



Language Failure In A 12-Year-Old Student With Dyslexia (A Case Study On Morphology And Syntax)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the morphological and syntactic abilities of 12-year-old dyslexic students in grade 1 of junior high school in South Tangerang City, through an analysis of errors in word formation (morphology) and sentence construction (syntax) that appear in their written and spoken language products. This study provides initial data for developing language learning strategies that can help improve morphological and syntactic abilities. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This method is used to provide more detailed data on students with dyslexia. The subject of the study was one dyslexic student studying in an inclusive junior high school. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with special assistance teachers and parents, and documentation of language assignment results. The results showed that students experienced difficulties in forming words with affixes, especially in the use of complex prefixes and suffixes. In the syntactic aspect, students tended to create disjointed sentences and often omitted important elements such as subjects or predicates. The direct learning strategies included a multisensory approach and repeated visual-phonetic learning techniques. Based on these findings, dyslexia significantly impacts language development in morphology and syntax, necessitating structured, individualized learning strategies that are oriented toward the learner's strengths. These findings serve as a basis for developing appropriate strategies to support the learning process of students with dyslexia through a simple, multisensory, and individualized approach, allowing teachers to focus on dyslexic students in order to help them achieve their learning goals.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary tool for communication and learning in formal educational settings. Proficient language skills encompass mastery of both morphological and syntactic aspects, which play a vital role in understanding and constructing words and sentence structures accurately (Robertson et al., 2024). Morphology, a branch of linguistics that studies word structure and affixation, enables students to understand the meaning of words and their various forms, while syntax governs how words are arranged in sentences to effectively convey messages (Rueda-Sanchez & Cárdenas, 2018). Mastery of these two aspects is crucial for students' success in reading, writing, and academic communication. However, not all students have optimal language skills. One learning disability that affects language skills is dyslexia, a specific learning disorder that primarily impacts reading and writing skills, with broad implications for various aspects of language (Peterson & Pennington, 2012). Dyslexia is not simply a reading difficulty, but rather a neurobiological condition that affects phonological processes and also impacts morphological awareness and syntactic abilities (Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). Children with dyslexia often have difficulty recognizing linguistic patterns and rules, including those related to word formation and sentence structure (Melloni & Vender, 2022).

Recent research by (Melloni & Vender, 2022) shows that children with dyslexia face significant difficulties in morphological tasks, particularly those involving the manipulation of non-lexical words in languages with complex morphological systems. This difficulty marks a challenge in understanding and applying complex morphological rules, potentially hindering the development of comprehensive reading and writing skills. This also applies in the context of Indonesian due to the use of various affixes as part of the morphological system that forms words.

In addition to morphology, syntax is also a challenging language skill for learners with dyslexia. At the junior high school level, academic demands increase with increasingly complex material, making the ability to understand and construct sentences with correct syntactic structure crucial. Georgiou & Spanoudis (2021) in their study of children with dyslexia, found difficulties in producing direct object clitics and constructing complex sentences, indicating deficits in syntactic processing. These deficits can impact students' ability to comprehend reading and write coherent sentences, negatively impacting their overall learning outcomes.

Facing this challenge, effective and adaptive language learning strategies are essential to support students with dyslexia. Explicit and multisensory learning approaches have been shown to improve morphological awareness and syntactic abilities in students with dyslexia (Supriatna & Ediyanto, 2021). Ardanouy et al., (2025) confirmed that systematic training in derivational morphology can improve reading, spelling, and language comprehension in children and adolescents with dyslexia. This type of strategy emphasizes the importance of teaching language rules in a structured and repetitive manner, thus helping students understand language structures comprehensively and apply them in everyday communication.

However, the implementation of effective learning strategies for students with dyslexia in schools, particularly at the junior high school level, still faces various obstacles. One major problem is teachers' limited understanding and training in basic linguistic principles such as morphology and syntax, as well as a lack of specific pedagogical competencies to address the needs of dyslexic students (Folia & Malisiova, 2025). This condition often results in interventions being suboptimal and lacking linguistic structure, resulting in less than optimal results in improving the language skills of students with dyslexia.

