

Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Teaching Slow Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of inclusive education requires English teachers to deal with the diversity of students with special needs. However, there is a gap between inclusion and theory in the field, especially regarding teacher readiness and available support. This study aims to identify the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms, as well as the strategies used to overcome them. This study uses a descriptive approach with a qualitative method on one teacher in an inclusive class at SMPN 14 Bandar Lampung. Data was collected through observation and interviews. The participant in this study was one English teacher who was purposively selected based on his or her first-hand experience in dealing with students with various special needs (including blindness, learning difficulties, and attention deficits) in an inclusive classroom environment. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative descriptive method through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The study concludes that ongoing training and professional collaboration are essential to support the effectiveness of English teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: *Challenges, English Teachers, Students with Special Needs, Inclusive Classrooms*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits through formal and informal learning. Safitri et al. (2024) argue that the process through which a person acquires knowledge can also be referred to as education. Education refers to an intentional and organized process that fosters learning, enabling learners to develop their abilities, such as intellectual, moral, and practical. It can occur in formal settings, such as schools. It is not only for regular students but also for students with special needs. In Indonesia, particularly in Bandar Lampung, several regular schools can also be referred to as inclusive schools.

Where inclusion itself refers to differences without discrimination, and everyone has the same right to be accepted and appreciated in all aspects of life, one of which is education. Inclusive classes are an excellent idea because they teach that all children deserve the same education, regardless of their physical or mental condition. According to the opinion of (Echsell et al., 2025), that every child has the right to an equal education, regardless of physical or mental condition. Inclusive education has become a key focus in global educational policies, aiming to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs. In Indonesia, implementing inclusive education has been supported by government regulations and initiatives. This is stated in the regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 70 of 2009 (K. P. N. R. Indonesia, 2009), which defines inclusive education as an education delivery system that provides opportunities for all students, including those who have abnormalities and the potential for intelligence or special talents, to participate in education in the educational environment together.

In line with the regulation, the actual practice of addition in the classroom, especially in English language teaching. Teachers often face complex difficulties when teaching in an inclusive class. No less complicated is the lack of time and supporting facilities. In this condition, it becomes difficult for teachers to divide attention fairly between providing individual assistance to students in need and ensuring that the learning process of the entire class continues as planned. According to [Rangarajan et al. \(2025\)](#) Although teachers understand the theory of differentiation, they have significant difficulty in applying it practically. Major obstacles include a lack of time to design different materials, large classes, and limited resources.

In addition, there are obstacles in the delivery of English in the learning process to students with special needs. Language is the most important communication tool that everyone uses in everyday life. The only difference is that each region of the country has its own language. As one of the most important communication tools, language plays an important part in the identity of society and the nation. Countries need to use different languages to communicate. For example, people in England communicate in English.

English teaching is unique and cannot be equated with other subjects. Language is not just a memorized material, but a skill that must be actively practiced. English teachers are not enough to just explain grammar or give a vocabulary list, they must create a situation where students dare to speak, hear, read, and write in the target language. The challenge is even tougher in an inclusive classroom, because each student has a different pace and learning style. In line with the above opinion, [Marlina \(2024\)](#) argues that English teaching now increasingly emphasizes process and practice, as well as recognizes the important role of everyday context in learning.

As a core component of the national curriculum, English is designated as a compulsory subject for Indonesian students from junior high school to college. This policy is based on the National Education System Law ([R. Indonesia, 2003](#)), which aims to prepare the young generation with global communication skills. Ideally, this continuous learning is expected to develop language skills and international competitiveness. But in practice, the implementation of this policy faces various complex challenges. In diverse classrooms, teachers have difficulty in organizing inclusive English teaching. They are required to adjust standard materials and learning approaches to respond to various learning needs, including those of students with special needs. ([Sari & Hafis, 2024](#)) English teachers in Indonesia still urgently need comprehensive assistance and facilities to implement an inclusive learning system, especially in terms of designing teaching materials. However, this frequently presents significant challenges for teachers, especially English teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive classrooms are expected to cater to a different group of learners, including those with physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. These students may require individualized instructional strategies, adapted materials, and additional support that go beyond traditional teaching practices. For numerous English teachers, especially those without specialized training, addressing these requirements while simultaneously meeting curriculum demands for the whole class becomes a considerable challenge.

