

Learning Interventions to Improve Academic Ability in Slow Learners: Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Slow learning is a condition in which students have a below-average learning rate, necessitating a specialized approach to the learning process. This study aims to review various learning interventions used to enhance the academic abilities of students with learning difficulties. The method used was a systematic literature review of 12 relevant articles to explore how various forms of learning interventions enhance the academic abilities of slow learners. The study results indicate that the most effective interventions include mentoring with a special guidance teacher, constructivist learning models, practice methods, repeated reading techniques and cloze procedures, and token economy strategies. These interventions can significantly enhance numeracy skills, early literacy, learning motivation, and social interaction in slow learners. However, several studies also highlight the lack of teacher training and the use of individualized education programs as ongoing challenges. The success of interventions depends heavily on the involvement of teachers, parents, and a supportive school environment. Therefore, integrated and adaptive learning strategies are essential to optimally support the development of slow learners' academic abilities.

Keywords : Intervention, Academic Ability, Slow Learners.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of all Indonesian citizens, as guaranteed by Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution. In practice, education must be provided fairly and inclusively, including for children with special needs. One group of children with special needs frequently found in school settings is children with mild learning disabilities, also known as slow learners. Slow learners have academic abilities that fall below average; they tend to struggle with understanding abstract concepts such as mathematics and language, and require additional time and specialized approaches to grasp course material. The responsibilities of an educator extend beyond merely delivering content; they also encompass various other critical roles, such as serving as a demonstrator, an effective classroom manager, a mediator, and a facilitator in the learning and assessment process. (Utomo & Utami, 2024). Teachers play a crucial role in determining the success of learning, especially for children with special needs. These four roles must be carried out in a balanced and harmonious manner, because they are closely linked to students' academic achievement. In a regular classroom, teachers continue to bear the primary responsibility for providing daily instruction. Teachers with extensive

educational experience have great potential to adapt their teaching strategies according to student needs (Woodcock et al., 2022).

Every child is a vital asset to their family and the nation, so they need to be supported throughout their growth and development. Education must take into account the diversity of children's characteristics, including those who require special support. Being a slow learner is one form of special need that is often overlooked. Although slow learners do not fall under the category of learning disabilities or children with special needs, they still face difficulties in keeping up with lessons, as they require more time and a different approach to understanding the material. This is particularly true in abstract subjects such as environmental science (Kumari & Kataria, 2022). Therefore, children who are slow learners still require a specialized, structured, and consistent pedagogical approach. The types of learners in the education system are highly diverse, including fast, average, and slow learners. Slow learners fall into the category of slow learners in cognitive aspects, characterized by frequently encountering obstacles due to difficulty understanding material, weak memory, a lack of basic knowledge, limited understanding of the importance of education, and difficulty concentrating and grasping abstract concepts (Putri et al., 2023). According to Korikana (2020) if teachers can uncover and nurture these students' hidden potential through appropriate learning environments, they will become more enthusiastic and confident in participating in the learning process.

However, in reality, many schools are still not fully prepared to provide inclusive educational services that are responsive to the needs of students with learning disabilities (Khan et al., 2024). Based on observations at a public elementary school in Padang, it was found that although the school has enrolled students with special needs, learning support facilities remain limited, there are no special education teachers available, and the teaching strategies implemented have not been adapted to the students' characteristics. Teachers noted that the presence of student teachers has been quite helpful because they can provide individualized attention to slow learners. Although this is only a temporary solution and does not address the root of the problem. If not addressed promptly, student with learning difficulties risk facing long-term negative consequences such as repeated academic failure, low motivation and self-confidence, social interaction difficulties, and a widening academic gap compared to their peers. Therefore, inclusive education in Indonesia needs to accommodate the needs of students with learning difficulties. As explained by Sakiinatullaila et al., (2020) inclusive schools face significant challenges in providing instruction for students with learning difficulties, particularly in mathematics and language arts. Adapting teaching methods, media, and learning resources is crucial to ensure that students can comprehend the material in accordance with their abilities.

