Teaching Strategies to Cope High School Students with Special Needs in EFL Class

Mutiara Khofifah¹, Mirjam Anugerahwati²
English Education Department, State University of Malang, Indonesia¹,²
Email: mutiara.khofifah.2302218@students.um.ac.id¹

Submitted: 04/02/2024 | Revised: 29/03/2024 | Accepted: 14/04/2024

E-ISSN : 2579-4574 | P-ISSN : 2549-7359

Abstract. This study was conducted to investigate how students with special needs in a private school learn an English subject as a foreign language and to explore the English teaching strategies that are utilized by teachers at the secondary level. This study collected quantitative data from 3 teachers at Panjura Private School, Malang. This study used a case study in which the data collected from the interview guide and classroom observation checklist as the instruments to know the technique, challenges, and how the teachers solve the problem that comes from the challenges. The findings revealed that the primary challenges faced by teachers in inclusive classrooms are related to instructional strategies and media. Moreover, this study stands out for its focus on English language education for students with special needs in public schools, addressing a gap in previous research. It provides new insights into inclusive educational practices in a broader context, emphasizing the importance of understanding diverse classroom dynamics and meeting the needs of students with special needs in a general educational environment.

Keywords: Student with special needs, private school, English teaching strategies.

https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
INTRODUCTION

As a result of education's capacity to broaden one's intellectual and professional horizon, it has developed into a vital component of human existence. Law Number 20 of the Year 2003 Concerning the National Education System stipulates that it is the constitutionally protected right of every individual citizen of Indonesia to have access to educational opportunities. According to the concept of inclusive education, schools should be able to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities, as well as children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups (Efendi, 2018). This covers members of the populace who possess unique abilities and attributes.

It is always an intriguing topic to discuss the existence of children with special needs in any community, particularly in regards to obtaining the same rights to receive a decent education as other children who are considered to be typical. The existence of specific requirements for care children in our immediate environment requires special education services without fail to meet their requirements. Children with special needs can only help themselves and adjust to their surroundings by applying their efforts through education (Efendi et al., 2022). Many researchers over the years have expressed an interest in researching the level of information that teachers have regarding the special needs and disabilities of their students (Efendi et al., 2022). In this research, we interpret self-efficacy as the level of confidence teachers have in students’ capacity to plan and carry out the necessary steps to achieve specific goals. Recently, the attention given to self-efficacy in studies on special education has increased (Alnahdi, 2019).

2,197,833 children in Indonesia were categorized as having special needs when they were of school age, according to the population census that was carried out in Indonesia in the year 2021 (5-19 years) (Novrizaldi, 2022). According to data from Kemendikbud, as of August 2021, 269,398 children were registered on Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB). However, Muhadjir Effendy, the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture, stated that only 12.26% of children with disabilities participate in formal schooling. This indicates that there is still a relatively small amount of what ought to be served (Novrizaldi, 2022).

One solution to the issue of students with special needs having limited access to educational opportunities is integrating students with mild, moderate, and severe special needs into regular school classrooms (Bansal, 2018). Educational support system that requires all students with disabilities or special needs to be provided at the school nearest their domicile, in regular classrooms with their peers, to achieve their full potential through practicing inclusive education. This is one technique that can be done to solve the problem (Blora, 2020). Additionally, students are offered inclusive education at regular schools. This implies that they can participate in regular classes alongside their peers. This effort is not only based on efficacy and cost-effectiveness but also on ensuring that students with typical needs and students with special needs who reside in the community are not divided from one another as a
community. Both of these principles are essential for the success of this endeavor (Evans et al., 2021). However, in contrast to previous research that predominantly focuses on specialized educational settings, this study provides novelty through a case that emphasizes English language education for students with special needs in public schools. While previous studies have primarily examined strategies employed in specialized schools, this research fills a gap by exploring the practices of EFL teachers in inclusive classrooms within public school settings. Therefore, this study provides novel insights into inclusive educational practices in a broader context, highlighting the necessity of understanding diverse classroom dynamics and catering to students with special needs within mainstream educational environments.

The beneficial impacts of inclusive education on the academic success, social growth, and emotional well-being of students with special needs have been extensively documented. However, research concerning individuals without disabilities in inclusive environments is scarce (Nkoma, 2022). On the other hand, inclusive education is not yet a reality for most individuals. According to the findings of several studies, teachers of foreign languages who work with students with special needs are likely to face a wide range of obstacles in both the classroom and outside of it (Utami et al., 2021). The provision of inclusive education services requires advanced planning that takes into account a variety of circumstances, including the conditions that are faced by students who have special needs (autism, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, and giftedness are all forms of disabling conditions).

