

**AN EFL TEACHER'S CHALLENGES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
CONTEXT**

**Presented to the Department of English Language Education
as Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements to Obtain the *Sarjana Pendidikan* Degree
in English Language Education**



KAYLA ARTAMEVIA PUTRI

21322008

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL SCIENCES
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA**

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CONTEXT

By

KAYLA ARTAMEVIA PUTRI

21322008



Approved on 22nd May 2025

By:

Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ista Maharsi', is written over a horizontal line.

Dr Ista Maharsi, S.S., M.Hum

NIP.056130501

RATIFICATION SHEET

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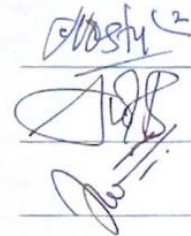
Defended before the Board of Examiners on 22nd May 2025 and Declared Acceptable

Board of Examiners

Supervisor : Dr Ista Maharsi, S.S., M.Hum,

First Examiner : Anandayu Suri Andini, S.S., M.A.

Second Examiner : Roro Millatu Al Ghaniy, S.S., M.Pd.



Yogyakarta, 22nd May 2025

English Language Education Department

Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences

Islamic University of Indonesia



Head of Department,



Puji Rahayu, S.Pd., M.LST., Ph.D.

NIP. 053310402

STATEMENT OF WORK'S ORIGINALITY

I honestly declare that in this thesis which I have written, does not contain the work or parts of the work of other people, except cited in the question and references, as a scientific paper should.

Yogyakarta, 22nd May 2025



Kayla Artamevia Putri

MOTTO

“Perhaps you dislike something which is good for you and like something which is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.” (2:216)

DEDICATION

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Allah SWT who always with me in every situation. I would like to thank you for myself for being able to keep running in every track even though in some moment there was a hole on it, but I did it, I did to stand up and back to my running track again. Then I dedicate this degree to my beloved parents, Surono and Krismawati who have always been there, sending me their powerful doas and supporting me physically, mentally, and financially. I would like to thank all my friends who supported me: Dikta, The Tolil, Bengsky, GG, KRS Ea, Ucrit Keren and PBI 2021 friends whom I cannot mention one by one. The ups and downs were always there, but thanks to all of you, I've made it this far.

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An EFL Teacher's Challenges in Teaching English for Elementary School Students in an Inclusive Education Context

Kayla Artamevia Putri

Universitas Islam Indonesia, 21322008@students.uii.ac.id, Indonesia

Ista Maharsi

Universitas Islam Indonesia, ista.maharsi@uui.ac.id, Indonesia

Article History:	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: May 19, 2024 Reviewed: May 19, 2024 Edited: May 25, 2024 Accepted: June 30, 2024</p>	<p>Inclusive education seeks to provide equitable learning opportunities for all pupils, including those with special needs, and has become an increasingly important focus in educational policy and practice worldwide. In Indonesia, however, the development of inclusive education, particularly within the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), remains underexplored and underdeveloped compared to other countries. This study addresses this gap by investigating the challenges faced by an EFL elementary school teacher in an inclusive classroom setting in Indonesia, where balancing the needs of pupils with special needs and regular pupils presents significant difficulties. Guided by the principles of differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogy, the research aims to answer the following questions: What specific challenges do EFL teachers encounter in inclusive classroom? How do they adapt their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their pupils? Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006). The study reveals the teachers must frequently modify the national curriculum to cater to the varying abilities of pupils, and highlights the crucial role of shadow teachers in supporting pupils with special needs. The findings underscore the importance of creative and adaptive teaching strategies in inclusive education and contribute to the limited body of literature on inclusive EFL education in Indonesia, offering practical insight for educators in similar contexts.</p> <p>Keywords: elementary school pupils, curriculum, inclusive education</p>
<p>Corresponding Author: Kayla Artamevia Putri Universitas Islam Indonesia 21322008@students.uii.ac.id Indonesia</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

Education programs for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have grown in Indonesia during the past few decades. The notion of integration and inclusivity has replaced the idea of discrimination where children with specific special needs and disabilities were taught in special schools. Globally, the essential purpose for inclusive education initiatives is the realization of human rights that promote equality and respect for all. The UNESCO 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education is now widely recognized as an influential document fighting for children's rights and strategies for inclusive education. It presents the case that inclusive education will provide equitable access to educational programs for children with special needs, with each pupil's needs being satisfied by suitable curriculum and child-centered pedagogical settings.