On the other hand, inclusive education, which emphasizes the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), provides a promising framework for accommodating the learning needs of diverse students, including those with dyslexia (CAST, 2021). The UDL approach encourages the use of a variety of flexible delivery methods, media, and learning activities that can be tailored to individual student needs. Thus, language learning that integrates explicit approaches to morphology and syntax, along with inclusive principles, is expected to provide a more meaningful and effective learning experience for students with dyslexia.

In this context, it is crucial to conduct in-depth research on the morphological and syntactic abilities of students with dyslexia at the junior high school level, particularly first graders in South Tangerang City. Furthermore, it examines the learning strategies implemented by teachers to address these difficulties. This research seeks to describe the actual conditions in the field and identify best learning practices that can serve as a reference for developing more effective, adaptive, and inclusive language learning models for students with dyslexia.

By comprehensively understanding the linguistic and pedagogical aspects that influence language learning for students with dyslexia, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to improving the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia. Furthermore, the results are also expected to form the basis for recommendations for developing teacher training, strengthening the curriculum, and formulating educational policies responsive to the needs of students with dyslexia at the junior high school level.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study, aiming to examine in-depth the morphological and syntactic abilities of a student with dyslexia in grade 1 of a junior high school in South Tangerang City. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for exploring social and psychopedagogical phenomena in a contextual and natural setting (Creswell, 2021). The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the specific symptoms of dyslexia within the context of Indonesian language learning, particularly in the aspects of morphology and syntax.

The subject of this study was a 12-year-old male student diagnosed with dyslexia by an educational psychologist. The subject is a student at a public inclusive junior high school in South Tangerang City. The subject was selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering that the student actively participates in the learning process, has a history of language difficulties, and receives support from a special teacher. Additional informants included the Indonesian language teacher, the special assistant teacher (GPK), and the student's parents. These additional informants played a role in providing triangulation information.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The observations were conducted directly during the language learning process in the classroom to examine students' participation and linguistic responses. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers and parents to explore their perceptions, strategies, and learning approaches in supporting students with dyslexia. The documentation consisted of student assignments, essays, teacher diaries, and audio recordings of classroom activities. During the data collection process, access to student assignments was carefully managed based on several indicators that served as the foundation for classifying children with dyslexia-related learning needs. Furthermore, the teacher diaries were pre-designed and prepared by the researcher to facilitate teachers who acted as observers in the study. These documents were analyzed to examine errors in morpheme usage and sentence structure. Qualitative research is grounded in natural settings and relies on humans as the primary research instrument (Moleong, 2010). Furthermore, data collection was supported by observation and interview guidelines developed based on the focus of the linguistic study.

Data were analyzed using an interactive model (Miles & Huberman, 2021), which encompasses three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and classifying data relevant to the research focus, particularly symptoms of morphological and syntactic difficulties. Data presentation was carried out in the form of narrative descriptions and a thematic matrix. Conclusions were drawn through interpretation of linguistic patterns and pedagogical practices found in classroom interactions and student assignments. To ensure data validity, source triangulation (teachers, students, parents) and technical triangulation (observation, interviews, documentation) were used. Validation of interpretations was

conducted through member checking with informants to confirm the findings and meanings obtained by the researcher. In relation to research ethics, the entire process was carried out in accordance with ethical research procedures. This included obtaining research permission from the students, their parents, the classroom teacher, and the school administration.

Specifically, this study aims to provide a depiction of the theoretical realities related to language difficulties in students with dyslexia. These theoretical realities are manifested at the morphological level, such as the incorrect use of affixes, omission of affixes, and inappropriate use of word categories. Such difficulties arise from challenges in distinguishing and manipulating sounds within the structure of base words that are transformed into derived words. At the syntactic level, the theoretical realities are reflected in errors in sentence structure, which are caused by the inability to construct complex sentences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Morphological Abilities of Dyslexic Students

The analysis of students' written data and observations during the classroom learning process indicate that the research subjects experience significant impairments in the morphological aspects of the Indonesian language. The morphological errors that occur are not merely incidental, but rather systemic and repetitive. This reflects a weak cognitive and linguistic processing of word structure. Some of the most prominent symptoms are as follows.

