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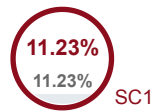
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Innovative strategies for teaching english in schools: Teachers' experiences and voices

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**ABSTRACT** Teaching English to students with special needs is certainly not an easy way. So, teachers need to use teaching methods that best suit their students' conditions. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore how teachers design English teaching methods and their implementation. Apart from that, this research also describes the challenges faced by English teachers in special schools (SLB). This research was conducted at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo Regency. The participants in this research were English teachers at junior high schools. **This research is qualitative research**

**using interview and observation data collection techniques. The results of this research show that** teachers use various methods adapted to students' ability levels, including heavy, light, and special classes, according to their needs. The methods applied reflect awareness of the importance of individualization in order to support special needs students in learning English. Challenges faced by teachers, such as grouping students based on ability, handling students' moods, and preparing appropriate learning materials, were also issues found in this research. The results of this research imply that teachers must understand that each student has special needs. Keywords: Students with special needs; Special Schools (SLB); English Language Teaching; English Teachers.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the field of education, addressing the diverse needs of students is a very important endeavor, especially in the context of special needs schools or what is known as Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB). Sekolah Luar Biasa is often used in the context of the Indonesian education system, referring to a unique category of educational institutions specifically designed and dedicated to providing educational services to students who have certain special needs (Nurrohmah Jauhari et al., 2020). Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) face learning difficulties in the learning activities. Learning difficulties refer to challenges that hinder students' ability to acquire and process knowledge. These schools provide education to students with various conditions. First is physical disabilities such as visual impairments, hearing impairments and cerebral palsy. These conditions with limitation bodily function that can affect physical activities. Second is developmental disorder such as down syndrome, **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**. These conditions impact student ability to learn, and communicate. Third is intellectual disabilities that involve limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, such as low IQ levels. Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) face various challenges (Akbar et al., 2024), such as social stigma, about special need schools, varied needs of student and curriculum adaptations in order to maintaining educational equality. Several studies agree that the main purpose of special schools is to provide individualized education plans for each student, encouraging the holistic development of each individual by considering their unique needs, strengths and weaknesses. In addition, special schools should ensure that every student can reach their full potential despite the challenges they may face (Rosadi, 2023).

Teachers in special schools certainly need to have the provision, skills and knowledge to apply teaching methods that best suit the unique characteristics, abilities and needs of their students. One of them is in teaching English lessons as one of the subjects in the school curriculum. The dynamics of teaching English in SLB certainly presents its own and specialized challenges that are not found in public schools in a detailed understanding. Effective methods, barriers encountered, and educators' and students' perspectives on learning effectiveness can contribute significantly to the development of inclusive and effective teaching methods and resources (Sari et al., 2024). Several studies addressing English language teaching in special education have shown that English language learning is most successful in improving the communication skills of students in special education. The research highlights the importance of curriculum adaptation and the use of techniques that support the varied learning styles of students with special needs (Nurfitri et al., 2023). The results of another study also conducted by (Kurniawan et al., 2024) highlighted that English teachers' methods of conducting teaching in special schools can provide in-depth and diverse learning experiences for students with special needs.

Kurniasandi et al (2023) found in their research that the right teacher using methods in teaching English to students with special needs can help students achieve learning goals. With an in-depth understanding of effective methods and barriers faced in teaching English in special schools, education managers in special schools can design inclusive approaches that support the development of more effective teaching methods and resources. Therefore, this study aims to offer valuable insights into how English teachers adapt their teaching methods to meet the unique needs of students in special schools, ultimately aiding the development of curriculum and teaching materials that are aligned with the characteristics of special school students and support the achievement of more students.

Thus, research into the methods used by teachers in special needs schools when teaching English is necessary to create an inclusive, effective and supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students with different abilities and disabilities. This research seeks to explore teachers' unique experiences in the realm of English language learning in special needs schools. Specifically, it will concentrate on exploring the teaching methods used and the challenges teachers face in the learning process. By focusing on secondary level special schools, **the results of this study are** expected to make a constructive **contribution to the development of** inclusive education in Indonesia, **particularly in the context of** English language learning in special needs schools. The findings will not only enrich educators' understanding of the challenges and successes in this educational setting, but also potentially foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment for students with special needs. From the background described above, the author formulates the following research questions:

1. How does the teacher design and implement teaching method in teaching English for students with special need at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita
2. What challenges are the teacher face in teaching English for student with special need at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita?

