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An Analysis of Distractive Behavior and Learning Barriers in Fifth-Grade Students at SD 1 Ngemplak

Mufidatul Inayah*
Universitas Muria Kudus, Kudus, Indonesia
mufidatul.inayah1712@gmail.com

Abstract

Distractive behavior and learning disabilities are common problems among fifth-grade elementary school students and have the potential to disrupt the effectiveness of the learning process. This study aims to describe the characteristics of students' distractive behavior, analyze the factors causing learning disabilities, and examine the reciprocal relationship between academic disabilities and distractive behavior in fifth-grade students at SD 1 Ngemplak. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Subjects were purposively selected: fifth-grade students exhibiting distractive behavior accompanied by learning disabilities, with supporting informants including classroom teachers and school officials. Data collection techniques included classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of student learning outcomes. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation, using triangulation of sources and methods to ensure data validity. The results showed that distractive behavior in students varied in intensity and was closely correlated with basic academic abilities, particularly reading and writing. High-intensity distractive behavior was found in slow-learners who had not yet mastered basic literacy, while in other students, distractive behavior was situational and manageable. These findings indicate that distractive behavior is not simply a behavioral problem, but rather a manifestation of learning barriers that lead to academic frustration and poor self-regulation. This research emphasizes the importance of an inclusive, differentiated learning approach, and collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents in addressing learning barriers and distractive behavior comprehensively and sustainably.

Keywords*: distractive behavior, learning barriers, slow learners, fifth-grade students, elementary school.*

*Corresponding Author

A. Introduction

Distractive behavior and learning obstacles are phenomena increasingly observed among elementary school students. Such distractive behavior represents a primary issue hindering the effectiveness of the learning process, characterized by actions such as speaking without permission, disrupting peers during academic activities, and a lack of active engagement in lessons (Banyuwangi, 2022). These behaviors often reflect internal student barriers related to attentional control, self-regulation, and hyperactivity factors empirically identified as major determinants of academic outcomes in elementary education (Rizqi et al., 2024). Field findings indicate that a significant number of students exhibit disruptive behaviors during instruction, including off-context conversation, restlessness, failure to complete assignments, and literacy skills that lag behind those of their peers (Carvalho et al., 2025). Furthermore, the learning obstacles students face can stem from various dimensions, such as deficient study skills, a tendency toward passivity during instruction, and a lack of participatory teaching methods, all of which significantly impact student involvement in classroom activities (Nurhasanah et al., 2024). These obstacles are not solely a result of student behavior; they are also influenced by classroom management, pedagogical methods, and social interactions within the classroom that often fail to accommodate students' cognitive and emotional developmental needs (Ansari & Jannah, 2024).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development places elementary school-aged children in the concrete operational stage. At this stage, children begin to reason logically, but this is still limited to objects and situations that are tangible and directly observable. Children are capable of performing mental operations such as grouping, sequencing, and understanding simple cause-and-effect relationships, but still have difficulty grasping complex abstract and symbolic concepts. The implications of the concrete operational stage for learning require the presentation of material that is concrete and structured, supported by concrete examples and hands-on activities (Piaget, 1972). When academic demands don't align with a child's cognitive developmental characteristics, students can experience confusion, difficulty understanding instructions, and decreased learning engagement. This can lead to maladaptive classroom behaviors, such as loss of focus and distractibility (Blair & Raver, 2020). Contemporary research shows that a mismatch between learning strategies and students' cognitive developmental stages contributes significantly to the emergence of learning disabilities and behavioral problems in elementary schools (Blair & Raver, 2020; Piaget, 1972; Woolfolk, 2020).

