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## TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION FOR SLOW LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi dan tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam mengajar pemahaman membaca kepada siswa dengan perkembangan lambat di kelas inklusif di sebuah sekolah menengah negeri di Semarang, Jawa Tengah. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, dan data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas menggunakan daftar periksa, serta wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan dua guru bahasa Inggris yang mengajar kelas inklusif di kelas 7 dan 8. Siswa dengan perkembangan lambat berpartisipasi secara pasif selama observasi kelas. Peneliti menganalisis data secara tematis untuk mengidentifikasi pola terkait strategi pengajaran dan tantangan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan berbagai strategi untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca bagi siswa dengan perkembangan lambat, termasuk pengajaran diferensiasi melalui perencanaan pelajaran yang dipersonalisasi, penggunaan media visual dan audio, pengajaran kosakata melalui latihan berulang, scaffolding melalui aktivitas membaca bertahap, dan pengajaran antar teman. Namun, guru juga menghadapi beberapa tantangan, seperti kurangnya pedoman spesifik untuk pendidikan inklusif, waktu yang terbatas, dan masalah manajemen kelas, serta konsentrasi dan motivasi siswa yang terbatas. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada literatur yang ada dengan mengeksplorasi implementasi pengajaran pemahaman membaca inklusif di sekolah menengah negeri yang tidak memiliki dukungan khusus, khususnya fokus pada strategi dan tantangan yang dihadapi guru, serta menekankan pentingnya pemahaman membaca sebagai keterampilan bahasa dasar.

**Kata kunci:** Pemahaman membaca, siswa dengan perkembangan lambat, dan kelas inklusif

### Abstract

*This study examines the strategies and challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading comprehension to slow learners in inclusive classrooms at a public secondary school in Semarang, Central Java. This study employs a qualitative research design, and the data were collected through classroom observations using a checklist, as well as semi-structured interviews with two English teachers who teach inclusive classes in grades 7 and 8. Slow learners participated passively during the classroom observations. Researcher analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to instructional strategies and challenges. The findings highlight that teachers implement various strategies to enhance reading comprehension for slow learners, including differentiated instruction through individualized lesson planning, the use of visual and audio media, vocabulary-focused instruction through drilling, scaffolding through step-by-step reading activities, and peer teaching. However, teachers also encountered several challenges, such as a lack of specific guidelines for inclusive education, limited time and class management issues, and students' limited concentration and motivation. These findings contribute to the existing literature by examining the implementation of inclusive reading comprehension instruction within public secondary schools that lack specialized support, specifically*

*focuses on the strategies and challenges faced by teachers and emphasizes the importance of reading comprehension as a fundamental language skill.*

**Keywords:** *Reading comprehension, slow learners, and inclusive classrooms*

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## INTRODUCTION

The skill of reading is crucial in achieving success in academics. For students, the ability to read was one of the most important skills, as it unlocked access to knowledge and information (Adora et al., 2024). In the context of Indonesian secondary schools, the national curriculum required students to be able to read, analyze, and interpret various genres of texts in English. On the other hand, based on Permendiknas Nomor 70 Tahun 2009 regarding Inclusive Education, inclusive education in Indonesia offered opportunities for all students with intellectual disabilities or talents to learn together with their peers in a regular educational environment. Since then, inclusive classrooms have been increasingly common in public schools, where teachers face the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of learners, including slow learners who struggle with reading comprehension. However, students who were identified as slow learners often struggle to meet these goals, as they have a slower pace of learning, limited working memory, and require more repetition to grasp textual meaning than regular students (Purnomo & Royanto, 2025). According to Tomlinson (2014), Differentiated Instruction is a framework that enables teachers to adapt the content, process, and product of learning to suit the readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students. This perspective emphasized the importance of modifying or adapting reading materials and strategies in order to support slow learners effectively.