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method because the authors describe the research findings without using numerical data but by explaining the data in depth and meaning. In addition that qualitative method used various focus approaches, including interpretation and naturalistic approaches to the research topic (Hasibuan et al., 2022). This research was conducted at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo Regency, especially at the junior high school level. The research was conducted from October to December 2023. **The participants in this study were English teachers who taught in** grades VII, VIII, and IX. The researchers did not reveal the detailed identities of the participants, both teachers and students, to maintain privacy and also as a code of ethics for qualitative research. In addition, maintaining their identity was necessary to make the participants feel more comfortable and open when sharing experiences or information that might be personal or emotional. This research was conducted after obtaining consent from the participants and the principal of SLB-AC Dharma Wanita, Sidoarjo.

Data collection technique for this study involved two primary methods: interviews and observation. To address research questions one and two, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with the English teacher. This approach was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the teacher's experiences. The interview questions were aligned closely with the research questions. To ensure data validity, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed before analysis. The second method was observation, which was used to answer research question three. Researchers employed overt observation, meaning the teacher and students were aware of their presence during the observation of the English learning process. This transparency was intended to foster an open and honest environment.

After collecting data in the form of interviews and observations, the author then analyzed the data with the following stages: First, transcribing the

interview data that had been conducted with teachers and students. The researcher also ensured that the transcription was accurate and complete. Second, the author analyzed the documents that had been collected, such as teaching modules or other documents relevant to the teaching method. English at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo. Then the researcher classified the findings from the interviews and document analysis according to the research questions, including teaching methods, factors that influence the selection of methods, the process of designing methods, special considerations for **students with special needs, obstacles faced, and the** experiences of students with special needs in learning English. After that, the researcher identified patterns or themes that emerged from the data that had been collected. At this stage researchers identified similarities or differences in experiences, views or practices between teachers and students. Researchers then interpreted and organized the findings into a coherent and meaningful narrative. Researchers also validates the data or trustworthiness of the findings that have been compiled by referring back to primary data, such as interviews, observations and document analysis, through discussions with research members or research supervisors then compiles the report as a whole.

## FINDINGS

1. Design and implementation of English teaching methods for special needs students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo, East Java.

The teaching methods used by teachers vary, adjusting to the needs and abilities of students (Irawan et al., 2024). Azizah (2022) describes five mandatory methods that teachers must use when teaching students with special needs, namely communication, task analysis, direct instruction, prompts and cooperative learning. All educators are required to prepare the best method and must be adjusted to the ability of students in order to achieve good learning outcomes. Educators are the main strategy holders in the character building of the nation's generation (Harahap & Prastowo, 2021). There are differences in the methods used by English language teachers in SLB and Non-SLB schools. If in Non-SLB, the methods prepared by educators only include approaches and classroom learning activities because the curriculum fully follows the direction of the government, while in SLB the methods prepared include the curriculum used, approaches, and ways of teaching. The diversity of strategies used by teachers can be seen from the results of interviews such as the following transcript except:

### Transcript 1

"I modify between the independent curriculum and k-13, a lot of which I adopt from the internet and then adjust to the conditions of the students. I also prepare 2 methods for teaching, for light and heavy classes. If in the light class I use the writing, reading method because the light category students are able to read and write. For the heavy category I apply more object matching methods, because they cannot read, write and many cannot understand things well, as well as with the special class I only use the method of pointing at objects".

