

# Making Quality Learning for Diverse Learners: Strategies of Teachers in Heterogeneous Classrooms

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Publication Date: 2025/02/08

**Abstract:** This study examined the strategies employed by educators to ensure quality learning for heterogeneous learners in the classroom. Eight (8) primary grade teachers from a public school in Matina District, Davao City, participated in this research. Data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted via virtual conferencing and limited face-to-face interactions, adhering to health protocols. Thematic analysis identified two key strategies utilized by teachers: differentiated instruction and collaborative learning. The challenges faced included individual differences among students and insufficient learning materials. Insights derived from this study highlighted the importance of professional development training on innovative teaching strategies and the need for adequate learning resources in schools. Overall, this study aimed to provide valuable insights regarding the strategies that teachers use to promote quality learning for heterogeneous learners. The knowledge gained from this study is significant for improving the delivery of education in schools.

**Keywords:** *Quality Learning, Diverse Learners, Strategies, Heterogeneous Classrooms.*

**How to Cite:** Dinah A. Velasco (2025). Making Quality Learning for Diverse Learners: Strategies of Teachers in Heterogeneous Classrooms. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(1), 1904-1908.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14831450>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The growing diversity in today's classrooms offers both advantages and obstacles for educators who aim to deliver equitable and inclusive educational experiences for every student. Classrooms characterized by a mix of cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds require creative teaching methods that cater to the distinct needs of each learner. This study navigates the strategies utilized by teachers to establish effective learning environments for diverse learners, highlighting methods that promote quality learning engagement.

Lancers (2022) emphasizes the critical importance of quality learning, particularly in primary schools, as a foundation for personal and societal success. It highlights that quality learning enables individuals to achieve their goals, develop skills, and build a strong base for lifelong learning. The role of education extends beyond basic literacy, encompassing critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability in an ever-evolving world. Moreover, the societal benefits of education are underscored, including reducing poverty, increasing productivity, and enhancing the economy and overall standard of living.

Moreover, Shenzhen Oasis International School (2018) highlights achieving high-quality learning through collaborative efforts among schools, teachers, parents, and students. It emphasizes that effective learning is an active process where students are encouraged to explore, research, and apply their knowledge rather than passively receive information. High-quality learning encompasses various aspects, including students' motivation, progress aligned with their abilities, self-awareness, and the ability to transfer knowledge across subjects and real-world contexts. Also, it stresses the importance of self-management, independent and collaborative work, respect for others, critical reflection, and active engagement in learning. The goal is to inspire, challenge, and empower students to become responsible, adaptable learners and global citizens.

Meanwhile, Aluvalu et. al (2017) discusses the dynamics of heterogeneous classrooms, which consist of students with varying learning abilities and proficiencies, unlike homogeneous classrooms where students have similar competencies. It highlights the challenges teachers face in addressing diverse learning needs and emphasizes the importance of group learning strategies in such environments. In heterogeneous classrooms, students collaborate in groups, with assigned roles and tasks, to enhance learning through mutual cooperation. Teachers are responsible for mentoring

students in group learning strategies, ensuring that groups are mixed-ability, and monitoring their progress. Evaluation of group work involves assessing both the collective output and individual contributions, with rubrics playing a key role in ensuring fair and effective assessment.

Similarly, Rogers (2023) stresses that diversity in the classroom can create various challenges, particularly regarding disciplinary issues and the difficulties teachers face in managing students from diverse backgrounds, genders, religions, and languages. It emphasizes that these challenges can be compounded by issues related to equality, inclusion, and school leadership with a fixed mindset. Teachers who lack emotional intelligence or professional flexibility may struggle to prevent or control behavioral problems. Additionally, language barriers may further hinder effective communication, making it harder for students to grasp concepts and for teachers to provide clear instruction.

Explains the concept of heterogeneous groups in educational settings, Lewis (2019) conveys that the practice is based on the idea that students of different abilities can benefit from working together, as positive interdependence is fostered when they collaborate to achieve common educational goals. In contrast to homogeneous groups, where all students are at similar levels, heterogeneous groups intentionally mix students with varying levels of ability, such as pairing high, medium, and low-level readers together. This arrangement allows for peer tutoring, where advanced students can help lower-performing peers, leading to improved learning outcomes for everyone. Instead of isolating students by ability, school administrators create balanced classes that mix students of diverse needs and abilities. Teachers may then use either heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping strategies during instructional periods to support effective learning.

Overall, exploring the challenges and strategies involved in teaching diverse groups of students is essential in creating effective learning environments for all students in heterogeneous groupings. With the growing diversity in classrooms, which demands immediate attention to ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, receive quality education, this study's relevance lies in addressing the need for inclusive teaching strategies that accommodate the varying academic, cultural, and linguistic needs of students, promoting equal learning opportunities for all. By identifying effective teaching methods for heterogeneous classrooms, this study contributes to enhancing educational equity and supporting the success of diverse learners in today's schools.

