

## **TEACHER STRATEGIES IN IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION FOR SLOW LEARNERS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study aims to describe teacher strategies in implementing differentiated learning for slow learners and identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation in elementary schools. The research approach used was descriptive qualitative, with subjects consisting of a fifth-grade teacher and three slow learner students at SD Negeri 1 Camden. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed descriptively. The research results show that teachers implement differentiated learning through three main components: content, process, and product differentiation. In content differentiation, teachers simplify language, use concrete media, and repeat explanations to help slow learners better understand the material. In process differentiation, teachers provide additional time, individual guidance, and peer support. Meanwhile, in product differentiation, teachers provide flexibility in learning outcomes according to students' abilities. Supporting factors include teacher commitment, peer support, and student motivation. Inhibiting factors include time constraints, minimal training, and inadequate facilities. Overall, teacher strategies demonstrate positive efforts toward inclusive and adaptive learning for slow learners, although professional training and adequate learning resources are still needed to increase their effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher strategies, differentiated learning, slow learners*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a fundamental right for everyone, regardless of their background, abilities, or special needs. Every child has different potential, learning styles, and learning characteristics that are influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they grow up (Sa'adah & Hamid, 2025). In the context of education in Indonesia, the reality is that many teachers still use a uniform learning approach for all students without considering individual learning needs. This situation often results in suboptimal learning because teaching strategies are not tailored to the abilities and needs of each student. Therefore, teachers need to understand student diversity so that the learning process can be effective, inclusive, and meaningful.

Student characteristics include various aspects, such as socio-cultural background, learning styles, interests, and social environments that influence the learning process. In the teaching and learning process in elementary schools, teachers often encounter students with diverse abilities, both cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically. A deep understanding of student characteristics is important in creating a conducive learning environment. Teachers are required to be able to recognize student characteristics and initial abilities as a basis for lesson planning

(Septianti & Afiani, 2020). In this context, the interaction between teachers and students is no longer one-way, but has developed into an interactive, emotional, and caring relationship throughout the learning process.

One group of students who require special attention in the context of elementary school learning are slow learners, namely children who experience delays in the learning process and therefore have difficulty following lessons. They need more time than other students with the same intellectual potential (Amelia, 2016). Slow learners are usually identified based on their intelligence test scores, with IQ ranging from 70 to 90 (Hadi, 2016).

Based on data from the Directorate of Special Education, Kemendikbudristek, (2023), it is estimated that around 10-15% of elementary school students in Indonesia are classified as children with mild learning difficulties, including slow learners. However, a UNICEF, (2022) shows that more than 40% of students with mild learning difficulties feel frustrated and lose motivation in regular schools because they do not receive appropriate learning support. This condition often causes them to fall far behind their peers, and some are at risk of dropping out of elementary school if they do not receive the right intervention. This fact confirms that the need for adaptive learning strategies is not merely pedagogical idealism, but a necessity to prevent systematic learning failure among slow learners.

If teachers allow slow learners to continue without proper intervention, this can have a negative impact on their academic development, as slow learners need more time to understand concepts and require a different learning approach.

To address the diversity of student abilities in the classroom, including slow learners, teachers need to implement differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an approach that can accommodate students' needs, interests, and abilities flexibly so that learning objectives are achieved optimally (Purnawanto, 2023). According to Tomlinson, (2017) differentiated learning provides teachers with the opportunity to adjust the learning process, content, and outcomes according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This approach not only emphasizes variety in methods but also provides equal learning opportunities for every student. The benefits of implementing differentiated learning include increasing student motivation, encouraging active engagement, strengthening independent learning, and creating an inclusive and fair learning environment for all students.

In the independent curriculum, differentiated learning is the main approach that emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning and is oriented towards diverse learning needs (Santika & Dafit, 2023). Therefore, the application of teacher strategies in differentiated learning

is an important aspect to be studied, especially in dealing with the diversity of student abilities in elementary schools, including slow learners.

Teachers play a central role in designing and implementing adaptive, creative learning that is tailored to the needs and characteristics of each student. Through appropriate strategies, teachers not only help slow learners achieve basic competencies, but also foster their self-confidence and motivation to learn. Thus, research on teacher strategies in implementing differentiated learning for slow learners in elementary schools is expected to contribute significantly to the development of inclusive, humanistic, and student-centered learning practices in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum.

