A Smart Book Based on Integrated "VAK": An Innovation in Learning Materials for Students with Disabilities Within Universal Design for Learning

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Abstract:. *The presence of people with disabilities in various communities around the world has a significant impact, both on their survival and the fulfillment of their educational needs. From various perspectives, the implementation of an inclusive education model at all levels of general education is the right solution to ensure that every student receives educational services tailored to their needs. Smart books, as an innovation in more advanced learning technology, are very suitable for accommodating the diverse learning styles of students with special needs be they visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Research through the use of a literature review has concluded that Auditory and Kinesthetic (VAK)-based smart books have been empirically proven to increase learning effectiveness by providing adaptive features that accommodate different sensory and cognitive needs, thus realizing the true essence of inclusion, which ensures accessibility and equal opportunities for success for every individual in the classroom*

Keywords: *Smart Books, People with Disabilities, UDL*

Abstrak: Kehadiran penyandang disabilitas di berbagai komunitas di seluruh dunia membawa dampak besar, baik terhadap keberlangsungan hidup mereka maupun pemenuhan kebutuhan pendidikannya. Dari berbagai sudut pandang, penerapan model pendidikan inklusif di semua jenjang pendidikan umum menjadi solusi yang tepat untuk memastikan setiap siswa mendapatkan layanan pendidikan yang sesuai dengan kebutuhannya. Smart books, sebagai inovasi dalam teknologi pembelajaran yang lebih maju, sangat sesuai digunakan untuk mengakomodasi beragam gaya belajar siswa berkebutuhan khusus—baik visual, auditori, maupun kinestetik. Penelitian melalui penggunaan tinjauan literatur diperoleh kesimpulan, bahwa Buku pintar berbasis Auditori dan Kinestetik (VAK) telah terbukti secara empiris meningkatkan efektivitas pembelajaran dengan menyediakan fitur adaptif yang mengakomodasi kebutuhan sensorik dan kognitif yang berbeda, sehingga mewujudkan esensi sejati inklusi, yang memastikan aksesibilitas dan kesempatan yang sama untuk sukses bagi setiap individu di kelas.

Kata kunci: Smart Books, Penyandang Disabilitas, UDL

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing population of people with disabilities worldwide transcends ethnicity, religion, race, or nationality. They can appear anytime and anywhere. There are indications that the increasing population of people with disabilities is correlated with the initial determinants, namely human interaction with the environment and the host (exposure), that we cannot put aside. The direct and indirect impacts of the interactions are believed to be contributing to the increasing global population of people with disabilities.

Whatever their circumstances, we should no longer question the presence of people with disabilities wherever they are. There is something far more important than that: focusing on what we can do to ease their burden. For example, we can provide relevant educational services to help them successfully navigate the developmental tasks at each stage. Therefore, our attitudes and responses toward people with disabilities will likely shape our future attitudes toward them (Efendi, 2008). In this regard, a positive attitude and response are undoubtedly essential. This attitude of viewing people with disabilities as individuals who have dignity, like children in general, will become their capital in maintaining their existence in society.

Strategic steps to alleviate the burden on persons with disabilities can be taken by empowering their independence through educational services that are accessible individually and collectively (Efendi, 2016). Empowering people with disabilities is not always easy. It requires systematic, targeted, and inclusive efforts across various stakeholders, particularly in education and rehabilitation. This is a refunctionalization and self-development process that enables people with disabilities to fulfill their social roles appropriately. (Depnaker, 1999).

The urgency of accurate education and learning to empower persons with disabilities not only adds value to children with special needs but also to their environment. The presence of educated persons with disabilities is expected to foster a sense of independence. Independence, in this context, refers to individuals' ability to self-regulate, direct their own actions, and not rely on others' will. Indicators include their ability to integrate, direct, and carry out activities they deem appropriate to their own needs. The long-term goal of developing adequate independence in persons with disabilities is to reduce their dependence on others.

