

**Teaching English in Inclusive Primary School: Teachers' Challenges
and Coping Strategies**

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Abstract

The awareness of inclusivity has grown significantly, particularly in the field of education. Every child deserves a quality education that can fully meet their diverse needs. Inclusive education recognizes and accepts the existence of differences and skills among children and assisting them in learning. Every student at ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School are supported in meeting their individual needs and abilities, and their responses to the English lesson varied. Teaching English language to diverse students require specific attitudes and strategies. The purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' challenges and coping strategies in inclusive primary school. This research was designed as qualitative case-study research to discover teachers' challenges and coping strategies when teaching English in inclusive settings. Five teachers who teach grades one through five at ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School participated in the study. The observation, interviews, and a review of the documents showed that the students' emotional-behavioral problems and communication-language features problems were the teacher's challenges during English teaching-learning. The results revealed that the coping strategies that the teachers used were through developing and maintaining a good relationship with the students, differentiation (content, process, and product) to accommodate the different needs of the students, and collaboration between teachers in teaching. In short, the combination of these strategies effectively dealt with challenges and is recommended for teaching English in inclusive schools.

Keywords: teaching English, inclusive education, inclusive primary school

INTRODUCTION

Every child deserves a quality education that can fully meet their diverse needs and allow them to explore their potential. Inclusive education is one option in education that recognizes and accepts the existence of differences and skills among children. Engaging all children in learning and assisting them in realizing their potential is the main objective of inclusive education. ZonaKata is one of the few schools that provide inclusiveness in teaching and learning.

ZonaKata is the community learning center (*Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat/PKBM*) equal to the primary school level. The school was established in 2018 and is located at 178 Pulau We Street, South Pontianak. ZonaKata is the recognized inclusive school in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, and has two different levels, Kindergarten and Primary. ZonaKata is a school that values diversity and inclusivity in education where all students, regardless of their needs and abilities, study together in the same classroom. This aligns with the school motto, “We Believe That Every Child Can Learn”.

Learning English for some students can be challenging. The teacher, as the facilitator, should be able to recognize each of the student's needs and abilities to introduce them to English effectively. The students studying in ZonaKata are school-aged students with various learning difficulties and uniqueness in terms of their needs and behavior. Additionally, there are some students in each class who have been identified as having specific learning disabilities. Thus, the strategies for teaching English must be carefully selected.

In this present study, the researcher conducted the research in ZonaKata inclusive school during English class. English is introduced and taught in ZonaKata school as part of a local content subject. The English lesson was also taught to prepare the students for their mandatory English subject in secondary school. The majority of the activities involved worksheets, active games, singing, and outdoor exploration of the surroundings while using English. During the teaching and learning activity, the students provided a range of responses. Some students paid close attention, while others were just preoccupied and unconcerned with the activity. Another student would only cry and act out in front of the class. It was discovered that some students struggled with their emotions, social interaction and their ability to communicate, which made it challenging for them to participate in English-related activities.

This study investigated the teaching experiences of teachers working with students with various needs to identify the challenges they face and explore the coping strategies that may be used to address them. Identifying the challenges could lead to intervention programs that improve the quality of inclusive education services. This study may help ensure equality by preparing all teachers to be more open-minded and inclusive in all aspects of education.

The uniqueness of this case could be seen in the teachers who are teaching English in an inclusive environment. Teachers from a variety of educational backgrounds, including Indonesian education, chemistry education, and physics education, facilitated English teaching and learning in ZonaKata. All of the teachers worked together with the English Education teachers to develop an English lesson that could accommodate ZonaKata's inclusive educational philosophy. Furthermore, the choice of this case was based on the fact that the number of inclusive school is still limited and ZonaKata is one of the few educational institutions implementing inclusivity at the primary school level.

The students studying at ZonaKata are diverse and each has their own learning preferences, needs, and difficulties. The teaching-learning strategy for students in inclusive environments must therefore be customized to reflect their unique needs. When drafting lesson plans for all subjects, including English, the teacher has access to each student's private information. Information about each student's characteristics, needs, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses as well as their developmental stage. These details and information can be used as a guide by the teacher when creating activities for the class.

