

Teaching English to Students with Developmental Disabilities: A Study on A School for Disabilities Students in East Lombok

Rahmi Ismayani¹, Sahuddin², Arafiq³, Muhammad Amin³

^{1,2,3,4} English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Mataram, Indonesia

Received : January 23, 2024

Revised : March 31, 2024

Accepted : March 31, 2024

Published: March 31, 2024

Corresponding Author

Author Name: Rahmi Ismayani

Email: cimollebae@gmail.com

DOI: [10.29303/jeef.v4i1.587](https://doi.org/10.29303/jeef.v4i1.587)

© 2024 The Authors. This open access article is distributed under a (CC-BY License)



Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the teachers' problems in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities and the factors that cause the problem to arise. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects of this study were 2 teachers on a school for disabilities students, one teacher was from SMPLB (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama Luar Biasa*) and the other one Teacher was from SMALB (*Sekolah Menengah Atas Luar Biasa*). The data was collected through interviews and observations. The research findings showed that the teachers had problems in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities such as difficulty in find appropriate teaching approach strategies, difficulty in applied sign language, difficulty in explain themselves in English especially orally, and difficulty in managing students. Several factors caused the problems, such as the teachers have lack of expertise in teaching English, teaching skills in classroom management, lack in mastery subject, and skill in general communication with students. Future studies are very recommended to find solutions to these problems.

Keywords: teacher, developmental disabilities, Teaching English

INTRODUCTION

The government promises equal education opportunities to all Indonesians, regardless of their class, social structure, or economic status. Likewise, children with special needs have the same right to education. There is a strong motif to achieve something that is supported by a favorable situation or behavior (Arifuddin, et.al., 2022). According to Hallahan (in Siahaan, 2022), disability is the inability to do something to support daily activity. But not all inabilities are disabilities. The government was preparing facilities such as special schools (SLB) and inclusion education methods so children with disabilities could mingle with peers and learn. Special Schools (SLB) are a form of education for those who have a level of difficulty in following the learning process generally due to physical, emotional, or social-mental disorders but then have the potential for intelligence and unique talent (Utami, et.al., 2021).

SLB (*Sekolah Luar Biasa*) is a school provided by the government to help students with developmental disabilities or special needs learn with confidence and safely. Still, now there are other choices called Inclusive Schools (Woolfolk & Kolter (2009)). According to Kirk and Gallagher (in Sudana, 2013) explain that a child is categorized as having special needs if they deviate from the standard regarding mental disabilities, sensory abilities, neuromotor characteristics, social behavior, communication abilities, or a combination of these aspects. According to Yusuf (2013), data from the United States Department of Education shows children with special needs as having learning difficulty, speech, intellectual disability, mental, physical, hearing, visual, or multiple impairments. The difficulties in teaching English with special needs are challenging because of the differences in disability each student has (Nurcahyo, 2013).

Based on the early Observation at a school for developmental disabilities students, it was found that there is only one Teacher who works as both a homeroom teacher and a subject teacher who teaches English. Sure, this dramatically

affects the quality of learning provided to students. Students with developmental disabilities also have a different way of communicating with other normal children, and it is complicated because learning is a process of transferring knowledge where good two-way communication is essential. According to Aprilia (2013), an English instructor at Autism Elementary Laboratory School Universitas Negeri Malang, appears to be ineffective in the classroom, owing to a background in neither special needs education nor English (Utami et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers who are competent and have suitable qualifications in teaching students with disabilities are needed, based on the stated decree of the Minister of National Education verse E number 16, the year 2007, "teachers at school with special needs or other equivalent forms must have academic educational qualifications of at least a diploma four (D-IV) or bachelor (S1) in a special education program or bachelor's degree by the subject being taught/taught, and obtained from accredited study program". Unfortunately, some previous studies showed the Teacher that teaching students with special needs have various difficulties while teaching and learning. Disability is a restriction or an inability to perform an activity in the manner or within the normal range for a human being, mainly resulting from impairment. (Barbotte, et.al., 2011).

