



Exploring Teacher Strategies in Using Flashcards to Teach English Vocabulary in an Inclusive Classroom at Singaraja Montessori School

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Abstract. This study explores teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in an inclusive Montessori-based classroom at the Singaraja Montessori School in Buleleng, Bali. This study employs a qualitative approach with a basic qualitative research design. Data were collected through classroom observations conducted on February 23, February 27, March 3, and March 6, 2026; in-depth interviews with two English teachers conducted on March 16, 2026; and analysis of documents, including Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), flashcards, and worksheets. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, and data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings indicate that the teachers implemented six interrelated strategies: drill-based, game-based, peer-teaching, questioning, worksheet-based, and multimodal teaching. These strategies were systematically combined in each lesson and aligned with Montessori principles, namely learning at one's own pace, freedom within certain limits, mixed-age classes, the teacher as a guide, a prepared environment, and sensory-based learning. Teachers also faced four main challenges: student diversity, supporting students with special needs, classroom management, and instructional differentiation. These findings confirm that the effective use of flashcards in teaching English vocabulary in an inclusive Montessori classroom requires teachers to thoughtfully integrate differentiated instruction with Montessori principles in every learning activity.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction; English Vocabulary; Flashcards; Inclusive Classrooms; Montessori Method; Teaching Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mastery of English vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning, particularly in inclusive classrooms where students have highly diverse learning characteristics. In the context of inclusive education, every student, including those with special needs is entitled to equal learning opportunities and meaningful participation within the same classroom environment (Padmadewi et al., 2024). The implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia is based on Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 70 of 2009, which affirms the right of students with special needs to receive a quality education in regular schools (Lisyawati et al., 2023), in line with the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 4 (Wiarsih & Aziez, 2021).

One of the media frequently used in English vocabulary learning is flashcards, which are visual-based cards that combine images and text, designed to present vocabulary concretely and systematically (Oktaviani & Isdaryanti, 2024). The flexibility of flashcards allows teachers to adjust the size, color, content, and difficulty level according to each student's needs, making them highly suitable for inclusive settings (Adella & Lestari, 2024). This adaptability aligns with the principle of Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson et al., 2014), which emphasizes the adjustment of content, processes, and outcomes based on students' readiness and learning profiles.

The Montessori method implemented at the Singaraja Montessori School is based on three core principles: experience-based learning, freedom of choice, and a prepared environment (Laksmi et al., 2021). These principles naturally align with the use of adaptive and multisensory flashcards. The Montessori assessment system at this school tracks student progress through observation categories, sometimes (s), frequently (f), and consistently (c) rather than through standard numerical grades, allowing teachers to authentically monitor each student's development and adjust instruction responsively. One of the school's key distinguishing features is its mixed-age classroom structure, where students from various grade levels learn together, creating a natural learning dynamic in which more capable students provide natural support to those needing additional assistance (Melinda Puspita Sari Jaya et al., 2022). The school also collaborates with external therapists to ensure consistency between classroom learning and therapeutic support, thereby providing holistic services for students with special needs.

The characteristics of students in the Octopus Class serve as a crucial context for this study. Students with Down syndrome generally require motor-based activities and respond better to flashcards featuring large images and high contrast. Students with autism require consistent and predictable visual structures, as well as familiar colors to reduce sensory anxiety. Students with slow learners require more time and repeated exposure to process information. Students with ADHD respond best to interactive and varied flashcard activities to maintain their focus.

Previous research has generally focused on the effectiveness of flashcards in special education schools (Nursalim & Mari, 2022); (Tyas, 2022); (Amelia, 2021) or conventional inclusive schools (Stefani & Samsiyah, 2021). However, no study has specifically explored how teachers design and implement flashcard strategies in Montessori-based inclusive classrooms. This study filled that gap by examining teachers' strategies in using flashcards and the challenges they faced in the Octopus Class at the Singaraja Montessori School.

This study aims to: (1) explore the teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary to both regular students and students with special needs within the Montessori approach. (2) identify the challenges faced by teachers in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in inclusive classrooms, particularly in addressing the learning needs of regular students and students with special needs. This study is based on two research questions: (1) What are the teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary to both regular students and students with special needs in the Montessori approach? and (2) What challenges do teachers face in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in inclusive

classrooms, particularly in meeting the needs of regular students and students with special needs?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a basic qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2014). This design was chosen because the study aimed to gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of the strategies and challenges faced by teachers in using flashcards in a natural classroom setting, without statistically measuring the effectiveness of the media.