Previous studies have investigated strategies to support teaching inclusive students. For instance, Mukhlis et al. (2023) found that special assistance teachers approached slow-learning students with special needs through intensive communication, remedial instruction, drill techniques, visual media, and teaching everyday life skills. Purwita et al. (2025) also found that in an inclusive junior high school in Samarinda, teachers used practices including subject review, direct instruction, indirect instruction, rewards, and classroom accommodations while working with a student who has ADHD. In addition, Steven et al. (2016) also found that in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom, the lecturer employed the first language, written instructions, various types of instruction, and visualization through pictures, which facilitated the teaching and learning process for hard-of-hearing students. Research by Adora

et al. (2024) also found that teachers in one of the junior high schools in Curup, Bengkulu, employed four teaching strategies, ranging from active learning, peer-tutoring, cooperative learning, and direct instruction. In addition, Zahron et al. (2023) found that teaching strategies to teach English vocabulary for young learners with hearing impairment, down syndrome, and also intellectual disabilities with limitations in social, intellectual, emotional, and mental aspects, such as using pictures, flashcards, songs, and videos to teach vocabulary, and each of them accompanied by a shadow teacher.

Although there has been extensive research on inclusive instructional strategies, most studies tend to focus on learners with formally identified disabilities, young learners, or contexts that involve special assistance, such as shadow teachers. Additionally, many of these studies discussed inclusive practices in a broad instructional context rather than specifically examining reading comprehension as a specific language skill. Limited attention has been given to slow learners without formal disability classifications in public secondary school inclusive classrooms, where teachers must manage large class sizes, constrained instructional time, and minimal guidance on effectively implementing inclusive instruction. Hence, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the strategies and challenges faced by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension to slow learners within public secondary school inclusive classrooms. The findings are expected to contribute to inclusive education practices, teacher training programs, and guide future research on differentiated reading instruction. So, the researchers can conclude that this research will find out (a) What strategies do English teachers use in public secondary school inclusive classrooms to teach the reading comprehension of slow learners, and (b) What challenges do English teachers face when implementing these strategies in inclusive classrooms.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach to investigate teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching reading comprehension to slow learners in inclusive classrooms. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teaching practices, classroom interactions, and teachers' perspectives within a natural school setting.

### Participants

This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 7 Semarang, a public secondary school with inclusive classes, located in Semarang, Central Java. The location was selected intentionally, considering the availability of an inclusive class and the school's willingness to cooperate. This study primarily focused on teachers' perspectives as the main source of data. This decision was made because teachers play a crucial role in designing, implementing, and adapting instructional strategies in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, focusing on teachers' perspectives provided the study with in-depth and reflective insights into inclusive teaching practices within a real classroom context. The selection of participants for this study was fundamentally influenced by the number of teachers responsible for handling slow learners within the school setting. Specifically, the institution employed two English teachers who taught slow learners in grades 7 and 8.

Students were identified as slow learners in this school based on the diagnostic results from the institution at the time of registration. According to the results of the diagnostic

assessments, the cognitive abilities of slow learners at the school align with those typically observed in third-grade students. Additionally, slow learners in the observed classes were included as passive participants in the observations. This observation aimed to observe their responses, interactions, and engagement during reading comprehension lessons. Students' participation was limited to observations without interviews. The inclusion of slower learners as interview participants was intentionally limited due to ethical and methodological considerations. These students often struggle to express abstract thoughts and reflect on instructional processes, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. Interviewing them could lead to challenges related to the reliability of the data and obtaining informed consent. Therefore, the data collected reflects actual teaching practices in the context of an inclusive classroom.