Based on this description, this study focuses on describing how teachers strategize in implementing differentiated learning for slow learners in elementary schools, as well as identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation process.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe in depth the strategies teachers use in implementing differentiated learning for slow learners and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation process. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon of learning in a natural and contextual manner, especially in observing the interaction between teachers and students during the learning process (Creswell & Creswell, J David, 2018). This research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Candan in October 2025.

The research subjects included fifth-grade teachers and three slow learners who were selected purposively based on several criteria, namely: (1) they had been identified by the class teacher as students who exhibited slow learner characteristics based on observation results and academic records; (2) they had a consistent level of participation in learning activities; and (3) they were willing to participate and were supported by their parents or guardians. The selection of these three subjects was intended to enable the researcher to conduct in-depth and detailed observations of each student's learning behavior without losing sight of the overall classroom context.

Data collection was carried out using three main methods, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe the differentiated learning process, from the planning stage to the implementation stage and the assessment of student learning outcomes. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students to gain an understanding of the strategies used and the challenges faced in implementing differentiated learning. Meanwhile,

documentation in the form of Lesson Plans, student learning outcome records, and photos of learning activities were used to reinforce findings in the field.

The data obtained was then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively by following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles dkk., 2014). Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation in accordance with the research focus. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to illustrate the patterns of teachers' strategies and the responses of slow learners during learning. Conclusions and verification were drawn repeatedly through a process of reflection and triangulation of sources (teachers, students, and documents) to ensure the validity of the findings.

Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of inclusive, adaptive, differentiated learning practices that are tailored to the learning needs of elementary school students.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Teacher Strategies in Implementing Differentiated Instruction for Slow Learners**

Based on observations in class V of SD Negeri 1 Camden and interviews with the class teacher (SS), the application of differentiated learning for slow learners was carried out through three main components, namely differentiation of content, process, and product. The implementation of these three components shows the teacher's efforts to adjust learning to the abilities, needs, and learning characteristics of students, although the implementation is still simple and limited to the regular context.

##### **a. Content Differentiation**

The SS teacher explained that the main strategy in terms of content is to simplify the language and concepts so that they are easier for slow learners to understand. Teachers use simple sentences, repeat explanations several times, and provide concrete examples that are relevant to everyday life. Teacher interview (SS):

*“I usually use simpler and repetitive language when explaining the material. If they don't understand, I give them real-life examples. For example, when teaching fractions, I bring pictures of pizza slices so they can visualize it.”*

Teachers also use visual media and simple teaching aids such as pictures, number cards, and whiteboards to reinforce students' basic understanding.

From interviews with slow learners:

BP: *“I prefer it when the teacher gives examples with pictures, so I can understand quickly.”*

GM: *“If it's explained slowly, I can follow. If the teacher explains quickly, I get confused.”*

NUJ: *“I like it when the teacher helps with aids, such as drawing paper or media that can be held.”*

The results of the observation show that the use of visual media helps students to be more focused and motivated in learning.

#### b. Process Differentiation

In process differentiation, teachers adjust the methods and pace of learning for students. Slow learners are given extra time to complete assignments and individual guidance. Teachers also take a personal approach so that students feel cared for and do not fall far behind their peers.

Teacher interview (SS):

*“I assist the children individually. If they haven't finished, I give them extra time. Sometimes I ask their classmates to quickly help them in small groups.”*

Classroom observations show that a collaborative approach among students also helps slow learners feel more confident.

BP: *“My friends often help me when I have trouble doing my homework.”*

GM: *“The teacher likes to say, it's okay if you haven't finished, you can continue later.”*

NUJ: *“When I'm confused, the teacher sits next to me and helps me slowly.”*

This approach keeps students actively engaged in the learning process without feeling left behind.

#### c. Product Differentiation

In product differentiation, teachers provide flexibility in terms of the expected learning outcomes. Teachers allow slow learners to convey their learning outcomes in a simpler form, such as short answers or verbally.

