



Investigating English Teacher Strategies for Slow Learners in Grammar Learning

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-28	<i>Inclusive education aims to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Among them are slow learners, whose learning ability is lower than that of their peers. However, its implementation is still not optimal. Consequently, there is a risk that the learning needs of slow learners will not be met. One of the causes is the limited number of teachers, as well as their low level of readiness to face the diversity of students in inclusive classes. To overcome these limitations, teachers need to be aware of teaching strategies that can accommodate their needs. In particular, English teachers need to be aware of the strategies they use when teaching grammar, which is known to be important yet challenging for language learners. In fact, there are still a few studies that explore the use of teaching strategies for grammar for slow learners in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to explore strategies for teaching grammar to slow learners and their implementation in inclusive classrooms. The qualitative study with a descriptive design involved English teachers and class teachers in grade 8 at a junior high school. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and field observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study show that teachers use structural, cooperative, translanguaging, and affective strategies, as well as repetition and visual media assistance, in grammar teaching. This study concludes that grammar teaching strategies not only focus on cognitive development, but also on approaches that promote the mental development and attitudes of slow learners.</i>
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1. Introduction

Each student has a different background and needs, even though they are in the same grade or even the same classroom. As Tomlinson (2001) emphasized, a classroom is essentially a space with diverse learning abilities, where students do not learn at the same speed, in the same way, or at the same level of readiness. Therefore, inclusive education is expected to provide equitable educational

services without discrimination for all students. In Indonesia, the number of inclusive schools continues to rise year after year. However, this increase has not yet fully guaranteed the realization of equitable education (Mulyadi, 2017). This is due to the implementation of inclusive education in some schools that remains inconsistent with government policies, particularly regarding the availability and readiness of educators (Sari et al., 2022).

Consequently, the provision of learning support for students with special needs has not been optimal. One group of students requiring special attention in inclusive education is slow learners, who also constitute the dominant category of students with special needs in inclusive schools (Fajriah et al., 2021). Slow learners are students who require more time and effort to understand learning materials than their peers (Amelia, 2016). In addition, Cheon (2024) states that slow learners fall into the category of borderline intellectual functioning (BIF) with an IQ range of 71–84.

Nevertheless, they are not classified as having an intellectual disability or a specific learning disorder because they are still capable of performing daily activities independently (Ferrari 2009; Belmont & Belmont, 1980; Mansyur & Bunyamin, 2022). In addition, they tend to have lower academic achievement, find it easier to understand concrete information than abstract concepts, require more time to learn, and have difficulty connecting new information with prior knowledge (Shaw, 2010). In short, even though they are still able to manage their daily activities independently, slow learners still need extra stimulation, support, and assistance in an academic setting.

Slower learners' difficulty in processing and connecting new information with prior knowledge is related to the cognitive load theory proposed by John Sweller (1988), which explains that human working memory has a limited capacity for processing new information. Therefore, both the complexity of the material and the inappropriateness of the instruction can turn information into a cognitive load for students, thereby hindering the formation of new understanding. Along the same lines, Paas et al. (2003) emphasize that inappropriate teaching techniques can cause a cognitive load for students known as extraneous load.

Thus, structured teaching strategies are necessary to help students process information more effectively. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) states that teacher support plays a crucial role in helping students achieve better understanding. Including in grammar learning, which is known to be complex in terms of its form and function (Graus & Coppen, 2015). This statement is supported by several studies that identify grammar as a challenge for many English language learners (Mahmud, 2018; Tiana et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2022; Silaban & Manurung, 2025). Nevertheless, understanding of grammar can enhance basic language skills (Verhagen et al., 2019 & Normawati, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of strategies in teaching grammar is necessary (Sorohiti et al., 2024), particularly

for slow learners who require additional support in their cognitive processes.

Considering the complexity of grammar and its urgency in language learning, discussions related to teacher strategies in teaching grammar have been highlighted in several previous studies. Among them, a study by Souisa & Yanuarius (2020) found that amid the challenges posed by student characteristics, the strategies used by teachers included a structural context strategy, which was implemented by providing example sentences in a situation to understand the pattern, story-based strategies involving stories or texts as learning media, cooperative strategies involving students in collaborative activities with fellow students, and translation strategies between the mother tongue and English or grammar-translation as support.

