

Analysis of Factors Causing Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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ABSTRACT

Reading ability is a fundamental literacy skill that determines students' success in participating in the learning process. However, some lower-grade students continue to experience difficulties in beginning reading, which may hinder their academic development. This study aimed to analyze the forms of reading difficulties and the internal and external factors contributing to reading difficulties among second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The primary participants consisted of six second-grade students identified as experiencing reading difficulties, while supporting informants included the classroom teacher, tahfiz teacher, principal, and students' parents. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and reading assessments. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties in recognizing and distinguishing similar letters, combining letters into syllables, reading words fluently and accurately, and comprehending simple texts. Internal factors contributing to these difficulties included low concentration, limited learning motivation, inadequate mastery of letter-sound correspondence, and low self-confidence. External factors comprised limited parental assistance, inadequate reading materials and literacy habits at home, insufficient individual guidance in the classroom, limited variation in instructional media, and a less conducive classroom environment. The study concludes that reading difficulties are multidimensional and require comprehensive interventions through early assessment, systematic beginning-reading instruction, individualized assistance, varied learning media, and collaborative partnerships among teachers, schools, and parents to improve students' foundational literacy skills.

Keywords: *Beginning Reading, External Factors, Internal Factors, Lower-Grade Students, Reading Difficulties.*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

July 20, 2026

Revised

August 03, 2026

Accepted

August 06, 2026

How to cite

Syahrani, S. M., & Sapri, S. (2026). Analysis of Factors Causing Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. *Journal of Society Counseling*. 4(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59388/josc.v4i2.1003>

Journal Homepage

<https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/josc>

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Published by

ScidacPlus

INTRODUCTION

Reading ability is a basic skill that serves as the foundation for students' success in following all the learning processes at school (Sapitri, Nasution, & Iskandar, 2023; Dabutar, Nst, & Farabi, 2025). Reading isn't just a way to get information, but it's also a prerequisite for developing critical thinking skills, communication, and achieving competence in various subjects (Anas & Sapri, 2021; Cantika, Junaidi, & Ayu, 2024). In elementary school, especially in the lower grades, mastering early reading skills is an important indicator of a student's readiness to move on to more complex learning stages. If reading abilities don't develop properly in the early phase of education, students will have trouble understanding lesson material, keeping up with class activities, and achieving the expected learning outcomes (Mukhlis & Ulinnuha, 2023; Sumanti, Nunzairina, & Salminawati, 2024).

Globally, low reading literacy skills are still a major concern in education. Various international assessment results show that students' reading abilities in Indonesia are still in a category that needs serious attention (Nahdi, YS, Jannah, Nahdiyaton, & Muhlis, 2023). This situation shows that most students are not yet able to deeply understand information, connect ideas in the reading, or draw conclusions based on the text they read. This phenomenon is influenced not only by the students' cognitive abilities but also by the quality of reading instruction, the family environment, literacy culture, and the availability of supporting media and learning resources (Amaliyah, Fajar, & Aminulloh, 2024).

Reading difficulties in lower-grade students are a multidimensional problem. Various studies explain that the causes of reading difficulties can come from internal or external factors. Internal factors include low letter recognition skills, weak phonological awareness, limited vocabulary, low learning motivation, lack of concentration, and differences in each child's cognitive development level (Zhahrani, Ikhwan, & Erwahyudin, 2025). Meanwhile, external factors include less varied learning methods, limited learning media, minimal parental support at home, a low reading culture in the family, and a less conducive learning environment. The interaction of these various factors causes each student's reading ability to develop at different speeds, so it's necessary to identify the causes comprehensively before deciding on the right intervention strategy (Amir, Baharun, Wibowo, & Nurhasanah, 2022; Ritonga & Nurmawati, 2025).

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, as an Islamic-based primary education institution, has a responsibility not only focused on developing academic skills but also on shaping character and strengthening Islamic values (Fakih, 2024). Therefore, reading skills become a very important competency because they are related to students' ability to understand textbooks, read the Qur'an, understand Islamic literature, and develop a culture of literacy that aligns with Islamic values. From an Islamic perspective, reading activities hold a very noble position, as emphasized in the first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through Allah's words in Surah Al-'Alaq verse 1, which commands humans to read (Iqra') (Maghribi, Anisa, Marsela, Syamila, & Sari, 2023). This shows that reading ability is an important part of developing knowledge and civilization.