The study was conducted at the Singaraja Montessori School, specifically in the Octopus Class, a mixed-ability inclusive classroom that integrates students from grades 1 through 3. The research subjects consisted of two English teachers, Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 2 (T2) as primary subjects, 18 students as secondary subjects, and four students with special needs as focus participants: Student T (slow learner), Student DR (autism spectrum disorder), Student E (Down syndrome), and Student KZ (ADHD). Classroom observations were conducted in four sessions on February 23, February 27, March 3, and March 6, 2026. The interviews were conducted on March 16, 2026.

Data were collected using three methods: (1) non-participant classroom observation to document teachers' instructional practices and students' responses; (2) semi-structured indepth interviews with both teachers to explore their strategies, motivations, and challenges; and (3) analysis of documents such as Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and instructional materials, including flashcards and worksheets. Data analysis followed the Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions. Source triangulation and methodological triangulation were applied to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. The Implementation of Teaching Strategies Based on Student Types in an Inclusive Classroom.

Student Type	Drill	Game Based	Peer Teaching	Questioning	Worksheet	Multi Modal
Regular Students	Pronunciation practice and vocabulary reinforcement	Guessing games and picture hunts to	Higher-ability students	Random questioning to check	Matching, circling, fill-in-the-blank,	Visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital

Slow Learner	Intensive repetition over several weeks until mastery	boost motivation Maintain motivation and engagement	support peers Peer support before teacher assistance	understanding on the spot Lower difficulty level, slower pace	and writing tasks Simplified matching and circling tasks	media combined Visual and audio combination with repetition Simple worksheets adapted to ability; no high expectations Cutting, pasting, and arranging pictures Same as regular students; cognitive ability allows it
Autism	Repetition to maintain focus and strengthen comprehension	Flexible use based on students' interests	Peer support before teacher steps in	Simple questions; not pushed if not ready	Simple worksheets adapted to ability; no high expectations	Simple worksheets adapted to ability; no high expectations Engaging images, sounds, and visual activities
Down Syndrome	Very intensive repetition due to the constant need for reinforcement	Simple image-based games to boost interest	Peer support for simple vocabulary	Focus on recognizing images or sounds	Cutting, pasting, and arranging pictures	Engaging images, sounds, and visual activities
ADHD	Consistent repetition adjusted to focus level	Highly effective for maintaining focus and engagement	Peer interaction to sustain engagement	Maintains active participation	Same as regular students; cognitive ability allows it	Gestures, sounds, and interactive activities

Table 2. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Using Flashcards in an Inclusive Classroom.

Aspect	Challenges	Description
Student Diversity	Mixed ability	Significant ability gaps require teachers to adjust flashcard use for each learner constantly.
	Mixed grade and culture	Students from grades 1–3 with different cultural backgrounds vary in vocabulary comprehension.
Students with Special Needs	Limited learning capacity	Flashcard use is focused on basic vocabulary mastery without uniform learning targets.
	Need for intensive repetition	Longer and more frequent repetition is needed to retain vocabulary.
	Difficulty maintaining focus	Flashcard activities must be made more engaging and flexible to sustain attention.
Classroom Management	Difficulty dividing attention	Many students need help at the same time, making individual attention difficult.
	Classroom complexity	Not all students can learn in the same way or follow instructions at the same time.
Instructional Challenges	Material differentiation	Flashcard types and worksheets must be adapted to each student's ability level.
	Different learning pace	Students progress at different rates; uniform achievement at the same time is not possible.

Teachers' Strategies in Using Flashcards

The findings indicate that teachers in the Octopus Class employ six interconnected strategies when using flashcards to teach English vocabulary. These strategies are not applied separately but are systematically integrated into each stage of learning, forming a coherent and responsive instructional system grounded in Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson et al., 2014) and core Montessori principles. Based on observations conducted on February 23, February 27, March 3, and March 6, 2026, and interviews conducted on March 16, 2026, the following strategies were identified.

