



Breaking Barriers: English Language Learning in Special Education Schools for Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze how children with special needs learn English in special education schools, by analyzing pre-learning strategies and the challenges of learning English for children with special needs in Special Schools. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, this article aims to identify and analyze English language learning models in special elementary schools. Data was collected through Google Form interviews by considering certain characteristics and situations. In the context of learning English for children with special needs, learning designs are prepared based on an analysis of their learning needs and barriers. By designing appropriate learning, the learning process becomes more structured, and learning objectives can be better achieved. A teacher must have creativity, flexibility, commitment to learning progress, and a willingness to continue learning from his students. emphasizes that a teacher, regardless of field of study, who teaches children with special needs must have a strong scientific understanding of disability, its causes, the assessment process, and its implementation. For English teachers, it is crucial to understand the specific aims or targets of English learning for students with special needs. With a strong grasp of learning objectives, teachers can design suitable learning approaches, models, and strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone desires a normal life where they can engage in activities without obstacles, whether in social settings, general life, or work. However, some individuals are born with physical, mental, emotional-social, or psychological abnormalities, which can make life challenging. While some may have a good understanding of their condition, others might not be aware of their own abnormalities. Physical disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, or paralysis, often draw significant public attention. The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, provides special attention to the provision of education for children with special needs (Yosiani, 2014). Data from the Central Statistics

Agency (BPS) shows that amount children need especially in Indonesia is increasing of 4.2 million to 8.3 million between in 2005 and 2007 (Tarnoto, 2016) Although there is imbalance between results study from second source that, however possible conclusions taken is that amount student need special Enough significant. This matter show necessity attention special from government in provide appropriate education For they.

Special schools are educational institutions designed specifically for children with similar types of disorders. These include schools for the blind, the hearing impaired, the mentally impaired, the physically impaired, and other specific needs. This study focuses on all types of students with special needs. (Irawati, 2023). Based on teacher observations of English language lessons, several issues have been identified. First, there is a significant discrepancy between writing and pronunciation, which complicates the learning process for students. This mismatch makes it difficult for students to effectively grasp the language. Second, there is a notable variation in students' understanding of the material, which affects their ability to read and speak proficiently. This problem becomes evident when teachers ask students to repeat material that has already been taught, revealing gaps in their comprehension and language skills.

Language is a tool used for communication and interaction between people. While communication can occur in other ways, language is the primary method humans use to express themselves and connect with one another (Wiratno, 2014). In communication, humans use language skills to both receive and convey information. In today's modern era, mastering foreign languages is increasingly important, as many advanced technologies rely on them. Proficiency in foreign languages facilitates expanded interactions and allows access to a broader range of knowledge from around the world (Mufidah, 2017). To accommodate people's needs for the role of English in everyday life, the Minister of Education and Culture introduced English subjects in elementary schools (Susini, 2021). However, learning English in special schools presents significant challenges. Understanding a new language requires time and effective strategies, especially for children with learning limitations. Factors influencing students' difficulties with English vocabulary include limited prior knowledge, a lack of interest and motivation in reading, insufficient use of learning media, low task intensity, and, importantly, the use of learning techniques or strategies that do not align with students' needs or adapt to their physical and cognitive conditions (Sapti et al., 2019) .

Children with special needs require specialized support due to developmental disturbances and abnormalities.. (Desiningrum, 2016). These children often exhibit physical, emotional, and intellectual levels that differ from those of other children, which can make adaptation to the learning process challenging (Triutari, 2014). It is crucial for teachers to employ appropriate strategies and approaches tailored to these unique needs. However, there is still limited research on how learning is conducted for children with special needs, whether in inclusive or special education classrooms. (Sumarni, 2019). Studying English language learning for these students in both types of classrooms raises interest in understanding the approaches used by teachers and the challenges they face during the learning process. Therefore, this article aims to explore teaching strategies, preparation methods, and the challenges encountered by English language teachers in inclusive education settings.

METHOD

The research uses a descriptive qualitative method to explore teaching strategies, preparation, and the challenges faced by teachers in special education classrooms. This approach

provides a detailed explanation of how English is taught to children with special needs. In qualitative research, several approaches can be employed, including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case studies, and content analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative research is characterized by its intensive data collection through direct contact with participants, allowing the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of individuals and groups. The findings are typically presented in descriptive words rather than numerical data.

