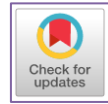


## Analysis of learning difficulties in reading, writing, and counting (Calistung) in upper elementary school: A case study



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**Abstract:** Reading, writing, and counting (calistung) are fundamental skills taught early to students and have become a significant issue in the learning process of upper elementary classes faced by teachers at the primary school level. This study aims to analyze the learning difficulties in calistung and the efforts made by schools and teachers to address these difficulties in upper elementary school students. The research method employed is qualitative, using a case study approach with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and document analysis. The research sample consisted of upper elementary students (grades IV to VI) who experienced difficulties in calistung, selected through purposive sampling. The data analysis technique involved stages such as data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research findings indicate the presence of calistung learning difficulties among upper elementary school students, which include pre-academic and academic learning difficulties influenced by internal and external factors. Pre-academic learning difficulties involve deviant student behavior and language development disorders, while academic learning difficulties encompass challenges in reading, writing, and counting. The study suggests that calistung learning difficulties in upper elementary schools can be addressed through teachers designing effective learning activities based on student needs and providing counseling services for students facing learning challenges.

**Keywords:** Learning difficulties; Teachers; Elementary School; Calistung

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## INTRODUCTION

Education involves the process of teaching carried out by an educator to students, where the educator, as an adult, is expected to set an example, provide instruction guidance, enhance ethics and morals, and explore each student's knowledge. Instruction to students does not only occur in formal education conducted by those in authority

(Haerullah & Elihami, 2020; Norlena, 2015; Ramli, 2015). In this context, the role of the family and society is crucial, serving as the nurturing ground that can awaken and develop knowledge and understanding (Hulukati, 2016; Marisyah et al., 2019; Rochanah, 2016; Rosyadi et al., 2021). Bamisaye (1989) states that education is a cumulative process of developing intellectual abilities, skills, and attitudes that can encourage the formation of a person's way of thinking and acting in life. Meanwhile, Sugihartono (2007) explains that education is a way to change human behavior in a conscious and systematic manner.

Education is key to creating a more intelligent society. It serves as a tool that provides humans with knowledge, skills, techniques, and various information (Prasad & Gupta, 2020). Elementary education (SD) is the initial strong foundation for the intellectual, social, and emotional development of each individual, paving the way for deeper understanding and broader opportunities in higher education and everyday life (Melianti et al., 2023; Sya'idah et al., 2022). Ihsan (2013) mentions that elementary education is an education that provides knowledge and skills, imparts the basic attitudes needed in society, and prepares students to pursue secondary education.

Elementary education, in principle, is an education that equips individuals for life development (Alfurqan et al., 2020; Alpian et al., 2019; Yunita et al., 2023). This education can take the form of school education or out-of-school education, which can be formal, non-formal, or informal education (AF et al., 2022; Hasan & Nurhayati, 2012). Sujana (2019) defines education as an effort to help the physical and spiritual aspects of students move from their natural state toward a more humane civilization. For example, students are advised to sit properly, avoid being noisy, not disturb others, understand what a healthy and clean body looks like, dress neatly, respect the elderly, care for the young, and show concern for one another. These are examples of the educational process aimed at humanizing individuals.

Elementary school is a crucial stage where learning difficulties can be identified and addressed effectively. According to Lerner (2000), learning difficulties is a general term for various learning challenges, including difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and counting. Burton identifies that a student can be diagnosed with a learning difficulty if the individual shows certain failures in achieving their learning objectives (Mulyadi, 2010). Learning difficulties are conditions where students with average or above-average intelligence fail to learn, which is related to barriers in perception, conceptualization, language, memory, concentration, self-regulation, and sensorimotor integration functions (Ananda & Wandini, 2022; Pautina, 2018; Setyawan et al., 2020).

