

A Multiple Case Study of Teaching Strategies for Learners with Language Delays and Disorders

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching practices that are thoughtfully planned and executed cultivate functional literacy by supporting learner engagement and skill mastery. This multiple case study explores teaching strategies that enhance functional literacy among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disability (ID), Down Syndrome (DS), Visual Impairment (VI) and Hearing Impairment (HI). Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research examines the similarities and differences of the practices of five purposively selected special education teachers from Central Elementary School Special Education Centers in the Davao Region, Philippines with five master teachers for data triangulation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews captured teaching strategies supporting functional literacy, and thematic analysis revealed both shared patterns and distinctive strategies across the cases. Cross-case findings show that all case units consistently employ core teaching strategies such as multisensory, scaffolded, and communication-oriented instruction, with variations in differentiated and functional curriculum-based instruction. These results highlight that effective functional literacy instruction relies on integrating consistent core strategies to enhance accessibility, engagement, and learning outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Evidence-based teaching strategies promoting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development support children with language disorders, speech delays, and developmental language disorder through targeted interventions in a self-contained classroom setting. Research demonstrates that multisensory reading materials have been shown to improve students' attention, motivation, and engagement during literacy activities, thereby

strengthening reading development (Pakingan, 2026). Teachers also successfully implement phonics-based instruction, differentiated instruction, and ability-based grouping to support literacy and language development (Pillay & Mbatha, 2026). Whole-class oral language interventions significantly improve vocabulary, grammar, and language comprehension among learners with developmental language disorder (Armstrong et al., 2026).

Building on this evidence, international studies consistently show that teachers remain underprepared to support learners with language delays and disorders in inclusive and special education settings. Uncertain intervention effectiveness has been reported for learners with high-functioning ASD in Spain (Díaz, 2020). Teachers in Australia often rely on experience and trial-and-error in supporting learners with ASD (Westerveld & Paynter, 2021). Furthermore, an overreliance on traditional assessments that fail to capture functional language abilities has been reported (Fitria, 2025). Collectively, these findings highlight a global need for stronger teacher preparation, multimodal instruction, and responsive assessment practices.

Recent Philippine literature consistently indicates that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends largely on teachers' capacity to translate policy into effective classroom practice. Although teachers demonstrate confidence in adapting instruction for learners with special educational needs, their instructional capacity is constrained by inadequate access to instructional materials and limited administrative support (Zamora et al., 2026). Likewise, evidence points to a persistent policy–practice gap, wherein teachers experience insufficient professional preparation, inadequate resources, and emotional demands that limit their ability to implement inclusive teaching strategies effectively (Tesoro & Belmore, 2025). While recent educational policies and Department of Education initiatives provide a stronger framework for inclusive education, teachers' capacity to deliver quality instruction continues to be affected by resource shortages and implementation challenges at the school level (Malazarte et al., 2026). Furthermore, teachers report that large class sizes, insufficient instructional resources, and limited professional training reduce their ability to consistently implement evidence-based inclusive practices despite demonstrating high levels of instructional commitment (Baldove, 2026). Collectively, these findings underscore that strengthening teachers' professional competence through sustained training, adequate instructional resources, and

institutional support is essential for improving the implementation of inclusive education and promoting functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders.

Across the Davao Region, the implementation of inclusive education continues to be constrained by inadequate teacher preparation and limited educational resources. Teachers in Davao del Norte report that insufficient professional training and constrained instructional resources impede the effective implementation of adaptive teaching strategies (Basco, 2026). Mathematics teachers across the region likewise identify the lack of adequate educational resources as a significant barrier to delivering quality and inclusive instruction (Baog et al., 2024). Similar implementation barriers have also been documented among Special Needs Education teachers in Davao City, who emphasized the need for contextualized professional development, stronger institutional support, and responsive policies to enhance inclusive teaching practices (Español et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that persistent deficiencies in teacher capacity-building, resource allocation, and policy support remain fundamental systemic challenges that undermine the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of inclusive education across the Davao Region.

Despite the growing body of literature on inclusive education, important research gaps remain regarding teaching strategies for learners with language delays and disorders. Existing studies in the Davao Region have primarily examined inclusive education practices, teachers' experiences, and implementation challenges, with limited emphasis on the specific teaching strategies that effectively support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms (Cagas et al., 2023). Research on the implementation of Republic Act No. 11650 further emphasizes rural challenges but provides limited evidence on effective teaching strategies in resource-constrained contexts (Zamora et al., 2026). Although previous studies have explored cultural-linguistic diversity, disability intersections, differentiated instruction, and collaborative practices, these investigations have largely described

implementation issues rather than providing a comprehensive understanding of evidence-based teaching strategies across diverse inclusive settings (Tesoro & Belmoro, 2025). Existing studies have also investigated teacher challenges, professional practices, and readiness for inclusive education, including the development of teacher readiness assessment tools; however, limited empirical evidence synthesizes the teaching strategies that effectively promote inclusive learning, particularly within the diverse educational contexts of the Davao Region (Dayso et al., 2025).

