

The Perspectives of Elementary School Students Who Are Potentially Dyslexic in Learning English as A Foreign Language

Angelica Romauli Silitonga¹, Luh Putu Artini², I Ketut Trika Adi Ana³

¹²³ Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Jl. Udayana No.11, Banjar Tegal, Singaraja, Kabupaten Buleleng, Bali 81116, Indonesia

Corresponding Author : angelica.romauli@undiksha.ac.id

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perspektif siswa sekolah dasar kelas tiga yang berpotensi mengalami disleksia dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (English as a Foreign Language/EFL) di SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu dan SD Negeri 1 Kampung Anyar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap enam partisipan, yang terdiri atas tiga siswa dengan potensi disleksia dan tiga siswa non-disleksia sebagai teman sebaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa dengan potensi disleksia menghadapi berbagai hambatan dalam pembelajaran EFL, meliputi kesulitan pengenalan huruf, pemahaman membaca, kemampuan menulis, ejaan, pemrosesan fonologis, serta persepsi auditori dan visual. Selain tantangan akademik, aspek sosial-emosional turut memengaruhi pengalaman belajar siswa, khususnya dalam bentuk ejekan dan perilaku bullying dari teman sebaya, meskipun beberapa siswa menunjukkan ketahanan emosional yang cukup baik. Teman sebaya non-disleksia umumnya menunjukkan perilaku suportif, seperti membantu membaca dan menulis, namun juga mengungkap adanya perlakuan negatif terkait kesulitan berbicara. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan pembelajaran multisensori dan peningkatan kesadaran disleksia dalam menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran EFL yang inklusif.

Kata kunci: Disleksia, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Siswa Sekolah Dasar, Perspektif Siswa, Pendidikan Inklusif

ABSTRACT

This study explores the perspectives of third-grade elementary school students who potentially dyslexic in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu and SD Negeri 1 Kampung Anyar. A qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews with six participants, consisting of three students who potentially dyslexic and three non-dyslexic peers. The findings indicate that students who potentially dyslexic experience multiple challenges in EFL learning, including difficulties in letter recognition, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, phonological processing, and auditory-visual perception. In addition to academic challenges, social-emotional factors significantly influence students' learning experiences, particularly peer teasing and bullying, although some students demonstrate emotional resilience. Non-dyslexic peers generally provide academic support, such as assisting with reading and writing tasks, while also acknowledging the presence of negative peer behaviors related to speech difficulties. These findings highlight the intersection between literacy challenges and social dynamics in inclusive classrooms and underscore the importance of multisensory instructional approaches and dyslexia awareness programs to foster inclusive EFL learning environments.

Keywords: *Dyslexia, English as A Foreign Language, Elementary Students, Student Perspectives, Inclusive Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents considerable challenges for elementary school students, particularly those who are potentially dyslexic. Dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental condition commonly associated with persistent difficulties in phonological

processing, word decoding, spelling, and reading fluency (Snowling, 2019; Shaywitz, 2020). For third-grade students, who are expected to consolidate foundational literacy skills, these difficulties may significantly affect academic performance and learning motivation.

In the Indonesian context, English is introduced at the elementary level as a compulsory or local content subject in many schools. The linguistic characteristics of English, including inconsistent spelling–sound correspondence and unfamiliar phonological patterns, often intensify learning difficulties for potentially dyslexic students (Padmadewi, Artini, & Dewi, 2019). Previous studies indicate that EFL learners with literacy difficulties tend to experience problems in letter recognition, reading comprehension, and pronunciation accuracy, which may lead to frustration and disengagement in classroom activities (Artini, Padmadewi, & Adnyani, 2018).

In addition to academic challenges, the social environment of the classroom plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences. Peer interactions can function as sources of academic assistance and emotional support; however, they may also involve negative behaviors such as teasing or exclusion (Santosa, 2023). Inclusive education emphasizes the importance of addressing both academic and socio-emotional dimensions of learning to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students (Adnyani, Artini, & Suwastini, 2020).