Based on initial observations at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center, there are still younger students who have trouble with early reading skills. Out of 60 students from grades 1 to 3, 14 students (23.3%) were identified as having reading difficulties with varying levels of severity. These difficulties show up in different ways, such as not being able to consistently recognize all the letters of the alphabet, often confusing letters that look

similar, reading slowly by spelling out words, having trouble blending syllables into words or simple sentences, and having low reading comprehension. Also, some students seem less confident when asked to read in front of the class, easily lose focus during lessons, and still need close support from the teacher.

Further observations showed that the reading difficulties faced by students are not only caused by individual abilities but are also influenced by various internal and external factors. Internal factors include low phonological awareness, limited vocabulary, low learning motivation, and differences in children's cognitive development readiness. Meanwhile, external factors include a lack of reading habits in the family environment, varying levels of parental support, limited use of engaging learning media, and the need to strengthen reading teaching strategies that are more adaptive to the characteristics of lower-grade students. These findings are in line with various studies stating that early reading difficulties are influenced by a combination of cognitive factors, family environment, learning motivation, and the teaching strategies applied at school.

Early reading skills are the main foundation for students' literacy development in elementary education. Various studies have identified that reading difficulties are influenced by linguistic, cognitive, psychological, social, and learning environment factors. First, previous research (Ramadhan & Tarmini, 2022) is more oriented towards identifying reading difficulties or testing the effectiveness of learning methods, so an analysis of the root causes of reading difficulties has not been conducted comprehensively. Internal factors, such as learning readiness, phonological abilities, motivation, and cognitive development, are often analyzed separately from external factors, such as teacher competence, parental involvement, family literacy culture, learning media, and the school environment. As a result, the interconnected relationships between these causative factors are not fully depicted, so the development of intervention programs still tends to be partial.

Second, research (Juhaeni et al., 2022) regarding reading difficulties has mostly been conducted in public elementary schools, while research in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is still relatively limited. In fact, madrasahs have different learning characteristics because they integrate the national curriculum with Islamic education, including habituation in reading the Qur'an and the development of religious character. These differences in characteristics allow for factors causing reading difficulties that are not entirely the same as those in public elementary schools. Therefore, the results from studies in public elementary schools cannot be directly generalized to Madrasah Ibtidaiyah without specific empirical research.

Third, the study (Putri & Sari, 2025) only considers reading ability as a learning outcome variable, without taking into account how the integration of academic learning and the Al-Qur'an tahfiz program shapes students' learning experiences. In fact, the learning characteristics in tahfiz madrasahs have their own dynamics, in terms of study time allocation, reading habits, phonological skills, as well as family involvement in supporting the child's learning process. This gap in research shows that there is still a need for more contextual studies.

Based on these gaps, this study offers novelty in three main aspects. First, it does not just describe the forms of reading difficulties but holistically analyzes the relationship between students' internal factors and the external learning environment factors, resulting in a more comprehensive mapping of the causes of reading difficulties. Second, this study was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Islamic Center Foundation, an integrated Islamic educational institution based on tahfiz that has learning characteristics different from regular elementary schools. This context provides a new perspective on how the Islamic education

environment affects the development of students' early reading skills. Third, the research is expected to produce a conceptual model of the dominant factors causing reading difficulties, which can serve as a basis for designing early detection programs, reading support, strengthening school literacy culture, and fostering more effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and the madrasa. In this way, the study not only enriches theoretical understanding of early literacy in Islamic elementary education but also offers practical contributions to the development of more contextual, adaptive, and sustainable reading teaching policies and strategies.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the types of reading difficulties and the factors that influence them in second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an, Yayasan Islamic Center. A qualitative study allows researchers to understand phenomena based on participants' experiences, perspectives, and social conditions in a natural context (Creswell, 2018). The case study design was used because the research focused on a single case tied to a specific location, subject, and educational context, namely reading difficulties in lower-grade students at an integrated Islamic school based on tahfiz (Yin, 2024).

