

Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Students with Special Needs at SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati

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Abstract-Inclusive education ensures equitable access to quality education for all learners, including students with special needs, yet teachers face significant challenges in implementing effective English language instruction for these diverse learners. This study aimed to examine the pedagogical challenges teachers encounter when adapting English lessons for students with special needs, analyze how teachers address communication barriers, identify instructional strategies and accommodations used, and investigate classroom management challenges at SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati. Unlike previous research that broadly examines inclusive education, this study highlights the lived experiences of English teachers in a school without a formal inclusive program, offering a context-specific perspective often overlooked. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed, utilizing purposive sampling to select 2-4 English teachers with direct experience teaching students with special needs. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews that analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The results revealed that teachers face multifaceted challenges including significant disparities in students' basic literacy abilities, inadequate specialized teaching materials and training, difficulties balancing attention between regular and special needs students, and disruptive behavioral management issues. Teachers demonstrated adaptive strategies such as multilingual instruction, differentiated learning approaches, modified assessments, and informal peer collaboration. However, professional development opportunities remained limited, with teachers relying primarily on spontaneous solutions and colleague discussions. The study concludes that while teachers show resourcefulness in addressing inclusive education challenges, systematic support systems, comprehensive training programs, and specialized resources are urgently needed. These findings provide important implications for inclusive education policy and practice by highlighting the necessity of formal teacher preparation programs, structured institutional support, and collaboration with special education experts to ensure that inclusive classrooms can effectively serve all learners.

Keywords: Students with special need, teachers' Challenges, teaching English

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an approach

that ensures every learner, regardless of disability, cultural background, or learning

need, is provided equitable access to quality education (Islam & Ghosh, 2024; Obah, 2024). It promotes social justice and individual development while fostering community integration (Herrero et al., 2020; Mieghem et al., 2018). Teacher preparedness and continuous professional development are critical for successful implementation, as evidenced by studies demonstrating the impact of positive teacher attitudes and targeted training on inclusive practices (Donath et al., 2023; Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023). Innovative strategies including digital tools and adaptable curricula enhance learning experiences across all educational levels, from preschool through higher education (Holmgren, 2024; Larysa et al., 2020).

Moreover, English language learning in inclusive classrooms is pivotal in cultivating equitable learning environments that validate diverse linguistic and cultural identities. Research indicates that integrating culturally responsive methodologies, such as identity texts and translanguaging practices, enhances student engagement and academic success (Krulatz & Steen-olsen, 2017; Wayan et al., 2024). Educators are encouraged to employ differentiated instruction and critical pedagogy to meet varied learning needs, thereby facilitating effective scaffolding and support for underrepresented groups (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Rovai & Pflingsthor, 2022). The strategic use of Information and Communication Technology further reinforces inclusivity by improving accessibility and enabling innovative instructional approaches (McGowan et al., 2014).

Furthermore, addressing challenges in inclusive English teaching is critical for enhancing both teacher efficacy and student success. Difficulties such as insufficient training, resource constraints, and mismatches between traditional pedagogy and inclusive needs hinder effective practice (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2018). Research indicates that improving teacher preparedness and professional development can positively influence attitudes toward diverse learners and enhance differentiated instruction techniques (Krischler et al., 2019). Moreover, tackling these issues empowers educators to adopt innovative

strategies and assistive technologies that support the academic and social growth of students with special needs (Rofiah, 2023).

Moreover, SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati is a well-established secondary school that provides education to a diverse student body; however, it does not yet have a formal inclusive education program to support students with special needs. As a result, students with disabilities such as students with dyslexia, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), autism, speech delays, etc. may face challenges in adapting to the standard learning environment, as they require specialized teaching strategies, individualized attention, and supportive interventions that are not systematically provided. English is a crucial subject in the school curriculum, reflecting its importance in national education standards and global communication, yet traditional teaching methods may not always be effective for students with special needs.