1. Inappropriate Use of Affixes

The student frequently used prefixes and suffixes that were not appropriate for the intended word category. For example, the form "*bermainan*" was used instead of "*bermain*" ("to play"). The form "*bermainan*" is morphologically irregular in Indonesian because the combination of the prefix *ber-* and the suffix *-an* is not appropriate in verb formation. This error indicates the student's lack of knowledge about basic affixation rules (Melloni & Vender, 2022).

2. Unconscious Omission of Affixes

Another example is the use of "*bukakan*" intended to mean the passive form "*dibuka*" ("was opened"). The omission of the prefix *di-* – which functions as a passive marker – demonstrates the student's difficulty in internalizing the rules for forming passive words in Indonesian. This reflects a weakness in morphological awareness of affixation processes that change word function (Ardanouy et al., 2025).

3. Substitution of Derivative Morphemes

The student also frequently substituted derivational morphemes, as in the word "*membacaan*" instead of "*bacaan*" ("reading material"). Here, the student has not yet been able to distinguish between derivation (the formation of a new word with a different meaning) and inflection (changing the form of a word without altering its core meaning). This error indicates an inability to distinguish the meaning and function of morphemes semantically and structurally (Hanifah et al., 2023).

This phenomenon reflects weak morphological awareness, namely the ability to reflect on and manipulate the morpheme structure within a word (Ardanouy et al., 2025).

This awareness is a crucial foundation for written language acquisition, especially in a language like Indonesian, which has a complex affixative morphological system.

Based on data triangulation from teacher interviews and classroom observations, it was discovered that students also experience difficulties understanding changes in meaning caused by affixation. An Indonesian language teacher stated:

"Students often confuse the basic word form with the affixed form. For example, they don't know the difference between 'ajar', 'pengajar', 'ajaran', and 'mengajar'. This makes it difficult for them to construct correct sentences and understand the correct meaning of words." (Interview, Indonesian Language Teacher, Junior High School, South Tangerang, 2024).

Teachers also acknowledged that their limited understanding of morphological principles is a barrier to providing effective intervention:

"I feel like I don't have a deep understanding of morphology, so sometimes I only focus on spelling and vocabulary without providing explicit practice on how to form words with affixes. In fact, this may be what makes students struggle more." (Interview, Special Assistant Teacher, 2024).

Furthermore, research by Melloni & Vender (2022) states that morphological difficulties in children with dyslexia are *"transversal"*, meaning they can affect various aspects of comprehension, production, and word encoding in verbal working memory. This is evident in students who, despite hearing the correct word verbally from the teacher, still have difficulty copying the word with the correct affix.

The visual-orthographic aspects also contribute to morphological errors. Classroom observations revealed that students often copy words based on globally familiar visual patterns, without breaking the words down into morpheme units. For example, the word *"pengumuman"* ("announcement") was written as *"penguman"*, indicating a less analytical approach to word processing and a lack of attention to the morphemic components *peng-* + *umum* + *-an*.

These errors are exacerbated by the limitations of the teaching approach used in the classroom. Interviews with teachers revealed that explicit reinforcement of morpheme structure and morphological meaning is rarely provided routinely. Teachers tend to focus more on phonological aspects or basic spelling without emphasizing the practice of segmenting words into morpheme components. This certainly impacts students' writing skills. Colenbrander et al. (2024) confirmed that explicit morphology-based intervention significantly improved the reading and writing skills of children with dyslexia, particularly in languages with complex morphology like Indonesian.