Implementing an inclusive educational model for students with special needs in public schools is, as a matter of empirical fact, always tough and meets with some resistance from many quarters. The difficulty originates from the internal and external environments of the school, specifically the community and policymakers in the immediate vicinity, because students with special needs who attend public schools are often seen as a burden on their institutions. Implementing the inclusive model can lower the rate at which ordinary students learn new material. The statement that there is a substantial difference when evaluated just by analyzing the productivity learning results of students with special needs compared to ordinary students who attend the same regular school may be correct. Because every one of a student's disabilities, whether they are experienced directly or indirectly, has the potential to affect the growth of psychosocial components (Efendi, 2018).

When inclusive education is put into practice, one of the realities that emerges is the assumption that students with special needs who are accepted into inclusive schools only have mild physical limitations and mild hyperactivity. This reality arises during the implementation of inclusive education, particularly in Indonesia. This is only one of the many realities that emerge when applying inclusive education practice. In the interim, lessons are being held for students with mental disabilities ranging from moderate to severe, as well as students with moderate physical needs. These students are educated in special schools (Florian, 2019). There is an absolute argument for the planners of regular inclusive schools to impose constraints on the number of students with special needs who can obtain an education. These restrictions may limit the number of students who can receive an education. There is indeed shortage of human resources, notably special guidance instructors with
qualifications to instruct students with special needs and special education status in a single classroom. Most teachers also experience apprehension, because they immediately picture how troublesome the students with special needs would be for them when they are integrated into their classrooms. This perspective is understandable if the teachers lack the certified ability to take care of the classes, which causes them to feel puzzled when they accept students with special needs but do not know what to do with them. The shortage of special guidance teachers is particularly severe (Efendi, 2018).

According to the previously discussed studies, the challenges that arise when instructing English to students with special needs can take on a variety of forms. Such challenges range from the lack of sufficient knowledge by the instructors in integrating the special needs students into the regular curriculum, and the fact that the current government-approved materials are inadequate. In addition, the previous research has concentrated on the Intellectual and Developmentally Disabled (IDD) students who attend Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) or a specialized school for students with special needs in Malang. However, studies on teaching English to special needs students, particularly in public schools, are lacking in number. This research pertains to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Simply put, no researchers have attempted to address the challenges that teachers encounter in their effort to meet the educational requirements of students with special needs in public schools. This study aims to investigate the teacher's awareness of students who have special needs and their rights according to the rules and regulations legislation, as well as the teacher's implementation of the strategy in the classroom. This idea paved the way for the formation of the thesis that the knowledge that teachers have of the students in their classrooms who have special needs eventually contributes to good classroom interaction and management as well as classroom inclusivity.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Participants

The methodology used in this study is known as qualitative research. Within the confines of this framework, interviews were conducted with three English teachers from Panjura, a high school located in Malang, Indonesia that have been teaching students with special needs and a forty-minute class one teacher who has a student special needs in her class was observed for supporting data. Interviews were taped for playback at a later time and transcribed. To conduct the study of the interview transcripts, a content analysis method was utilized. The use of observation notes allowed for the evaluation of interview data, and the drawing of conclusions.

Research Design

2.1 Data Collection Procedure

According to (Creswell, 2002) to collect qualitative data, the five stages are all interconnected with one another. The researcher went to a high school in Malang, and after having a conversation with the principal of the school and receiving formal authorization, the researcher met with the teachers, informed them about the research, and asked for their assistance. The researcher utilized an interview and an
observation checklist as an additional instrument to obtain the data regarding the problems, methods, and solutions from the teachers. These instruments were used in conjunction with one another. To begin, an interview is a tool of qualitative research as an instrument to get more in-depth information about various topics. In the present study, the researcher acquired specific information from the English teachers regarding the obstacles they face, the techniques they employ, and the solutions they find. The research questions for this study served as the basis for the questions asked during the interviews. During the interview, the researcher addressed other impromptu questions to follow up on or provide further context for the responses provided by the teachers to the primary topics. When employing open-ended questions, the researcher was able to ask more in-depth questions connected to the answers given by the researcher when adhering to the stated questions that were originally asked. The interview questions revolved around the challenges and difficulties that the teachers experienced and the solutions they came up with. These interviews lasted anywhere from fifteen minutes to thirty minutes each with every single educator that was being talked to.