Forlin (2008) and Kusuma (2021) have highlighted ongoing curriculum reforms in the Asia-Pacific region, noting both progress and persistent challenges in inclusive education. However, these studies primarily rely on policy analysis and lack empirical evidence from classroom settings, which limits their applicability to the daily experiences of teachers. Inclusive education in China is already in place, however there are still some issues to be resolved, including a shortage of highly qualified teachers, particularly in less developed areas, a low enrollment rate for pupils with disabilities, an extensive population and a disparate allocation of resources for education (Faragher et al., 2021). Meanwhile in South Korea, there is a big issue in putting in place an inclusive education system. Regular teachers often avoid or undervalue the obligation to educate children with SEN. They would rather give special education teachers total control (Kim, 2013; Kusuma, 2021; Song, 2016). In Thailand, inclusive education has been around for nearly a decade, some of its practices and concepts which are primarily derived from the western system remain incompatible with Thai culture and are still viewed as strange and impractical by certain Thai community groups (Kusuma, 2021; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2015). Like Indonesia, inclusive schools have been developed in a number of Indonesian cities, yet the system is not well organized (Kusuma, 2021). Some of the obstacles include the lack of the necessary infrastructure and facilities and Indonesians are still stigmatized for not being able to enroll students with SEN in public schools (Darma & Rusyidi, 2015; Kusuma, 2021).



Despite the growing body of research on inclusive education, there is a noticeable gap in studies specifically addressing the challenges by EFL teachers in inclusive classrooms, particularly in Indonesia. Existing research, such as that by Porsch and Wilden (2021), often overlooks the unique linguistic and cultural challenges present in non-Western contexts, which this study aims to address. While studies like Benko and Martionović (2021) in Croatia suggest that pupils with special needs may not benefit from mainstream EFL programs, research in Germany (Porsch & Wilden, 2021) indicates that teachers with proper training have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. This contrast underscores the importance of contextual factors and highlights the need for more localized studies, such as the present research in Indonesia. Many studies in the field have employed inclusive pedagogy as a guiding framework; however, there is a limited application of this theory in EFL contexts. This study builds on Florian's (2009) work on inclusive pedagogy by exploring its applicability in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly focusing on differentiated instruction as a strategy for addressing the diverse needs of students. By addressing the gap in research on EFL teaching in inclusive Indonesian classrooms, this study not only contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive educators facing similar challenges in other non-Western contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Education in Indonesia

In 2003, Indonesia's education system was officially introduced to inclusive education. The fundamentals of inclusive education are declared in Indonesia's Constitution and National Education Law (No. 20/2003) and National Decree (No. 70 on Inclusive Education Services). As stated in the Directive Letter No. 380/C.66/MN/2003 of the Directorate General of Primary and Secondary Education about Special Education in Regular Schools, each district must run its primary schools, secondary schools, general high schools and higher vocational schools as inclusive schools. The Indonesian government is still working to construct physical facilities for folks with disabilities and to enhance the number of inclusive schools. In line with Indonesia's inclusive policies, numerous studies have shown that inclusive schools can give benefits to the pupils (Capodiecì et al., 2016; De Boer et al., 2014; Doll et al., 2003; Hurst et al., 2012; Wauters et al., 2008). Indonesia's inclusive education policy is regulated by the Minister of National Education's Regulation No. 70, 2009 (Article 2) which stated that education system in inclusive education offers chances for all pupils who have SEND and have potential capabilities and/or special competent to

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participate in learning in an educational setting together with all other pupils (Article 1).

With regard to the administration and implementation of education, Article 130 (1) *Peraturan Pemerintah* (Government Regulation) No. 17, 2010 states that special education for pupils with SEND can be conducted in all elementary or secondary education grades and levels; and (2) special education can be implemented through special, general, vocational, and/or religious education units. As a result, inclusive education regulations have been established in Indonesia since 2003 for pupils of a variety of ages and academic stages. The most current regulation on education for children with SEND, which is listed in *Peraturan Pemerintah* No. 13, focuses on providing Adequate Accommodation for Pupils with disabilities in 2020. Based on the regulation, the aims of the Provision of Adequate Accommodation in the field of education are to guarantee the federal government and local governments implement and/or facilitate education for pupils with disabilities in all fields, at all stages, and in all forms of learning, including special and inclusive.

