

Teachers' Strategies for Supporting Slow Learners in Inclusive Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the importance of appropriate instructional strategies for supporting slow learners in inclusive elementary school settings. The study aimed to analyze teachers' strategies in assisting slow learners during classroom instruction in inclusive elementary schools. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at an inclusive elementary school in Cilegon, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and document analysis involving students with slow learning characteristics in grades 3 and 5. The collected data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques to identify instructional challenges and support strategies implemented by teachers. The findings revealed that slow learners experienced difficulties in academic comprehension, emotional regulation, and social interaction during classroom learning. Teachers addressed these challenges by modifying instructional materials, simplifying learning tasks, providing individualized guidance, and collaborating with accompanying teachers to improve students' engagement and concentration. In addition, teachers implemented supportive learning environments and adaptive instructional approaches to accommodate students' diverse learning needs. In conclusion, effective instructional support for slow learners requires adaptive teaching strategies, emotional support, and individualized learning assistance in inclusive classrooms. The findings imply that elementary school teachers need adequate pedagogical competence and inclusive teaching preparation to optimize learning outcomes for slow learners.

Keywords: inclusive education, slow learners, instructional strategies, elementary school, learning support.



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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global concern in ensuring equal access to quality learning opportunities for all students, including children with special educational needs. The implementation of inclusive education emphasizes that every child has the right to learn together in the same educational environment regardless of their cognitive, emotional, social, or physical conditions [1]. Inclusion in education can be strengthened through the Whole Education Approach, which emphasizes holistic collaboration among schools, families, communities, and governments to create a safe, supportive, and equitable learning environment for all students [2]. International organizations such as UNESCO continue to encourage schools to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse student characteristics and minimize educational discrimination. However, despite the growing commitment toward inclusive education worldwide, many schools still face challenges in providing appropriate instructional support for students with learning difficulties, particularly slow learners. These students often experience barriers in academic achievement, classroom participation, emotional regulation, and social interaction, which may negatively affect their overall educational development.

Slow learners are generally identified as students who demonstrate lower academic achievement compared to their peers due to slower cognitive processing, limited concentration, and difficulties in understanding instructional materials [3]. Unlike students with severe intellectual disabilities, slow learners usually remain within the borderline intellectual functioning category and still have the potential to achieve academic success when supported by appropriate instructional strategies. In elementary schools, slow learners frequently encounter difficulties in reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, memory retention, and task completion [4]. These learning barriers may become more problematic when teachers apply uniform instructional approaches without considering students' individual learning needs. Consequently, slow learners often experience low self-confidence, reduced motivation, and limited participation during classroom learning activities.

The issue of slow learners in inclusive classrooms has become increasingly important in recent years because elementary schools are expected to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students. Teachers are required not only to deliver curriculum content but also to ensure that instructional practices accommodate students with diverse learning characteristics [5]. In practice, however, many teachers still experience difficulties in identifying effective learning strategies for slow learners. Some teachers focus mainly on curriculum completion rather than adaptive instructional approaches, causing slow learners to struggle in following classroom instruction. In addition, limited teacher preparation in inclusive education and insufficient pedagogical support often reduce the effectiveness of learning services provided for children with learning difficulties. This is what distinguishes slow learners from students with intellectual disabilities; although slow learners may have cognitive delays, with remedial instruction, additional time, and modifications to assessment criteria, they can achieve the expected academic goals (Atika & Andriati, 2023)

In Indonesia, the implementation of inclusive education continues to expand in elementary schools as part of the national commitment to educational equity. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that every citizen has the right to obtain quality education according to their needs and abilities [6]. This policy encourages schools to accept students with various learning characteristics, including slow learners, within regular classroom settings. Nevertheless, the reality in many inclusive elementary schools indicates that slow learners still encounter substantial barriers during the learning process. Teachers frequently face challenges in adapting instructional materials, managing heterogeneous classrooms, and maintaining student engagement. Furthermore, many inclusive schools have

limited special assistance teachers, inadequate learning facilities, and insufficient training related to inclusive instructional practices. Students must possess an active, imaginative, analytical, and articulate disposition in order to engage in scientific study in the 21st century ([7]Minsih, 2022). Critical thinking skills are one of the main benefits for science students, so the learning process using critical thinking skills can be applied to.