According to Songbatumis (2017), challenges in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) arise from the both educators and learners. The researcher conducted observation checklist and interview to find out what kind of problems that teachers face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities and the factors cause the problem to arise. Linusi, et.al. (2022), in research on the problems and challenges English teachers face in teaching a student with disabilities, found that the difficulties teachers face in SMPLB 1 Negeri Lombok Barat while teaching include lack of management class, lack of communication between teachers and student, lack of writing and reading skills and problem also can come up from the Teacher's

education background and physical. The solution was found to use double assistance or private assistant and the TPR method. During the learning process, there are many methods of educating children with special needs used by teachers in SLB or inclusive schools. According to Sanjaya (2010), a practice is a way used to implement a plan that has been prepared in actual activities so that the objectives that have been designed are achieved optimally.

There are several methods are considered the most effective to teach English to students with developmental disabilities, according to expert:

- 1) Applied Behavior Analysis In this method conducted by Lovaar (1960), ABA has a structure for looking at behaviors, what causes them to behave that way, and how to shape or eliminate that behavior;
- 2) Total Physical Response (TPR) The total physical response (TPR) method is one of the language teaching methods built on the coordination of speech and action (Tarigan, 2009)
- 3) Argumentative and Alternative Communication (ACC) ACC involves attempts to study and, when necessary, compensate for temporary or permanent impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions of individuals with severe disorders of speech-language production and comprehension, including spoken and written modes of communication" (Beukelman & Light, 2020).
- 4) Visual stories/ visual support Visual support refers to using pictures or other visible items to communicate with a child with difficulty understanding or using language. Visual support can be photos, drawings, objects, written words, or lists (Madyastuti, 2018).

Visual stories are visual communication tools that help children with special needs understand social situations or abstract concepts. According to Gardner (1993) develop a theory called multiple intelligence. he states that each individual has their own diverse and distinct intelligence. In this theory he suggests that in English language learning, a teacher should be able to identify and adopt an appropriate teaching method based on that intelligence. For instance, music-based instruction for children with musical intelligence and visual spatial-based instruction for children with visual spatial intelligence. Then, what are the points/reason you are choosing this topic as your research? Please outline 1 or 2 paragraphs about it.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher focuses on the teachers who teach English to students with disabilities at the SMPLB and SMALB classes at A school for disabilities students, with the disabled students deaf and non-speaking (*tuna rungu wicara*). This research using qualitative methods, according to Bhandari (2020), qualitative research gathers and evaluates nonnumerical data (such as text, record, and audio) to better comprehend concepts, opinions, or experiences. The instruments for collecting the data are as follows: observation, documentation, and interview. For the data analysis uses three

stages such as data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. For the observation, the researcher used checklist observation with eight variables in order to help the researcher analyze the situation of the classroom learning process. Then interview, the researcher developed 10 interview questions to analyze the teachers' difficulty in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities. For the data analysis using data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusion/verification. Sugiyono (2018: 247-249) defines data reduction as summarizing, picking the main points, and focusing on the essential point that is relevant to the research issue, looking for themes and pattern, and eventually creating a clearer picture and making additional data collecting easier. According to Miles & Huberman (1992), data presentation provides ordered information that will later choose the next direction, such as an appropriate conclusion or action, such as re-analyzing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The problems teachers face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities

1. Difficulty in find appropriate teaching approach strategies

Based on the observation checklist, some variables have different answers between the two classes.

In the interview session, the researcher tried to explore more deeply about what kind of experiences faced by the teachers while teaching English to students with developmental disabilities. The answers obtained were different between the SMPLB and SMALB teachers.

In the questions about the problem that teachers face while teaching English to students with developmental disabilities, the teacher says:

"The real challenge is how I get closer to them so that no wall limits me as a teacher of them. Children with disabilities do not have the term naughty or other; they want to be noticed, and when we are one with them, they will be easy to direct. They can also understand themselves if they feel they have crossed the line or started being disrespectful. They can then manage themselves back to normal. The point is that when teaching children with disabilities, teachers must have patience and a big heart. Maybe later it will be tiring because you have to talk often or repeatedly deliver material in front of the class, which drains energy."

Based on the answers from the interview results, it can be understood that the real challenge for teachers is how teachers can approach and understand students, especially when they are students with disabilities that teacher need to understand individually. Another thing that must be considered in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities is the teacher needs to become patience because sometimes the teacher needs to talk a lot and repeat the material delivered.

