

## **Navigating Challenges: Educators' Perspectives on Teaching English to Inclusive Students in Regular Classrooms**

**Meirlyn Bunga Ambar Sari**  
[meirlynbunga12@gmail.com](mailto:meirlynbunga12@gmail.com)  
**UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya**

**Fahmy Imaniar**  
[fahmy.imaniar@uinsa.ac.id](mailto:fahmy.imaniar@uinsa.ac.id)  
**UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya**

**Ita Eka Oktaviani**  
[oktacute1610@gmail.com](mailto:oktacute1610@gmail.com)  
**SMPN 35 Surabaya**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore how English teachers address the challenges of teaching in regular classrooms that include students with special educational needs. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research gathered data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations in inclusive junior high school classes at SMPN 35 Surabaya. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences in balancing the learning needs of both regular and inclusive students. The findings reveal that teachers encounter several obstacles, including limited time, lack of specialized training, insufficient teaching resources, and rigid curriculum demands. Despite these challenges, teachers apply a range of differentiated instructional strategies such as simplifying materials, using visual and auditory media, implementing peer tutoring, and designing tailored worksheets. These strategies help inclusive students remain engaged while motivating regular students to participate actively. The study highlights the need for ongoing professional development, flexible school policies, and adequate facilities to strengthen inclusive practices. The results contribute practical insights for policymakers and teacher education programs by underscoring the importance of equipping teachers with concrete strategies such as peer collaboration, differentiated materials, and adaptive assessments to improve inclusive English language teaching.

**Keywords:** Teaching Challenges; English Language Learning; Inclusive Students

### **INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education is increasingly being implemented in mainstream schools, where students with special educational needs learn together with regular students in one class. In practice, the number of inclusive students is usually small, often only one or two per class. Their presence brings significant changes to the teaching and learning process. Inclusive students are given equal opportunities to learn in a

regular environment, which helps develop both their academic and social skills. However, teachers must balance the learning needs of regular students and those with special requirements within the same classroom. This presents a unique challenge, especially in English language teaching, where all students require suitable strategies, media, and motivation to develop their skills and confidence in using the language.

Teachers are expected to meet the needs of students with diverse abilities while also fulfilling curriculum demands (Woodcock et al., 2022). In practice, they often face issues related to learning pace, limited resources, and varying levels of English proficiency among students. To manage these differences, English teachers need creativity, patience, and flexibility (Young, 2024). Despite these challenges, inclusive classrooms also provide teachers with opportunities to innovate and improve their teaching quality (Goyibova et al., 2025). Teachers can develop strategies such as adapting lesson plans, using visual and audio media, forming collaborative groups, and utilizing technology to support diverse learning needs. By exploring teachers' experiences and approaches, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to promote meaningful learning for all students.

Inclusive education emphasizes the value of diversity and equal access to education for all learners, regardless of physical, intellectual, or emotional differences. In the Indonesian context, the government has actively promoted inclusive education through national regulations that encourage every school to accept and serve students with special educational needs. However, the implementation of inclusive education still faces practical challenges at the classroom level, particularly in English language teaching, which requires high levels of interaction and comprehension. Many teachers are still unprepared to handle mixed-ability classrooms, and they often lack professional development focused on inclusive pedagogical practices. As a result, there remains a gap between inclusive education policies and their actual execution in daily teaching practice, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction.

Several previous studies have examined inclusive education in Indonesia and other contexts. For example, Muhitida et al. (n.d.) highlight that inclusive classrooms require teachers to adapt teaching materials, manage linguistic diversity, and develop culturally sensitive practices. Larios and Zetlin (2023) also found that teacher preparation programs need to be more interactive and sustained to strengthen teachers' readiness to handle inclusive settings. Similarly, Lu et al. (2022) in China revealed that English teachers often lack specialized training, teaching assistants, and resources to adjust instruction for students with special needs. These studies underline the importance of equipping teachers with inclusive strategies, but few of them focus specifically on how English teachers at the junior high school level in Indonesia personally navigate these challenges and apply practical classroom solutions.