The concept of slow learner refers to a child whose intellectual abilities are slightly below average, but not classified as an intellectual disability. Slow learners generally have slower information processing speeds, limitations in executive function, and difficulty sustaining attention for long periods. In terms of language development, they often experience difficulties understanding vocabulary, constructing sentences, and expressing ideas orally and in writing (Holmes et al., 2021). These limitations directly impact the ability to read, write, and understand academic instruction, requiring more time and intensive repetition to learn. Research shows that slow learners are prone to repeated academic failure, which further impacts motivation, self-confidence, and attitudes toward school (Alloway & Gathercole, 2020). Thus, slow learning is not only related to cognitive aspects, but also has implications for students' emotional and behavioral development in the classroom. Distractive behavior in learning is defined as behavior that disrupts the smooth flow of the teaching and learning process, both for the individual concerned and for other students. Common forms of distractive behavior in elementary school classrooms include chatting during class, walking aimlessly, playing with objects excessively, and interrupting peers. From a behaviorist perspective, particularly Skinner's perspective, distractive behavior is understood as the result of a learning process through mechanisms of reinforcement and punishment. Behavior that receives reinforcement, such as attention from a teacher or peer response, tends to be repeated, while behavior that is not reinforced tends to decrease. In the classroom context, distractive behavior often persists because it is indirectly reinforced by the learning environment. Research shows that inconsistent classroom management and inappropriate teacher responses can reinforce disruptive behavior in students (Emmer & Sabornie, 2021; Skinner, 1953).

The relationship between slow learning and distractive behavior can be comprehensively understood through a reciprocal cycle model that positions both not as stand-alone phenomena, but as dynamic, mutually reinforcing processes within the context of formal learning, particularly at the elementary school level. The academic difficulties experienced by slow learning students result in an inability to optimally participate in learning, resulting in students feeling left behind and incompetent (Wentzel & Muenks, 2022). These feelings trigger boredom, frustration, and low motivation to learn, which are then expressed through distractive behavior. This behavior, in turn, disrupts the learning process, worsens academic achievement, and reinforces student backwardness. Developmental and social-emotional psychology perspectives emphasize that repeated experiences of learning failure can negatively impact children's self-concept

and emotional regulation. Empirical studies indicate that the relationship between learning difficulties and problem behavior is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing, particularly in upper-grade elementary school students (Kim & Park, 2023; Wentzel & Muenks, 2022).

Factors causing distractive behavior and learning disabilities in fifth-grade students can be classified into internal and external factors. Internal factors include cognitive limitations, weak executive function, low intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation difficulties. Children with immature executive function tend to have difficulty controlling impulses and maintaining attention, making them more susceptible to disruptive behavior. External factors include a less conducive classroom environment, monotonous learning methods, and the quality of teacher-student interactions. Learning that does not take into account individual differences in ability can exacerbate learning disabilities and trigger distractive behavior. Research shows that a supportive classroom climate, varied learning methods, and positive teacher-student relationships play a significant role in reducing problem behavior and increasing student engagement (Nurhasanah et al., 2024; OECD, 2021). Research (Blair & Raver, 2020) confirms that poor self-regulation and executive function in elementary school-aged children are closely linked to inattentive behavior and academic difficulties. Furthermore, poor basic reading and writing skills have been identified as a major factor exacerbating learning barriers and impacting student motivation and engagement in learning. (OECD, 2021). This condition not only affects individual learning outcomes, but also impacts the overall classroom climate, because unaddressed distractive behavior can disrupt the concentration of other students and the effectiveness of learning.

The urgency of analyzing distractive behavior and learning disabilities from an educational psychology perspective is further strengthened by the results of recent empirical research. A study (DuPaul et al., 2021) showed that disruptive behavior and mild learning difficulties not categorized as clinical disorders still significantly impact the academic achievement and social adjustment of elementary school students. Research (Ramli et al., 2022) in the context of Asian primary education found that students with low literacy skills tend to exhibit distractive behavior as a form of compensation for the academic difficulties they experience. This finding is supported by research (Kim & Park, 2023), which states that difficulties focusing and motivating students in upper elementary school are often rooted in repeated experiences of academic failure, particularly in basic reading and writing skills. However, most previous research still separates the study of distractive behavior and learning disabilities, as if they were separate issues.

