

Exploring the teaching of english in an inclusive classroom: A case study

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Naskah diterima: 29/03/2022; Revisi: 20/04/2022; Disetujui: 6/06/2022

Abstract

This study has three aims. The first was to investigate the program that support the inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium UM. Secondly, the study was aimed at investigating how the teacher teaches English in inclusive classrooms, and the common challenges faced by the English teacher in teaching an inclusive classroom. The researchers used qualitative research using the case study method with two main instruments, namely interviews and observations. The participants involved in this research were an inclusive education school coordinator, an English teacher in inclusive classrooms, and students with special needs. The data were collected in two weeks via two interviews and two field observations. The data collected were in the form of tape recording, field notes, pictures, and videos. Those data were qualitatively analyzed to answer the research questions. The result of the study is categorized in three main points. First, the school offers program that support the implementation of inclusive education, such as self-development program, and extra courses that facilitate SEN students' development of basic life skills. There are ten classes assigned to accommodate at least one special need student in each class. Second, when it comes to teaching English in inclusive classrooms, the teachers showed a lack of specific strategies, but they used game-based technology like Kahoot to make enjoyable learning. The teachers faced challenges, like handling tantrums and moody students. Third, the result also shows that patience and sincerity are important when teaching SEN students.

Keywords: *Inclusive classroom, teaching English, SEN students*

Introduction

Education has to be accessible for everybody, also for students with special needs. It is stated in the Decree of 1945 that every individual has the right to proper education for achieving a better future (DPRRI, 2022). As a

result, Indonesia has announced several types of special education programs for pupils. One of them is inclusive education. According to [Allan \(2014\)](#), inclusive education is a philosophy that directs action to uphold every student's entitlement to a high-quality education. The goals of inclusive education are to increase the involvement of all students, develop systems that value each person equally, and advance justice, compassion, respect, and human rights ([Booth, 2009](#)). Besides that, it is also important to study in depth the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language in students who have special educational needs ([Villafuerte & Mosquera, 2020](#)).

Special needs education is education for students with disabilities, and the familiar term for them is Special Educational Needs (SEN) students ([Strogilos et al., 2023](#)). Students who have special needs are expected to gain abilities, and to become more independent so that they can participate in society through education ([Jaya et al., 2018](#)). A variety of strategies are used in normal classes, including small-group instruction, team teaching, instruction tailored to individual students' achievement levels, and the utilization of support aides ([Puspitasari, 2019](#)).

Indonesia's implementation of inclusive education was first started in 1947. Law Number 33 of 1947 holds the compensation for workers who get work accidents. It is intended to protect workers with disabilities if an accident happens to them. This law was followed by The Government Regulation Number 72 of 1991 which set the education system for disabilities. As a result, Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB or special school) was established. Finally, inclusive education is specified in Permendiknas Number 70 of 2009. It specifies the regulations on inclusive education, the right for students with disabilities and those who have special talents and intelligence to study with regular students ([Kusuma, 2021](#)). From that, inclusion schools are already carried out around Indonesia.

[Andriana and Evans \(2020\)](#) investigate the implementation of inclusive education in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The subjects of their study were twelve teachers, four principals, and six parents from those schools. The result of their study shows that the teachers admit that they have to be more patient and careful while interacting with students with special needs. The teacher always took students' voices as a chance to do a better teaching. [Imaniah and Fitria \(2018\)](#) also found that the success of the practice of inclusive education cannot be separated from the role of the stakeholders ranging from the government and institutions (schools, educators, school environment) to community, and parents. Additionally, they state that schools that organize inclusive education need adequate infrastructure for efficient and effective teaching and learning process. [Amor et al. \(2019\)](#) state that it is important to move beyond examining strategies in non-inclusive settings and building on

foundational knowledge to better approach inclusive education, promoting meaningful outcomes and full citizenship for all people, including those with disabilities.