Furthermore, for long-term investment, this will also reduce the cost of maintaining or caring for people with disabilities (Efendi, 2017). Independence as an attitude among people with disabilities is a series of accumulated understandings, appreciations, and skills that are not only acquired through the general teaching and learning process but also go beyond it. Independent education is not only about learning values, but also about how someone learns to commit to them (learning to commit to values). In this case, independence is not only a person's knowledge of independence but also the ability to lead their own life in a directed manner (Sasmita, Prayitno, & Karneli, 2020).

2. METHOD

This research employed a library research method, aiming to examine various theories, research findings, and relevant concepts regarding the development of smart textbooks to support Universal Design for Learning (UDL)-based learning for students with special needs. The research implementation procedure involved three systematic stages: (1) Library Data Collection: Collecting primary and secondary reference sources from textbooks, scientific journals, and related research articles; (2) Selection and Classification: Screening and grouping data sources based on thematic relevance, author credibility, and the quality of the information presented; (3) Content Analysis: Conducting descriptive data analysis to identify universal-based learning strategies that are effective in improving the competencies of students with special needs. The supporting instrument used in this research was a literature annotation sheet, which serves to document the author's identity, year of publication, research focus, and the level of relevance of the findings to the study topic in a structured manner.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The goal of inclusive education is to effectively meet the diverse learning needs of all students, from those with dyslexia and those with visual impairments to those with exceptionally gifted learning, using a single, flexible learning plan. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) serves as a blueprint or operational guide for making inclusive learning truly work. If inclusive schools are the goal, then UDL is the method. UDL is a proactive framework that requires educators to design a flexible curriculum from the outset, rather than waiting for students to fail before providing remediation.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review Results

No.	Title	Year	Conclusion
1	Pengembangan modul adaptif untuk melayani keanekaragaman gaya belajar berbasis universal design for learning	2003	Universal design for learning is achieved through materials and activities, a flexible curriculum that offers alternatives for children with very diverse abilities and backgrounds
2	Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning,	2002	UDL accommodates the recognition of individual uniqueness and the need to accommodate diversity, as well as how to

No.	Title	Year	Conclusion
			create learning experiences that are appropriate to the characteristics of students, and maximize their abilities for progress
3	Universal Design for Learning Sebagai Sarana Untuk Memfasilitasi Perbedaan Gaya Belajar Peserta Didik Dalam Belajar	2016	UDL addresses the diversity of all learners and creates a flexible curriculum to support access, participation, and progress for all. It allows students to choose the most appropriate method for accessing information while teachers monitor the learning process. The learning process provided by educators is tailored to the individual learner, making the teaching and learning process more streamlined.
4	Pengembangan modul adaptif untuk melayani keanekaragaman gaya belajar berbasis universal design for learning	2022	DL provides learning preferences that can be adjusted to each learner's learning style, and the presentation of enjoyable material can make learners feel happy and comfortable while learning.
5	Filosofi Pendidikan Inklusi dalam Praktik Pendidikan Abad Ke-21 di Indonesia	2024	Inclusive education requires a holistic and collaborative approach between the government, society, and educational institutions to create a truly inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.
6	Pengaruh Gaya Belajar Visual Auditorial Kinestetik Terhadap Pemahaman Siswa Pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Man 2 Dan Sd Negeri 53 Banda Aceh	2025	The importance of an inclusive learning approach, by adapting teaching strategies to the diversity of students' learning styles to enhance their holistic understanding.
7	Pendidikan inklusif dengan universal design for learning	2025	UDL can create an inclusive learning environment, increase empathy, and reduce stereotypes and discrimination against students with disabilities..
8	Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Akidah Akhlak Berbasis Metode Visual, Auditory, Reading/Write And Khinesthetic (VARK) di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.	2023	Integrated visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK)-based learning materials are one of the most effective tools for implementing UDL principles due to their ability to provide flexibility in material packaging and significantly improve student learning outcomes, reaching a very high level of 69%.
9	Media visualisasi auditori kinestetik (VAK) terpadu untuk stimulasi keaksaraan awal anak	2022	Principle UDL allows student For processing and responding material When just and support students in need time longer to learn , repeat material in accordance speed they Alone without pressure . Book clever integrated VAK based can increase literacy more Good .