Moreover, factors such as limited resources, lack of professional development, insufficient collaboration with special education staff, and class sizes can hinder the effectiveness of inclusive English teaching. Teachers may also struggle with assessing students fairly, maintaining classroom management, and ensuring meaningful participation for students with special needs. This situation highlights a gap between inclusive education policy and practice. Understanding the specific challenges faced by English teachers in inclusive classes is essential to improving teacher support, instructional practices, and ultimately, student outcomes. Therefore, based on preliminary research, researchers have found a problem to be investigated with the title "*Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Teaching Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms*."

METHOD

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. It is a method for studying descriptive data in the form of people's written and oral words and observed behaviors. In line with this opinion, [Vaismoradi & Snelgrove \(2019\)](#) argue that the qualitative descriptive approach focuses on describing phenomena in participants' own words and observed behaviors. Data collection typically involves interviews and observations, with analysis aimed at providing a comprehensive summary of the information collected. While [Creswell & Poth \(2016\)](#) argue that the descriptive approach in qualitative research is a systematic attempt to describe a phenomenon, event, or group in detail and in depth in its natural context.

This approach allows researchers to explore social phenomena naturally through direct interaction with the research subject and to generate meaningful descriptive data. This descriptive qualitative approach is used because the focus of this research is limited to the challenges faced by English teachers in inclusive schools.

Respondents

The subject of this study is an English teacher who teaches in an inclusive eighth-grade classroom at SMP Negeri 14 Bandar Lampung. At the school, 3 English teachers teach in inclusive classes. However, researchers need only one English teacher for the research sample.

Instruments

This teacher was chosen purposefully because he has first-hand experience in dealing with students with special needs in the English language learning process. Subject selection criteria include: (1) actively teaching in an inclusive school for at least one year, (2) having students with special needs in their classes, and (3) being willing to be research informants. The process of collecting the data needed in this discussion goes through two stages of research, namely:

Interview Guide

This instrument is used to delve into English experiences, perceptions, and strategies in depth. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, which allowed the researcher to explore the respondents' answers further while remaining guided by core themes. The interview guide focuses on several key aspects, namely: (1) Understanding and preparation of teachers teaching inclusive classrooms, (2) The types of challenges faced, both pedagogically, psychologically, and technically, (3) Strategies implemented to overcome these challenges, and (4) The need for support and training.

Observation Guide

This instrument is used to observe firsthand the dynamics and interactions that occur within an inclusive classroom during English lessons. Observation is carried out by an observer. The observation guide focused on: (1) The physical condition and atmosphere of the classroom, (2) The interaction between the teacher and the students with special needs, (3) The interaction between the students with special needs and their peers, (4) The learning methods and media used by the teacher, and (5) The behaviour and participation of students with special needs during the learning process.

Data Analysis Technique

To fulfil this research question, the researcher must determine if the outcome answers the study questions. The data was analyzed using the following procedure:

Questionnaire

According to [Sugiyono \(2020\)](#), in descriptive qualitative research, questionnaires function as a tool to deepen data, especially through open-ended questions. The goal is not to measure statistics, but to explore participants' opinions, experiences, and perceptions in a

narrative and in-depth way. These questionnaires act like written interview guides that allow for rich qualitative data collection, especially when in-person interviews are not possible.

The researcher categorized all the interview questions of the English teacher, with a focus on understanding the depth, context, and complexity of challenges, strategies, and adapting teaching methods, rather than measuring their frequency.

The data from the questionnaire were presented in a table.

The researcher would enter the questionnaire results into a table appropriately categorized.

The researcher presented and generated a descriptive information analysis of the interview results.

The researcher concluded based on the data after the research was completed.

Data Validity

The examination of the validity of the data in this study was carried out through two testing strategies designed to maintain the quality and integrity of the findings:

Test Data Credibility by Using Reference Materials

In an effort to ensure that the data collected has an adequate level of reliability, the researcher conducts a series of credibility tests by referring to various reference sources that serve as a comparison tool and evidence reinforcement.

Test Data Credibility with Member Check

Member check is a verification procedure taken by researchers to return the findings that have been obtained to the parties who are the source of the data. The main purpose of this step is to measure the degree of conformity between the results of the researcher's interpretation and the actual intent and meaning that the informants want to convey. If all parties involved agree to the data presented, it is an indicator that the data has reached an adequate degree of validity, which in turn strengthens the overall credibility of the findings. On the other hand, if there is disagreement due to a fundamental difference in interpretation between the researcher and the informant, the step taken is to hold further discussions to bridge the gap in understanding. Thus, the essence of the implementation of the member check is to ensure that all the information that will be used in the final report truly reflects the authentic views of the data sources. This procedure can be carried out at two different moments, namely after the data collection phase for a certain period is declared complete, or when the researcher has arrived at a finding or partial conclusion that is considered important.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on research carried out at SMPN 14 Bandar Lampung, it is known that there are several challenges, strategies, and learning methods used by English teachers in teaching slow-learning students. The data collection process was carried out through observation, interview, and documentation techniques, and from these results, several findings were obtained:

