



Factors Contributing To Low Early Reading Skills Among Year 2 Pupils At State Primary School 023 Pandau Jaya

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ABSTRACT

This study was prompted by the low and uneven early reading ability of Year 2 pupils, as well as the various difficulties encountered in the reading process. It aimed to describe the forms of difficulties in early reading and the factors influencing them amongst Year 2 pupils at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya. This study employed a qualitative approach with a narrative design. The research participants comprised four pupils, two classroom teachers and the school headteacher. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analysed using triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. The results reveal that pupils' early reading ability remains relatively low and varies considerably. The difficulties experienced by pupils include difficulty in recognising letters, reading by sounding out words which leads to a lack of fluency and difficulty in understanding simple texts. The factors causing these reading difficulties stem from the interaction of several aspects, namely physiological, intellectual, environmental, socio-economic and psychological factors. Among these, psychological factors were found to be the most dominant, particularly in relation to low motivation, a lack of interest in reading and low self-confidence. Furthermore, the family environment plays a significant role, especially in terms of limited reading experiences and a lack of literacy habits at home. In conclusion, pupils' low early reading ability is not caused by a single factor, but rather by multiple interrelated factors. Therefore, comprehensive efforts are required, including the implementation of more varied and engaging teaching strategies, the enhancement of pupils' motivation and self-confidence, and active parental involvement in fostering reading habits.

Keywords: causal factors, early reading, literacy, primary school pupils, reading difficulties

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a process aimed at nurturing and developing human potential holistically, encompassing both physical and spiritual aspects throughout an individual's lifetime. In a formal context, schools play an essential role in providing structured and systematic learning experiences. According to Article 1(1) of Law No. 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process that enables learners to actively develop their potential. One of the fundamental skills supporting this process is reading, particularly at the primary school level, where early reading skills become an essential foundation for subsequent literacy development.

Reading is a fundamental activity for acquiring information for both educational and recreational purposes. In the current era, reading is not merely a habit but an essential skill that supports pupils' participation in the learning process. Pupils who have adequate reading skills generally have greater opportunities to access and understand learning materials, whereas difficulties in reading may create obstacles in understanding information from various learning sources. The primary aim of early reading instruction is to enable pupils to recognise letters, establish letter-sound relationships, pronounce words correctly, and gradually understand simple texts (Evans, 2015). To support this development, reading instruction can employ various learning materials, including letter cards, word cards, picture cards, and sentence cards. However, in practice, reading instruction may still rely heavily on textbooks and conventional teaching practices, resulting in limited learning experiences for pupils who require more varied forms of support.

In the lower years of primary school, pupils' early reading development can be associated with various factors originating from both the learning environment and the pupils themselves. Evans (2015) highlights the importance of literacy exposure and reading experience in the early years. Similarly, Smith (2018) emphasises that teaching approaches that provide limited interaction may create difficulties for pupils in developing reading skills. The availability and variation of learning materials are also relevant because visual and concrete materials can provide additional support for pupils who are still developing their ability to recognise letters and words (Brown, 2021).

Recent literature further indicates that early reading development involves multiple dimensions rather than a single instructional factor. Castles et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of evidence-based approaches to early literacy instruction, while Ehri (2020) highlights the central role of letter-sound knowledge in the development of word-reading ability. Kim et al. (2020) also identify oral language and the learning environment as essential elements in pupils' literacy development. In addition, the OECD (2021) emphasises the importance of literacy-oriented and innovative learning strategies in supporting students' reading development. These studies demonstrate that early reading proficiency should be understood through the interaction of instructional practices, learning resources, and pupils' individual characteristics.

However, a review of these studies indicates a research gap. Existing studies have largely examined particular dimensions of early reading development, such as evidence-based reading instruction, letter-sound relationships, oral language, or the learning environment. While these studies provide essential explanations of early literacy development, fewer studies have simultaneously examined the **teacher-related and pupil-related factors** that are encountered in an actual primary school classroom, particularly in relation to pupils who experience difficulties in early reading. Thus, there is a need for contextual qualitative research that does not merely measure pupils' reading achievement but explores the various factors identified by teachers and observed in pupils' learning behaviour.