There are several previous studies discussing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practice in an inclusive environment. Desmita & Machrus (2019) focused on the strength of students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Furthermore, she also investigates the appropriate strategies to accommodate ADHD students in learning English. The findings showed that the need analysis by seeing the strength of ADHD students and using role model strategy is effective in teaching English to ADHD students. Lintangari & Emaliana (2020) investigated the teachers' roles and challenges in teaching students with visual impairments in inclusive settings. The findings showed that the main challenges faced by the teacher are inadequate resources and teacher training. The use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) are mentioned as the strategies in effective instructional teaching.

Furthermore, Ismael (2022) found that the teachers face several challenges when teaching students with autism, such as lack of teaching material, difficulties with social interaction and communication, repetitive behaviors and different abilities, unusual emotional reactions and expressions, and lack of parental involvement. He emphasized that it is essential to collaborate and have strong partnerships between teachers, schools, and parents. Flexible teaching materials and differentiated instruction (DI) are mentioned as necessary in inclusive settings.

The case study method was employed in this study. The researcher used a case study method in order to investigate and examine the challenges that occurs in ZonaKata inclusive primary school during English teaching-learning activity and the strategies used by the teacher to coped with them. A case study method involving observations, interviews, and a document review were carried out to analyze this topic thoroughly. The researcher reviewed the teachers' documents which are the worksheets that created by teachers for teaching English and the media used. To conclude, this research focuses on exploring the teachers' challenges and their coping strategies in teaching English in Inclusive settings, a case study on teachers of ZonaKata inclusive school in the academic year 2022/2023.

METHOD

The researcher used a case study design in this study. A case study research design were carried out to analyze this topic thoroughly. The participants of this study were five teachers who teach English from Grade 1 to Grade 5 at the primary level in the ZonaKata inclusive school. The researcher used the steps from Braun and Clarke for conducting thematic analysis when examining the data. The thematic analysis involved six steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. The researcher went through these steps when transcribing the data.

The first step was familiarization. The researcher listened to the audio and read through the data or data corpus to get familiar with it. At this stage, the researcher also

made notes and jot down the key information. The second step was coding. Coding breaks down large amounts of data into small chunks of meaning and organizes it meaningfully and systematically. In this step, the researcher highlighted the important words, phrases or sentences and labelled them as the codes.

The third step was generating themes. The researcher identified the pattern and created the themes. A theme is a pattern that captures something important or intriguing about the data or research question. The fourth step was reviewing themes. The researcher reviewed, modified and developed the preliminary themes identified in step 3. This procedure ensures that the themes are relevant and accurately represent the data. The fifth step was defining and naming theme. The researcher formulated the definition of each theme and named it with an understandable name to help understand the data. The theme that the researcher used in the study was "Teacher's Challenge" and "Coping Strategy". The last step was writing up. The result was examined and presented descriptively by the researcher. In order to have a thorough understanding of the data, the researcher also presented the data in the form of pictures.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation, interview and documents review, two overarching themes related to teachers' challenges and three themes related to teachers' coping strategies emerged from the responses of the participants.

Teachers' challenges

Students' emotional-behavioural problems

It was discovered through observation that the students are very diverse. Some students were very active and could not concentrate during class, while the other students tend to be passive and did not want to be involved in the activity. During the observation, one student threw tantrums and cried because he did not want to study. At the beginning of the class, he was crying and laying on the floor. The classroom environment was slightly chaotic, but the teachers appeared to be capable of handling it all. The teacher stated that each student is different, even though they belong to the same class and age.

Based on the interview with the teachers, the students with learning difficulties often unable to establish satisfying interpersonal relationships, with the teachers and the other peers. As a result, they have a low level of interpersonal relationships, misbehaving and experiencing negative emotions. The students also frequently experience sadness, angers or frightened that makes them struggle to interact socially and academically. Thus, the teacher needs to be able to acknowledge each of students needs and provide the supports for them in teaching and learning.

