



# Implementing Multisensory Approach to Overcome Reading Difficulties in 4th Grade Students

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## Abstract

Reading is one of the language skills that students must possess. The purpose of this study is to address difficulties in learning to read through multisensory methods for participants. The study was conducted at SD Inpres Lisabheto (a public elementary school), Sikka Regency. The research method employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The subjects targeted in the study were fourth-grade students. To gather data, the researcher used observation techniques, documentation, and reading practice tests. The results of the study obtained by the researcher through the use of multisensory methods on fourth-grade students who still experienced difficulties in learning to read using visual (sight), auditory (hearing), tactile (touch), and kinesthetic (movement) sensory tools. The use of multisensory methods proved to be an improvement in the reading learning ability of fourth-grade students who still struggle with reading. The study found that implementing the multisensory approach in reading instruction had a positive impact on the reading speed of fourth-grade students at Inpres Lisabheto Elementary School. The guidance provided by the classroom teacher and researcher was effective in improving the students' ability to memorize the alphabet, spelling, combining words, and recognizing symbols in writing. The use of the multisensory approach also increased the students' confidence and motivation to become more active and interactive in their learning.

**Keywords:** Fourth Grade Students, Multisensory Approach, Reading Difficulties

## Introduction

Reading is one of the language skills that students must possess. At the beginner level, reading is a learning activity for students to recognize written language, and in this case, they are also expected to vocalize the symbols of language [1]. Children who experience difficulties in learning to read exhibit several characteristics. They have limitations in visual discrimination, meaning that they struggle to differentiate between different visual stimuli. Additionally, they are unable to decode words into letters, indicating a lack of understanding of the basic structure of written language [2]. These children also have low visual memory, making it difficult for them to remember what they have seen or read.

Auditory discrimination is another area in which these children struggle. They may have difficulty understanding the source of sound, and may be less able to combine visual and auditory information [3]. This can result in difficulty sequencing words and letters, as well as reading word by word rather than fluidly. Finally, children who experience difficulties in learning to read may have low conceptual thinking abilities [4]. This means that they struggle to understand abstract concepts and may need more concrete examples to comprehend new information. Overall, these characteristics can make it challenging for children to learn to read, and may require specific interventions to help them overcome these barriers.

Multisensory is a technique or approach that combines several senses to strengthen or stimulate children's abilities to understand information during the learning process [6]. Its application involves using auditory senses to receive information (auditory learner), visual senses during the learning process (visual learner), using whole or real models that are commonly perceived through the sense of touch (tactile learner), and maximizing physical activities to receive information (kinesthetic learner). The multisensory method is used to teach children who have difficulty reading using auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic approaches [6].

Students who struggle with reading are often found to have difficulty reading letters, words, or sentences, which is not caused by primary issues such as mental retardation, low visual and auditory abilities, motor disorders, and emotional disturbances. These difficulties are common among students and include abnormal reading habits, word recognition errors, comprehension errors, and various symptoms [7]. The research aim is to investigate the effectiveness of multisensory methods in addressing the problem of reading difficulties faced by students at SDI Lisabheto.

## Methods

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The study was conducted during the second semester of the 2021/2022 academic year from November 18 to December 18, 2021, at SDI Lisabheto. The subjects of this study were students in fourth grade who have difficulties in learning to read. Data collection techniques used in this study were observation, documentation, and reading practice tests. The researcher observed two targets in the observation technique, which were to assist in the learning and teaching process with the classroom teacher and to provide special guidance outside the classroom to the students who became the research subjects to identify their difficulties in learning to read. The documentation technique was used to take pictures or videos during the activities, and reading practice tests were conducted to identify the difficulties faced by each child. The data analysis techniques used in this study were data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

The instrument used to measure the reading ability of fourth-grade students in this study includes four aspects: abnormal reading habits, reading errors, comprehension errors, and variety of symptoms. The first aspect, abnormal reading habits, refers to any unusual or atypical reading behaviors observed during the assessment process. The second aspect, reading errors, refers to errors made by the students while reading, such as mispronunciation, omission, substitution, and addition of words. The third aspect, comprehension errors, refers to the inability of students to understand or make sense of what they are reading. Finally, the fourth aspect, variety of symptoms, refers to a range of difficulties and challenges experienced by students in relation to their reading ability. These aspects are used to identify and measure the specific reading difficulties experienced by each student in the study.