#### Instruments

The primary instruments were semi-structured interviews and observations. The interview guidelines were created to gather information about the teaching strategies employed by the teacher, the reasons for selecting these strategies, and the challenges faced during reading comprehension lessons in an inclusive classroom. The questions were open-ended, which allowed the teacher to provide detailed responses. The interview questions were categorized into four sections: teachers' backgrounds, teaching strategies for reading comprehension, challenges and solutions, and reflective perspectives on inclusive education. This structure offered flexibility for teachers to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. Meanwhile, classroom observations were conducted using a structured checklist designed to identify teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching reading comprehension to slow learners. The checklist consisted of two main sections aligned with the research questions. The first section focused on instructional strategies, which included: pre-reading activities (discussing titles, examining pictures, or predicting text content), explaining vocabulary before reading, utilizing visual or audio media, asking while-reading comprehension questions, implementing scaffolding practices (repetition, additional explanations, modeling), modifying texts for slow learners, encouraging group work or peer teaching, providing immediate feedback, and conducting evaluations and reflecting on lessons. The second section addressed instructional challenges, including difficulties with classroom management, limited instructional time, students' diverse abilities, insufficient facilities or teaching materials, communication barriers with slow learners, and a lack of specific training or guidelines for inclusive teaching. Each indicator was marked using Yes/No responses, accompanied by a frequency column and a notes section to record contextual information and notable classroom events. In addition, to establish the trustworthiness of the data, this study employed method triangulation by comparing findings from classroom observations with interview data. Observation data offered concrete evidence of actual teaching practices, while interviews provided insights into teachers' explanations and reflections on those practices. The alignment between these data sources strengthened the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, detailed descriptions of the research context and procedures were presented to enhance transferability.

#### Data collection and analysis

Data collection was done on November 28th, 2025. It was conducted in two stages, the observation using a checklist and the teacher interviews. The first one was an observation during two meetings of reading comprehension lessons. The researchers completed a checklist by marking items that reflected the behaviors or strategies used by teachers throughout the learning process. This method enabled more structured data collection, making it easier to analyze the results. After the observations were completed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher. These interviews aimed to explore deeper into the findings from the checklist and to understand the reasons behind the use of specific strategies. All data collected from the checklist were summarized, and the interviews were recorded (with the teachers' consent) and transcribed. The data were analyzed utilizing thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021). This analytical procedure consisted of six stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the final report. The interview transcripts were read several times to ensure a complete understanding of the information. Initial codes were subsequently developed and organized into potential themes. These themes were then reviewed and refined before being clearly defined and presented in the final report.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To address these research questions, the researchers conducted interviews with two teachers, referred to as T1 and T2. The researchers also conducted classroom observations during English class to see how the teaching and learning process was implemented using the teachers' strategies. Through in-depth interviews and careful observation, researchers found that teachers implemented various strategies to support slow learners, including differentiated instruction and individualized lesson planning, the use of audio and visual media, vocabulary-focused instruction, scaffolding through step-by-step reading activities, and peer teaching. However, teachers encountered several challenges when teaching slow learners in inclusive classrooms, including limited time and class management, a lack of specific instructional guidelines and training, and students' limited concentration and motivation. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of these strategies, along with the associated challenges.

### 1. Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension for Slow Learners Differentiated Instruction through Individualized Lesson Planning

The findings revealed that both teachers emphasized the importance of differentiating instruction for slow learners. T1 explicitly stated that he prepared separate lesson plans (RPP) for inclusive students, including slow learners. The differentiation involved significant modification of reading materials, including reducing and simplifying text complexity by approximately 50% and adjusting learning objectives based on students' diagnosed cognitive levels. In some cases, individualized lesson plans were designed for slow learners to accommodate their learning needs.

*“Saya bagi dua RPP, satu untuk murid general, satu untuk murid inklusi... bahkan satu RPP untuk satu anak.” (T1)*

*“I create separate lesson plans for general students and inclusive students, including individualized plans for specific students.” (T1)*

Similarly, T2 adjusted learning materials by simplifying texts, dividing reading passages into smaller units, and adjusting pacing based on students' responses. T2 also followed the same approach as T1, creating a different lesson plan for slow learners.