The statement of the English teacher at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita in Sidoarjo district in transcript 1 illustrates a planned and diverse approach in adapting the curriculum and teaching methods **according to the needs of the** learners. **It can be seen that** teachers have made modifications between the independent curriculum and the 2013 curriculum (K-13), by taking many references from the internet and adjusting them to the conditions of their learners. English teachers in SLB-AC Dharma Wanita can modify 2 different curricula because the 2013 curriculum and the independent curriculum are not much different, where the assessment results become the teacher's guide for developing learning activities (Indriani et al., 2023). It is also proof that teachers have analyzed in advance to find out the character and ability of students to receive subject matter (Khusna & Harsiwi, 2023). By utilizing media in the form of online resources, it makes it easier for teachers to get ideas and additional learning resources that are more effective for students (Khasanah et al., 2024). Transcript 1 above also shows that teachers do not only take material from the internet, but also adjust it to the needs and abilities of their students who are special students. In the transcript, it is also known that the teacher applies two different methods between the heavy class (not able to follow directions) & the light class (able to follow directions), as well as special methods for certain special classes (having very specific educational needs and often related to rare or complex disability conditions). The difference in application based on the level of student condition is illustrated in the following table:

Table.1 English language teaching methods for students with special needs at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita

Level of students condition at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo

Methods	Severe	Mild	Specific
Writing English vocabulary			√
Read simple English sentences			√
Matching objects through English instruction		√	
Pointing out objects through English instruction	√		√

Table 1 above illustrated the English teaching methods used by teachers in the classroom, namely: 1) teaching methods for the light class use writing and reading methods because learners in this category are already able to read and write. 2) teaching methods for the heavy class: more matching and pointing objects, because learners in this category are not yet able to read and write and have difficulty in understanding the material verbally. Then 3) teaching methods for special classes only use the method of pointing at objects, because learners in special classes have special educational needs that require a more specialized approach.

### Transcript 2

"Learning in SLB also uses the method of repetition or repetition of material continuously, because students in SLB are not required to be good at academics but good at self-help and skills, so it is very common to repeat the same material within a month or more or even in one semester to only learn one material."

Transcript 2 of the interview revealed that learning in Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) is based on the use of the repetition method or continuous repetition of material. That is, this method involves repeating the same material over and over again to ensure a deep understanding by learners. This is because learners in SLB are not emphasized to reach the level of intelligence high academics. Instead, the main focus of learning is on developing independence and skills because learning cannot only prioritize fun but also the main function of learning itself for students (Prameswati, 2020). In addition, because the learning approach focuses on repetition of material, there is often repetition of the same material over a long period of time. This can include repetition in one month, more than one month, or even for a semester just to learn one particular material. This learning approach shows that the educational goals at

SLB-AC Dharma Wanita are more oriented towards developing independence and skills rather than conventional academic achievement. Thus, the above explanation reflects the efforts of English teachers at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita in designing diverse teaching approaches that suit the individual needs of their learners.

## 2. Challenges faced by teachers in teaching English lessons to students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita, Sidoarjo

In non-SLB schools, **the challenges faced by teachers are** still limited to active and passive students during **teaching and learning activities**. In contrast to students in special schools, **the challenges faced by teachers** are very diverse as in the interview results in the following transcript fragment:

### Transcript 3

"I have to deal with students who are light (able to follow directions) and heavy (not able to follow directions), I also have to deal with the mood of the students, if they don't want to learn, especially special students, I have to understand and let them enjoy their time and not force them to learn, besides that my challenge is also in preparing materials, especially during exams. I have to prepare a variety of questions according to the ability of the students"

The interview with the teacher in transcript 3 illustrates the challenges faced in teaching in a diverse environment. First, teachers have to deal with different groups of learners which of course require different methods to accommodate the individual needs of students in the English learning process. The second is handling students' mood. Teachers who participated in this study realize the importance of paying attention to the mood of their learners. If learners are not motivated to learn, teachers choose not to force them, but give the students the opportunity to enjoy their time. This approach demonstrates a deep understanding of the importance of learners' emotional well-being in the learning process. The third is the challenge of preparing learning materials. The preparation of learning materials is a challenge in itself, especially when facing exams where teachers have to prepare a variety of exam questions that suit the diverse abilities of learners. This shows the teacher's effort to ensure that the learning and evaluation materials prepared are suitable for the individual needs of the learners. This is also in accordance with (Ramadani et al., 2021) about the efforts of a teacher, namely teachers are required to always improve their abilities and knowledge for the development of the learning process. An example of the efforts made by teachers at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita is, following professional development in order to increase knowledge so that they can face the challenges that existed (Astnan, 2020).

Thus, the results of this study reflect English teachers at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita's awareness of the needs of diverse learners and efforts overcome the challenges that arise in teaching in an inclusive educational environment.