This research was conducted from February to April 2024. Data was collected using a Google Form questionnaire to examine teaching strategies, preparation, and challenges in teaching English to children with special needs in non-mainstream schools. Interviews were conducted with three teachers from two different schools, following a structured interview guide. These interviews aimed to uncover teaching strategies, preparation methods, challenges faced during teaching, and teachers' expectations for the learning process.

The interview results were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods, (Miles et al., 2014) which involve three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and data verification. In the data condensation stage, relevant information from the interviews with the two teachers was selected and summarized. This process focused on extracting data related to teaching strategies, preparation, and challenges in teaching children with special needs. Next, in the data presentation stage, the condensed data was organized and displayed in a table format to provide a clear overview of the findings. This presentation helps in understanding the strategies, preparation methods, and challenges identified during the interviews. Finally, in the data verification stage, the presented data was reviewed and cross-checked to ensure its accuracy and reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English learning strategies

Data was obtained through interviews with fifteen correspondents. Interviews were conducted in accordance with interview guidelines prepared to discover teaching strategies (including teaching preparation) and the challenges teachers face while teaching the learning process. The interview results were then analyzed using qualitative analysis methods. Explains the three stages in data analysis, namely data condensation, data presentation, and data verification. The data condensation process was carried out to select and present relevant data obtained from interviews with two teachers. Data selection was carried out based on the aim of exploring information about teaching strategies, teaching preparation, and challenges in teaching children with special needs. Data about strategies, preparation before teaching, and challenges are then grouped and presented in table form.

Table 1. English language learning preparation strategies

Correspondent	Answer Correspondent	Code
P1, P2, P5, P6, P8	Many students have difficulty understanding the teacher's explanations. Even when asked to repeat what has been explained, they often still don't grasp the material. They may continue to ask questions about what was covered and struggle to recall the information that was taught.	Difficulty understand explanation
P 3, P 4, P9, P10, P11, P13	Students often struggle to understand the material unless it's repeated multiple times. If the material is only explained once, they usually can't remember it well. Teachers have to go over things two or three times and sometimes use different methods to make sure students get it. They keep repeating the explanations until the students understand, and they need to find effective ways to explain the material so that students can grasp it	Explanation must be repeated
P14, P15, P7, P12	Teachers must be capable of modifying the lesson plan before the learning process. If the lesson plan is too long or not customized to the students' conditions, it can be problematic. There is also a lack of reinforcement at the moment they learn.	Lesson plan (RPP) is too long

Based on the interview data, teachers with experience in special education schools, including those working with students with intellectual disabilities, often use contextual strategies for students with ADHD and Down syndrome. According to these teachers, this approach is highly effective because it connects learning material with students' everyday activities. The contextual approach is integrated into the classroom through stages outlined in the Learning Implementation Plan. Additionally, teachers translate English vocabulary into Indonesian, which proves to be very effective for students with ADHD and Down syndrome who struggle to understand the material.

Furthermore, during core activities, teachers usually teach vocabulary according to the material being studied. However, the teacher conveys this English material by translating from Indonesian to English or vice versa. Apart from using picture media, the teacher also explained that the process of explaining the material was carried out repeatedly until the students were deemed to understand. This method is also used by teachers who teach slow learner children, who pay attention to the condition of the students who are learning. Because the focus is on vocabulary, the teacher also ensures how each word spoken by the student is articulated.

English Language Learning Challenges

Teaching students with special needs presents its own challenges. Teachers must organize learning with a plan that suits students' needs, by simplifying lesson plans and preparing interesting learning media. Apart from preparation before teaching, several other things are challenges for special school teachers. Data obtained from interviews with 15 correspondents who are special school teachers, can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Challenges in English learning

Correspondent	Answer Correspondent	Code
P1, P2, P5, P6, P8	Children with special needs often have unpredictable moods and frequently change their interests in learning. Sometimes, even if engaging methods are used, students may suddenly lose interest and refuse to participate in their studies.	Children behavior changes
P 4, P 9, P10, P11, P13	Teachers sometimes don't do thorough preparation before the learning process, or don't modify the draft material to be delivered to students. Also, the methods used sometimes make students not want to study English.	Preparation before learning
P14, P12	Repeated explanations are sometimes not done by the teacher. In fact, repeating explanations is necessary in special education schools to ensure that all students understand what the teacher is saying.	Explanation repeated
P1, P3, P6, P7, P8, P15	When the teacher delivers material using various methods, but lacks adequate facilities and infrastructure, it becomes a barrier to effectively	Lack of infrastructure

conveying information to students,
especially those with special needs.
who are child need special.