The research was conducted at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center. The main subjects of this study were 6 second-grade students who were identified as having reading difficulties, while supporting informants included the second-grade teacher and the tahfiz teacher. The selection of research subjects used purposive sampling, which is picking informants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022). The criteria for the students chosen included not being fluent in recognizing letters, having difficulty distinguishing letters with similar shapes or sounds, struggling to combine letters into syllables, reading words and sentences haltingly, making omissions or substitutions of letters when reading, and not yet being able to understand the content of simple texts. The number of research subjects was set at six students because this already met the principles of information richness and data saturation, which is the point when observations and interviews no longer produce new information relevant to the research focus (Moleong, 2024).

The supporting informants in this study include second-grade teachers, tahfiz or Qur'an teachers, school principals, and parents. The classroom teachers are important informants because they have direct experience observing students' reading abilities and learning development in class. Tahfiz teachers are involved to gather information about students' Quran reading activities, study habits, and the connection between tahfiz learning and students' literacy development. Principals are included to provide data on school policies, literacy programs, and support for learning facilities. Meanwhile, parents serve as supporting informants to explore students' reading habits at home, learning guidance patterns, availability of reading materials, and the family's support for the development of the child's reading skills.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations are carried out during the learning process to see the types of reading difficulties students face, their responses when participating in reading activities, teacher-student interactions, the teacher's teaching strategies, and the use of learning media. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with students, class teachers, tahfiz teachers, the school principal, and parents so that the researcher can get in-depth information while still having a line of questioning aligned with the research focus (Arikunto, 2021). Documentation is used to complete data from observations and interviews, such as student

lists, reading assessment results, learning progress notes, teaching modules, learning tools, school literacy programs, and records of learning activities.

Data analysis uses an interactive model (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2024), which includes data condensation, data presentation, as well as drawing and verifying conclusions. Data condensation is done by selecting, simplifying, grouping, and coding data relevant to reading difficulties and the internal and external factors that influence them. Next, the data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions, matrices, and categorization tables so that the patterns of relationships between findings can be understood systematically. The final stage is carried out by drawing conclusions and continuously verifying them throughout the research process to ensure that the findings are based on adequate field data.

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is done by comparing information obtained from students, classroom teachers, tahfiz teachers, principals, and parents. Technique triangulation is done by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, this study applies member checking, which means confirming back the data summaries or the researcher's interpretations with the informants to ensure consistency between the researcher's interpretations and the informants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of triangulation and member checking is important to boost the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.

This study pays attention to research ethics because the main subjects are elementary school students. The researcher obtained permission from the school and consent from the students' parents or guardians before collecting any data. The informants' identities are kept confidential by using initials or codes on all records and research reports. Observations and interviews are conducted in simple language and a comfortable environment so that the students can share their learning experiences without pressure. With these procedures, this study is expected to produce a deep, contextual, and accountable understanding of the factors causing reading difficulties in second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Forms of Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

Based on classroom observations of second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center, several forms of reading difficulties were identified among early-grade learners. The most prominent difficulty was the students' limited ability to recognize and distinguish letters, particularly those with similar shapes, such as b and d, p and q, as well as m and n. Some students also experienced difficulty blending letters into syllables and reading simple words as complete units.

In addition, many students tended to read hesitantly, paused for extended periods when encountering certain words, and frequently made errors such as omitting, adding, or substituting letters while reading. During several reading activities, some students were able to pronounce words correctly but were unable to comprehend the meaning or content of the text they had read. These findings indicate that reading difficulties were not limited to reading fluency but also involved reading accuracy and comprehension of simple texts. The observational findings served as the basis for analyzing the internal and external factors influencing students' reading difficulties. The observation results were also consistent with the interview findings, which are presented below.

Table 1. Interview Results on Reading Difficulties Among Second-Grade Students

Informant	Interview Findings
Second-Grade Classroom Teacher	Several students are still not fluent in recognizing and distinguishing letters, particularly b and d, p and q, and m and n. In addition, many students read hesitantly, frequently pause when encountering certain words, and occasionally omit or substitute letters while reading.
Student 1	Reported feeling afraid of making mistakes when asked to read aloud. The difficulty becomes more pronounced when encountering longer words, causing frequent pauses because the student is unsure how to pronounce them correctly.
Student 2	Explained that although able to read some texts, comprehension of the reading material remains limited. The student often feels confused when asked to explain or answer questions about the content of the text that has been read.
Tahfiz Teacher	Explained that several students still require guidance in recognizing letters and blending sounds into words. In addition, some students demonstrate relatively good Qur'anic reading skills but still experience difficulties and slower performance when reading Indonesian texts.

