

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SMART CLINIC PROGRAM IN DEVELOPING ACADEMIC SKILLS OF SLOW LEARNERS

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### Abstract

*Children with slow learner characterized by a slow response in learning, completing assignment lately, short-term memory, lower learning achievement, and low motivation. In academic competencies, children with slow learner category faced special needs in reading, writing, and other academic compulsory, etc. Therefore, a program as Klinik Pintar "Smart Program" was implemented at Badrussalam Islamic Primary School in Surabaya. This study aims to reveal the implementation of klinik pintar in developing students' academic capability with slow learner. This research used qualitative design with Miles and Huberman as the analyses technique. The results revealed that 2 children at Badrussalam Islamic primary school have been identified as children with special needs as slow learners. To accommodate their needs, the school implemented smart clinic program that focused on developing students' ability in reading and writing. The activity conducted in this program implemented by considering students academic differentiation started from learning alphabet, words, and sentences. In improving writing competencies, students also learned how to use pencils, sitting position in learning, and doing exercise in writing to optimize students' motoric skill.*

**Keyword:** Smart Clinic, Slow Learner, Academic Ability

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on efforts to meet the needs of children with special needs through learning and special intervention programs have been conducted. To be able to determine the appropriate intervention program, it is necessary to assess the profile of learners. In students with slow learner specialization, there are often indications that they have low self-confidence. These are the findings of a study analyzing the level of self-confidence of slow-learner students which shows that slow-learner students do not have high self-confidence. One of the causes of low self-confidence is discrimination and bullying at school. In this research with a qualitative approach, data were obtained that slow learner students felt that the teacher was not paying attention so students did not understand the material taught by the teacher. Students who are slow learners tend to be silent and look down when learning and do not have self-confidence (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021).

Learners who have special needs in their development process have different needs. One of the criteria for children with special needs is slow learners (Slow Learner). Students with the slow learner category are children who have low learning abilities compared to children in general (Sakiinatullaila et al., 2020). Some of the obstacles that slow learner children have include being late in thinking, reading, calculating, responding to stimuli, and being slower than regular or normal children. Slow learner children have cognitive abilities below the average so they need more effort to be able to follow learning in regular classes. To accommodate these needs, the inclusive education system is expected to provide space for children who experience specific barriers to learning to develop their competencies according to their abilities and learning needs (Lestari, 2023).

Through appropriate interventions, children with special needs can optimize their abilities. The results of Annamalai research show that intensive assistance to slow-learning students has a positive impact on their academic development (Kamepalli et al., 2020). Through inclusive education, it is hoped that children with special needs can participate in the learning process together with regular

children according to their growth and development stages. Children with the slow learner category generally have characteristics like children of the same age. However, if identified from the results of IQ score tests, slow learner children usually have IQ abilities between 70 and 90. With these special conditions, slow-learner children can still participate in learning in regular classes based on inclusion (Nurhidayah, 2018). In addition, to support through learning, schools can also provide support in the form of programs, one of which is through a smart clinic to be able to provide support for slow learner children in improving their learning outcomes. Referring to the framework above, the purpose of this study is to elaborate on the implementation of the smart clinic program in developing the academic abilities of slow learner children, especially reading and writing skills.

## **METHODS**

This research uses qualitative research methods with the aim of describing phenomena in accordance with the real circumstances experienced by the research subject (Creswell & J. David, 2018). This research uses a case study approach aimed at carefully investigating the occurrence of a particular event, activity, process, or group of individuals (Hakim, 2017).