Then, research by Prasetyaningrum et al. (2023) shows that the dominant strategy used is the metacognitive strategy, in which students are directed to be aware of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their grammar understanding independently. In addition, the results of student interviews by Zhou (2017) show that grammar is considered difficult material for students. Therefore, in learning it, they use metacognitive and cognitive strategies that involve several actions aimed at understanding and remembering the material, such as memorization. However, the results of these studies were obtained from teaching situations in regular classrooms, not from classrooms in inclusive schools.

On the other hand, research conducted in inclusive educational institutions includes a study by Mukhlis et al. (2023), which found that assistant teachers in inclusive elementary schools apply a learning approach that relates the material to things in everyday life and also engage in intense communication with students. Then, Hermanto & Pamungkas (2023) found that inclusive elementary school teachers adjust the objectives, processes, and products of learning to the abilities and needs of students so that students can access learning according to their needs.

Furthermore, Asri & Nuroh (2023) show that when teaching slow learners, teachers provide extra time for them to study and complete their assignments, simplify instructions and tasks, seat them in the front row, offer individual assistance by visiting their desks, and consistently provide support to keep them motivated. Unfortunately, all of these studies did not refer to the teaching practices of specific subjects. In other words, the scope of these studies is limited to general teaching practices in inclusive classrooms.

Although several studies have addressed teaching strategies for slow learners, research on the implementation of grammar teaching strategies in English learning for slow learners remains limited. This is an important area to explore because grammar contribute to supporting basic language skills. Therefore, teaching strategies are needed to meet the learning needs of slow learners in inclusive classrooms.

In regards to these situations, this study was conducted to explore

information related to English teachers' strategies in teaching grammar to slow learners at the junior high school level. Why junior high school? Because, apart from the fact that there is still limited research related to inclusive classrooms at this level, Ji & Liu (2018) also argue that grammar begins to be studied in earnest at the junior high school level.

Moreover, several studies in Indonesia have found that junior high school students experience difficulties with grammar (Andriani, 2021; Gayo & Widodo, 2018). Thus, the investigation was directed at answering questions related to "What strategies do teachers use in teaching grammar to slow learners?" and "How are these strategies applied in inclusive classrooms?"

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative method to explore and reconstruct the meaning of teacher's teaching strategies from the practice of teaching grammar in inclusive classrooms, which include children categorized as slow learners (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the descriptive approach was chosen to describe the teachers' teaching experiences, particularly their strategies in teaching grammar to students categorized as slow learners. This is in line with Sugiyono (2022), who states that the main focus of the descriptive approach is to present a picture of the experiences and activities that actually occur in the field, without making changes or experiments to the learning process.

The participants involved in this study were an English teacher as participant 1 (P1) who taught eighth grade and a homeroom teacher as participant 2 (P2) who played a role in supporting, supervising, and assisting students during the learning process. Participants were selected using a purposive technique based on the suitability and relationship between the research subjects and the required data (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025), namely junior high school teachers who teach or are involved in the English teaching process in inclusive classes where there are slow learners among students from different backgrounds.

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Subsequently, the data were corroborated through non-participant observation during two meetings in classroom. Each meeting lasting 80 minutes. The research instrument used was an interview guide with open-ended questions designed based on Cognitive Load Theory developed by Paas et al. (2003). This theory emphasizes that students' cognitive load is not only influenced by the difficulty level of the material but can also arise from a mismatch between the teacher's instructions and the way the material is presented (extraneous cognitive load).

Therefore, the interview instrument was focused on exploring the various efforts made by teachers in teaching grammar to slow learners in inclusive classrooms so that the material presented remains meaningful and does not burden the students. Interviews with homeroom teachers included questions

related to the role of the homeroom teacher, the dynamics of supporting slow learners, and reflections on the support provided. Meanwhile, interviews with English teachers focused on teaching experiences, the characteristics of slow learners, the planning of learning sequences and the presentation of grammar material, as well as the forms of support and assistance provided to slow learners during the learning process.

During the observation, the researchers used field notes to document how teachers presented grammar material in the classroom, their interactions with students with learning difficulties during the learning process, and the types of support and instructional accommodations provided by teachers to students with learning difficulties in inclusive classrooms.

Moreover, the thematic analysis technique was used to process data into information. The analysis process involves sorting data, coding, grouping patterns, and drawing and verifying meanings (Miles et al, 2014). The analysis process began with selecting and organizing all data obtained from transcripts of interviews with English teachers and homeroom teachers, as well as observation notes on grammar instruction in inclusive classrooms.