This study was conducted to examine various learning interventions that have been implemented to improve the academic abilities of students with learning difficulties. Some intervention strategies proven to be effective include support from special education teachers, the constructivist learning model, the drill method (repeated practice), repeated reading and cloze procedure techniques, and the token economy strategy. This study is useful for summarizing learning approaches to improve academic abilities based on results already observed in the field. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to

analyze 12 relevant research articles. Consequently, the interventions identified in the literature can be implemented in schools. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and policymakers in developing more adaptive learning strategies that yield tangible improvements in the academic performance of slow learners in inclusive schools.

METHODS

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) employs a systematic approach to identify and analyze relevant studies on learning interventions aimed at improving academic abilities in students with learning difficulties. The literature search was conducted in May 2025 using the Semantic Scholar database with the keywords “slow learner; learning difficulties; student; child; academic intervention,” yielding 24 articles. Subsequently, the researcher expanded the search to Google Scholar using the same keywords, yielding 965 articles. The total number of articles fully identified through the database search was 989. The researcher then applied a time-range restriction to the years 2020–2025, resulting in the exclusion of 472 articles; this step left 517 articles. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart was used to visualize this process, including the reasons for exclusion at each stage (e.g., duplicates, irrelevant topics, or weak methodology). This approach ensures that the literature review is conducted comprehensively and is scientifically accountable.

517 articles were identified based on their titles and abstracts. Subsequently, 486 articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the topic, for example, they did not address students with learning difficulties or appropriate academic interventions (such as those discussing other clinical disorders or failing to examine classroom interventions). Subsequently, 31 articles were selected for full-text retrieval. After downloading and conducting an in-depth review of the 31 full-text articles successfully accessed, 19 articles were excluded for failing to meet the in-depth eligibility criteria. Detailed reasons for exclusion included: intervention procedures were not explicitly described ($n = 10$), intervention outcomes did not clearly measure academic improvement ($n = 7$), and discrepancies in publication years were found after reviewing the full texts. Consequently, the final number of articles that passed the screening process and were used in this literature review was 12. These articles met the established inclusion criteria. Subsequently, these articles were analyzed in depth regarding learning interventions to improve academic abilities in students with learning difficulties.

