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## Analysing Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Mixed-Abilities Classes at Singaraja Montessori School

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the increasing diversity of student profiles in mixed-ability classrooms at Singaraja Montessori School, focusing on the Octopus classroom. The study aims to analyze teachers' strategies in teaching students with different abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles. Using a qualitative descriptive case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving two teachers. The findings show that teachers mainly apply differentiated instruction and peer tutoring to support student diversity. Differentiated instruction is implemented through the learning process, outcomes, and environment, although it focuses more on task difficulty than delivery methods. Meanwhile, peer tutoring promotes collaboration, improves academic understanding, and develops students' social skills. Despite some limitations in classroom design and differentiation practices, these strategies create a more inclusive, engaging, and student-centered learning environment. This study emphasizes the importance of adaptive teaching strategies in supporting mixed-ability students in Montessori education.*

**Keywords:** Mixed-Ability Classes, Montessori Education, Teaching Strategies.

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya keberagaman karakteristik peserta didik dalam kelas dengan kemampuan yang beragam (mixed-ability classroom) di Singaraja Montessori School, khususnya pada kelas Octopus. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi yang digunakan guru dalam mengajar siswa yang memiliki perbedaan kemampuan, latar belakang, dan gaya belajar. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan dua orang guru. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan dua strategi utama, yaitu pembelajaran berdiferensiasi (differentiated instruction) dan tutor sebaya (peer tutoring) untuk mengakomodasi keberagaman siswa. Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi diterapkan melalui diferensiasi proses, produk, dan lingkungan belajar, meskipun implementasinya masih lebih berfokus pada penyesuaian tingkat kesulitan tugas dibandingkan variasi metode penyampaian pembelajaran. Sementara itu, tutor sebaya mendorong kolaborasi antarsiswa, meningkatkan pemahaman akademik, serta mengembangkan keterampilan sosial seperti komunikasi, kerja sama, dan tanggung jawab. Meskipun masih terdapat keterbatasan dalam desain lingkungan belajar dan praktik diferensiasi yang lebih komprehensif, kedua strategi*

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*tersebut mampu menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih inklusif, menarik, dan berpusat pada siswa. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya penerapan strategi pembelajaran yang adaptif untuk mendukung keberhasilan belajar siswa dalam kelas dengan kemampuan yang beragam pada konteks pendidikan Montessori.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Kelas Kemampuan Beragam, Pendidikan Montessori, Strategi Pembelajaran.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the world of education, the diversity of abilities among students is unavoidable. Diversity in learning is very important. In this case, teachers must understand the uniqueness of their students (Rigianti, 2023). Each learner has a different age, level of ability, language background, and learning style. This concept is called mixed-abilities classes (Heng et al., 2023). In this class, students have different strengths and weaknesses, and they also have different approaches to learning. However, the existence of students with different abilities can also create good opportunities in the learning environment, because students can interact and collaborate in learning. With mixed-abilities classes, students can also learn with their friends from different classes (Hove, 2022). In mixed-abilities students can learn from each other, help each other, and understand each other in the same class (Bhandari et al., 2025).

Montessori education is a child-centered approach developed by Dr. Maria Montessori (Saha & Adhikari, 2023). The Montessori system in Singaraja applies a mixed-abilities classes system that combines three levels of classes from grades 1, 2, and 3, and combines three levels of classes from grades 4,5, and 6. This combined class is called the Octopus class and Rainbow class. In the Octopus class at Singaraja Montessori School, there is a diversity of differences, from language, background, age, and also differences in the abilities of the students. Mixed-abilities in Montessori education is very harmonious because the Montessori learning model combines students of different ages, backgrounds, language styles, and also different learning styles, with this, they will be able to appreciate each other, help each other, respect, and also understand each other in the classroom (Hasanah et al., 2024). In the Octopus class at Singaraja Montessori School, there are several children with special needs, as well as children without special needs. Therefore, the Octopus class is also an inclusive class at Singaraja Montessori School. Montessori education also supports an inclusive learning environment where children of different ages can learn together by sharing the abilities each child possesses (Agustin, 2020). This supports their social and academic development as they learn by teaching each other. It also provides a fun and diverse learning experience for children (Muarifah Ngewa & Kamariah Hasis, 2020). Mixed-abilities, a unique approach to Montessori education, allows for collaboration and social interaction between older and younger children in the classroom. In addition to mixed-abilities, Montessori also supports individualized learning, where each child can learn according to their own interests to explore their interests and talents. Therefore, Montessori education not only focuses on their academic achievements, but also focuses on character development, independence, a high sense of socialization, and also focuses on their self-confidence. With Montessori Education using a mixed-abilities approach to create a supportive

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environment for all children, Montessori Education also supports a more inclusive and respectful education.