Although several studies have explored inclusive education, most concentrate on policy frameworks, teacher attitudes, or student outcomes, rather than on teachers' day-to-day teaching experiences in mixed-ability English classrooms. Moreover, research that focuses explicitly on how English teachers adapt materials, methods, and classroom interactions to serve both regular and inclusive students remains limited. Therefore, this study fills this gap by examining how English teachers at SMPN 35 Surabaya manage the challenges of teaching inclusive students within regular classrooms and what specific strategies they use to respond effectively.

SMPN 35 Surabaya was chosen as the research site because it represents a typical urban public school that adopts an inclusive education policy. In each class, there are one or two students with special educational needs who study alongside their peers. The school's English teachers must design and implement lessons that accommodate different levels of language ability while maintaining engagement for all learners. This context offers a rich opportunity to analyze how teachers practically interpret and apply inclusive principles in their everyday classroom routines.

The objective of this study is to identify the challenges faced by English teachers at SMPN 35 Surabaya in teaching inclusive students within regular classes and to describe the strategies they use to address these challenges. This unified objective ensures that the study not only reveals the barriers encountered by teachers but also highlights the adaptive and innovative approaches they employ to support inclusive learning in English. By clarifying both aspects challenges and strategies this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how teachers balance curriculum requirements, manage classroom diversity, and sustain student motivation in inclusive settings.

In addition, this study aims to contribute practical insights into how inclusive English teaching can be strengthened through professional development and policy support. Teachers' experiences can serve as the basis for designing training programs that focus on differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and the development of accessible learning materials. For instance, findings related to effective use of visual aids, simplified materials, and peer collaboration could inform the design of teacher workshops and mentoring programs for inclusive education. Policymakers could also use these findings to reconsider school-level support systems, such as providing teaching assistants, allocating more flexible schedules, and ensuring the availability of special learning resources.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice. While inclusive education is widely promoted in policy documents, teachers often face these realities alone, relying on trial and error to find what works best for their students. Understanding their real-world experiences provides valuable insights into how inclusion can be made more achievable and sustainable in English language classrooms. In the long term, the results of this study are expected to guide the development of teacher training programs, inclusive

curriculum design, and school management practices that genuinely support diversity in learning.

In conclusion, this introduction establishes the context, rationale, and objectives of the study. English language teachers in inclusive classrooms encounter multifaceted challenges, yet they also develop practical strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. By focusing specifically on SMPN 35 Surabaya, this study not only identifies the challenges teachers face but also explores the strategies that have proven effective in balancing inclusivity and instructional quality. The insights gained will contribute to improving both pedagogical practice and policy frameworks for inclusive education in Indonesia, helping to ensure that every student regardless of ability can learn English meaningfully and confidently.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies on English language teaching in inclusive classes are very important because they describe the unique challenges faced by teachers while teaching students with diverse abilities. Inclusive education keeps students with special requirements in regular classes, usually one or two inclusive students per class. In this situation, teachers need to be able to balance the demands of the course with individual students' personal needs, especially in English subjects that require active connection in speaking, hearing, reading and writing skills. Understanding the challenges experienced by teachers in this context is important to prepare effective teaching strategies, so that both regular students and inclusive students can achieve meaningful learning results.

### **Teaching English in Inclusive Classrooms**

Teaching English in a regular class, including students with special requirements, is a challenge and an opportunity for teachers. In this context, teachers are not only responsible for giving materials according to the course, but should also ensure that every student with special requirements can actively participate in the learning process. This requires flexible teaching strategies, use of various media and understanding of individual characteristics of each student. In addition, English learning has its own challenges because it includes listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, all of which require adjustments for students with special requirements.

According to Emaliana et al. (2024) awareness of potential English language teachers (EFL pre-service teachers) about inclusive education, to see how their attitude and understanding affect their readiness to teach in inclusive classes. Research findings indicate that although potential teachers have high awareness and intentions to support inclusive learning, they are still hesitant to implement practical practices due to limited direct experience and special training. These findings underline training programs and syllabus that more emphasis on inclusive practices

so that future teachers become more confident and efficient in management of diverse classes.