The data collection techniques used are observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Observation in this study was carried out to explore data related to the implementation of the smart clinic program and its impact on developing the academic abilities of slow learner children. The data analysis technique used refers to the concept of Miles and Huberman, namely data reduction, data display, and verification (Miles et al., 2014). For the validity of the research results, the triangulation used is method triangulation through the use of various valid and reliable research instruments, namely using observation, interviews, and documentation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of the Smart Clinic Program in MI Badrussalam**

The smart clinic program is one of the programs initiated by MI Badrussalam to facilitate the needs of slow-learner children related to their academic obstacles. This program focuses on strengthening students' abilities in reading, writing, and counting. Before determining whether students need to join this program or not, the school first conducts an initial assessment. The results of the initial assessment related to the category of slow learner students show that children with slow learner specialization have below-average knowledge abilities with IQ scores around 80-85. In a previous research study, it was described that slow learner or slow learning is a condition where the cognitive abilities of children are delayed and are below the average of normal children (Farisia et al., 2017). With these obstacles, slow learner children need a relatively long time or more learning to master or understand learning material (Imran et al., 2023). The results of the initial assessment of slow learner children show that slow learner children have slower cognitive abilities than their peers, require more time and effort in understanding learning materials, and have difficulty adapting. Through the smart clinic program, slow learner students are assisted intensively outside of learning hours to develop their reading, writing, and counting skills. This is because slow learners are children who have lower intellectual potential than children of the same age. Slow learner children experience obstacles or delays in thinking, responding to stimuli, and obstacles in adapting.

In this study, the research locus is MI Badrussalam with the consideration that this madrasah is an inclusive madrasah and has implemented various programs to accommodate the various needs of children with special needs according to their respective characteristics. The school also uses a modified curriculum so that children can learn according to their initial abilities. In De Ajer's research, it was explained that curriculum modifications are needed to overcome various learning barriers experienced by children (de Jager, 2013). One of the types of children with disabilities found in MI Badrussalam is slow learners. There are two students categorized as slow learners in grade six. To accommodate the learning needs of slow learner students, MI Badrussalam implements a smart clinic program. The smart clinic is a forum prepared by the school with the main design focused on efforts

to overcome learning obstacles experienced by students with the slow learner category. In the early stages, MI Badrussalam conducted initial assessment tests for all students, both students without special needs and students with disabilities. Based on the results of the assessment, students who need to participate in the smart clinic program and those who do not are identified. In its implementation, students who take part in this smart clinic are not all children with special needs, but are also intended for students who have obstacles in the learning process.

Based on observations made at MI Badrussalam, the smart clinic program is implemented once a week. In its implementation, students are grouped according to the obstacles they have, for example, there is a group of students whose ability is lacking in reading, they are organized in one group. Students with poor numeracy skills are grouped separately to be given guidance and treatment according to the obstacles they experience. For example, a slow learner student with the initials HK participates in the smart clinic program for slow learner children with interventions in the form of reading and writing guidance, because HK has obstacles in reading and writing. This is in line with Kamepalli's research which shows that there is a significant impact of inclusion class interventions on slow learner children (Kamepalli et al., 2020).

### **Triggering Factors for Slow Learner Children**

There are several factors that can cause slow learners, including: (1) genetic factors and (2) emotional factors. Children in the slow learner category usually experience severe and persistent emotional problems that interfere with the learning process. Some of the factors that influence slow learners' lack of self-confidence include students' sense of inferiority compared to other students because they do not have the learning speed and understanding of the material as well as their friends (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021). These emotional problems cause slow learners to have poor academic performance, poor interpersonal relationships, and low self-concept. Other research results also show that slow-learner students have low self-confidence (Sakiinatullaila et al., 2020).

According to Triani and Amir (2013), the factors that cause slow learner children are prenatal factors and genetic factors, biological factors (non-hereditary), childbirth process factors, and post-birth factors, as well as environmental factors (Triani & Amir, 2013). Meanwhile, the results of interviews with teachers based on the results of initial assessments conducted on students show that one of the factors causing children to have learning disabilities (slow learner) is the condition of not reading fluently which is not in accordance with the child's developmental stage, difficulty counting, and difficulty remembering.

