

APPLYING UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN INCLUSIVE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, yet many Indonesian schools still face challenges in implementing inclusive English instruction. This study explores the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in teaching English vocabulary in teaching English vocabulary in an inclusive elementary classroom at an elementary school in Medan, Indonesia. Guided by two research questions, employing a descriptive qualitative research design, the study involved one English teacher with three years of experience teaching in an inclusive classroom. The participant was selected through purposive sampling based on her experience in teaching students with diverse learning needs. Data were collected through classroom observations conducted across four meetings, semi-structured teacher interviews, and documentation of lesson plans and learning media. The data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify patterns related to the teacher's instructional strategies and perceptions of UDL implementation. The findings indicate that the teacher implemented the three principles of UDL: multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. The teacher combined visual, auditory, and contextual representations to support vocabulary understanding, used flexible and emotionally supportive activities to enhance student engagement, and provided varied forms of assessment to allow students to demonstrate their understanding. These strategies supported vocabulary comprehension and increased participation among students with diverse learning needs. The study highlights the practical potential of UDL as an instructional framework for improving vocabulary learning and fostering inclusive practices in inclusive elementary classroom.

Keywords: Diverse Learners, English Instruction, English Language, Instructional Approaches, Vocabulary Framework

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been widely promoted as a fundamental educational reform aimed at ensuring equal access to learning for students with diverse abilities and learning needs. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNESCO emphasize inclusive and quality education as a shared global responsibility. However, previous studies show that the implementation of inclusive education at the

classroom level often falls short of policy objectives. Inclusion is still often interpreted as the physical placement of students with special needs in regular classrooms without significant instructional adjustments. (Nation, 2006; UNESCO, 2017). When teaching practices are not adapted to accommodate the diversity of students, learners may continue to encounter barriers to participation even within an inclusive classroom. Consequently, inclusion may remain merely structural, focusing only on rules within the school system and student placement. In such situations, inclusion becomes a formality in which teachers continue to use standard teaching methods rather than employing pedagogical approaches that respond to students' special needs.

Previous research highlights that effective inclusive education requires flexible teaching approaches that allow teachers to design learning activities responsive to the diverse characteristics of learners (Rao, 2021). According to Eun (2016), inclusive education must be founded on instructional strategies that acknowledge students' cultural, linguistic, and cognitive diversity by offering chances for meaningful engagement and interaction. This viewpoint emphasizes the function of educators as mediators who actively support learning, modify the language of instruction, and create educational activities that allow every student to access and create meaning. Without such pedagogical mediation, students with diverse learning needs may remain at a disadvantage even if they are physically present in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, inclusive education risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative when teaching practices are not adapted to address the various characteristics of learners. This situation indicates that many inclusive classrooms continue to operate at a structural level, rather than functioning as pedagogical spaces that support meaningful learning for all students.

In Indonesia, inclusive education at the elementary school level has been implemented through a national policy in line with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which promotes equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their abilities. Nevertheless, empirical studies show that the implementation of inclusive education at the classroom level continues to face considerable challenges, especially in inclusive elementary schools in Medan. For instance, Wahyuni et al., (2025) found that teachers in inclusive classrooms experience difficulties in handling the diversity of students due to large class sizes, limited learning resources, and a lack of professional training. In line with this perspective, inclusive education is not only understood as the physical placement of students with special needs in regular classrooms, but also as a systemic transformation that accommodates diverse learning needs and ensures equitable participation for all students (Sitorus et al., 2026).

Inclusive practices in many classrooms depend on educators' improvisation rather than a structured pedagogical framework (Fovet, 2020). Several recent studies also emphasize that teachers need a practical teaching framework that can guide inclusive teaching practices and reduce learning barriers for diverse students (Espada-chavarria et al., 2023), in urban areas such as Medan, inclusive classes often consist of students with widely varying learning abilities in one classroom, including students with special educational

needs and typically developing students. This condition places educators under high instructional demands within limited time and curriculum constraints. As a result, designing learning activities that can effectively accommodate all students becomes a challenge. This situation highlights the need for a flexible and adaptive teaching approaches that allows students to participate meaningfully and access learning materials according to their individual abilities.