This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Year 2 pupils, as this stage represents an essential period for strengthening foundational reading abilities. Understanding the factors associated with reading difficulties at this level requires attention to both the instructional context provided by teachers and the characteristics and learning experiences of pupils. Such an approach can provide a more comprehensive description of the conditions underlying pupils' early reading difficulties than an analysis that focuses on only one factor.

Based on an initial observation conducted on 1 March 2023 in Year 2 at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya, the learning process was still dominated by lecture-based and relatively conventional teaching practices. The teacher tended to use similar instructional approaches and had limited use of varied learning media. As a result, several pupils appeared less actively engaged during the learning process. Several pupils lost focus during the lesson and engaged in conversations or play with their classmates.

The initial observation also indicated that several pupils experienced difficulties in early reading. Of the 28 pupils observed, 7 pupils were classified as having very low reading proficiency and 6 pupils were classified as having low reading proficiency. Several pupils had difficulties recognising letters and distinguishing between similar letter shapes. During assessment activities, several pupils still required teacher assistance through dictation and guidance, indicating that they had not yet developed sufficient independence in performing basic reading tasks. Interviews with teachers also indicated that limited variation in teaching methods and learning materials was one of the conditions observed in the classroom. In addition, teachers reported differences in pupils' reading interest, motivation, and learning characteristics. These initial findings indicate the need for further investigation into the factors associated with low early reading proficiency among Year 2 pupils.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated qualitative examination of teacher-related and pupil-related factors associated with low early reading proficiency within a specific classroom context. Rather than focusing exclusively on the effectiveness of a particular teaching method, a learning medium, or an individual psychological factor, this study examines how different factors are identified and experienced in the actual

learning environment. Teacher-related factors include teaching approaches, the use and variation of learning media, and the support provided during reading activities. Meanwhile, pupil-related factors include reading interest, learning motivation, and difficulties in recognising letters and performing basic reading tasks. This integrated perspective provides a more contextual description of early reading difficulties.

Another contribution of this study is its provision of empirical evidence from SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya, a specific primary school context that has not been the main focus of the previous studies discussed above. The study, therefore, seeks to complement previous research by connecting established findings concerning early literacy with the concrete classroom conditions experienced by Year 2 pupils. The contribution is not merely based on the research location but on the effort to identify and describe the combination of factors emerging from teachers' experiences and pupils' learning conditions.

Based on this background, the research question is: What teacher-related and pupil-related factors are associated with low early reading proficiency among Year 2 pupils at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya? Accordingly, this study aims to describe the teacher-related and pupil-related factors associated with low early reading proficiency among Year 2 pupils at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of research on basic literacy, particularly by providing a contextual understanding of factors associated with early reading difficulties. Practically, the findings may provide teachers with information for designing more varied and responsive reading instruction, assist schools in identifying areas requiring support, and provide a reference for future researchers conducting studies on early reading development.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research design. The design was selected because this study aimed to describe and explore the factors associated with low early reading proficiency among Year 2 pupils based on the conditions found in the field. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to obtain detailed information regarding the learning process, teachers' experiences, pupils' learning conditions, the use of learning media, and other conditions related to early reading instruction. This study did not aim to examine causal relationships, but rather to provide a contextual description of the factors identified through observations, interviews, and documentation.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya. The location was selected based on preliminary observations indicating that several Year 2 pupils experienced difficulties in early reading. The research was conducted from June to August 2025, covering the preparation stage, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the research report. The research activities were conducted systematically, beginning with preliminary observations to identify the conditions relevant to the research focus, followed by determining the research focus, collecting data, analysing the data, validating the findings, and preparing the research report.

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. The selection was based on predetermined criteria related to the research objectives, particularly the participants' direct involvement, relevant experience, and relevance to the focus of the study. The participants consisted of four Year 2 pupils, two teachers, and one headteacher. The four pupils were selected because they were directly involved in the Year 2 learning process and had been identified as experiencing difficulties in early reading, particularly in recognising letters, distinguishing letter forms, reading words, or performing basic reading tasks. The two teachers were selected because they were directly involved in teaching and assisting pupils in early reading activities and therefore had relevant experience regarding teaching methods, learning media, classroom conditions, and pupils' reading difficulties. The headteacher was selected because of their role in supervising learning activities and their knowledge of the school context, literacy programmes, and support provided for pupils' learning. The selection of these participants was intended to obtain information from different perspectives relevant to the research focus rather than to achieve statistical representation.

