



Teachers' strategies in teaching english for inclusive students: a case study in Balirejo public elementary school

Patria Handung Jaya ^{a,1,*}, Ade Berliana Putri ^{a,2}

^a Department of Elementary Teacher Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

¹ patria.jaya@pgsd.uad.ac.id; 2211005064@webmail.uad.ac.id

* corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching children is not only about the material but how we deliver the material to them to achieve the goal of learning. The challenges are real especially when we teach children with special education need (SEN) in an inclusive classroom, where they are together with regular children. In addition, subject that has to be taught is English language, which used to be removed from an elementary school's curriculum. This research aims to find out teachers' strategies in teaching English for inclusive students as well as the challenges they face. This is a case study in Balirejo Public Elementary School, Yogyakarta which is conducted qualitatively by interviewing the English teachers and the Headmaster there. The result shows that pleasurable activities and good communication can effectively increase students' motivation which become the biggest challenge. Students' character, ability, and mood are also other challenges found by the teachers since the students in inclusive classrooms are varied. The researchers hope that this research can create more awareness to teachers, schools, and government related to English teaching and learning process in inclusive classrooms.

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1. Introduction

The world is getting more sophisticated and borderless. Everyone can have more opportunity to expand their skill and to get better future since there is no limit for everyone. One of the keys to achieve the goal is that by having a good skill in communication [1]. People interact one and another as well as building the connection. As a means of communication, language takes a vital role. When it comes to a borderless communication, we can all agree that English is the most effective language to connect to people. Indonesia takes English as a foreign language where most of the exposure is obtained in schools. This is because Indonesians do not use English in a daily basis to communicate one to another. Nonetheless, knowing the importance of this language, the urgency to learn this language from a very early stage needs to be taken into consideration. Not only do they need to learn the language, they have to make sure that they can use this language practically to communicate with wider society [2]. Teachers hold the key for the success in the learning process [3]. It is because teachers act as the role model and also facilitator in the classroom.

There are many factors that support a person's success in learning English as the foreign language, such as strategies, methods, time and age/study period. Many studies and experts say that the best age to learn a foreign language is elementary school age. According to Maili, the critical period a person ranges in age from 2 to 13 years and a person's first language learning capacity will be lost if it is not activated or trained during this period [4]. They also explained

that children's cognitive development in language education must be taught from an early age, namely the elementary school years between 6 and 13 years because that period is the golden period for children's language development [5]. That's why elementary school age children are the most appropriate time to learn English. Indonesia used to face this unfortunate condition when Curriculum 2013 was implemented. At that time, the government believe that learning foreign languages, no matter what it was, in the elementary level would create an issue about children's nationalism. Hence, English was not taught in the elementary level for several years until the existence of Merdeka Curriculum. This condition created problems for several Gen Z, especially those living in a rural area or countryside since they did not really know English until they were in the middle school level and of course, they find difficulties because their exposure to English started late, we can say.

Despite the condition, teaching English for young learners (TEYL) requires skills and strategies. Teaching children is not the same as teaching adults [5]. The approach and method should be adapted based on children's need and condition. Unfortunately, some teachers do not really pay attention on this. Most of them only teach without considering students' condition and understanding about the material. Teacher centered learning is still quite popular in this country. Discussing the topic of learning English in elementary school education, people often forget that in this world not all students get their rights. Education is the right for every individual regardless their condition. Children with special needs or students with special education needs (SEN) are not exception. Many people forget that children with special needs are also students and part of society who live in the same world as them. That is why, the Indonesian government made a policy regarding inclusive education where inclusive education system is required at every level of education [6]. Inclusive education which has the aim of providing equal opportunities for all students, whether they have special needs or not is something new in Indonesia and is expected to be a solution for fulfilling the right to education for all levels of society, including children with special needs.