Additionally, teachers experience multifaceted challenges pertaining to pedagogy, classroom management, assessment, and resource support. Pedagogically, insufficient training and limited content knowledge constrain instructional innovation and effective curriculum delivery (Noor et al., 2020; Saidalvi et al., 2022). The rationale for this study is grounded in the critical need to explore the challenges educators face, such as inadequate training, limited resources, and the disconnect between traditional teaching methods and the diverse needs of students with special needs. By investigating these experiences, the research aims to identify areas that require attention and support, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of teaching strategies and support systems for educators in inclusive English language learning environments.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive case study approach to explore teachers' challenges in teaching English to students with special needs at SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati. The research focused on English teachers who have direct

experience teaching students with special needs, selected through purposive sampling with a sample size of 2-4 teachers depending on data saturation. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately chosen based on specific characteristics, knowledge, or experiences that are directly relevant to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2015). Data collection utilized multiple methods including semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to explore teachers' experiences, challenges, strategies, and perceptions, as well as classroom observations to examine real-time teacher-student interactions and teaching strategies. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing interviews and observation notes, coding data into categories such as pedagogical challenges, communication barriers, and classroom management issues, and identifying recurring themes. Ethical considerations were maintained through informed consent forms, confidentiality protection by keeping teachers' identities anonymous, and obtaining permission from school authorities before conducting the study to ensure compliance with ethical research guidelines.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from interviews conducted with English teachers at SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati regarding their experiences teaching students with special needs. The results are organized around five key areas: pedagogical challenges in adapting English lessons, communication barriers and solutions, instructional strategies and accommodations, classroom management difficulties, and available professional development opportunities. Following the presentation of findings, the discussion section analyzes these results within the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks to provide deeper understanding of the challenges and implications for inclusive English language education.

3.1 Result

a. Pedagogical challenges faced by teachers in adapting English language lessons for students with special needs

English teachers face significant challenges when teaching students with special needs, particularly regarding differences in students' basic abilities. Some students cannot even read or write well, making it extremely difficult for them to follow English language learning. As expressed by one teacher: "...there are definitely those who cannot read yet. We become confused, especially when learning English. How to teach English when the child himself has difficulty writing his own name." (Teacher 1). This condition requires teachers to lower the material level far below regular class standards.

Furthermore, time and attention limitations also become major obstacles. Teachers often find it difficult to divide their focus between regular students and students who need more attention. This was expressed by a teacher: "It's actually quite difficult, if we focus exclusively on them, time for others is wasted. If we don't pay attention to them, they will remain like this." (Teacher 1). A similar challenge was experienced by another teacher: "...having to take care of this child while other classmates sometimes feel, 'why am I not being paid attention to,'... eventually the class becomes somewhat noisy." (Teacher 2).

The next obstacle is the lack of special teaching materials and learning media. Teachers do not have modules or special equipment for children with special needs, so they can only make limited modifications to existing materials. As stated, "So there are no special materials made for these children yet? Not yet possible. Because the needs in each class are different..." (Teacher 1). In assessment too, teachers often have to adjust grade weights to be fairer: "In normative assessment... sometimes the content is differentiated. But if daily tests are the same, the weights are differentiated." (Teacher 2).

Another fairly dominant problem is teachers' limited competence. Many teachers feel unprepared because they lack special

training in inclusive education. This was honestly expressed: "If asked specifically, honestly I'm not ready." (Teacher 1). Similarly, another teacher added: "I don't have the ability because I wasn't given the knowledge foundation to teach children with special needs." (Teacher 2).

In classroom management, the behavior of students with special needs also presents unique challenges. There are students who have tantrums, are hyperactive, or are extremely passive. A teacher explained: "There are indeed children with special needs... some also have tantrums. Sometimes there are several tantrums. Can't sit still, disturb friends, go in and out of class..." (Teacher 1). On the other hand, there are also students who are too quiet and passive: "What I encounter in class... they tend to just stay quiet when asked." (Teacher 2). Both conditions equally hinder interaction and participation in English language learning.

Beyond classroom factors, minimal support from parents also compounds teachers' challenges. There are parents who are reluctant to accept their child's condition and do not provide support at home. As stated, "Sometimes it's the parents who don't want to cooperate... sometimes they even blame the teacher." (Teacher 1). However, there are also aware parents who still choose for their child to attend regular classes: "The parents say, I know my child cannot do this or that, but I want my child to attend normal school..." (Teacher 2).

