GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING SLOW LEARNER STUDENTS AT SMPN 17 SURABAYA

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the guidance and counseling (GC) strategies used to address slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving the guidance counselor as the primary informant. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations of the learning process, and documentation of counseling services. Data analysis was conducted thematically through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the identification of slow learner students is carried out through the inclusion pathway and mid-semester psychological testing, followed by needs assessment, parent consultation, and coordination with subject teachers. The GC strategies implemented include individual counseling, structured learning guidance, group guidance, curriculum adjustments through material simplification, and collaboration with homeroom teachers, subject teachers, psychologists, and accompanying student assistants. These strategies have proven effective in improving attention, motivation, and self-adjustment abilities among some slow learner students. This study underscores the importance of guidance and counseling services that are collaborative, continuous, and differentiated according to student characteristics. The findings are recommended as a basis for strengthening the SOP for identifying slow learners and enhancing the competence of guidance counselors in providing differentiated services.

Keywords: Slow Learner; Guidance and Counseling; Assistance Strategies; School Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Students with slow learning abilities at the junior secondary school level continue to pose significant challenges in the field of education, including at SMPN 17 Surabaya. Empirical conditions in the field show that many students experience difficulties in understanding learning materials, display low learning motivation, and demonstrate academic performance that tends to be below average. This situation affects not only their academic development but also their psychosocial well-being, and it often does not receive optimal intervention from the school.

Children categorized as slow learners generally have below-average IQ scores, ranging from 70 to 80 on the WISC scale. Individuals in this category may be classified as children with special educational needs. Hallahan and Kauffman explain that students with special needs are those who require specialized educational services to optimally develop their human potential.

The characteristics of slow learners are not easily identified because, physically, they appear typical and are able to function appropriately in most situations. They generally display normal physical appearance, adequate memory capacity, and sufficient common sense. These factors frequently leave parents confused about the underlying reasons for their children's learning delays.

Slow learners face various obstacles in thinking, responding to stimuli, and adapting to their environment. These barriers affect not only academic ability but also other developmental domains such as communication, language, moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and social functioning. According to Sangeeta Malik, children with learning delays tend to have low concentration and difficulty maintaining abstract thinking. This leads to challenges in achieving learning outcomes that align with expected standards for their age group. These characteristics distinguish students with slow learning abilities (Ningrum, 2022).

Guidance and counseling (GC) services function to support students in overcoming learning barriers through individual counseling, group guidance, and collaboration with subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. GC services serve not only as remedial interventions but also as preventive and developmental efforts to help students realize their full potential. Within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the role of GC becomes increasingly strategic in supporting students' personal, social, and academic development holistically. GC services also assist students in improving the quality of their learning, strengthening character formation, and fostering independence (Ramadhan & Marsela, 2025).

Conceptually, GC services comprise four major program components: basic services, responsive services, individual planning services, and system support services. These programs are implemented across four developmental domains—personal, social, academic, and career guidance—all aimed at helping students achieve optimal development in alignment with their potential and characteristics.

According to Assyifa (2023), effective GC services must be oriented toward understanding students' needs and providing structured learning support. For slow learners, GC strategies typically emphasize needs assessment, academic assistance, and adjustments to learning services based on the student's abilities. Cross-sector collaboration is a crucial component to ensure that interventions for slow learners are more targeted, continuous, and able to meet their developmental needs (Analita Nur Kamilah, Yeni Afrida, & M. Arif, 2024).

A significant gap remains between theoretical concepts and practical implementation of GC services for slow learners. Theoretically, GC services in schools should provide comprehensive support through needs assessment, individual counseling, group guidance, and collaboration with subject teachers and parents. However, in practice, interventions for slow learners are often not well-structured, particularly in early identification, mapping of learning needs, instructional adjustments, and interdepartmental coordination. As a result, the services provided do not fully meet the learning needs of slow learners (Fitriani et al., 2022). In response to this condition, the present study proposes more targeted and integrative GC strategies tailored to the context of SMPN 17 Surabaya, with a focus on individual services, academic assistance, and collaboration among guidance counselors, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents.

This study aims to identify and analyze effective GC strategies in supporting students with slow learning abilities, while also evaluating their impacts on academic and psychosocial

development. The research problem addressed is how GC strategies can be effectively implemented to overcome learning difficulties among slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya. The objectives of the study are to provide a concrete description of GC strategy implementation that aligns with the characteristics of slow learners and to formulate practical recommendations for guidance counselors and schools to enhance the quality of GC services (Fitriani et al., 2022).