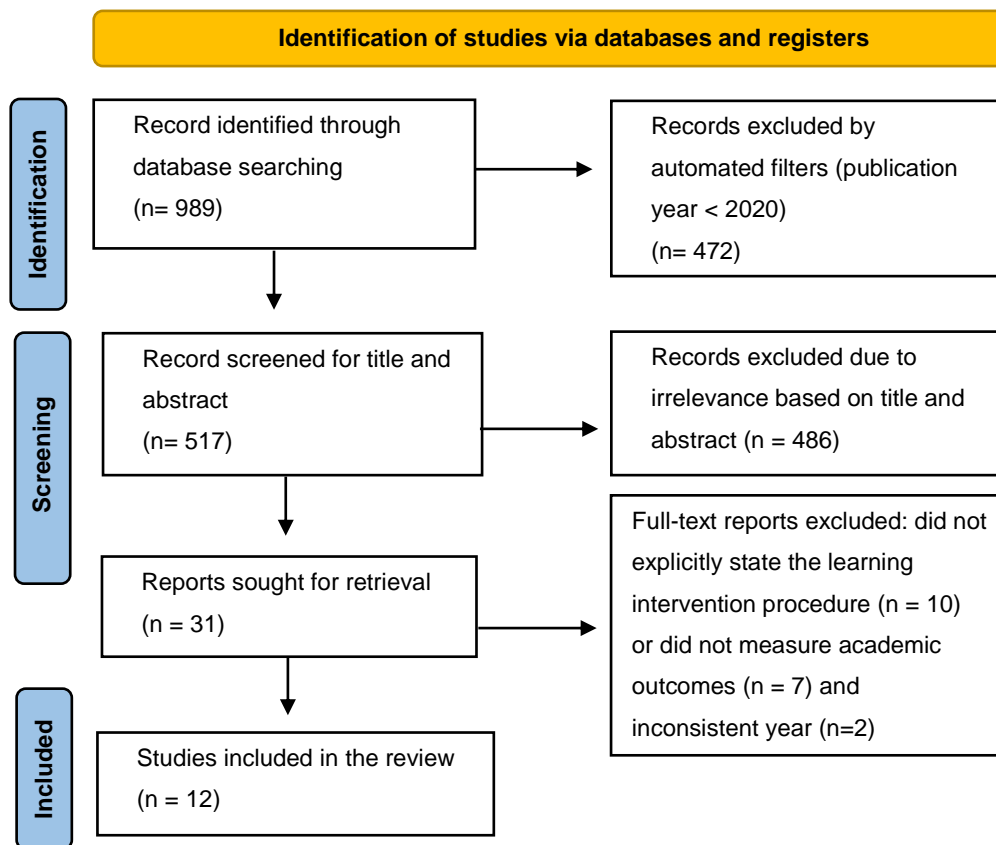


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

RESULTS

Slow learners are a group of students who require special attention in the learning process because they learn at a slower pace than the average student. To help them reach their full academic potential, appropriate and effective learning intervention strategies are needed. This literature review examines 12 research articles discussing various learning interventions to improve the academic abilities of slow learners.

Of the 12 articles analyzed, the studies employed diverse methods to assess the effectiveness of learning interventions. Two studies used a qualitative approach, deeply exploring the learning experiences of slow learners through observation and interviews. This approach was applied in Article 1, which observed mathematics learning profiles at Garuda Cendekia Junior High School in Jakarta, and Article 6, which examined the Talaqqi learning model at SMPIT Permata Kota Probolinggo.

Furthermore, four studies used experimental methods to assess the effectiveness of the interventions measurably. Article 3 conducted a classroom action research study using a quantitative approach at SD Adabiah Padang; Article 4 employed a pre-experimental design at SDN 3 Sedayu in Yogyakarta; Article 7 implemented a pre-post-test design at SDN Gresik; and Article 9 conducted an experiment with three groups at an elementary school in Jaipur, India. Three other studies employed case studies to understand individual student conditions: Article 2 at SDN Pandansimping in Klaten, Article 8 at MI Salafiyah Mahbubiyah in East Java, and Article 11 at the ASMITA Centre in Lucknow, India. Meanwhile, there is 1

quantitative survey study in Article 10 in Rwanda, 1 mixed-methods study in Article 12 in Punjab, India, and 1 community service study in Article 5 in Yogyakarta.

These studies were conducted at various educational levels, ranging from elementary school to junior high school. Most of the studies (8 articles) focused on the elementary school level, 4 articles on the junior high school level, and the rest on Islamic education, as well as international research in India and Rwanda. The learning settings studied were highly diverse, encompassing inclusive classrooms, regular classrooms, and special education schools. Geographically, 8 studies were conducted in Indonesia, with locations spread across various regions such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Padang, Gresik, Probolinggo, Klaten, and Tuban. Meanwhile, 4 studies were conducted abroad, namely 3 in India (Punjab, Lucknow, and Jaipur) and 1 in Rwanda. This diversity of locations and settings provides a comprehensive perspective on the implementation of learning interventions for slow learners in various educational contexts.

Table 2. List of Reviewed Articles

No.	Author (Year)	Title	Setting	Place	Method
1.	Hasibuan et al., (2020)	Profil Pembelajaran Matematika pada Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus Ragam Slow Learner di Kelas Inklusif SMP Garuda Cendekia Jakarta	Inclusive Middle School Class	Garuda Cendekia Junior High School, Jakarta	Descriptive qualitative observation
2.	Ru'iyah et al., (2021)	Educating with Paying Attention to Individual Differences: Case Study of Slow Learner Students in Inclusion School	Inclusive Elementary School Class	Pandansimping Elementary School, Klaten	Case study on the observation and documentation approach
3.	Asmar & Delyana, (2022)	Improved problem solving skills slow learner students in elementary school through the use of constructivism learning model	Kelas V SD	Adabiah Elementary School, Padang, 5th grade, 16 students (8 in the experimental group, 8 in the	A two-cycle classroom action research (CAR) study using a quantitative approach.