This study discusses the practice of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in inclusive classes for students with special educational requirements (SEN) in China. The study included 328 primary and secondary schools teachers to assess their experiences, practices and attitudes towards learning in regular classes (LRC) policy. Results suggest that most teachers lack special training in inclusive education, lack of teaching assistants, and limited ability to customize materials and teaching methods for students with special requirements. Teachers' approaches are generally mixed: some support inclusion, but many people are concerned about teaching assignments, differences in student abilities and impact on the performance of the overall class. This study emphasizes that successful inclusive EFL education requires policy assistance, special teacher training and additional resources to ensure that students with Sen have really similar learning experiences (Lu et al., 2022).

This study discusses the practices of inclusive learning in English subjects in a public junior high school in Malang, focusing on how teachers support students with special educational requirements (Sen). This qualitative research employs semi-corresponding interviews and classroom comments to detect practices, challenges and solutions implemented by teachers. Results suggest that the school has adjusted SEN students through differentiated teaching, special materials and analog assessment. However, teachers face obstacles such as limited infrastructure, lack of professional training and class management difficulties. The study recommends the importance of training and resource support to make teacher cooperation, communication with parents, and inclusive education practices in English classes more effective (Islami et al., 2025).

The research conducted by Shilvani et al. (2024) Experiences of teachers in teaching English at Zonakata Inclusive Elementary School, Pontiaq. The focus of this study is to identify the challenges faced by teachers and the strategies they use to remove them. Using a qualitative case study approach, the data was collected from five teachers of grade 1 -5 through comments, interviews and document analysis. The results of the study suggest that teachers face two main challenges: students' emotional-behavior issues (such as tantrums, difficulty in regulating emotions) and communication-language Parbari (understanding and understanding themselves). To resolve these challenges, teachers apply three strategies: formation of positive relationships with students, discriminated teaching (material, procedure, product), and cooperation between teachers in teaching and designing materials according to personal requirements. These strategies have been proved to help teachers in inclusive classes to create a more favorable and effective learning environment.

### **Challenges in Teaching English to Inclusive Students**

Teachers in inclusive classes face difficulties, especially in dividing their attention between regular students and inclusive students. Difference in learning speed, limited ability to understand the instructions in English, and less confidence often causes inclusive students to fall back (Salvaña & Protacio, 2025). On the other hand, teachers are also compelled by lack of time, minimal special training, limited resources and a rigorous course, which makes it difficult to adapt the contents of students' diverse requirements (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). Another challenge arises from the psychological aspect, that is, how to maintain the inspiration of the inclusive students to ensure that regular students are excited about learning without feeling neglected.

This study discusses the implementation of English language teaching with special requirements (SEN) in inclusive university classes by examining policies, challenges and lecturer strategies. This qualitative study found that although the policies of inclusion have been implemented, their execution still faces limited features, lack of special training for lecturers and interruptions such as courses and minimal optimization of teaching materials. The study also indicated that lecturers developed several strategies to overcome difficulties, such as differential instructions, use of adaptive media, and adjustment to evaluation methods according to student needs. In the end, the success of inclusive teaching in higher education depends largely on institutional policy support, readiness of the lecturer and a permanent support system (Ozbakir & Karal, 2025).

This research investigated the difficulties faced by English teachers in South Sulawesi, which are accessible to all students in various classes. By incorporating 28 teachers and using a descriptive qualitative approach through interviews, comments and document analysis, this study found that the main challenges for teachers include the level of students' capacity, limited resources, time deficiency and lack of training on inclusive teaching strategies. To address these issues, teachers use strategies such as work modifications, collaborative learning, scaffolding and use of differential teaching materials. The findings of the study have been emphasized that although teachers are committed to creating inclusive classes, they still require better access to resources and professional development programs for all students to be really appropriate and effective (Mada et al., 2025).

This study examined English teachers' efficiency and experience in teaching students with special requirements in inclusive classes. The study was conducted through a semi-composed interview with eight teachers in Bartın, Türkiye, and analyzed using descriptive techniques. The results of the study indicate that teachers typically have limited knowledge about inclusive education, most of them only get information from personal experience or short-term training. The main challenges faced by them include lack of parents' support, congested classes, difficulties in management of inclusive students, limited professional assistance, and insufficient time to balance the needs of regular students and students with special requirements.