One area where these challenges are very apparent is the teaching of English vocabulary in elementary schools. Vocabulary mastery is fundamental to language skills, yet inclusive EFL classrooms present challenges due to learners' cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural diversity. Beck & McKeown (2007) emphasize that effective vocabulary instruction integrates contextual use, discussion, and meaningful application, which corresponds with UDL's multiple means of representation. Gu & Johnson (1996) highlight the role of metacognitive and flexible strategies, while Ghalebi et al. (2020) show that motivation and learning environment are more influential than gender in vocabulary acquisition.

Recent studies also emphasize that multimodal and interactive vocabulary teaching can significantly enhance student engagement and comprehension in diverse classrooms (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Stuart & Nation, 2017). These findings suggest that UDL-based vocabulary instruction can promote meaningful learning, engagement, and inclusion through multimodal activities; however, most existing studies focus on general EFL contexts rather than inclusive classrooms. Although these studies highlight the value of contextual and multimodal vocabulary teaching, less attention has been given to how these strategies are implemented in inclusive elementary classrooms, particularly using the UDL framework. Prior research demonstrates that inclusive education and UDL positively influence academic outcomes, social interaction, and participation, but are often limited by insufficient resources, teacher preparedness, and inconsistent implementation.

While vocabulary studies widely recommend multimodal and contextual approaches, few examine their application within inclusive elementary classrooms. One area of learning that clearly demonstrates these challenges is the teaching of English vocabulary in elementary schools. Vocabulary is a fundamental element in language development and student academic success, as it supports overall reading, speaking, and communication skills (Alqahtani, 2015). Studies show that vocabulary mastery requires repeated exposure, varied teaching strategies, and continuous engagement (Chiriac, 2025; Neofotist, 2006). Garden (2022) reports that limited vocabulary in early education is associated with long-term academic difficulties. In inclusive classrooms, these challenges become more complex due to differences in students' cognitive abilities, learning rates, and linguistic backgrounds. Blocker (2017) found that a uniform teaching approach often results in uneven vocabulary acquisition among students. Although multimodal vocabulary instruction has been widely discussed, limited research has examined how such an approach is implemented in inclusive elementary school classrooms, especially through the Universal Design for Learning framework.

To address these instructional challenges, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was developed as a learning framework that supports inclusive teaching practices. UDL

emphasizes anticipatory learning design through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to reduce learning barriers early in the learning process. Several studies show that UDL can increase student engagement and learning accessibility in various educational contexts (Kirsch & Luo, 2023). Recent studies increasingly show that UDL provides flexible learning pathways that allow students with diverse needs to access content and demonstrate understanding through various forms of interaction (Almeqdad et al., 2023; Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023). However, studies also reveal that educators face difficulties in consistently applying UDL principles in daily classroom practice. Fornauf & Erickson (2020) report that limited training, time constraints, and a lack of institutional support are major obstacles. In Indonesia, UDL has a positive impact, its implementation is still not optimal.

Although UDL has been studied in various subjects and groups of learners, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs (Mansell, 2023; Mayes, 2020; Rosa & Norman, 2020), empirical studies that specifically examine educators' experiences in applying UDL to English vocabulary teaching in elementary schools are still limited.

One such framework is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). According to Kelly et al., (2022); CAST (2018), the three primary concepts of UDL were used as recommendations in planning and conducting learning activities, which include:

1. Multiple Means of Engagement (several approaches to motivate students to learn)
2. Multiple Means of Representation (different methods to deliver material)
3. Multiple Means of Action and Expression (several ways for students to show understanding)



Figure 1. CAST 2018 The UDL guidelines version 2.2. <http://udl-guidelines.cast.org>

Several studies highlight inclusive practices in Indonesian educational contexts. Ritonga et al (2025) report that inclusive practices at Melati Kindergarten in Pekanbaru involved IEPs, differentiated instruction, collaboration with professionals, and parental engagement, yet were constrained by limited learning aids and training. Similarly, (Celia, 2006) stresses that inclusion involves building learning communities that value diversity and students' strengths, a view aligned with UDL principles. (Dewi, 2024) further shows that inclusive education in multicultural classrooms improves academic and social outcomes but remains challenged by cultural and resource limitations, highlighting the need for structured frameworks such as UDL to support responsive instruction, including vocabulary learning. In fact, understanding how educators deal with real challenges in inclusive classrooms is crucial. This gap is even more apparent in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, where the implementation of inclusive education is still in the process of strengthening practices. Therefore, studies that focus primarily on educators' experiences are very important. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the actual practice of UDL in inclusive classrooms. Although these studies provide valuable insights into inclusive education practices, they rarely investigate how structured frameworks such as UDL are specifically applied in English vocabulary learning in inclusive elementary school classrooms.