Drill Strategy

The first strategy involves the teacher repeatedly showing flashcards while students verbally repeat the vocabulary. For example, when teaching animal vocabulary, the teacher showed a flashcard displaying a picture of a cat while pronouncing the word aloud. Students then repeated the pronunciation several times before identifying the same image among other flashcards. This activity was repeated across multiple sessions to strengthen vocabulary retention. This strategy reflects the Montessori principle of individualized learning tailored to each student's own pace (Mavrič, 2020). For Student T (slow learner), the same vocabulary is reviewed intensively for 2–3 weeks without pressure to move forward, allowing learning to proceed according to each student's developmental readiness. As Teacher 2 (T2) stated in the interview: *"Slow learners need repetition; for English lessons, we cover the material at the same time for about 2-3 weeks until they understand and remember it."* Teacher 1 (T1) further confirmed: *"For slow learners, we'll definitely repeat the material up to five times... and go over it again the following week so they don't forget."* For regular students, drill activities are extended to broader language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For students with special needs, repetition is more intensive, and the delivery method is adapted to each student's specific condition -combined with visual stimuli for Student DR (autism), varied with movement for Student KZ (ADHD), and sustained continuously for Student E (Down syndrome), who tends to forget easily without regular reinforcement.



Figure 1. Implementation of a Learning Strategy Through Vocabulary Drills using Worksheets and Teacher Guidance.

Game-Based Strategy

The second strategy incorporates activities such as picture hunts and guessing games. This strategy reflects the Montessori principle of freedom within certain limits (Laksmi et al., 2021). Teacher 2 (T2) explained: *"In the games, students are randomly selected to answer flashcards; those who answer correctly earn points or stars to keep them motivated."* Teachers 1 (T1) added: *"Usually, these are games like a picture hunt, where the teacher hides a picture and the students look for it... or guessing games using gestures and sounds."* This strategy proved highly effective in maintaining the engagement of Student KZ (ADHD) through student-led, movement-based activities.

For Student T (slow learner), games are used to reinforce basic vocabulary through simpler instructions and a slower pace. For Student DR (autism), games are more effective when they have a clear structure and consistent visual stimulation. For Student E (Down syndrome), games serve as repetition presented in a more relaxed, non-pressured environment. Randomly selecting students during games ensures all students remain actively involved without over-relying on more confident learners.



Figure 2. Students Participating in a Game-Based Vocabulary Activity Involving Movement and Interaction (Picture Hunt Activity).

Peer Teaching Strategy

The third strategy directly embodies the Montessori principle of mixed-age classrooms (Melinda Puspita Sari Jaya et al., 2022). More capable or older students naturally support peers who need assistance. Teacher 2 (T2) noted: *"If a student is having trouble, they should first try to figure it out with their classmates... and if they're still having trouble, then the teacher will step in to help."* Teacher 1 (T1) added: *"Teacher pair higher-performing students with those who are struggling so they can help each other."* Students T and E particularly benefited from

this non-intimidating form of peer support. Peer teaching not only benefits students who are struggling but also reinforces vocabulary retention in more capable students through the act of explaining, while embodying the inclusive principle that all students participate without feeling singled out.



Figure 3. Peer Interaction During Vocabulary Learning Activities, Where Students Assist Each Other using Flashcards and Worksheets.

Questioning Strategy

The fourth strategy reflects the Montessori principle of the teacher as guide (Fadhilah & Supriyanto, 2024). Teachers use questions not merely to test memory but as a formative observation tool. Teacher 1 (T1) stated that instruction would not proceed to new vocabulary until at least 50% of students demonstrated understanding: *"The teacher will ask each student individually; only when students have understood at least 50% of the material will we move on to the next topic."* Questions are individually adapted: repeated more slowly for Student T; linked to consistent visual cues for Student DR; combined with direct teacher modeling for Student E; and delivered briefly and directly for Student KZ. This adaptive questioning also serves as formative assessment, guiding real-time instructional decisions in every lesson session.



Figure 4. The Implementation of Questioning Strategy, Where The Teacher Asks Questions While Using Visual Media to Engage Students.

Worksheet-Based Strategy

The fifth strategy reflects the Montessori principle of the prepared environment (Dinda Nur Afifah, 2020). Worksheets are systematically differentiated by difficulty level: matching and circling tasks for students with special needs and beginners; cut-and-paste activities for Student E (Down syndrome) to simultaneously support motor development and vocabulary learning; and writing tasks for more proficient regular students. Teacher 2 (T2) stated: *"Beginners should focus more on matching and circling exercises, while those who are more advanced can move on to writing."* Teacher 1 (T1) added: *"For students whose fine motor skills still need practice, we give them cut-and-paste or line-drawing exercises."*



Figure 5. Students Working on Worksheets While Still Interacting with Peers in a Small Group Setting.