## Results and Discussions

Research findings based on observations and daily activities of fourth-grade students at SDI Lisabheto during classroom learning activities indicate that there are several students who are still struggling and not fluent in reading. Difficulties in learning to read among these students are apparent

when they are asked to read. The learning difficulties faced by these students stem from their lack of self-confidence, laziness in learning, and insufficient attention from parents or guardians. The reading difficulties experienced by the students include difficulty in recognizing letters, constructing words, combining letters into syllables and words, and comprehending the reading material. This is evident when the class teacher and researcher ask the students to read a reading text from the fourth-grade thematic book. The students are still hesitant and confused while reading, finding it difficult to arrange letters into syllables and words correctly. Out of 20 students, 13 are already fluent and proficient in reading, while seven are still struggling.

During a practical reading test, two of these seven students were unable to recognize all the letters of the alphabet, such as the letters Q, q, X, x, Z, z, R, and r, making it challenging for them to read. Some students also mistakenly read letters such as M with N, J with Z, Q with K, and had difficulty distinguishing between similar-looking letters such as M and W, D and B. See Fig. 1 for the example of learning material. This can be attributed to the students' intellectual factors, making it difficult for them to understand, memorize, and recognize the letters while reading. The reading difficulties experienced by the seven students in the fourth-grade class during the learning process and practical reading tests conducted by the researcher can be viewed from various aspects. Ref. [8] stated the aspects include:

- Irregular reading habits, which make it challenging for students to learn to read. Nine indicators of irregular reading habits that these seven students exhibit when reading are frowning, scratching their heads, being restless, lowering their voice, biting their lips and hands, jumping while reading, repeating words, covering their faces with the book, and keeping the book too close to their eyes.
- Error aspect, which has five indicators such as hesitation, stuttering, mispronunciation, reversal, and omission of words.
- Misunderstanding aspect, which has two indicators such as not understanding the theme of the reading and not finding the correct sequence of the story while still struggling to answer the questions related to the text.
- Various aspects, which have several indicators of reading difficulties, such as students experiencing tension and losing their voice, reading with improper emphasis, and reading word by word.

The indicators of reading difficulties experienced by these struggling students when reading necessitate the use of multisensory methods as an approach to address the learning difficulties in reading. This approach aligns with the research conducted by Ref. [6], which indicates that by using multisensory methods in reading instruction, students are exposed to new concepts of learning to read by utilizing their senses.



Fig. 1. Example page of the learning material

Teaching using multisensory methods involves guidance on reading to strengthen or stimulate students' ability to comprehend information from the process of reading [9]. This approach can be used to address various aspects of reading difficulties, such as irregular reading habits, errors, misunderstanding, and various aspects. Using multisensory methods, teachers can incorporate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic methods to engage students in the learning process actively [10]. For instance, teachers can use pictures, illustrations, and videos to help students visualize the reading materials. Teachers can also ask students to listen to the sounds of letters, syllables, and words to help them understand how they should sound when read [11]. Additionally, teachers can use activities that involve movement, such as clapping, jumping, and dancing, to help students remember the sounds [12]. See Fig. 1 for the student activity situation in school.



Fig. 2. Student activities in the school using Multisensory approach

Another multisensory approach that can be used to improve reading skills is the Orton-Gillingham method [13]. This approach uses a systematic and structured approach to teach reading skills, starting with the basics such as letter recognition and sound-symbol association, and gradually building up to more complex skills such as decoding and comprehension. The Orton-Gillingham method is particularly effective for children with dyslexia, as it focuses on the underlying phonological and phonemic awareness skills that are often deficient in children with this learning disorder [14].

There are also other strategies that can be used to improve reading skills in struggling students. These include providing more individualized instruction and support, using assistive technology such as

text-to-speech software and audiobooks, and promoting a love of reading through regular exposure to high-interest materials and positive reinforcement [15]. It is important to note that addressing reading difficulties in struggling students requires a collaborative effort between teachers, parents, and other professionals such as speech therapists and learning specialists [16]. By working together and implementing a range of evidence-based strategies, it is possible to help struggling students improve their reading skills and achieve academic success.

## Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussions, the researcher can conclude that the reading ability of fourth-grade students is still facing difficulties. Prior to the implementation of multisensory teaching, students' reading ability was very low. The difficulties faced by students in reading can be seen when they are asked to read by the researcher and classroom teacher, as students still have trouble recognizing letters, composing words, combining syllables, and spelling words in reading a text from the thematic book. To overcome these problems, the researcher was able to apply the multisensory method as a handling method for students' reading difficulties by using visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic approaches to motivate students' interest during the reading learning process. After receiving reading instruction using the multisensory method in fourth-grade students at the Inpres Lisabheto Elementary School, it had a positive impact on the improvement of students' reading speed. The guidance provided by the classroom teacher and researcher was quite effective as students experienced improved changes and showed that the multisensory teaching method can improve reading speed, memorization of the alphabet from A-Z, students begin to be fluent or proficient in spelling letters and words, students can combine words and recognize symbols in writing. With the application of teaching through the multisensory method, students become confident and motivated to become active and interactive.

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