No.	Author (Year)	Title	Setting	Place	Method
				control group).	
4.	Qutratuain & Ariyanto, (2023)	The Effectiveness of The Drill Method to Improve Counting Skills in Slow Learners at The Primary School Level	Yogyakarta	Sedayu Elementary School No. 3, 3rd grade, 5 students with learning difficulties.	Pre-eksperimen (One Group Pretest-Posttest)
5.	Permatasari et al., (2022)	Pendampingan belajar matematika bagi siswa slow learner	Two elementary schools	Yogyakarta	Stages of observation, interviews, evaluation (community service)
6.	Laila & Dirgayunita, (2022)	Model Pembelajaran “Talaqqi” Tahfidzul Qur’an Era Pandemi Covid 19 Pada Siswa Gangguan Lambat Belajar (Slow Learner)	Islamic Junior High School,	Permata Islamic Junior High School, Probolinggo	Observasi praktik talaqqi dan pendekatan kualitatif
7.	Dewi & Wicaksono, (2023)	Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Anak Slow learner menggunakan Teknik Token economy	6 grade of the elementary school	Gresik	Pre-Post Test desain intervensi Token Economy
8.	Sofianti & Andriani, (2024)	The Effectiveness of Repeated Reading and Supported Cloze Procedure to Improve Beginning Reading Skills in Elementary	4 grade of the elementary school	MI Salafiyah Mahbubiyah, Tuban	Single-case experimental design. 1 child who is slow learner.

No.	Author (Year)	Title	Setting	Place	Method
		School Slow Learner Students			
9.	Kumari & Kataria, (2022)	Effectiveness of Academic Intervention on Learning of Environmental Science among Slow Learners	3 elementary schools, Year 3	Jaipur, India	A three-group experiment (remedial, inclusive, control)
10.	Masengesho & Hesborn (2024)	The Effect of Remedial Program Practices on the Academic Performance of Slow Learners in Mathematics Subject in Public Lower-Day Secondary School in Rwanda: A Case of Kirehe District	64 state secondary schools	Kirehe District, Rwanda	A quantitative correlational survey Click to apply
11.	(Singh, 2024)	Intellectual Ability and Subjective Well-Being of Slow Learner: A Case Study with Academic and Behavioral Intervention	ASMITA Centre for Slow Learner and Mental Health Care	Lucknow, India	An individual case study of a 14-year-old boy with learning difficulties
12.	Khan et al. (2024)	A Mixed-Method Study on Prevalence of Specific Learning Difficulties in Slow Learners and Its Implications for Academic Achievements	Special education centre for slow learners (primary school) in Punjab	Punjab, India	Mixed-method (quantitative + qualitative)

DISCUSSION

The articles reviewed showed variation in the number and types of intervention techniques applied. Most of them, specifically 6 articles, used a single primary intervention technique. Examples include the application of the constructivist learning model, the drill method, the token economy, learning mentoring, the talaqqi method, or social interaction among students. These single interventions typically focused on improving a specific academic aspect, such as numeracy skills, early reading, or interest in learning. Additionally, 5 articles combined two intervention techniques, such as the combination of concrete media with the drill method, repeated reading with the cloze procedure, learning modules with peer tutoring, or teacher mentoring with curriculum adaptation. These combinations were designed to strengthen learning outcomes by addressing students' cognitive and affective aspects simultaneously. Meanwhile, the other three articles employed more than three intervention techniques in a single study. These articles presented complex and structured interventions, such as language simplification, visualization of material, repetition, hands-on practice, the use of concrete materials, and behavioral and emotional therapy. These studies tend to involve students individually or in small groups and aim to have a more comprehensive impact on the academic and social development of students with learning difficulties. Only one article did not specify the interventions but focused on mapping learning difficulties and the limitations of the education system in identifying the needs of students with learning difficulties.