Multi-Modal Teaching Strategy

The sixth strategy reflects the Montessori principle of sensory and experiential learning Azhari et al. (2024) and Krian et al., (2025). Students interact with vocabulary simultaneously through multiple modalities: visual (flashcards and video), auditory (pronunciation and teacher verbalization), kinesthetic (movement and gestures), and tactile (physical card manipulation). Teacher 2 (T2) noted: *"Flashcards are used in combination with TV or videos, as well as games, to make them more engaging for children."* Teacher 1 (T1) added: *"Teachers combine flashcards with sounds and gestures... for example, when teaching about animals, they can use sounds and movements to make it easier to understand."* This approach was especially beneficial for Student E, who responded positively to motor-based activities, and Student DR, who benefited from consistent and predictable visual stimulation. For Student T, the combination of repeated visual and auditory input reinforced understanding gradually, while for Student KZ, movement and sound sustained engagement more effectively than verbal instruction alone.



Figure 6. Students' Engagement in Multi-Modal Learning Activities Through Reading, Writing, and Peer Interaction During Vocabulary Learning.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Using Flashcards (RQ2)

Based on the table above, teachers face various complex challenges in using flashcards in a Montessori-based inclusive classroom. The researcher elaborates on each challenge in detail below.

Student Diversity

The first challenge concerns the classroom composition of students from multiple grade levels (grades 1–3) with varying abilities and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As an intentional feature of the Montessori model (Melinda Puspita Sari Jaya et al., 2022), this diversity requires teachers to simultaneously manage multiple levels of flashcard content, worksheet complexity, and vocabulary targets. Teacher 2 (T2) described this directly: *"The challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms with students of varying abilities, mixed grade levels, diverse cultural backgrounds, and both students with special needs and typically developing students mean that teachers cannot set high expectations for them."* Teacher 1 (T1) added: *"One of the challenges stems from the mixed grade levels, which requires creating questions and adjusting their difficulty to accommodate students ranging from those who learn more slowly to those who learn more quickly."* This aligns with Onyishi & Sefotho (2020), who note that differentiated instruction demands significant preparation time and substantial professional competence.

Supporting Students with Special Needs

The second challenge involves simultaneously meeting the distinct adaptive requirements of each student with special needs. Student KZ (ADHD) requires short, movement-based tasks; Student DR (autism) needs consistent and predictable flashcard designs; Student T (slow learner) requires intensive repetition over several weeks; and Student E (Down syndrome) benefits from concrete, motor-based activities. Teacher 2 (T2) stated:

"Teachers shouldn't set their expectations too high for them; they might only understand a few words, and we can't force them to master everything 100% or move on to the next level."

Managing these needs simultaneously places considerable demands on teachers, consistent with Sugiarti & Maulana (2025) and Li (2025). The school's collaboration with external therapists helps maintain instructional coherence between the classroom and therapeutic settings.

Classroom Management

The third challenge is the difficulty of dividing attention among multiple students requiring simultaneous individual support, most acutely during worksheet sessions. Teacher 2 (T2) noted: *"The teacher gets a little overwhelmed when all the students call out to her one by one; while she's focused on checking Student A's answers, Student B will call out and ask a question."* Teacher 1 (T1) confirmed: *"Managing an inclusive classroom is a challenge, because not all students are willing to sit still, and sometimes there are students who really need special support."* This reflects the structural tension between the Montessori ideal of student independence and the practical demands of inclusive education (Andriyan et al., 2023), suggesting that inclusive Montessori environments would greatly benefit from additional support staff such as shadow teachers or co-teachers.

Instructional Differentiation

The fourth challenge involves continuous real-time adjustment of question levels, drill pace, game structures, and learning targets within each session. This requires teachers to make spontaneous adaptive decisions based on observed student responses. Teacher 1 (T1) explained: *"If the students have understood the material, we'll move on to another topic; those who haven't will be given additional instruction the next day until they fully understand."* This level of instructional flexibility reflects a high degree of professional expertise, consistent with Zinafis (2023) and Tomlinson et al. (2014), who emphasize that differentiated instruction demands teacher competencies that go far beyond technical knowledge of methods alone.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that effective flashcard-based vocabulary instruction in an inclusive Montessori classroom is not a simple act but a complex, multi-layered professional practice. The six strategies identified, drill, game-based, peer teaching, questioning, worksheet-based, and multimodal teaching, do not operate as isolated techniques. Instead, they function as an integrated instructional system in which each strategy reinforces and complements the others within a single lesson sequence.