No.	Title	Year	Conclusion
10	The Universal Design of Early Education Moving Forward for All Children.	2006	*UDL* accommodate need participant diverse education so that allows all participant educate For access the same information and avoid segregation .

3.1. The Phenomenon of Inclusive Schools

The increasing distribution of people with disabilities across Indonesia has consequences for the provision of relevant educational institutions to accommodate their needs. Meanwhile, access to special education services (especially Special Schools/SLB) remains limited. So far, SLB locations are primarily located in provincial and district capitals; only a small number are located in sub-district towns. The disparity in the availability of special schools/SLB accessible to people with disabilities is a particular problem. People with disabilities who do not live in cities will face difficulties in accessing the educational services they need. However, the population of children with disabilities is spread across almost all regions (cities, regencies, sub-districts, and villages). This factor is why many parents or families do not provide opportunities for people with disabilities to receive educational services relevant to their needs (Efendi, Hudha, Aryani, 2012).

Along with the implementation of policies to equalize opportunities for school-age children with special needs to access nine years of basic education, most city/district governments in Indonesia have responded to these policies. The implication is that the City/Regency/Provincial Government launched a policy to implement inclusive education in regular schools within its area. This condition is like a match made in heaven, following the implementation of Law Number 20 of 2003 (UU No. 20/2003). This law introduced inclusive education as an alternative educational service for children with special needs (people with disabilities), namely, the integration of people with disabilities into regular educational institutions (Efendi, 2013). This policy also addresses the limitations of special education institutions in accommodating people with disabilities seeking access to education. This is especially evident in SLB, which has been the primary focus of educating children with special needs.

The frequency with which people with disabilities receive education relevant to their needs is indeed lower than that of normal children, whether in special schools or regular schools (Munauwarah et al., 2021). However, all policies to accommodate their educational needs today should be appreciated. In the United States, it is estimated that only about 0.5% of people with disabilities attend special schools, with the rest attending regular schools (Ashman & Elkins, 1994). Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, in the 1990s, enrollment in special schools was projected to decline from 9 million to approximately 2 million due to a return to regular schools, and the student population in special schools constituted less than 3% of the total number of children with disabilities (Fish, 1985).

According to USAID (2011), the composition of schools serving people with disabilities in Indonesia includes 1,858 special schools (SLB), 1,654 elementary schools (SD), and 320 secondary schools. More than 73,100 children were served in special schools, and over 29,700 in inclusive schools (SD and SMP). Meanwhile, a WHO report (2008) showed that only 20% of the population of people with disabilities aged 6–11 years had the opportunity to learn, and 19% of the population of children with disabilities aged 12–17 years or secondary school age (Baine, 2013). Therefore, inclusive education services for children with disabilities can be a wise choice to ensure their educational needs are well served.

Empowering children with special needs or disabilities through education is indeed costly, as each type of disability requires different educational tools. Therefore, counterproductive thinking often arises among education bureaucrats when discussing the cost of educating children with disabilities. This thinking is that the costs incurred to empower children with disabilities are not commensurate with the resulting productivity contribution. Regardless of the risks, as mandated by existing laws and regulations, empowering children with disabilities through education must remain a national education agenda. This ensures that people with disabilities develop a sense of independence, fostering the ability to act on their own volition, perseverance in achieving success, rational thinking and action, self-control, and self-worth and confidence (Efendi, 2021). Above all, this ensures that the presence of people with disabilities within the community of normal children is not further undermined.

The practice of inclusive education services for people with disabilities is an educational philosophy that integrates all students, regardless of ability, disability, background, or learning style, into a shared learning environment. The goal is to eliminate segregation and ensure that every child feels accepted and has an equal opportunity to participate (Pertiwi, Ali, & Sartinah, 2025). However, this noble philosophy often faces a significant practical challenge in the classroom: how can a teacher effectively meet the diverse learning needs of students with dyslexia, visual impairments, and exceptional gifts using a single rigid curriculum? This is where Universal Design for Learning (UDL) comes in as a blueprint or operational guide to making inclusiveness truly work. If inclusive schools are the goal (what), then UDL is the method (how). UDL is a proactive framework that asks educators to design flexible curricula from the start, rather than waiting for students to fail and then providing "fixes." It is like an architect designing a building with ramps and elevators from the start, not just stairs, so that everyone, from wheelchair users to parents pushing strollers, can easily access it.