Table 1. Interview Results from Research

Number	Questions	Answer
1	What challenges do you experience in developing and implementing a lesson plan that can reach all students, both regular and those with special needs?	Adapting the lesson plan for students with special needs.
2	How do you choose English teaching materials that are appropriate for students with special needs? What are the obstacles?	By choosing the most essential materials and the easiest vocabulary.
3	In terms of teaching methods, what difficulties do you encounter when it comes to accommodating different learning styles and different levels of understanding for	Their basic knowledge and their motivation is so low, so I implemented differentiation methods.

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	students with special needs?	
4	What difficulties do you face in teaching specific English skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, to students with special needs?	The lack of students' vocabulary mastery.
5	What strategies do you apply to modify teaching materials, oral instruction, and assignments in English learning to suit the diverse learning styles and abilities of students with special needs in the classroom?	Oral instructions, switching, repeating, and shifting English – Indonesia. Assignment: Copying some sentences.
6	How do you manage interactions and group dynamics in the classroom to ensure students with special needs can actively participate and feel psychologically safe?	By giving more attention, choosing his friends in a group, and giving some guiding questions.
7	What is your strategy in assessing students with special needs?	Copying and repeating some sentences.
8	How do you monitor the understanding of students with special needs on an ongoing basis during the learning process?	By giving some test (questions/instructions).
9	How do you modify the way you give instructions or questions to students with special needs to make sure they understand and can respond?	By repeating, slowly and shifting and switching.
10	Can you provide specific examples of how to modify English assignments, such as writing, reading, or speaking, with different levels of difficulty for students with different needs?	Yes, I can. For example, open your book to page ten. After you finish this worksheet, collect it from my desk and put your pencil down. Is your pencil down?
11	What teaching methods do you use the most? How can you modify the method technically, for example, in the speed of speech, the use of body language, the repetition of instructions, or the selection of examples, so that it is easier for students with special needs to understand?	Differentiation methods, by adapting the basic knowledge and skills he has mastered.
12	How do you utilize and adapt learning media as a bridge to facilitate the understanding and participation of students with special needs?	By adapting some online learning games.
13	What steps do you take to explicitly teach regular students how to interact and help their friends with special needs without being overprotective?	By giving information to the regular students on how they should treat and communicate with the special needs students.

Based on the results of the interview above, the following is a complete explanation.

Challenges in Implementing Lesson Plans for Slow Learner Students

When teachers try to adjust lesson plans for slow-learning students through a differentiation approach, the main difficulty often arises from the nature of the students' needs themselves, which are inconspicuous but greatly affect the rhythm of learning. In contrast to other, more visible distractions, slow learners work more slowly to process information, so content differentiation must be designed with high repetition and gradually reduced complexity. Kurniasari et al. (2025) argue that in children in the slow learner category, easily visible characteristics include their tendency to work more slowly when working on lesson questions. The obstacle is that teachers in one class also have to serve other students whose learning rate is normal or even fast. Assessments for slow learners must provide more time tolerance and simplified question forms. In a learning environment, slow learner students urgently need clear oral instruction, sentence repetition, and not many visual distractions in the classroom. According to (S. H. Lee, 2024) Slow-learner children experience long-term cognitive barriers that impact their academic achievement and social interaction. Therefore, learning needs to be directed at environmental arrangement and strengthening concentration

because this is directly related to students' ability to understand oral instructions from teachers.

Challenges about Different Learning Styles and Different Levels of Understanding for Slow Learner Students

The condition in slow learner students is low mastery of basic knowledge and weak motivation from within to learn. These two things make them lose interest quickly, give up easily, and have difficulty following a uniform learning flow. Faced with this situation, teachers cannot rely on only one teaching approach. Therefore, the differentiation method is a rational choice. According to (Ma'idah et al., 2025) Slow learner students show low learning readiness, so they require differentiated learning strategies that adapt to their readiness and learning style. Through this method, teachers prepare learning plans and activities by taking into account the differences in students' learning styles. For slow learners, differentiation allows teachers to simplify teaching materials, increase repetition, adjust the speed of delivery, and provide more concrete forms of exercises and assessments.