Addressing these research gaps supports the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), by advancing inclusive, equitable, and high-quality learning through strengthened teaching strategies and enhanced teacher competence for learners with diverse educational and communication needs. To extend the study's contribution, its findings may be disseminated through scholarly conferences, teacher professional development programs, policy dialogues, and publications in peer-reviewed journals. Such dissemination will facilitate evidence-based instructional practices, inform curriculum development, and contribute to the continuous improvement of inclusive education policies and practices at the local and national levels.

This multiple case study explores the teaching strategies used by teachers handling learners with language delays and disorders across case units among Department of Education Elementary School Special Education Centers within Davao Region. A multiple case study design is appropriate as it allows an in-depth comparison of how teachers in Davao Region Special Education Centers employ teaching strategies to promote functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders. This study specifically answers the research question “What are the similarities and differences of teaching strategies employed by teachers in promoting functional literacy of learners with language delays and disorders across case units?” utilizing

the lenses of constructivist theory of Piaget (Brown & Desforges, 2013) and Vygotsky (1978).

2. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design anchored in the constructivist paradigm to explore the teaching strategies used by special education teachers in promoting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development in central elementary school SPED centers across the Davao Region (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Yin, 2018). The participants consisted of five purposively selected special education teachers, identified through maximum variation sampling to represent different disability groups, namely ASD, ID, DS, VI, and HI. Eligible participants had at least five years of teaching experience, were actively involved in designing and implementing functional literacy instruction and voluntarily consented to participate. Additional master teachers served as key informants to triangulate the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews using an interview guide with approximately ten open-ended questions covering teachers' backgrounds, teaching strategies, teaching adaptations, and concluding reflections. Audio recordings, field notes, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with master teachers were also utilized to enhance the credibility of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin, 2017; Seidman, 2019). The research procedure involved securing ethical clearance and institutional approvals, recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, conducting onsite interviews lasting 45–60 minutes, audio-recording and transcribing interviews verbatim, performing member checking, and organizing the data for analysis while maintaining participant confidentiality. Finally, the data were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme refinement, cross-case analysis, and interpretation of findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3. Results

3.1. Similarities and Differences of Teaching Strategies Promoting Functional Literacy among Learners with Language Delays and Disorders across Case Units

This study presents a cross-case analysis of teaching strategies employed by teachers in promoting functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders across five case units (T-ASD, T-ID, T-DS, T-VI, and T-HI). Cross-case findings show that all case units consistently employ core teaching strategies such as multisensory, scaffolded, and communication-oriented instruction, with variations in differentiated and functional curriculum-based instruction.

Regarding multisensory instruction, T-ASD, T-ID, T-DS, T-VI, and T-HI case units employ approaches that engage multiple sensory modalities—such as visual, auditory, and tactile inputs—to facilitate learning and comprehension among learners with atypical language development. This shared strategy indicates a common pedagogical emphasis on enhancing accessibility, reinforcing understanding, and supporting retention by presenting information through varied sensory channels. The convergence across all cases suggests that

multisensory instruction serves as a foundational teaching strategy in promoting functional literacy for diverse learners. An illustrative example from one teacher includes:

“I use multisensory activities where they can see, hear, and touch. My language is simple and concrete, and I provide clear instructions while assisting them.” (T-DS)

Multisensory instruction emerges as a consistent and foundational teaching strategy across all case units, reflecting its role in enhancing comprehension, engagement, and retention. Its uniform use highlights its effectiveness in supporting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development through the integration of multiple sensory modalities.

Moving to scaffolded instruction, all case units consistently apply structured guided support, progressive sequencing of tasks, and gradual release of responsibility to facilitate learner toward greater independence. The convergence across all cases highlights scaffolded instruction as an essential strategy in supporting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development. Teacher extracts demonstrate this practice:

Table 1

Cross-Case Analysis of Teaching Strategies Promoting Functional Literacy among Learners with Language Delays and Disorders across Case Units

Major Themes	Case Units		Remarks
	Similar	Different	
Multisensory Instruction	T-ASD, T-ID T-DS, T-VI, T-HI		All case units demonstrate the use of multisensory instruction across learners, indicating a shared emphasis on engaging multiple sensory modalities to support learning.
Scaffolded Instruction	T-ASD, T-ID T-DS, T-VI, T-HI		All case units consistently apply scaffolded instruction through guided support, progressive learning, and gradual independence
Differentiated Instruction	T-ID, T-DS, T-VI		T-ID, T-DS, and T-VI Case units reflect the use of differentiated instruction, demonstrating adaptive teaching practices that respond to learner diversity

