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Supporting Reading Skills of Children with Speech Impairments in Early Childhood Education: A Qualitative Study of an Individualized Intervention Program

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Abstract

Reading ability is an important aspect of language development for children with speech impairments and requires learning activities that are adapted to the characteristics and needs of each student. This study aims to describe the implementation of an intervention program to support the development of reading skills among children with speech impairments and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted in July 2026. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving the head of the institution, teachers, and parents as informants. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results showed that the intervention program was implemented through initial assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation, with activities adjusted to each student's abilities. The learning activities utilized visual media, individual assistance, repetition, educational games, and gradual scaffolding. During the program, developments were observed in letter recognition, reading simple syllables and words, as well as students' participation, interest, and confidence. Supporting factors included visual learning media and support from teachers and parents, while the main obstacle was differences in the abilities of each student.

[*Kemampuan membaca merupakan aspek penting dalam perkembangan bahasa anak tunawicara dan memerlukan kegiatan pembelajaran yang disesuaikan dengan karakteristik dan kebutuhan setiap peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan implementasi program intervensi dalam mendukung perkembangan keterampilan membaca anak tunawicara serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat pelaksanaannya di UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan dilaksanakan pada Juli 2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala lembaga, guru, dan orang tua sebagai informan. Data dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program intervensi dilaksanakan melalui asesmen awal, perencanaan, pelaksanaan, dan evaluasi, dengan*

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kegiatan yang disesuaikan dengan kemampuan setiap peserta didik. Kegiatan pembelajaran memanfaatkan media visual, pendampingan individual, pengulangan, permainan edukatif, dan scaffolding secara bertahap. Selama program berlangsung, terlihat perkembangan dalam pengenalan huruf, pembacaan suku kata dan kata sederhana, serta keaktifan, minat, dan kepercayaan diri peserta didik. Faktor pendukung meliputi media pembelajaran visual serta dukungan guru dan orang tua, sedangkan hambatan utamanya adalah perbedaan kemampuan setiap peserta didik.]
Keywords: Intervention Program, Early Childhood, Reading Ability, Speech Impairments

Introduction

Early childhood education is a crucial stage in building the foundational abilities that underpin children's development at subsequent stages. During this period, children undergo rapid development in the language, cognitive, social-emotional, and motor domains. Language ability is one of the domains most closely related to learning readiness, because through language children are able to understand information, express their needs, and interact with their environment (Afwanni & Pamungkas, 2024; Arifiyanti et al., 2025; HMS & Rizqina, 2025; Nurjanah et al., 2026; Sapendi et al., 2026). However, this developmental process does not unfold in the same way for every child. Children with special needs, including children with speech impairments, require educational services that are adapted to their characteristics, abilities, and barriers (Rizqina, 2019; Saddhono et al., 2019; Yunitasari et al., 2025).

Children with speech impairments experience barriers in speaking and language abilities that may affect the communication process and the acquisition of academic skills (Irchamna et al., 2025). These communication barriers may have implications for reading ability, particularly when children are required to recognize letters, connect symbols with meaning, understand simple words, and participate in reading activities independently (Mulyawati, 2023). Yet, early reading ability is one of the basic skills needed to support the learning process at the next level of education. Therefore, the provision of appropriate stimulation and intervention from an early age is an important part of helping children with speech impairments develop their literacy skills (Juherna et al., 2021).

Intervention programs in special education are needed so that learning is not merely delivered in a general manner but is designed on the basis of each child's needs and abilities (Asmara et al., 2021). Interventions can be carried out through activities that are systematic, gradual, and repetitive, and that use media and strategies suited to the child's learning characteristics. For children with communication barriers, the use of visual stimuli, hands-on activities, and learning that involves repetition can help children understand the relationships among symbols, words, and meanings (Farhan, 2026; Sugianti & Jabar, 2026). Accordingly, intervention programs are directed not only toward the attainment of reading ability but also toward increasing children's engagement in the learning process (Husna et al., 2025).

A number of previous studies have shown that interventions tailored to learners' needs can support the development of reading ability among children with special needs. Asri et al. (2023) found that the implementation of an Individualized Education Program resulted in differences in the early reading ability of students with special needs compared with learning without such a program. The study also showed that reading interest was one of the aspects associated with students' reading ability. This finding highlights the strength of the individualized approach, as the learning program can be adapted to the characteristics and needs of each learner (Sandjaja, 2022). However, that study was conducted with students with special needs in inclusive elementary schools and did not specifically examine children with speech impairments at the kindergarten level.