*"Teksnya lebih sederhana untuk yang slow learner... nggak langsung satu teks panjang."* (T2)

"The text is simpler for slow learners... it is not long and is presented in small sections at a time." (T2)

Based on this information, researchers concluded that differentiated instruction was a primary strategy for accommodating the reading abilities of slow learners. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes adapting content and learning processes according to students' readiness levels. Tomlinson (2001) also noted that the Differentiated Instruction Model consists of four elements: content, process, product, and environment. In this case, the teachers used differentiated instruction through content and process. The content referred to the materials and methods used by teachers, and it is essential to recognize that not all students should receive the same content. In this context, teachers differentiate the content for slower learners by simplifying the text compared to what is provided to regular students. On the other hand, the process referred to a strategy that encompassed various activities and methods used to instruct students according to their individual preferences and learning styles. For instance, teachers often use mentoring or personal assistance specifically for slow learners.

In inclusive classrooms, differentiation was essential because students exhibit varying levels of cognitive ability, language proficiency, and learning speed (Goyibova et al., 2025). Magableh & Abdullah (2022) argued that Differentiated Instruction enhanced reading comprehension in secondary education students by providing tailored methods that foster independence and responsibility for their own learning. In the meantime, differentiation not only enhanced reading skills but also significantly impacted other skills as well. For instance, research by Pudjiati & Utami (2023) indicated that differentiated learning strategies effectively improve poetry writing skills among elementary school students. This strategy enabled students to actively participate, gain a deeper understanding of the material, and achieve improved learning outcomes. In contrast to earlier research that examined contexts supported by special assistance teachers or individualized learning services, this study revealed that differentiated instruction was independently developed and implemented by subject teachers within public secondary school classrooms. This underscored that differentiated instruction was not merely an educational theory but rather a practical strategy for effectively managing instructional demands in inclusive settings, particularly when institutional support is limited. By modifying lesson plans and learning objectives, teachers can effectively mitigate cognitive overload and enhance the capacity of slower learners' working memory during reading comprehension activities. As a result, differentiated instruction was a highly effective method that ensured each student received teaching tailored to their specific learning needs (Shareefa et al., 2019).

### **The use of visual and audio media**

Based on observation and interview, both teachers highlighted the use of visual and audio support. T1 frequently used visual aids such as pictures and real-life references to clarify vocabulary meanings, particularly when teaching concrete nouns and parts of the body. Additionally, he frequently modeled pronunciation and used audio input to reinforce word

recognition. In the meantime, T2 also relied heavily on visual media. He used pictures as a pre-reading activity for introducing reading texts, allowing students to infer meaning visually before reading the written text. For example, when teaching greeting cards, she showed students pictures of greeting cards with visual elements such as balloons or birthday hats. Through guided questions, students were encouraged to infer the type and purpose of the text based on visual cues. Sometimes, he used audio modeling via Google Voice when students faced challenges with pronunciation. This strategy helped slow learners build background knowledge and reduce cognitive load during reading activities.

*“Jadi mereka ini lebih senang ketika ada gambar atau visual, juga audio” (T1)*

*“Kalo slow learner itu ternyata mereka lebih senang ketika dikasih gambar dulu.” (T2)*

Translate:

*“They are happier when pictures or visuals come first, as well as audio”(T1)*

*“It turns out that slow learners are happier when they are given pictures first.” (T2)*

