EDUMASPUL:
Jurnal Pendidikan
P-ISSN 2548-8201 | E-ISSN 2580-0469

Vol. [10] No. [2] ([2026])1335-1339
DOI: 10.33487/ edumaspul.v10i2.575.

Identification of Learning Problems Among Grade VIII Students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
[10-09-2026]	[11-10-2026]	[18-10-2026]	[25-10-2026]

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the learning problems experienced by Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang based on students' experiences and teachers' perspectives. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using interviews with 16 informants consisting of one homeroom teacher, three subject teachers, and 12 Grade VIII students. The data were analyzed thematically by grouping responses into recurring patterns relevant to the research focus. The findings derived from the available informant accounts revealed several issues, namely students' limited openness in communicating their difficulties, inconsistent classroom participation, procrastination in completing assignments, and family responsibilities that reduce the time and energy available for learning. Some students reported being distracted by recreational activities, while others experienced fatigue after helping their parents at home. These findings indicate that learning problems need to be understood by considering academic factors, study habits, communication, and family context. Guidance and counseling services can support the identification of students' needs and the development of effective learning strategies and time management skills.

Keywords: *learning problems; junior high school students; interviews; thematic analysis; guidance and counseling*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis masalah belajar yang dialami siswa kelas VIII UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang berdasarkan pengalaman siswa dan pandangan guru. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara terhadap 16 informan, yang terdiri atas satu wali kelas, tiga guru mata pelajaran, dan 12 siswa kelas VIII. Data dianalisis secara tematik dengan mengelompokkan jawaban ke dalam pola-pola yang berulang dan relevan dengan fokus penelitian. Temuan yang diperoleh dari keterangan informan yang telah tersedia menunjukkan beberapa persoalan, yaitu keterbatasan keterbukaan siswa dalam mengomunikasikan kesulitan, partisipasi kelas yang belum konsisten, penundaan pengerjaan tugas, serta tanggung jawab keluarga yang mengurangi waktu dan energi untuk belajar. Sebagian siswa mengaku terdistraksi oleh aktivitas hiburan, sedangkan sebagian lainnya merasa lelah setelah membantu orang tua di rumah. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa masalah belajar perlu dipahami dengan mempertimbangkan faktor akademik, kebiasaan belajar, komunikasi, dan konteks keluarga. Layanan bimbingan dan konseling dapat mendukung identifikasi kebutuhan siswa serta pengembangan strategi belajar dan pengelolaan waktu.*

Kata kunci: *masalah belajar; siswa SMP; wawancara; analisis tematik; bimbingan dan konseling*

CITATION:	Jehari, M., & Nagul, W. (2026). Identification of Learning Problems Among Grade VIII Students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang: A Qualitative Descriptive Study. *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v10i2.575
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Introduction

Learning is a process that involves students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, as well as environmental influences. Throughout this process, students may encounter various obstacles, ranging from difficulties in understanding learning materials and instructions, limited communication with teachers, to challenges in managing time to complete assignments. Learning difficulties are not always directly reflected in students' academic achievements, such as their grades. Some problems may go unnoticed because students tend to keep their difficulties to themselves and may lack the confidence or habit of expressing their needs or seeking help when facing learning obstacles (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011).

One of the challenges that can interfere with the learning process is the tendency to postpone the completion of academic assignments. This behavior may arise when students perceive assignments as difficult, experience unpleasant emotional states, or prefer engaging in other activities that they consider more enjoyable than fulfilling their academic responsibilities.

This statement is consistent with Steel (2007) research, which explains that procrastination is associated with perceptions of task difficulty or unpleasantness, low confidence in one's abilities, and susceptibility to distractions. Sirois & Pychyl (2013) also explain that procrastination can serve as a means of avoiding negative emotions that arise when facing a task. Research by Gao et al. (2025) on mathematics homework procrastination among secondary school students indicates that task-related emotions, including anxiety and boredom, are associated with the tendency to delay assignments. Although that study focused specifically on mathematics homework, its findings highlight the importance of considering students' experiences and emotional responses when completing academic tasks.