The data in this study consisted of qualitative data in the form of words, statements, observations, and descriptions obtained from the field. The primary data were obtained directly from the participants through classroom observations and interviews with four pupils, two teachers, and one headteacher. Meanwhile, secondary data consisted of supporting documents relevant to the research, including learning records, photographs of learning activities, school documents, and other written materials related to early reading instruction. The use of primary and secondary data enabled the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive description of the conditions associated with pupils' early reading proficiency.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out by directly observing the Year 2 learning process, particularly activities related to early reading. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer and did not directly participate in the learning activities. The observation focused on pupils' participation, reading behaviour, interactions with teachers, the use of learning media, classroom conditions, and pupils' responses during reading activities. Interviews were conducted with the four pupils, two teachers, and one headteacher. The interviews used semi-structured interview guidelines so that the researcher could maintain consistency in the questions while still providing opportunities for participants to explain their experiences and perspectives in greater depth. The questions addressed pupils' experiences in learning to read, teachers' instructional practices, the use of learning media, pupils' reading interest and motivation, reading difficulties, and school support for early reading instruction. Documentation was used to complement the information obtained through observation and interviews. The documentation included photographs of learning activities, learning records, relevant school documents, and other supporting materials related to the research focus.

The instruments used in this study consisted of observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation sheets. The researcher served as the primary instrument, as qualitative research requires the researcher to be directly involved in collecting, interpreting, and analysing data obtained from the field. The supporting instruments were used to maintain the consistency and systematic implementation of the data collection process. The observation guidelines were used to record relevant conditions during the learning process, while the interview guidelines were used to guide conversations with pupils, teachers, and the headteacher. Documentation sheets were used to organise and record supporting documents obtained during the research.

The validity of the data was established through triangulation. In this study, triangulation was used specifically as a technique for examining the credibility and consistency of the data and was not treated as a stage of data analysis. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from pupils, teachers, and the headteacher. Information provided by one participant was compared with information obtained from other participants to determine the consistency of the findings. Technical triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. For example, information obtained through interviews was compared with classroom observation findings and relevant documents. Data were also collected at different times during the research period when necessary to examine the consistency of the information obtained. Through this process, the researcher could assess whether the findings were supported by more than one source or data collection technique.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously throughout the research process. The analysis consisted of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organising the data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. At this stage, the researcher identified information relevant to the research focus and grouped the data into themes related to teacher-related factors, the use of learning media, pupils' reading interest and motivation, and difficulties experienced during early reading activities. Data presentation was subsequently conducted by organising the reduced data into systematic descriptive explanations and thematic categories. The presentation of data was intended to provide a clear description of the conditions found in the field and the perspectives expressed by the participants. Relevant original interview excerpts were included to support the main findings and demonstrate the evidence obtained directly from the

participants. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researcher identified patterns and meanings emerging from the presented data and related them to the research questions. The conclusions were continuously verified by comparing them with the observation, interview, and documentation data to ensure that the conclusions reflected the evidence obtained from the field.

Thus, data analysis and data triangulation were treated as two distinct processes in this study. Data analysis was conducted to organise, describe, interpret, and draw conclusions from the collected data, whereas triangulation was conducted to examine the credibility and consistency of the findings. The separation of these two processes was intended to ensure that the research procedures were methodologically clear and that the findings were based on evidence obtained from multiple relevant sources and data collection techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study, conducted in Year 2 at SD Negeri 023 Pandau Jaya, aimed to identify in depth the factors associated with low early reading ability, as well as the types of difficulties experienced by pupils. Data collection was carried out using three main techniques observation, interviews and documentation which were used in an integrated manner to obtain a complete and comprehensive picture of the state of reading instruction in the classroom. Based on the research findings, it was found that pupils' early reading skills remained at varying levels and tended to be low. Of the 28 pupils, only 10 were able to read fluently and comprehend simple texts, whilst 5 pupils were still reading by sounding out the words, and 4 others were not yet able to recognise letters effectively. This variation indicates a significant gap in ability, which reflects differences in cognitive ability, affective factors, and the pupils' learning environment.