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education in Indonesian elementary schools, limited research has explored the perspectives of potentially dyslexic students themselves, particularly in EFL learning contexts. Understanding students' lived experiences is essential for developing instructional practices that are responsive to their needs (Widana, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by potentially dyslexic third-grade students in learning EFL and to explore how they perceive their interactions with non-dyslexic peers in inclusive classroom settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the perspectives of third-grade students who potentially dyslexic in EFL learning contexts. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu and SD Negeri 1 Kampung Anyar, both of which implement inclusive education practices.

Six participants were selected through purposive sampling: three students identified by teachers who potentially dyslexic based on persistent literacy difficulties, and three non-dyslexic peers who frequently interacted with them during classroom activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between March 10 until March 12, 2025.

Each interview lasted approximately 10–12 minutes and was conducted in familiar school settings to ensure participant comfort. The interview questions addressed students' experiences with EFL learning tasks, perceived academic difficulties, emotional responses, and peer interactions. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, including transcription, open coding, categorization, and theme development. Credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing and theoretical triangulation (Permana, 2020; Aryana, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study concerning the perspectives of third-grade potentially dyslexic students in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their interactions with non-dyslexic peers in inclusive classroom settings. The results are organized into two main themes: (1) challenges faced by potentially dyslexic students in EFL learning and (2) students' perceptions of peer interactions in the EFL classroom. Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with three students who potentially dyslexic (S1-SDN1KU, S1-SDN1KA, S3-SDN1KA) and three non-dyslexic peers (S2-SDN1KU, S2-SDN1KA, S4-SDN1KA) from SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu and SD Negeri 1 Kampung Anyar.

1. Challenges Third-Grade Students with Potential Dyslexia Face in Learning English as a Foreign Language

The findings indicate that potentially dyslexic students experienced substantial difficulties in acquiring basic EFL literacy skills, particularly in letter recognition, reading comprehension,

writing, spelling, and phonological processing. These challenges were consistently reported by all three potentially dyslexic participants (S1-SDN1KU, S3-SDN1KA, and S5-SDN1KA).

Difficulties in reading were the most frequently reported issue. One participant from SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu (S1-SDN1KU) expressed confusion when attempting to decode English words, stating that letters often “did not match” and made reading slow and effortful. Similarly, a participant from SD Negeri 1 Kampung Anyar (S3-SDN1KA) reported needing significantly more time than peers to read simple English words, particularly when encountering unfamiliar spelling patterns. These accounts suggest weaknesses in phonological awareness and letter–sound correspondence, which are central characteristics of dyslexia and are further complicated in EFL contexts due to irregular English orthography.

Writing and spelling difficulties were also prominent. One student (S5-SDN1KA) explained that letters were frequently reversed or misplaced during writing tasks, resulting in words that were difficult to recognize. This difficulty often led to incomplete assignments and reluctance to participate in writing activities. The students’ narratives indicate that writing tasks in English imposed a higher cognitive load compared to oral activities, as they required simultaneous processing of spelling, letter formation, and meaning.

In addition to literacy-related challenges, phonological processing and pronunciation difficulties were evident. One participant (S3-SDN1KA) reported confusion when pronouncing English words with similar sounds, such as long and short vowels, which occasionally led to misunderstandings during oral activities. These pronunciation difficulties often resulted in decreased confidence and hesitation to speak in front of the class.

Emotionally, the academic challenges experienced by potentially dyslexic students affected their self-confidence and learning motivation. Several students described feelings of frustration and anxiety when they were unable to complete tasks at the same pace as their classmates. However, despite these challenges, some participants demonstrated persistence and continued effort, indicating early signs of resilience in coping with learning difficulties.

2. How Third-Grade Students with Potential Dyslexia Perceive Their Interactions with Non-Dyslexic Peers in the EFL Classroom

Peer interactions played a significant role in shaping the learning experiences of potentially dyslexic students. The findings reveal a dual pattern of peer relationships, encompassing both supportive behaviors and negative social interactions.