Therefore, the researchers can conclude that the use of visual and audio support was one of the effective strategies. Visual aids were tools that enhance clarity, diversity, and engagement in education by effectively conveying complex information through various visuals that improve focus, motivation, and retention (Pateşan et al., 2018). This finding supported previous studies suggesting that the application of multimodal which incorporate visual, auditory, and textual components plays an important role in facilitating reading comprehension, which can result in increased engagement and improved understanding (Apriliasari & Novita, 2024; Mariam et al., 2025). This was because using visuals helped them organize complex information, see how ideas connect, and develop their understanding (Asilestari et al., 2025). Using visual and audio media helped decrease the load on working memory by allowing information to be processed through different channels. When teachers combine verbal explanations with visual aids and sound, students who struggle with reading can understand the material more effectively. However, earlier studies often indicated the use of visual and audio media in settings supported by shadow teachers or special education resources. In contrast, the present study showed that these strategies were integrated into regular classroom instruction and managed exclusively by subject teachers. This finding suggested that visual and audio media serve not just as supplementary tools, but also as essential instructional supports in inclusive classrooms within public secondary schools that have limited resources. Furthermore, the use of audio-visual media extended beyond English learning and has a significant impact on education overall. Research conducted by Suharsiwi et al. (2022) indicated that incorporating audio-visual media in online learning has boosted prayer reading from 11% to 95% and improved movement ability from 6% to 94%. This demonstrated that visual media were highly effective not only for learning the English language but also for other subjects when applied appropriately.

### **Vocabulary-focused instruction through drilling**

Both teachers noted that limited vocabulary knowledge was the main barrier preventing slow learners from comprehending written texts. T1 argued that vocabulary instruction is an essential component that occurs before reading comprehension tasks, so it is not just an extra activity.

*“Kalau reading itu yang paling penting vocabulary dulu..... saya menunjuk langsung di badan” (T1)*

*“When it comes to reading, vocabulary is the most important thing..... I will point directly at the body.” (T1)*

Before engaging students in reading activities, he conducted vocabulary drilling by repeatedly introducing target words, modeling their pronunciation, and asking students to repeat the words aloud. This drilling process was often supported by visual aids, gestures, and real-life demonstrations to strengthen the connections between words and their meanings. For example, when teaching parts of the body, he pointed to specific body parts while pronouncing the words, allowing students to connect auditory input with concrete visual references. Additionally, he would often ask slow learners to point to the body part being mentioned. T2 supported this by providing keywords and guiding students to understand vocabulary gradually through repetition and contextual clues. So, this strategy was consistently used to support comprehension, especially since slow learners often struggled with limited vocabulary knowledge.

According to Baddeley's Working Memory Theory (2012), learners with limited working memory capacity often struggle to decode words, store information, and construct meaning simultaneously. For slow learners, encountering unfamiliar vocabulary during reading tends to increase cognitive load, which can result in difficulties with comprehension. Engaging in vocabulary drilling can prevent this challenge by reducing the cognitive load on working memory. When vocabulary terms were repeatedly practiced and effectively stored in long-term memory, slow learners who may experience difficulties can focus their attention on comprehending the meaning of sentences instead of focusing on decoding individual words. The findings supported Apriliani et al.'s (2021) study, suggested a strong connection between students' vocabulary skills and their reading comprehension, as some students achieve high scores on vocabulary tests because they know many words, which helps them answer questions quickly and correctly. Additionally, research by Mulyandari & Husadani (2025) found that drilling methods combined with visual support enhance word retention and reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms, and repetitive instruction proves to be more effective than implicit instruction for learners with intellectual disabilities. Overall, this finding indicated that vocabulary-focused instruction through drilling was especially effective in inclusive secondary classrooms, where slow learners benefit from repeated exposure and reinforcement to effectively process linguistic input.

### **Scaffolding through Step-by-Step Reading Activities**

Both teachers noted that slow learners struggled to process both long texts and complex information simultaneously. Consequently, reading activities were systematically divided into smaller and manageable or several steps to help students gradually build meaning. T2 explained that he provided one paragraph at a time, or smaller parts, rather than presenting the entire text at once, and guided them to understand its meaning before progressing to the next section.

*“...Saya keluarin satu paragraf dulu... setelah dia paham baru saya kasih bagian selanjutnya...” (T2)*

*“...I will provide one paragraph first.... once they understand it, I will give them the next part...”*



This approach allowed slow learners to process information at their own pace and prevented cognitive overload. Additionally, T1 implemented scaffolding strategies by breaking reading texts into simple ones, introducing vocabulary, then modeling reading aloud, followed by guided practice, and finally allowing students to independently attempt comprehension tasks with close monitoring.