In addition to factors directly related to learning, responsibilities at home may affect students' available time and energy. Students who help their parents, care for younger siblings, or perform household chores after school may have less time available for studying. This situation needs to be understood in light of students' individual experiences rather than immediately interpreted as a lack of willingness to learn. Qualitative interviews enable researchers to obtain deeper insights into informants' experiences and perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

At school, teachers and guidance and counseling (GC) teachers require sufficient information to identify students' needs. However, when students tend to remain silent or refrain from expressing their difficulties, problems may only become apparent after their consequences emerge, such as late assignment submissions or declining academic performance. Organizing interview findings into themes can help clarify patterns in informants' experiences. Braun & Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as an approach used to identify and interpret patterns of meaning in qualitative data.

Based on this context, this study focuses on analyzing the learning problems experienced by Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang through interviews with teachers and students. The purpose of this study is to describe the types of learning problems identified in the informants' accounts and discuss their implications for learning support and guidance and counseling services.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to describe and understand the learning problems experienced by Grade VIII students based on students' experiences and teachers' perspectives. This approach was selected to explore the learning difficulties encountered by students within their school context. The study was conducted at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang over a two-month period, from September to October 2026.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The study involved 16 informants, consisting of one homeroom teacher, three subject teachers, and 12 Grade VIII students at UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang. The teachers provided information regarding students' classroom participation, learning difficulties, communication patterns, and assignment completion. Meanwhile, the students shared their experiences of learning, time management, challenges in completing assignments, and family responsibilities.

The inclusion of both teachers and students was intended to obtain an understanding of learning problems from the perspectives of educators and learners. To protect confidentiality, the students were identified using the initials R., D., K., E., C., M., Y., F., I., S., A., and N. The specific sampling technique could not be determined because information regarding the participant selection procedure was not available.

Instruments and Measures

The research data were collected through interviews with teachers and students. The interviews explored students' experiences in classroom learning, understanding learning materials and instructions, communicating with teachers, completing assignments, managing time, and fulfilling responsibilities at home. Interviews with teachers focused on their observations of students' learning behaviors, classroom participation, communication, and difficulties encountered during the learning process.

The interview data served as the primary source for identifying and describing students' learning problems. Qualitative interviews enable researchers to gain a deeper understanding of informants' experiences and perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). No standardized measurement scales were used because the study focused on exploring informants' experiences and perspectives through qualitative inquiry.

Procedure and Research Ethics

Data collection was conducted through interviews with the participants involved in the study. The interviews focused on students' experiences during classroom learning and teachers' perspectives on the learning difficulties observed in the classroom. The information obtained was then organized according to topics relevant to the research objectives to identify different forms of learning problems.

Students' confidentiality was maintained by using initials when presenting the research findings. The researcher should ensure that school permission, informed consent from participants or their parents/guardians where required, and appropriate measures to protect informants' confidentiality have been fulfilled in accordance with applicable requirements. Detailed information regarding ethical approval and consent procedures was not available in the research information provided and should therefore be adjusted to reflect the procedures actually implemented.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of meaning in the informants' accounts. The analytical process involved reviewing the available interview notes or transcripts, identifying statements relevant to the research focus, grouping responses with similar meanings, developing themes, and interpreting the themes in relation to the research objectives. This procedure was guided by the thematic analysis approach described by (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis focused on describing the learning problems reported by the informants, including students' limited communication of learning difficulties, inconsistent classroom participation, procrastination in completing assignments, and family responsibilities that affected the time and energy available for learning. The findings were used to understand students' experiences and formulate implications for learning support and guidance and counseling services.

Results and Discussion

Results

Students' Difficulties in Communicating Learning Problems

The homeroom teacher explained that some students were not yet open about communicating the difficulties they experienced at school. When asked about their situation, some students tended to remain silent and respond, "I'm fine, Ma'am," sometimes while looking down. As a result, teachers sometimes only became aware of students' problems after their grades had declined or their assignments had begun to be submitted late.