Several previous studies have explored instructional strategies for children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Existing research generally discusses differentiated instruction, classroom management, adaptive curriculum, and teacher roles in supporting students with learning disabilities [8], [9], [10]. Other studies have highlighted the importance of emotional support, individualized learning assistance, and collaborative learning environments in improving student participation [11]. However, most previous studies tend to focus broadly on children with special needs without specifically examining the instructional challenges and adaptive strategies used for slow learners in inclusive elementary schools. In addition, many studies emphasize theoretical discussions rather than practical classroom implementation experienced directly by teachers in everyday learning contexts.

Another important gap identified in previous studies is the limited exploration of how teachers combine academic support, emotional assistance, and classroom adaptation simultaneously for slow learners in inclusive settings. Research discussing slow learners often focuses only on cognitive limitations or academic achievement without examining the holistic learning support required in elementary classrooms [12]. Moreover, studies conducted in Indonesian inclusive elementary schools remain relatively limited, particularly those investigating direct classroom practices and teacher experiences in supporting slow learners. As a result, there is still insufficient empirical evidence regarding effective learning service strategies that can help slow learners participate actively and meaningfully in classroom learning activities.

This study is important because understanding effective instructional strategies for slow learners can contribute to improving inclusive learning quality in elementary schools. Appropriate learning support may help slow learners develop better academic understanding, classroom participation, emotional regulation, and social interaction. Furthermore, identifying practical strategies implemented by teachers may provide useful recommendations for educators, schools, and policymakers in strengthening inclusive education practices. The study is also relevant in addressing current educational demands that require teachers to implement student-centered and adaptive learning approaches for diverse learners.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the practical implementation of learning service strategies specifically designed for slow learners in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Unlike previous studies that discuss inclusive education generally, this research explores teachers' real experiences in identifying learning barriers, adapting instructional methods, modifying learning tasks, and providing emotional and academic support for slow learners. This study also integrates classroom observation, teacher interviews, and contextual analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive instructional practices are implemented in everyday elementary school learning situations. Therefore, the findings are expected to enrich the literature on inclusive education and provide practical insights for improving learning services for slow learners.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze teachers' strategies in supporting slow learners in inclusive elementary school classrooms and to identify the instructional challenges faced during the implementation of inclusive learning practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' strategies in supporting slow learners within inclusive elementary school classrooms. The research was conducted at Irnanda Elementary School, an inclusive school located in Cilegon, Indonesia, which implements inclusive learning practices for students with diverse educational needs. The object of this study was the implementation of learning service strategies for slow learners, while the research subjects consisted of classroom teachers, subject teachers, accompanying teachers, and slow learner students in grades 3 and 5 who experienced learning difficulties during classroom instruction. The data were analyzed in four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions ([4]Asri & Nuroh, 2023). The selection of participants was carried out purposively based on their direct involvement in inclusive learning activities and their experience in assisting students with slow learning characteristics. Data collection was conducted through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive information regarding instructional practices and learning support strategies. Observations were carried out directly during classroom learning activities to examine student participation, teacher interaction, classroom management, and instructional adaptations implemented for slow learners. Interviews were conducted with teachers and accompanying teachers to explore their experiences, challenges, and strategies in managing inclusive classrooms and supporting students with learning difficulties. In addition, document analysis was conducted on lesson plans, student assignments, assessment records, and school documents related to inclusive education practices. The main research instruments included observation guidelines, interview protocols, field notes, and document analysis sheets developed based on indicators of inclusive instructional practices and learning support strategies. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman [13], which consisted of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During the analysis process, the researcher continuously organized, categorized, and interpreted the collected data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships related to instructional strategies for slow learners. To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation techniques involving the comparison of data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation was also conducted by comparing information from different participants, including teachers and students, to strengthen the credibility of findings. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming interview results and interpretations with participants to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the collected data. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce valid and comprehensive findings regarding learning service strategies for slow learners in inclusive elementary school settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of inclusive learning at Irnanda Elementary School involved various adaptive instructional strategies designed to support slow learners in classroom activities. The data is analyzed in four components, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Asri & Nuroh, 2023). Based on classroom observations and interviews with teachers, each classroom generally consisted of two to five students identified as having learning difficulties or slow learning characteristics. These students demonstrated different levels of academic, emotional, behavioral, and social challenges during the learning process. Teachers explained that slow

learners often experienced delays in understanding instructional materials, difficulties completing assignments independently, low concentration levels, and challenges in maintaining active participation during classroom discussions. In several cases, students also displayed emotional instability and limited social interaction, which further influenced their learning performance and classroom engagement.