Utami (2020) describes learning difficulties as conditions in which the learning process is marked by obstacles to achieving learning outcomes, making the main condition ineffective for students. These obstacles come from both within and outside the student. Learning difficulties are frequently encountered by teachers and are the responsibility of teachers to address (Idris, 2009; Nuraeni & Syihabuddin, 2020; Yvonne et al., 2024). These challenges occur when students are less capable of meeting the demands of the learning process, resulting in unsatisfactory or suboptimal learning outcomes (Suartini, 2022). Mabruia (2021) emphasizes that the urgency of addressing learning difficulties in the learning process is to identify and locate the sources of students' learning difficulties and determine possible solutions by considering the factors influencing learning success. Therefore, Ismail stresses that diagnosing learning difficulties should be done for several reasons: students should receive opportunities and services to develop to their fullest potential; there are differences in abilities, intelligence,

talents, interests, and environmental backgrounds among students; the school teaching system should allow students to progress according to their abilities; and to address students' challenges, teachers should intensify their efforts in handling students by enhancing their knowledge, openness, and skills in identifying learning difficulties (Ismail, 2016).

Calistung-related learning difficulties can be categorized into several types, such as recognizing letters, counting, or writing. Rachman (2019) explains that reading, writing, and counting are basic abilities for recognizing letters and numbers. These abilities make it easier for individuals to communicate, whether through language, writing, or numbers (Mariyono, 2016; A. S. Nur et al., 2019). Kurtanto (2013) notes that teaching reading, writing, and counting is an integrated thematic learning that connects or integrates at least two subjects, namely Indonesian and Mathematics, within a topic or sub-topic. Elementary school students must master reading, writing, and counting skills, as they are the fundamental knowledge needed to participate in learning activities, especially in the lower grades (Natasya et al., 2023).

Hanum (2021) states that reading is a benchmark for determining the success of the teaching and learning process as expected in educational goals. By reading, students acquire basic skills that help them easily understand various other knowledge concepts (Fahmi, 2018; Navida et al., 2023; Tantri, 2016). The importance of introducing calistung lies in students' ability to develop basic skills such as reading, writing, and counting (A. Nur, 2018; Rizki & Bakhtiar, 2022). Calistung not only helps students prepare for formal education but also encourages individual abilities to build confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Holis, 2009).

The ability to do calistung should be taught to students psychologically when they reach the ideal age of 6 to 7 years, the early stage of elementary school (Apriyanti & Aprianti, 2023). According to Article 9 of Law Number 35 of 2014, every student has the right to receive education and teaching to develop their personality and intelligence according to their interests and talents. Teaching students the ability to read, write, and count is an initial effort to introduce the importance of knowledge for human life. Poverty, backwardness, ignorance, and societal helplessness can be avoided through this knowledge (Ardini et al., 2022; Jessica et al., 2017).

Calistung is a fundamental ability that every individual must possess. However, introducing these abilities through the learning process is not yet evenly accessible to all layers of society. The ability to read, write, and count is a key solution to reducing the illiteracy rate in Indonesia, which remains high. Low reading, writing, and counting skills in the community correlate with low cognitive development. In 2023, Indonesia ranked 54th out of 78 countries in global education rankings. One indicator in these rankings is literacy and illiteracy rates. This indicates a lag in human resource development based on knowledge acquisition. The community's openness to the balanced development of knowledge and technology must be accompanied by the ability to understand them through reading.

Many previous studies have explored similar topics, but this research excels in deeply identifying factors influencing the success of calistung (Cahyaningsih et al., 2024; Munirah, 2018; Nani & Hendriana, 2019; Ningsih et al., 2022). The strength of this research lies in its ability to develop more effective and relevant educational strategies, providing practical insights for parents, teachers, and educational organizers to support students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. This study also offers a more comprehensive understanding of creating a solid foundation for students' educational

development in the future. Therefore, this research aims to review learning difficulties in reading, writing, and counting in upper-grade elementary schools, focusing on effective learning difficulty analysis to overcome learning barriers in upper grades.

## METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative case study approach. The qualitative approach emphasizes meaning and understanding through *verstehen*, reasoning, and defining a particular situation (Musianto, 2002; Sarwono, 2009). According to Creswell, the goals of qualitative research are divided into four: main objectives, central phenomenon, research subjects, and research location. Meanwhile, a case study, according to Yin (2018), is an empirical inquiry process that investigates and examines various phenomena within the scope of real life. Case studies are used to examine a case in detail, intensively, deeply, and comprehensively (Fadli, 2021).