This scaffolding strategy contrasts with conventional reading instruction, where students were often expected to read complete texts independently and answer comprehension questions afterward. While this method may work well for average or advanced learners, it often put slow learners at a disadvantage. These students may struggle with decoding, retaining information, and understanding the material. Therefore, step-by-step reading activities directly address the limited working memory capacity of slow learners. As stated by Baddeley (2012), working memory can only store and process a limited amount of information at the same time. When slow learners were presented with long texts without any support or guidance, their working memory can become overwhelmed, leading to a lack of engagement and failure to understand the material. By breaking texts into smaller parts and providing step-by-step comprehension guidance, teachers decreased cognitive pressures and enabled slow learners to process information more efficiently (Merchán & Corría, 2021).

This finding is supported by Suryani et al.'s (2023) A study found that implementing scaffolding strategies in reading comprehension can significantly enhance students' reading skills, as it helps them address challenges they may face while understanding English texts and responding to related questions. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that teachers in public secondary schools employed step-by-step scaffolding as part of their regular teaching practices. This means scaffolding can be a flexible teaching method, not just something used in specific interventions or circumstances. By giving less text and instructions at each stage, teachers help students focus on understanding the material instead of trying to read and comprehend everything at once. In summary, the scaffolding teaching technique effectively improved reading comprehension for slow learners in inclusive public secondary school settings.

### Peer Teaching

The findings revealed that both teachers implemented peer teaching by pairing slow learners with higher-achieving students during group discussions.

*“Jadi slow learner, teman-teman yang memiliki disabilitas, itu biasanya saya pasang dengan teman teman yang memang biasanya sudah menguasai lebih jauh, jadi nanti ada peer teaching disitu...” (T1)*

*“Kadang juga saya minta temennya untuk mengajari atau memandu anak slow learnernya.” (T2)*

Translate:

*“I usually pair slow learners and students with disabilities with more proficient peers to encourage peer teaching....” (T1)*

*“Sometimes, I ask their friends to help teach or guide the slower learners.” (T2)*

Based on the interview, peer support facilitated engagement among slow learners and prevented feelings of isolation within inclusive classrooms. Both teachers intentionally paired slower learners with peers who had higher English proficiency to enhance learning through social interaction and collaborative support. T1 explained that slow learners are not grouped only with

other slow learners. Instead, they work alongside students who have higher English skills. This mixing encourages peer teaching, where higher-skilled English students help slow learners understand vocabulary, sentence meanings, and task instructions. This way, slow learners get immediate support in a less formal and less intimidating setting than direct teacher instruction. T2 also noted that peer teaching occurred naturally during group discussions, especially when slow learners struggled with reading tasks. Peers often assist by re-explaining instructions, translating key words, or guiding slow learners through comprehension questions. This approach not only supported comprehension but also fostered social interaction and inclusion within the classroom. Previous studies have also highlighted peer-assisted learning as an effective strategy in inclusive EFL settings (Utami & Prestridge, 2018). Research by Nurkhairiyah (2017) found that enabling students to collaborate and support one another enhanced students' reading comprehension through the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). However, the findings also emphasized that peer teaching requires careful management and supervision. Teachers emphasized the importance of selecting suitable peer tutors and closely monitoring their interactions to prevent dependency or unequal participation. Overall, this approach improves academic success and builds strong social connections. It creates a positive and supportive environment for everyone (Navrátilová & Jurčík, 2025).

## 2. Challenge in Teaching Reading Comprehension for Slow Learners

Despite the implementation of various instructional strategies, teachers encountered several challenges in teaching reading comprehension to slow learners in inclusive classrooms.