The findings of this study are expected to strengthen the role of guidance counselors as key facilitators in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment, as well as to serve as a foundation for developing more innovative and collaborative GC programs in the future. Thus, this research is anticipated to contribute meaningfully to narrowing the gap between theory and practice in counseling services at public schools in urban settings (Rangkuti, 2018).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of guidance and counseling strategies in addressing slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya. The primary informants in this research were guidance counselors who were directly involved in the assistance process for slow learner students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who were considered to have the most comprehensive understanding of the issues and direct experience in handling these students.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations of the learning process and student interactions, and documentation of school counseling programs and service records. Observations were conducted to examine the responses of slow learner students in the classroom, the forms of support provided by teachers, and the challenges that emerged during the learning process. Documentation was used to complement information related to the GC programs and records of assistance activities.

Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, achieved by comparing information derived from interviews, observations, and documentation to maintain consistency of findings. This triangulation principle was implemented according to credibility verification procedures in qualitative research (Melinda, 2021).

Data analysis was carried out thematically through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. All data obtained were categorized based on major themes related to GC strategies, forms of service adjustments, and interventions implemented by counselors in supporting slow learner students. This approach provided a comprehensive and in-depth picture of GC practices in the school setting (Dody Hartanto, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview conducted with the guidance counselor on April 25, 2025, a summary of the findings is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Summary of Interview with the Guidance Counselor

No	Component	Interview Findings
1	Name of Counselor	Female Guidance Counselor at SMPN 17 Surabaya
2	Interview Date	April 25, 2025
3	Interview Topic	Identification and intervention for slow learner students
4	Identification of Slow Learner Students	- Two students were identified at the time of admission through the inclusion pathway.

		- Nine students were identified through mid-semester psychotests in Grade VII conducted in collaboration with the school psychologist.
5	Steps After Identification	- The school invited parents to communicate the psychotest results. - Parents were interviewed to gather information on home learning conditions, barriers, and student potential. - Assessment results were communicated to homeroom teachers and subject teachers.
6	Assessment Process	- Identification - Parent consultation - Interviews - Needs assessment - Adjustment of learning services
7	Intervention / Support	- Structured learning guidance 1–2 times per week. - Special assistance from subject teachers during class. - Curriculum adjustment through reduced scope (grade) of materials while maintaining the same scoring standard as regular students.
8	Status of Slow Learner Students	- Two inclusion students have been officially recorded as students with special needs. - Nine students identified through psychotests are still under observation and not yet included in the school's official profile.
9	Student Differences	- Each student shows distinct characteristics. - Example: Student A shows high enthusiasm and good self-confidence. - Student B has low confidence and difficulty recalling/repeating materials.
10	Special Findings from the Interview	- Many students have experienced learning difficulties since Grade 5–6 of elementary school. - Some students have been in the inclusion pathway since elementary school.
11	Student Progress	- Four students show improvement; five students require further intervention. - Accompanying university students provided support for 3–4 months in learning guidance.
12	Challenges	- Slow learner students require repeated explanations. - Students tend to respond slowly to instructions.

Based on Table 1, the identification of slow learner students was carried out through the inclusion pathway and psychometric testing. The interventions provided included structured learning guidance, teacher assistance, and curriculum adjustments. Overall, the identification and

intervention processes were implemented gradually and involved multiple stakeholders. Accompanying university students also contributed to strengthening the learning support for a period of 3–4 months.

Overall, the findings indicate that the identification and intervention processes for slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya have been conducted systematically through psychological assessments, collaboration with parents, and the continuous adjustment of learning methods and guidance and counseling (GC) services. This approach aligns with the concept of holistic assessment, which emphasizes understanding students' individual needs and promoting cross-stakeholder collaboration to support the academic and psychosocial development of students with special learning needs (Dona Evelina Saragih & Yuni Fitriani, 2024).

The study findings on GC strategies for managing slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya show both alignment and divergence with existing theories and previous research results. Based on interviews with the guidance counselor, the identification process of slow learner students was conducted through two pathways: inclusion at enrollment and mid-semester psychometric testing in collaboration with the school psychologist. This procedure reflects the principle of holistic assessment, which prioritizes collecting data from multiple aspects to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' needs (Annisa, Marmoh, & Hadiyah, 2023). Nevertheless, this study also highlights a gap between theory and practice, particularly regarding the continuity of GC services and adjustments in teaching methods.

The GC strategies implemented at SMPN 17 Surabaya not only emphasize individual counseling and learning guidance but also strengthen collaboration among guidance counselors, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents as part of the effort to support slow learner students. This collaborative pattern aligns with the Operational Guidelines for Guidance and Counseling Services (BK POP) in junior secondary schools, which stipulate that GC teachers must cooperate with various stakeholders to ensure services are comprehensive, continuous, and tailored to students' needs. This collaboration is reflected in routine coordination between GC teachers and subject teachers to adjust teaching methods, intensive communication with homeroom teachers regarding academic progress and student behavior, and involving parents in decision-making regarding learning interventions at home.