Intervention Using a Single Intervention Technique

Interventions using a single intervention technique are divided into several studies that employ a specific intervention technique. In the constructivist learning model applied in the study by Asmar & Delyana, (2022) shows that students' active involvement in small-group discussions and collaborative activities can improve problem-solving skills as well as affective aspects such as self-confidence and motivation. This model emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through experience and students' active engagement. The application of constructivism to Year 5 slow learners has proven effective in improving mathematical problem-solving skills. Not only have cognitive aspects improved, but also affective aspects such as learning motivation, self-confidence, communication, and creativity. Furthermore, interaction with peers enhances the academic, social, and self-confidence skills of slow learners. This model also makes learning more meaningful as it is linked to students' real-life experiences.

In rote-learning-based education, the talaqqi model applied in the context of Qur'anic memorization provides concrete, direct-interaction-based learning. This method is highly effective as it emphasizes the visualization of articulation through face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. The Talaqqi model is an oral-verbal learning method through direct interaction between teacher and student, in which the student directly imitates the teacher's pronunciation (known as *musyafahah*). In the context of Qur'an memorization at SMPIT Permata Kota Probolinggo, this model has proven successful for students with learning difficulties as it involves simultaneous observation of lip movements, listening, and pronunciation (Laila & Dirgayunita, 2022). This intervention is supported by a warm and personalized learning environment, as well as reinforcement from the family. Although based

on religious memorization, this talaqqi approach has important implications for students with language difficulties or short-term verbal memory issues. In addition, there are structured remedial programs, including small-group learning, multisensory learning, and performance feedback. The results achieved include an improvement in mathematical problem-solving skills. There is a strong correlation between students' active participation and improved academic achievement (Masengesho & Hesborn, 2024).

Meanwhile, a token economy strategy based on symbolic rewards has proven effective in boosting students' interest in learning by motivating measurable and consistent rewards (Dewi & Wicaksono, 2023). Token economy is a behavioral intervention strategy that uses a points or symbol system as a form of positive reinforcement for pupils' behavior or academic achievement. In a study by Dewi & Wicaksono (2023), three students with learning difficulties showed a consistent improvement in their learning motivation scores after being given tokens each time they demonstrated active engagement or completed a task. This system helps to foster positive learning habits, particularly among students who are less motivated by verbal or intrinsic praise.

In addition, repetition or drill techniques can be used as one method of intervention for students with learning difficulties. In a study by Qutratuain & Ariyanto, (2023) Five students with learning difficulties who struggled with basic arithmetic operations (particularly multiplication and division) showed significant improvement. The drill method (repeated practice) is capable of significantly improving arithmetic skills, particularly in basic operations such as multiplication and division; pupils' marks improved from 30–70 to 80–100. Drill helps to strengthen long-term memory and build pupils' confidence in numerical problems, making it highly suitable for the teaching of basic mathematics.

Intervention Using Two Intervention Techniques

Teaching students with learning difficulties in an inclusive environment requires appropriate and varied interventions to accommodate their cognitive limitations and strengthen their potential. Research findings indicate that students become more active in understanding mathematical concepts. Furthermore, interventions utilizing academic intervention modules are implemented across two settings: remedial and inclusive classes, and peer tutoring. Research findings by Kumari & Kataria (2022) show a significant improvement in science literacy. Furthermore, in terms of literacy, the combination of repeated reading and the cloze procedure has been shown to improve early reading skills in slow learners, with performance improving by 83% (Sofianti & Andriani, 2024). In the theory of Cognitive Load Theory, once basic reading and numeracy skills have reached the automatic stage, a child's intrinsic cognitive load will decrease significantly. The mental capacity remaining in their working memory can then be allocated to higher-order cognitive functions, such as abstract problem-solving skills developed through constructivist models (Asmar & Delyana, 2022). This method emphasizes repeated practice of problems to enhance the automatic application of basic skills. Furthermore, students who are slow learners require specialized methods to understand mathematics. This process consists of three stages: preparation, support, and evaluation. The support stage involves an initial assessment to gauge the child's understanding of mathematics, following which individualized tuition is provided.

Subsequently, an evaluation is carried out to assess the child's understanding following the support. As a result, pupils find it easier to understand the material, leading to improved results (Permatasari et al., 2022).