Universal Design for Learning exists not only as a bridge to accommodate students with special needs in regular classrooms, but also as a means of truly enabling learning for those with disabilities (Wahyuni & Eliasa, 2025). UDL ensures academic inclusion by providing a variety of presentation methods (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), various ways for students to demonstrate understanding (projects, oral tests, written assignments), and various ways to motivate students. Ultimately, UDL transforms the classroom from a "one-size-fits-all" to a responsive and equitable environment, where diversity is not seen as a barrier but as a necessity built in from the start.

3.2. Smart Books "VAK" in Universal Design Learning

In a learning group, teachers need to understand that each student has a unique cognitive blueprint. This uniqueness determines how they absorb and process information. This uniqueness creates diversity in their responses to learning experiences. Individualizing experiences demonstrates that each student has a different learning style. Some students are excellent visual learners. For them, abstract concepts only become clear when presented in the form of diagrams, videos, or mind maps. Another group of students relies on their hearing (auditory) to learn. They learn most quickly through oral explanations, group discussions, or listening to material read aloud. Meanwhile, other students truly learn through hands-on experience, touching, moving, and practicing a skill to gain a deeper understanding (kinesthetic) (Syauky et al., 2025).

This diversity of learning styles is commonly and clearly evident in everyday classroom dynamics. One student might easily understand a social studies lesson by silently reading a textbook, while the classmate next to them only grasps the same material after watching a movie or video or participating in a role-playing activity. This is not a difference in intelligence or willingness to learn, but rather a fundamental difference in how their brains are wired. If a teacher uses only one teaching method, such as lecturing, they might reach only auditory learners, while visual and kinesthetic learners struggle to stay engaged and understand the material.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be considered a blueprint or practical guide for realizing the philosophy of inclusive schools (Septyah, 2024). Inclusive schools have the noble goal of embracing all students, regardless of ability, background, or disability, in a single learning environment. However, the biggest challenge is how to teach effectively in such a diverse classroom. This is where UDL comes in. Instead of designing one lesson for the "average" student and then making specific adjustments for different students, UDL proactively designs a flexible curriculum from the start to eliminate barriers for all learners.

In other words, UDL is a way to make inclusion truly work in practice. Inclusive schools without UDL risk becoming places where students with diverse needs are physically present but not academically engaged. UDL ensures that inclusion is more than just attendance; it is about participation. By providing multiple ways of presenting material (representation), multiple ways for students to demonstrate what they know (action and expression), and multiple ways to generate interest (engagement), UDL gives every student a fair chance to access the curriculum and succeed, making "education for all" a reality in the classroom.

Minister of National Education Regulation No. 4 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education provides broader access to students with diverse characteristics. With the emergence of inclusive schools, we can now easily find students with special needs attending school alongside their peers without special needs. Implementing inclusive education means teachers are now tasked with providing effective, efficient learning for a diverse student population. This diversity includes students with varying learning styles and abilities, students with diverse cultures and languages, and students with special needs such as blind, deaf, physically disabled, mentally retarded, autistic, slow learners, those with behavioral disorders, and gifted intelligence. This situation requires specific learning strategies to accommodate the diverse characteristics of these students in an inclusive learning environment.