Researchers also made direct observations in the classroom to see the real conditions in the field about the application of teachers teaching English and to crosscheck information from interviews conducted with teachers. The following is an example of teacher activity with grade 8 (severe category) students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita.

### Transcript 4

Teacher: "what is it, what is this thing?" (showing a book) Students: "bukuu" (simultaneously)

Teacher: "well yes, what was the English book yesterday children"

Student: "A book is a book" (one student answers, the others are silent or busy with themselves).

Teacher: "right, that's great Bagus"

Transcript 4 above is a teacher and student activity when discussing material about "things in the classroom" and the material according to the teacher has been repeated for one month with a variety of problem models such as counting and recognizing the color of objects in the classroom. At the time of observation, the situation was seen when the teacher taught objects in the classroom by asking students to say the word 'book' by showing objects in the form of books and the teacher said the word 'book' as a stimulus. The word 'great' spoken by the teacher is something that can increase the enthusiasm for learning of students, because the increasing ability of students can be determined from good instruction and feedback from the teacher (Kok et al., 2021). This is one of the challenges faced by teachers in SLB when facing heavy classes. Learners cannot pronounce in English, so they are given a stimulus through a word in Indonesian and then invited to remember the meaning of the word in English.

The next activity is to write the objects from the pictures that have been pasted on the notebook. This is one of the challenges of teachers in SLB when in heavy classes where teachers are required to use image media or realia media to facilitate learning activities. Not only that, teachers also have to deal with students who do not understand at all what is being discussed when there are questions, students are just silent, busy with toys or around the class. In heavy classes, teachers also have to deal with students who cannot write and read independently, they have to be read out and then written down and then they copy the existing writing.

Figure 1: English learning activities of 8th grade students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo

It is different when teachers have to deal with the lightweight category. The majority of light class students are very calm and cooperative with the teacher's directions. They have also been able to read and write without having to have pictures as media, only directions from the teacher. However, the challenge remains as in the following transcript fragment:

### Transcript 5

Teacher : "can you read?" (while carrying a textbook)

Students : "I can" (students answer simultaneously)

Teacher : "Come on, who wants to read number 1?"

Student : "Me... me, me"

Transcript 5 above shows when the teacher teaches English in a light class. It can be seen that students are very enthusiastic to be the first to be willing to read the sentences written by the teacher on the blackboard. The results of this observation are in line with the results of interviews with teachers about the lightweight class at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita.

Transcript 6:

"When I'm in a light class, I don't face many challenges, maybe it's just their mood that I have to understand. Because the majority of them can read and write. In the light class they are able without pictures, able complete the word or sentence without us having to write it down, we only need to give direction to write and read something."

Transcript 6 above shows the challenges that English teachers face when teaching in light classes. It is not as heavy as when teaching in heavy classes **but there are still challenges that** teachers must face.

**This research highlights the importance of** using diverse teaching methods in special schools, particularly in English language learning. In SLB-AC Dharma Wanita in Sidoarjo, East Java, it was found that English teachers try to adapt their teaching methods to the needs and abilities of learners. With a variety of methods, teachers can more effectively accommodate differences in students' learning abilities and conditions. The results of this study are in accordance with several studies that learning methods for children with special needs should be tailored to the individual abilities of students (Nuraini, 2023).

Unlike the previous study, which did not classify the level of students' ability to teach lessons with certain methods. In this study, students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita can be divided into several categories, including heavy class, light class, and special class. Students in the heavy class usually have a higher level of educational needs compared to the other classes. They may have more severe or multifaceted disabilities. Generally, they need extra attention and support in understanding the subject matter. Teaching methods that applied in the heavy class may be more tailored to their limited abilities, such as the use of visual methods. Students in the light class have a lower level of educational needs than the heavy class, but still require additional support. They have better academic abilities or less severe disabilities. Teaching methods in the light class can be more diverse, possibly including a combination of visual, auditive and kinesthetic approaches. Typically, students in light classes can follow the general curriculum with some adjustments or support. Finally, students in special classes usually have very specific educational needs and are often related to rare or complex disabling conditions. Teaching in special classes is more focused on providing highly individualized support according to the unique needs of each student. Teaching methods may be highly customized to the student's condition and abilities, with an emphasis on experiential learning or social interaction. These differences reflect the diverse educational and support needs of students with disabilities in special schools and the adjustments required in the provision of effective and inclusive education for them.