The background challenges faced by teachers in teaching mixed-abilities classes at Singaraja Montessori School illustrate the diverse nature of inclusive education. At Singaraja Montessori School, where grades 1, 2, and 3 are combined into a single class, this provides a unique learning experience. Teachers also have challenges in teaching with this mixed-abilities approach. One of the challenges experienced by teachers is that there are differences in the ability levels of children. This is due to their different backgrounds. Teachers must be able to understand each of their needs (Tavares, 2023). Teachers must also design an activity where this learning activity can be accessed or done by all learners in the class (Farley & Burbules, 2022). Teachers must also understand the character of each learner to facilitate the learning process, because in the classroom, there are different class levels (Zydziumaite et al., 2022). The challenges that are often faced by a teacher who teaches a mixed-abilities class are also faced with a variety of interactions carried out by students with different abilities, such as children who have a faster way of learning may find it a little difficult with children who have a slightly slower way of learning, and for children who have delays in learning also feel depressed and left behind in terms of learning (Altohami et al., 2022).

Hence, to face this challenge, a teacher must have good classroom management skills, so that things like this can be easily overcome in a class that uses a mixed-abilities approach (Altohami et al., 2022). This will also create a unique atmosphere and learning environment, and also, students with different backgrounds can be motivated by their friends in the classroom (Garcia-Peinado, 2024). The challenges faced are the limitations in the training provided. There are many educators or teachers who do not have experience in teaching a class with students of different abilities and also from different grade levels. This can also be said to be an obstacle for teachers because they will have difficulty in implementing teaching strategies that they can do effectively (Husnaini et al., 2024). Thus, schools need to provide support for them in the form of providing support such as training adequate training for teachers to develop their skills in dealing with mixed classrooms (Kottacheruvu & Jampa, 2024). With this, Singaraja Montessori School can continue to be committed to providing solutions, understanding the challenges that exist, and creating an inclusive and quality learning environment for their learners.

Effective teaching strategies to accommodate students with different abilities and backgrounds are relevant in today's education. In this increasingly diverse world, where a class has different diversity, these differences can come from the learners' diverse abilities, different language backgrounds, diverse cultural backgrounds, and also their different learning styles (Almujab, 2023). So, teachers need to meet the needs of students in this case, so that learners can get the opportunity to learn effectively. The main reason for this is that effective teaching strategies are very helpful in creating an inclusive learning environment (Prima, 2024). Students are in a good learning environment, can be appreciated and also accepted, and then they will be more involved in the learning process in the

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classroom. By meeting the different abilities of learners' backgrounds, teachers can reduce gaps in the learning process, provide motivation, and also increase the confidence of learners (Sutrisno et al., 2023). By understanding that each child has a different ability to learn, teachers can design engaging activities in the classroom that not only benefit their academic needs but also support their social interaction and emotional development. For instance, project-based learning, collaborative learning, and technology-enabled learning can also help to create a more engaging learning experience. Besides, by implementing inclusive learning strategies, teachers can also help students in creating a learning environment that has a sense of tolerance and helps develop a sense of empathy in students.

This approach is carried out in one class because in the classroom there is a variety of diversity that is owned by students in one class. They have different family backgrounds, different language backgrounds, different cultural backgrounds, and different learning styles from each learner.