Students' communication-language feature problems

The students of ZonaKata Inclusive school exhibit some problems that related to their ability to communicate verbally. Based on the observation and interview with the teachers, the majority of students are still very dependent on the teachers' guidance. The students frequently need to have the teacher's explanations to be repeated and they have trouble following verbal instruction. Moreover, some students also struggle with talk and language development, making it difficult for them to express themselves or participate in oral activities.

“some of them require specific instruction and some are having communication problems that make it pretty challenging to instructed them, they are not able to hold a very simple conversation, only keep silent and often crying..”

(Interview, Teacher 1)

The teacher must be able to manage students with varying needs and personality. According to the teacher, getting to know and interacting with each student can be challenging because they all have unique social and cognitive challenges. From the interview, the teacher admitted that those components frequently leave them feeling overwhelmed.

“..teaching them is very challenging. We know that they have their own difficulties in learning which often overwhelmed us, the teacher”

(Interview, Teacher 3)

How to handle students A, B, C, and other students must be carefully considered by the teacher. It was found through observations and interviews with five teachers that they employ three coping strategies when teaching English in inclusive primary schools. These coping strategies are discussed in more detail below.

Teachers' coping strategies

Develop a good relationship with the students

Developing and maintaining good relationships with students is one of the strategies in language teaching, especially in inclusive schools. The teacher must build a strong connection with the students and acknowledge their needs, abilities, and behavior. The teachers at ZonaKata School demonstrate the importance of getting well and humanizing students. This is also reflected in the teacher's humanistic way of teaching.

According to the observation, one student was highly active, tended to pay little attention to the rules, disliked sitting still in their chair, and had no regard for other people. He was only preoccupied with his own world while pacing the classroom. One of the teachers claimed that Student A was extremely shy and had trouble communicating in two directions because she only sat still and didn't speak during class. The teacher continued by saying that they must establish a comfortable relationship and connection with the students before being taught directly or given the materials.

” We need to build a relationship first, to approach the students. Once we get close to them, becoming their safety and comfort zone, where they feel accepted and safe, they will start to listen to us, learn to obey the rules, the instructions, it takes a lot of time and patience but it certainly works”

(Interview, Teacher 2)

The teacher is also expected to be empathetic and try to accept and understand their students. In handling students with specific learning disabilities, the teacher also used several intervention to establish a good relationship with them. One of them is through providing calming manipulatives, such as doodling, singing and page colouring. From the interview, it was also discovered that the teacher paid lot attention to students' well-being and condition. It was found that through this strategy, the students showed a positive attitude and could obey the rules set by the teachers.

“.. we need to be able to read their mood. If they look down, or unenergized, give them a little time to rest first. Or giving some puzzle or coloring pages until their mood come back”
(Interview, Teacher 2)

“.. if one student looks tired or bored, we allow them to rest for a while. We give them time. We also need to know, which student to handle and guide first, which one is independent enough”
(Interview, Teacher 5)

In the teaching process, the teacher brings not only their experiences, subject knowledge, and methodology but also their personality, attitudes, and interests to the students. It was discovered that by developing and maintaining positive relationships with students, the challenges of teaching can be reduced. This is demonstrated by assisting them when encountering problems, providing feedback, identifying the importance and role of emotions in communication, and incorporating emotions into the learning process.

Differentiation

The teacher must acknowledge each student's needs, abilities, and behavior. ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School students have a certain degree of motivation, needs, and cognitive and proficiency levels. Thus, teachers need to have certain ways to accommodate those differences. One of the strategies mentioned by the participants was through differentiated learning.

Differentiated learning is a teaching and learning strategy that provides students with flexibility and multiple learning methods. Differentiating means recognizing and responding to students' various backgrounds, levels of competence and needs. The curriculum can be differentiated across three different areas, which are the content, process and products elements. To address the differences among students, teachers, as participants, differentiate the content by designing the task and worksheet in a variety of models and levels of difficulty. According to the teachers' interview, every student has a different worksheet. Although the subject matter being studied is the same, the task form is customized for each student.