During the data sorting stage, the researcher focused on data related to teachers' strategies for teaching grammar to slow learners, such as methods of presenting material, forms of learning support, use of instructional media, delivery of instructions, and teacher-student interactions during the learning process. Subsequently, coding was conducted inductively by identifying recurring information and patterns emerging from the interview and observation results. Some of the codes identified included "concrete examples," "repetition," "student engagement," "simplified language," and "visual."

Once the coding process was complete, related codes were grouped into broader patterns or categories to describe the various grammar teaching strategies employed by teachers in inclusive classrooms. From this grouping, the researcher then interpreted how these strategies were used in different learning situations according to the needs of students with learning difficulties. In the final stage, the meaning of each finding was re-verified by comparing interview results and observation notes to ensure that the resulting interpretations remained consistent, contextual, and aligned with the learning conditions observed directly.

3. Result

Contextual Structural Strategy

Based on the results of interviews and observations, the data indicate that teachers employ contextual strategies when teaching grammar in inclusive classrooms. As stated explicitly by P1 in the interview:

"Usually, I teach grammar contextually. I start with simple example sentences that are relevant to the students' lives. After that, I discuss the patterns or rules" (Excerpt 1).

The statement above indicates that grammar instruction begins with the presentation of example sentences related to students' lives, before proceeding to an explanation of grammatical patterns or rules. In line with this, the observation results show that the lesson begins with an opening activity which consisted of greetings, prayer, and taking attendance. Then, it is followed by a brief instruction regarding the learning topic to be covered in that meeting.

Furthermore, P1 wrote several sentences on the whiteboard containing information about a person's name, age, and possessions that directly referred to one of the students in the class. In this process, the sentences written not only served as examples of grammatical structures but were also directly linked to a real-life situation occurring in the classroom.

In addition, the student referred to in the sentence was invited to stand in front of the class. Thus, the content of the sentence written by the teacher directly referred to a real situation in the classroom, namely that the student mentioned in the sentence was directly involved in the learning activity. After that, all students were asked to read the sentence together under the teacher's guidance.

Furthermore, after the read the sentence, P1 continued the lesson by explaining the structure of the simple present tense. At this stage, P1 wrote the grammar formula on the whiteboard. Then, P1 explained that the simple present tense is typically used to express facts and habits. As shown in the example sentences on the whiteboard, they state facts about a student who is standing in front of the class.

P1 guided the students to analyze the sentences that had been used earlier in the lesson. The analysis was conducted by identifying the function of each word in the sentence step by step under the teacher's guidance in class. Thus, there was continuity between the contextual sentences used in the initial stage, the group reading activity, and the systematic analysis of grammatical structure.

Cooperative Strategy

During the interview, P1 also mentioned the challenges and concerns they face in teaching, particularly:

"The challenge is to make sure that students don't get bored too quickly, while also ensuring that slower students are not left behind." (Excerpt 2)

Based on the statement above, P1 as a teacher faces the challenge of balancing the needs of each student with the goal of creating an engaging learning environment that is still accessible to slow learners. Regarding this need, P1 explains:

"Usually, I address it through task variation. For example, team work, where students

with lower abilities are grouped with those who are more capable. And I continue to provide extra support to students who need it.” (Excerpt 3)

From the excerpt above, it is evident that in overcoming challenges, P1 employs a cooperative strategy by pairing slow learners with students who grasp lessons quickly and forming them into a team to work together to complete the assigned tasks. In addition, P2 stated in the interview that:

“We do ask for help from the typical children, Alhamdulillah, they never complain. Even in learning, sometimes using their friend’s own words can make it easier for them to understand. And indeed, we encourage their friends to avoid bullying and to assist one another.” (Excerpt 4)

It shows that the school encourages all students, including typical students, to help students who need assistance, such as slow learners. This statement is also supported by classroom observations showing that slow learners are seated next to typical students. During the class, the desk mate who is a typical student was seen helping to guide their slow learner desk mate as they took notes on the material that the teacher wrote on the whiteboard.

Translanguaging Strategy

In response to a question about conditions that indicate a slow learner is confused or beginning to lose track of the teacher’s explanation, P2 responded with the following statement:

“One example of this confusion is noticeable. Unlike typical children, who are focused on their work, children with special needs tend to be focused on themselves rather than on what their teacher is saying.” (Excerpt 5)

The excerpt demonstrates that, while the explanation is being delivered, the slow learner is not following the instructions being given by the teacher. In this situation, the slow learner’s attention is no longer directed toward the ongoing learning activity in the classroom. Furthermore, the activities the slow learner engages in do not align with the teacher’s instructions.