The research gap is that there is limited research on mixed-ability classrooms in Montessori environments, especially on combining different grade levels in one class. Moreover, there is also a lack of training for teachers in dealing with diverse classrooms, especially in the Montessori setting, which makes it difficult for teachers to implement inclusive learning strategies. Departing from that, the novelty of this research lies in the researcher's intention to conduct a study on analyzing teachers' strategies in teaching mixed-abilities classes at Singaraja Montessori School. However, there has been no similar research on analyzing teachers' strategies in teaching mixed-ability classes at Singaraja Montessori School, which have different language backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, ability backgrounds, and learning styles. Therefore, it is an opportunity for researchers to conduct research on how teachers' strategies in teaching these mixed classes. This research is also expected to provide new insights and information on the use of the mixed-abilities approach in mixed classrooms.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to investigate teachers' strategies in teaching mixed-ability classes at Singaraja Montessori School. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by teachers in real classroom contexts, particularly in combined classes consisting of students with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles. The subjects of this study were two teachers who teach in the mixed-ability classroom, as they play a key role in designing and implementing instructional strategies. The object of this study was the teaching strategies used in mixed-ability classes and the challenges encountered during their implementation. Data were collected through three techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine teaching practices and classroom interaction. Interviews were carried out to explore teachers' perspectives, experiences, and challenges. Documentation, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and classroom environment, was used to support and validate the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result from the qualitative research conducted in the Octopus class at Singaraja Montessori School employs two primary strategies in teaching mixed-ability students, namely differentiated instruction and peer tutoring. These strategies are implemented to accommodate students' diverse abilities, learning styles, and educational backgrounds within the same classroom.

### **The Strategies Teachers Use to Teach Mixed-Abilities Classes at Singaraja Montessori School**

The findings indicate that the teacher applied both differentiated instruction and peer tutoring to accommodate the diverse characteristics of learners in the mixed-ability classroom. The implementation of each strategy is presented in the following sections.

#### *Differentiated Instruction*

Differentiated instruction is applied through three main aspects: process, product, and learning environment (Fitria, 2026). In terms of process, teachers adjust learning activities based on students' ability levels. Higher-ability students are encouraged to engage in group discussions and collaborative tasks, while lower-ability students receive more structured guidance and step-by-step instruction (Rafi & Pourdana, 2023). The use of visual aids such as flashcards also supports different learning styles, particularly for visual learners (Qasserras, 2024). This finding aligns with the concept of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes flexibility in teaching to meet diverse learner needs.

In terms of product, differentiation is mainly reflected in the variation of worksheet difficulty levels (Aeti et al., 2025). Students are given tasks ranging from simple to more complex according to their abilities (Siefer et al., 2021). For instance, first-grade students focus on basic recognition and simple responses, second-grade students construct sentences, and third-grade students complete more complex tasks involving analysis. Although this approach demonstrates the implementation of differentiated products, it is still limited, as students are not yet fully provided with diverse ways to express their understanding, such as through creative projects or presentations.

Regarding the learning environment, teachers create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere by providing additional assistance to students who need it (Awais Irshad et al., 2024). In some cases, students requiring extra support are taught in smaller groups or separate sessions in a quieter environment. This strategy helps students feel more comfortable and focused, particularly those who struggle in the regular classroom setting (Pratiwi, 2025). However, environmental differentiation is primarily focused on support and attention, with limited variation in physical classroom arrangements or flexible learning spaces (Yesil & Saralar-Aras, 2024).

#### *Peer Tutoring*

Peer tutoring is implemented as a complementary strategy to support collaborative learning (Tang et al., 2021). The process begins with identifying students' abilities through observation, assessment, and analysis of their work. Based on this identification, teachers work with heterogeneous groups of students with different ability levels.

In the implementation stage, higher-ability students act as peer tutors who assist their classmates in understanding the material (Anggriani et al., 2023). This creates a two-way interaction where students actively engage in the learning process. The teacher plays a role as a facilitator by monitoring group activities, providing guidance when necessary, and ensuring that learning objectives are achieved (Dumasari et al., 2024).

The results show that peer tutoring not only improves students' academic understanding but also enhances their social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and responsibility. Students become more confident in expressing their ideas and more comfortable asking questions to their peers (Huang, 2021). This finding is consistent with collaborative learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in knowledge construction.

Furthermore, the evaluation and reflection stage indicates that peer tutoring contributes to a more interactive and student-centered learning environment (Ishaka et al., 2026). Teachers can assess both students' academic progress and the effectiveness of group interactions (Rafiuddin & Darmawan, 2023). Feedback provided during this stage helps students improve their understanding and attitude toward learning.