The research also revealed differences in teaching approaches between SLB and non-SLB. In SLB, teachers not only focus on classroom approaches and learning activities but also take into account a more structured and customized curriculum, approach and way of teaching. This indicates greater flexibility in designing teaching methods in SLB, in contrast to the curriculum that follows government directives in non-SLB schools. The results show that effective teaching methods are those that are tailored to the students' conditions and abilities. English teachers at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo use different approaches for mild, severe and special classes, according to the students' ability levels and needs. This finding is supported by the findings of several studies that teaching English to students with special needs requires effective strategies (Sadriani et al., 2023) (Anggraheni et al., 2020) (Muryanti et al., 2020) This shows a strong awareness of the importance of individualizing teaching approaches in supporting effective learning.

**This research also highlights a number of challenges** faced by teachers in teaching English in SLB. These challenges include grouping students based on ability levels (severe, mild, specific), handling students' moods, and preparing learning materials that suit students' needs. The emphasis on repetition of material as part of the teaching method is also a challenge for teachers in SLB. This finding is supported by (Fazira, 2023) that all teachers must have difficulties and problems. It is a challenge to teach English, a foreign language, to students with special needs.

The direct observations in the SLB-AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo classroom provided a concrete picture of the application of the teaching methods presented in the teacher interviews. The observations provided a deeper understanding **of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in** SLB and how teachers overcome these challenges in practice. Thus, this study not only provides an overview **of the application of teaching methods** in SLB, but also provides more specific insights into the challenges faced by teachers and their efforts in overcoming these challenges. This is important in the development of more effective and inclusive learning strategies in special education settings such as SLB. From the results of this study, it is also known that it is important to provide debriefing and training to teachers both pedagogically and psychologically. Teachers in SLB need to be able to manage the classroom well, including managing student behavior that may vary. Psychological training helps teachers understand the psychological factors that influence student behavior and gives them the skills to manage the classroom with a positive and inclusive approach. To realize better inclusive education, it should be fully supported and facilitated by the government and all levels of society (Shamo, 2020). To get full support, it can be done by socializing and educating students' families to support their children to work so that all levels of society can see and appreciate the abilities of children with special needs (Risa Fadila, 2023).

In line with the explanation from (Azila & Resdati, 2024) that families must be involved in every child's learning development to improve the life skills of children with special needs so that good inclusive education can be realized.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion of the study emphasize the importance of diverse teaching methods in supporting the learning needs of students at SLB-AC Dharma Wanita. Teacher use approaches tailored the categories of students namely severe, mild and specific to find their own individual needs. This reflected the importance of categorize learning needs to create an inclusive and effective learning environment. This research also discover significant differences between teaching approaches in special school (SLB) and regular school (Non-SLB). Instead of rely on classroom activities, teachers at special schools adapted the curriculum and modifying between independent curriculum and curriculum (k-13) in order to find the learning needs of students.

In addition, teacher faced various challenges such as grouping students based on their ability levels, managing students learning mood, and preparing diverse learning materials. Since the primary goal of learning in special schools is to help students improve their independence and skills rather than just their academic performance. Direct observations demonstrated actual implementation of teaching methods, such as use visual media for students in the severe category and simple instructions for student in the mild category.

Last, this research also emphasize the necessity of providing teachers through pedagogical and psychological training in order to help them to manage inclusive classroom more effectively. Enhancing the quality of inclusive education recognizing the potential of students with special needs also require community and family support. Therefore, these results offer helpful direction for creating inclusive and effective teaching strategies in special education

## CONCLUSION

In summary, this study shows the efforts of English teachers at SLB- AC Dharma Wanita Sidoarjo in designing diverse teaching approaches that suit the individual needs of their learners. It was found that teachers use a variety of methods tailored to the students' ability levels, including heavy, light and special classes, according to their needs. The methods used by teachers reflect an awareness of the importance of individualization in learning approaches to support effective learning for children with special needs who have different needs. The research also revealed a number of challenges faced by teachers, such as grouping students based on ability levels, handling students' moods, and preparing learning materials that are appropriate for them.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT: