete materials and gradual exercises was chosen as the main solution because it allows the teacher to adjust exercises to the student's abilities, provide direct attention, and monitor their understanding progress. Additionally, study guidance through collaboration between the classroom teacher and the school counselor can help build structured study habits, increase responsibility in completing tasks, and foster a positive attitude towards math. All these efforts need to be evaluated regularly to match the students' needs and development. Below is a schedule table for multiplication and division learning intervention for Student A.

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