Teaching English for young learners is a challenge but teaching English for young learners with SEN seems like a double challenge. Teachers need to adjust in both students' condition-the students with or without SEN. It is because in inclusive school, there will be a small number of students with SEN joining the learning process with the others. The strategies need to be appropriate and suitable for all students in the classroom so that the students with SEN can get their right to learn without having to expense the other students without SEN. This condition started to be familiar for most society since the existence of Merdeka Curriculum even though only small percentage of public school implementing the system. In the other hand, more private schools nowadays started to implement inclusive education in their curriculum. Hence, knowing what strategies that teachers use in this particular situation needs to be discussed. There have been some research conducted regarding to English Language Teaching (ELT) and teaching English for young learners (TEYL) discussing the important of ELT based on teachers' perspective in Pakistan and how to make it effective [7]. They said that there should be a training or professional development for teachers since teachers' competence is urgent in ELT process. Ying, et al., wrote more specific topic regarding method used in teaching English for elementary level [8]. By making students active in practicing the language, they believe that the classroom will be enjoyable and at the same time, students are able to use English well. Furthermore, there are also some research regarding teaching students with SEN. Most of the teachers said that they have no problems in teaching in a classroom with inclusive students. What they were worried about was the classroom management since most of elementary level schools have large class with many students. In the other hand, there must be more awareness from the faculty regarding the students with SEN since the support system is still lacking [9], [10].

Based on the review in the previous studies, research regarding strategy in teaching English in inclusive classroom with inclusive students/ students with SEN inside has never been conducted before. The research merely focuses on either regular classroom or teachers' readiness in having inclusive students. In fact, English plays a vital role's in children's future regardless their condition. Therefore, the aim of this research is to find out what strategies used by teacher in teaching English for inclusive students. This research come up with three (3) research questions namely (1) what are the strategies used by teachers in teaching English for inclusive students in elementary level? (2) how is the implementation of the strategies in the

inclusive classroom? and (3) what is the challenge faced by teachers in implementing the strategies?

2. Method

This study is a qualitative descriptive research. The research will be conducted in Balirejo Public Elementary School, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This school is one of the public schools in Yogyakarta which is well known for its inclusive education. Each year, parents who have children with SEN entrust their kids to study here. This school also supports the process of inclusive education by considering the ratio of students in the classroom with the number of teachers. They have shadow teachers or more than one teacher in the classroom to help students with SEN in the learning process. The research subjects were two (2) English teachers and the Headmaster of the school. While the objects of the research are the strategies of the teachers in teaching English language for inclusive students. The techniques of data collection were interview and library research. The Headmaster will also be interviewed to find out the school policies and environment regarding inclusive education. The writers did some observation before the research to find out relevant information about the research. After the data were collected both from interview and library research, the data were analyzed qualitatively based on the qualitative data analysis which was started from identifying the issue until drawing the important findings. After the analysis, the data were identified and classified to answer the research questions. The instruments of data collection and analysis were structured interview, notes, recorder, laptop, and the researchers themselves as human instrument [11].

3. Result and Discussion

This research aims to find out strategies used by teacher in teaching English for inclusive students in Balirejo Public Elementary School, Yogyakarta. To achieve the object, there are three (3) research questions namely (1) what are the strategies used by teachers in teaching English for inclusive students in elementary level? (2) how is the implementation of the strategies in the inclusive classroom? and (3) what is the challenge faced by teachers in implementing the strategies? Here are the answers of the three research questions.

3.1. Strategies Used by Teachers and the Implementation in Inclusive Classrooms

The researchers did some observations by attending the English class taught by the English teachers. Afterwards, interviews with the two English teachers, MT and MF were conducted in different but not too distant time. Both of them shared the same answers by saying that the teaching and learning activities must be a pleasurable experience. MT stated that she often used video to attract students' attention. Similarly, MF used audio as the listening practice, one of the activities enjoyed by the students. "I usually play the students videos and play games during the class. Ice breaking during class is also one activity I used such as singing while clapping hand, etc" (MT). "I often play some audios to the students as well as play games with them. Further, I also make songs to make them memorize something easily. The songs are sometimes prepared, but it mostly a spontaneous one during class." (MF).

Beside the visual and auditory exposures, both of the teachers believe in the idea of active learning. Student centered learning is effective to create an enjoyable learning [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. It is a principle where the students are learning while playing. MF's said that her students even stated firmly that they do not want to study. Instead, they want to play games. This is what triggers her to make activities in which the students are learning something, but it feels like they are playing games. This result is supported by previous research stating that pleasurable activities are one of the keys in learning process. Fun activities will not burden students and make them willing to join the class [3], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22]. As for the inclusive environment in the elementary school, the teachers find that students have different interest. Therefore, when some students started to lose their attention, especially those with special needs such as autism or hyperactive, the teachers usually use ice breaking to attract their attention, or making a discussion with the students on what activities they want to have in the class. "When some students are not interested in the activity, I usually ask them which activity they want to do in the class" (MF). By having the discussion and understanding what the students want, both of the teachers said that the students feel enjoy the class because they

consider students as their friends. Interaction and communication are necessary in teaching children [5], [23], [24], [25], [26], [27].