An inclusive setting incorporating peer tutoring is more effective than standard remedial classes. A review of the literature indicates that one of the most essential interventions is direct support from a special needs teacher (SNT). These teachers not only provide physical support during the learning process, but are also involved in lesson planning, modifying assessments, and adapting teaching methods to suit the characteristics of the pupils. At SMP Garuda Cendekia Jakarta, this approach has been shown to improve the understanding and participation of slow learners in mathematics lessons (Hasibuan et al., 2020).

Intervention Using Three or More Intervention Techniques

The combined intervention comprised academic training (such as reading, writing, and mnemonics) as well as behavioral training (through role-play, group activities, art, and music therapy). Two months after the intervention, the child's intellectual abilities had improved from below average to average. Their subjective well-being scores also improved, shifting from a state of slight dissatisfaction to being somewhat satisfied with their lives. The child showed improvements in attention, communication, and self-confidence in social and school settings. They also began to be more active in class, responding to the teacher's questions and demonstrating more positive and independent behavior (Singh, 2024). Language-based interventions, such as simplifying narratives and using local dialects in religious education, are also extremely helpful for students with learning difficulties in understanding the material in a more concrete and easily digestible way (Ru'iyah et al., 2021). Additionally, the majority of pupils struggle with writing, reading, and mathematics. Teachers are not trained to identify SLDs, IEPs are not used to their full potential, and the referral system is weak (Khan et al., 2024).

Thus, personalized, concrete interventions based on positive reinforcement have proven successful in improving various aspects of learning for students with learning difficulties. Adaptations to teaching strategies (whether through visual, verbal, participatory, or emotional approaches) form a vital foundation for designing inclusive, effective, and meaningful learning experiences. These interventions complement one another and need to be implemented in an integrated manner so that students with learning difficulties can achieve optimal development within an equitable and supportive educational environment.

LIMITATIONS

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) has several major limitations, including a limited literature search, focusing only on Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar databases, to maximize coverage of articles from accredited national and open-access journals (Sinta). This potentially missed more comprehensive coverage of the global literature in international databases such as ERIC or Scopus. Furthermore, there is a risk of publication bias, as the articles found are dominated by primary studies reporting significant results or successful interventions that improve the academic performance of slow-learning students. Conversely, results from ineffective interventions are less likely to be published. Finally, there is high

methodological heterogeneity among the 12 primary studies reviewed, ranging from qualitative descriptive studies and case studies to quantitative experiments, as well as variation in the learning performance measurement instruments used. This limits the authors' ability to generalize intervention effect sizes uniformly and mathematically.

CONCLUSION

Based on a review of 12 research articles, teaching students with learning difficulties requires an approach tailored to their specific characteristics and needs. The intervention proven to be most effective is direct support from a specialist tutor combined with curriculum adaptation (Article 1), whereby students demonstrate increased motivation to learn and a better understanding of the subject matter. The drill method (Article 4) yielded highly significant results in numeracy skills, with scores rising from the 30–70 range to 80–100. The constructivist learning model (Article 3) has been shown to significantly improve pupils' problem-solving skills and affective aspects compared to conventional learning. The repeated reading and supported cloze procedure techniques (Article 8) significantly improve early reading skills, particularly in reading accuracy. The token economy system (Article 7) successfully increased pupils' interest in learning following the intervention.

However, not all interventions have yielded satisfactory results. Article 12 (Khan et al.) found that the majority of teachers have not been trained to recognize specific learning difficulties, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are not being used to their full potential, and the referral system remains weak. The study showing the most comprehensive results was a multi-method intervention (Article 11) that combined different academic and behavioral interventions by involving parents and tutors, resulting in an increase in intellectual ability from a score of 37 to 45 and in subjective well-being from a score of 16 to 21. Another key finding is that inclusive learning with peer tutoring (Article 9) proved more effective than standard remedial classes in improving understanding of science subjects. Thus, successful interventions are generally individualized, employ a concrete approach, involve repetition and reinforcement, and require support from various parties, including trained teachers, parents, and a supportive education system.

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