One solution to address the problem of diverse student characteristics in an inclusive classroom is to apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning. The UDL approach gives teachers the flexibility to adapt the curriculum, adjust the learning delivery method, and assess students in any way possible. One of the principles that animates this UDL is that the curriculum must be created by including specific alternatives, ensuring it is accessible and appropriate for students with diverse backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and disabilities. There is awareness and recognition of individual uniqueness and the need to accommodate diversity, as well as of how to create learning experiences that are appropriate to students' characteristics and that maximize their abilities for progress (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

Universal learning design is essentially an educational concept or approach to designing instructional methods, instructional materials, learning activities, and evaluation procedures in an effort to assist individuals with "significant differences in their ability to see, hear, speak, and move" (Orkwis, 2003). Universal Design for Learning is implemented by providing curriculum flexibility and a variety of alternative activities for learners with diverse abilities. These adaptations are designed from the beginning of the instructional design and are not adjustments added later. UDL provides equal access to learning, not just equal access to information. This allows learners to choose the most appropriate method to access information while the teacher monitors the learning process (Firmansyah, Toenlioe, & Ulfa, 2016). In UDL, it is assumed that no single method of presentation and expression can provide access for all diverse learners. Therefore, learning activities and materials are provided to offer flexibility and a variety of alternative ways to learn (Rose & Meyer, 2002; McGuire, Scott & Shaw, 2003). These accommodations are built directly into the instructional materials so that all learners, regardless of ability, can use the same materials, but in ways tailored to their abilities and learning needs (Freund & Reach, 2005).

Conn-Powers (2006) identified several key principles that must be met in Universal Design for Learning to accommodate the needs of diverse learners: 1) Enable all learners to access the same information and avoid segregation or discrimination (equitable design); 2) Flexibility to accommodate various individual preferences and abilities; 3) Easy to understand; 4) Effectively communicate necessary information through visuals, verbally, and tactilely, regardless of the user's sensory abilities; 5) Minimize harm and risks from intentional or unintentional actions; 6) Efficient, comfortable, and non-fatiguing use; 7) Adapt size and space to the learner's body size, posture, or mobility.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be applied to learning objectives, methods, materials, and assessments. Regarding teaching materials, the application of Universal Design for Learning encompasses several aspects: accessibility of printed materials, digital content, visual teaching materials, and audio teaching materials. The application of Universal Design for Learning to teaching materials encompasses several aspects, including: (1) accessibility of printed materials, (2) accessibility of digital content, (3) accessibility of visual teaching materials, and (4) accessibility of audio teaching materials. The development of adaptive learning materials based on Universal Design for Learning is an innovation to solve learning problems (Murtadho, Praherdhiono, & Wedi, 2022).

Smart books based on the integrated visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) approach are among the most effective tools for implementing UDL principles, as they offer flexibility in how materials are packaged. The results of a VAK-based learning material trial on 22 students who were given post-test questions revealed that 15 students, or 69%, achieved very high scores, and six students, or 27%, achieved high scores (Fatima & Iqbal, 2023). Students with disabilities who struggle with reading, such as auditory learners, can use audio features, and dyslexic students can use printed text to overcome reading comprehension barriers. Visual learners can explore material presented in text integrated with

videos, animations, and interactive simulations. Text and image magnification significantly assist students with low vision, ensuring that the learning material (what is learned) is accessible to all students in a format most appropriate to them. Kinesthetic learners can learn material presented in Braille, enriched with integrated audio/video.

Smart textbook formats, equipped with features accessible to students with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles, certainly support UDL implementation by providing a variety of ways for students to interact and demonstrate their understanding. Instead of passive reading, students can directly engage with the learning content through audio or video that reinforces what they are learning. This format strongly supports the UDL principles of action and expression, allowing students to process and respond to the material in ways that differ from reading a traditional essay. Learning materials are accessible at any time and support students who need more time to learn, allowing them to review the material at their own pace without pressure. Integrated VAK-based smartbooks can significantly improve literacy (Paramita, 2022).

4. IV. CONCLUSSION

Effective implementation of inclusive education requires the strategic role of professional teachers in understanding the cognitive "blueprint" and diverse learning styles of students (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) to achieve independence for students with special needs. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach presents a proactive and comprehensive solution through flexible curriculum design from the outset, integrating the principles of information accessibility, method flexibility, and diversity of expression to eliminate barriers to academic participation. Innovations in the use of learning media, such as integrated Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK)-based smartbooks, have been empirically proven to increase learning effectiveness by providing adaptive features that accommodate different sensory and cognitive needs, thus realizing the true essence of inclusion, which ensures accessibility and equal opportunities for success for every individual in the classroom.

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