		T-ASD, T-HI	T-ASD and HI case units do not exhibit differentiated instruction, suggesting that instructional practices in these contexts are not primarily organized around systematic adaptation of content, process, or assessment to address learner variability.
Communication-Oriented Instruction	T-ASD, T-ID, T-DS T-VI, T-HI		All case units employ communication-oriented instruction as means of facilitating interaction, comprehension, and meaningful engagement between teachers and learners through varied communication modes.
Functional Curriculum-Based Instruction	T-VI, T-HI		T-VI and T-HI case units demonstrate the presence of functional curriculum-based instruction, focusing on real-life application, independence, and practical skill development.
		T-ASD, T-ID T-DS	T-ASD, T-ID, and T-DS case units do not exhibit functional curriculum-based instruction, suggesting that instructional practices in these contexts are more focused on other forms of teaching strategies rather than explicit real-life functional application.

"I break the tasks into smaller steps so they can understand and follow." (T-ID)

Scaffolded instruction is consistently implemented across all case units, highlighting its importance in structuring learning through guided support, step-by-step progression, and gradual release of responsibility. This shared practice enables learners to better understand tasks, build foundational skills incrementally, and develop independence, thereby reinforcing scaffolded instruction as a key strategy in promoting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development.

Concerning differentiated instruction, T-ID, T-DS, and T-VI case units reflect the use of differentiated instruction, demonstrating adaptive teaching practices that respond to learner diversity through modifications in content, process, and learning support. These case units show intentional efforts to tailor instruction based on learners' varying needs and abilities. In contrast, the T-ASD and T-ID case units do not exhibit differentiated instruction, suggesting that instructional practices in these contexts are not consistently structured around systematic adaptation to address individual learner differences. This variation indicates that while differentiated instruction is present in some

contexts, its application is not uniform across all case units. Illustrative example:

I organize them in functional groups and guide them through tasks. (T-DS)

Differentiated instruction is evident in T-ID, T-DS, and T-VI through adaptive practices such as modeling, grouping, and guided support, but its absence in T-ASD and T-ID indicates inconsistent application, highlighting its context-dependent use across case units.

In terms of communication-oriented instruction, T-ASD, T-ID, T-DS, T-VI, and T-HI case units utilize varied communication modes—such as verbal explanations, sign language, visual cues, and gestures—to facilitate interaction, enhance comprehension, and support meaningful engagement between teachers and learners. This shared practice reflects a common instructional emphasis on ensuring that communication is accessible and responsive to learners' diverse language abilities. The convergence across all cases highlights communication-oriented instruction as a central strategy in promoting functional literacy among learners with atypical language development. An example includes:

"If they do not understand, I dramatize... facial expression is very important because they cannot hear tone." (T-HI)

Communication-oriented instruction is consistently applied across all case units through varied modes such as verbal repetition, sign language, visual cues, gestures, and facial expressions to support interaction and comprehension. This uniform use highlights its central role in making instruction accessible, reinforcing understanding, and promoting meaningful engagement, thereby serving as a key strategy in developing functional literacy among learners with atypical language development.

Regarding functional curriculum-based instruction, T-VI and T-HI case units demonstrate the use of functional curriculum-based instruction, emphasizing real-life application, independence, and the development of practical life skills. Instruction in these contexts is directed toward enabling learners to perform meaningful daily activities and apply learned concepts in real-world situations. In contrast, the T-ASD, T-ID, and T-DS case units do not exhibit functional curriculum-based instruction, indicating that their instructional practices are less centered on explicit real-life application and more focused on other teaching strategies. This pattern highlights variation across case units in the integration of functional, context-based learning approaches. Teacher extracts illustrate these approaches:

"If a learner is hesitant, I give them time and positive reinforcement so they can try confidently." (T-VI)

Functional curriculum-based instruction is evident in T-VI and T-HI through real-life, independence-focused learning supported by reinforcement and parental involvement, while its absence in T-ASD, T-ID, and T-DS highlights variability in the use of context-based instruction across case units.

The cross-case analysis shows that teaching strategies across all case units are largely similar, with consistent use of multisensory, scaffolded, and communication-oriented instruction to support functional literacy. However, variations

emerge in the use of differentiated and functional curriculum-based instruction, indicating differences in how teaching is adapted across contexts.

4. Discussion

The cross-case analysis indicates that teachers across the five case units (T-ASD, T-ID, T-DS, T-VI, and T-HI) consistently employ multisensory, scaffolded, and communication-oriented instructional strategies to promote functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders. While these core strategies are evident across all cases, variations in differentiated instruction and functional curriculum-based instruction reflect the need to address learners' diverse abilities, communication needs, and functional goals. These findings suggest that effective functional literacy instruction is founded on a common set of evidence-based strategies that are flexibly implemented according to the unique characteristics of each learner group.