UDL encourages the use of varied inputs such as visuals, gestures, contextualized activities, and interactive tasks. Previous studies indicate that while teachers tend to be more confident in providing multiple representations, supporting learner engagement and expression remains more challenging (Yuege & Zaharudin, 2025). Nevertheless, when supported by adequate training and institutional commitment, UDL has demonstrated potential to enhance student participation and learning outcomes, while (Muhammad Salama Muhammad et al., 2024) reported improved participation and learning outcomes through multimedia use despite technological barriers. (Capp, 2020) similarly notes that representation is often prioritized over engagement and expression, indicating that effective UDL implementation depends on teacher readiness and institutional support. These studies show that a clear pedagogical framework beyond placement policies is necessary for inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of models such as UDL to encourage inclusive classroom practices, such as vocabulary teaching. However, despite its growing popularity, the implementation of UDL in classrooms remains uneven and highly dependent on institutional support and teacher readiness, especially in early-stage English as a foreign language (EFL) learning situation.

Based on these issues, this study aims to explore educators' experiences in implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in teaching English vocabulary in inclusive elementary classrooms in Indonesia. This study is limited to teaching English vocabulary at the elementary school level and focuses on the perspective of educators in the context of an inclusive classroom. The focus of the study includes how UDL principles are applied in daily learning practices and the benefits of UDL in supporting vocabulary learning and student engagement. With its limited scope, this study is expected to provide an in-depth and contextual overview. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How is UDL implemented by teacher in teaching English vocabulary in inclusive elementary

classrooms? (2) How does teacher view the benefits of UDL for vocabulary learning and student engagement in inclusive elementary classrooms? The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study enriches the literature on inclusive pedagogy by linking UDL principles with vocabulary instruction in inclusive elementary education. Practically, it offers insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing more inclusive and adaptive English language instruction for diverse learners.

METHODS

This study was designed to employ a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in English vocabulary instruction within an inclusive classroom. This design aligns with the research objectives, which aimed to explore how UDL principles were expected to be applied and how teachers perceived the sustainability of their implementation. Descriptive qualitative research sought to understand phenomena in natural settings by emphasizing meanings, processes, and participant experiences rather than hypothesis testing Creswell (2014) In line with this perspective, the study is adopted a naturalistic inquiry approach in which the researcher acted as the primary instrument and learning facilitator. This role is enabled systematic observation, interpretation, and reflection on instructional practices (Patton, 2015). The UDL-based instruction was implemented over three classroom meetings and one interview with the teacher to capture authentic teaching and learning dynamics.

The participant in this study was an English teacher who taught in an inclusive classroom at the elementary school level. The teacher was female and had more than three years of teaching experience. She was directly involved in teaching students with special needs in a regular inclusive classroom. The teacher was motivated to teach English in an inclusive class because there was a woman she admired who was an example of enthusiasm in teaching children with special needs. She was also interested because she had never found an inclusive school where she lived before. As an English teacher, the participant faced a diversity of language abilities and learning needs among students in an inclusive class. The participant has tried to apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in learning by providing various forms of material presentation, student engagement strategies, and alternative ways of expressing understanding.

Although the application of UDL is not yet fully structured, the learning practices carried out reflect ongoing efforts to create an inclusive and flexible learning environment in accordance with UDL principles. Purposive sampling was intended to ensure alignment with the research objectives (Creswell & Cheryl N.Poth, 2018), which is the selection of subjects based on specific criteria in line with the research objectives. The criteria for research subjects included English teachers who taught in inclusive classrooms and naturally applied the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the learning process. Subject selection also considered ease of access, namely the subjects' willingness to be interviewed, cooperate in the research, and provide permission for observation and documentation during the learning process. At the school where the research was conducted, there was only one English teacher who met these criteria, so the entire relevant population

became the research subjects. This process contributed to source triangulation and enhance the credibility of the study.

Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured teacher interviews, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of UDL-based vocabulary instruction. Classroom observations were conducted across four meetings, conducted using an observation checklist and field notes based on UDL principles, including multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. First, classroom observations were conducted across four meetings in which the teacher implemented lesson plans and media designed according to UDL principles multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. During these observations, the researcher paid attention to teacher strategies, media use, student engagement, and the interaction patterns between regular students and students with special needs. Field notes, photographs, and short video clips were collected to ensure rich and authentic data, following Patton (2015) recommendation that observations must capture naturally occurring behaviors as completely as possible. Second, semi-structured teacher interviews were conducted using an interview protocol consisting of open-ended reflective questions after full implementation of the lesson.