Supportive peer behaviors were commonly reported by both potentially dyslexic students and non-dyslexic peers. Non-dyslexic participants (S2-SDN1KU, S4-SDN1KA, and S6-SDN1KA) described helping their peers during EFL lessons, particularly in reading and writing tasks. For instance, one peer from SD Negeri 1 Kaliuntu (S2-SDN1KU) stated that they often assisted a classmate by reading instructions aloud or helping to spell English words. Such assistance was perceived positively by potentially dyslexic students, who expressed gratitude and reported feeling more confident when receiving help from classmates.

However, the findings also indicate the presence of negative peer interactions, particularly teasing and verbal bullying related to speech and reading difficulties. One non-dyslexic participant (S4-SDN1KA) acknowledged that some students mocked peers who struggled with English pronunciation or reading aloud. This teasing had a noticeable emotional impact on potentially dyslexic students. One participant (S5-SDN1KA) reported feeling sad and embarrassed when teased, which occasionally led to withdrawal from classroom activities.

Despite experiencing negative interactions, not all potentially dyslexic students responded in the same way. Some demonstrated resilience by continuing to participate in EFL lessons, even after being teased. Non-dyslexic peers also observed that motivation and participation levels of potentially dyslexic students fluctuated depending on the social atmosphere of the classroom. When peer support was present, students appeared more engaged; conversely, negative comments often resulted in reduced participation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that potentially dyslexic students experience persistent difficulties in reading and phonological processing. These challenges are consistent with dyslexia-related deficits in phonological

awareness and auditory discrimination, which significantly affect word decoding and pronunciation accuracy (Snowling, 2019). In EFL contexts, such difficulties are further exacerbated by the irregular orthography of English, as also reported in Indonesian primary school settings (Padmadewi et al., 2019).

The emotional responses reported by students, including frustration and reduced self-confidence, align with previous research indicating that repeated academic failure may negatively affect learners' motivation and classroom participation (Shaywitz, 2020). From a social perspective, supportive peer interactions were found to facilitate learning engagement, supporting earlier findings that collaborative peer assistance enhances inclusion in EFL classrooms (Artini et al., 2018; Adnyani et al., 2020).

Conversely, instances of teasing and bullying negatively influenced students' emotional well-being and willingness to participate in learning activities. This finding supports previous studies highlighting the impact of negative peer dynamics on students with learning difficulties in inclusive educational settings (Santosa, 2023). Therefore, inclusive EFL instruction should address not only instructional adaptation but also peer awareness and classroom social climate.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the perspectives of potentially dyslexic third-grade elementary school students in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and explored how they perceive their interactions with non-dyslexic peers in inclusive classroom settings. The findings indicate that potentially dyslexic students experience persistent challenges in EFL learning, particularly in letter recognition, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, and phonological processing. These difficulties are closely related to the linguistic characteristics of English, which differ significantly from the students' first language and require advanced phonological awareness skills.

Beyond academic challenges, the study reveals that emotional factors play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences. Feelings of frustration, embarrassment, and reduced self-confidence frequently emerged when students struggled to keep pace with classroom activities or received negative responses from peers. Peer interactions were found to exhibit a dual dynamic. On one hand, supportive behaviors from non-dyslexic peers, such as assisting with reading and writing tasks, contributed positively to students' engagement and sense of inclusion. On the other hand, instances of teasing and bullying related to speech and literacy difficulties negatively affected students' motivation and willingness to participate in EFL learning activities.

These findings reinforce existing theories regarding literacy difficulties associated with dyslexia and highlight the importance of addressing both academic and socio-emotional dimensions in inclusive education. The study underscores the need for multisensory instructional approaches that accommodate diverse learning profiles and promote active engagement in EFL classrooms. In addition, fostering dyslexia awareness among teachers and students is essential to create a supportive learning environment that minimizes negative peer interactions and encourages collaboration.

Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive EFL education in Indonesian elementary schools by foregrounding students' perspectives. Future studies are recommended to involve larger participant groups, longitudinal designs, and classroom observations to further explore effective instructional practices and social strategies that support potentially dyslexic learners in EFL contexts.

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