Since students can focus only for about ten minutes shows the need to use learning strategies that are tailored to students' disabilities. Another important question asked in the interview is how teachers prepared the materials in the classroom, as well as the use of syllabus and lesson plans. The teachers in SMPLB and SMALB have in similarity that they both take the material and lesson plans from the PMM website

and adopt it according to the student's needs and to be used as a reference for learning in the classroom. According to the teacher's answer using this adopted method and outside resources to prepare the learning materials is quite efficient and not time-consuming but ensures that it is by the relevant curriculum.

When the researcher asked the teachers about what kind of strategies teachers used in teaching English both teachers gave a different answer. The teacher at SMPLB said there is no special approach used while teaching English to students with developmental disabilities. But in general, teacher use pictures on the whiteboard, it helps students understand the lesson quickly. For projectors, the teacher says they are rarely used because it's more efficient and effective for students to use pictures on the whiteboard. Then the SMALB teacher answers that she usually uses PPI (*Program Pembelajaran Individual*) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) for strategies. This method is familiar in inclusive education, especially in the case of students who are slow in receiving materials in the classroom.

The implementation of this method is to create individualized plans for each student based on their need to make progress. Information that needs to be included in the IEP includes basic information, the student's strengths and difficulties, areas for development, specific targets for the child, and the support that must be provided for the student to achieve the targets (Rovik, 2017).

For teaching methods and tools, the teacher in SMALB uses role-play instead of pictures, like in the previous class. An example of role play that is carried out when on the material of "Clothes" and the word that must be understood is 'dress,' then the teacher will try to show an example of a dress like the clothes she wears and tell the student the sign language of that word then reminds the students again about how to write it down in the English.

2. Difficulty in applied sign language

"..., there is such a thing as international signs, but I still teach using Indonesian signs. So, to students, I only introduce how to write and what it means. Maybe to use international sign language is too difficult for them. When using Indonesian signs, they are sometimes confused and have to ask again. What I teach is that they understand what the sentence or word is and how it looks, so when they see it in other places, they have at least seen it and what it means, even though they may not be able to interpret it into international sign language. That's why in this school, we need a real teacher to teach them English to help them learn the international sign language".

The other challenge in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities is difficulty in teaching the English material by using international sign language. The teacher presents English material using Indonesian sign language and gestures during this time. The gestures are needed to clarify and provide understanding to the students. This is difficult for both parties, the teacher, and students. Teacher has difficulty teaching English to mute and non-speaking students using international sign language. Also, students will have more difficulty understanding English material and interpreting it using international sign language.

The teacher, in this case, is more inclined to the student's understanding of the vocabulary learned in the material presented.

3. Difficulty in explaining themselves in English especially orally

The answers teacher in SMPLB when asked about what difficulties faced when teaching English to students with disabilities is:

The teacher says the biggest obstacle for herself is the pronunciation of the word she taught. Even though the students she teaches are deaf and non-speaking, we can say they cannot hear the word that the teacher says. But still, that has become something that affects teachers when teaching English to students. This is also related to the teacher's educational background. In the interview when asked about the teacher's educational background, the teacher admitted that he had been teaching in slb for more than 8 years but had always taught students with other disabilities, such as mental disabilities or physical disabilities and with Indonesian teaching materials. To teach children with deaf and non-speaking disabilities, especially in subject English is a new experience for the teacher. Many things must be learned from the beginning for the teachers.

4. Difficulty in managing students

The other answer that teacher give while asking about the problem she faced in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities is:

"Usually, the most difficult challenge is keeping students focused and quiet. Because they can only focus for about ten minutes, there are external disturbances, such as other children with disabilities who barge into the class, and sometimes they are challenging to manage when asked to leave. I deal with this by often calling names or hitting the table to get their attention to focus on learning. In contrast, for external disturbances, I will usually call the teacher responsible for the child and help persuade the student to come out and not disrupt the learning."

The other problem that teacher face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities is when the teacher hard to keep the students focused on the class and the disturbance from the other developmental disabilities students' class. Teachers often have difficulty in maintaining student focus in learning, students seem more interested in talking with friends who are next to them. This can happen due to several things, such as the lack of interesting material delivered by the teacher, the absence of rules in the classroom during learning, and the lack of discipline in students. Another thing that becomes a difficulty for teachers in controlling students is the disruption of students with mental disabilities. Students with these special needs often suddenly enter the classroom and make noise, such as not wanting to be quiet and keep talking, or even disrupt learning by crying in the classroom. If this happens, then the teacher will be looking for the teacher who is responsible for the child.