Although the protocol served as a reference framework, the interviews were conducted flexibly, allowing researchers to ask follow-up and in-depth questions based on the teachers' responses, drawing on Schon (2024) concept of reflective practice, which emphasizes the importance of teachers' reflective insights in understanding the practical meaning of instructional decisions. Through these reflective interviews, in-depth data was obtained regarding teachers' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the feasibility of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the context of real classrooms. Third, documentation was used to strengthen the data, including lesson plans (RPP), learning media, and classroom records. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016) documentation serves as an important complementary source that increases the dependability and confirmability of qualitative findings. Together, observation, reflection, and documentation created a comprehensive and trustworthy dataset. This combination of techniques ensures that the study captures the instructional process holistically what happened in the classroom, how the teacher experienced the implementation, and how students responded to the instructional design.

Data analysis was conducted using Braun & Clarke (2006) Thematic analysis is considered suitable for examining and identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data, particularly those related to teachers' perspectives and experiences in implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This analysis emphasizes the perceived benefits of using the UDL concept by teachers in teaching English vocabulary. The main data sources for the analysis process are teacher interview transcripts, which are reviewed multiple times and supplemented with learning documentation and classroom observation notes. This stage aims to develop a deep understanding of vocabulary teaching strategies in inclusive classrooms using the UDL approach. Next, initial codes were constructed inductively to reflect recurrent and relevant notions in the data, such as "teachers' strategies in implementing UDL," "reasons for using UDL," "benefits of UDL for the teaching process," and

“perceived changes in vocabulary learning.” Following that, these codes were categorized into more general themes that represented the viewpoints of the professors, such as:

- (1) Ways to teach vocabulary using UDL principles;
- (2) Teachers' pedagogical factors while selecting a UDL strategy;
- (3) Benefits of implementing UDL on the vocabulary learning process according to teacher;

These themes were then combined into an analytical narrative that connects teacher practical experiences with the UDL theoretical framework. This approach allows for a deep, reflective, and contextual interpretation of research findings, positioning teachers as the primary actors in the implementation of UDL in inclusive classrooms.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on three days of classroom observations and an in-depth interview with an English teacher in an inclusive elementary school. The results are organized thematically to illustrate how the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were enacted in English vocabulary instruction.

Multiple Means of Representation in Vocabulary Instruction

Based on the results of interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, it was found that English teacher in inclusive classrooms applied multiple means of representation in English vocabulary learning. This application is carried out by presenting material through various forms of representation such as spoken language, visuals, body movements, facial expressions, songs, and audiovisual media to suit the diverse learning needs and abilities of students. The findings indicate that the teacher consistently employed multiple forms of representation when introducing English vocabulary. Based on the interview results, the teacher explained that in teaching English vocabulary, she did not use English directly, but started with Indonesian first. This is done so that all students, including those with special needs, understand the basic concepts of the material before being introduced to vocabulary in English. The teacher stated that understanding concepts is very important in inclusive classrooms because students' cognitive and language abilities vary. Once students understand the meaning of words in Indonesian, the teacher gradually introduces English vocabulary as stated by the teacher:

“I usually start with Indonesian. I make sure the students understand what we are going to discuss first. Once they understand, I then move to English.” (Teacher interview, #1).

In addition, the teacher also explained that the use of images, sounds, and movements is more effective than written text. According to the teacher, most elementary school students tend to be less interested in reading long texts, so visual and audiovisual media are more likely to attract their attention. The results of this interview show that teachers consciously adjust the way they deliver material to the characteristics of students in inclusive classrooms and do not rely on just one learning method. The interview findings

were supported by classroom observations. During day one observation, vocabulary such as *table*, *chair*, and *book* was introduced by directly referring to real objects in the classroom. This concrete approach supported students, particularly those with special needs, in understanding the meaning of the words. The teacher also made extensive use of visual and audiovisual media, including pictures, facial expressions, body movements, and YouTube videos when students' attention decreased. The teacher emphasized the effectiveness of such media:

"Pictures and sounds are more effective for children. They tend to be reluctant to read." (Teacher interview, #2).