Challenge Face in Teaching Specific English Skills to Slow Learner Students

In English learning, one of the most basic obstacles that teachers feel when dealing with slow learner students is the weak vocabulary they have. M. Amalia & Santoso (2026) assessed that the lack of vocabulary is the biggest obstacle that hinders student development, especially in an inclusive classroom setting. The slow pace of individual learning has been shown to reduce students' ability to remember and activate vocabulary, while low motivation and memory exacerbate this condition, causing ongoing difficulties in memorization, pronunciation, and oral and translation expressions. This limitation does not only affect one type of skill, but also spreads to almost all aspects of language. When teachers ask students to read short texts, they often stop halfway because they do not understand the meaning of each word, so their understanding of the content of the reading is broken. Liswaniso & Pretorius (2025) state that how extensive a student's vocabulary is the most important determinant of his academic achievement. Their study of EFL students in Namibia showed that having a vocabulary below the 5,000-word threshold would directly weaken reading comprehension, so that without adequate vocabulary, students with low learning speed would not be able to understand the subject matter independently.

In writing skills, the problems that arise are different, but the roots remain the same: students have difficulty finding the right words to express their ideas or feelings, so the resulting sentences are cut into pieces or are even unresolved. A study by (Pratiwi et al., 2024) revealed that slow learner students are often unable to choose the right words, resulting in sentences that are meaningfully inaccurate and difficult to understand. For listening or listening skills, the situation is no less difficult. Slow learners need more time to digest a foreign word. Meanwhile, for speaking skills, their low vocabulary mastery causes them to hesitate to open their voices, for fear of misspeaking or not knowing which word to use. English teachers also have to go the extra mile, for example, by making a list of specific vocabulary that is less numerous, repeating the same words in different contexts, and using pictures or real objects as intermediaries. However, in a classroom with diverse students, this effort often feels like walking in place because the available time is never enough to catch up with the vocabulary of slow-learner students fully.

Based on some of the challenges above, here are the strategies used by English teachers to increase participation and understanding for slow-learning students:

Oral and Switching Instruction

Oral instruction allows the teacher to set the speed of delivery, pauses between clauses, and emphasis intonation. For slow-learning students, oral information spoken directly by the teacher has higher absorption because it eliminates the burden of decoding text. Maryaty et al. (2024) found that teachers who slow down the rhythm of speech, extend the pause between clauses, and repeat sentences significantly are able to increase students' absorption of teaching

materials. Teachers can start with short sentences, such as "Open your book to page ten," while pointing to physical objects. The advantage of this method lies in its real-time nature. Meanwhile, switching in this context is not an arbitrary change of language, but a deliberate switch of code at certain points in the learning flow. [Firdaus et al. \(2024\)](#) found that English teachers in the school environment deliberately implement code switching to achieve certain pedagogical goals, including making it easier for students to grasp the material, helping to translate complex terms, and improving the overall efficiency of the teaching and learning process. The teacher determines, for example, that command verbs are still pronounced in English, while grammatical explanations are delivered in Indonesian. Concrete example: "After you finish this worksheet, collect it from my desk." This strategy keeps students exposed to functional English vocabulary without losing instructional meaning. In other words, switching creates a predictable bilingual pattern that gradually forms automaticity. (Tenés et al., 2023) Their research showed that the higher a person's proficiency in both languages, the more skilled he or she is at using code-switching strategically, so that when teachers implement consistent switching patterns in the classroom, students not only learn foreign languages but also develop an awareness of how the two languages complement each other.

Repeating

Repeating for slow learners is not mechanical repetition until memorization, but repetition with variations in context. The teacher can say the same instruction in three different forms in the span of two minutes: first as a direct statement, "**Put your pencil down**", second as a confirmation question, "**Is your pencil down?**"; third, as a restatement by students and teachers simultaneously. What distinguishes this approach from just regular repetition is the spacing effect, or a short pause time between each repetition, which gives slow-learning students room for processing. [\(Butowska, 2024\)](#) revealed in their research that slow-learner students may be more comfortable with the same mechanical repetition when scientifically varied approaches provide greater benefits. This underscores the importance of the role of teachers to consistently implement varied repetition strategies even though they may not immediately receive appreciation from students.