### **Implementation of the Smart Clinic Program in Developing Cognitive Skills of Slow Learner Students**

In general, slow learner children are the type of children who have below average learning abilities. Case studies conducted on 2 slow learner children at MI Badrussalam show that the two children have limitations in developing their learning outcomes, especially in reading and writing in the mild slow learner category. These two slow learner children need special assistance to be able to develop and improve their learning delays. One of the programs implemented by MI Badrussalam is the smart clinic program that has been developed since 2016. Through this program, slow learner students receive intensive assistance to develop their reading, writing, and counting skills. The accompanying impact that children have through the program is the development of children's self-confidence because their competence develops by learning according to their needs. Ardianti's research results show that slow learner children's self-confidence can develop well when they are given the opportunity to try something new including new ways of learning (Ardianti et al., 2021).

At the beginning of children entering MI Badrussalam, the school held an IQ (Intelligent Quotient) test for all students. Based on the results of the IQ test and information from the appointed expert doctor, there are 2 children who are diagnosed with mild slow learners. To accommodate their learning needs, the school implements a smart clinic program that is carried out once a week starting

from grade I until now, grade VI. Both slow learner children have attended the smart clinic program regularly accompanied by their accompanying teachers. The school has a target per quarter (3 months) to see the progress of children who take part in the smart clinic program. During the learning in the smart clinic, the two slow learner children had many developments such as in the beginning they could not read and write at all, could not read correctly, could not speak with clear articulation, could not hold a pencil correctly, were still stiff in writing and needed more time to write, to have better reading and writing skills.

Some of the abilities that developed rapidly after they attended the smart clinic included in the 2022/2023 odd semester in class VI, they were able to read several sentences and also stories clearly but the dot punctuation and comma punctuation still needed to be considered and developed correctly. Their reading comprehension skills are also developing, such as understanding the material has also developed well but they also still need a brief explanation. Their writing skills have developed quite well, they can write limply, not stiff anymore but still need further assistance. In the development of numeracy skills, they are able to calculate square root and square root numbers. In the aspect of speaking, the slow learner children in this school are able to speak with clearer articulation, able to understand and carry out the instructions given. To speak with expressive language or expression in the form of words, they are also able to express words clearly about what they see or express their ideas and thoughts to others. This condition indirectly has an impact on increasing the self-confidence of slow-learner students. This result is in line with the findings of previous research that slow-learner students' increased academic ability has a positive impact on increasing children's self-confidence (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021).

With the smart clinic program at MI Badrussalam, there are many benefits that have an impact on the development of slow learner children. Based on the results of interviews with teachers and parents of the two slow learner children, it is described that the smart clinic is an effective medium for efforts to handle slow learner children. The programs implemented at the smart clinic are not only taught to develop the cognitive abilities of children with learning delays, especially in reading and writing skills, but children are also assisted in developing their artistic abilities so that they can develop optimally. In terms of the development of the two slow learner children in the cognitive aspect, it can be categorized as quite well developed because the two children can follow all subjects both general and religious subjects well even though they still use a modified curriculum with a decreased in indicators in several subjects tailored to the abilities of the two slow learner children. Thus, school readiness in meeting children's learning needs plays an important role in encouraging children's learning success (Damayanti et al., 2022).

Their psychomotor development is also developing quite well, both fine motor and gross motor. Teachers also cooperate with parents, by providing information on the growth and development progress of the two children so that parents can provide appropriate stimulation to children when they are at home. Parents are asked to train children to write back the material that has been read and then invite children to read storybooks or fairy tales, then children are asked to explain the contents of the story that has been read. Through this process, all parties are involved in developing the abilities of slow learner children so that the results achieved are maximized. The participation of various parties and consistency in accompanying slow learner children is one of the keys to encouraging the success of this program (Sol et al., 2013).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Slow learner children are children who have delays in learning. Children who are said to be slow learners are children who have lower intellectual potential than children of the same age with an IQ value of around 80-85. Slow learner children are also slow in terms of capturing and understanding learning materials so they need special assistance. One of the programs implemented at MI Badrussalam to support optimal child development is by implementing a smart clinic program. The smart clinic is a place to help slow learner children, especially in the aspects of reading, writing

and counting. The results showed that the smart clinic program positively contributed to the cognitive development of slow learner children.

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