In an effort to ensure that slow learners do not experience confusion or difficulty understanding the lesson, P1 stated:

“The language is mixed. For example, after I explain something in English, I switch to Indonesian. Just use simple words, don’t use complicated terms that will confuse them”. (Excerpt 6)

In addition, observations show that the teacher translates the slow learner's answer regarding the color of the bag namely, "Hitam" (Indonesian) to "Black" (English). Subsequently, the explanation of the material delivered in English was followed by a restatement in Indonesian. It was found that the teacher alternated between two languages during the teaching process: the target language and the source language.

Furthermore, the teacher used simple words when presenting the material and avoided complex terminology. Thus, the delivery of the material was conducted through the use of two languages within a single learning process. Using a variety of familiar languages by teachers and students in the learning process, with the aim of facilitating the achievement of learning objectives, refers to the application of a strategy known as translanguaging (Beatty et al., 2021).

Affective Strategies

P1 employs affective strategy in teaching grammar that focuses on shaping and developing students' attitudes, particularly regarding self-confidence in the learning process within an inclusive classroom. Based on the interview results, P1 noted that in addition to difficulties in understanding the material, slow learners also exhibit another characteristic: low self-confidence. This is expressed in the following excerpt:

"Well, other than cognitive characteristics, besides having difficulty understanding the material, they usually show a lack of self-confidence." (Excerpt 7)

The statement indicates that low self-confidence is one of the characteristics associated with slow learners in the classroom learning process. This condition is related to students' engagement in classroom learning activities. In response to this reality, P1 provides support to slow learners to help them overcome their fears and doubts about their own abilities, through:

"Appreciating the process isn't just about the end result, for example. We appreciate whatever they do. Like, "Wow, you're doing great," even if their answer is wrong, or not completely correct yet." (Excerpt 8)

This was also evident in the observation results, when P1 praised a slow learner with "Yeah, great!" after the student answered a question in class. Although the slow learner did not respond immediately and the answer was only a repetition of the words the teacher had used as a clue. The explanation above shows that as a teacher, P1 does not focus solely on the final outcome but also prioritizes the process. Thus, even though the results of the process the students went through have not yet met the criteria, the teacher continues to support slow learners by acknowledging their efforts in participating in the activity.

However, rather than just giving appreciation, P2 emphasizes that teachers need to implement:

“The first aspect is communication. It really must be implemented. Because if we ignore them or treat them indifferently, they actually don’t feel excluded. We involve them. Their involvement with us is what makes them feel valued and engaged.” (Excerpt 9)

Based on the above excerpt, it can be concluded that the involvement of slow learners in the learning process depends on the teacher's initiative in establishing communication with them. Because, when teachers are mindful of involving slow learners in classroom interactions, the students will feel valued and included. Otherwise, if teachers just rely on the students’ existing interest without directly encouraging them, no progress or change will occur.

Repetition and Visual Media

In addition, the findings of this study also indicate the use of repetition in delivering explanations, particularly in the basic aspects of the grammar material being taught. Based on the observations, P1 repetitively emphasized fundamental concepts of the subject matter. For example, the function of the simple present tense used to express facts and habits. Subsequently, P1 also checked the slow learner’s attention by asking them to repeat the instruction that had just been given. Even though the slow learner did not answer the question immediately, P1 repeated the instruction, then asked the same question again, and guided the slow learner to provide the correct answer. In line with P1’s statement in the interview, the use of repetition aligns with the finding that:

“They are afraid of making mistakes, or maybe they are easily distracted. That’s why they need the instructions repeated” (Excerpt 10)

Moreover, P1 was also found to use visual media through emoji expressions which were drawn on the whiteboard during the discussion of Adjectives. These emoji images were used as a media to illustrate the meaning of the adjectives, including one emoji that referred to the adjective “sad.” Budiman (2016) argues that the use of visual media in the learning process can increase students’ attention and interest compared to learning that is only based on verbal instruction. Furthermore, visual media can help students form a concrete picture of the information received (O’Bannon et al., 2006). Referring to previous explanations about the characteristics of slow learners, the use of repetition and visual media can address their need for extra time to understand and obtain concrete information.