This study emphasizes the requirement of in-service training, family support, reduces the number of students in the classroom, and collaborates with the school to make inclusive education practices more successful (Studies, 2022).

This study regularly conducted challenges faced by English teachers in teaching students with special requirements (SEN) in inclusive classes. This qualitative study found that teachers face various difficulties, such as lack of special training, limited teaching materials and facilities, a unskilled learning environment, and a rigid course that is difficult to adapt to the needs of SEN students. Results suggest that although inclusion provides equal learning opportunities for students with special requirements, its implementation success is heavily dependent on the support of the government, schools, parents, as well as improves the efficiency of teachers through special training and provision of adequate resources (Puspitasari, 2019).

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

This study applied a qualitative research design as its objective was to find out the experiences and approaches of English teachers who work with inclusive students in regular classes. Creswell (2015) states that qualitative research is suitable for gaining a deep understanding of human experiences, especially when the focus is on meaning, processes, and individual reflections rather than numerical data or measurements. By using this approach, the researcher was able to capture the voices of teachers and understand their challenges in their own words.

The participants of this study were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they could provide rich and relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation. Five English teachers from SMPN 35 Surabaya were chosen based on several specific criteria. First, each teacher had a minimum of three years of teaching experience, which ensured they had sufficient professional exposure to the challenges of English instruction in inclusive settings. Second, all participants were currently teaching regular classes that included one or two students with special educational needs (SEN), such as students with mild learning disabilities, attention difficulties, or speech impairments. Third, the participants represented a range of teaching backgrounds, including both junior and senior teachers, to capture varied perspectives and teaching strategies.

The selection of SMPN 35 Surabaya as the research site was also intentional because it is one of the public junior high schools in Surabaya that officially implements inclusive education under government regulation. The school's English teachers are required to adapt their teaching methods to meet diverse learner needs within the same classroom, making it a relevant and information-rich context for this study. This combination of criteria ensured that the sample reflected the realities of inclusive education in urban public schools, where teachers are expected to teach both regular and inclusive students without the assistance of specialized

co-teachers. The variation in teaching experience and class composition allowed the study to capture different levels of understanding, preparedness, and adaptation among teachers when dealing with inclusive practices.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

In this study, participants were English teachers of regular classes that included one or two students with special educational needs. The selection of teachers as participants was based on the researcher's previous involvement in the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka) program at the same school. SMPN 35 Surabaya was selected as the research site because it is a regular public school that implements inclusive education, making it relevant for exploring English teaching practices in classrooms that accommodate both regular and inclusive students. According to Creswell (2015), purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative research because it allows researchers to select participants who can provide rich and detailed information about the phenomenon being studied.

Data were collected through two main instruments: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The semi-structured interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' experiences, challenges, and teaching strategies when working with inclusive students in regular English classes. The questions covered areas such as classroom management, instructional adaptation, assessment techniques, and teachers' perceptions of inclusivity. A total of five English teachers participated in the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to allow teachers to express their thoughts comfortably. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to the interviews, four classroom observations were conducted to triangulate the data and provide a contextual understanding of how inclusive teaching strategies were implemented in practice. Each observation lasted for one full English lesson (about 80 minutes) and focused on the interaction between teachers and students, the use of teaching materials and media, classroom management, and the level of participation of inclusive students. Field notes were taken systematically during the observations, and an observation checklist was used to record evidence of differentiated instruction, peer collaboration, and adaptive assessment practices.

The classroom observations were carried out in two different grade levels (Grade VII and Grade VIII) to capture a broader picture of inclusive teaching practices across the school. Before the observations began, the researcher coordinated with the teachers to schedule lessons that represented typical teaching conditions. No interventions were made during the observations to ensure natural classroom behavior. To ensure ethical research procedures, the researcher obtained permission from the school principal and informed consent from all participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that their identities would



remain anonymous in the final report. The combination of semi-structured interviews and systematic classroom observations provided both verbal and behavioral data, allowing for a more holistic understanding of teachers' challenges and coping strategies. This triangulation also strengthened the credibility and rigor of the research findings by confirming patterns that appeared consistently across both data sources.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data received from semi-structured interviews and classroom comments was done using a thematic analysis approach. All interview results were recorded, transferred, and then read again to gain a deep understanding. The analysis process was conducted through the coding stages, including to identify the major words, phrases, or important statements relevant to the research focus. These codes were then classified into broader categories, which shows the main themes about the challenges faced by teachers in teaching and teaching strategies they applied in regular classes.