### Lack of specific instructional guidelines and training

A major challenge identified was the absence of clear and specific instructional guidelines for inclusive education in Indonesia, especially in teaching slow learners.

*“Belum adanya panduan khusus bagaimana cara mengajar slow learner....”* (T1)

*“There are no specific guidelines on how to teach slow learners.....”* (T1)

Similarly, T2 also posed the same challenge. Both teachers reported having limited access to formal guidance and standardized instructional frameworks for inclusive education. This was because neither teacher has formal training in special needs education, as their qualifications are primarily focused on English language education. This lack of specialized knowledge negatively impacts their ability to effectively support students identified as slow learners. Additionally, since these slow learners have only been enrolled at the school for about two years, the teachers have not yet gained enough experience or expertise to address their educational needs. As a result, they relied on peer discussions and self-developed strategies.

Effendi et al. (2024) also reported a similar issue, noting that a review of evidence regarding disability and inclusive pedagogy in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education at the initial stage revealed that inclusive content is generally lacking or inadequate in EFL teacher preparation programs worldwide. As a result, prospective teachers are often insufficiently prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms. Insufficient training and ambiguous instructional guidelines limit teachers' ability to implement effective reading strategies for students with learning difficulties. Similar challenges have been reported in Indonesian inclusive school contexts, where teachers often receive insufficient professional preparation (Chairunnisa & Rismita, 2022). Overall, the lack of specific instructional guidelines and

consistent training is a significant barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive reading instruction. While teachers creatively address the needs of slower learners, their efforts are mostly self-driven and lack institutional support. This emphasized the need for professional development programs and instructional frameworks that equip teachers to teach reading comprehension effectively in inclusive classrooms.

### Limited time and class management

Another significant challenge identified in this study was limited instructional time and classroom management difficulties when teaching reading comprehension to slow learners in inclusive classrooms. Both teachers reported that managing instructional time while addressing the diverse needs of students in a single classroom posed considerable challenges, particularly in large classes with inclusive students. T1 explained that monitoring slow learners required intensive attention. Additionally, T1 also reported difficulties in providing intensive support to slow learners while simultaneously managing classes with more than 30 students. T1 also highlighted that his focus on providing individual assistance to slow learners resulted in a lack of guidance for other students. This led to them becoming noisy and disruptive. Consequently, managing the class effectively poses a challenge, as he needs to provide individualized assistance to slow learners while maintaining an environment conducive to learning for all students.

*“Memonitor satu anak (inklusi) saja sudah susah apabalgi ini ada beberapa murid. Apalagi kita kan satu kelas ada 32 anak.”* (T1)

“Monitoring one student with inclusion is challenging, let alone multiple students, and there are 32 students in one class.”

Similarly, T2 stated that slow learners often required extended time to complete tasks.

*“Kendalanya paling di waktu ya mbak kalo ngajar slowlearner .... kl slow learner pasti waktunya agak mundur meskipun soalnya sudah dibikin beda tapi tetep mundur”*

“The biggest challenge is time when teaching slow learners... Slow learners always take longer, even though the questions are made differently.”

Based on the interview, slow learners have diverse comprehension speeds. T2 noted that when slow learners receive information, they often experience confusion and do not fully understand the material or content. As a result, they frequently pose the same questions multiple times, which can interrupt the flow of classroom learning and limit instructional time. Consequently, slow learners are typically granted additional time to complete assignments. Furthermore, in certain situations, they may be permitted to utilize tools such as smartphones to access dictionaries for unfamiliar vocabulary, which is not an allowance extended to their peers who learn at a regular pace. Slow learners often required repeated explanations and extended time to complete reading tasks, which affected lesson pacing for other students. This finding was consistent with previous research indicating that large class sizes pose significant challenges in inclusive education (Materechera, 2020). Additionally, Sari et al. (2025) indicated that teachers struggle with balancing the time spent on classroom instruction with the individual

support needed for students with special needs. This dilemma arose because allocating more attention to students with special needs can decrease the time and focus available for regular students, and vice versa. This challenge can impact the overall learning dynamics and hinder the achievement of learning goals. Overall, the findings showed that limited instructional time and classroom management challenges have a significant impact on the implementation of inclusive reading instruction. Although teachers used various strategies to support struggling learners, the insufficient time and large class sizes hindered the effectiveness of these efforts. This situation underscored the need for structural support, such as smaller class sizes or additional teaching assistance, to improve inclusive teaching practices.