The primary level being the starting point to the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. Numerous public primary schools are designated by the government to act as pilot schools. Teaching aids (such as modules of instruction and books) to support the program were provided to those schools. Moreover, training on inclusive education to support educators who, in the main, did not have specific capabilities in special education are provided by the government. Special needs schools' educators frequently went to the schools to talk about issues that came up and assisted class educators develop teaching resources that are suitable for pupils with SEND. The pilot programme for educators of pupils with SEND was discontinued in the eleventh year of the implementation of inclusive education which was in 2014. The public elementary schools which were designated as pilot schools are no longer able to lean on educators of special education to assist the learning process for pupils with SEND. Whenever special education educators were free, pupils with SEND were able to get additional hours of instructional support typically in the special education educator's room one-on-one or in groups. However, in this current term, subject and classroom educators are still in charge of the pupils with SEND. educators might not feel secure in their capability to provide pupils with SEND's learning activities in the classroom due to their diverse needs and the methodology which must be suited to pupils' specific needs. Furthermore, educators who teach a number of pupils with SEND also stated that they did not have sufficient time to develop the essential approaches of teaching (Riahta & Kurniawati, 2019).

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Teaching English in Inclusive Classrooms

The objective of the research discussed in this paper is to define teaching methods as the strategies or programs created by instructors to support instruction and learning (Anderson, 1981; Florian 2009). Meanwhile, using multiple teaching methods instead of just one instructional technique could be advantageous (Speece and Keogh 1996; Davis et al., 2004). There are many teaching methods that the instructors could use for the pupils especially in inclusive class. As stated by Flem et al., 2004; Lindsay, 2007; Winter & O'Raw, 2010 the following groups of tactics, methods, and procedures can facilitate and encourage inclusive practice: (1) differentiation, (2) collaborative learning, (3) encouraging inclusive classroom management practices.

First, differentiation is the process of preparing and developing inclusive instructional methods in an adaptive way by reacting to the needs of pupils (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2020; Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Teachers must customize aspects, including intensity, duration and assignment style in order to differentiate instruction based on pupils' characteristics or needs of learning (Choate 2000). Differentiation can include adapting or modifying the method of instruction, extending the time set for assignments, consulting with pupils to determine their preferred learning strategies, adjusting the duration of the assignment and offering more time for finishing assignments. Second, collaborative learning methods are ones that let pupils work in small groups to accomplish tasks that will help all pupils learn. Peer collaboration and peer tutoring are two examples of informal to formal activities that can be included in the model. It might be for a brief period or be ongoing throughout the academic year, depending on the learning objectives (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Third, inclusive classroom management indicates effective student learning that is characterized by routines and frameworks for classroom management that are both clear and supportive (Wong and Wong 2014). In order to foster inclusivity, teachers must demonstrate behaviors that allow for it. These behaviors include changing the makeup of groups for various kinds of activities, controlling when to give praise, checking in regularly, giving feedback, and modifying seating arrangements depending on need. On the other hand, different implementations might result from different understandings of word inclusion (Slee, 2001). The meaning of inclusion is circumstantial and can be practicalised depending on the school's resources and cultural background (Florian 2005). It is also questioned the way inclusive education is implemented, particularly with regard to teaching approaches (Farrell, 2000). Inclusion relies on educators, knowing, doing, and believing. Knowing is known as teachers' understanding of teaching concept and policy. To illustrate this point,

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teaching strategy disability and special needs, what children need to learn. Doing is defined as the use of one's knowledge. Such as putting knowledge into practice, going beyond reflective practice, and enhancing practice with the use of evidence. Believing is defined as teachers' belief in encouraging all children's educational processes. To illustrate this point, all children deserve an education, all children are capable of learning, they have capability to make a change to the children's lives (Kurniawati, 2021; Rouse, 2009).