Upon further analysis, this situation implies that the early reading learning process has not yet fully accommodated the diverse learning needs of the pupils. Pupils who had difficulty reading generally required more time, repeated explanations, and more intensive guidance compared with pupils who were already able to read fluently. In contrast, pupils with better reading abilities tended to complete reading tasks more quickly and participate more actively in classroom activities. This disparity indicates that teaching has not yet optimally applied the principle of differentiation. These findings underscore that early reading is not merely a technical skill, but a complex process involving the interaction between cognitive abilities, learning motivation, and environmental support. This is in line with Snow's (2020) view that reading development is a complex process involving language, cognitive, and environmental aspects. Therefore, the discussion of these research findings focuses on two main aspects: forms of reading difficulties and factors associated with pupils' low early reading skills. The findings reported below first present the observed conditions and informant accounts, while the interpretation is supported through relevant theories and previous studies.

Physiological Factors

Physiological factors were examined as one of the fundamental aspects that could potentially be related to pupils' readiness for early reading. Physiological conditions include general physical health, visual condition, fine motor skills, and other physical conditions that may be observed during the learning process. Based on classroom observations, all pupils were generally in good physical condition. No pupils revealed extreme fatigue, obvious visual impairment, or physical conditions that prevented them from participating in reading activities. Most pupils were able to sit, hold books, look at reading materials, and participate in reading activities normally.

In addition, the teacher interview indicated that there were no pupils with chronic health conditions or severe neurological disorders that were reported to interfere directly with classroom participation. The pupils generally participated in mainstream classroom activities without special educational needs being reported by the teacher. The teacher stated, "As far as I have observed, the pupils do not have serious health problems that prevent them from participating in reading activities. They can follow the lesson normally, although some still experience difficulties when reading." (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

Thus, based on the available observation and interview data, physical health and neurological limitations were not identified as dominant conditions in explaining the low early reading ability. The reading difficulties observed in the classroom were more closely related to pupils' literacy experiences, visual recognition of letters, cognitive processing, motivation, and learning environment.

Fine Motor and Visual Recognition

One of the physiological aspects identified in the observation was pupils' ability to recognise and distinguish letter symbols. Several pupils, particularly PO, RT, VS, and AK, experienced difficulties in recognising letters with similar visual forms, such as b/d and p/q. They required more time to provide answers, revealed hesitation, and sometimes made errors when naming letter sounds.

This observation underscores that visual and symbolic processing may still be developing among some pupils. According to Ehri (2020), the ability to connect visual letter symbols with their corresponding sounds is an essential part of early reading development. Pupils need repeated opportunities to establish stable connections between letters, sounds, and words.

Documentation of classroom activities also revealed that several pupils stared at letters for relatively long periods, moved their heads closer to the reading material, or used their fingers as pointers when attempting to identify letters. These behaviours were particularly visible when pupils were asked to read unfamiliar words. Stein (2019) explains that visual recognition and the processing of written symbols are essential components of early reading development because pupils need to recognise letters accurately before they can connect them with sounds and words.

In addition, the teacher explained that some pupils could name familiar letters but still experienced difficulty distinguishing or recalling certain letter symbols. The teacher stated, "Several pupils can name the letters, but they still confuse letters that look similar, such as b and d or p and q. They need to be reminded repeatedly so that they can recognise the letters correctly." (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

Based on these findings, fine motor and visual recognition aspects were identified alongside the initial reading difficulties experienced by several pupils. However, the findings do not indicate that physiological conditions were the sole explanation for low reading ability. Instead, difficulties in visual recognition appeared as one aspect of the broader reading difficulties identified in the classroom.

Gender

Gender was considered in the observation and interview process. The number of male and female pupils was relatively balanced, and no substantial difference in early reading ability was identified based solely on gender. Both male and female pupils were found among those who could read fluently as well as among those who experienced difficulties.

The teacher, moreover, explained that differences in reading ability were more often observed in relation to reading habits, support at home, motivation, and individual learning characteristics rather than gender. This indicates that gender was not identified as a prominent variable in explaining pupils' low early reading abilities based on the available data.