A central finding is the deliberate alignment between each teaching strategy and a corresponding Montessori principle. The drill strategy operationalizes self-paced learning by allowing Student T to repeat the same vocabulary over several weeks without pressure. The game-based strategy reflects freedom within limits by giving Student KZ structured yet movement-rich choices. Peer teaching activates the mixed-age classroom dynamic by enabling older or more capable students to organically support those who struggle. The questioning strategy positions the teacher as a formative observer rather than a knowledge transmitter, consistent with the Montessori teacher-as-guide principle. The worksheet-based strategy reflects the prepared environment through differentiated tasks that match each student's readiness level. Finally, the multimodal strategy embodies sensory learning by engaging students through visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile channels simultaneously.

This integration echoes the Differentiated Instruction framework proposed by Tomlinson et al. (2014), which emphasizes adjusting content, process, and product to meet diverse learner needs. In this classroom, content differentiation is visible in the variety of flashcard types (picture-only, word-picture, CVC phonics, reading cards); process differentiation appears in the range of activities employed; and product differentiation is seen in the varied output formats oral responses, worksheets, cut-and-paste activities, and written tasks. This three-dimensional differentiation confirms that flashcard use in this context is purposefully designed and systematically responsive.

Regarding the challenges, the four categories identified student diversity, supporting students with special needs, classroom management, and instructional differentiation collectively point to a fundamental structural tension inherent in inclusive Montessori education. On one hand, the Montessori model ideally positions students as self-directed learners in a carefully prepared environment. On the other hand, the reality of inclusive education requires teachers to intervene intensively and individually, often simultaneously, for multiple students with highly varied needs. This tension is particularly acute during worksheet sessions, where the demand for individual attention can overwhelm even experienced teachers, as reported by both Teacher 2 (T2) and Teacher 1 (T1).

This finding is consistent with (Andriyan et al. (2023), who argue that inclusive classrooms require structural support beyond what a single teacher can realistically provide, and with Onyishi & Sefotho (2020), who note that the professional demands of differentiated instruction are substantially higher than those of conventional teaching. The challenge of instructional differentiation in particular requiring real-time, spontaneous adjustment to question levels, drill pace, game structures, and learning targets reflects the degree of expertise

that inclusive Montessori teaching demands. As Zinafis (2023) and Tomlinson et al. (2014) note, this level of adaptive teaching goes far beyond technical proficiency and requires sustained professional judgment developed through experience.

Taken together, these findings affirm that effective use of flashcards in inclusive Montessori vocabulary instruction requires teachers to simultaneously hold two professional responsibilities: faithfully applying Montessori principles as a pedagogical foundation, and flexibly enacting differentiated instruction as a responsive strategy for individual student needs. Neither dimension alone is sufficient it is their deliberate integration that makes flashcard-based instruction both inclusive and effective in this context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers at the Singaraja Montessori School employ six systematic and interrelated strategies in using flashcards for teaching English vocabulary: drills strategy, game-based strategy, peer teaching strategy, questioning strategy, worksheet-based strategy, and multimodal teaching strategy. These strategies are not applied in isolation but form a coherent instructional system that intentionally integrates differentiated instruction and Montessori principles. Each strategy corresponds to a specific Montessori principle: repeated practice with self-paced learning; game-based learning with freedom within certain limits; peer-to-peer teaching with mixed-age classes; questioning with the teacher's role as a guide; worksheet-based learning with a prepared environment; and multimodal teaching with sensory and experience-based learning. Teachers also face four major challenges: managing student diversity in mixed-age inclusive classrooms; simultaneously supporting the individual needs of students with Down syndrome, Autisme, slow learners, and ADHD; classroom management demands arising from the tension between Montessori ideals and the realities of inclusive education; and the ongoing professional demands of implementing real-time instructional differentiation. These challenges underscore that effective flashcard-based vocabulary instruction in inclusive Montessori classrooms is a complex professional practice, requiring the integration of inclusive pedagogy, Montessori principles, and differentiated instruction. It is recommended that teachers continue to systematically develop and combine the six identified strategies, while documenting their adaptations of flashcards as material for professional reflection. Schools are encouraged to provide a more varied range of flashcard materials, digital tools such as classroom TV screens for video-based vocabulary reinforcement, and professional development focused on inclusive Montessori pedagogy, including the addition of support staff such as shadow teachers or teaching assistants for high-demand sessions.

Future research could investigate the long-term vocabulary retention effects of these strategies or develop practical implementation guidelines for teachers in similar inclusive Montessori settings.

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