Students' behavior can be quite unpredictable, fluctuating with their mood or circumstances, which presents a major challenge for teachers. They need to prepare various learning alternatives that can accommodate these changes. In less ideal conditions, students may display different behaviors. For instance, a teacher working with students with intellectual disabilities mentioned that creating a comfortable and conducive classroom environment is crucial before beginning lessons. Similarly, students with ADHD and Down syndrome need a calm and supportive setting, especially when they exhibit excessive behaviors like crying, laughing, or talking continuously. One teacher noted the importance of isolating students temporarily to help them calm down and avoid disrupting their peers.

Special needs students, such as slow learners and those with Down syndrome, often require repeated explanations. In this study, students with Down syndrome were found to be hesitant to speak and frequently fell asleep in class, leading to inadequate development of their verbal skills. Teachers must repeat material or ask questions multiple times to ensure understanding. Before starting English lessons, teachers prepare by modifying materials and simplifying lesson plans. They focus on simplifying concepts and highlighting essential points. In this research, using a strategy of translating English into Indonesian is considered effective for meeting students' needs.

Additionally, teachers face challenges related to their preparedness and the lack of infrastructure. Limited availability of educational tools, special software, and other resources, along with minimal training for teachers, further complicates the support for children with special needs.

DISCUSSION

In teaching English, a teacher must exhibit creativity, flexibility, and a strong commitment to advancing students' learning, along with a willingness to continuously learn from their students. Hallagan (2005) emphasizes that teachers, regardless of their field of study, must have a thorough understanding of disabilities, including their scientific basis, causes, assessment processes, and implementation strategies. For English teachers, it is crucial to understand the objectives and future targets of English learning for students with special needs. With a solid grasp of these learning objectives, teachers can design effective learning approaches, models, and strategies.

Learning design refers to a comprehensive plan for the learning process, which includes analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (Sunanto & Hidayat, 2016). In the context of teaching English to students with special needs, the learning design should be based on an analysis of their needs and learning obstacles. By designing appropriate learning

experiences, the process becomes more structured, and learning outcomes can be achieved more effectively. There are six key elements in developing English teaching for students with special needs, particularly in inclusive classrooms. The principles proposed by Bishaw can serve as a guide for addressing important aspects of teaching English to students with special needs, whether in inclusive or integrated school environments.

The teacher's role is crucial for effective English teaching, as the success of the process largely depends on their attitude and quality. According to Machi (2007), several factors influence a teacher's attitude towards teaching, including their educational background, teaching experience, class size, number of contact hours, workload, and funding. However, special training is essential for teachers instructing students with special needs, as teaching them requires different skills compared to teaching general students. This training aims to enhance teachers' competencies, making their teaching more effective and efficient. Additionally, curriculum adjustments are necessary to meet the individual needs of children with various types of special needs. Customizing the curriculum ensures that each child's learning requirements are adequately addressed.

Davies (2004) notes that teaching effectiveness improves when teachers can respond to the diverse needs of special needs students by applying various learning strategies. Using a range of appropriate strategies tailored to each student can boost their motivation and engagement. Teachers should also weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy used in the classroom. If these six aspects are well-addressed, English teaching can proceed smoothly and achieve the desired learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English to children with special needs is both challenging and demanding, requiring thorough preparation. Teachers must design learning materials and media carefully to ensure they are easily understood by students. The design must be simplified, and the materials should be modified to meet each child's specific needs. Since children's behavior can fluctuate with their mood, it's crucial for teachers to be psychologically prepared before teaching. Adequate facilities are also essential for a smooth learning process, whether in regular or special schools. Teaching English to special needs children involves collaboration among all components within the school environment. Effective English learning for these children requires careful planning, a structured learning process, and the selection of appropriate approaches, models, methods, and learning media tailored to their needs. Additionally, evaluation must be aligned with students' specific requirements. With a well-designed learning approach, special needs children are expected to achieve optimal learning outcomes, similar to their peers.

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