Based on the observation and interview findings, it can be concluded that second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center continue to experience reading difficulties in several areas, including letter recognition, distinguishing visually similar letters, syllable blending, reading fluency, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension. These difficulties are reflected in hesitant reading, letter omission and substitution errors, fear of making mistakes while reading, and the inability to explain the meaning of the text after reading it. Therefore, students require more intensive and individualized reading instruction tailored to their specific learning needs.

Internal Factors That Cause Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

Based on classroom observations of second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center, the internal factors contributing to reading difficulties were primarily reflected in the students' low levels of concentration, interest, and learning motivation. During reading activities, some students were easily distracted by their classmates or the classroom environment, making it difficult for them to focus on recognizing letters, syllables, and words. As a result, these students required more time to identify letters and blend sounds into words.

In addition, several students demonstrated insufficient mastery of letter recognition and letter-sound correspondence. They frequently confused letters with similar shapes or sounds and had not yet developed fluency in blending syllables. A lack of self-confidence was also evident when some students were asked to read aloud in front of the class. They tended to read quietly, hesitantly, and paused frequently when encountering certain words. These findings indicate that reading difficulties are influenced by students' readiness in basic reading skills, concentration, learning motivation, and self-confidence during the learning process. The observational findings were also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Table 2. Interview Results on Internal Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties Among Second-Grade Students

Informant	Interview Findings
Second-Grade Classroom Teacher	Explained that several students still experience difficulty maintaining concentration during reading activities. Their attention is easily distracted by classmates or the classroom environment, making it difficult for them to focus on recognizing letters and reading words. In addition, some students have not yet fully developed their ability to recognize letters and their corresponding sounds.
Student 1	Reported frequently losing focus while reading because of paying attention to classmates or listening to conversations in the classroom. The student also admitted often forgetting the letters in longer words, making reading more difficult.
Student 2	Stated that they feel embarrassed and afraid of making mistakes when asked to read aloud. These feelings cause the student to read quietly, hesitantly, and frequently pause when encountering words perceived as difficult.
Tahfiz Teacher	Explained that students' reading abilities vary considerably. Some students still require guidance in distinguishing letters and blending sounds into syllables. When they are uncertain about their reading, they tend to hesitate and display a lack of confidence when reading in front of the teacher or their classmates.

Based on the observation and interview findings, it can be concluded that the internal factors contributing to reading difficulties among second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center include low concentration, limited interest and learning motivation, insufficient mastery of letter recognition and letter-sound correspondence, and a lack of self-confidence. These factors make students more susceptible to distraction, cause them to read hesitantly and slowly, and hinder their ability to distinguish letters and blend syllables effectively.

External Factors That Cause Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

Based on classroom observations of second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center, several external factors were found to contribute to students' reading difficulties. One of the most significant factors was the variation in learning support provided at home. Some students did not receive regular reading guidance from their parents or other family members, resulting in limited opportunities to practice letter recognition, syllable reading, and word reading outside the classroom. In addition, the availability of children's reading materials at home varied considerably, reducing students' opportunities to develop regular reading habits beyond school.

During classroom instruction, the large number of students and the wide variation in reading abilities required teachers to divide their attention among all learners. Consequently, students experiencing reading difficulties were not always able to receive intensive individualized instruction. Furthermore, reading instructional media still need to be diversified to make learning more engaging and better suited to students' needs. Classroom conditions that were occasionally noisy also interfered with students' concentration during reading activities. These findings indicate that family support, teachers' instructional strategies, learning media, and the classroom environment are important external factors that should be considered when addressing students'

reading difficulties. The observational findings were also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

**Table 3. Interview Results on External Factors Contributing to Reading Difficulties
Among Second-Grade Students**

Informant	Interview Findings
Second-Grade Classroom Teacher	Explained that students' reading abilities are influenced by the level of learning support they receive at home. Some students rarely practice reading because their parents are unable to provide regular guidance. In addition, differences in students' reading abilities require the teacher to divide attention among all learners, making it difficult to provide optimal individualized instruction.
Parent	Reported that providing learning assistance at home cannot be done every day because of work commitments and family responsibilities. The child generally reads only when assigned schoolwork by the teacher. Moreover, the limited availability of reading materials at home reduces opportunities to develop regular reading habits.
Student 1	Stated that reading activities at home are usually carried out only when there are school assignments. At other times, the student spends more time playing and does not always receive guidance while practicing reading.
Tahfiz Teacher	Explained that a less conducive classroom environment is one of the factors affecting students' reading abilities. When the classroom becomes noisy, students with reading difficulties are more likely to lose concentration. Therefore, they require a quiet learning environment and engaging instructional media to help them remain focused during reading activities.

Based on the observation and interview findings, it can be concluded that the external factors influencing reading difficulties among second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center include limited parental support, insufficient reading materials and reading habits at home, the lack of optimal individualized instruction in the classroom, the need for greater variety in instructional media, and a classroom environment that is occasionally noisy. These factors limit students' opportunities to practice reading regularly and reduce their ability to maintain concentration during reading instruction.

Discussion

Forms of Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

The research results show that second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an of the Islamic Center Foundation still experience difficulties in several basic reading aspects, such as recognizing and distinguishing letters, combining letters into syllables, reading whole words, reading fluency, reading accuracy, and understanding the content of the text. The most common difficulties found include mixing up letters that look almost the same, such as b and d, p and q, and m and n. In addition, students still read hesitantly, pause on certain words, and make mistakes like omitting or replacing letters. These findings indicate that students' beginner reading skills have not developed optimally, especially at the stage of letter symbol recognition, associating letters with sounds, and combining sounds into words.

This finding aligns with research (Supriatin, Latifah, & Annisah, 2023), which shows that the difficulty in early reading among second-grade students is marked by slow letter recognition,

mistakes in distinguishing similar letters, and a low ability to connect letters with sounds. This condition affects reading fluency and text comprehension. Research (Inayah, Kuntarto, & Khoirunnisa, 2024) It was also found that lower-grade students still have trouble recognizing letters, forming syllables, and reading simple words smoothly. These similar results show that mastering letters and being aware of sounds are important foundations for early reading development. When students can't consistently tell letters and their sounds apart, the process of reading words will be slower and more prone to mistakes.

Students' difficulties in combining letters into syllables and reading long words show that their decoding skills are not fully developed. Decoding is the ability to connect letter symbols with sounds and arrange them into syllables or meaningful words. Research on phonological awareness in students with reading difficulties explains that many students who struggle with reading also have trouble recognizing, distinguishing, and manipulating language sounds. Phonological awareness is important because it helps students understand the relationship between letters, sounds, syllables, and words during the reading process (Safitri, 2021). Therefore, students' mistakes in spelling, leaving out letters, changing letters, and stopping at certain words can be understood as indicators that they still need structured practice in recognizing sounds and blending syllables.

The results of interviews with the second-grade teacher strengthen these findings. The teacher explained that some students are still not fluent in distinguishing letters and still make mistakes when reading words. Students' statements about feeling afraid of making mistakes and stopping when they encounter long words also show that reading difficulties are not just about technical skills but can affect students' emotional state. Fear of making mistakes can make students read hesitantly, in a low voice, and less willing to try. This situation needs attention because reading lessons that focus too much on mistakes can lower students' confidence. Teachers need to create a safe learning environment, give positive reinforcement, and provide opportunities to read progressively according to students' abilities.

The findings of this study also show that some students have been able to pronounce words, but are not yet able to explain the content of what they read. This condition indicates a difference between the ability to read mechanically and the ability to understand reading. Reading isn't just about pronouncing a sequence of letters, but also involves understanding the meaning of words, sentences, and the text as a whole. (Rahma, Gajah, Hasibuan, & Nasution, 2025) explaining that reading comprehension is related to reading fluency, working memory, vocabulary, language structure, and the ability to understand meaning. Therefore, students who are still reading haltingly will pay more attention to recognizing letters and putting sounds together, so their ability to understand the content of what they read hasn't developed optimally yet.

The tahfiz teacher's note that there are students who are quite good at reading the Qur'an but still slow at reading Indonesian texts shows that reading skills need to be understood according to the characteristics of the writing system and the student's learning experience. Being able to read the Qur'an can help in getting used to recognizing symbols, sounds, and pronunciation accuracy, but that skill doesn't automatically guarantee fluency in reading Indonesian. Indonesian uses different letter patterns, vocabulary, word structures, and text comprehension from learning to read the Qur'an. So, tahfiz learning can be a supporting strength in building discipline and reading habits, but it still needs to be accompanied by systematic Indonesian reading instruction that's appropriate to the student's developmental stage.

