

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In the world of education, differences in abilities among students are something that cannot be avoided. 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 approach is called mixed-abilities classes (Heng et al., 2023). Approach is a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language, learning, and teaching Anthony, (1963). In this class, students have different strengths and weaknesses, and they also have different approaches to learning (Al-Subaiei, 2017). 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 uses mixed-ability classes that combine three levels from grades 1, 2, and 3, and three levels from grades 4, 5, and 6. This combined class is called the Octopus class and the Rainbow class. In the Octopus class at Singaraja Montessori School, there is a diversity of differences in language, background, age, and abilities. 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 (Ngewa & 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 and 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 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. Teachers must also design an activity where this learning activity can be accessed or done by all learners in the class. Teachers must also understand the character of each learner to facilitate the

learning process, because in the classroom, there are different class levels. 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 feel 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.

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 mixed abilities. 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. 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. 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. 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 these differences can come from the learners' different abilities, different language backgrounds, 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 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.

Based on the preliminary research, it was found that Singaraja Montessori School is unique, as it has two primary school classes adopting a mixed-abilities approach, where different grade levels are brought together into one class. Grades 1, 2, and 3 are united in the same classroom, and grades 4, 5, and 6 are also united into one classroom. 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 is 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 researcher to conduct research on how teachers' strategies in teaching these mixed classes. This research is also expected to provide new insights and information in the use of the mixed-abilities approach in mixed classrooms.

1.2 Problem Identification

One of the main problems identified in this study is the significant differences in students' ability levels within the mixed-ability classroom at Singaraja Montessori School. Students in the same classroom demonstrate varying levels of English proficiency, learning pace, prior knowledge, and learning readiness. Some students are able to understand instructions quickly and complete more complex tasks independently, while others still require continuous guidance and simpler learning activities. These differences become more complex because the classroom consists of students from different grade levels and includes students with special needs, requiring teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and learning materials continuously. Another challenge is the limited professional training and support available for teachers in managing mixed-ability classrooms, particularly within the Montessori context. As a result, teachers often rely on their own experience and judgment when addressing diverse learning needs, which may

affect the effectiveness of the strategies they implement. In addition, designing learning activities that are appropriate for students with different ability levels remains difficult, as the teachers must ensure that activities are both accessible to lower-achieving students and sufficiently challenging for more advanced learners while maintaining the same learning objectives. These challenges highlight the importance of examining the teaching strategies used by teachers to effectively support learning in mixed-ability classrooms.

1.3 Problem Limitation

This research is limited to investigating the teaching strategies used by teachers in managing mixed-ability classrooms in the Octopus Class at Singaraja Montessori School. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by teachers in the teaching and learning process. The study also focuses on the implementation of teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction used by teachers to accommodate students with different levels of learning, learning styles, language backgrounds, and learning needs. Furthermore, the research is conducted only in the Octopus Class, which consists of grade 1, 2, and 3 students learning in the same classroom. The participants of the study are limited to two teachers who teach in the Octopus Class during classroom activities.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the problem above, there are two research questions in this study:

1.4.1 What are the challenges teachers face in teaching mixed-abilities classes?

1.4.2 What are the strategies teachers use to teach mixed-abilities classes at Singaraja Montessori School?

1.5 Research Objective

Based on the problem above, there are two research questions in this study:

1.5.1 To identify the challenges that teachers face in teaching mixed-abilities classes.

1.5.2 To analyse the strategies used by teachers in mixed-abilities classes at Singaraja Montessori School.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research has important theoretical significance as it will inform the existing literature on mixed-abilities education, particularly in the context of Montessori education. In addition, by analyzing the teaching strategies at Singaraja Montessori School, this research is expected to develop a theoretical framework for inclusive teaching and enhance understanding of interactions among students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in diverse classrooms.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

1.6.2.1 For the Teachers

This research will provide strategies and insights for teachers working in classrooms with students who have diverse abilities. By understanding the learning methods used, teachers can adapt them to students with different diversities, thereby improving classroom management and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

1.6.2.2 For the Students

This research benefits students by promoting a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive classroom environment. When teachers effectively implement mixed-ability strategies, students engage in a collaborative learning environment, feel confident and motivated, and develop a sense of community.

1.6.2.3 For the Researchers

For researchers in the field of education, particularly those working in mixed-ability education, this research will also encourage further studies on mixed-ability education using Montessori principles, thereby contributing to the understanding of inclusive education.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1 Conceptual Definition

1.7.1.1 Teaching Strategies: Applying appropriate in the learning process assists students in acquiring knowledge and achieving the expected education goals (Brown, 2000)

1.7.1.2 Mixed-abilities Classes: Classes that have a variety of differences in terms of students' ability levels in learning and differences in learning styles, where they are in the same class (Hallam et al., 2008).

1.7.1.3 Montessori Education: An educational approach developed by Maria Montessori that emphasizes self-directed learning, hands-on experiences, independence, and active interaction with a prepared environment to support children's natural development (Lillard et al., 2017)

1.7.1.4 Challenge in Teaching: a difficult situation, task, or problem that requires effort, skill, or determination to overcome in the class (Maulana & Faradiba, 2020)

1.7.2 Operational Definition

1.7.2.1 Teaching Strategies: In this study, the teaching strategies to be implemented by teachers include differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, peer tutoring, and the use of multimodal teaching materials, as well as classroom management techniques

that accommodate students with different abilities, backgrounds, teaching techniques, and class levels.

1.7.2.2 Mixed-abilities Classes: In this study, mixed-abilities classes are operationally defined as classrooms at Singaraja Montessori School where students from different grade levels (grades 1, 2, and 3) are placed in the Octopus class and combined into one learning environment. The Octopus class consists of students with different academic abilities, different backgrounds, different learning abilities, and different languages. Different ages and different learning styles.

1.7.2.3 Montessori Education: In this study, Singaraja Montessori School, an educational institution that applies the Montessori method developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. This school emphasizes independent learning, practical activities, and individual guidance, as well as encouraging social interaction and collaboration between students of various ages.

1.7.2.4 Challenge in Teaching: Challenge refers to the difficulties experienced by teachers in managing and facilitating learning in a mixed-ability Montessori classroom. These difficulties include addressing diverse learning abilities, providing individualized instruction, maintaining classroom participation, managing time effectively, and ensuring that all students achieve the intended learning outcomes.