This study focuses on the learning difficulties in the calistung of 4th and 5th-grade students at SD Panancangan 5. The research sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a method of selecting samples deliberately or purposefully choosing sample units that match the research objectives or specific analytical needs (Etikan et al., 2016; Firmansyah & Dede, 2022). In this technique, researchers use certain considerations or relevant criteria to select samples deemed most representative of the population or phenomenon being studied (Lenaini, 2021). The criteria for selecting teachers as subjects include having worked for at least two years, residing in the city of Serang (as teachers in this area have relevant data on local challenges and needs relevant to the research site), and being willing to participate in the research. The criteria for selecting students as subjects include being 4th and 5th-grade students at SD Panancangan and being willing to participate in the research. The data sources used in this study are primary data from interviews with two 4th and 5th-grade teachers and four 4th-grade students. Supporting secondary data include documentation, photographs related to the research, and other supporting documentation. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques use the theory from Miles and Hubberman (2014), which involves data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learning difficulties in calistung are conditions where a student struggles to understand and master basic concepts of mathematics and language taught early in education. Calistung learning difficulties refer to students' challenges in recognizing letters, numbers, colors, or even letter shapes. Calistung, introduced to students from an early age, supports the implementation of effective learning activities. However, learning difficulties in calistung can occur at various levels, both in elementary and advanced schooling. At the elementary school level, difficulties can arise in lower grades, including grades I to III, and upper grades, including grades IV to VI. Calistung learning difficulties are divided into two categories: pre-academic calistung learning difficulties and academic calistung learning difficulties (Marlina, 2019).

### Pre-Academic Learning Difficulties

Pre-academic learning difficulties include students' deviant behavior and language development disorders. Academic calistung learning difficulties encompass students' challenges in reading, spelling, and fluent reading, writing, and counting. Based on

research findings, pre-academic learning difficulties in upper-grade elementary students include:

**Deviant Student Behavior**

Deviant student behavior refers to actions or attitudes that violate accepted norms, rules, or values within the school or community environment. Deviant behavior in students is a complex phenomenon involving various actions or decisions that breach social norms or applicable rules. This includes a range of behaviors, from minor infractions like talking while the teacher is teaching to more serious issues such as harassment or violence.

According to observations conducted at SDN Panancangan 5, several students exhibited deviant behavior. Forms of deviant behavior included disturbing peers during both class time and break times at school. In learning activities, students failed to create a conducive classroom environment and became passive individuals in the learning process, primarily due to their lack of attention to the lesson.

Deviant behavior in learning activities can vary, including concentration issues, behavioral disruptions, and actions that interfere with the teaching and learning process (Wicaksono, 2013). Concentration problems often manifest as students' inability to focus on the learning material (Alim, 2015; Andriani et al., 2022). When students cannot focus on learning, they cannot understand the material well, which can hinder the learning process.

Interviews revealed that:

*“In the ongoing learning process, some students show very active behavior towards other activities, thus failing to focus their attention on the learning process. Among these students, some even do not pay attention to the lesson.”*

Thus, based on direct observation and interviews, it is evident that students display deviant behavior.

Educators and school authorities must address deviant behavior seriously. The school's efforts to minimize students' deviant behavior, which hinders learning activities and creates learning difficulties, include collaborative follow-up between the classroom teacher and the Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher. Below is documentation of notes made by the teacher and the BK teacher.

KEGIATAN BIMBINGAN DAN PENYULUHAN							
: 2) (S.B)							
: 1 / Juli							
: 2023 / 2024							
No	Hari/Tanggal	Masalah	Kegiatan Bimbingan / Penyuluhan	Banyak Siswa	Teknik	Hasil	
				Individu	Kelompok	Alamiah	Tindak lanjut
	Rabu 16 Juli 23	Tidak berminat Pembelajaran	Adalah Berminat Berkas	1	✓	-	berminat dan antusias dalam belajar
	Senin 19 Agustus 23	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	1	✓	-	Berkas Merasakan Merasakan
	Rabu 26 April 23	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	2	-	✓	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran
	Rabu 16 Sep 23	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	3	-	✓	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran
	Senin 5 Okt 23	berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	2	-	✓	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran
	Senin 20 Okt 23	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	1	-	✓	Berkas Merasakan Merasakan
	Rabu 23 Okt 23	tidak berminat dalam pembelajaran	tidak mau berminat dalam pembelajaran	1	✓	-	Berkas Merasakan Merasakan