Student Participation in Learning

A subject teacher reported that two-way communication in the classroom had not been consistently established. When asked whether they had understood the learning materials, some students chose to remain silent, making it difficult for the teacher to assess their level of understanding. When completing assignments, some students did not understand the instructions, copied their classmates' work, or failed to complete the assigned tasks.

Assignment Procrastination

Four students identified by the initials R., D., K., and E. reported that the number of assignments or their level of difficulty sometimes made them feel overwhelmed. They acknowledged that playing games, using social media, spending time with friends, or resting could delay the completion of their assignments. As submission deadlines approached, they felt panicked and attempted to finish their assignments within a short period.

Family Responsibilities and Limited Study Time

Four students identified by the initials C., M., Y., and F. explained that after returning home from school, they helped their parents with various responsibilities, such as looking after a shop, caring for younger siblings, cleaning the house, or working in gardens and tending to livestock. These activities left them feeling tired, reducing their motivation to study at night. In some situations, their school assignments were postponed or completed in a rush.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that students' learning problems are not only related to their ability to understand learning materials but also to communication between students and teachers, time management, assignment procrastination, and family responsibilities. Qualitative interviews help researchers understand informants' experiences based on their own explanations (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Students' tendency to remain silent when experiencing difficulties may hinder teachers from identifying their learning needs at an early stage. A

safe and nonjudgmental classroom environment, specific guiding questions, and opportunities to ask questions privately may help students communicate their difficulties. Teachers can also check students' understanding through brief exercises or by asking them to explain instructions in their own words.

The assignment procrastination reported by R., D., K., and E. indicates challenges in time management and distraction control. Procrastination does not necessarily mean that students are unconcerned about learning. Based on the available accounts, procrastination also occurs when assignments seem numerous or difficult and recreational activities become more appealing. Gao et al. (2025) emphasized that emotions and motivation associated with assignments should be considered when examining homework procrastination. The findings of this study are not intended to establish causal relationships but rather to describe the experiences reported by the informants.

Students' involvement in helping meet household needs may limit the time available for studying and deplete energy that could otherwise be used for academic activities. These circumstances need to be examined by considering students' backgrounds and life situations rather than immediately interpreting them as a form of indiscipline. Telzer & Fuligni (2009) demonstrated that adolescents' involvement in helping their families may be associated with academic achievement, although the effects may vary depending on students' contexts and backgrounds.

As a form of support, schools and families can help students develop study schedules that suit their circumstances, set reminders for assignment deadlines, divide academic tasks into simpler stages, and maintain open communication about students' learning needs. Parental support that allows room for autonomy is also relevant to helping students manage their time and complete academic assignments (Won & Yu, 2018).

For guidance and counseling (GC) services, these findings can serve as a basis for identifying students' needs, providing classroom guidance on time management and study strategies, and offering individual counseling to students experiencing personal or family-related barriers. Organizing responses into themes helps develop a structured understanding of patterns emerging from interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that students' learning problems are complex issues that extend beyond their ability to understand learning materials. These difficulties are also associated with communication between students and teachers, time management skills, the tendency to procrastinate on assignments, and family responsibilities. Therefore, addressing students' learning problems requires consideration of both their academic circumstances and life backgrounds through appropriate support, open communication, and collaboration between schools and families.

Acknowledgment (Optional)

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to UPTD SMPN 16 Kupang for providing the opportunity to conduct this research. The authors also extend their appreciation to the homeroom teacher, subject teachers, and Grade VIII students who participated in the interviews and shared their experiences and perspectives, which contributed to the completion of this study.

Funding (Optional)

This research received no external funding

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

The authors contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The authors also contributed to drafting, reviewing, and editing the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Generative AI Disclosure

Generative AI tools were used to assist with language translation, paraphrasing, and manuscript editing. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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