METHOD

To further describe the EFL teacher's challenges in teaching English in an inclusive classroom, this study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. A descriptive study is one which concentrates mostly on description compared to examining the relationship between an event and its description (Kumar, 2011). For the purpose to understand the challenges faced by an EFL teacher when teaching English in inclusive classrooms and to describe the pedagogy employed by the teacher, the study's data was analyzed by using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) with the following six phases: 1. Familiarizing yourself with your data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Producing the report.

An EFL teacher from one of the elementary inclusive schools in Jepara was involved in a semi structured interview. Semi-structured interviews give more freedom for the interviewee to answer questions based on their preference. Semi-structured interviews are known to provide more freedom and ease for the interviewers (Canals, 2017). The interviews were guided by three themes:

- The pupils' types of special needs
- The use of curriculum
- The strategies of the teacher

The participant, Miss Ina, currently teaches grade 4,5, and 6 and all of the classrooms had at least 1-3 pupils with SEN in each class. The types of needs varied and included autism with low comorbidity, ADHD (*Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder*), slow learning, and communication difficulties. Miss Ina was 45 years old and had an undergraduate degree in marketing management, however Miss Ina had already been teaching English to young learners since she graduated from senior high school. Nevertheless, Miss Ina has been only teaching English in inclusive classes for the past 5 years and understands about inclusive education but never had received basic training in inclusive education before. Data collection was started by contacting an English teacher of a private primary inclusive



school via message. The teacher was informed that the data would only be used for research purposes and that confidentiality would be upheld with respect to the anonymity of names and other personal information.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview conducted, three themes were generated, 1) Specific curriculum which was used by the English teacher in the classroom, 2) The types of needs of the pupils, and 3) Teaching strategies which the teacher used when teaching in an inclusive classroom.

1. *Specific Curriculum for Special Need Pupils*

Based on the interview, this study finds that before the school applied *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the school used *Kurikulum 2013* known as *K-13*, in which English called as *Muatan Lokal* subject not as the obligatory subject as that in *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

"In Kurikulum 2013, English was not included... Yes, it was not included in the compulsory subjects... In X school (name of the school) itself, it is included in the Muatan Lokal subject..."

"For the material or other things, I made it by myself because if I used the book published by the Ministry of Education, it would be too hard for the children to understand..."

The teacher does not explain all the material that is contained in the book, but the teacher chooses some materials in every chapter which are easier for the pupils to understand since the pupils do not learn English intensively at school.

"So, for example like today's class, the title is 'At the Airport'... Well, the pupils learn about preposition, about direction, so take the preposition and direction. But take the easy ones, because the text itself was confusing... It's confusing for the pupils because they do not learn English intensively... It's only once a week and it's only 90 minutes."

Since the teacher teaches inclusive classrooms, where there are two areas, the regular pupils and pupils who need special attention, the teacher used a differentiated method. The teacher might teach regular pupils with full material, but the pupils with SEN will get the same material but with different activities and different worksheets according to the pupils' condition and ability. The teacher already applied the right instruction



when teaching an inclusive classroom where there are two types of pupils with different needs. This is in line with the research from (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2020; Lindner & Schwab, 2020), differentiation is the process of preparing and developing inclusive instructional methods in an adaptive way by reacting to the needs of the pupils. Miss Ina made the instruction and activities for the pupils with SEN suited with their needs.

"Yes, it's different. For normal pupils they can learn with full material and for children with special needs it is too difficult to focus. They cannot focus for a long time and their abilities are still very basic."

The activities provided to pupils with SEN in the class may be easier, given their limited ability to focus compared to regular pupils. The worksheets will have more pictures, colors, and fewer texts. This is in line with the research result of Apriliyanti (2023) which revealed that teaching English to pupils with SEN using visual learning materials such as movies or images proved to be the most effective. In addition, utilizing gestures and visual aids could improve perception of pupils with SEN (Apriliyanti, 2023; Browder et al., 2009; Jobling & Moni, 2004; Susilo Adi et al., 2017; Zohoorian et al., 2021; Tlustošová 2006).

"For example, if it's 'at the airport', maybe I will give them a picture of an airplane, luggage... something like that. Then later, they can color it and connect the dot. For example, the plane is dotted then later they straighten it."