These findings demonstrate that the teacher did not rely on a single mode of instruction but combined visual, auditory, and contextual representations. This practice reflects the UDL principle of multiple means of representation, which emphasizes providing information in various formats to ensure accessibility for all learners. On the second day of observation, vocabulary learning focused on feelings. The teacher used facial expressions, body movements, flashcards, and songs to introduce vocabulary such as happy, sad, angry, excited, and scared. Students with special needs demonstrated their understanding by pointing at pictures, imitating facial expressions, and making gestures corresponding to the vocabulary mentioned by the teacher. The teacher did not force students to respond verbally but still valued nonverbal responses as a form of understanding. During the learning process, the teacher also uses YouTube videos when the students' attention begins to wane. This shows that the teacher is flexible in choosing learning media to keep students focused and engaged in learning activities. The results of the observation show that vocabulary learning is not delivered abstractly, but is linked to the students' real experiences through visuals, movements, and the surrounding context. This approach helps students with different learning needs to keep up with their peers.

The results of the interviews and observations were supported by an analysis of learning documents in the form of English teaching modules used by teachers. These teaching modules stated that vocabulary learning was carried out using pictures, songs, facial expressions, and body movements. The teaching modules also showed that students were given the freedom to understand and express vocabulary according to their individual abilities, either through speech, pointing at pictures, or performing movements. The learning objectives listed in the teaching modules also emphasize that students are not only required to memorize vocabulary, but also to understand its meaning through various means. This shows that the application of multiple means of representation has been systematically planned in the teachers' learning tools and does not just arise spontaneously in the classroom.

The lesson plan's primary learning activities are analyzed to demonstrate how different forms of representation are purposefully developed in order to reinforce data triangulation.

Table 1. Core activity Reflecting the Use of Multiple Means of Representation in Vocabulary Instruction

Core Learning Activities	Description	UDL Principle
Introducing feelings vocabulary using pictures	The teacher introduces vocabulary by showing pictures of emotions and demonstrating pronunciation.	Multiple Means of Representation
sing songs to reinforce vocabulary meaning	Vocabulary is taught through a song adapted from a familiar melody (<i>Twinkle Little Star</i>)	Multiple Means of Representation
Using facial expressions and body movements	Each feeling is demonstrated through gestures and facial expressions to support students' comprehension	Multiple Means of Representation
Providing activity choices for students	Students respond by pointing to pictures, imitating expressions, or producing verbal responses	Accessibility and learner variability

Note. Adapted from the teacher's lesson plan (core activity), anonymized

The table confirms that the use of various representations in vocabulary teaching is systematically incorporated into the instructional design by teachers, in accordance with the UDL framework.

Multiple Means of Engagement in an Inclusive Classroom

Based on the results of interview, observations, and documentation, it was found that teachers applied multiple means of engagement in teaching English vocabulary in inclusive classrooms. This application was evident in the teacher's efforts to employ various method to engage students through emotionally safe, flexible, and responsive learning environment for students with diverse conditions and needs, especially students with special needs. The teacher highlighted the importance of emotional safety in learning:

“What children need most is a sense of safety. When they feel pressured, their thinking becomes suppressed.” (Teacher interview, #3).

Based on the interview results, the teacher emphasized that students' engagement in learning is greatly influenced by their emotional state. The teacher stated that before students can understand English material, they must feel comfortable and safe in the classroom. Therefore, the teacher not only focuses on delivering the material but also pays attention to the students' mood and readiness to learn. The teacher explained that pressure and coercion can actually hinder the learning process, especially for students with special needs. According to the teacher, when students feel pressured, their ability to receive and process information decreases. Therefore, the teacher strives to avoid a coercive approach and prefers a patient and empathetic approach. The teacher also explained that physical conditions and the learning environment also affect student engagement. The teacher realized that some students, especially those with special needs, are sensitive to sound, light, and temperature. Therefore, the teacher sometimes moves learning activities to a more comfortable place or adjusts the students' seating positions so that they can follow the lesson

better. The results of this interview indicate that the teacher views student engagement not only as academic participation but also as emotional and psychological involvement in the learning process.