To increase the validity of data, the researcher used tri -techniques by comparing conclusions with interviews and comments. In addition, the participants were examined by asking the participants to confirm the results of the interpretations of the researcher, while the colleague was debriefed to ensure the fairness of the analysis. With these steps, research results are expected to have strong reliability and validity.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching inclusive students within regular classes and to describe the strategies they used to address these challenges. Data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically, resulting in four main themes: (1) differentiated instruction and material adaptation, (2) classroom management and time balance, (3) motivation and emotional support, and (4) teachers' professional challenges and learning needs.

### **Differentiated Instruction and Material Adaptation**

All teachers consistently modified their lesson content and teaching techniques to accommodate the diverse learning needs of both regular and inclusive students. This differentiated approach enabled them to present materials at multiple levels of complexity while maintaining an inclusive classroom environment. One young English teacher explained that she divided each lesson into smaller, manageable segments to make complex grammar structures easier for all students to understand. When teaching the present continuous tense, for example, she provided complex sentence examples for regular students and used picture cards with short, concrete

phrases such as “I am eating” for inclusive students. She also incorporated gestures, modeling, and repetition to reinforce comprehension and engagement.

A senior teacher applied a similar differentiation strategy in writing lessons by tailoring tasks to students’ ability levels. During a descriptive text activity, regular students were asked to compose full paragraphs about their pets, whereas inclusive students focused on identifying and applying basic adjectives such as “big,” “small,” and “brown.” Likewise, an experienced teacher prepared two versions of worksheets a standard version for regular students and a simplified version featuring visual prompts and key vocabulary to support inclusive learners.

### **Classroom Management and Time Balance**

Managing classroom dynamics and maintaining time balance emerged as one of the most significant challenges for teachers in inclusive English classrooms. The presence of students with diverse learning abilities required teachers to carefully allocate attention, design flexible lesson pacing, and maintain consistent engagement for all learners throughout the lesson.

The young English teacher described how supporting inclusive students often required additional time, which sometimes led regular students to lose focus. To address this issue, she designed group-based learning activities that encouraged peer collaboration. While she provided individualized assistance to inclusive students, regular students engaged in small-group discussions or practiced extension tasks, ensuring that learning continued seamlessly for everyone.

Similarly, the experienced teacher emphasized the importance of balancing instructional focus by alternating between whole-class teaching and individualized clarification. She began each lesson with a unified explanation for all students, followed by brief one-on-one support for inclusive students who needed reinforcement. During these moments, regular students worked independently or in pairs on related exercises, which helped sustain attention and prevent off-task behavior.

Both teachers highlighted that maintaining this balance required flexibility and real-time decision-making. They often had to adjust lesson pacing, simplify instructions, or shorten activities to ensure that all students remained engaged. Time constraints, however, remained a major obstacle, particularly when teachers had to meet curriculum targets while accommodating slower learning progress among inclusive students.

### **Motivation and Emotional Support**

Maintaining student motivation and fostering emotional well-being were consistent priorities for all teachers in this study. They recognized that inclusive education requires not only instructional adaptation but also a classroom climate that supports

confidence, empathy, and a sense of belonging among all learners. Teachers believed that when students both regular and inclusive felt valued and encouraged, they were more willing to participate and persist through learning challenges.

The young and new teachers frequently used verbal encouragement and immediate positive feedback to build confidence among inclusive students. Phrases such as “Good job” or “Well done” were used to acknowledge small successes and reinforce participation. These simple affirmations helped inclusive students feel recognized and capable, while also modeling supportive communication for their peers. At the same time, regular students were given extension activities or creative challenges, allowing them to stay engaged without feeling overlooked.