Even though the pupils with SEN have different worksheets, they still have activities together with other regular pupils in class. The teacher stated that usually the pupils with SEN still join the activities of class, such as watching videos together or singing together. After that, the lesson will be differentiated, the regular pupils will have lessons as usual meanwhile the pupils with SEN will work on their worksheet accompanied by a shadow teacher but still in the same classroom.

"So in the beginning, for example if there is a movie, the students watch together for five minutes or sing together or do other activities together. Okay then later regular pupils will have usual lessons and those pupils with SEN will start doing their worksheet."

"Pupils with SEN are still there (at class)... but have different activities. It is still in the same class since the small number of pupils with SEN, but it can still be grouped outside and the shadow teacher is there."

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The teacher only used a differentiated method when teaching in an inclusive classroom. The teacher stated that she does not want to discriminate the pupils, therefore, the teacher uses differentiated methods to ensure that each pupil can still gain knowledge suited to their needs.

"We do not want the regular pupils to fall behind and miss out, so even though we focus on pupils with special needs, we make sure that the regular pupils are also adequately supported. So, for the gap that is not too far away, it has to be like that..."

Furthermore, differentiated instruction is one of the elements that is implemented in *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024) but teaching and learning practices of differentiated learning are rarely used (Aprima & Sari, 2022). Additionally, the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* have not been adequately addressed to raise the standard of education throughout Indonesia though the curriculum has been in existence since 2022/2023 (Samiha et al., 2023). The lack of understanding among educators and parents regarding *Kurikulum Merdeka* is being the factor of this curriculum have not been fully achieved (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023). Meanwhile the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has the point plus for teaching inclusive classroom. Miss Ina stated that *Kurikulum Merdeka* is more comfortable when teaching in inclusive class.

"For Kurikulum Merdeka, it is more comfortable for mom, because it really considers the children' ability... Like the needs that they need... and it is really independent. Mom Ina enjoyed it so much."

In addition, the teacher never gives group work to the pupils. Miss Ina did not want left behind pupils because ASD pupils were able to complete their assignment without falling behind when teachers used differentiated instruction in their class (Sandra & Kurniawati, 2021). The teacher believed that English is about understanding what people say and people understand what we say, as communication theory. Therefore, the teacher never makes any group work with the pupils and they still have separated learning until now.

"I never did it (group work).. for English. Because for me, the concept of English is that at least you cannot only write, the concept when you learn English is that there are people saying what you understand and when you say what the person understands, right? that is the concept of communication... So, I never made a group work with them. They still have separated learning until now."



2. Types of Special Needs Pupils and the Roles of Shadow Teacher

At school, Miss Ina only teaches the upper classes (grade 4,5, and 6). To illustrate, in 6th grade there are seven pupils with SEN with different kinds of special needs.

"In 6th grade now there are seven students with SEN that are not too severe, there is only ADHD, autism but with the low comorbidities, there are two who have problems with communication, then there are three slow learners. So, it is not a problem in communication, they still understand what is imagined but they are not very able to communicate what they want and sometimes if they are told to sit they have to be held..."

Miss Ina acclaimed that teaching an inclusive classroom only by herself was not easy and the teacher cannot afford it, therefore Miss Ina was helped by the shadow teacher when she teaches the pupils in class. Miss Ina still could communicate with the pupils with SEN even though Miss Ina had to use body language. This is in line with the result of research from (Apriliyanti, 2023) which revealed that the most effective technique to communicate with pupils during the lesson is to use body language and to address them by name while maintaining strong eye contact. The task between the teacher and shadow teacher will be divided. Miss Ina will teach all the pupils but when it comes to doing assignments, the shadow teacher will be asked to accompany the pupils with SEN but the activities are still done in the same classroom. This is in line with the findings of Setiawan & Rahman (2023) who revealed about the role of shadow teacher in learning support for pupils with SEN, the shadow teacher must be able to truly assist pupils with SEN by creating lesson plans and employing easily understandable instructional materials for all pupils, including those with special needs. In the same vein, Sandra & Kurniawati (2021) confirm that the shadow teacher who called as paraprofessionals played a big part in the learning process of ASD pupils. The shadow teachers' presence helped them comprehend the material and complete the assignment. The shadow teachers also offered the ASD pupils extra assistance during class.