The study by Asri et al. (2022) also developed an Individualized Education Program for early reading instruction for students with special needs. The results of the exploration stage indicated that teachers needed a reading program that was more individualized and systematic. The strength of that study lies in its attention to teachers' needs and students' characteristics in program development; however, the study was still at an early stage of development and therefore did not yet provide an in-depth picture of the implementation of reading intervention programs in the context of early childhood education in special schools.

The study by Widodo & Mahmudah (2025) showed that the syllable method had a significant effect on the early reading skills of deaf students in a special elementary school. The study involved seven students and employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. The results showed an improvement in early reading skills following the application of the syllable method. This finding reinforces the importance of using systematic learning strategies in developing the reading ability of children with communication barriers. Nevertheless, that study focused on deaf students at the elementary school level and emphasized the syllable method, whereas the present study examines the implementation of an intervention program for children with speech impairments at the kindergarten level.

These differences in learner characteristics and educational settings indicate that the findings of previous studies have not fully described how reading intervention programs are implemented for young children with speech impairments. This need is all the more important in the context of UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam, which provides educational services to children with special needs at the early stages of development. Based on the conditions found in this study, some children with speech impairments still experienced difficulties in recognizing letter shapes, distinguishing visual symbols, connecting letters with words, and understanding simple words used in everyday life. The children also required fairly intensive assistance when participating in reading activities (Supriyatin & Retnaningrum, 2024). These conditions indicate the need for a program that is not only oriented toward the delivery of content but also takes into account individual abilities, the use of visual media, repetition, motor activities, and the active engagement of the children (Susanti et al., 2025).

These problems raise the question of how a reading intervention program is implemented to help improve the reading ability of children with speech impairments and what factors support and hinder its implementation at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam. A well-planned intervention program is expected to serve as an alternative for providing reading learning experiences that are better suited to the children's characteristics. The success of the program is also inseparable from the role of teachers in conducting assessments, determining strategies, providing learning media, implementing activities consistently, and evaluating children's development (Sidik et al., 2026). Support from parents and the school environment is also needed so that the stimulation provided can continue beyond learning activities.

Based on the above description, this study aims to describe the implementation of an intervention program to improve the reading ability of children with speech impairments at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. This study is expected to provide an empirical picture of the implementation of reading interventions at the early childhood education level and, at the same time, to serve as a consideration for teachers and schools in developing reading instruction services that are more individualized, systematic, and appropriate to the needs of children with speech impairments.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was used to obtain an in-depth picture of the implementation of an intervention program to improve the reading ability of children with speech impairments based on conditions occurring directly in the field. The study was conducted at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam, South Sumatra Province, from July 2026 until the completion of the study. This site was selected because it has learners with communication barriers who receive special education services and participate in an intervention program to support the development of their reading ability.

The research data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of information obtained directly through observation and interviews with those involved in the implementation of the program, namely the head of the UPT, the teacher implementing the intervention, parents, and the children as supplementary sources of information. Informants were selected purposively, taking into account their involvement in and knowledge of the implementation of the intervention program. Secondary sources consisted of documents and records related to learning activities and children's development, such as developmental records, lesson plans and learning materials, documentation of activities, and other documents supporting the study. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly during learning activities to examine the process of implementing the intervention program, the strategies used by the teacher, the children's engagement, and the development of reading ability observed during the activities. Interviews were conducted with the head of the UPT, the teacher, and parents to obtain more in-depth information regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program, as well as the various conditions affecting its implementation. Documentation was used as supporting data to complement the results of observation and interviews, particularly in relation to intervention activities and the development of children's reading ability.

The trustworthiness of the data was examined through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing the information obtained from the head of the UPT, the teacher, and parents in order to determine the consistency of information regarding the implementation of the program and the children's development. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was carried out by comparing the data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. This process was undertaken to ensure that the data used in the study were consistent and credible. Data analysis was conducted interactively through three stages, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The data obtained from the field were first selected and simplified by focusing on information relevant to the research focus. Next, the data were presented in the form of narrative descriptions so that the findings regarding the implementation of the intervention program could be understood systematically. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions based on the patterns and findings that emerged during the research process. Through these stages, the study sought to gain an understanding of the implementation of the intervention program in improving the reading ability of children with speech impairments, as well as the factors supporting and hindering its implementation at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam.

Results and Discussion

Implementation of the Reading Intervention Program for Children with Speech Impairments

The results showed that the reading intervention program for children with speech impairments at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam was implemented gradually through identification and initial assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage was adjusted to the abilities and needs of each learner. Assessment was conducted to determine the children's initial ability to recognize

letters, distinguish symbols, match letters with pictures, and read syllables and simple words. Observation results showed that the learners' initial abilities varied; therefore, the teacher set different learning targets according to each child's condition. This finding was reinforced by an interview with Fitri, S.Pd., the classroom teacher, who stated, "Before learning begins, we first conduct an assessment. We see whether the child already knows the letters, whether they can already distinguish letters, or whether they can still only recognize pictures. From there, we determine each child's learning targets because their abilities differ." This statement indicates that the initial assessment served as the basis for the teacher in determining the form of intervention and the learning targets. The head of the UPT also emphasized that learning cannot be generalized because each child has different conditions and abilities.

The assessment results were then used in developing the intervention program. The teacher prepared the learning objectives, content, methods, media, activities, and evaluation by taking into account each child's abilities. The content was delivered gradually, starting with the introduction of vowels and consonants, followed by syllable formation, and then reading simple words. The classroom teacher explained, "We set the learning targets gradually. In the first week, the children are introduced to vowels first, then consonants, and only after that do they learn to combine letters into syllables and read simple words. The targets are adjusted to each child's abilities." In its implementation, the teacher used visual media in the form of letter cards, syllable cards, picture word cards, picture storybooks, and educational games. These media were used to help children connect letter symbols with pictures and meaningful words. Learning was carried out through modeling, reading practice, games, repetition of content, and individual assistance. Children who still experienced difficulties received more assistance, whereas children who had mastered basic skills were given the opportunity to try more independently. The program was implemented over ten sessions from 13 to 24 July 2026, with content delivered gradually and reinforced through repetition.

During the implementation of the program, development was observed in the learners' reading ability and engagement. At the beginning of the study, several children were still hesitant in recognizing letters and required a great deal of assistance from the teacher. After participating in repeated practice, the children began to be more confident in pointing to letters, reading simple syllables, following instructions, and attempting to read with less assistance. The classroom teacher stated, "In the first week, many of them were still hesitant in recognizing letters, but after the content was repeated in the second week, the children began to be more confident. Some children can already read simple syllables without much guidance." This finding indicates that repetition and assistance are important parts of the reading learning process for children with speech impairments.

Development was also observed in the ability to recognize letters, read syllables, and connect words with pictures. In the second week, most learners began to be able to recognize more letters, read several simple syllables, and participate in reading activities more actively. In addition, the children appeared more confident when asked to demonstrate their reading ability in front of the teacher. These changes indicate the development observed during the intervention process, although the level of achievement differed for each learner. Evaluation was conducted continuously through observation, reading performance, developmental recording, and communication with parents. The teacher recorded the abilities that had been mastered and the difficulties that the children were still experiencing in order to determine follow-up learning. Fitri, S.Pd. explained, "After every lesson, we always record each child's development. If today the child already knows the vowels, the following week we continue to syllables. But if they are still having difficulties, the content will be repeated until the child truly understands it." This indicates that evaluation was not only used to determine children's development but also served as the basis for determining subsequent content and activities.

Information from parents further reinforced the findings regarding the children's development. One parent stated that before participating in the program, the child did not yet know the letters, whereas after participating in the learning activities, the child began to recognize several letters and showed interest in picture books. Although the child's reading ability was not yet fully fluent, the parents observed progress in the child's letter recognition and interest in reading activities. These research findings can be related to Vygotsky's theory of social development, particularly the concepts of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (Rahman, 2024; Ulfadhilah & Nurkhafifah, 2025; Utami & Yus, 2025). The teacher provided assistance according to the child's ability and then gradually reduced the assistance as the child began to be able to perform tasks more independently. The adjustment of content from letter recognition to syllables and simple words shows that learning was provided based on the abilities the child had already mastered while being directed toward the next ability. Teacher–child interaction, the use of visual media, repetition, and individual assistance were mutually supporting components in this process.