The next challenge is communication problems and understanding instructions. Many students have difficulty understanding commands, even when delivered in Indonesian. Teachers often have to repeat explanations and use mixed languages. A teacher conveyed: "I teach using three languages... Indonesian, if they don't understand I ask using Balinese." (Teacher 1). This difficulty also emerges when students read, write, or understand meaning in English texts: "When they cannot write, then read slowly, automatically they don't understand meaning... especially when they have to learn English." (Teacher 2).

Based on interview results, it can be concluded that English teachers face various challenges in teaching students with special needs. Main challenges include differences in students' basic abilities that make it difficult for them to follow lessons, time and attention limitations that require teachers to divide focus between regular students and students with special needs, and minimal special teaching materials and learning media provided by schools. Additionally, teachers also feel less competent because they haven't received adequate training, so the strategies used are still simple and spontaneous.

From the classroom perspective, teachers face diverse student behaviors, from tantrums and hyperactivity to being too passive, which often disturb learning dynamics. This challenge is further exacerbated by minimal parental support, where most are uncooperative or even deny their child's condition. On the other hand, communication problems also become obstacles because students have difficulty understanding instructions, so teachers must use various languages simultaneously for messages to be conveyed.

Thus, the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers are not only technical learning issues, but also involve professional competence, classroom management, family support, and availability of school facilities. This shows the need for more comprehensive support, both in the form of teacher training, provision of special resources, and active parental involvement so that inclusive English language learning can be implemented optimally.

b. Ways teachers overcome communication barriers when teaching English to students with special needs

Based on interviews with teachers, teachers have several ways to overcome communication barriers when teaching English to students with special needs. First, teachers use mixed languages so messages are more easily understood. A teacher explained: "I teach using three languages...

Because of Indonesian. I translate using Indonesian. Later, to make sure there's no response in Indonesian or English, I ask in Balinese." (Teacher 1)

This strategy helps students who don't understand instructions in Indonesian or English to still catch the teacher's meaning through local language that is more familiar. Second, teachers repeat instructions and provide additional explanations simply. This was expressed by a teacher: "Sometimes I repeat... to ensure that they really understand the instructions they need to follow." (Teacher 2). Through repetition, teachers can check student understanding and reduce misunderstandings. Third, teachers provide more intensive individual assistance when students show difficulties in writing, reading, or understanding text meaning. As explained: "I provide assistance with longer time duration to this child." (Teacher 2). This approach helps students who tend to learn slowly so they don't fall too far behind their classmates. Additionally, teachers also try to use body language and personal approaches such as calling students directly, inviting them to talk outside class, or using communication through chat (WhatsApp) for students who are more comfortable expressing themselves in writing compared to face-to-face (Teacher 1). Thus, communication barriers are overcome through a combination of linguistic strategies (using various languages), instructional strategies (repetition, simple explanations), and interpersonal strategies (intensive assistance and personal approach) adapted to each student's condition.

Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers overcome communication barriers in teaching English to students with special needs by using mixed languages (Indonesian, Balinese, and English) so instructions are more easily understood, repeating explanations until students really understand, and providing intensive individual assistance for students who are slow in reading and writing. Additionally, teachers also utilize personal approaches, both through direct interaction and communication via media such as

WhatsApp, to reach students who are more comfortable providing indirect responses. These strategies help create better understanding and make students feel cared for despite having communication limitations.

c. Learning strategies and accommodations used by teachers to support students with special needs in English language learning

Based on teachers' responses, teachers use various learning strategies and accommodations to support students with special needs in learning English. First, teachers make material adjustments by lowering the difficulty level according to student abilities. For example, when regular students are asked to make sentences in tenses, students with special needs are only asked to copy or translate simple vocabulary. A teacher said: "I've asked children in general to make sentences. But for words, they're still confused... I just ask them to copy... just the vocabulary." (Teacher 1). Second, teachers implement learning differentiation based on student interests and learning styles. A teacher explained that some students are asked to make simple comics, some use Canva on phones, and some make collages according to their respective creativity: "The differentiation I often make... those who like IT create with Canva, those who like drawing make simple comics, those who like collages please use their creativity." (Teacher 1). Third, teachers provide additional time and special assistance for students who are slow to understand material. A teacher expressed: "This child has the same worksheet, but I provide assistance with longer time duration to this child." (Teacher 2). Fourth, teachers make modifications in assessment. Students with special needs are evaluated with different standards, usually only targeted to achieve Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM), while other students can get higher scores. As conveyed: "They still get KKM, but others might get KKM plus 2. For them, just KKM. In my opinion, KKM scores are