It is made based on their level and needs. The topic being learn is the same, but the task is designed to meet each students' abilities.
(Interview, Teacher 3)

“Each student has a different type of worksheet, the topic being learn is the same but the form of task is designed and adjusted to individual student - the main topic to learn is same, but their process and ways of learning is different”
(Interview, Teacher 5)

The teachers further stated that they differentiate the process by giving different instructions and teaching methods to accommodate that. Teachers, as a facilitator in language learning, need to be able to give and serve different ways of instruction for them to get the literal meaning.

Teachers differentiate the product or output of the learning process to accommodate the differences of the students. In the interview, the teacher described one of the strategies for differentiating the class's output or product. For example, if student A is capable, she is asked to describe the animal, including its color, what it eats, and how many feet it has. Student B is only asked to tell the animal's name, while Student C is shown some pictures and asked to point and choose whether it is a giraffe or a crocodile. By differentiating the product, students can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in various ways.

Collaborative teaching

Collaborative teaching is one of the strategies in language teaching, especially in inclusive schools. The teacher needs to work and teach collaboratively to cater to diverse learning needs and support every student. The ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School teacher teaches collaboratively to ensure the students are well-assisted in every aspect during teaching-learning activity in the classroom. In Grade 1, for example, three teachers are responsible for twelve students. Meanwhile, in Grade 2, two teachers are handling nine students.

The teachers are seated with the students while individually going over the course materials with each one of them. This allows the teacher to monitor each student's progress and maximize attention. The interview revealed that some students occasionally throw tantrums in the middle of the class. In the teaching process, the other peers can assist when one teacher is teaching and explaining the lesson by keeping an eye on the students and calming them down because the lesson cannot continue if this doesn't happen.

“Their mood can change easily, one time they want to sit down and study, the other time they do not even want to hold a pencil, or even throwing their papers out to window- by having two teachers the situation in the class can be under control”
(Interview, Teacher 2)

“Student sometimes have a meltdown or throwing tantrums during the class, so when one teacher is teaching and explaining the lesson, the other peers can help by monitoring and calming the students, because if not, the lesson can't continue”
(Interview, Teacher 4)

When that occurs, according to the teacher, the other teachers can help by keeping an eye on the students and calming them down while one teacher teaches and explains the lesson. Because if this doesn't happen, the lesson can't be taught in an effective way. The collaboration between the teachers was an essential aspect of teaching and learning. Within each section of the language learning activity, they collaborated and developed a rapport that they shared with the students.

Collaboration between teachers is also evident in the process of designing and creating a worksheet for students. Collaboration improves the learning experience for students, and teachers can improve their teaching practices by interacting with students and other teachers. Furthermore, the collaboration between teachers enables them to keep an eye on student's needs and development while effectively facilitating teaching-learning.

Discussion

The research participants were found to have a unique case in teaching English in Inclusive primary schools. Students studying in ZonaKata inclusive primary school had a wide range of learning needs, styles, and difficulties. Moreover, some students have also been diagnosed with specific learning disabilities that make them exhibit various responses towards English teaching and learning. Despite those differences, they are all studying together in the same classroom in an inclusive environment.

The participants were teachers who have been teaching for more than one year in an Inclusive primary school and have experience handling students with various needs, learning styles, and learning difficulties. The findings show that the students' emotional-behavioral problems and the students' communication-language features problems are the challenges that the teacher faces during English teaching-learning. Therefore, the coping strategies that the teachers used were through developing and maintaining a good relationship with the students, differentiation (content, process, and product) to accommodate the different needs of the students, and collaboration between teachers in teaching. This study confirms a previous study by Padmadewi & Artini (2017) that the combination of differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching are appropriate to help the Autistic student to learn English in inclusive classroom.

The teachers of ZonaKata Inclusive primary school have shown how crucial it is to develop and maintain a good relationship with the students. Some students struggle to maintain their emotions, throwing tantrums and acting inappropriately. The observation and interview showed how the teachers have created a bond with the students that could engage them and make them enjoy the learning process. This is in line with Arifi (2017) study that humanistic teaching approaches help students develop emotionally positive attitudes, influence good relationships in groups, and encourage students to develop language competence. The teachers have shown that the learning experience could be effective and meaningful by humanizing the students.

The ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School students have various learning needs, styles and difficulties. Additionally, some students in each class have been identified as having specific learning disabilities. Based on the classroom observation and interview with the participants, the students have something in common. The participants clarified that the students were very visual. This required them to use visual media to learn English. Visual media here meant everything that the students could visually see. It is a medium for conveying information to students through visuals (Isnaini & Lisani, 2019). Visual media can be objects, printed matter of any kind, body language and behaviour of others which can be the visual support for communication.

When it comes to the teaching-learning process, visual media use has many benefits. Sofian & Anggraeni (2021) stated that using visual media in teaching could boost student enthusiasm, prevent student boredom, facilitate easy comprehension of the curriculum, and enhance the systematization of the teaching and learning process.

When the teacher taught about colours, the teacher showed the student many kinds of media (papers of different colours/origami). The teacher picked one piece of paper, mentioned the colour, and asked them to repeat. To confirm their understanding, the teacher partnered them with other students and had a small exchange talk about colour. On the vocabulary level, the students can say all the colours in English but do not understand how it is used for communication. That's also when the teacher needs to explain and model how to use it in communication. The teacher also used other types of visual media, such as pictures and animated videos. It can be seen that the worksheets

provided by the teacher were full of pictures that could help the students to understand the material.

The teacher also uses mime, action and gestures in the teaching process. In the study conducted by Kesen et al. (2019) the use of non-verbal signals (i.e., mime, gesture, facial expression) was one of the most frequent strategies used by EFL learners in Turkey. It can be interpreted that the use of those actions when explaining the materials can help all the students, including students with specific learning disabilities, understand better. Based on the observation, the teacher used the mime, action, and specific gestures to instruct the students. For example, the teacher tends to use a firm voice with a hand gesture to instruct the students. The instruction itself needs to be short and concise and, most of the time, must be repeated. This can help the students to understand the instruction and the material being learned.

In the conversation in the interview, the participants mentioned another coping strategy for teaching English in Inclusive primary school, which is through differentiation. Differentiation is the teaching and learning approach that gives students flexibility and multiple options for taking information (Meyad et al., 2014). This aligns with the statement from Paseka & Schwab (2020) that inclusive teaching practices require more personalised instruction, a wide range of differentiation strategies, and cooperation of all parties to be implemented successfully. Differentiating in other words can be defined as recognizing and responding to students' varying backgrounds, readiness, language, learning preferences, and interests.

Differentiated instruction is a method of teaching and learning for students with varying abilities who are in the same class. It aims to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where they are and assisting in the learning process. ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School teachers differentiate the content by designing the tasks and worksheets in various models and difficulties to deal with the students' differences. For example, a student worksheet in type A is made for students who can write correctly and able to identify colors. Meanwhile, the worksheet in type B is made in a cut-and-paste format with a sample piece of paper next to them so that students who struggle with color identification and writing can use it. The type B worksheet also includes "boxes" to help students learn how to write appropriately inside each one.

The teachers differentiate the process by giving different instructions for delivering the lesson and differentiating the product or output from the learning process. In the interview, the teacher described one of the strategies for differentiating the class's output. For example, if student A is capable, she is asked to describe the animal, including its color, what it eats, and how many feet it has. Student B is only asked to tell the animal's name, while Student C is shown some pictures and asked to point and choose whether it is a giraffe or a crocodile. By differentiating the product, students can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in various ways. The lesson can be delivered effectively by having sufficient knowledge and understanding of them.