### **Students' limited concentration and motivation**

Another challenge identified in this study was students' limited concentration and motivation during reading comprehension lessons, particularly among slow learners. Both teachers noted that slow learners often struggle to maintain attention for long periods, which negatively impacts their engagement and understanding during reading activities. These conditions increased teachers' workload and complicated classroom management.

*"Kadang mereka masih ngambang, harus diulang lagi." (T2)*

*"Sometimes they still don't get it, so we have to repeat it again." (T2)*

T1 noted that some slow learners often appeared tired, sleepy, or unenthusiastic about participating in classroom activities. These students sometimes lacked the motivation to finish reading tasks and wanted to stop learning early. To help with this, the teacher tried to understand their personal and emotional situations by having informal chats. Instead of forcing them to participate, he encouraged them gradually with personal support and short breaks during lessons. These breaks were intended to give students a chance to rest and reorganize their information before continuing to learn. The teacher believed these breaks were important because slow learners need more time to process information than their classmates. This reflects an understanding that slow learners require not only cognitive support but also emotional and motivational encouragement. Similarly, T2 showed that slow learners often seem distracted or disconnected, even after they have heard explanations several times. They usually need to hear instructions or content repeated before they can fully understand. This suggests that slow learners may not lack effort, but rather struggle with cognitive processing.

Paresti et al. (2024) reported that students who learn at a slower pace in inclusive classrooms frequently struggle with staying focused and motivated. Slow learners require a well-organized and stable educational environment, along with frequent guidance, to address their difficulties with concentration, as these challenges can hinder the psychological and physical growth of slow learners. So, it is essential to provide tailored services to maximize their potential (Minkos & Gelbar, 2021). This finding supported previous studies that emphasize the importance of repetition, reinforcement, and alternative teaching strategies for slow learners to overcome challenges and maintain motivation (Adeoye, 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored how English teachers teach reading comprehension to slow learners in inclusive classrooms and what challenges they face. It used a qualitative approach to provide insights into teaching practices in a public secondary school. The study found that teachers

employed a combination of differentiated instruction through individualized lesson plans, multimodal support, vocabulary-focused teaching through drilling, scaffolding, and peer-teaching to facilitate reading comprehension. Differentiated instruction served as the foundational strategy, guiding lesson planning and instructional adaptation. In the meantime, the challenges faced by the teacher were a lack of instructional guidelines and training programs, limited time and class management, as well as students' limited concentration and motivation.

Despite its contributions, this study has several practical implications. First, teacher training programs need to focus more on inclusive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Training should provide practical guidance on creating lesson plans that meet diverse learning needs. Second, schools must provide better support for inclusive practices in the classroom. This means encouraging teamwork among teachers through regular discussions, mentoring, and sharing resources. Schools should also provide appropriate teaching materials and offer additional support, such as teaching assistants (also known as shadow teachers) or smaller class sizes, to better meet the diverse needs of their students. Third, policymakers should create clear guidelines for inclusive EFL education in public secondary schools. They should integrate inclusive teaching methods into national curricula and ensure that teachers receive consistent training and support to effectively implement these practices. Additionally, this study presents limitations. Firstly, it only included a small group of teachers from a single school, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, it did not directly assess the opinions of students, rather, it focused solely on the perspectives of teachers. Future research should aim to include a more diverse range of participants and consider the viewpoints of students. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance inclusive English language instruction.

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