Overall, the results of this study show that reading difficulties in second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center are gradual and interconnected. Difficulties in

recognizing letters and sounds affect the ability to read syllables and words, while reading fluency that hasn't developed yet impacts understanding of the text. Therefore, addressing reading difficulties needs to be done through an initial assessment of students' abilities, repeated practice in recognizing letters and sounds, gradual activities in reading syllables and words, using engaging visual media, and individual support for students who need it.

Internal Factors That Cause Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

The results of the study showed that internal factors that affect reading difficulties in grade II students of SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Islamic Center include low concentration, interest, and motivation to learn, mastery of letters and sounds that is not optimal, and lack of confidence. The findings were seen when students were easily distracted by friends or the atmosphere of the class, took longer to recognize letters and compose sounds into words, and read hesitantly when asked to appear in front of the class. This condition shows that reading difficulties are not only related to the technical ability to recognize writing, but also related to the cognitive readiness and psychological state of students during the learning process.

Students' difficulty in distinguishing letters and blending sounds into syllables is in line with research (Rohma & Fawaid, 2023) which emphasizes that the ability of phonological awareness and linguistic awareness are important foundations in early reading. Students who are not yet able to consistently recognize the relationship between letter forms and their sounds tend to face obstacles when reading syllables, words, and simple texts. In this study, students' mistakes in distinguishing similar letters and difficulties in reading long words show that the process of recognizing symbols, sounds, and blending syllables still needs to be strengthened through gradual and repeated practice.

Those findings are also relevant to the research (Rezeki & Sagala, 2021), which found that second-grade students can still have difficulties with letter recognition, word recognition, reading fluency, and word comprehension. The study showed that each student's early reading ability does not develop uniformly. This aligns with the results of interviews with class teachers and tahfiz teachers in this study, who explained that students' abilities vary; some students still need guidance to distinguish letters and blend sounds into syllables. Therefore, differences in basic reading readiness are an internal factor that needs to be identified early so that teachers can provide support according to the students' needs.

Low concentration also plays an important role in reading difficulties. Interview results show that students are easily distracted by friends or noises around the classroom, so they pay less attention to the letters and words they are reading. When students' attention is divided, the process of recognizing letter shapes, remembering sounds, and putting syllables together slows down. Research (Suprpti & Utami, 2023) explains that early reading difficulties need to be understood through the connection between phonological skills, language ability, and the student's learning conditions. This means that unstable concentration can make it harder for students whose mastery of letters and sounds is still limited.

Besides the cognitive aspect, the research results show there are emotional factors like embarrassment and fear of making mistakes when students are asked to read in front of the class. Students who are afraid of making mistakes tend to read quietly, stop at certain words, and are reluctant to try reading words they consider difficult. These findings are in line with research (Ibrahim, Abdullah, & Amalia, 2024) that found a positive relationship between the concept of reading self-concept and reading motivation in students who have reading difficulties. Students who have a more positive self-assessment of their reading abilities tend to have better reading

motivation. Therefore, the doubt and lack of confidence that appear in students in this study need to be understood as conditions that can reduce student involvement in reading practice.

Low interest and motivation in learning can also make reading difficulties worse because students become less active in practicing and give up easily when they come across a difficult word. (Hamidah, Jamarudin, & Sucipto, 2025) explaining that reading difficulties can be related to low interest, anxiety, doubt, and students' tendency to avoid reading aloud when they feel their pronunciation skills are not good. Even though that study was conducted with a different group of students, the results are relevant for explaining the experiences of students in this research, especially students who are afraid of making mistakes and stop when they encounter long words. Therefore, motivation and self-confidence need to be built through positive reading experiences, giving appreciation, and practice activities that don't create pressure.

Overall, the internal factors of reading difficulties in second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Yayasan Islamic Center are interconnected. Weak mastery of letters and sounds makes students slower at reading, while easily distracted concentration, unstable motivation, and fear of making mistakes can make these obstacles worse. Therefore, teachers need to do an initial assessment to map out students' abilities, provide gradual exercises for sound awareness and syllable blending, and create a supportive reading environment. This approach is important so that students can practice reading more focused, confidently, and in line with their individual abilities.

