



# Teacher Perception of Using Posters in Teaching English Vocabulary to Slow Learners

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## Abstract

*Vocabulary is an important foundation in learning English, but it becomes a particular challenge for slow learner students who require a more structured visual approach and repetition. This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the use of posters in teaching English vocabulary to slow learner students in an inclusive elementary school. A descriptive qualitative design was used with one third-grade English teacher as a participant selected purposively. Data were collected through non-participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The results of the study found two main themes: first, the teacher has a positive perception of the effectiveness of posters in helping slow learner students understand vocabulary, increasing learning motivation, and strengthening memory through a poster rotation system every two to three weeks adjusted to the frequency of English learning once a week; second, the teacher faces challenges in limited time for media preparation and classroom management with students of different learning ability backgrounds. This study concludes that posters are a relevant medium and responsive to the learning needs of slow learner students, and the recommendations include the need for more adequate institutional support so that their implementation can run optimally and sustainably.*

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary plays a very important role in learning English as a foreign language. Without sufficient vocabulary mastery, students will face difficulties in understanding texts, expressing ideas, and communicating effectively (Nation, 2020). Webb and Nation (2017) explain that effective vocabulary learning requires a combination of explicit teacher instruction and incidental learning through language exposure. In practice, this challenge becomes much greater when teachers work with slow learner students, namely students with an IQ range of 70–90 who need more time to process new information (Shaw, 2010). Students with these characteristics generally experience difficulties in working memory, maintaining attention, and understanding abstract concepts therefore, they require intensive repetition, structured instruction, and multisensory support (Cooter & Cooter, 2004; Kaznowski, 2004).

One approach considered relevant to addressing these needs is the use of posters as visual media. Theoretically, the use of posters can be explained through Clark and Paivio's (1991) dual coding theory, which states that information is easier to remember when presented both visually and verbally. Mayer (2021) strengthens this idea through multimedia learning theory, which emphasizes that the combination of pictures and words significantly reduces students' cognitive load compared to text alone. Harmer (2015) further argues that visual media help students build mental images that strengthen the relationship between words and their meanings. For slow learner students, these principles are highly relevant because posters can transform abstract verbal concepts into concrete and directly perceivable representations.

Nevertheless, the successful use of posters in the classroom does not occur automatically. Borg (2019) emphasizes that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes directly influence how they make instructional decisions, including in selecting and using teaching media. Phipps and Borg (2009) add that teachers with positive perceptions toward a strategy are more likely to apply it consistently and continuously adapt it based on students' responses. In other words, teachers' perceptions become a determining factor in how far the potential of posters can truly be optimized in inclusive classrooms.

Although many studies have discussed visual media and the needs of slow learner students, there is still limited research specifically examining how teachers' perceptions shape the use of posters in teaching English vocabulary to slow learner students in inclusive EFL classrooms. Florian and Beaton (2018) state that truly effective inclusive education requires a deep understanding of how teachers' beliefs are implemented in actual classroom practices. This gap becomes the primary reason for conducting the present study.

This study focused on two research questions: (1) How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of posters in teaching English vocabulary to slow learner students? and (2) What challenges do teachers face in implementing posters to teach vocabulary to slow learner students? Theoretically, this study expands research on

teacher cognition in the context of differentiated instruction for students with special needs in inclusive EFL classrooms. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for teacher training programs and policy development supporting the use of visual media in inclusive classrooms.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. Sandelowski (2000) emphasizes that this design produces comprehensive and concise descriptions of a phenomenon in everyday terms, while remaining as close as possible to the data without engaging in high-level theoretical interpretation. This design was chosen because the study aims to describe teachers' perceptions as they naturally occur in the field, in accordance with what teachers experience and feel in their daily teaching practice.

The participant of this study was an English teacher teaching third grade at an inclusive public elementary school in Medan, North Sumatra. The teacher was selected purposively (Creswell & Poth, 2018) based on three criteria: actively teaching English in elementary school, having direct experience teaching slow learner students, and having used posters in vocabulary teaching for slow learner students. This study involved only one participant because all slow learner students at the school were placed in the third grade, meaning that only the third-grade teacher had direct and relevant experience aligned with the focus of the study. The class consisted of 36 students, four of whom had been identified as slow learners through the school's initial assessment.