Classroom observations conducted in grades 3 and 5 showed that teachers attempted to implement individualized instructional support to accommodate the diverse needs of slow learners. Teachers simplified instructional explanations, provided easier exercises, repeated learning instructions several times, and guided students intensively during classroom tasks. Students who experienced difficulties in mathematics, for example, were first introduced to basic numerical concepts before progressing toward more complex problem-solving activities. This adaptation allowed students to gradually develop understanding without feeling overwhelmed by instructional demands. The findings indicate that teachers recognized the importance of adjusting instructional complexity according to students' cognitive readiness and learning pace.

Another important finding was the presence of accompanying teachers who assisted slow learners individually during classroom instruction. Accompanying teachers played a significant role in maintaining students' concentration, helping them complete tasks, and providing emotional support during learning activities. This individualized assistance was especially important for students who experienced emotional regulation difficulties and social interaction problems. The presence of additional instructional support appeared to reduce students' anxiety and helped them participate more confidently in classroom activities. Teachers also emphasized that emotional encouragement and patience were essential elements in supporting slow learners because many students demonstrated low self-confidence and hesitation when participating in learning activities.

The study further revealed that the school implemented a classroom transfer system in which students moved from one classroom to another according to subject schedules. Although this system was designed to increase learning flexibility and classroom specialization, several slow learners experienced difficulties adapting to instructional transitions and maintaining concentration after changing classrooms. Some students required additional time to adjust to new learning environments and classroom situations. This finding suggests that classroom organizational systems may significantly influence the learning experiences of slow learners, particularly students who require stable routines and structured learning environments. Therefore, teachers often provided repeated instructions and emotional reassurance to help students adapt during classroom transitions.

Interview findings indicated that the challenges experienced by slow learners varied substantially between students. Teachers explained that some students demonstrated primarily academic difficulties, while others experienced emotional and behavioral challenges that affected learning participation. Students with academic difficulties generally required longer time to understand concepts, complete assignments, and follow classroom instructions. In contrast, students with emotional difficulties tended to lose concentration easily, become frustrated during learning tasks, and experience difficulties interacting positively with peers. These findings confirm that slow learners do not represent a homogeneous group but rather

consist of students with diverse characteristics and educational needs. Consequently, teachers cannot rely on a single instructional approach when supporting slow learners in inclusive classrooms.

Teachers also identified several factors contributing to slow learning conditions among students. According to participants, limited parental educational support, insufficient stimulation during early childhood, and restricted social interaction were among the dominant factors influencing students' learning development. Some teachers explained that children who lacked parental guidance and learning support at home often experienced delayed academic readiness when entering elementary school. In addition, students who rarely interacted socially during early childhood tended to demonstrate lower communication confidence and reduced classroom participation. These findings highlight that slow learning conditions are not solely associated with cognitive limitations but may also be influenced by environmental, social, and emotional factors. Character education in schools is not only knowledge that is taught but the example and habituation of the teacher are very much needed ([14]Minsih et al, 2015).

The findings additionally revealed that teachers conducted early identification processes to recognize slow learning characteristics among students. Teachers used developmental observations, drawing activities, motor skill assessments, and classroom behavioral evaluations to identify students who required additional learning support. Early identification was considered important because it enabled teachers to prepare appropriate instructional strategies before students experienced severe learning difficulties. Teachers emphasized that identifying students' strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of schooling allowed them to develop more personalized learning support and prevent students from becoming increasingly left behind academically.

Table 1 presents the results of interviews conducted with teachers regarding the characteristics, challenges, causes, identification processes, and learning strategies implemented for slow learners in inclusive classrooms.

Table 1. Interview Results with Teachers

No	Aspect	Answers	Conclusion	Informants
1	Learning disorder	Two children with learning disabilities or slow learning were identified in grades 3 and 5.	In this school, there are two slow learners in grades 3 and 5.	IH
2	Obstacles/difficulties faced by each slow learner child	The obstacles or difficulties faced vary in each child. One of them is that the child is slow to understand academic subjects so that he lags behind his classmates (IM). There	For the 3rd-grade child, there are obstacles in academics so that the child is left behind in learning with classmates (IM). Meanwhile, the 5th-	IM, IP