Thus, the reading intervention program at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam was implemented through the stages of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation, adjusted to the learners' characteristics. The use of visual media, individualized learning, repeated practice, educational games, and gradual assistance were the strategies used by the teacher to support the development of reading ability among children with speech impairments. The results of observation and interviews showed development in the ability to recognize letters and to read syllables and simple words, as well as increased engagement and self-confidence among the children during learning activities.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Reading Intervention Program

The implementation of the reading intervention program at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam was influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors related to learning conditions and learner characteristics. The results of observation, interviews, and documentation showed that the main supporting factors came from the use of visual learning media, teacher support, and parental involvement. Meanwhile, the most apparent obstacle was related to differences in the reading ability and learning pace of each learner.

The most prominent supporting factor was the use of visual learning media adapted to the characteristics of children with speech impairments. The media used included letter cards, syllable cards, picture word cards, a flannel board, and picture storybooks. Observation results showed that these media helped the children maintain their attention and made it easier for them to connect letter symbols with pictures and words. The teacher also combined the media with educational games, modeling, visual cues, and repetition of content so that reading activities became easier to follow. The classroom teacher explained, “Picture media are very helpful for the children's learning process. If things are only explained verbally, they forget quickly, but when we use letter cards and pictures, the children remember more easily. They also enjoy the lessons more because it feels like they are playing.” Support came not only from the use of media but also from the school and family environments. The school provided support through the provision of learning media and facilities that the teacher could use according to the learners' needs. On the family side, parents continued simple practice at home so that the content delivered at school did not stop when the lesson ended. One parent stated, “My child now prefers to learn using picture cards like the ones the teacher uses at school. At home, I also try to make simple cards so that my child is willing to review the lessons.” This finding shows that the continuity of practice between school and home was a factor supporting the development of children's reading ability.

The inhibiting factor identified was mainly related to differences in the learners' reading abilities. Observation results showed that some children were already able to recognize vowels and several consonants, while others still had difficulty distinguishing letter shapes or combining letters into syllables. This condition required the teacher to provide individual assistance and adjust learning targets. The teacher could not provide the same content and targets at the same time because each child required a different level of assistance and repetition. These differences also required the teacher to organize activities so that children waiting for assistance remained engaged in learning.

This condition was reinforced by the results of an interview with the classroom teacher, who explained, "Each child's ability is different. Some recognize letters quickly, but others need things repeated many times. Because of that, I cannot set the same targets for all children. The learning has to be done one by one according to their abilities." Repetition was also still needed when children had difficulty understanding the content. The teacher stated that after each lesson, the children's development was recorded, and the content would be repeated if the targeted ability had not yet been mastered.

These findings can be understood through Vygotsky's concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding (Rahman, 2024; Ulfadhilah & Nurkhafifah, 2025; Utami & Yus, 2025). Differences in children's abilities indicate that learning assistance needs to be adjusted to each child's level of ability. The teacher provided more intensive assistance to children who experienced difficulties and then reduced the assistance as the children began to be able to perform tasks independently. Thus, visual media, individual assistance, repetition, and parental support were complementary elements in the implementation of the program. Meanwhile, differences in learners' abilities constituted a challenge that needed to be addressed through learning that is flexible, gradual, and responsive to each child's needs.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the reading intervention program for children with speech impairments at UPT TK SLB Negeri Pagar Alam was implemented through initial assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation, adjusted to the abilities and needs of each learner. The application of visual media, individualized learning, repetition, educational games, and gradual assistance supported the development of children's ability to recognize letters and read syllables and simple words, as well as increased their participation, interest, and self-confidence in reading activities. The main supporting factors of the program were the use of visual learning media and support from teachers and parents, whereas differences in the abilities of each learner constituted a challenge requiring target adjustment, individual assistance, and repetition of content. These findings indicate that reading interventions need to be implemented flexibly, gradually, and continuously by taking into account the characteristics of each child and strengthening collaboration between school and family. The school is expected to continue providing appropriate learning media and facilities, while teachers and parents need to maintain consistent reading practice both at school and at home. Future studies may extend this inquiry with a longer research period and a broader range of learners so that the development of reading ability among children with speech impairments can be observed in greater depth and on a continuing basis.

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