The factors that cause the problems of English teaching to student with developmental disabilities.

Based in the data that has been collected, several factors that cause the appearance of the problem can be analyzed, including:

1. The teacher lack of expertise in teaching English

It is based on the teacher answer when the researcher asked the teacher about their educational background before starting to teach at SLB; the teacher said:

“Educational background is a graduate of PLB and has been teaching since 2011. There is no training and experience in teaching English to students with special needs. I, as a teacher, only remember lessons that have been learned in the past. Therefore actually, in this SLB there is also a need for an English teacher who understands English and how to teach it to students with special needs.”

Based on the statement above, it can be seen that the teacher has no previous experience in teaching English to children with disabilities. The material taught by the teacher is only based on the teacher experience when taking previous education. There is no update in the material given to the student. The teacher also revealed that in this school needs a teacher who has the ability as an English teacher.

2. Teachers lack skill in classroom management

The teacher has difficulties in controlling students' focus and making the class quite due to a lack of classroom management skills or a lack of consistent discipline in the classroom. The teacher does not have rules in the classroom, such as encouraging students to remain calm in the classroom, so during learning, students are more likely to talk to their friends next to them and ignore the teacher explaining the material. Students with disabilities, deaf and non-speaking, are normal students in terms of IQ but have disabilities in speaking and hearing. In public, students with these disabilities look like normal students, and discipline in the classroom can be applied by the teacher in the classroom.

3. Teachers lack mastery subject

The teacher also has difficulty in mentioning words when teaching English material, this can be cause by the teacher lack of speaking ability in English. Teachers should be able to learn through YouTube or other media that can support teachers to overcome difficulties in mentioning words in English, this aims to support better English learning for students. Teachers also may have limited understanding or mastery of the international language. International sign language has a specialized grammatical structure and vocabulary, and if teachers do not fully understand it, it can be difficult to teach it effectively.

The use of international sign language is an option that can be done or not. Depending on how the parents and teacher decide in choosing what kind of method to use in learning, every region of the world has its sign language, such as American sign language (ASL), British sign language (BSL), or *Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia* (BISINDO). Referring to the official website of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Diseases, there is no agreed universal

sign language. This means that the sign language of each country region will be different from other regions.

4. Teachers lack in general communication with students

The lack of effective communication skills with students can be one of the factors why it can be difficult for teachers to get closer and understand students. The use of good and effective communication strategies can certainly help teachers understand the character of individuals in the classroom. Other factors that also such as the lack of teacher knowledge about student backgrounds, lack of sensitivity in building emotional relationships between teachers and students, or even lack of training or support from institutions on how to build bonds with students' disabilities in the classroom.

Problems the teachers face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities at a school for disabilities students?

There are some problems that teachers face while teaching English to student with developmental disabilities. Based on the findings there are several problems that teachers face such as difficulty in find appropriate teaching approach strategies, difficulty in applied sign language, difficulty in expressing themselves as orally, and the difficulty in keeping students focus. It is already answered the first research questions about the problems teachers face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities.

For the using methods, teacher used two different methods in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities, teacher at SMPLB using pictures as the method in learning process and teacher at SMALB using role play as the method in teaching English. The student in this research is a student with disabilities of deaf and non-speaking, but the teachers can find out the different methods that can help students in accepting the English material well and according to their learning style. Although there are several problems that teacher face when teaching English to students with disabilities, teachers are able to find effective ways of learning for them. This research also related with the previous study, that there are similar problems the teachers face, that was the English proficiency of the teachers (Utami et.al., 2021). The lack of skills in management class, problems in pronouncing and speaking or using sign language. But the way of cope with this problem quite different, in the previous studies from (Linusi et.al., 2022) offer a solution such as double assistance or TPR method but in this study, it offers a solution such as improvement in teachers training, adjusting learning methods, and collaboration with other educators.