already heavy." (Teacher 1). Fifth, teachers use flexible communication strategies, including mixing Indonesian, Balinese, and English, and repeating instructions so students understand. "I teach using three languages... if they don't understand, I ask using Balinese." (Teacher 1). Thus, strategies and accommodations implemented by teachers include material adjustment, learning differentiation, individual assistance, assessment modification, and use of mixed languages and instruction repetition. All these strategies are done so students with special needs can still follow English language learning according to their capacity.

d. Challenges faced by teachers in classroom management when teaching English to students with special needs

Based on interview results, teachers face several challenges in classroom management when teaching English to students with special needs. One main challenge is controlling students' behavior that tends to disrupt the learning process. A teacher mentioned students who have tantrums, are hyperactive, go in and out of class, or disturb their classmates. "There are indeed children with special needs... some also have tantrums. Sometimes there are several tantrums. Can't sit still, disturb friends, go in and out of class..." (Teacher 1). To overcome this, teachers usually move students to front positions so they're easier to monitor. Additionally, teachers also have difficulty dividing attention between regular students and students with special needs. When focus is given to certain students, other students often feel less attention, making the class noisy. "...having to take care of this one child while other classmates sometimes feel, 'why am I not being paid attention to,'... eventually the class becomes somewhat noisy." (Teacher 2). Another challenge is learning group division. Students with special needs are often excluded or not chosen by their classmates. "Sometimes they often don't get groups. Already like being excluded." (Teacher 1). To overcome this, teachers don't give

freedom to choose groups, but divide groups using number systems to be fairer. Generally, teachers face obstacles in maintaining conducive classroom atmosphere, balancing attention to all students, and ensuring that students with special needs are not isolated in group interactions. These challenges require teachers to have extra patience, flexible management strategies, and creativity in creating inclusive classroom atmosphere.

e. Professional development opportunities available to teachers to improve their skills in teaching English to students with special needs

Based on interview results, teachers emphasized that professional development opportunities for teachers in teaching English to students with special needs are still very limited, but remain open for improvement. First, teachers acknowledge the importance of special training regarding inclusive education. A teacher stated: "If asked specifically, honestly I'm not ready." (Teacher 1), and "I don't have the ability because I wasn't given the knowledge foundation to teach children with special needs." (Teacher 2). This shows that the need for practical and in-depth training about strategies for handling students with different needs is very urgent. Second, teachers also see the need for assistance from experts or psychologists. As expressed by a teacher: "Actually, we need psychologists, because we once held community service with psychologists too..." (Teacher 1). Professional assistance can help teachers understand student diagnoses and adjust appropriate learning strategies. Third, there are opportunities through collaboration among teachers at school. Teacher 2 conveyed that they often have discussions or share strategies with colleagues: "We try to discuss with friends... there's sharing with Mr. Agus... if the method is okay, then for this child we adopt that method." (Teacher 2). This becomes a form of informal professional development that helps teachers learn from other colleagues' experiences. Additionally, teachers also have

opportunities to seek references independently, for example through the internet or other sources, to find suitable strategies. A teacher mentioned: "...browsing on the internet. How to handle children like this..." (Teacher 2). Thus, professional development opportunities for teachers in this context include special training, psychologist assistance, teacher collaboration, and independent learning initiatives. However, to be more effective, schools and government need to provide systematic support so teachers not only rely on personal efforts, but also get broader access to relevant training programs and resources.