**Table 1. Summary of Key Findings from the Results Section: Instructional Strategies in Mixed-Ability Classrooms**

Major Strategy	Implementation Patterns	Pedagogical Focus	Observed Outcome
Differentiated Instruction	Teachers adjusted instructional processes according to learner readiness, including guided instruction for lower-performing students and collaborative tasks for advanced learners. Learning materials were modified through tiered worksheets and visual supports.	Academic accessibility, individual pacing, and task adaptation.	Students were able to engage with learning tasks at an appropriate level of challenge, and visual scaffolds increased participation among visual learners.
Differentiation of Process	Classroom activities were structured differently based on student ability, ranging from direct support to independent group interaction.	Learning engagement and instructional flexibility.	Higher participation in group interaction and improved task completion among heterogeneous learners.

Differentiation of Product	Assignments were sequenced according to grade and competency progression rather than uniform output expectations.	Performance alignment with the developmental stage.	Students demonstrated understanding through progressively complex tasks, although output options remained limited.
Differentiation of Environment	Additional support was provided through small-group sessions or quieter learning spaces for students needing focused assistance.	Emotional comfort and concentration support.	The learner requiring extra assistance showed improved focus and classroom comfort.
Peer Tutoring	Higher-performing students acted as academic facilitators within heterogeneous groups after teacher identification of learning profiles.	Collaborative learning and social interaction.	Increased confidence, peer communication, mutual support, and active classroom participation.

The implementation of differentiated instruction and peer tutoring in the Octopus class reflects the principles of student-centered learning, which are central to Montessori education (Hidayat et al., 2024). Both strategies enable teachers to address the diversity of learners while promoting independence and collaboration among students.

However, the findings also suggest that the implementation of these strategies is not without limitations. Differentiation tends to focus more on task difficulty rather than on offering multiple modes of learning expression (Goyibova et al., 2025). Similarly, environmental adjustments are still limited in terms of physical classroom design. These findings indicate the need for further development in applying more comprehensive differentiation practices.

Despite these challenges, the combination of differentiated instruction and peer tutoring proves to be effective in supporting inclusive education (Nardacchione & Peconio, 2022). These strategies help bridge the gap between students with different ability levels and create a more engaging and supportive learning environment (Marmet, 2023). Therefore, they can be considered appropriate and relevant approaches for teaching mixed-ability classes, particularly in contexts similar to Montessori classrooms (Kersna et al., 2025). To further enhance the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, teachers need to expand their practices beyond adjusting task difficulty to incorporating various learning modalities, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches (Afdilah & Bahri, 2026). Effective differentiation should consider students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles to ensure that all learners can access the material in meaningful ways (Deniz, 2025). In this context, providing choices in how students demonstrate their understanding, such as through presentations, creative projects, or written tasks, can foster deeper engagement and ownership of learning (Zitha et al., 2023). Additionally, integrating flexible grouping strategies can further support individualized learning while maintaining opportunities for collaboration among students.

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Moreover, improving the physical and social learning environment is essential to fully support student-centered learning. Drawing on the principles of Maria Montessori, the classroom should be intentionally designed to encourage independence, exploration, and interaction (Leuwol et al., 2023). This includes organizing learning materials in accessible ways, creating designated areas for different types of activities, and ensuring that the classroom layout promotes movement and collaboration (Altaee & Al-Kazzaz, 2024). A well-structured environment not only supports differentiated instruction but also enhances the effectiveness of peer tutoring, as students can interact more freely and confidently (Deniz, 2025). Therefore, optimizing both instructional strategies and classroom design is crucial for creating a holistic and inclusive learning experience in mixed-ability classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that implementing differentiated instruction and peer tutoring in the Octopus class at Singaraja Montessori School effectively addresses the challenges of teaching in mixed-ability classrooms by accommodating students' diverse abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds. These strategies align with the research purpose of analysing teachers' approaches in such contexts by promoting student-centered learning, collaboration, and inclusivity. Although the findings indicate certain limitations, particularly in the scope of differentiated and classroom environment design, the overall application of these strategies demonstrates positive impacts on students' academic engagement and social development. Therefore, this study contributes to the field of education by providing empirical insights into practical teaching strategies within a Montessori mixed-ability setting, highlighting the importance of combining instructional flexibility and collaborative learning to support inclusive education. Additionally, it offers valuable references for educators and future researchers seeking to develop more comprehensive and adaptive teaching practices for diverse classroom environments.

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the head of Singaraja Montessori School for granting permission to conduct this study. Special appreciation is extended to the teachers of the Octopus class who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights throughout the research process. Their valuable contributions were essential in providing guidance, feedback, and support throughout this study. In addition, appreciation is given to all students who participated directly or indirectly in this research.

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