Factors cause the problems of English teaching to student with developmental disabilities at a school for disabilities students

There are many factors that can cause the emergence of problems faced by teachers when teaching English to students with developmental disabilities, such as teachers lack expertise in teaching English, teachers lack skills in classroom management, teachers lack of mastery language and teachers lack of skills in general communication with the students. Based on this finding research questions number two about the

factor cause the problem of English has been answered. It is also related with the previous studies from Ahammed (2018) the problems teachers face in teaching English to students with developmental disabilities can come from the internal and external factors. Likewise in this study the problem can come from the teachers itself such as teachers' self-esteem and can also come from external factors such as the lack of availability of learning resources such as books that can help teachers.

The result of this study is in line with theory from Gardner (1996), called multiple intelligence. This theory suggested that teachers should be able to identify the student's intelligence and adopt an appropriate teaching method to help student develop their abilities. It is also found out in this study that teachers who teach English subject to students with disabilities must have the ability to be able to adopt and help students by bringing methods that develop their abilities although there are some problems faced by the teachers in the process of teaching English to students with disabilities. In this case helping students in develop English skills at writing and reading.

CONCLUSION

The aims of this study were to find out what problems teachers face when teaching English to student with disabilities, especially to children with deaf and non-speaking and find out the cause of the problems. It was found out that there several problems teachers face such as difficulties in find appropriate teaching approach strategies, difficulty in applied sign language, difficulty in explain themselves in English especially orally, and difficulty in managing students. And for the factors cause the problem such as teachers lack of expertise in English, teachers lack skill in classroom management, teachers lack in mastery subject and teachers lack of skills in general communication with students.

REFERENCES

- Ahammed, H. (2018). *Challenges Faced by Teachers while Teaching Learners with Learning Disability*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325380717>.
- Aprilia, T. (2013). *The Teaching of English at Autism Elementary Laboratory School State University of Malang*. [Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis]. Universitas Negeri Malang.
- Arifuddin, Arafiq, Zamzam, & Udin (2022). The Outbound Students' Motivation and Interest in the English Education ILIC Programs. *Journal of positive psychology & Wellbeing*, 6(1), 722–734. <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jppw/article/view/986/506>
- Barbotte, E., Guillemin, F., Chau, & Lorhandicap Group. "Prevalence of Impairments, Disabilities, Handicaps and Quality of Life in The General Population: A Review of Recent Literature." *Bulletin of The World Health Organization*. Vol. 79, No. 11. (2011).
- Beukelman, D., & Light, J. (2020). *Argumentative & Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Bhandari, P. (2020) *What Is Qualitative Research? Methods & Examples*. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative_research/.
- Gardner, H. 1993. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice A Reader*. New York: Basic Books.
- Linusi, Y. Amin, M. & Baharuddin. (2022). The Problems and Challenges English Teachers Face in Teaching Students with Disabilities. *Jurnalistrendi: JURNAL LINGUISTIK, SASRA, DAN PENDIDIKAN*, 7(1).
- Madyastuti, L. R. (2018). Visual Support Menurunkan Kecemasan Anak yang Mengalami Hospitalisasi pada Pemberian Injeksi. *Journals of Ners Community*, 9(1).
- Miles & Huberman. (1992). *Analisis Data Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nurchahyo, D. (2013). *Students' Responses to the Types of Questions Used in Teaching English for Mentally Retarded Students: A Study at SLB Bina Putra*. Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga.
- Rovik, R. (2017). Individualized Education Program (IEP) Mata Pelajaran Kimia untuk Siswa Slow Learner. *Inklusi*, 4(1), 93. https://doi.org/10.14421/ijds.0401_05
- Siahaan, M. K. (2022). *Education For Children With Special Needs*. Graduate School Nommensen HKBP University, Medan. (Vol. 8, no. 2)
- Songbatumis, A. M. (2017). Challenges in Teaching English Faced by English Teachers at MTsN Taliwang, Indonesia. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.2223>
- Sudana, A. A. (2013). *Konsep Dasar Pendidikan Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus*. Yogyakarta: Familia.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif Dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Tarigan, H. G. (2009). *Pengajaran Kedwibahasaan*. Bandung: Angkasa.
- Utami, R. P., Suharyadi, & Astuti, U. P. (2021). EFL Teachers' Problems and Solutions in Teaching English to Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disability. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 173-188.
- Woolfolk, A. & Kotler, P. (2009). *Educational Psychology: Active Learning Edition*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Yusuf, A. (2013). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif & Penelitian Gabungan*. Jakarta: Kencana.