The senior teacher viewed motivation as a shared classroom responsibility. She promoted a sense of teamwork by implementing peer tutoring and cooperative learning activities, pairing regular and inclusive students during practice sessions. This approach helped inclusive students receive peer assistance and fostered empathy among regular students, encouraging them to see learning as a collaborative effort rather than a competition. The experienced teacher complemented these approaches with tangible rewards, such as stickers and stars, to acknowledge students’ effort and persistence. Regular students were motivated through light competition and performance-based recognition, while inclusive students received personalized encouragement to strengthen their self-esteem. The teacher noted that these practices not only motivated students academically but also nurtured positive classroom relationships and mutual respect.

The findings highlight that teachers in inclusive classrooms use a blend of emotional and behavioral reinforcement strategies to sustain student motivation. Verbal praise, peer collaboration, and symbolic rewards were key tools in maintaining engagement and fostering inclusivity. Through consistent emotional support and recognition of individual progress, teachers created learning environments where all students regardless of ability felt encouraged to participate actively and confidently.

### **Teachers’ Professional Challenges and Learning Needs**

While teachers demonstrated creativity and adaptability in managing inclusive classrooms, they also faced persistent professional challenges that limited the effectiveness of their efforts. The data revealed that these challenges were primarily related to limited knowledge of inclusive pedagogy, insufficient institutional support, and the rigidity of the existing curriculum. The new teacher admitted feeling inadequately prepared to teach students with special educational needs, particularly during her first year of experience in an inclusive class. She explained that her pre-service education had not provided sufficient training in inclusive teaching strategies. As a result, she often relied on self-study and informal guidance from senior colleagues or school counselors to adapt lesson materials and classroom

management approaches. This reliance on peer mentorship, though helpful, reflected the absence of formal professional development opportunities.

The senior teacher echoed these concerns, emphasizing that curriculum demands often conflicted with the realities of inclusive learning. She noted that progress among inclusive students was generally slower, yet schools expected all students to achieve the same learning outcomes within a limited timeframe. This misalignment between curriculum expectations and classroom realities created additional pressure on teachers to modify lessons without reducing content quality. Similarly, the experienced teacher pointed out the lack of instructional resources and specialized support, such as teaching assistants or individualized learning tools. She explained that teachers often had to create their own materials, design simplified worksheets and find alternative media to meet students' needs. Despite these efforts, she expressed that without consistent institutional backing such as workshops, resource allocation, and policy flexibility teachers' attempts to sustain inclusive practices remained constrained.

The findings indicate that while teachers are committed to inclusive education, they face systemic challenges that hinder their ability to fully implement inclusive pedagogy. The need for continuous professional development, resource provision, and administrative understanding emerged as central concerns. Teachers in this study viewed ongoing training in inclusive teaching methods, exposure to case-based learning, and collaboration with special education professionals as essential for improving their confidence and competence.

The findings of this study reveal that English teachers in inclusive classrooms employ a combination of differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and emotional reinforcement to accommodate the learning needs of both regular and inclusive students. These strategies directly address the research objectives concerning the challenges teachers face and the methods they use to foster inclusivity in regular classes. Teachers' creative adaptations—such as using two versions of worksheets, picture cards, simplified instructions, and visual media—allowed all students to engage meaningfully with lesson content. The study also found that teachers relied on parallel instruction and peer collaboration to manage time efficiently and maintain balance between student groups. This integrated approach represents a practical and context-specific model of inclusion that has evolved organically in Indonesia, where formal training and resources for inclusive education remain limited.

These findings align with earlier studies emphasizing the value of differentiated instruction in inclusive learning environments. Similar to Goyibova et al. (2025) and Islami et al. (2025), this study confirms that differentiation improves accessibility and participation for students with diverse needs. However, it extends prior research by showing how differentiation emerges not from prescribed frameworks but from teachers' initiative and improvisation under constrained conditions. The results also resonate with Lu et al. (2022), who demonstrated that

simplified input benefits learners with special educational needs, yet this study adds insight into how differentiation is sustained without external support. Furthermore, the use of peer tutoring as both an instructional and emotional strategy reflects findings from Salvaña and Protacio (2025), who noted that peer learning enhances empathy and motivation. In this study, peer tutoring also helped teachers manage classroom time, showing a dual function rarely discussed in previous literature.