Teacher interview (SS):

*“In Indonesian language learning, for example when writing reports, students who write quickly complete the task. But for slow learners, I allow them to answer orally or with short sentences. The important thing is that they understand the core of the material.”*

BP: *“I prefer to answer directly, sometimes it's difficult when I'm asked to write a lot.”*

GM: *“If I write a little, I can't write too much, but the teacher still says it's good, so I'm motivated.”*

NUJ: *“The teacher says the important thing is that I try, so I enjoy learning.”*

Teachers appreciate students' efforts without emphasizing perfection in results, thereby increasing student motivation and confidence. In the assessment process, teachers continue to use the same criteria in substance, namely understanding of the subject matter, but the form of assessment is tailored to the characteristics of the students. For students who answer orally, teachers conduct observation-based formative assessments, evaluating the accuracy of the answers, language use, and the ability to relate concepts to the learning context. Meanwhile, for students who write short answers, teachers assess the clarity of the main ideas and the suitability of the answers to the learning objectives.

Teachers also apply the principle of authentic assessment by emphasizing the process and effort, not just the final result. This means that students with different abilities still receive fair assessments based on indicators of understanding, not the length of their writing or the completeness of the format. This approach is in line with the principle of differentiated learning, where the diversity of ways in which students express their learning outcomes is valued as a form of achievement that is equivalent to their respective capacities.

It can be concluded that the teacher's strategy in implementing differentiated learning in class V of SD Negeri 1 Camden shows a real effort to create an inclusive learning environment. Although still simple, this implementation is effective in helping slow learners understand the material according to their respective abilities and in providing fair and meaningful assessment.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Differentiated Learning**

Based on interviews with SS classroom teachers, there are factors that support and hinder the implementation of differentiated learning.

#### **a. Supporting Factors**

##### **1. Teacher Commitment and Concern**

Teachers are highly aware of the diversity of student abilities.

*“I want all children to be able to learn, even if it is slowly. They all have the right to understand.”* (SS)

##### **2. Support from colleagues and the school environment**

Teachers feel helped by the cooperation between teachers in designing learning that is appropriate to the students' conditions.

### 3. Student motivation

Although slow, students show an increased willingness to learn.

*“Children are enthusiastic when praised, so even if the results are not perfect, I still encourage them.”*

#### b. Inhibiting Factors

##### 1. Time Constraints

Although there are only a few students in fifth grade, teachers still face time constraints in teaching. This is due to differences in ability among students, requiring teachers to give special attention to slow learners without reducing the time allocated to other students.

##### 2. Lack of training or specific guidance

Teachers have received training on differentiated learning, but the training is still general in nature and does not go into depth on concrete classroom practices. This means that teachers must make their own efforts to adapt strategies to the conditions of their students in the field.

##### 3. Limited facilities and learning media

Learning resources are still limited, so teachers often innovate by using simple tools made from materials that are easily found in schools.

##### 4. Limitations in students' abilities and concentration

Even though the number of students is small, the variation in abilities and concentration levels remains a challenge for teachers. Slow learners often need repetition and intensive guidance so that they do not lose focus during learning.

Despite various obstacles, teachers continue to adapt learning activities so that every student has the opportunity to understand the material in their own way. Teachers say that this process requires patience and creativity, but it is an important part of realizing inclusive learning that is tailored to students' learning needs.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Teacher Strategies in Implementing Differentiated Instruction for Slow Learners**

The results of the study indicate that teachers at SD Negeri 1 Camden have attempted to implement differentiated learning through three main components, namely content differentiation, process differentiation, and product differentiation. Although the implementation is still simple, this shows the teachers' awareness and efforts in adjusting learning to the learning needs of slow learners. This is in line with the opinion of Prihandini dkk., (2023), who stated that teachers play

an important role in creating learning that is responsive to differences in student abilities so that all students have equal learning opportunities.

In terms of content differentiation, teachers adapt the delivery of material to the abilities and characteristics of students. Teachers use simple language, provide concrete examples, and repeat explanations so that slow learners can understand the material better. This finding is in line with Tomlinson, (2017) opinion, which explains that content differentiation allows teachers to modify learning material to suit students' readiness levels, interests, and learning styles. Thus, students with cognitive limitations can still understand basic concepts through simpler and more contextual presentation of material. In addition, Sriwidiastuty dkk., (2025) also emphasize that the use of simple language, real examples, and visual media greatly helps slow learners in understanding learning, especially abstract material.

In process differentiation, teachers provide extra time, individual guidance, and peer support to keep slow learners actively engaged. This finding is supported by Almujab, (2023), who explains that differentiated learning is effective when teachers provide a variety of learning activities that give students the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in their own style. This is also reinforced by Anisa Masyitoh dkk., (2024), who state that personal support from teachers and social interaction between students can increase students' confidence and active participation in learning activities.