		are also children who have emotional control disorders so that it can affect concentration in learning (IP).	grade child has obstacles in social interaction that can influence the learning process (IP).	
3	Factors that cause children to be slow learners	The causes of slow learning vary. Some children experience slow academic comprehension, while others experience emotional disorders affecting learning concentration.	Most slow learner conditions are caused by inappropriate parental education, limited environmental support, and lack of social interaction.	IM, IP
4	Identifying children who experience slow learning	Identification is conducted through drawing tests, motor development tests such as crawling or walking straight, and behavioral observation since early school enrolment (IH) . Parents can be a source of information regarding which learning process difficulties the child faces, both from health factors or if the child experienced accidents during the period when the learning process in the child's brain was being formed. (IP). Child identification can be observed during the learning process. Teachers can observe where the child has difficulties, whether in understanding information or	Children can be identified through drawing tests and motor development assessment (IH) . Identification of children can be obtained from parents' experience in teaching basics such as walking, holding something, and sitting (IP) . Children's learning process can be identified from the classroom during the learning time (IM)	IH, IP, IM

		material, or in completing tasks. (IM)		
5	Learning strategies suggested by homeroom teachers	Several learning strategies are suggested, including private instruction and individualized learning between teacher and student. Students with emotional disorders are also trained to control emotions and improve peer interaction (IM) . Slow learner children due to emotional disturbances, they need to be trained to control their emotions and interact with peers, such as their classmates or neighbors. (IP). Teachers use learning strategies that can be adjusted according to the subjects they teach. (MN)	Most strategies emphasize individualized learning support and emotional-social guidance for slow learners (IM) Slow learners caused by emotional disorders also need to learn to control their emotions and interact with their peers. (IP). Teachers need to use various strategies in order to find the most appropriate strategy in teaching slow learners. (MN)	IM, IP, MN

The interview results shown in Table 1 indicate that teachers understood the complexity of challenges experienced by slow learners and recognized the need for individualized learning services. Teachers emphasized that slow learners required not only academic support but also emotional and social guidance. This finding suggests that inclusive learning practices should adopt holistic instructional approaches addressing students' cognitive, emotional, and social development simultaneously.

Regarding instructional strategies, teachers implemented several adaptive learning approaches to support slow learners. One of the most frequently used strategies was individualized learning assistance through one-on-one instruction between teachers and students. Teachers believed that direct and personal interaction helped students understand learning materials more effectively because they could ask questions freely and receive immediate clarification. In addition, teachers divided learning tasks into smaller and simpler components to reduce students' cognitive burden and increase their confidence in completing assignments. The simplification of learning tasks was considered effective because slow learners often became overwhelmed when confronted with complex and lengthy instructions.

Teachers also attempted to create supportive and emotionally safe classroom environments for slow learners. They encouraged peer support, reduced excessive academic pressure, and appreciated students' small learning achievements to improve self-confidence. Several teachers explained that emotional support was equally important as academic assistance because many slow learners experienced feelings of inferiority compared to their classmates. By creating a positive classroom atmosphere, teachers attempted to ensure that students remained motivated to participate in learning activities despite their limitations.

In addition to individualized instruction, teachers implemented several student-centered learning strategies such as discovery learning, inquiry learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. These instructional approaches were selected because they encouraged active participation, collaboration, and experiential learning. However, teachers acknowledged that these learning models required significant adaptation when applied to slow learners. Students often needed additional scaffolding, repeated explanations, and simplified tasks to participate effectively in collaborative and inquiry-based activities. This finding indicates that student-centered instructional approaches can benefit slow learners when accompanied by adequate instructional support and flexibility.

The findings of this study strongly support previous research emphasizing that slow learners require adaptive and flexible instructional strategies in inclusive classrooms. Previous studies demonstrated that slow learners generally experience delayed comprehension, concentration difficulties, and lower academic achievement compared to their peers [3], [4]. Similar findings emerged in this study, where students required repeated explanations, individualized guidance, and simplified learning materials to participate effectively during classroom instruction [15]. These similarities suggest that slow learners need learning environments that prioritize gradual understanding, patience, and continuous instructional support.

This study implemented individualized learning assistance to increase learning motivation among slow learners [15]. Personalized instruction allows teachers to identify specific learning difficulties experienced by students and provide direct assistance according to individual needs. In the present study, individualized instruction helped students maintain concentration, reduce confusion, and complete classroom tasks more confidently. This finding reinforces the perspective that instructional personalization is one of the most effective approaches in inclusive learning settings because it accommodates students' diverse cognitive and emotional characteristics.

Another important aspect identified in this study relates to curriculum and instructional modification. Teachers adjusted instructional duration, simplified learning content, and modified classroom activities according to students' learning capacities. This finding shows that curriculum adaptation is an essential component of inclusive learning services for students with learning difficulties. Curriculum modification allows students to learn according to their developmental readiness while still participating in the same classroom environment as their peers [16]. The present study demonstrates that flexible instructional adaptation can reduce students' academic frustration and increase participation during learning activities.