## II. METHOD

This study explores the strategies of teachers in creating and maintaining effective learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of learners in heterogeneous classrooms. By focusing on the varied backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles of students, the research aims to identify how teachers

ensure that quality learning is accessible to all. A qualitative phenomenological research design is employed to delve into the lived experiences of teachers, providing a deeper understanding of their approaches, challenges, and adaptations in managing diverse classrooms.

Phenomenology, as a research methodology, centers on grasping the collective experiences of educators as they strive to cultivate effective learning environments in diverse classrooms. It delves into how teachers perceive and address the varied needs of their students, highlighting the importance they attribute to different teaching methods. According to Tomaszewski et al. (2020), referencing Flood (2010), the phenomenological approach in qualitative research is particularly adept at uncovering the core of lived experiences. This approach allows for a deeper insight into how teachers' strategies in heterogeneous classrooms resonate with both their own perspectives and those of their students, revealing the profound meanings behind their commitment to enhancing quality education in diverse learning contexts.

In this phenomenological study, eight primary grade teachers from a public school in the Matina District of Davao City were selected as participants. The researcher used in-depth interviews as the primary method for data collection, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the teachers' lived experiences in creating and maintaining effective learning environments for heterogeneous learners. The participants shared both their strategies and the challenges they faced while implementing practices to ensure quality learning for diverse learners.

Meanwhile, on the nature of in-depth interviews, Fontana and Frey (2000) highlight that these interviews can be structured or flexible, which makes them particularly useful for ethnographic studies. In the context of this research, in-depth interviews are used to explore how teachers develop and sustain effective learning environments that address the diverse needs of learners in heterogeneous classrooms. The interviews provide an opportunity to examine the complex teaching strategies used for managing and supporting these diverse learners.

Moreover, this study utilizes purposive sampling to carefully select participants, all of whom are primary grade teachers from public schools in the Matina District of the Davao City Division. This sampling approach is essential for exploring the effective strategies these teachers employ in engaging diverse learners and delivering high-quality education. As established by Chun et al. (2019) and cited in Mwita (2022), purposive sampling is particularly beneficial for gathering insights from individuals who have extensive knowledge about the subject matter. In this study, participants are purposefully chosen based on their substantial experience of over three years in teaching primary grades, ensuring a rich and informed perspective on the topic.

Further, in this study, I followed ethical guidelines throughout the research process. I obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their right to ask questions at any time. Participants also gave me permission to record conversations, and I assured them that all information would remain confidential and used only for academic purposes. I focused on key ethical principles such as respect for individuals, doing good, fairness, consent, and confidentiality, to maintain the study's integrity and build trust with participants.

As qualified researcher, my role as a researcher involves the careful formulation of research inquiries, conducting in-depth interviews with the teachers, and analyzing the data to uncover the strategies they employ in heterogeneous classrooms. Using the method outlined by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and cited in Vinitha (2019), I will categorize and code the participants' responses, drawing out underlying meanings across various themes. This process will allow for a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences, particularly in relation to the challenges and strategies they use to address the diverse learning needs of students. Ultimately, this method will provide rich, nuanced insights that contribute to the study's goal of improving quality learning in diverse classrooms.

Furthermore, the data analysis is conducted through Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), as described by King (2004) and referenced in Dawadi (2020), to extract meaningful themes that capture the strategies and challenges experienced by teachers. This process involves carefully reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews to identify significant patterns that reflect the narratives of the teachers regarding their practices in heterogeneous classrooms. Following the approach outlined by O'Connor and Gibson (2003), the data is organized, categorized, and synthesized into overarching themes, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. The final presentation of the results is structured to offer clear and coherent insights that contribute to understanding how teachers adapt their strategies for diverse learners.

To establish credibility and validity of research findings, environmental triangulation is employed. By collecting data from various school environments, the study compares and integrates insights from different settings, enhancing the robustness of the results. This approach, as highlighted by Vivek (2023), helps strengthen the reliability of the qualitative outcomes by incorporating diverse contexts, reflecting the varied experiences of teachers in implementing strategies for heterogeneous learners. The use of environmental triangulation ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies and challenges teachers face in creating inclusive classrooms.

Overall, this qualitative phenomenological study examines the strategies employed by primary grade teachers to

create and maintain effective learning environments in heterogeneous classrooms, focusing on their lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. Using purposive sampling, eight teachers from public schools in Matina District, Davao City Division, were selected, and in-depth interviews were conducted to gather data on their approaches to addressing diverse learners' needs. The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards and employed thematic content analysis, supported by environmental triangulation, to ensure reliable and meaningful insights into the strategies and challenges of fostering quality learning in diverse educational settings.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents the findings of this study, which delves into the strategies employed by teachers in ensuring quality learning for diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms. Through thematic content analysis of the collected data, key themes emerged, shedding light on the approaches and practices teachers utilize to address the varying needs, abilities, and backgrounds of learners within classroom settings. The themes and findings on the strategies of teachers in making quality learning for heterogeneous learners in the classrooms are as follows:

#### ➤ *Differentiated Instruction.*

One of the strategies identified by participants in delivering quality learning to diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms is the implementation of differentiated instruction. This strategy has proven effective in addressing the varied learning needs of students by tailoring instruction to individual preferences and abilities. Differentiated instruction involves understanding how each student learns best and adapting the curriculum to align with their specific requirement.