Figure 1. Notes on Deviant Student Behavior

Deviant behavior in classroom learning activities can be a form of learning difficulty that negatively impacts the educational process (Hidayah, 2016). There are two main factors contributing to students' deviant behavior: internal and external factors (Yanti

et al., 2023). Internal factors include psychological issues such as emotional problems or mental disorders. External factors involve social, cultural, and other environmental influences. The environment in which students grow and develop plays a crucial role in shaping their behavior (Sa'idah et al., 2019). Students exposed to unstable environments are likelier to exhibit deviant behavior (Khamdani, 2021; Rochaniningsih, 2014).

Collaboration between educators and school authorities is a solution that can be applied to address deviant behavior as a learning difficulty. According to Rahmawati Rahmawati (2020), teachers' efforts to address deviant behavior include reprimanding, giving advice, issuing warnings, calling parents, and administering punishments and sanctions. Solutions to deviant behavior can also involve developing teaching strategies that address individual students' needs. According to Killen (1998), teachers must choose teaching strategies that are suitable for the situation. Therefore, creating effective learning activities and a conducive learning environment allows each student to achieve their learning potential optimally.

### Language Development Disorders

Language development disorders are a form of learning difficulty that can hinder students' ability to understand and communicate effectively. Students with language disorders may struggle to comprehend words, express thoughts verbally, or understand complex language structures. Learning difficulties due to language development disorders can impede cognitive development.

Observations from teachers and students revealed that some students experience language development disorders. These disorders include low language comprehension skills. In classroom activities, teachers must repeat the material to ensure that the students fully convey and understand the meaning and content.

Language development disorders can include difficulties in organizing and constructing sentences correctly, known as language pattern disorders (Gumiwang, 2021; Khairina et al., 2020). Students with language disorders struggle to express ideas clearly and coherently and have difficulty following proper grammar rules (Pratama & Junaidi, 2022). This can hinder students' ability to express themselves verbally and in writing effectively.

Supported by interviews with the class teacher, students with language development disorders have low comprehension and are inactive during the learning process. In interactions with peers, these students are reluctant to socialize with others and do not want to speak with the teacher or other students. Figure 2 is documentation of students' test responses who experience language development disorders.

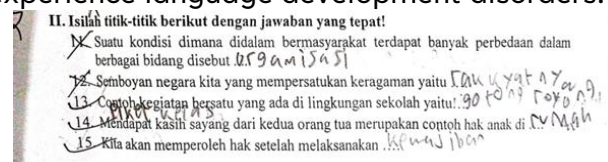


Figure 2. Student Answer Sheet with Language Disorders

Language development disorders can occur at various levels, from difficulties understanding words to problems producing complex sentences (Nani & Hendriana, 2019; Salamah, 2012). Language development disorders can lead to difficulties in understanding lessons and social interactions and decreased self-confidence and learning motivation. Therefore, addressing learning difficulties related to language disorders in elementary school requires collaboration between teachers to develop lesson plans that



consider each student's unique needs (Afandi & Badarudin, 2011; Bariyah, 2019). The use of technology and educational software can serve as tools to enhance students' language skills interactively and enjoyably (Mahyudi, 2023; Murniasih & Budiarti, 2023; Sarjani et al., 2023). A supportive classroom learning environment can play a significant role in helping students with language disorders feel accepted and motivated to learn. Educators should create an atmosphere that allows students to feel comfortable participating in classroom activities and interacting with peers (Rifly, 2023; Salmiah et al., 2022).

### Academic Learning Difficulties

Academic learning difficulties in counting and literacy can impact students' academic abilities. In some cases, learning difficulties can lead to academic gaps between capable students and those with learning difficulties. Types of academic learning difficulties include:

#### Reading Difficulties

Reading difficulties show a lack of vocabulary understanding or phonological processing and challenges in understanding the meaning of the text as a whole. Reading difficulties are learning disorders that can affect a person's ability to read, spell, and comprehend text. Symptoms of reading difficulties can be identified by recognizing students' letters and hearing recognition challenges, which lead to difficulties in linking letters into words and sentences.