Thus, these findings confirm that the morphological abilities of students with dyslexia are impaired not only at the mechanical level of writing, but also at the conceptual level related to understanding the structure and function of morphemes in language. Therefore, systematic and explicit interventions in morphology learning are needed to improve the literacy of students with dyslexia comprehensively.

In conclusion, the syntactic abilities of students with dyslexia in this study are impaired not only in the mechanical aspects of writing and word order but also at the conceptual and functional levels. They experience difficulties in connecting meaning, structure, and communicative purpose cohesively within sentences. Therefore, syntactic instruction for students with dyslexia requires an explicit, structured, and repetitive

approach, focusing on understanding grammatical functions and the relationships between ideas in sentences.

B. Syntactic Skills of Dyslexic Students

Analysis of student writing data and observations of verbal interactions in the classroom revealed complex impairments in the syntactic skills of the study subjects. The results showed that students with dyslexia experienced significant difficulties in forming coherent and grammatical sentence structures. Students with dyslexia struggle to structure and organize their thoughts, thus hindering their ability to develop coherent writing (Riadiyani et al., 2024). The sentences they produced often lacked clear subject-predicate conventions, had random word order, and missing or inappropriate syntactic elements.

One example of a sentence found in a student's writing is "*Pergi pasar ibu beli sayur rumah*". This sentence contains several syntactic problems, such as the absence of an explicit subject at the beginning of the sentence, a broken predicate, and illogical clause order. This condition indicates a weak understanding of the basic structure of Indonesian sentences, namely the subject-verb-object-adverb (S-P-O-K) pattern, as well as the grammatical function of each component within the syntactic structure.

This finding aligns with a study by Robertson et al. (2024) which explains that dyslexic children have difficulty constructing complex sentences, including difficulty using subordinate clauses, temporal conjunctions, and clitics (pronouns) correctly. In this context, dyslexic students tend to avoid compound or subordinate clauses and often use grammatically incomplete single clauses. This syntactic weakness is also evident in the failure to logically sequence words in active and passive sentences. Another example sentence, "The house was unlocked by me," demonstrates the students' lack of understanding of the proper order between agents (doers), actions, and objects in passive sentence structures. Students with dyslexia have difficulty constructing sentences with correct grammatical structure (Young et al., 2022).

In oral communication, students with dyslexia demonstrate adequate basic skills, but tend to use simple, elliptical phrases that are highly contextualized. This is consistent with the findings of Bradshaw et al. (2021) that children with dyslexia typically exhibit a marked difference between everyday speech skills and the syntactic skills required in academic contexts. This imperfection in syntactic structure directly impacts the quality of written expression. Students experience difficulty connecting temporal, causal, and logical relationships between ideas due to a lack of ability to use conjunctions appropriately. A student's writing example, "*Saya ke sekolah. Saya telat. Guru marah.*" illustrates difficulty combining clauses into a cohesive discourse unit, such as the sentence: "*Saya telat ke sekolah sehingga guru marah.*". This difficulty reflects deficits in the use of subordinating conjunctions and the ability to build relationships between clauses (Nation & Snowling, 2004).

From the interviews, Indonesian language teachers acknowledged that the current approach to syntax learning has been less explicit and structured:

"In class, we tend to focus on understanding text content and spelling, but don't provide specific practice on word functions or sentence structure. In fact, students with dyslexia need more detailed and gradual instruction in understanding sentence structure."
(Interview with Indonesian Language Teacher, Junior High School, South Tangerang, 2024).

This finding is supported by Frizelle et al.(2018); Westerveld & Gillon (2008) who stated that explicit and repeated syntactic intervention can improve sentence structure skills in children with dyslexia.

In conclusion, the syntactic skills of the dyslexic students in this study were impaired not only at the mechanical aspects of writing and word order, but also at the conceptual and functional levels. They had difficulty connecting meaning, structure, and communicative purpose within sentences cohesively. Therefore, syntax learning for students with dyslexia requires an explicit, structured, and repeated approach, focusing on understanding grammatical functions and the relationships between ideas within sentences.