Recent evidence consistently supports the effectiveness of multisensory, differentiated, and communication-oriented instructional strategies in promoting literacy among learners with language delays and disorders. Multisensory strategies, phonology-based interventions, and interactive technologies have been shown to improve sound recognition and production among learners with phonological disorders (Jannah et al., 2025). Differentiated instruction likewise demonstrates significant positive effects on literacy achievement, particularly in writing and letter-word recognition (Puzio et al., 2020). Communication-oriented, individualized language interventions remain essential for learners with intellectual disabilities because of persistent communication challenges (Abbeduto & Thurman, 2022). Similarly, evidence-based instruction across phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension effectively supports literacy development among deaf and hard-of-hearing learners (Beal et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings reinforce that integrating multiple evidence-based instructional strategies is fundamental to addressing the diverse literacy needs of learners with disabilities.

Moreover, current evidence provides stronger theoretical than empirical support for scaffolded and functional curriculum-based instruction. Effective differentiated literacy programs incorporate individualization, learner choice, and alternative curricula, reflecting key principles of scaffolded instruction (Puzio et al., 2020). Likewise, individualized interventions based on learners' strengths and challenges conceptually support scaffolded teaching (Abbeduto & Thurman, 2022). Functional curriculum-based instruction is supported by its emphasis on developing language, literacy, and functional communication for greater independence; however, evidence-based literacy practices specific to learners with intellectual disabilities remain limited (Abbeduto & Thurman, 2022). These findings highlight the need for more empirical research on the effectiveness of scaffolded and functional curriculum-based instruction for learners with language delays and disorders.

The findings extend constructivist learning theory by demonstrating that functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders is best supported through the integration of multisensory, scaffolded, differentiated, and communication-oriented instructional strategies. Consistent with Piaget's emphasis on active knowledge construction, multisensory learning enables learners to develop literacy through meaningful interactions with varied learning experiences (Brown & Desforges, 2013). Likewise, the consistent use of scaffolded instruction across cases reinforces Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, highlighting the essential role of teacher guidance in facilitating literacy acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). The findings further contribute to the growing body of inclusive education literature by demonstrating that while core evidence-based teaching strategies are applicable across disability groups, their effectiveness depends on flexible implementation that responds to learners' individual characteristics and communication needs.

The findings emphasize the need for teachers to adopt an integrated instructional approach that

combines multisensory, scaffolded, differentiated, communication-oriented, and functional curriculum-based strategies when teaching learners with language delays and disorders. Professional development programs should strengthen teachers' competencies in designing individualized literacy instruction, selecting appropriate instructional materials, and integrating evidence-based interventions across different disability categories. The findings also highlight the importance of collaborative practice among teachers, specialists, school leaders, and parents to ensure that literacy instruction remains responsive to learners' functional communication and educational needs.

The findings reinforce the implementation of existing Philippine inclusive education policies, particularly DepEd Order No. 021, s. 2019, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, and DepEd Order No. 023, s. 2022, by providing empirical evidence that learner-centered and differentiated instructional strategies support functional literacy among learners with disabilities. The study suggests that future policy initiatives should prioritize sustained professional development in evidence-based literacy instruction, provide adequate multisensory instructional resources and assistive technologies, and develop curriculum guidelines that explicitly integrate functional literacy instruction across disability groups. Strengthening institutional support for these evidence-based practices would further improve the quality and consistency of inclusive education implementation in Philippine schools. The study is limited by its qualitative multiple-case design involving only five special education teachers from selected central elementary school SPED centers in the Davao Region. Consequently, the findings are intended to provide in-depth contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization. The study relied primarily on self-reported interview data and key informant validation without direct classroom observations or learner outcome measures. In addition, the investigation focused exclusively on teaching strategies for functional literacy among learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disability, Down Syndrome, Visual

Impairment, and Hearing Impairment, and therefore may not fully represent instructional practices for other disability categories or educational settings. Future studies employing mixed-methods or experimental designs with larger samples and classroom-based observations are recommended to establish the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies and their impact on learners' functional literacy outcomes.

5. Conclusion

This study found that teachers consistently employ multisensory, scaffolded, communication-oriented, differentiated, and functional curriculum-based instructional strategies to promote functional literacy among learners with language delays and disorders. While these evidence-based strategies are

common across disability groups, their implementation is adapted to learners' diverse communication, developmental, and functional needs. The findings reinforce constructivist learning theory and support Philippine inclusive education policies that advocate learner-centered and differentiated instruction. The study recommends strengthening teacher professional development, expanding access to multisensory instructional resources and assistive technologies, and fostering collaboration among educators, specialists, and families. Future research should examine the effectiveness of these instructional strategies using larger samples and mixed-methods or experimental designs to generate stronger evidence for functional literacy instruction in inclusive education.

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8. Author Declaration

The author declares that this manuscript is an original work. The author further declares that there are no personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, or reporting of this study.