The results from the interview were reinforced by classroom observations conducted over three days. During the learning process, the teacher consistently created a classroom atmosphere that encouraged student engagement. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher often started with simple questions, such as asking students how they were feeling, which helped students feel noticed and valued before moving on to the learning material. On the first day of observation, the teacher provided extra time for students who needed longer to respond. Students with special needs were not forced to answer immediately or follow instructions quickly. The teacher waited patiently, repeated instructions in a softer voice, and offered individual support without drawing excessive attention from other students. On the second day of observation, learning took place in an open space, creating a more relaxed and less rigid classroom atmosphere. Students appeared more comfortable and confident in expressing themselves. Students with special needs were more engaged when learning activities involved songs, movements, and facial expressions. The teacher also demonstrated flexibility in arranging seating positions so students could choose where they felt most comfortable. Furthermore, the teacher appreciated all forms of student participation. When students were unable to respond verbally, positive reinforcement was still given for nonverbal responses such as gestures, facial expressions, or pointing to pictures. This approach created a safe classroom atmosphere and encouraged students to remain engaged without fear of making mistakes. In conclusion, the observation results indicate that student engagement was demonstrated not only through verbal participation but also through attention, nonverbal responses, and social interaction with peers, supported by a positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere.

The results from the observations and interviews were corroborated by educational materials demonstrating that teacher had created adaptable, student-focused learning experiences. The teaching modules implemented included activities that allowed students to engage based on their individual skills and comfort zones, such as singing, doing movements, pointing at images, or responding verbally. The educational documents also indicated that teacher did not establish a single mode of participation as the primary benchmark. Rather, student engagement is recognized as a varied and evolving process. This perspective aligns with the classroom practices of the teachers, which honor the diverse ways in which students engage with and react to learning. The documentation indicates that student participation has been taken into account from the learning planning phase, ensuring that the activities conducted in the classroom are not just random occurrences but are part of a deliberate effort to foster the involvement of every student in an inclusive environment. These results supported by instructional documents, which indicate that flexible teaching methods and learning media were planned before being implemented in the classroom (see Figure 2).

- F. Metode Pembelajaran**
1. Demonstrasi
 2. Total Physical Response (TPR)
 3. Bernyanyi
 4. Tanya jawab
 5. Kerja individu & kelompok kecil
- G. Media dan Sumber Belajar**
- Flashcard feelings
 - Lirik lagu tentang feelings
 - Ekspresi wajah guru
 - Lingkungan kelas

Figure 2. Teaching methods and learning media planned in the English lesson module

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

In terms of action and expression, based on the results of interviews, classroom observations, and learning documentation, it was found that teacher apply various methods in teaching English vocabulary in inclusive elementary classroom. The application of this principle is seen in the way teacher give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in various ways, both verbally and non-verbally, according to the abilities and needs of each student. The teacher explained this flexible approach to assessment:

“What matters is not what the teacher wants, but how the child is able to show understanding. Some students can pronounce words but cannot write them, and we still consider that as valid assessment.” (Teacher interview, #4).

The teacher clarified she does not need each student to demonstrate their understanding in the same way in an inclusive classroom based on the findings of the interview. The teacher underlined that the primary goal of education is to guarantee that students comprehend the meaning of vocabulary, not to encourage them to commit to specific ways of assessment. According to the teacher, some students can accurately pronounce words but struggle with writing, while others are adept at expressing their comprehension through body language or facial expressions. The teacher still views the students' answers as accurate indicators of learning success in these situations. The teacher also mentioned that for students with special needs, non-verbal responses are often the primary form of understanding. Teachers choose not to force students to speak or write if it causes stress and hinders their involvement in learning. The results of these interviews indicate that teachers have an inclusive perspective on the learning process and outcomes, with an emphasis on conceptual understanding as the main focus of vocabulary learning.

“Even if their eyes and body move around, when they are asked to ‘jump’ and they do so, it means they understand.” (Teacher interview, #5).

These results indicate that the teacher valued diverse forms of expression and recognized non-verbal responses as legitimate demonstrations of understanding, which is central to the UDL principle of *multiple means of action and expression*. The interview findings were reinforced by the results of classroom observations conducted over three days. During the learning process, the teacher gave students the opportunity to express their understanding of vocabulary through various actions and expressions. In vocabulary lessons about objects in the classroom, students were asked to directly point to the objects mentioned by the teacher. Special needs students who had difficulty writing were not forced to copy words but were allowed to demonstrate their understanding by pointing to or approaching the intended objects.