Meanwhile, in product differentiation, teachers allow flexibility in the form of learning outcomes, for example, slow learners can present their results orally or in a simple form. This approach is in line with Nasrodin dkk., (2025), who emphasize that product differentiation helps students demonstrate their understanding according to their respective potentials. Similarly, Agusta dkk., (2024) explain that providing flexibility in learning outcomes can increase students' motivation to express their understanding in a way that best suits their abilities. In addition, Wahyuningsih, (2023) adds that providing positive feedback and rewards for the efforts of slow learners is very important to build confidence and reduce learning anxiety.

In the context of assessment, teachers continue to refer to indicators of conceptual understanding, rather than the length or form of the answer. Students who present their learning outcomes orally are assessed based on the accuracy of the content and their ability to explain the main ideas, while students who write in short form are assessed based on the clarity of their ideas and their suitability to the learning objectives. This approach reflects authentic assessment in differentiated learning, which values the process, effort, and understanding of students as forms of learning achievement that are equivalent even though they are expressed in different ways.

Thus, the strategies implemented by teachers have shown positive results towards inclusive learning, although they are still simple and require professional development support for optimal implementation.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Differentiated Learning**

From the interviews, it was found that the supporting factors for the implementation of differentiated learning at SD Negeri 1 Canden included teacher commitment, peer support, and student motivation to learn. Teachers are aware of the importance of adapting learning to the diverse needs of students. This is in line with the findings of (Muhammad Sobirin, 2025), who emphasized that the success of differentiated learning greatly depends on the readiness and positive attitude of teachers towards individual differences.

In addition, Rochmaningsih & Susilo, (2023) also explain that teachers who are highly committed to student ability differences will be able to design learning that is more equitable and student-centered. Support from colleagues and the school environment are also important motivating factors. The results of research by Putri dkk., (2025) show that cooperation between teachers in designing differentiated learning helps to create a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Student motivation is also a driving factor in the implementation of differentiated learning. Although slow, students show increased enthusiasm for learning when given rewards or positive feedback from teachers. This is in line with the opinion of Julianti dkk., (2023), who state that emotional support and rewards from teachers can increase the confidence of slow learners in participating in learning activities.

The inhibiting factors include time constraints, varying numbers of students, and a lack of specific training on differentiation. These conditions make it difficult for teachers to give each student their full attention. According to Irawan, (2025), the main obstacles to implementing differentiated learning in elementary schools are a lack of training support and adequate learning facilities.

In addition, Komariyah dkk., (2025) added that although many teachers have participated in independent curriculum training that includes the concept of differentiated learning, the training is still general and not in-depth. Limited facilities and learning media are also another obstacle. According to Bintang dkk., (2024), simple and unvaried media can limit the learning appeal for slow learners, as they require concrete and visual aids to understand lesson concepts. Furthermore, Tanjung & Namora, (2022) mention that differences in students' abilities and concentration levels require teachers to be more patient and creative in managing the classroom.

Nevertheless, teachers continue to strive to adapt their teaching to the conditions in their classrooms. This demonstrates an effort to make learning more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to the learning needs of slow learners.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion regarding teachers' strategies in implementing differentiated learning for slow learners in grade V at SD Negeri 1 Canden, it can be concluded that teachers have made real efforts to create inclusive and adaptive learning that meets students' learning needs. The implementation of differentiated learning is carried out through three main components, namely content differentiation, process differentiation, and product differentiation. In terms of content differentiation, teachers simplified the language, used concrete examples, and utilized simple media to help slow learners understand. In process differentiation, teachers provided additional time, individual guidance, and peer support so that students could continue to participate actively. Meanwhile, in product differentiation, teachers provided flexibility in the form of tasks according to students' abilities and emphasized appreciation for their learning efforts. This strategy reflects learning practices that are student-centered and oriented toward individual potential. The supporting factors for the implementation of differentiated learning include teacher commitment and concern, peer support, and student motivation to learn. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include time constraints, student diversity, lack of teacher training related to differentiation, and limited learning facilities. Overall, the implementation of differentiated learning at SD Negeri 1 Canden has shown a positive direction towards inclusive learning practices. However, in order to be more optimal, continuous support is needed in the form of professional teacher training, the provision of adequate learning facilities, and the strengthening of collaboration between educators to develop more varied and effective learning strategies for slow learners.

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