External Factors That Cause Reading Difficulties in Lower Grade Students

The research shows that reading difficulties in second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Islamic Center Foundation are not only influenced by the students' abilities but also by external factors from home and school environments. These factors include limited parental guidance, lack of reading materials and reading habits at home, less than optimal individual guidance in the classroom, learning media that still need improvement, and sometimes noisy classroom conditions. These findings show that early reading development needs ongoing support from both family and school.

The limitations of parental guidance found in this study are related to the fact that students haven't been practicing reading at home regularly. Parents mentioned that they can't supervise every day because of work and household chores, while students tend to read only when they get assignments from teachers. These findings are in line with previous research (Sedyowati & Abduh, 2022), which shows that parental involvement in literacy activities at home, like reading together, talking about story content, and providing study time, plays a role in building children's early literacy experiences. When reading support hasn't been consistent, students have fewer opportunities to go over letters, sounds, syllables, and words outside of school learning activities.

Besides guidance, the availability of reading materials at home is also an important part of a child's literacy environment. Research shows that children's books at home are still limited, so the habit of reading hasn't really been established strongly. These findings are relevant to research (Masnun, Putri, Jaelani, & Ummah, 2022), which explains that the home literacy environment, including the availability of reading materials and parental involvement in learning activities, is related to the development of children's reading skills. The study (Putri & Rati, 2022) It also emphasizes that the family plays a role in shaping reading habits through parental example, providing reading materials, and reading together. Therefore, limited books and reading activities at home can reduce the intensity of students' practice, especially for those who still need support with early reading.

In the school context, research results show that teachers face differences in students' reading abilities and need to divide their attention among all students. This situation causes students who have difficulty reading not always to receive intensive individual support. These findings are in line with research (Maknun, Darmuki, & Fathurrohman, 2025) which shows that individual support, the use of contextual media, and learning activities that respond to children's needs are important in early literacy development. Individual guidance is especially needed for students who still have trouble recognizing letters, blending sounds, and reading words, because their learning needs are different from students who can read more fluently.

The use of learning media for reading that still needs to be varied is also a factor that needs attention. Visual media, letter cards, word cards, pictures, language games, and simple reading materials can help students understand the relationship between letters, sounds, and word meanings more concretely. Research (Baharun, Trisilia, Munjiat, & Hussien, 2022) explains that teachers can boost reading interest through direct learning, indirect learning that creates a supportive learning environment, as well as providing independent reading activities. In this study, variations in media and learning strategies are needed so that students who struggle with reading not only get repeated practice but also have an engaging learning experience that matches their developmental stage.

The sometimes noisy classroom atmosphere also affects students' concentration when reading. The tahfiz teacher explained that students who have difficulty reading are more easily distracted if the learning environment is not conducive. This aligns with studies (Ferdiansyah & Khusnadiyah, 2025; Sitorus, Sipahutar, Nasution, Purnama, & Iskandar, 2025) which emphasize that the classroom environment plays a role in early reading development through managing the learning atmosphere, teacher-student interactions, availability of learning resources, and support for student engagement. A calm, structured classroom that gives students the chance to read in small groups can help them focus on learning letters, sounds, and words.

Overall, external factors affecting reading difficulties among second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Islamic Center Foundation show a link between the home environment and the school environment. Limited support and reading materials at home can reduce reading practice habits, while the need for individual guidance, media variety, and classroom management needs to be strengthened at school. Therefore, dealing with reading difficulties should be done through collaboration between teachers and parents, providing simple reading materials at home, encouraging regular reading habits, using more varied media, and giving step-by-step support to students according to their level of difficulty.

CONCLUSION

Based on research results, second-grade students at SD IT Tahfizhil Qur'an Islamic Center Foundation still face difficulties in reading, such as recognizing and distinguishing letters, blending syllables, reading fluently and accurately, and understanding simple reading content. These difficulties are influenced by internal factors, like concentration, interest, motivation, knowledge of letters and sounds, and students' self-confidence, as well as external factors such as limited parental guidance, reading materials at home, individual support in class, variety of learning media, and classroom environment. This finding implies the need for initial assessments, step-by-step reading lessons with engaging materials, individual guidance, and collaboration between teachers and parents. However, this study was limited to one class and one school with a limited observation period, so future research should involve a wider range of subjects, use

mixed methods, and test the effectiveness of reading intervention programs that suit students' needs.

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