Reading difficulties significantly impact the effectiveness of learning activities. Observations show that some students experience reading difficulties. Interviews with the class teacher revealed that:

*“There are students who cannot read, who have only reached the stage of recognizing letters, and some are still spelling out words.”*

This is due to students' reluctance to study independently and a lack of active learning activities, resulting from their lack of motivation and inability to study diligently. The teacher's role is limited to teaching students at school and does not fully extend to the student's home and community environments.

Reading difficulties in students hinder the implementation of effective learning activities and the achievement of learning goals. School resources collaborate with class teachers to design programs to address reading difficulties. Below is documentation of the teacher's notes on implementing guidance and counseling programs for students experiencing reading difficulties.

**KEGIATAN BIMBINGAN DAN PENYULUHAN**

Kelas : 4  
Semester : 2  
Tahun Pembelajaran : 2023/2024

No.	Hari/Tanggal	Masalah	Kegiatan Bimbingan / Penyuluhan	Banyak Siswa			Teknik			Hasil	Tindak lanjut
				Individu	Kelompok	Klasikal	Individu	Kelompok	Klasikal		
1.	Senin, 20/01/2024	Alfa Naya	Belajar dan Membaca	1	✓				baik	Belajar	
2.	Selasa, 19/01/2024	Muhammad	Belajar dan Membaca	1	✓				baik	Belajar	
3.	Kamis, 9/01/2024	Fahmi	Belajar dan Membaca	1	✓				baik	Belajar	

Figure 3. Teacher's Notes on Implementing Guidance and Counseling Programs

Solutions that teachers can implement to address reading difficulties, according to Munirah's (2018) research, include sudden play techniques, object-naming contests,

singing, watching TV, and drama games. Teachers can design activities that encourage students to actively participate in learning as a primary effort to address students with reading difficulties (Nur`aini et al., 2024; Rivaldi & Rosyid, 2022; Zulkarnaini & Mahdalena, 2019). The learning process is designed based on students' conditions so that learning materials are accessible to all students, regardless of their abilities (Azkiya & Ridhuan, 2023). Below is documentation of one vocabulary media used by the teacher to introduce letters to students.



Figure 4. Vocabulary Media Bottle Caps

Teachers address students' reading difficulties by conducting guidance with the class teacher and encouraging students to learn through play (Barus et al., 2023; Saputra & Noviyanti, 2022). According to Pratiwi (2022), there are nine solutions that teachers can use in collaboration with parents to address reading difficulties in elementary school students. These include teachers demonstrating reading activities to students and managing academic activities. Teachers strive to provide training for students to guide them in spelling until they become fluent (peer tutoring) and use learning media, such as vocabulary media, to help students recognize letters and vocabulary (Azizah & Rahmawati, 2022; Nurjannah, 2014). Other activities that teachers can implement with students include taking students shopping at the school canteen and assigning them to read the names of various types of food sold at the canteen. Teachers ask students to spell out slowly and then pronounce according to the reading results.

### Writing Difficulties

Learning to write at the elementary school level can be a significant challenge for some students. Writing difficulties include problems with using uppercase and lowercase letters, punctuation, or spelling difficult words. Writing difficulties can also be characterized by students struggling to copy and form letters correctly.

Observations show that some students still experience difficulties with writing. Writing sentences with uppercase and lowercase letters is inconsistent. To address this issue, teachers assign students to practice writing more. Teachers direct students to write down every word dictated or spoken by the teacher in their handwriting.

Dictating or having students write down each word requires a process of letter recognition (Febrianti & Mukhlisina, 2022; Harahap et al., 2023; Umayra & Kasiyati, 2021). Without this process, students cannot write each letter pronounced by the teacher. Dictating texts with a few words and having students write them into meaningful word arrangements can also train students in combining letters to form meaningful words.





### Counting Difficulties

Counting difficulties refer to challenges in understanding, mastering, or applying basic mathematical concepts related to counting. Inability becomes evident when dealing with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division activities. This can occur at various levels of difficulty for each student.

Observations indicate that counting difficulties can affect students' academic performance. During learning activities, students struggle with math exercises on addition and subtraction. Some students have difficulty when faced with questions comparing the largest and smallest numbers. In daily life, counting difficulties can hinder the individual's activities.