3. More Creative Strategies to Teach Special Need Pupils

The main challenge found from the interview was the range of focus of the pupils with SEN in the classroom activities. The teacher acclaimed that the focus of pupils with SEN easily changed, therefore the teacher needed to create the activities which could get the attention of the pupils with SEN. ASD pupils who are prone to tantrums and have uncontrollable



emotions will find it extremely difficult to study English or other material (Apriliyanti, 2023; Bakare M. & Munir K., 2011; Grzadzinski et al., 2013). In addition, there is a wide range of autistic children, including brilliant autistic children and autistic children whose emotions are very difficult to control leading to low IQ.

"The challenge is that their range of focus is short, and they have to find something that is... interesting. Interesting but also not hard for them to understand. It is easy actually but the challenge is how you design the suitable activities for them."

In addition, the material preparation of the teacher before teaching in an inclusive classroom also needs additional time. The teacher stated that she needs to prepare different activities and worksheets for the regular pupils and pupils with SEN since the needs between them are different. If the teacher wants to use an easy method, she might give the regular pupils lessons from the textbook, meanwhile if the teacher gives pupils with SEN the same activities, they could not follow the lesson or even could not understand due to their special needs ability. This study revealed that the number of pupils with SEN in the classroom can also influence material preparation, as they have different levels of need.

"If there are a lot of inclusion children with special children, it might be a bit complicated... I have to prepare it by myself. That was hard maybe because there is more preparation, because in the normal class you can use a textbook, you can bring it to class, but not for them (children with SEN)."

"The strategy must be creative when preparing teaching materials. When preparing materials for special pupils, I usually make my own. Nowadays, there are many tools. You can use various kinds of tools, but in the past you had to make your own materials manually. For example, like writing each of the worksheets... writing the dots..."

According to Miss Ina, the teacher's strategy for creating materials for pupils, especially those with SEN, is to be creative. Given the varying needs of the pupils and also the short attention span of each pupil with SEN. Also, teacher's creativity in teaching give some benefit to the pupils. According to the result research from (Hestika et al., 2021) which revealed that pupils' enthusiasm in studying English arose as a result of the teacher's creative teaching approaches. So as pupils to feel at ease while studying, and in order for pupils to be engaged in attending the class. The result of research from (Djalali et al., 2022) also found that engaging in creative learning activities can boost pupils' motivation to learn by

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enhancing the creativity of teachers. As well as nowadays there are a lot of tools which help the teacher when making creative materials for the pupils.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study showed that Miss In understood how to teach an inclusive classroom even though Miss Ina did not graduate with an educational degree and special needs education. The English teacher already uses one of the instructions which is suited for an inclusive classroom. The use of differentiated instruction really helped the teacher to teach both regular pupils and pupils with SEN. The differentiated instruction also could help pupils to not be left behind since the materials are based on the pupils' needs. The adjustment of teaching media could really help the student to learn the materials in class, but it would be different if there are many pupils with SEN in the classroom, the teacher would need help from other teachers. Shadow teachers also have an important role in the inclusive classroom, because the English teacher also needs to give her attention to regular pupils. The most challenging part was designing the materials for the pupils with SEN because they have a short range of focus. This made the English teacher have to be creative to catch the interest and focus of the pupils with SEN when teaching them in class. Findings also revealed that English was not the main subject before the school used *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Furthermore, this new curriculum is more comfortable for Miss Ina since in *Kurikulum Merdeka* the teacher could make materials based on the needs of the pupils and differentiated instruction is used on this curriculum.

Based on this study, the researcher would like to suggest some points. In the implementation of inclusive practice, it is hoped that there will be more EFL teachers who understand about various inclusive teaching methods. Second, teachers be more creative in developing the materials, open to technological innovation when developing material and teaching in the classrooms. Third, teachers be more effectively active in every educational development, therefore the lesson can be useful for the pupils, both for their own lives and others. For the further research, this study could be used as a reference for other research and it is expected that this research will continue by finding that *Kurikulum Merdeka* really could make teachers comfortable when teaching in inclusive classrooms and explore more about the good method in teaching English for high school pupils in an inclusive education context.



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