Individual counseling provided to a slow learner student to enhance learning motivation was reinforced through coordination between subject teachers and parents in implementing learning strategies at home. This practice is consistent with Afriani (2024), who emphasizes the importance of a personal approach in building slow learners' self-confidence. This study extends the approach by involving accompanying university students as part of routine monitoring—an innovation rarely addressed in previous studies but proven to enhance the consistency of support received by students.

The effectiveness of GC strategies at SMPN 17 Surabaya is also reflected in the implementation of group guidance services for slow learner students. These findings are consistent with Elmansyah and Maulana (2022), who state that group guidance can reduce students' negative behaviors through structured service stages. In this study, the service helped students improve self-control, understand the consequences of their behavior, and demonstrate positive changes in learning attitudes. Therefore, the combination of individual counseling and group guidance has been proven to strengthen motivation, discipline, and self-adjustment abilities among slow learner students.
Curriculum adjustments through scope simplification (grade reduction) without changing the numerical scores at SMPN 17 Surabaya demonstrate teachers' efforts to align learning demands

with slow learners' abilities. This approach aligns with the principles of remedial teaching, which emphasize curriculum and teaching method adaptations to make learning simpler and more comprehensible (Linuriya, 2022). Such practice helps students better follow the material and reduces the pressure they experience during learning.

Additionally, the school implements class-wide guidance services using sociodrama techniques to enhance students' motivation and self-management skills. Harahap et al. (2025) support that sociodrama effectively promotes self-awareness and responsibility through social simulations. The study findings also show that nine students are still under observation and have not been classified as students with special needs. This condition underscores the importance of establishing clearer and standardized SOPs for identifying slow learners, as recommended by Aulia Nurjannah and Hartini (2024).

Although guidance and counseling (GC) theories emphasize the importance of collaboration between GC teachers and subject teachers, in practice, this is often constrained by limited time and resources. This aligns with the findings of Aprianti et al. (2025), which explain that the high workload of GC teachers frequently hinders the optimal implementation of services and necessitates support from other parties. At SMPN 17 Surabaya, these obstacles were addressed by involving accompanying university students and holding regular meetings as a forum for evaluation. This innovation constitutes a novel contribution to the GC literature, as most previous studies focused solely on internal school roles without involving external parties such as university students.

Findings regarding the variation in slow learner students' characteristics—for example, one student demonstrating high learning enthusiasm compared to others who show low self-confidence underscore the importance of implementing differentiated GC strategies. This approach aligns with cognitive counseling, which emphasizes individualized services, and is consistent with Afriani (2024), who found that homogeneous strategies are ineffective for slow learner students.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the constructivist approach in GC services, highlighting the importance of interventions based on students' specific social and psychological conditions. Findings regarding the need for continuous assessment also enrich the concept of assessment in GC, which has traditionally been static and less flexible to changes in students' conditions (Aulia Nurjannah & Hartini, 2024).

Practically, the study provides several recommendations for strengthening GC services:

First, the findings emphasize the need to enhance collaboration between GC teachers, psychologists, and external parties such as intern students or educational volunteers. Such collaboration is essential to optimize the support process, as slow learner students require more intensive and multidisciplinary assistance. With effective cooperation, the processes of identification, intervention, and evaluation of student development can be conducted more comprehensively.

Second, the study recommends developing clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the identification of slow learner students. The SOP should include systematic stages, from psychometric testing, observation of behavior and learning processes, to parent interviews. Having standardized SOPs allows GC teachers and schools to conduct identification more accurately, systematically, and not solely based on teachers' subjective perceptions.

Third, the study encourages GC teachers to receive specialized training in differentiated counseling techniques suitable for the characteristics of slow learner students. Additionally, the use

of technology in recording and monitoring student progress should be optimized, as suggested by Linuriya (2022). Such training and technology utilization are expected to support GC teachers in delivering more effective, measurable, and sustainable services.

This study has limitations in that it was conducted at a single school, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized widely. Future research is expected to involve other schools with similar characteristics or to explore the long-term impact of GC strategies on the academic achievement of slow learner students. Moreover, future studies could also explore the use of assistive technologies, such as student monitoring applications, as part of innovations in guidance and counseling services (Aulia Nurjannah & Hartini, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The study findings indicate that guidance and counseling strategies for addressing slow learner students at SMPN 17 Surabaya have been implemented systematically through processes of identification, needs assessment, and continuous support. Identification was conducted via the inclusion pathway and psychometric testing, followed by coordination among guidance counselors, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, parents, and psychologists. The strategies employed included individual counseling, structured learning guidance, group guidance, curriculum adjustments, and the involvement of accompanying university students.

This approach has been proven to enhance self-control, motivation, and academic abilities for some slow learner students, although certain students still require further intervention. The study emphasizes that the effectiveness of GC services is determined by cross-stakeholder collaboration, differentiated services tailored to student characteristics, and ongoing assessment. The research implications encourage schools to develop more structured Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for identifying slow learners and to improve GC teachers' competencies through training in differentiated counseling techniques and the use of technology for monitoring student progress.

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