

# Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching Literacy and Numeracy for Slow Learners

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## Abstract

The current study explored pedagogical strategies carried out by teachers to support special need children in improving their level of literacy and numeracy. The current study utilized qualitative research design where classroom observations were carried out to explore teaching activities used by teachers in teaching language and mathematics. It was then followed by a focus group discussion to identify problems faced by children in numeracy and literacy. This research was carried out in one of the elementary schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Data collected was analyzed manually by focusing on the main aspects. Results demonstrated that 27 activities were frequently used by teachers in teaching language and mathematics. Those activities are the common teaching practice for slow learners. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of those practices, a focus group discussion with a group of students was carried out. Results revealed that most students have problems in literacy (spelling, reading complex words, and write long words) and numeracy (counting, subtraction, multiplication and divide). As the common teaching practice was found to have minimal effect on children's literacy and numeracy, the current study suggests rethinking of a new pedagogical approach for improving literacy and numeracy for slow learners.

**Keywords:** pedagogical strategy, slow learners, literacy, numeracy, teachers, special need children

## 1. Introduction

Improving literacy and numeracy is the main priority and becomes the national strategy in most of the countries in the world (Quinn, 2011). Many countries introduce various educational plans and pedagogical practices to improve literacy and numeracy. For instance, the Irish Department of Education and Skills has introduced and funded where the set targets to be met by 2020 are really high. In Poland, OECD (2015b) has reported that "Literacy and numeracy skills of 16-65 year olds in Poland are below the average of countries participating in the Survey of Adult Skills, while 16-24 year-olds score above the average in literacy and around the average in numeracy (p.4)". In Indonesia, improving numeracy and literacy rates among people are also the main educational priority (OECD 2015a) has also listed several strategies for improving numeracy and literacy for children in Indonesia. In the late 1990s, most countries realized that improving literacy and numeracy among children has a strong connection with children ability. Since then, the spectrum of research on literacy and numeracy has been expanded into education for special needs. The terms such as learning disabilities and learning difficulties are frequently used in public when discussing numeracy and literacy. In educational context, the majority of scholars believe that pedagogical strategy for special education requires specific approaches and techniques. This is due to learners' diversity in terms of their cognitive levels, emotional development stages and various stages of mental practices. One of the pedagogical strategies used in teaching and learning for children with special needs is a mediation technique. Mediation techniques refer to strategies that integrate all the elements of reading, listening, playing, acting and role playing. Past research also suggest the importance of using modern technological tools to support learning for children with special needs. Although those suggested strategies are found to be useful, teachers have their preferences to carry out activities that are suited with the children need and school environment. This implies that teachers play a great in teaching school pupils.

### 1.1 Problems

There are few terminologies used in past studies while discussing learning strategies among slow learners such as learning disabilities, learning disorders, intellectual disabilities and learning difficulties. In clinical psychology,

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