Overall, physiological factors were not identified as the primary condition associated with low early reading ability. General physical health was relatively good, while visual recognition difficulties were observed among several pupils. These difficulties were associated with initial challenges in letter recognition and reading practice. Therefore, the findings underscore that physiological aspects should still be considered in early reading instruction, particularly when teachers identify pupils who experience repeated difficulties in distinguishing letters.

Intellectual Factors

Intellectual factors are relevant to pupils' early reading performance, as reading requires pupils to recognise symbols, connect sounds and letters, remember information, understand instructions, and process meaning from written language. In this study, intellectual factors were examined through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and documentation of pupils' learning activities.

Logical and Analytical Thinking Skills

The classroom observations reveal differences in pupils' ability to process information during reading activities. Pupils who demonstrated stronger thinking skills were generally quicker in recognising letters, syllables, and whole words. In contrast, pupils such as PO, RT, VS, and AK often read in a disjointed manner, paused frequently, repeated sounds, and required more time to complete reading tasks.

In addition, the teacher explained that pupils experiencing reading difficulties sometimes had difficulty following simple instructions. They required instructions to be repeated and needed more specific guidance when completing classroom activities. The teacher stated, "Pupils who have difficulty reading usually need the instructions to be repeated. I also have to give them more individual guidance because they do not immediately understand the task." (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

Differences in logical thinking were observed not only during reading activities but also in broader learning tasks. Documentation revealed that pupils with stronger observed learning performance tended to participate more actively, complete tasks more quickly, and indicate greater confidence. Meanwhile, pupils who required more assistance were more likely to remain passive and depend on teacher guidance.

These findings are in line with Perfetti and Stafura, who explain that reading comprehension requires the coordination of word recognition, language knowledge, and meaning construction. Castles et al. (2018) also emphasise the importance of developing foundational reading skills through systematic learning experiences.

Based on the findings, differences in pupils' thinking abilities were identified alongside differences in early reading abilities. Pupils who required more time and repeated practice also tended to demonstrate greater reading difficulty. However, these findings do not establish that intellectual ability alone determines pupils' reading performance.

The Relationship between Intellectual Ability and Reading Ability

The relationship between intellectual ability and reading ability was examined through pupils' observed learning performance rather than through a formal intelligence test. Pupils who demonstrated stronger learning performance generally appeared to grasp reading activities more quickly. In contrast, pupils such as PO, RT, VS, and AK experienced obstacles in recognising letters, combining sounds, and reading simple words.

The teacher also described a clear pattern between pupils' general learning performance and their reading ability. The teacher stated, "Pupils who understand the lesson more quickly usually also learn to read more easily. Those who need more explanation generally need more time when reading as well." (Teacher 2, interview, July 2026).

Documentation of pupils' academic activities, moreover, showed that pupils with stronger reading skills tended to demonstrate better performance in other classroom tasks. However, this finding should be understood as an observed relationship between learning performance and reading ability rather than evidence of a direct causal relationship.

Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro explain that reading comprehension involves several cognitive processes, including vocabulary knowledge, inference, working memory, and the ability to integrate information. Kendeou et al. also emphasise that reading comprehension develops through the interaction of cognitive and linguistic processes.

Thus, the data indicate an observable relationship between pupils' observed cognitive performance and early reading ability. Pupils with stronger observed cognitive performance tended to demonstrate stronger reading performance, while pupils requiring more guidance tended to experience greater difficulty. Nevertheless, intellectual ability was not identified as the sole condition explaining pupils' reading difficulties.

Environmental Factors

The learning environment is relevant to early reading development because pupils' reading experiences are not limited to the classroom. Family support, reading opportunities at home, availability of reading materials, and social and emotional conditions may form part of the context in which pupils develop their reading habits.

A Supportive Family Environment

Classroom observations indicate that pupils who appeared to have more reading experience were generally more active, responsive, and confident during reading activities. In contrast, pupils experiencing reading difficulties were more likely to remain passive and require greater teacher assistance. These differences may reflect differences in prior literacy experiences.

The teacher explained that pupils who receive support and attention at home tend to have more opportunities to practise reading. The teacher stated, "Pupils who receive more attention from their parents at home generally have more opportunities to practise reading. Several pupils, however, rarely read with their parents." (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

Interviews with pupils also showed that reading activities with parents were not consistently reported. Several pupils stated that they usually read only when they had homework, while other activities at home were more often related to playing or other forms of leisure.