Data were collected through three instruments simultaneously to support source triangulation. Non-participant observation was conducted to directly observe how the teacher used posters in the classroom and how slow learner students responded during learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the teacher's perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in depth regarding the benefits, challenges, and strategies in using posters all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Documentation in the form of lesson plans and photographs of classroom posters was used to confirm and complement the observation and interview data.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis through six stages: data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This process was active and interpretative, in which themes were constructed from meaningful patterns identified in the data. As an illustration of analytical transparency, the following example of the coding process is presented:

Table Thematic Analysis Coding Process

Raw Data	Initial Code	Sub-Theme	Main Theme
"The words are too abstract if they are only written text."	Verbal abstraction as a barrier	Posters help vocabulary understanding	Positive perceptions of poster effectiveness
"The students who were usually silent suddenly raised their hands."	Increased spontaneous participation	Posters increase motivation	Positive perceptions of poster effectiveness
"If I replace the posters too quickly, the words do not stay in their memory yet."	Exposure duration as a retention strategy	Poster rotation strengthens retention	Positive perceptions of poster effectiveness
"The printing costs come from my own pocket."	Individual financial burden	Limited time and cost	Implementation challenges
"If I spend too much time with slow learners, the other students start becoming noisy."	Dilemma of classroom differentiation	Managing heterogeneous classrooms	Implementation challenges

### 3. Result

Based on the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), two main themes and four sub-themes were identified, describing the teacher’s perceptions and experiences in using posters to teach English vocabulary to *slow learner* students in a third-grade elementary class. The overall overview of the themes is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-Themes of Thematic Analysis Results

No	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Data Source
1	Teacher Perception of Poster Effectiveness	1.1 Posters Help <i>Slow Learner</i> Students Understand Vocabulary	Interview, Observation, Documentation
		1.2 Posters Increase Learning Motivation and Engagement	Interview, Observation
		1.3 Poster Rotation Every Two to Three Weeks Strengthens Vocabulary Retention	Interview, Documentation
2	Challenges in Poster Implementation	2.1 Limited Time in Preparing Poster Materials	Interview, Documentation

2.2 Classroom Management Interview,  
with Students of Diverse Observation  
Learning Abilities

*Teacher Perception of Poster Effectiveness*

*1.1: Posters Help Slow Learner Students Understand Vocabulary*

The teacher perceived posters as media that clearly helped slow learner students understand vocabulary. When the word eraser was written only on the whiteboard, all four slow learner students showed no response. In contrast, when the teacher directed their attention to a picture poster, one student immediately mentioned the object's name in two languages. This pattern was consistently observed throughout the observations. The teacher described the experience as follows:

*"They do not struggle because they do not want to learn, but because the words are too abstract if they are only written. The pictures are what help them understand."*

These findings indicate that the primary difficulty faced by slow learner students is cognitive rather than motivational. Posters address this barrier by providing concrete visual representations, making unfamiliar words less abstract. This finding was also confirmed in the lesson plans, which consistently positioned posters as the primary medium for introducing new vocabulary.

*1.2: Posters Increase Motivation and Learning Engagement*

Besides supporting understanding, posters were also found to increase the active participation of slow learner students who were usually passive during lessons. The frequency of spontaneous verbal responses increased from an average of once to three or four times per session when posters were used. Two students who had never voluntarily raised their hands previously answered the teacher's questions during lessons using animal-themed posters.

*"I pointed at a picture of a bird and asked, 'what animal is this?' Two slow learner students who were usually the quietest suddenly raised their hands. It seemed that the pictures made them confident enough to answer because they could directly see the answer themselves."*

These findings suggest that posters function not only at the cognitive level but also at the affective level. When students can verify their own answers through pictures, fear of making mistakes decreases and confidence in participating increases.

### *1.3: Poster Rotation Every Two to Three Weeks Strengthens Vocabulary Retention*

The teacher developed a poster rotation system adjusted to the English learning schedule, which occurred only once a week. Each poster theme was maintained for two to three meetings before being replaced with a new one so that slow learner students received sufficient exposure before moving on to new vocabulary.

*“If I change the posters too quickly, slow learner students only see them once or twice, so the words do not stay in their memory yet. That is why I use one poster for two to three weeks before changing the theme.”*

The effectiveness of this system was visible in students’ work samples, which showed improved vocabulary answers from the first meeting to the second meeting within the same theme, even without explicit memorization instruction. These findings demonstrate that the teacher did not merely use posters as classroom decorations but integrated them into a planned instructional design responsive to slow learner students’ needs.

### *Challenges in Poster Implementation*

#### *2.1: Limited Time and Costs in Preparing Posters*

Despite the positive perceptions, the teacher faced real obstacles in preparing posters regularly. Designing layouts, selecting appropriate pictures, and printing posters required considerable additional time outside teaching hours. Furthermore, all costs had to be personally covered because the school did not provide a specific budget for inclusive learning media development.

*“To create good posters with clear pictures and large writing, I have to design them myself on the computer and print them using my own money. It takes a lot of time and money.”*

The impact of these challenges was evident in field notes: poster replacement was delayed by one week from the planned schedule during the last two weeks of observation. This delay potentially disrupted the consistency of the vocabulary exposure cycle that formed the core of the teacher rotation system.

## *2.2: Classroom Management with Diverse Student Abilities*

Another challenge faced by the teacher was managing a classroom consisting of 36 students with highly varied ability levels. The teacher often experienced a dilemma between providing intensive attention to slow learner students and maintaining the engagement of the other students simultaneously.