This research gap arises from the limited number of studies that integratively analyze the reciprocal relationship between academic challenges and distractive behavior in the context of elementary school child development. Furthermore, existing research tends to focus on problem identification, without providing contextual and applicable pedagogical implications for teachers in the classroom. The current state of research demonstrates increasing attention to behavioral issues and learning difficulties, but few have comprehensively positioned them within the framework of child development and learning dynamics in fifth grade. Based on these gaps, this study offers a novel approach by examining distractive behavior and learning barriers as interrelated phenomena influenced by both academic and non-academic factors in student development. This approach aligns with Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology theory, which emphasizes that children's behavior is the result of the interaction between individual characteristics and the learning environment. A Study (Wentzel & Muenks, 2022) swowed that motivation, teacher-student relationships, and a supportive classroom climate play a significant role in reducing distractive behavior and increasing learning engagement. Research (Nurhasanah et al., 2024) also proves that learning strategies that are responsive to students' developmental needs can reduce disruptive behavior and improve the academic achievement of slow learner students in elementary schools. Thus, the formulation of the problem in this article is focused on the characteristics of distractive behavior that appears in fifth grade students, the factors that cause distractive behavior and learning barriers, the relationship between academic barriers and distractive behavior, and the implications of these findings for classroom management strategies. The purpose of writing this article is to describe the distractive behavior of fifth grade elementary school students, analyze the academic and non-academic causes behind it, explain the relationship between distractive behavior and learning barriers, and present alternative educational strategies that are relevant and based on educational psychology. Theoretically, this article is expected to enrich the study of student behavior with learning barriers in elementary schools, while practically it can be a reference for teachers, counselors, and schools in designing more appropriate, preventive, and child development-oriented management.

B. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which was chosen because the characteristics of the problems studied are complex, contextual, and closely related to the dynamics of student behavior and learning development in the

natural school environment. The qualitative approach was used by researchers to understand distractive behavior and learning barriers not merely as symptoms that appear on the surface, but as developmental phenomena influenced by the interaction between individual, academic, and school environmental factors. The case study is considered appropriate because this research focuses on an in-depth study of a specific case, namely elementary school students, especially fifth grade elementary school students who exhibit distractive behavior accompanied by learning barriers, so that the analysis can be carried out intensively and holistically (Yin, 2020). In the context of educational psychology, this design is relevant for uncovering the meaning, patterns, and processes underlying student behavior, which often cannot be adequately explained through quantitative approaches. The modification in this study lies in combining the analysis of distractive behavior and learning barriers as a single developmental phenomenon, so that the results are expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding than studies that separate the two aspects.

The research subjects were fifth-grade students at SD 1 Ngemplak who exhibited distractive behavior and learning disabilities, particularly in basic academic skills such as reading and writing. Subject selection was conducted purposively, considering that the subjects possessed characteristics that matched the research focus and were able to provide rich information related to the phenomena being studied. Supporting informants included fifth-grade teachers, subject teachers, and school officials who were directly involved in the learning process and had a deep understanding of student development and behavior. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, directly present in the field to collect, interpret, and analyze data (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The researcher's presence was limited to participatory nature, where the researcher was not directly involved in the learning process, but systematically observed student behavior and interactions in the classroom. The research procedure is carried out through systematic and continuous stages as recommended in the qualitative research approach to ensure the depth and consistency of the research data (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The initial stage of the research began with preliminary observations aimed at recognizing classroom conditions and identifying students who exhibit distractive behavior and learning barriers naturally in the context of everyday learning (Sugiyono, 2019). The next stage is the collection of primary data through repeated observations, interviews, and collection of student learning outcomes as a form of comprehensive data collection from various sources (Miles et al., 2020). The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, categorization, and meaning-making to identify patterns and relationships between phenomena. Data reduction was carried out by sorting and focusing on relevant data according to the research objectives to ensure