Copying some Sentences for the assignment

Teachers apply this strategy through several techniques that are tailored to the learning objectives. First, pure copying: students copy two to three sentences from a whiteboard or worksheet into their book without alterations. This activity is especially useful in the early stages of introduction to simple sentence structures such as Subject-Verb-Object. Second, copying with minimal modifications: students copy a sentence but replace one element in it, for example, changing the subject 'I' to 'She' or changing the noun 'book' to 'chair'. Third, interrupted copying: the teacher provides whole sentences that are deliberately randomized, and then students copy them back in the correct order after hearing the teacher's reading. [\(Y. Lee & Kim, 2025\)](#) argue that pure copying is an effective strategy in the early stages of introduction to simple sentence structure, especially to help slow learners in encoding form and meaning simultaneously. In line with that, [\(Alnufaie, 2024\)](#) also argues that copying activities, when carried out systematically and gradually, can be an effective bridge for learners to understand sentence structure before they are able to produce sentences independently.

Based on the challenges and strategies above, here are some of the learning methods used by English teachers to teach slow learner students in inclusion classes:

Differentiation Method

Teachers use differentiation methods in teaching slow learner students to adjust their basic knowledge and the skills they are proficient in. [\(al., 2025\)](#) in their research on the impact of differentiation on student learning outcomes are slow to affirm that a differentiated learning approach places students at the center of the learning process and creates an environment that supports effective learning. First, the use of vocabulary that is already known by slow learner

students. This practice is usually used. For example, a teacher who wants to teach the word 'breakfast' does not immediately introduce it in complicated sentences. He will first make sure that students know the words 'eat' and 'morning'. This method helps students to make it easier to understand the vocabulary explained by the teacher.

Second, the use of the ability to imitate sounds to build the courage to speak. [Saeed & Mahmud \(2026\)](#) argues that students who imitate the sounds of English words spoken by teachers show significant improvements in speaking ability. This activity not only helps them absorb the original pronunciation and rhythm, but also reduces anxiety while also transforming the practice of speaking from simply following to an active process that builds confidence. The teacher takes advantage of this by saying a short phrase, then asking the students to say it again exactly as they heard. There is no demand to understand grammatical structure at an early stage. The important thing is that the sound comes out of the student's mouth. After the habit of imitation is formed, the teacher slowly begins to translate the phrase and asks the meaning of the sound that has just been imitated.

Third, the question-answer dialogue is limited to vocabulary that has been mastered. In this practice, the teacher only gives questions whose answers are already in the vocabulary collection that students are familiar with. For example, students have mastered the word (yes, no, like, rice), so the questions asked are limited to "Do you like rice?". The teacher consciously does not say "What is your favorite food?" Because the sentence contains the words 'favorite' and 'food' that slow learner students have not mastered. This restriction is not a form of standard lowering, but rather a strategy to ensure that every question gets a response, and that every response builds confidence.

Using Learning Apps

In the practice of teaching English to students with slow learner characteristics, teachers often encounter situations where conventional methods such as lectures, written assignments, and verbal repetition do not yield satisfactory results. Students appear passive, easily distracted, and in many cases show a refusal attitude when asked to open a book or work on a worksheet. This phenomenon does not occur because students are lazy or do not have the ability, but because the way the material is presented is not in accordance with their cognitive abilities. This opinion is in line with [\(Kucukkaragoz & Meylani, 2025\)](#) identifying that resistance to learning arises from a complex interaction between psychological, cognitive, and educational factors, not solely due to student laziness or incompetence.

Therefore, teachers try to use learning applications based on the observation that slow learners who have difficulty lasting fifteen minutes in a learning session can survive up to forty-five minutes when faced with a colourful game interface, accompanied by sounds, and feedback that appears immediately after each action they take. Learning on the app not only changes the classroom atmosphere, but also changes the student's relationship with the subject matter itself. [Ameen \(2025\)](#) argues that learning environments that use lecture methods or written assignments often trigger stress due to fear of making mistakes. By reducing psychological pressure, game apps allow students to focus on the process of exploration and mastery of material more naturally.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings reveal three primary difficulties in teaching slow-learning students in inclusive settings: adapting lesson plans to their slower processing pace while balancing the needs of regular students, including modified assessments with extended time and simpler questions; addressing limited foundational knowledge and low intrinsic motivation, which require differentiated instruction; and overcoming weak vocabulary mastery, which affects reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. To address these challenges, teachers employ controlled pacing, strategic code-switching between English and Indonesian, repetition, and brief pauses to provide processing time. They also use copying activities, ranging from simple transcription to sentence rearrangement, while building new vocabulary from familiar words

and using sound imitation to increase speaking confidence. Question-and-answer activities are limited to mastered vocabulary, and gamified platforms such as Quizizz and Wordwall are incorporated to sustain engagement, extending students' attention from approximately fifteen to forty-five minutes compared with conventional lectures.

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