Table 1. Summary of Research Results

Theme	Findings	Examples / Teacher Statements
Pedagogical Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide gaps in students' basic literacy (some cannot read/write) • Lack of specialized teaching materials • - Teachers feel unprepared due to limited training 	<p>"There are definitely those who cannot read yet... how to teach English when the child has difficulty writing his own name." (T1)</p>
Time & Attention	Teachers struggle to balance focus between regular and special needs students	<p>"If we focus exclusively on them, time for others is wasted." (T1)</p>
Communication Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have difficulty understanding instructions • Teachers use mixed languages (Indonesian, Balinese, English) • Frequent repetition 	<p>"I teach using three languages... if they don't understand I ask using Balinese." (T1)</p>

	of explanations needed	
Instructional Strategies & Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting material difficulty • Differentiation by interest/learning style • Modified assessments (lower expectations for students with special needs) • Extra time and individual assistance 	<p>"Regular students make sentences, but special needs students just copy vocabulary." (T1)</p>
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral challenges (tantrums, hyperactivity, passivity) • Difficulties dividing attention • Group work exclusion of special needs students 	<p>"Sometimes they don't get groups. Already like being excluded." (T1)</p>
Parental Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents uncooperative or in denial • Others support inclusion despite challenge 	<p>"Sometimes it's the parents who don't want to cooperate... they even</p>

	s	blame the teacher.” (T1)
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers lack inclusive education training • Rely on colleague discussions and internet searches • Express need for psychologists or experts 	“Honestly, I’m not ready... I wasn’t given the knowledge foundation to teach children with special needs.” (T2)

ssion

Research results show that English teachers face significant challenges in teaching students with special needs, especially regarding basic ability differences, time limitations, minimal teaching materials, and lack of inclusive pedagogical competence. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) opinion that learning in inclusive classrooms requires differentiation so all students' needs can be met.

In overcoming communication barriers, teachers use mixed languages, instruction repetition, and individual assistance. This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of Zone of Proximal Development, where assistance through scaffolding is very important for students to understand material according to their developmental stage. The use of body language and personal approaches also supports Bruner's (1997) view that meaning can be constructed through various forms of communication, not limited to verbal language.

Learning strategies implemented by teachers, such as material adjustment, differentiation, assessment modification, and additional time provision, align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles from Meyer et al. (2014). By

providing various ways of representation and expression, students with special needs can learn according to their capacity and learning style.

From classroom management perspective, teachers face difficulties in controlling students' behavior, dividing attention, and preventing social exclusion in group work. This is consistent with Emmer & Evertson (2016) who emphasize the importance of flexible management strategies in inclusive classrooms, and Johnson & Johnson (1994) who emphasize the need for cooperative grouping to enhance social interaction.

Finally, regarding professional development, teachers feel they lack inclusive training foundation. This finding aligns with Forlin (2010) who states that inclusive education success is greatly influenced by teacher readiness obtained through continuous training. Teachers' initiatives to discuss with colleagues and seek references independently also show professional learning community practices (Stoll et al., 2006) that can help competence improvement.

Thus, English language learning for students with special needs requires curriculum adaptation, flexible communication strategies, inclusive classroom management, and teacher professional development support so the learning process can run optimally.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that English teachers at SMP Negeri Hindu 2 Sukawati face multifaceted challenges in teaching students with special needs, encompassing pedagogical, communicational, managerial, and professional development aspects. The primary obstacles include significant disparities in students' basic literacy skills, inadequate specialized teaching materials and training, difficulties in balancing attention between regular and special needs students, and disruptive behavioral management issues. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate resourcefulness by implementing adaptive strategies such as multilingual instruction,

differentiated learning approaches, modified assessments, and informal peer collaboration. However, these solutions remain largely spontaneous and unsystematic, highlighting the urgent need for structured support systems and comprehensive teacher preparation programs in inclusive education.

To address these challenges, practical steps should be prioritized. First, teacher training models specifically designed for inclusive English classrooms need to be developed, focusing on differentiated instruction, classroom management, and the use of assistive technologies. Second, schools should establish systematic collaboration with psychologists and special education experts to provide both diagnostic support and tailored intervention strategies. Third, school policies should mandate the provision of specialized teaching materials, ongoing professional development programs, and formal peer mentoring systems to support teachers. By integrating these strategies into policy and practice, inclusive education can be implemented more effectively and sustainably, ensuring that all learners receive equitable access to quality English language education.

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