This strategy aligns with Ivory (2022), who emphasizes that students possess unique learning styles, and tailoring instruction can effectively address their diverse needs. Beyond simply modifying teaching methods, differentiation extends to adjusting the learning environment based on students' readiness, interests, or social preferences. Moreover, Cambium Learning (2023) supports this approach, highlighting how differentiated instruction engages most students, enhances learning outcomes for the entire classroom, and accommodates both struggling and advanced learners. By utilizing this strategy, teachers create an inclusive learning environment that fosters academic success while streamlining the teaching process.

#### ➤ *Collaborative Learning.*

Another prominent theme that emerged from the strategies of teachers in ensuring quality learning for diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms is collaborative learning. The participants' narratives highlight that collaborative

learning is an effective approach, enabling students to learn with the assistance and support of their classmates in a diverse classroom setting. Valamis (2022) describes collaborative learning as an educational strategy where learners work together in groups to solve problems, complete tasks, or acquire new knowledge, thereby fostering active engagement with information and concepts beyond rote memorization.

In similar vein, Nguyen (2020) defines collaborative learning as a broad term encompassing various approaches that involve joint intellectual efforts among students, or between students and teachers. These efforts often take the form of group work where individuals from diverse backgrounds and learning levels collaborate to achieve shared educational goals. This strategy not only enhances academic understanding but also fosters inclusivity and mutual respect among learners in heterogeneous classroom.

Meanwhile, teachers in primary grades encounter significant challenges in delivering quality learning to diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms. The complexities of addressing varied learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds among students often make this task particularly demanding. The participating teachers shared their experiences, shedding light on the difficulties they face in creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. These challenges reflect the intricate nature of catering to the needs of heterogeneous learners while maintaining educational quality. The specific themes that highlight the obstacles teachers encounter in their efforts to provide equitable and meaningful learning experiences for diverse learners are as follows:

#### ➤ *Individual Differences.*

Based on the narratives of the participants, one of the significant challenges in providing quality learning to diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms is addressing individual differences. The participants highlighted that the varying abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles of students often pose considerable difficulties in such settings. Dumont (2017) emphasizes that public school systems worldwide face the dual challenge of educating large numbers of students efficiently while also catering to each student's unique needs. This challenge becomes even more complex in the context of increasing diversity brought about by waves of international migration, requiring schools, teachers, and education systems to adapt to an ever-changing and diverse student body with distinct needs. These individual differences underline the complexities of ensuring inclusive and quality learning in heterogeneous classrooms.

#### ➤ *Inadequate Learning Materials.*

Another challenge identified by the participants in providing quality learning to diverse learners in heterogeneous classrooms is the issue of inadequate learning materials. The teacher-participants expressed that the lack of sufficient resources significantly hindered their ability to offer effective

and engaging learning experiences for all students. According to Maffea (2020), the lack of sufficient classroom resources is a significant global challenge that persists, leading educators to adapt their teaching methods in the absence of necessary tools and materials. To tackle this complex challenge, it is essential to develop multifaceted, long-term solutions that empower educators to create resource-rich learning environments, thereby improving educational outcomes for diverse learners.

Consequently, beyond examining the strategies and challenges faced by the participants in providing quality learning to diverse learners, this study also explores the insights that emerged from the experiences shared by the teachers. These insights offer valuable perspectives on how educators can address the difficulties they encounter in fostering quality learning in heterogeneous classrooms. The study provides actionable insights that can enhance teachers' efforts to create inclusive and effective learning environments for all students. These insights are rooted in the strategies and challenges identified by the teacher-participants, serving as propositions for improving educational practices. Among the key insights drawn from the study are the importance of participating in training programs focused on new teaching strategies and the need for the provision of adequate materials in schools. These insights emphasize the necessity of gaining support for teachers in their ongoing efforts to make learning quality-driven and inclusive in diverse classroom settings.

Overall, this research delves into the methods educators employ to promote effective learning in diverse classrooms, highlighting differentiated instruction and collaborative learning as essential strategies. Teachers encounter obstacles like managing the varying needs of students and dealing with a lack of adequate learning resources. The study underscores the significance of ongoing professional development and the necessity of providing ample resources to enhance teaching practices. The conclusions drawn from this research present practical suggestions aimed at refining educational methods and creating inclusive learning spaces for all students.

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