4. Discussion

This study focuses on grammar teaching practices in an 8th-grade class at an inclusive junior high school located in Medan. Based on classroom observations and interviews conducted with the English teacher and the homeroom teacher, it was found that there were two slow learners in the class. Then, there was also no shadow teacher in the 8th-grade class. Thus, the learning process in the classroom was only handled by the English teacher and the homeroom teacher.

Furthermore, it was found that the teachers employed several strategies in teaching grammar to slow learners such as contextual structural, cooperative, translanguaging, and affective strategy. In addition, teacher also use repetition and visual media to supporting learning process. First, the contextual structural strategy focuses on providing students with direct experiences to acquire and develop new knowledge (Maftuh et al., 2023).

Based on observations during lessons on the simple present tense, the teacher transformed facts related to “a student” into example sentences. This step was taken with the aim of creating a familiar atmosphere for students regarding the meaning of sentences, which they could confirm directly through the presence of a student who served as the “subject” of the sentence. Second, the cooperative strategy, which is the most familiar to students at this school. This is because the teacher directs typical students to assist students with special needs, including slow learners.

This strategy opens opportunities for slow learners to gain understanding through peer tutoring. On the other hand, students who serve as tutors have the opportunity to develop their cognitive, social, and character skills through the experiences and interactions during tutoring (Topping et al, 2011; Slavin, 2015; Casey & Fernandez, 2019). Manubey et al. (2021) argue that teachers act as a facilitator of interaction between the tutee and the tutor, while also providing guidance when necessary. The third strategy is translanguaging, which is characterised by the use of two or more languages by the teacher and students. As posited by Garcia and Lin (2017), there are several types of this strategy, including translation, code-mixing, and code-switching.

Nonetheless, the predominant approach adopted by the majority of teachers is that of the utilisation of a translation type of text. In this context, the use of the target language and the students’ known language is not limited to the teacher alone. In other words, students are also allowed to use the language they know and the target language they are learning to interact during the learning process. Although the primary goal of this strategy is to help students easily grasp concepts, connect new knowledge with prior knowledge, and facilitate their active participation in sharing ideas (Laksono et al., 2025).

Last, affective strategies through teachers' efforts in communication in the form of appreciation and initiative aim to foster self-confidence, a sense of security, and a sense of being valued in slow learners. This is particularly important in

addressing the challenges faced by slow learners who are hesitant and lack confidence in participating in class (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021). Although these efforts do not directly address instructional elements such as content or teaching media, their ultimate goal and effect remain to support the language learning and teaching process in the classroom (Robiansyah & Rochmahwati, 2020).

Overall, the teachers' efforts identified in this study lead to the same purpose, namely, engaging slow learners during the grammar learning process in inclusive classrooms. However, the implementation of these strategies still requires attention to certain aspects. In the contextual strategy, the presentation of material should not only provide familiar examples from students' lives, but also ensure that students gain learning experiences through direct engagement.

Furthermore, in peer tutoring within the cooperative strategy, the teacher should ideally maintain control in guiding interactions and the learning process. Slow learners are not supposed to be a burden on the tutor. The teacher is fully responsible for facilitating both parties to contribute to the project they are working on. Meanwhile, the implementation of translanguaging must be balanced to prevent the native language from dominating, ensuring students continue to receive exposure to the target language.

As for the affective strategy, a good communicative relationship between the teacher and the slow learner is the key to this strategy. However, the teacher is not permitted to give them special treatment. Thus, these findings indicate that various strategies and supportive practices in grammar learning require careful planning and management to ensure that the expected results are achieved.

5. Conclusion

This descriptive study found that in helping slow learners during the grammar learning process, teachers need to implement strategies that foster development in their cognitive and affective abilities. The cognitive development refers to the ability of slow learners to process information regarding grammar material to achieve understanding. The strategies that aid in this area include structural-contextual, cooperative (peer tutoring), and translanguaging strategy. Meanwhile, affective development refers to students' ability to recognize the positive values within themselves, manifested as self-confidence, which can be fostered through affective strategies. Teachers can also maximize the success of these strategies by incorporating supportive elements, such as providing repeated instructions and stimulating slow learners through learning media. Moreover, teachers need to recognize that the success of these strategies requires not only planning and execution that prioritizes the needs of slow learners but must also maintain inclusivity in the classroom.

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