the analysis remained focused and in-depth (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The data aims to group distractive behavior and learning barriers into certain themes to facilitate the process of interpreting meaning (Miles et al., 2020). The data analysis process was conducted interactively and continued from the beginning of data collection to the final stage of the study to maintain continuity between the data and the research findings. To ensure data validity, this study implemented triangulation of sources and methods, member checks with teachers, and peer discussions as the main strategies in increasing the credibility of the research findings. In practice, source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, especially class teachers, assistant teachers, and the results of direct observations of students in class. The distractive behavior of students observed by researchers during learning was not immediately accepted as a single fact, but was confirmed through teacher explanations regarding the students' academic backgrounds, history of learning difficulties, and student responses in different learning situations (Creswell & Poth, 2021). This confirmation process shows that the same behavior can have different meanings depending on the learning context and individual student experiences, thus emphasizing the importance of contextual analysis in qualitative educational research (Miles et al., 2020) Meanwhile, method triangulation was realized through the use of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and review of learning documents such as teacher notes, student work, and progress reports. In reality, observational data often only shows surface symptoms, while interviews help uncover the reasons behind the behavior, and academic documents show consistent patterns of learning difficulties. The congruence of the findings from these three methods strengthened the researcher's confidence in the validity of the data. Member checking with teachers was carried out by discussing the preliminary results and the researcher's interpretations regarding distractive behavior and student learning barriers. In this process, teachers not only verify the accuracy of data descriptions but also provide clarification and corrections if there are any inaccurate interpretations. Additionally, peer discussions are conducted with fellow researchers or academic colleagues to test the consistency of the analysis and avoid subjective bias. Through these discussions, researchers are exposed to alternative perspectives that challenge initial assumptions, allowing for more critical, reflective, and balanced data interpretation. In reality, this process helps researchers distinguish between findings that are truly supported by the data and conclusions that are potentially influenced by personal perceptions. These steps are taken to ensure that the research results have validity, credibility, and can be scientifically accounted for, in accordance with qualitative research standards in education and developmental psychology (Sabnis & Wolgemuth, 2023).

C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that distractive behavior and learning barriers in fifth-grade students at SD 1 Ngemplak are interrelated phenomena that cannot be understood separately. Variations in the intensity of distractive behavior found in students reflect differences in basic academic abilities and self-regulatory capacities. Therefore, behaviors observed in the classroom should be interpreted as adaptive responses to the learning demands faced by students. These results align with the perspective of developmental psychology, which emphasizes that the behavior of elementary school-aged children is strongly influenced by the match between the demands of the learning environment and the individual's actual abilities (Blair & Raver, 2020). Theoretically, the findings of this study can be explained through Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which places fifth-grade students in the concrete operational stage. At this stage, students should be able to use reading and writing skills as tools to understand more complex learning concepts. When basic literacy skills are underdeveloped, as was found in one of the study subjects, students experience a significant gap between academic demands and their cognitive capacities. This mismatch triggers confusion, frustration, and decreased learning engagement, which then manifests in the form of distractive behavior. Thus, distractive behavior in this context is not simply a disciplinary violation, but rather an indicator of serious obstacles to academic development.

The research results also strengthen the concept of slow learners as explained by Alloway & Gathercole, (2020) serta Holmes et al (2021) which states that children with information processing delays and executive function limitations tend to have difficulty maintaining attention and managing academic demands. In slow learners who have not yet mastered basic literacy, academic failure occurs repeatedly and systematically. This condition weakens learning motivation and self-regulation abilities, so that distractive behavior functions as a self-protection mechanism to avoid repeated failure experiences. These findings support the model of the reciprocal relationship between learning difficulties and problem behavior proposed by Wentzel & Muenks (2022) where academic difficulties and distractive behavior reinforce each other in a negative cycle. From a methodological perspective, the use of a qualitative approach with a case study design enabled researchers to capture the dynamics of student behavior in depth and context. Repeated classroom observations, combined with teacher interviews and analysis of learning outcome documents, provided a comprehensive picture of distractive behavior patterns and students' academic backgrounds. This approach is relevant for uncovering the meaning behind apparent behavior, which often cannot be explained through quantitative measurements alone. Triangulation of sources and methods also strengthened

the credibility of the findings, as observed behavior was confirmed through teacher perspectives and student academic evidence. Thus, the results of this study have strong contextual validity, although they are not intended for statistical generalization.