SMP Laboratorium UM Malang has conducted inclusive education since 2010. The school has facilities (therapy room, display room to display the work of special need students, and program to support the implementation of inclusive education. Two programs are called “Kelas anak hebat” in which inclusive students are given special hours to learn social skills, such as manners and how to speak to elders and teachers, and “outing class” that provided students to learn outside the class, such as exploring nature and visiting a factory. Inclusive schools welcome all students, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or educational needs. Students with special needs will gain knowledge, contribute, and take part in every aspect of school life. However, dealing with students who have special needs is not always easy because they have their own unique characteristics. For this reason, it is recommended for teachers to get to know the learning styles of SEN students. Many teachers also have their own perceptions of teaching in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, this research answers the unique characteristics that influence learning in inclusive classrooms and teachers’ perceptions of inclusiveness in the class they are teaching. As well as the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching students with special needs in inclusive classes, and how they try to overcome these challenges.

The research questions are:

1. What are the school’s programs that support SEN students at SMP Laboratorium UM?
2. How does the teacher teach English in inclusive classrooms?
3. What are the common challenges faced by the English teacher in teaching an inclusive classroom?

Method

The research design used in this study is a case study. Case Study is a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2002). The case study is considered appropriate because the school has some characteristics that made it different from other school. Among others are the school has approximately thirteen years of experience in conducting inclusive education. It has also some programs that accommodate the special need students to be able to socialize well with other mainstream ones, such as “Kelas anak hebat” and “Outing Class”. Because of its years of experience dealing with

inclusive education, the schools has its distinctive characteristics that differentiate it with other school.

Subjects of the Study

The setting of this study is SMP Laboratorium UM, which is located in Malang, East Java. The subjects of this study were two teachers and some students with special needs. The first teacher was the coordinator of inclusive education of the school, and an English teacher who teach inclusive classroom. The first teacher is in charge of the inclusive education program at the school. The second subjects were special need students. The researchers observed them to get a better understanding of inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium UM.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted to find out more information about inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium UM. The observations were conducted to learn from real-life experiences about inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium. Both interviews and observations were conducted twice with different participants. The first interview was conducted with the first teacher to get information about inclusive education in general at SMP Laboratorium UM. The second interview was conducted with the English teacher to get information about teaching English in an inclusive classroom. The first observation we did was for a program the school held for special needs students; the event was about Eco print. The second observation we did was a classroom observation.

Table 1. Blueprint Interview with the coordinator of Inclusive education of the school.

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1.	General information about inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The management of inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium UM
2.	Facilitations for inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The implementation of shadow teachers ● The environment for inclusive education ● The special services provided ● The relationship with students and parents
3.	Experience with inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The experience faced with inclusive education

Table 2. Blueprint Interview for the English teacher

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1.	Teaching techniques and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preparations before teaching • The media used in the classroom
2.	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The common challenges faced and the solutions
3.	Experience with inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experience faced during teaching inclusive classes

Interviews and observations were collected as the primary sources of data. The Interview was in relation to the research aims that would expose the experience of teachers. Meanwhile, the observation is the main source of information of inclusive practice in the real classroom context, and confirms the experience explained by the teachers.

Data Analysis

The interview was conducted twice. The first interview was conducted on 8th November with the coordinator, while the second interview was on the second week of November 2022 with the English teacher. Before every interview, structured questions are discussed and fixed as an interview guide. The team researchers were taking notes and documenting the interview through photos or recordings. Both interviews have the same pattern of data collection. The first observation was held on second week of November 2022. It was an observation of the Eco print Class joined by the students with special needs as participants. The focus of the observation was the interaction between the teacher with the students and the teacher with the students. After the observation, the researchers directly transcribed the notes into a text as an archive. The researchers used the steps of qualitative data analysis. The researchers also used simple codification to categorize the data. The data from the interview of the first teacher were coded as T1/Int, while the data from the second teacher were coded T2/int.

Finding and Discussion

School's Programs to Support SEN students

Education (2004) stated that special needs education was to be replaced by inclusive education which implies that segregated education were to be avoided, and the mainstream classroom should open up to diversity. The result of the interview with the coordinator of inclusive education in SMP

Laboratorium UM shows that the school has managed and provided facilities to be able to implement the inclusivity at its best. Firstly, the inclusive education management in SMP Laboratorium UM has certain requirement before accepting students with special needs. Only students with low-level autism are accepted in the school. The special need students were distributed to ten existing classes, in which one special need student would be assigned per class.