In vocabulary learning about feelings, students were given the opportunity to express the meaning of words through body movements and facial expressions. When the teacher mentioned vocabulary such as happy or sad, students showed their understanding by smiling, bowing their heads, or making appropriate gestures. Students with special needs appeared to be more responsive when allowed to express their understanding through gestures rather than verbal responses. In addition, teachers also provide flexibility in the form of evaluation and assignments. Some student complete assignments by writing, while others complete assignments by matching pictures, pointing to cards, or following instructions through movements. Teachers accept all forms of response without comparing the results between students. The results of the observation show that teachers do not use speaking or writing skills as the only indicators of learning success. Instead, teachers facilitate various forms of expression to ensure that all students can demonstrate their understanding in a meaningful way.

Analysis of learning documentation shows that flexibility in the form of actions and expressions has been planned in the learning tools. The teaching modules used by teacher state that students are given a choice of ways to demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary, such as through speaking, pointing at pictures, imitating movements, or showing facial expressions. Thus, the learning documentation shows that the application of multiple means of action and expression does not only occur spontaneously in the classroom but has become part of learning planning that takes into account the diversity of ways in which students express their understanding. The learning also shows that assessment is carried out adaptively and does not only focus on written results. This can be seen from the way teachers consider assessment by looking at student participation, verbal responses, and students' ability to follow instructions according to their respective abilities. This planned flexibility is evident in the learning documentation, which outlines various options for student actions and expressions (see Figure 3).

<p>4. Aktivitas Pilihan (Diferensiatif)</p> <p>Siswa bebas memilih satu:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Menunjuk gambar sesuai feeling• Menirukan ekspresi wajah• Menyebutkan kosakata secara lisan
<p>1. Refleksi sederhana: “How do you feel today?”</p> <p>2. Siswa menjawab dengan kata / gambar / Gerakan</p> <p>3. Guru memberi penguatan positif</p>

Figure 3. Differentiated student action and expression planned in the lesson module

Based on the triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be concluded that teachers have applied the principle of multiple means of action and expression in learning English vocabulary in inclusive classrooms. Teachers provide space for students to express their understanding through various means, both verbally and nonverbally, without imposing a specific form of expression. This approach allows students with diverse learning abilities, including students with special needs, to demonstrate their understanding fairly and meaningfully in the learning process.

DISCUSSION

This discussion section aims to interpret the research findings by relating them to theoretical and empirical studies related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the context of inclusive education. The research findings show that the learning practices applied by teachers in inclusive elementary school classrooms have reflected the main principles of UDL, particularly through flexibility in vocabulary learning and student engagement. These practices show that UDL can be applied contextually through daily pedagogical decisions, without necessarily having to explicitly use the UDL theoretical framework. This is in line with Priyadharsini & Sahaya Mary (2024), who state that UDL functions as a practical framework in inclusive education by emphasizing accessibility, flexibility, and learner-centered learning. The results of the study show that the application of UDL principles provides tangible benefits to vocabulary learning. Teachers use various forms of representation, such as pictures, real objects in the classroom, body movements, facial expressions, songs, and audiovisual media to introduce English vocabulary. From the teachers' perspective, this strategy helps students, especially those with special needs, to understand the meaning of vocabulary more easily because the words are not presented

abstractly but are linked to concrete experiences. This strategy reflects the principle of multiple means of representation in UDL, which is the provision of various ways of presenting material to accommodate the diversity of learners (CAST, 2018).

These findings are in line with Alghamdy (2023) research, which shows that UDL-based vocabulary learning has a positive effect on English vocabulary mastery because vocabulary is presented through various meaningful representations. In this study, vocabulary learning became more accessible when English words were manifested in the form of actions, visuals, and sounds. The practice of teachers who begin their explanation of concepts using Indonesian before introducing English vocabulary also helps strengthen students' understanding, especially for students with diverse learning needs. In addition, vocabulary learning that is linked to the context of students' daily lives helps students build meaning gradually. The use of objects in the classroom environment and emotional expressions allows students to associate new vocabulary with experiences they are already familiar with. Thus, the findings of this study indicate that UDL plays a role in reducing cognitive barriers and supporting more inclusive vocabulary learning in elementary school classrooms.