Another new contribution lies in the emphasis on emotional reinforcement as a consistent instructional practice. Teachers' use of praise, encouragement, and small rewards created a positive environment that motivated both inclusive and regular students. This supports Alsabilah and Fatimah (2020), who argued that emotional affirmation fosters engagement in inclusive settings, but the present findings highlight that such encouragement also serves as a behavioral management tool. Moreover, teachers' reliance on informal mentoring and self-learning underscores a professional gap in inclusive training. Similar to Larios and Zetlin (2023), who observed that teachers often learn inclusion through peer collaboration, this study shows how educators become self-directed learners in the absence of institutional support.

Despite these strengths, the study highlights several systemic barriers. Teachers face limited resources, rigid curricula, and heavy workloads, echoing the challenges reported by Ozbakir and Karal (2025) and Puspitasari (2019). However, what distinguishes this context is teachers' localized innovation creating their own materials, integrating visual aids, and building peer systems to sustain inclusive learning. These adaptive solutions demonstrate teacher agency and resilience in the face of structural limitations.

The implications of these findings are multifold. First, teacher education programs should incorporate hands-on modules on inclusive English pedagogy, focusing on differentiation, peer collaboration, and time management strategies. In-service training should move beyond theory to emphasize reflective practice and collaborative problem-solving. Second, schools and policymakers need to provide stronger institutional support by allocating co-planning time, developing flexible curricula, and building resource-sharing networks among teachers. Third, curriculum developers should supply adaptable lesson materials such as graded texts, scaffolded tasks, and multimedia aids to reduce teachers' preparation burden and ensure consistency across schools. Lastly, future research should examine the effectiveness of these integrated practices through longitudinal or mixed method approaches that include student learning outcomes and engagement measures.

This study has several limitations. It involved a small sample of five teachers from one urban public school, limiting generalizability. Classroom observations covered only a few lessons, which may not capture variation across semesters. Because the data rely largely on teacher reports, there is also potential for social desirability bias. Furthermore, the study focused on instructional strategies rather than measurable student outcomes. This research demonstrates that inclusive English language

teaching in Indonesia thrives largely on teacher creativity and empathy rather than institutional provision. The study contributes new evidence on how teachers integrate differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and emotional reinforcement into cohesive classroom routines. While their improvisational practices enable meaningful inclusion, long-term sustainability requires systemic investment in professional development, curriculum flexibility, and resource equity. Ultimately, the findings affirm that inclusive education can succeed when teachers are empowered to adapt pedagogy to their students' needs and when policy frameworks recognize the importance of supporting this adaptive professionalism.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that English teachers in regular classrooms with inclusive students encounter complex challenges involving time constraints, limited teaching resources, rigid curricula, and the need to balance attention between regular and inclusive learners. Despite these constraints, the teachers displayed notable creativity and adaptability in designing and implementing their lessons. The most frequently applied and effective strategies included differentiated instruction using simplified materials and picture cards, peer tutoring and cooperative learning to foster collaboration, and emotional reinforcement through praise and motivation to maintain students' interest and participation. Together, these strategies enabled teachers to deliver meaningful learning experiences that supported the participation and progress of inclusive learners without hindering that of regular students. The findings emphasize that successful inclusive English instruction depends not only on teachers' personal commitment but also on institutional and systemic support. Access to professional development, adequate learning materials, and flexible school policies that address the diverse needs of learners are essential to sustaining inclusive education. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the broader school community also plays a crucial role in maintaining a supportive learning environment. Future research should explore the effectiveness of structured teacher training programs that focus on differentiated and inclusive instructional practices, preferably through intervention-based or longitudinal approaches. Moreover, quantitative studies on teachers' self-efficacy and confidence in managing inclusive classrooms would provide deeper insights into how professional development affects instructional performance. Overall, this study adds to the growing literature on inclusive English education by showcasing practical, teacher-driven strategies that are effective in real classroom contexts. When complemented by adequate training, resources, and policy flexibility, approaches such as differentiation, peer tutoring, and emotional reinforcement can form a strong foundation for creating equitable and engaging learning experiences for all students.