We only accept SEN students who are manageable, like moderate slow learners, mild autistic learners with mild tantrums. These students can still be managed and controlled. We also do various kinds of tests, such as counting, writing and drawing. This test only applies to students with special needs. (T1/Int)

In terms of the facilities, there are several things which are provided to support the implementation of the inclusive education program at school. First, the school is open to any shadow teacher if needed. If the parents requested a shadow teacher, they should communicate it first to the school.

Our school does not provide shadow teachers, because the school wants students to be able to mingle with other mainstream students. However, if the parents provide their own shadow teacher themselves, that is very permissible. There is one student who uses a shadow teacher because he is a medium level of slow learner. (T1/Int)

Based on the interview, there was a 9th grader with a shadow teacher, but the shadow teacher was only occupied in the early phase of the student's activity which was intended to help the student adapt to the new environment. If the student was already adapted to the new situation, the shadow teacher would not be needed anymore.

Apart from that, there are also extra hours on Wednesdays for students inclusive learning as self-development. The activity takes place from 2 to 3 p.m. The activities are simple, such as folding clothes and other simple things to support student independence. (T1/Int)

Another facility is the additional course for students with special needs. This course is called "kelas pengembangan diri" (self-development class) which was an advanced program developed by the coordinator. The origin of the self-development class was a program called "kelas anak hebat" (great students' class) which was developed before her time. Furthermore, the previous

program was more focused on developing student's social skills, while the recent program includes more aspects such as independence, self-development, self-regulation, and soft skills. The course also focuses on basic life skills like folding clothes, making art, and so on. Additionally, to support self-development class program, the school re-provides a new inclusive class. The coordinator also stated that one of the facilities for special educational need (SEN) students was the rapport. SEN students in this school have different rapport from the mainstream students by considering adjustments to students' learning abilities, so that their abilities are assessed fairly. Lastly, besides mentioning the ongoing program, the coordinator also mentioned a plan to launch a yearly program with the concept of a three ways conference to build parent-school relationships. This three-way conference would be attended by parents, psychologists and SEN students. In the event, they would have 30-40 minutes per session to discuss the development of each student.

Teaching English in Inclusive Classroom

The English teacher in this school has been an active English teacher for four years. She got her bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching from one of the state universities in Malang. The result of the interview shows that the teacher had no different treatment and strategies when teaching English in the inclusive classrooms.

The strategy is adding games because SEN students and mainstream students really like games. I often use PPT, Kahoot, and also videos as learning media. (T2/Int)

This is in line with the result of the observation in the classroom that the teacher was not using any other specific strategies to teach the inclusive classroom. The teacher did the teaching and learning process as usual, using white board and PPT. However, the teacher always put an effort into making an interesting learning through games, such as Kahoot as observed during her teaching. This is in line with [Puspitasari \(2019\)](#) who states that the teachers should apply various ways to teach students in an inclusive classroom context. What should be underlined is that the teacher should pay more attention to students with autism as they might often get bored easily, show slow understanding, or shift focus for some conditions. In terms of classroom management, the teacher remained consistent in approaching the student's desk and encouraging them to keep up with the learning progress.

In my opinion, SEN students have good English. There is one student's name FI, he always goes out of class and doesn't come

back during my lessons. However, After I talked to him, and I evaluated myself in my approach, and give him trust, this student finally wants to join English class. (T2/Int)

The teacher also maintained clear pronunciation and a loud voice when giving instructions. Teachers stated that most of SEN students have above-average skills in English as compared to regular students in their classroom.

Challenges in Teaching Inclusive Classroom

The teachers shared their experiences of challenges in teaching inclusive classrooms. Based on the interview with the coordinator, she mentioned that students with autism might have tantrums whenever they were interrupted by their friends. The English teacher explained the solution that was by lowering the tension first. After that, the SEN students were given space and time to express their feelings through crying or shouting and screaming.