Regarding student engagement, the results of the study show that the application of UDL principles contributes to creating an emotionally safe learning environment and encourages student participation. Teachers emphasize the importance of safety, patience, and flexibility in engaging students during the vocabulary learning process. Students are not forced to always respond verbally but are given the opportunity to show engagement through movements, pointing at pictures, or facial expressions. These findings are in line with Sharma (2024), who states that the application of UDL can increase student engagement by creating a low-pressure learning atmosphere that respects individual differences. The flexible approach applied by teachers helps students with special needs remain engaged in learning without fear of making mistakes. This is reinforced by Mayes (2020), who asserts that student engagement and motivation to learn increase when learning provides choices, flexibility, and emotional support. In this study, student engagement was observed not only through verbal responses, but also through attention, body movements, and student interaction with learning media. These findings indicate that engagement in inclusive classrooms is multidimensional and cannot be limited to just one form of participation.

These research findings are also in line with Fan's study in his article Review on the Application of Universal Design for Learning in Classroom Instruction, which emphasizes that the application of UDL encourages student engagement by providing learning choices, flexibility in participation, and recognition of the diversity of ways students interact with learning materials (Fan, 2024). Fan highlights that student engagement will increase when teachers do not limit participation to verbal or written responses but also accommodate nonverbal forms of participation that suit the characteristics of the students. In the context of inclusive classrooms, this approach is particularly relevant because it allows all students to be meaningfully involved without the pressure to conform to a single standard of participation. Additionally, teachers' sensitivity to students' emotional and physical conditions plays an important role in maintaining student engagement during learning.

Adjustments such as allowing more response time, flexible seating arrangements, and changes in learning locations help students feel more comfortable and willing to participate. This practice aligns with the principle of multiple means of engagement in UDL, which emphasizes the importance of reducing emotional and environmental barriers in the learning process.

Integration of Vocabulary Learning and Engagement through UDL research findings also indicate that the benefits of UDL for vocabulary learning and student engagement are interconnected. When vocabulary is taught through flexible and multimodal strategies, student engagement tends to increase. Conversely, when students feel safe and emotionally supported, they are more willing to participate in vocabulary learning activities. This aligns with Alghamdy (2023), who states that successful vocabulary learning is closely related to student motivation and engagement, which can be enhanced through the application of UDL principles. From a teacher's perspective, UDL provides a practical approach to accommodating student diversity without having to separate students based on ability. Acceptance of various forms of student responses, including nonverbal responses, reflects fair and inclusive assessment. This aligns with Capp (2020) and Fan (2024), who emphasize that inclusive learning should provide space for students to express their understanding in various ways that suit their individual characteristics. Thus, UDL helps teachers create a learning environment that is inclusive, equitable, and meaningful for all students.

In general, the results of this study confirm that the application of UDL principles provides clear benefits for vocabulary learning and student engagement in inclusive elementary school classrooms. Through flexible representation, supportive engagement strategies, and recognition of the diversity of ways in which students participate and express their understanding, teachers are able to minimize learning barriers and support the active participation of all students. These findings reinforce the view that UDL is a relevant and applicable pedagogical framework in supporting inclusive English language learning practices at the elementary school level.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in teaching English vocabulary in inclusive elementary school classrooms can be applied contextually and reflectively, even when teachers do not explicitly refer to UDL as a formal theoretical framework. Through flexible teaching strategies such as the use of visual media, movement, games, songs, and adaptive assessment methods, teachers are able to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students with special educational needs. From the teachers' perspective, these practices support vocabulary learning by helping students understand the meaning of words more concretely and meaningfully, while also encouraging active participation during classroom activities. These findings expand the existing literature on inclusive pedagogy and UDL by showing that UDL principles can naturally emerge in classroom practice through teachers' adaptive and reflective teaching strategies. Although previous studies emphasized the theoretical benefits of UDL for inclusive learning, this study provides empirical insights into how these principles are applied in everyday classroom contexts, particularly in English vocabulary learning in inclusive primary school settings.

Thus, this study contributes to the development of research that highlights the role of flexible and student-centered instructional design in supporting diverse students.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study highlight the importance of adaptive pedagogy in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' sensitivity to students' emotional conditions, learning readiness, and class dynamics plays a crucial role in supporting an inclusive learning environment. Therefore, this study suggests that teacher education programs and professional development initiatives emphasize reflective teaching practices, flexible instructional strategies, and fair assessment approaches to better support diverse students in inclusive schools. However, this study has several limitations. This study only involved one teacher and a limited classroom context, which may restrict the generalization of the findings. Future research should involve a larger number of participants and diverse school contexts to provide a broader understanding of the implementation of UDL in inclusive English language learning. Further studies can also explore student learning outcomes to deepen insight into the effectiveness of UDL in inclusive educational settings.

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