C. Language Learning Strategies by Teachers

In the context of language learning for students with dyslexia in the 1st grade of junior high school in South Tangerang City, Indonesian language teachers apply several modified learning strategies tailored to the special needs of the students. Based on interview results and classroom observations, the teachers stated that they use an approach emphasizing the simplification of material as well as delivering instructions visually to accommodate students' difficulties in language processing.

Specifically, teachers provide material using simpler sentences and easily understood structures, and increase exercises with repetitive and contextual sentence models. This approach aims to gradually strengthen the recognition of morphological and syntactic patterns without burdening students with high language complexity simultaneously. Additionally, the use of visual media such as pictures, diagrams, and word cards is integrated to help students map the relationships between words and meanings concretely.

Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) more intensively utilize a multisensory approach that engages multiple senses in the learning process. For example, shared reading activities with oral guidance, slow spelling and writing exercises, and the use of touchable and movable word cards as tools for word manipulation. This multisensory approach aligns with the principles of Structured Literacy proposed by Muhammad & Hendriani (2024), which emphasize the effectiveness of explicit, systematic, and multisensory learning methods in increasing linguistic awareness in students with dyslexia.

Moreover, teachers routinely provide direct feedback when students make morphological or syntactic errors, such as mistakes in the use of affixes or word order. This feedback practice is important to correct errors early and prevent entrenched error patterns. Teachers also encourage students to revise the sentences they have written to develop reflective skills and understanding of correct language structures. However, analysis of interview results reveals that teachers' understanding of linguistic principles, particularly morphology and syntax, remains limited and superficial. This results in interventions that are less linguistically structured and sometimes still intuitive without strong theoretical support. This shortcoming potentially limits the effectiveness of learning strategies that should target the language aspects most problematic for students with dyslexia.

This situation emphasizes the urgency of strengthening teacher competencies, particularly in the areas of basic linguistics and language learning pedagogy for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Developing teacher capacity through formal

training and workshops on the linguistic aspects of Indonesian and structured intervention techniques for dyslexia is essential for more effective and sustainable learning (Folia & Malisiova, 2025). Furthermore, collaboration between classroom teachers and special education teachers needs to be strengthened to comprehensively align the methods and materials provided.

Thus, the learning strategies currently implemented are already directed towards appropriate approaches but still require refinement in terms of mastery of linguistic theory and special pedagogical application to optimize the learning potential of students with dyslexia comprehensively.

D. Discussion and Implications of Findings

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that the language difficulties experienced by dyslexic students are not solely rooted in phonological aspects, but also significantly encompass morphological and syntactic dimensions (Melloni & Vender, 2022; Rueda-Sanchez & Cárdenas, 2018). This confirms the multidimensional nature of linguistic impairment in dyslexia, necessitating comprehensive treatment in the language learning process. In the Indonesian educational context, language learning for students with dyslexia has tended to be general in nature and has not adopted approaches that specifically target fundamental linguistic difficulties, such as strengthening morphological awareness and syntactic structures. Teaching that has focused solely on developing reading and writing skills without explicit instruction in morphological and syntactic aspects can lead to obstacles to ongoing language development. Therefore, the integration of explicit and systematic linguistic teaching strategies with a differentiated learning approach that is adaptive to the individual needs of dyslexic students is necessary (Muhammad & Hendriani, 2024).

Moreover, this study highlights the importance of cross-professional collaboration and stakeholder involvement in supporting the holistic language development of children with dyslexia. Synergistic collaboration between classroom teachers, Special Assistant Teachers (GPK), and parents can create a consistent and supportive learning environment, making interventions more effective and sustainable. This collaborative approach aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes flexibility in teaching methods, learning materials, and assessments to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia (CAST, 2021).