The finding of this study connects to some previous research. The research conducted by Aliakbari & Haghghi (2014) showed that the differentiation of content, process, and output could improve students' reading comprehension. Magableh & Abdullah (2020) also indicated that differentiated instruction improved EFL students' reading comprehension in Jordan. More recently, Arianto et.al (2023) found that the students who receive differentiated instruction demonstrate a significant improvement in

their confidence when speaking English, as well as a greater enjoyment of learning because the lessons are tailored to their individual needs and areas of interest.

Collaborative teaching is also mentioned as one of the coping strategies in teaching English in Inclusive primary school. This study's findings align with Boland and Al-Mutairi's research about collaborative teaching (Boland et al., 2019). It was found that the collaboration between teachers could lead to better student support and consequently leaning toward EFL learning improvements. Their study showed a significant impact on students compared to the class with one teacher only. Moreover, in Hsieh & Teo's study, it is revealed that collaboration between ELTs and early childhood teachers (ECTs) in the classroom greatly impacts how well students learn English (Hsieh & Teo, 2023). The findings demonstrated that the majority of participants worked together and adopted a "one teach, one assist" philosophy.

Collaboration between teachers is now regarded as critical to EFL language learning success. There are more opportunities to meet the diverse learning needs of the students and to support the weaker ones when two or more teachers are present in the classroom. The observation and interview revealed that some students frequently throw tantrums or have breakdowns in class. The teachers divide up their responsibilities in this instance. One teacher would handle the students who were having tantrums, while another would handle the other students so that they could stay focused. The students who had tantrums should be watched and taken care to avoid hurting themselves or others. After a while, the students have relieved their emotions, and that's when the teacher can ask them back to continue studying. It shows that the situations and activities can be controlled with more teachers. The collaboration between teachers also showed in the process of designing the teaching materials. Based on the interview, it is revealed that the teachers collaborated to plan, design and create the worksheets and activities that can accommodate the student's needs. Thus, it was discovered that collaborative teaching is needed so that the teachers can accommodate the range of students' needs.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it was concluded that this study has answered the research questions to discover the challenges and teachers' coping strategies in teaching English in Inclusive primary school. It was found that the teachers' challenges are the students' emotional-behavioral problems and the students' communication-language features problems.

Students studying in ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School has different needs, learning styles, and learning difficulties. The teacher should use specific coping strategies to accommodate each student. Although this study provided answers to the research questions, it still had some limitations. Since the study was conducted in a primary school with a small class size, it is difficult to generalize the results to other regular schools. Furthermore, these studies were carried out in a specific inclusive school, ZonaKata, and each school should have students with varying needs, styles, and difficulties. However, the coping strategies can still be used in a regular class with a small number of students (less than ten students) and in another inclusive class similar to this one.

The ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School students are diverse and have learning difficulties. The teachers argued that the students' behavior and their communication problems often overwhelmed them during the teaching-learning activity. Furthermore, the teachers applied some ways and strategies to cope with the challenges in teaching,

which are by developing and maintaining good relationships with the students, the differentiation (content, process, and product) to accommodate the different needs of the students and the collaboration between teachers to maximize the teaching and attention to students in the classroom.

Suggestions

Learning and reflecting on the coping strategies used by the teachers in ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School, creating a bond and developing a positive relationship with the students is an important aspect of teaching. The teacher needs to have a sense of humanistic and humanist the students, knowing and acknowledging their needs and interest and supporting them positively so that they can enjoy the learning process. The collaborative teaching strategy required strong teamwork. It is advised that the teachers have a good and professional relationship in which they can share ideas related to student development, the teaching process and other students' related issues.

The research on EFL teaching and learning in inclusive school is still limited. Since this research focuses on the ZonaKata Inclusive Primary School only, it is advised that the future researcher could involve other inclusive schools at other levels. Moreover, with the growing awareness of inclusive education, it is suggested that the institution provide more information about inclusiveness in education. Additionally, it is hoped that the institution will offer more workshops, trainings or seminars for teachers, particularly those related to teaching in inclusive settings.

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