This indicates that regular family literacy stimulation was not consistently reported among the pupils. Limited reported literacy stimulation was accompanied by fewer reported opportunities for repeated reading practice. Sénéchal and Niklas emphasise the relevance of home literacy experiences to children's early literacy development.

Therefore, the family environment was identified as an essential context associated with pupils' early reading experiences. However, the findings should not be interpreted as establishing a direct causal effect of family support on reading ability.

Reading Experiences at Home

Reading experiences at home were identified through observation and interviews. Several pupils demonstrated familiarity with books and reading activities, while others stated that they rarely read outside school.

One pupil explained, "At home I usually read when there is homework. If there is no homework, I more often play." (Pupil PO, interview, July 2026).

Another pupil stated, "I do not have many reading books at home, so I usually read the books from school." (Pupil RT, interview, July 2026).

The teachers also described regular reading practice as being associated with greater reading fluency. One teacher explained that pupils who practise reading consistently generally become more familiar with letters, syllables, and words. This implies that a limited reading experience was accompanied by fewer opportunities for repeated practice.

Niklas et al. emphasise that literacy activities at home can provide children with opportunities to interact with written language. Repeated exposure to reading materials may support familiarity with words and written symbols.

Therefore, limited reading experience at home was identified as one of the conditions associated with pupils' early reading development and may act as a barrier when pupils have few opportunities to practise independently.

Social and Emotional Conditions at Home

Social and emotional conditions were identified in the data. During classroom observations, pupils who appeared confident generally participated more actively, while several pupils who lacked confidence were hesitant to read aloud and occasionally spoke in a very soft voice.

The teacher explained that emotional support at home was crucial in encouraging pupils to remain confident when facing reading difficulties. The teacher stated, "Children need to feel supported when they make mistakes. If they are often afraid of being wrong, they may become less confident when they have to read in front of the class." (Teacher 2, interview, July 2026).

A pupil also explained, "Sometimes I am afraid to read aloud because I am worried that I will make a mistake and my friends will laugh." (Pupil AK, interview, July 2026).

These findings underscore that pupils' reported emotional state was related to their engagement in reading activities. Limited emotional support may present a barrier when pupils already experience difficulties and require confidence to practise reading.

Previous studies on social-emotional development indicate that confidence, emotional security, and classroom support are relevant to children's participation in learning activities. Therefore, social and emotional conditions at home were identified alongside differences in pupils' engagement and self-confidence.

Children's Socio-Economic Factors

Economic circumstances were considered in relation to access to learning resources and reading materials. However, household income, parents' occupations, and detailed family economic conditions were not directly collected in this study. Therefore, socioeconomic information is presented only as contextual information based on observations and informant accounts and should not be interpreted as evidence that socioeconomic status caused or determined pupils' reading ability.

Based on classroom observations, several pupils came to school with additional learning resources, such as supplementary books, while others appeared to rely mainly on books provided by the school. Pupils with access to additional reading materials were often observed participating more actively in reading activities.

However, these differences represent differences in access to learning resources; the available data do not establish the socioeconomic reasons for every difference. Several pupils reported having limited access to books at home. One pupil stated, "I do not have many reading books at home, so I usually read the books from school." (Pupil RT, interview, July 2026).

Teachers also reported that family circumstances were related, in their view, to differences in access to learning resources. One teacher stated, "Several families can provide additional books for their children, while others mostly use the books available at school. The pupils who have more materials usually have more opportunities to practise reading." (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

The teacher further explained that several pupils depended primarily on school-provided books, whereas pupils with additional reading materials had more opportunities to practise. Teachers described this difference as occurring alongside differences in reading progress.

The data reveal differences in access to resources alongside differences in self-confidence and reading engagement. However, the study did not collect sufficient evidence to establish an economic explanation for these differences. Therefore, socioeconomic conditions should be understood as contextual information rather than as a direct cause of low early reading ability.

Theoretically, Letourneau et al., Hair et al., and the OECD have discussed the broader relevance of family resources and learning opportunities to children's educational experiences. These perspectives provide context for understanding why access to books and learning materials may differ among pupils, but they do not establish a direct socioeconomic explanation for the individual pupils in this study.