*“For slow learner students, I need more time pointing at the pictures slowly and repeating the words several times. But if I spend too much time on them, the other students who already understand start getting bored and the class becomes noisy. On the other hand, if I follow the pace of the other students, the slow learner students are left behind.”*

Observation showed that when the teacher spent more than seven minutes on poster-based repetition activities for slow learner students, several students in the back rows began showing unproductive behavior. This challenge emphasizes that the effectiveness of posters does not stand alone but strongly depends on the teacher ability to manage a heterogeneous classroom simultaneously.

## **4. Discussion**

### *Posters as an Effective Visual Medium in Vocabulary Learning for Slow Learner Students*

The findings of this study can be understood through a simple yet comprehensive model: posters facilitate students' cognitive processing, successful processing builds confidence and motivation, and this increased confidence ultimately strengthens long-term vocabulary retention. This model is strongly supported by three complementary theoretical frameworks.

Clark and Paivio's (1991) dual coding theory explains why posters work effectively for slow learner students. When a picture of an eraser is presented alongside the word eraser, two cognitive channels visual and verbal are activated simultaneously, resulting in much stronger memory traces compared to text alone. Mayer (2021) further strengthens this explanation through multimedia learning theory: the combination of pictures and words fundamentally reduces extraneous cognitive load, which is particularly important for slow learner students with limited working memory capacity (Cooter & Cooter, 2004; Kaznowski, 2004).

Meanwhile, Sweller et al.'s (2019) cognitive load theory provides justification for the teacher poster rotation system presenting material gradually in limited portions is effective for students with limited processing capacity.

Beyond the cognitive dimension, this study also revealed an equally important affective dimension. Florian and Beaton (2018) emphasize that effective inclusive pedagogy creates meaningful participation opportunities for all students,

including those with different learning profiles. Desai (2017) adds that learning environments minimizing the risk of failure are prerequisites for the success of slow learner students. In this study, the mechanism of self-verification through pictures on posters was proven to reduce academic anxiety and encourage participation something that text-based instruction alone could not achieve.

From the perspective of teacher cognition, all pedagogical decisions demonstrated by the teacher in this study, from printing posters to designing the rotation schedule, reflected a system of beliefs formed through classroom experience and reflection (Borg, 2019; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

### *Implementation Challenges and Critical Perspectives*

The two identified challenges reveal important structural gaps that need to be acknowledged. Richards and Farrell (2011) note that EFL teachers in resource-limited schools face high workloads with minimal time for media development. When media development costs are borne personally by teachers, the sustainability of pedagogical innovation depends heavily on individual dedication alone a condition that cannot be relied upon in the long term. Florian and Beaton (2018) remind us that effective inclusive education requires not only positive teacher beliefs but also substantial institutional support.

In addition, there are inherent limitations of posters as media that need to be critically recognized. Harmer (2015) argues that visual media should function as scaffolding that is gradually reduced as students' abilities improve. Excessive dependence on visual cues may hinder slow learner students' ability to decode words independently in the future. Kalyuga and Singh (2016) further explain that differentiating cognitive load according to students' learning profiles requires a variety of strategies rather than relying on a single type of media. Therefore, posters are most effective when used as part of a broader instructional strategy rather than as the teacher's sole instructional support.

From a theoretical perspective, this study expands teacher cognition theory (Borg, 2019) into the domain of inclusive learning in EFL classrooms, an area that remains underexplored, particularly in the Indonesian context. The study demonstrates that teachers' beliefs regarding visual media are not merely passive attitudes but are actively translated into concrete and adaptive pedagogical decisions, forming a pattern that moves from perception to practice and from practice to measurable student outcomes.

From a practical perspective, this study provides empirical evidence that posters are feasible and responsive media for supporting vocabulary learning among slow learner students in inclusive classrooms. These findings may serve as a foundation for schools to allocate specific budgets for inclusive learning media development, for training institutions to design programs integrating visual media strategies into differentiated instruction, and for teachers to develop practical guidelines for poster use adjusted to their students' contexts and needs.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found that the teacher had positive perceptions toward the use of posters in teaching English vocabulary to slow learner students. These perceptions did not remain merely at the level of attitude but encouraged the teacher to develop adaptive teaching practices, one of which was a two- to three-week poster rotation system adjusted to the frequency of instruction. These practices resulted in observable improvements in vocabulary understanding, learning motivation, and retention among slow learner students. On the other hand, poster implementation also faced two unavoidable challenges limited time and costs fully borne independently by the teacher, and difficulties in managing heterogeneous inclusive classrooms. These findings emphasize that the effectiveness of posters is determined not only by the quality of the media itself but also by sufficient institutional support and teachers' competence in implementing instructional differentiation effectively.

This study has limitations because it involved only one participant. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to broader contexts. The findings are contextual and tied to the specific setting in which the study was conducted. Future studies are recommended to involve more participants from various inclusive school contexts to improve the transferability of findings, while also exploring further how visual media based differentiated instructional strategies can be sustainably implemented in inclusive EFL classrooms.

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