The results of the study revealed three profiles of distractive behavior, indicating that the intensity of disruptive behavior directly correlates with the level of learning disability. Students with severe literacy disabilities exhibited persistent and pervasive distractive behavior, while students with adequate academic ability exhibited situational distractive behavior. These findings align with research Ramli et al (2022) dan Kim & Park (2023) which states that distractive behavior in elementary school students is often rooted in academic difficulties, particularly in basic reading and writing skills. However, this study extends these findings by showing that in students without literacy difficulties, distractive behavior is more influenced by pedagogical factors such as boredom, group dynamics, and variations in learning methods. Teachers' strategies for providing alternative assignments tailored to the interests of slow-learning students have been shown to reduce the intensity of distractive behavior in the short term. This finding supports the behaviorist view that behavior can be modified through positive reinforcement and reduced academic pressure (Skinner, 1953). However, the results of this study also indicate that this strategy has not addressed the root of the problem, namely the lag in basic literacy. Without structured, sustainable, and developmentally-based remedial interventions, distractive behaviors have the potential to reappear when students are faced with the same academic demands. This underscores the importance of a differentiated and inclusive learning approach in heterogeneous regular classrooms, as recommended by (OECD, 2021).

The findings of this study also highlight the crucial role of collaboration between schools and parents in addressing learning barriers and distractive behaviors. Students' academic barriers are not only formed at school but are also influenced by learning support patterns, routines, and emotional support at home. When school interventions are not supported by consistent educational practices within the family, treatment efforts become fragmented and less sustainable. These findings align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, which emphasizes that child development is the result of interactions between various environmental systems, including the school and the family. Therefore, parental involvement needs to be positioned as an integral part of treatment strategies, not merely a supplement.

While providing in-depth insights, this study has several limitations. First, the case study design with a limited number of subjects limits the generalizability of the findings to other school contexts. Second, this study did not in-depth explore the dynamics of the family environment and socioeconomic factors that may influence students' learning barriers. Third, this study did not test the effectiveness of remedial literacy interventions longitudinally, so its long-term impact on behavioral change and academic achievement cannot be concluded. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to involve more subjects and diverse school contexts, use a longitudinal design to monitor the development of slow learners over time, and empirically test the effectiveness of basic literacy interventions and differentiated learning. Furthermore, further studies that integrate parental perspectives and family environmental factors in greater depth will enrich our understanding of comprehensively addressing learning barriers and distractive behavior. Thus, future research findings are expected to be not only descriptive but also provide a strong foundation for developing more inclusive and child-development-oriented educational practices.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that distractive behavior in fifth-grade students at SD 1 Ngemplak varies in intensity and is closely related to learning disabilities, particularly basic literacy skills. High-intensity distractive behavior is found in students who have not yet mastered reading and writing, making it persistent and pervasive. In other students, distractive behavior tends to be situational and manageable. These findings confirm that distractive behavior cannot be understood solely as a discipline problem, but rather as a manifestation of academic difficulties, learning frustration, and weak self-regulation. This research is limited by its case study design, limited number of subjects, and focus on a single school context, making the findings difficult to generalize broadly to a larger population. Furthermore, this study did not fully explore family factors and long-term interventions conducted outside the classroom context. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve more diverse subjects and settings, use a longitudinal approach, and examine the effectiveness of differentiated learning interventions and school-parent collaboration in addressing learning disabilities and distractive behavior on an ongoing basis.

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