The findings further reinforce the principles of differentiated instruction, which emphasize the adjustment of content, learning processes, and assessments according to students' diverse learning needs. Teachers in this study recognized that slow learners required different

instructional approaches compared to regular students. Therefore, they adapted learning tasks, instructional pacing, and classroom interaction patterns to ensure students could engage meaningfully during instruction. This adaptive approach aligns with contemporary inclusive education perspectives, which argue that equality in education does not mean treating all students identically but rather providing support according to individual learning needs. The choice of learning strategies will be made by the teacher based on: the formulation of learning objectives, needs analysis, as well as the characteristics of the students to be produced, and the type of learning material (Hasan, 2019). The development of learning activities of course must consider the students, one of which is the condition and preferences of the students so that it makes it easier for children to understand the concept of recognizing numbers (Yanti & Fauzan, 2021)

The implementation of discovery learning, inquiry learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning also reflects current trends in student-centered education. Previous research has shown that active learning approaches encourage students to become more engaged, independent, and collaborative during classroom instruction [17]. However, the findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of these approaches for slow learners depends largely on teachers' ability to simplify learning tasks and provide continuous scaffolding. Without adequate support, slow learners may struggle to participate actively in inquiry-based and collaborative activities because these approaches often require higher-order thinking and independent learning skills.

An important contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on emotional and social support within inclusive classrooms. Several students demonstrated emotional instability, low self-confidence, and difficulties interacting with peers. Teachers attempted to address these challenges by creating emotionally supportive classroom environments and encouraging positive peer relationships. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that successful inclusive education depends not only on academic adaptation but also on emotional inclusion and social acceptance [18]. Positive teacher-student relationships and emotionally safe learning environments significantly influence students' motivation, participation, and psychological well-being.

The findings additionally indicate that teachers play a central role in determining the success of inclusive learning practices for slow learners. Teachers are required not only to deliver curriculum content but also to function as facilitators, motivators, counselors, and emotional supporters for students with diverse learning characteristics. This multidimensional role requires strong pedagogical competence, patience, creativity, and understanding of inclusive instructional practices. However, several teachers acknowledged that implementing adaptive learning strategies in inclusive classrooms remains challenging because of limited instructional resources, time constraints, and insufficient professional training related to inclusive education.

This study contributes to the literature on inclusive education by providing empirical evidence regarding practical instructional strategies implemented for slow learners in elementary school settings. Unlike previous studies that focused mainly on theoretical discussions, this research presents contextual classroom experiences directly observed in inclusive learning environments. The findings demonstrate that effective learning support for slow learners requires collaboration between teachers, accompanying teachers, schools, and families.

Inclusive education should therefore not only emphasize student placement in regular classrooms but also ensure that adaptive learning systems, emotional support mechanisms, and instructional flexibility are consistently implemented.

Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive education for slow learners can be optimized through individualized instruction, curriculum adaptation, emotional support, and flexible student-centered learning approaches. Slow learners possess the potential to participate actively and achieve meaningful learning outcomes when educational environments accommodate their cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics appropriately. Therefore, schools and policymakers should strengthen teacher training programs, provide sufficient inclusive learning resources, and develop supportive educational policies to improve the quality of learning services for slow learners in inclusive elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that slow learners in inclusive elementary school classrooms experience various academic, emotional, and social challenges that influence their learning participation and achievement. The findings revealed that students commonly encounter difficulties in understanding instructional materials, maintaining concentration, completing assignments, and interacting effectively with peers. These challenges are influenced not only by cognitive factors but also by environmental conditions, parental support, and early developmental experiences. To address these difficulties, teachers implemented adaptive instructional strategies such as individualized learning assistance, simplified learning materials, task modification, emotional support, and student-centered learning approaches. Teachers also collaborated with accompanying teachers to improve students' concentration, confidence, and classroom engagement. In addition, early identification through developmental and behavioral observation was considered important for providing appropriate learning interventions. The study implies that successful inclusive education for slow learners requires flexible instructional adaptation, supportive classroom environments, and strong teacher competence in inclusive pedagogy. Therefore, schools and policymakers should strengthen teacher training programs, provide adequate learning support systems, and encourage collaboration between teachers and parents to optimize learning outcomes for slow learners in inclusive elementary schools.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without any commercial or financial relationships that could be interpreted as potential conflicts of interest.

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