During classroom observation, a tool known as an observation checklist is utilized to collect additional data on the students being observed. Researchers utilized participant observation checklists to promote increased focus on key aspects of the teaching and learning process. The observation checklist consisted of five aspects: physical environment, teacher behaviors, student engagement, materials, and instructional strategies. NSDC tools adopted the observation checklist from eleven practical ways to guide teachers toward differentiation by Carolyn Chapman and Rita King. The eleven practical ways are: (1) know the standard; (2) vary instructional strategies and activities; (3) create a learning climate; (4) exhibit “whiteness”; (5) provide a wide variety of materials and resources; (6) know the students; (7) assess before, during, and after the learning; (8) adjust assignments; (9) plan students focused opportunities; (10) use flexible grouping designs; and (11) know change is gradual.

2.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The Iterative process best describes the nature of the total data analysis technique. Before beginning the process of actually analyzing the data that has been gathered, the criteria for the data analysis are determined first. This step is necessary to ensure that the data analysis can be carried out systematically. When conducting qualitative research, it is essential to set norms that must be adhered to appropriately. This makes it possible to prevent biased interpretations and quick shallow generalizations, as well as coding, clustering codes that appear at least twice, and turning each cluster into a theme. Additionally, this makes it possible to avoid generalizations that are too broad or too broad in scope. Following the transcription of the interviews, an iterative process was carried out, which involved multiple readings of the verbatim transcripts for introduction, coding, grouping, retrieval, and reorganization of the data, as well as the search for relationships between codes to develop themes and ultimately answer and research questions. The word processor will highlight facts that are linked to one another, and then those highlighted sections that are related to one another will be labeled with the same name to create a cluster.
Even though the subject of the study was kept in mind throughout the entire process, the interviews were read and reread to identify any additional probable themes that may have surfaced. On the other hand, given that the research questions served as the foundation for the semi-structured interview questions, it was impossible to discern any distinguishing themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

While analyzing the data acquired from the interviews, the concepts of challenges, strategy, and solution emerged as being prevalent throughout the data.

3.1 Challenges Faced by The Teachers

The responses of the overwhelming majority of persons who took part in the study indicated that they did not have any significant challenges when teaching students with special needs. This was the consensus of the participants. The statements made by participants about the aspects of the situation that were deemed to be challenges are included in the following excerpts:

Teacher A: To teach students with special needs, we have to be patient in facing students with special needs. Some students can learn fast but sometimes can be distracted by their surroundings.

Teacher B: When it comes to teaching students with special needs, the obstacle that I face is that the course materials are too advanced for students with special needs to understand, so I have to explain it again to the students with special needs.

Teacher C: We have to be more patient in explaining and teaching them.

The majority of the time, they will use the word "extra" since it is necessary for them to have a great deal of patience with the student and to be more engaged in the classroom for them to be able to teach students with special needs. During the conversation that was held about the issue, each of the participants expressed their viewpoint that the course load was either too extensive or too extensive with an excessive number of courses and that the amount of time that was given to each group was insufficient to cover all of the topics that were being discussed at the time. The researcher was able to uncover additional challenges that were linked with the process of teaching English to students who had special needs with the use of the observation class checklist. It appeared that teachers had difficulties in making sure that their students comprehend and remember the knowledge taught to them, as indicated by the findings of several researchers.

3.2 Solution Done by Teachers

During the interviews and observations, each teacher claimed they did their best to find a solution to the challenges that occurred. Participants said the following regarding this criterion:

Teacher A: For the solution, I usually give the students with special needs fewer questions than other students, however, to avoid upsetting the students, I give them the same question and let them do as much as they can do.
Teacher B: I usually repeat the material so that the students with special needs along with the other students can still remember what they have learned yesterday.

Teacher C: I gave more attention to the students with special needs, and explained the material again for them.

Two of the three teachers interviewed received training in teaching students with special needs but the training was too shallow and generalized. The solution that is implemented in the classroom for students who have special needs is that the teacher will ask fewer questions of those students; however, to avoid upsetting the student, the teacher will typically let the student do as much as the student is capable of, such as from a set of five questions, the student will only complete three of them, and that will be fine. Every teacher feels that the most successful teaching methods are repetition and a lot of practice over a long period. In English class, the teacher will require the students to repeat the same pronunciation and terminology several times throughout the lesson. Because it is conceivable that students may forget about a topic after only one meeting, perhaps the topic can be taught in more than one meeting. The teacher mentioned that there is yet another approach by directing students in an individualized method. The teacher emphasizes that the reading and writing processes require more time for students with specific needs. As a direct consequence, teachers devote more attention to students with special needs, and once other students have finished their worksheets, teachers ask them to assist students with special needs.