First, if SEN students cannot follow the material presented, we, as teachers, must be patient. Second, autistic students often have tantrums, get angry, scream, and disturb other friends. In the end, the teacher will take this student to the inclusion room so that they can be alone first and take their time. If they cannot be handled, the school will report the matter to the parents. (T1/Int)

The last was to crosscheck the information and gave the best solution to it. If it was not sufficient to solve the problem, she would suggest communicating the problem to the counselor. Other than tantrums, the challenges faced by the teachers were SEN students' boredom with a specific lesson or subject that might make them skip classes, or have mood changes, and lack of focus.

If SEN students are bored, they like to ask for a permission to go to the bathroom. If a friend bothers him/her, he/she can have tantrums and not in a good mood. If he/she is not in the mood, he/she usually does not want to do any task. So, these inclusive students must always be paid attention to and asked about their condition. But so far, we can handle them. (T2/Int)

Each teacher has faced different challenges in teaching English in inclusive classroom, but the teachers said that patience and sincerity were the key to teaching the SEN students. Teachers in SMP Laboratorium UM were already putting good effort to solve the challenges that might appear during the teaching of English in inclusive classroom. In relation to this, [Chan and Yuen](#)

(2015) state that students with autism are mostly sensitive to insincere intention, utterance, and actions.

Teaching in an inclusive classroom presents difficulties that are not unique to Indonesia. According to Singal (2019), there are several obstacles facing inclusive education in India, such as differences in enrollment rates between types of disabilities, low rates of transition to upper primary and secondary education, and a lack of focus on the quality of instruction and learning that children with disabilities receive. According to Singal (2019), teachers frequently rely on basic teaching techniques and have restrictions in their practices and preparedness to incorporate all students. Furthermore, a major obstacle to the revolutionary and transformative aim of inclusive education is the emphasis on integrating SEN students into the mainstream system without addressing the fundamental issues.

From these findings there are some implications drawn. First, the study highlights the importance of specific requirements and procedures in managing inclusive education, such as accepting students with low-level autism and assigning them to classes with at least one SEN student in one class. Schools and educational institutions can use this information to refine their inclusive education policies, ensuring that they have clear guidelines for accepting and supporting SEN students. Second, the provision of additional courses focusing on basic life skills plays a crucial role in facilitating the adaptation of SEN students to the mainstream classroom. Other schools may consider expanding similar support systems and courses to better address the diverse needs of students with various learning challenges. Third, the finding shows that teachers should use similar strategies in inclusive classrooms and employ engaging activities like games is noteworthy. Teacher training programs can emphasize the importance of adapting standard teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners, while still incorporating engaging and interactive elements. Last, the challenges faced by teachers, such as tantrums, boredom, mood changes, and lack of focus, underscore the need for effective classroom management strategies. Professional development programs for teachers should address specific challenges related to inclusive classrooms, providing strategies for managing behavior and maintaining a positive learning environment.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that Inclusive education at SMP Laboratorium UM keeps developing in terms of the education system and teaching-learning activities. The school facilitates SEN students with some programs to help them develop themselves in many aspects such as

communication, independence, self-development, self-regulation, and soft skills. The school also planned to have a program to build parent-school relationships so they can communicate better for the SEN student's development. Besides that, the school has a policy to select SEN students in which only those with low level of autism are admitted. When it comes to teaching English in inclusive classrooms, the teacher uses typical media for teaching such as PPT, videos, and kahoot. However, SEN students have special treatment from the teachers to keep them on track during the teaching and learning process.

From the findings written, the researchers have some suggestions for educational institutions, educators, and pre-service teachers. For educational institutions, the school should provide more facilities that support SEN students to learn, like providing shadow teachers or team teaching. The school should also facilitate teachers to join workshops to improve their awareness and competence on teaching inclusive classroom so that they know how to deal with students with unique learning styles. Also, the school should foster a culture that values inclusivity, patience, and sincerity. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, workshops, and ongoing support for teachers, students, and parents. Next, the suggestions for the educators, they could establish ongoing professional development skills that focus on inclusive teaching techniques, classroom management skills, and strategies that are crucial to address specific challenges faced by teachers in inclusive settings. Lastly, for the pre-service teachers, equipping themselves with the knowledge of inclusive education and classroom management are important. The pre-service teachers can take courses that specifically discuss inclusive education. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the practices and challenges of inclusive education, offering practical implications and suggestions for educators and educational institutions committed to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

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