## REFERENCES

- Alhammadi, M. M., & AlDhaheri, R. T. (2025). Challenges facing general education teachers in the UAE in inclusive classrooms. *Sustainable Perspectives in Business, Economics and Education: Theoretical and*

- Empirical Approaches*, 405–418. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1623453>
- Alsabilah, A., & Fatimah, N. (2020). *Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English for Children with Special Needs at SMP Luar Biasa in Yogyakarta*.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*.
- Emaliana, I., Nur Lathifah, E., Iswahyuni, & Husna, L. (2024). EFL Pre-Service Teachers' High Inclusive Awareness: Researching Practical Implementation. *JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 13(4), 756–765. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpiundiksha.v13i4.82255>
- Goyibova, N., Muslimov, N., Sabirova, G., Kadirova, N., & Samatova, B. (2025). Differentiation approach in education: Tailoring instruction for diverse learner needs. *MethodsX*, 14(December 2024), 103163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2025.103163>
- Islami, D. I., Amaldi, F. D., Salsabilla, A. W., Salsabilla, A. A., & Setyowati, L. (2025). Exploring the Inclusive Classroom Practice in a Public Junior School in Malang: A Case Study. *SELL (Scope of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature) Journal*, 10(1), 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.31597/sl.v10i1.1217>
- Jardinez, M. J., & Natividad, L. R. (2024). The Advantages and Challenges of Inclusive Education: Striving for Equity in the Classroom. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 12(2), 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v12i2.7182>
- Larios, R. J., & Zetlin, A. (2023). Challenges to preparing teachers to instruct all students in inclusive classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 121, 103945. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103945>
- Lu, J., Jiang, H., & Huang, Y. (2022). Inclusive EFL Teaching for Young Students with Special Needs: A Case in China. *Children*, 9(5), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9050749>
- Mada, S., Wahyuni, A., & Nur, S. (2025). EFL teachers challenges in designing accessible learning tasks. *English Education Journal (E2J)*, 10(2), 98–102. <https://ejournal.lppmunidayan.ac.id/index.php/english/article/view/1727>
- Muhitida, T., Tillarni, X., Rishning, R., Va, I., & Muammolari, I. (n.d.). *NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION*. 155–160.
- Ozbakir, A., & Karal, M. A. (2025). Teaching English to students with special educational needs: Perspectives of teachers in inclusive classrooms in Türkiye. *Preventing School Failure*, 13(May), 76–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2025.2556054>
- Puspitasari, D. (2019). English language teaching in inclusive class: a challenge. *Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama*, 11(1), 37–46.
- Rahayu Adinda Sahra, & Khairunnisa Dwinalida. (2024). Teacher's Problems in Teaching English with a Level of Common European Framework of Reference for Students with Special Need (A Case Study in Inclusive School at SMP Al Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Purwokerto). *Ahmad Dahlan Journal of English Studies*, 11(1), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v11i1.747>
- Salvaña, L., & Protacio, A. (2025). Navigating Inclusive Classrooms: English

- Language Teachers' Narratives of Teaching Students with Special Needs. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 40(10), 1266–1282. <https://doi.org/10.70838/pemj.401002>
- Shilvani, S., Yohanes Gatot Sutapa Yuliana, & Clarry Sada. (2024). Teaching English in Inclusive Primary School: Teachers' Challenges and Coping Strategies. *Lectura : Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15(1), 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.31849/lectura.v15i1.16217>
- Studies, L. (2022). Exploring the Competencies and Challenges of English Language Teachers in Teaching Inclusive Education Programs: A Qualitative Research. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(3), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v2i3.43>
- West, E. A., Loreman, T., Smith, R., Florian, L., & Chambers, D. (2025). *RESOURCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES Series Editor : Chris Forlin. September.*
- Woodcock, S., Sharma, U., Subban, P., & Hitches, E. (2022). Teacher self-efficacy and inclusive education practices: Rethinking teachers' engagement with inclusive practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 117, 103802. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103802>
- Young, D. (2024). Identifying inclusive training needs with the inclusive practices in English language teaching observation scale. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00287-9>