

Teacher Strategies for Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties in Inclusive Primary Education: A Qualitative Case Study from Indonesia

Ratna Dewi¹, Sholeh Hidayat¹, Aan Hendrayana¹

¹Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Banten, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: dewisafarina79@gmail.com

Article History: Received on 8 September 2025, Revised on 6 October 2025,
Published on 16 December 2025

Abstract: This qualitative case study examines the implementation of inclusive learning for primary school students with learning difficulties, focusing on the role of teachers and the selection of learning materials. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Pandeglang using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Findings reveal that teachers act as facilitators who adapt lesson plans flexibly, employ simple language, and apply differentiation strategies. Learning media are chosen contextually, including concrete teaching aids, visual images, and educational games. Evaluation is carried out individually and comprehensively, covering both academic and non-academic aspects. Results indicate significant improvements in students' conceptual understanding, active participation in group work, emotional self-regulation, and independent learning. The study underscores the importance of teacher preparedness, contextual media selection, and comprehensive evaluation in creating adaptive inclusive learning environments. The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating how adaptive teaching strategies and contextual media use can effectively support slow learners in primary schools. Its contribution enriches the literature on inclusive education by highlighting the central role of teachers in fostering holistic student development.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Primary School, Slow Learners, Student Development, Teacher Strategies

A. Introduction

Inclusive education in Indonesia has evolved in line with the global commitment to provide all children with equal and meaningful educational opportunities. In the context of primary schools, inclusive education becomes a vital approach to providing educational services to all children (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Kefallinou et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education aims to create an open learning environment for all children, including children with special needs (CWSN). This approach integrates the regular curriculum with special needs education within a single system, grounded in the principles of diversity and equity (Hornby, 2015; Z. P. Sari et al., 2022). Inclusive

education focuses on adjusting the school environment to meet the needs of all students and ensure equal opportunities in the learning process (Kovačević & Radovanovic, 2023). Strengthening inclusive education is a dynamic process influenced by the complexity of the education system. A fair and inclusive system is determined not only by the elimination of barriers but also by how transformative inclusive practices grow and create sustainable impact (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024). In this context, the inclusion perceptions of educators also influence the development of future generations (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Saloviita, 2022; Tajic & Bunar, 2023). Inclusive education at the primary school level is a dynamic process that ensures equitable learning access for all students through curriculum integration, environmental adjustments, and active educator involvement.

Inclusive education aims to provide opportunities for children with special needs (CWSN) to learn alongside their peers in regular classrooms, including students with learning difficulties. Slow learners are students who, from a psycho-pedagogical perspective, demonstrate a slower pace of understanding compared to their peers, requiring more time to grasp classroom concepts. Therefore, they need adaptive and supportive teaching approaches to help them develop their potential optimally (Hikma et al., 2025; Varghese & Aneesa, 2021). Inclusive schools are a strategic choice to support students with learning difficulties by providing equal opportunities for social interaction within the same educational environment (Dell'Anna et al., 2022; Hidayah & Utami, 2024; King & Ryan, 2019). Moreover, slow learners require adaptive learning support through teacher collaboration, and a positive attitude and pedagogical competence from teachers are key to successful inclusive education (Widodo et al., 2020). Through adaptive and collaborative approaches, inclusive education provides a strong foundation for students with learning difficulties to thrive in equitable and supportive learning environments.

The development of these students must be supported optimally, with teachers designing instructional strategies that are tailored to their specific needs and characteristics (A. P. Sari et al., 2020; Smets et al., 2022). Strategies used by teachers to address slow learners include multisensory learning, project-based approaches, and individual sessions that are short, engaging, and contextual to align with each student's learning rhythm and specific needs (Hikma et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, an in-depth study is needed to examine how inclusive learning is implemented in primary schools to support the development of students with learning difficulties. This research focuses on the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers, the selection and use of appropriate learning media, and adaptive evaluation methods tailored to students' needs. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to the advancement of inclusive education that accommodates the diverse abilities of all students.

B. Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of inclusive learning practices for students with learning difficulties in primary schools. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with classroom teachers to explore the instructional strategies applied, the challenges encountered, and the support systems available for these students. In addition, participatory observations were conducted to directly observe classroom activities, including the teaching methods used and the involvement of students with learning difficulties in the learning process, along with the collection of documentation related to inclusive education. Thematic analysis was applied through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to identify significant patterns in inclusive education practices. To enhance the validity of the findings, this study utilized source triangulation (teachers, students, and parents) and method triangulation (interviews, observations, and documentation). Through this approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive learning is implemented for students with learning difficulties in primary schools.

C. Results and Discussions

Inclusive education has been developed to ensure that every individual, including students with special needs, has access to quality education (Nilholm, 2021). In schools, inclusive education is often implemented with flexibility while remaining firmly grounded in the fulfillment of each child's right to learn within a relevant and meaningful context (Tajic & Bunar, 2023). This approach is expected to improve the quality of life for all students, including those with learning difficulties (Sood et al., 2020).