3.2. Challenges Faced by the Teachers

Though the class seems very nice and teachers can handle it very well, there are some challenges faced by them. MT argued that initially, the biggest challenge was the students' motivation. This challenge can be felt even up until now even though the number is decreasing. When she first came to school two years ago, English was not taught there due to the existence of curriculum 2013 in Indonesia. Most of the students believed that English is not important because they never use it. The challenge was confirmed by the headmaster, BD because surrounding support is indeed urgent [5]. The headmaster said that the condition of the students outside the school affects the behavior inside the school. The students never use English outside the school so it is the biggest factor of their low motivation in learning the language. Not only English, BD said that most of the students also struggle in using Indonesian because they use Javanese most of the time at home. Therefore, BD, as the headmaster support the reborn of English subject in elementary school by providing the teachers with some books related to English language teaching. "The government must be firm about the policy of English subject in elementary school. It is indeed important because nowadays, English is used for everything. Hence do not make some inconsistency policy by deleting and existing the English subject in elementary school." (BD).

Another challenge is the number of students. As one of the pioneers of inclusive education in the province level, Balirejo Public Elementary School accepts so many students with varied ability and interests. BD said that actually, there is a limitation in accepting students especially the students with special needs. Students with SEN must at least have IQ of 60 or 70 and it is usually proven by some sort of certificate from a psychologist or licensed institution. Nonetheless, even though some students do not achieve that measure, school is reluctant to reject them. This is what somehow creates problems in the learning process. Some people may relate IQ with academic achievement. It is somehow true. If someone has a low IQ, the effort must be harder than anybody else [28], [29], [30]. In this case, teachers need to make sure that these students are willing to work harder than their friends. The number of students often make it hard for MT and MF to handle the class because they will need extra effort. They have shadow teachers for the inclusive students but mostly they have to handle them by themselves. Not only that, they also have to find the best strategies and method used in the classroom. This is in line with the research from Ulfah, et al., who shows that teachers have to work harder with many students inside the class [31]. The number of students lead to the number of different characters that the teachers need to struggle.

"Some students need to be treated as calm as possible, so I can't use the loud voice because they will have a bad mood and do not want to join the class." (MF). These teachers never had any training regarding inclusive education before. MT who graduated from English Education and MF who used to be a tour guide are not really exposed to inclusive education. They are learning while doing. They keep on studying by themselves on how to make sure that their students love them and love the subject. Internet and bookshops are also their best friends in improving their teaching skills as well as the strategies inside the class. They are willing to join the training should the government or school provide any training for inclusive education because they believe that it will be much beneficial for them. This statement is supported by the previous research proving that giving training for teachers can be the best option we can have to provide improve the professionalism [32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37], [38]. They give the example of training for teachers in Covid-19 pandemic on how to improve the quality of education during pandemic. MT and MF really enjoy teaching as if it is their world. MT for instance, said that she loves the job no matter what because there are more students that now enjoy English compare to those who do not. MF even said another heartwarming statement in which the students can heal her. When she was sick for instance, she can be healthy once she teaches her students in class.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, strategies made by teachers must be based on the students' condition in the classroom. In case of English subject in Balirejo Public Elementary School, Yogyakarta, the

teachers will make sure that students learn the material in a fun way. They do not only focus on the material but the activity also covers students' interests. They want to make the students happy whenever they see them. It is common to see the teachers sing together along with the students, or watch videos during the learning process because this is how the students learn. They understand the discussion better with singing, watching video, or even playing games. Some challenges cannot be neglected. Motivation plays a big role here. Lack of motivation from the students become the most crucial thing. As a foreign language, English is rarely spoken in a daily basis. Besides, the big number of students with different learning styles and ability makes the teachers put more effort in the learning process. Communication the key to create an effective classroom environment. In the future, there should be more teachers participating in this research topic. Future researchers interested in this topic can conduct further research to collect more teachers' opinion, not only in one school regarding the strategies in teaching English in inclusive classroom. However, the researchers hope that this research can make other teachers more aware in choosing strategies in teaching English for children, particularly in the inclusive classroom. Furthermore, schools and government are expected to hold trainings for teachers in handling inclusive classrooms to make them more professional in this field.

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