3.3 Strategies Used by Teachers

It was clear from the information gained from the interviews and the classroom observation checklist that the three teachers utilized several distinct approaches to teaching their students. The following participant excerpts are provided as examples to demonstrate an understanding of the various strategies that were stated to be used by participants:

Teacher A: When teaching I generalize all students, then I will walk around the students, asking the students with special needs what they do not understand and explaining back to them.

Teacher B: I shift the seating arrangements of the students. I will ask the students with special needs to sit in front of the class so they can hear and see the material clearer and to make it easier to ask them if they do not understand the material.

Teacher C: For me, I have to teach them individually and face to face.

For example, teachers A and C adopt an approach in which the teacher generalizes all students when explaining in class, but after students with special needs have been given an assignment, the teacher will accompany those students and explain it back to them. Both Teacher A and Teacher C use this tactic in their classrooms. Teacher B shifts the seating arrangements of the students in the classroom around. She places the students with special needs into seats closer to the
teacher's desk so they can participate actively in the teachings while seated at the front of the class. Heterogeneous grouping is another method utilized by teachers, and it's called "mixing it up." This technique promotes collaborative learning and works exceptionally well in classrooms where there is a big difference between the individual academic prowess of the students.

Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated that the EFL teachers who were interviewed and the classes that were observed utilized instructional strategies and solutions that were very similar to those typically utilized in Malang to instruct special needs, students. These findings countered prior studies, which found that students with special needs had distinct social and learning styles from those of typically developing students (Utami et al., 2021). In addition, they are confronted with various challenges or difficulties, and unable to determine how to solve these issues; hence, they continue to apply the same strategy repeatedly. It resulted from the lack of training to teach English to special needs students. It is necessary to rethink EFL teacher education programs to include training on methods to instruct special needs students.

It is important to keep in mind the following concepts when attempting to implement inclusive education successfully to get positive results: (1) educational goals that are aimed at all students (knowledge, skills, and values); (2) curricular flexibility that allows for the response to diversification and the provision of opportunity to succeed. (3) evaluation based on the individual's growth; (4) ensuring that the taught content and skills are pertinent to the child. The core principle underlying inclusive education is the belief that all students, to the greatest extent feasible, should study together, irrespective of the difficulties or distinctions they may face (Unesco, 1994).

Implementing inclusive education programs for students with special needs in conventional schools, in addition to complying with formal legal requirements, promotes community cohesiveness and considers the specific requirements of special education students. This is because inclusive education programs are designed to cater to the requirements of students enrolled in special education. Therefore, the learning profile of inclusive schools needs to reflect the following: (1) the implementation of a multi-level and multimodality curriculum. In this scenario, the teacher is responsible for creating a classroom atmosphere that accommodates all students to the maximum by emphasizing an atmosphere and social behavior that respects differences in terms of ability, physicality, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and religion, amongst other categories; (2) Application of learning model, which refers to cooperative learning strategy, which incorporates inter-student cooperation, mutual teaching and learning, as well as actively participating and taking responsibility for both their education and the education of their peers. All of the students are grouped together in one classroom, not to compete against one another but to collaborate on their education and instruction; (3) Collaboration between educators and members of other professions (such as counselors, psychologists, physicians/paramedics, speech therapists, and so on) to discuss and consult on the many different methods of assessing and evaluating student's knowledge and
abilities; (4) Involvement of parents in the education of their children through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and aid with home study as a kind of active participation on the part of the parents (Efendi, 2018; Sunardi, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This case study centered on the challenges, solutions, and strategies utilized by three English as a Foreign Language teachers at public high schools. It is necessary to be aware of the challenges that arise while teaching English to students who have special requirements so that we can determine what aspects of our current educational system require improvement. Inevitably, difficulties will arise in the classroom while teaching English, particularly when working with students who have disabilities. Perhaps, troubles stem not only from the students but also from the instructors. Despite the seemingly infinite problems that occurred throughout the entire process of studying and teaching, the instructors did their very best to find solutions to the issues. According to the data, it was discovered that the teachers encountered quite a few of the same challenges. In response to these challenges, every instructor devised a unique plan to address them head-on in their respective classrooms.

Even if some of the aforementioned methods have the potential to be helpful for certain classes, it is imperative that teachers focus their attention first on the circumstance that exists within the class. Because there are many distinct approaches to education, a single classroom or individual students may require unique teaching strategies. It is strongly suggested that educators investigate and experiment with various teaching strategies in the classroom to determine which approach is most effective for their students. In addition, the school ought to, if at all possible, provide English training for the instructors to raise the teachers' level of English proficiency.

REFERENCES


Evans, W., Gable, R. A., & Habib, A. (2021). Lessons from the past and challenges for
the future: Inclusive education for students with unique needs. Education Sciences, 11(6), 281.