Students with learning difficulties reflect the diversity within the education system through their unique ways of processing and acquiring knowledge (Imran et al., 2023). They often experience low self-confidence; therefore, to encourage their active participation, it is essential to avoid the use of labeling or limiting language, ensuring that they can be fully engaged in the educational process (Demetriou, 2022).

The Role of Teachers in Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties

Teachers play a key role in building effective collaboration as a strategic approach to developing inclusive learning practices, enabling the learning process to be accessible and engaging for all students, including those with special needs, within the same classroom (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Furthermore, teacher attitudes and dispositions significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive education (Alsarawi & Sukonthaman, 2023; Saini et al., 2025). Teacher motivation often serves as a catalyst that inspires student enthusiasm (Vidigal-Alfaya et al., 2025).

Findings at SD Negeri 1 Pandeglang show that teachers play a central role in supporting slow learners in inclusive classrooms. Teachers are not merely content deliverers but responsive facilitators of individual learning needs. They design adaptive lesson plans by developing accessible and flexible learning modules. The teaching approach is tailored to the characteristics of students with learning difficulties by using clear and understandable language, providing concrete examples, and allowing additional time for concept comprehension (Rosi et al., 2024). Teachers implement differentiated strategies and offer one-on-one support. They also encourage student participation in class discussions, foster two-way communication, and cultivate an inclusive and discrimination-free learning environment.

However, limited training opportunities and a shortage of qualified inclusive education teachers hinder the optimal provision of services for students with special needs. Continuous professional development and the recruitment of trained teachers are essential to ensure that inclusive education is both accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of all learners (Hikma et al., 2025). For students with learning difficulties, assessments are conducted individually and differ from those applied to other students. Teachers implement a formative assessment approach that prioritizes learning processes over outcomes. The assessment methods include direct observation, performance-based evaluations, and portfolios containing student work and simple tasks.

Beyond academic aspects, evaluations also cover non-academic dimensions such as social skills, emotional control, independence, and learning motivation. Teachers record these developments regularly through informal notes, and some compile progress charts or reports that are shared with parents. These evaluations help provide constructive feedback and foster holistic student development (Arora et al., 2023).

Observations indicate that most slow learners have shown positive development through inclusive learning. These developments span cognitive, social, and emotional domains. Students begin to understand simple instructions, complete tasks with minimal assistance, and actively engage in group activities. Socially, they form more harmonious peer relationships and demonstrate improvement in social interactions. Teachers also report better emotional control and growing student confidence.

Selection and Use of Appropriate Learning Media

Teachers at this school demonstrate creativity in selecting and designing learning media that meet the specific needs of slow learners. The use of appropriate media significantly impacts their self-confidence (Ardianti et al., 2021). Media include concrete teaching aids, visual images, educational videos, and simple educational games. The selection of learning media is based on students' cognitive levels, with

careful consideration of easily accessible visual and motor aspects. Concrete materials have proven effective in helping slow learners build foundational understanding (Agrawal & Morin, 2016). Despite limited facilities, teachers resourcefully use local and simple materials to create engaging media. Teacher creativity is essential in ensuring equal access to learning materials for all students.

This success is attributed to teachers' patience, supportiveness, and consistent application of adaptive teaching strategies. The inclusive learning environment provides a safe and supportive space for slow learners to develop according to their potential. Consequently, it can be concluded that the inclusive approach implemented at SDN 1 Pandeglang supported by teachers' active involvement in media selection, individualized assessment strategies, and holistic teaching methods has significantly contributed to the learning progress of slow learners.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that inclusive learning practices at SDN 1 Pandeglang significantly enhance the development of slow learners. Teachers play a central role by adapting lesson plans, selecting contextual media, and conducting individualized evaluations that address both academic and non-academic aspects. As a result, students show notable improvements in conceptual understanding, classroom participation, social interaction, emotional regulation, and independent learning. These findings affirm that inclusive education depends not only on school policy but also on teacher competence, creativity, and reflective practice. The implications of this study extend across theory, practice, and policy. Theoretically, the results broaden frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction by emphasizing socio-emotional growth alongside academic achievement. Practically, the study recommends integrating mandatory modules on low-cost adaptive media and differentiation strategies into pre-service teacher training, fostering collaboration among teachers, parents, and support staff, and embedding continuous formative evaluation in classroom practice. Policy-wise, the findings call for targeted funding to support professional development in inclusive pedagogy and the provision of accessible teaching resources. National education policies should mandate inclusive standards that prioritize teacher preparedness, contextual media use, and comprehensive evaluation systems. Together, these implications highlight the need for coordinated efforts to ensure equitable and meaningful learning opportunities for slow learners. Improving the quality of inclusive education for slow learners requires a shared commitment among teachers, schools, and policymakers. There is a need to enhance teacher capacity through continuous training, the provision of adaptive learning media, and evaluations that respond to individual student needs. A supportive and collaborative learning environment will strengthen the meaningful and equitable implementation of inclusive learning.

E. Acknowledgement

Thanks to all lecturers and friends in Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa who supported us in this article.

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