Thus, the socioeconomic dimension remained a contextual consideration in interpreting differences in access to reading resources. The available data indicate that several pupils experienced limited access to reading materials, while others had greater access to supplementary resources. These conditions can be understood as contextual conditions described by informants. Efforts to support early reading may therefore consider pupils' differing access to learning resources and family contexts without making assumptions about household economic status.

Psychological Factors

Psychological factors were one of the recurring areas identified in the data. Motivation, interest in reading, confidence, social-emotional maturity, and adaptability were repeatedly described in relation to pupils' willingness to participate in reading activities.

These psychological conditions were reflected in whether pupils were willing to learn, make an effort, and engage in reading activities. They were also reflected in the frequency with which pupils practised reading and their willingness to read aloud in front of others.

Motivation

Classroom observations reveal that several pupils demonstrated low motivation during reading activities. They were sometimes passive, participated only when asked, and occasionally attempted to avoid reading activities by talking or engaging in other activities.

Interviews with pupils PO, VS, and AK indicated that reading was sometimes considered difficult or boring. One pupil stated, "I like playing more than reading because reading is sometimes difficult and I get bored when I read for a long time." (Pupil VS, interview, July 2026).

The teacher also explained that pupils who demonstrated lower reading ability were often less active during reading activities. The teacher stated, "Several pupils who have difficulty reading are also less motivated. They do not always want to try by themselves and usually need encouragement before they start reading." (Teacher 2, interview, July 2026).

The data reveal that pupils described as less motivated also reported less frequent reading practice. Reading development requires repeated opportunities to interact with written language and practise reading skills. In these cases, limited practice was observed alongside limited reading progress during the research period.

A recurring pattern was observed in which lower engagement and limited practice occurred together. Schunk explains that motivation is an essential component of engagement in learning, while Guthrie et al. emphasise the relationship between reading engagement and literacy development. Therefore, motivation was identified as one of the factors associated with lower engagement in early reading activities.

Interest

Interest in reading was observed to be relatively low among several pupils. During reading activities, several pupils appeared bored, participated minimally, and showed limited perseverance when facing unfamiliar words. Interviews indicate that several pupils preferred playing to reading. One pupil explained, "I prefer playing because reading is not always interesting for me." (Pupil PO, interview, July 2026).

Another pupil stated, "Sometimes I do not want to read because there are many words that I cannot read yet." (Pupil AK, interview, July 2026).

Teachers also explained that several pupils rarely read outside of the lesson. One teacher stated, “Several pupils only read when there is a reading task in class. Outside the lesson, they do not often choose reading by themselves.” (Teacher 1, interview, July 2026).

Low reported interest was accompanied by limited independent reading. This condition reduced the frequency with which several pupils interacted with reading materials outside formal learning activities.

Therefore, interest in reading was identified as a factor that may act as a barrier to the development of pupils’ early reading skills when pupils rarely choose to engage in reading activities independently.

Social, Emotional and Adaptive Maturity

Social, emotional, and adaptive maturity were observed during reading activities. Several pupils showed low confidence, hesitated before reading, spoke quietly, or avoided reading aloud when they were unsure about the answer. Pupils RT, VS, and AK expressed feelings of fear or embarrassment when asked to read in front of their classmates. One pupil stated, “Sometimes I am afraid to read aloud because I am worried that I will make a mistake and my friends will laugh.” (Pupil AK, interview, July 2026).

Teachers also described a similar pattern. One teacher explained, “Several children are actually able to read parts of the text, but they become nervous when asked to read in front of the class. They need patient guidance so they can feel more confident.” (Teacher 2, interview, July 2026).

Pupils who expressed low confidence were also observed to participate less readily. The data, therefore, reveal a pattern between confidence and engagement, without establishing causal direction. Previous studies on social-emotional development indicate that self-confidence, emotional regulation, and adaptability are relevant to pupils’ readiness to participate in learning. In early reading activities, pupils may need a supportive environment in which mistakes are treated as part of the learning process.

Thus, social, emotional, and adaptive maturity were identified alongside differences in pupils’ self-confidence and engagement in reading instruction.