In terms of implications, these findings call for strengthening teacher capacity not only in learning methodologies but also in basic linguistic understanding related to Indonesian morphology and syntax. Teacher training and professional development should focus on providing explicit teaching strategies emphasizing the introduction of language structures and repeated multisensory practice. Linguistically oriented learning interventions have been shown to significantly improve reading and writing abilities in students with dyslexia, as supported by empirical evidence from international studies (Folia & Malisiova, 2025).

Additionally, the integration of educational technology that offers interactive learning media based on morphology and syntax can also serve as an innovative alternative to facilitate more engaging and effective learning for students with dyslexia. The use of gamification-based or augmented reality learning applications, for example,

enables students to practice recognizing word patterns and sentence structures more contextually and kinesthetically.

Overall, this study affirms that efforts to improve the quality of language learning for students with dyslexia must be multidimensional, involving explicit linguistic approaches, adaptive pedagogical interventions, and collaborative support from various stakeholders. Thus, it is hoped that the potential of students with dyslexia in the language domain can be optimized, ultimately enhancing the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that first-grade junior high school students with dyslexia in South Tangerang City experienced significant difficulties in mastering Indonesian morphology and syntax. Misuse of affixes, omissions of affixes, and inappropriate word forms reflect students' weak morphological awareness. In terms of syntax, the inability to construct correct sentence structures, such as incorrect word order, omitted subjects, and combining clauses without conjunctions, indicates a limited understanding of grammatical functions and basic sentence structure (S-P-O-K). These findings align with previous research showing that dyslexia affects not only phonological aspects but also more complex linguistic abilities such as morphology and syntax.

The learning strategies implemented by Indonesian language teachers and special assistance teachers have encompassed several important aspects, such as simplifying material, using visual instructions, and a multisensory approach that supports explicit reinforcement of language structures. However, teachers' limited understanding of basic linguistic principles prevents learning interventions from being implemented optimally and linguistically structured. Teachers have not been able to fully provide an understanding of linguistics, particularly morphology and syntax, resulting in junior high school students' abilities remaining inadequate. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity through formal training and professional development in linguistics and specialized pedagogy for students with dyslexia is crucial.

This research reinforces the theory that learning for students with dyslexia requires a simple, multisensory, and individualized approach so that teachers' focus on the students can help them achieve their learning goals. Furthermore, this research emphasizes the need to integrate explicit and systematic learning approaches, particularly in morphology and syntax, combined with differentiated learning approaches that are responsive to individual student needs. Collaboration between classroom teachers, support teachers, and parents is also a key factor in creating a conducive and supportive learning environment. Several studies have shown that the principles of Universal Learning Design (UDL) can strengthen students' linguistic abilities, particularly in morphology and syntax. This collaborative approach allows for flexible and adaptive material delivery, thus facilitating the holistic language development of students with dyslexia.

Overall, this study makes an important contribution to the development of inclusive education in Indonesia by emphasizing that addressing language learning difficulties among students with dyslexia must consider broader linguistic dimensions. This effort can be supported by enhancing teachers' competencies in identifying the forms of linguistic difficulties experienced by dyslexic students. To optimize language learning for students with dyslexia, teachers may design specialized instructional models, such as

individualized learning or peer tutoring, implemented in a consistent sequence and adapted to students' needs and characteristics. These two models represent examples of instructional approaches aligned with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). In addition to adjusting instructional models, teachers can also prepare various learning media to support students' needs for instance, developing digital materials tailored to morphological and syntactic challenges to help reduce the pressure associated with linguistic demands.

This research certainly needs to be strengthened with other case studies to strengthen the findings on dyslexic students, particularly in morphology and syntax. Broader research will provide a general overview of the abilities of dyslexic students at the junior high school level. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is needed, as it can be used as a strategy to strengthen the abilities of dyslexic students.

Further research on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach is needed to provide insight into the achievement of dyslexic students in morphology and syntax. Research on the implementation of this approach will provide new insights into alternative learning strategies for students with special needs, such as dyslexia. This approach needs to be tested for its effectiveness in teaching morphology and syntax so that the result can be used as an alternative learning approach in schools.

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