These counting difficulties are supported by interviews with the class teacher, who stated:

*“Students might not focus during counting lessons. When the teacher conducts question-and-answer sessions on counting, students cannot respond quickly like other students.”*

Figure 7 is documentation of a student struggling with counting while completing a task assigned by the teacher.



Figure 7. Student Struggling with Counting

Some students show a high dependency on the teacher's assistance. While working on counting tasks, students still struggle to complete them. They seek help from the teacher to learn how to finish the given counting tasks. Below is documentation of the results of a student's counting task.

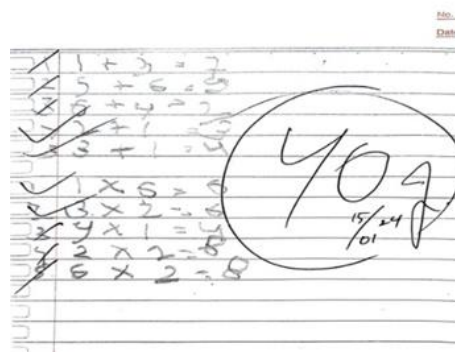


Figure 8. Results of a Student's Counting Task

The range of scores between students who have age-appropriate counting skills and those who struggle with counting shows a significant difference. Students with counting difficulties have lower scores. The class teacher addresses counting difficulties by conducting quizzes on questions like multiplication, addition, and subtraction, or memorization. Using quizzes can motivate students with counting difficulties to participate and provide answers. In the learning process, the teacher continuously trains counting using fingers, counting sticks, and surrounding objects. Below is documentation of one counting media, counting sticks, used by the teacher to train students in counting.

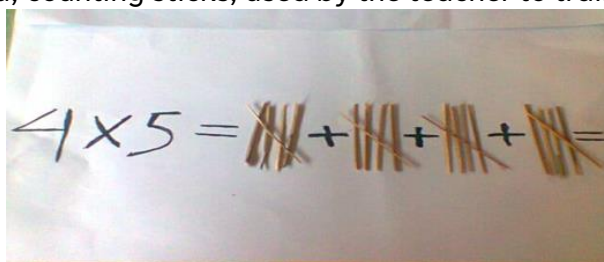


Figure 9. Mathematic stick media

The use of teaching media and aids effectively helps students overcome difficulties in counting (Ahudulu, 2020; Alfitriani et al., 2022; Yantoro et al., 2020). Difficulties in counting at the elementary school level occur due to several factors involving various aspects that affect students' ability to understand and master basic mathematical concepts. One main factor is a lack of understanding of basic mathematical concepts (Buyung et al., 2022; Raharjo et al., 2021; Wulandari, 2006). Students may struggle with understanding the relationship between numbers, remembering arithmetic facts, or comprehending basic mathematical operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division (Ningsih et al., 2022).

Counting difficulties among some students are also influenced by differences in students' learning styles in learning to count (Rahmawati et al., 2021). By considering students' learning styles, teachers can develop more effective and relevant teaching strategies. Lesson plans can incorporate engaging and varied teaching methods. Teachers can use mathematical manipulatives, interactive math applications, math games, and problem-based activities that are concrete and relevant for students (Nasaruddin, 2015; Novitasari & Fathoni, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that there are five types of learning difficulties experienced by upper-grade students: (1) pre-academic difficulties, including deviant student behavior and language development disorders, and (2) academic difficulties, including difficulties in reading/students still spelling and not yet fluent in reading, difficulties in writing, and difficulties in counting. The efforts made by teachers to address students' learning difficulties are: (1) Providing punishments such as studying outside the classroom and giving additional lessons or cleaning the classroom, and then engaging students in singing to remind them that deviant behavior is inappropriate and providing counseling for students with deviant behavior. (2) Providing other media that are easy for students to understand and asking students to discuss with their peers or tutors. (3) Conducting guidance with the classroom teacher, engaging students in learning through play, and providing training for students to guide

and use vocabulary media. (4) Providing writing guidance using the dictation method for students. (5) Practicing with mathematical sticks, sticks for math, and using objects around, as well as frequently conducting question-and-answer sessions on multiplication, addition, and subtraction or memorization.

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