Overall Findings

The findings indicate that pupils’ low early reading skills were associated with various interrelated conditions identified across the data rather than being represented by a single factor. These conditions included physiological, intellectual, environmental, socioeconomic, and psychological aspects.

Physiological factors were not identified as a dominant condition in the available data. Pupils generally showed good physical health and were able to participate in classroom activities. However, several pupils experienced difficulties in visual recognition of letters, particularly letters with similar forms. These difficulties were observed alongside initial challenges in reading.

Intellectual factors were observed alongside differences in reading performance. Pupils who required more time to process instructions and reading materials also tended to require more repetition and practice. However, intellectual ability was not identified as the sole condition associated with early reading difficulties.

Environmental factors, particularly family support and reading experience, were repeatedly identified alongside differences in pupils’ reading ability. Pupils who had more opportunities to interact with books and practise reading were generally more familiar with reading activities, while pupils with limited reading experiences required greater assistance.

Socioeconomic conditions provided contextual information concerning access to learning resources. Several pupils had additional reading materials, while others relied mainly on school-provided resources. As detailed socioeconomic information was not directly collected, these differences should not be interpreted as evidence that socioeconomic status caused low reading ability.

Psychological conditions were frequently identified in the accounts and observations concerning pupils’ early reading experiences. Motivation, interest, and confidence were observed alongside differences

in pupils' participation and reading practice. Pupils who showed less engagement were also observed to practise reading less frequently.

Overall, the findings reveal overlapping conditions across the five areas. Environmental and contextual conditions were described alongside pupils' reading experiences, while psychological experiences were observed alongside their level of engagement. Cognitive and visual recognition abilities were also observed alongside differences in reading performance. These conditions occurred together within the classroom context and provide a more comprehensive description of pupils' low early reading proficiency.

It can, therefore, be understood that pupils' low early reading skills were associated with a combination of various conditions identified through observation, interviews, and documentation. No single factor was identified as a sole explanation; rather, several conditions were identified across the five areas. This finding reinforces the importance of examining early reading difficulties comprehensively by considering pupils' individual characteristics as well as their learning experiences and environmental contexts.

Based on these findings, teachers can provide additional opportunities for pupils who experience reading difficulties through repeated reading practice, letter recognition activities, individual guidance, and supportive classroom interactions. Parents can also provide regular opportunities for children to interact with books and practise reading at home, according to the resources available to the family.

For future researchers, further studies may examine other factors related to early reading proficiency using a broader range of participants and data sources. Further research may also explore how specific instructional strategies, reading interventions, and home literacy practices are experienced by pupils with different levels of early reading proficiency.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the early reading skills of Year 2 pupils are still relatively low and reveal quite marked differences in ability between pupils. This is evident from the fact that there are still pupils who are not yet familiar with the alphabet, who read by sounding out the words, and who are not yet able to comprehend the content of simple texts. These low reading skills are influenced by several interrelated factors, namely physiological, intellectual, environmental, socio-economic and psychological factors. Of these five factors, psychological factors are the most dominant, particularly in relation to pupils' motivation, interest in reading and self-confidence. Furthermore, environmental factors also have a significant influence, particularly in terms of reading experience and family support. Thus, pupils' early reading skills are not influenced by just one factor, but are the result of a variety of interrelated factors.

Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study focused on Year 2 pupils in a particular school context; therefore, the findings may not be generalisable to pupils of different ages, schools, or educational settings. Second, although the study identified physiological, intellectual, environmental, socio-economic, and psychological factors associated with pupils' early reading skills, it did not examine each factor in the same depth. In particular, psychological factors such as reading motivation, interest, and self-confidence were identified as dominant factors, but their individual contributions were not measured quantitatively. Third, the study relied primarily on the information and conditions observed within the research setting, which may not fully capture the complexity of pupils' reading experiences outside school, including parental involvement and home literacy practices. Finally, because early reading skills are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, the findings should not be interpreted as establishing a direct causal relationship between the identified factors and pupils' reading abilities. Future studies could involve a larger and more diverse sample and employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to examine how these factors interact and influence the development of early reading skills over time.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

The first author was responsible for the research planning, data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing. The second author contributed to the supervision of the research and the review of the manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the results, interpretation, or reporting of the research presented in this manuscript.

Ethical Declaration

All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study. They were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or disadvantages.

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