

## INVESTIGATING INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN PRIMARY EFL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the practice of inclusive education (IE) in SDN Junrejo 1, specifically in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, starting from the school facilities, teaching challenges, and strategies. It employed a case study design involving three main subjects: Teacher A who is an English teacher, Teacher B who is the coordinator of IE management, and 10 SEN students who were willing and permitted by the school to be the participants of the study. The data were collected using interviews and observation. Then, it was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings are categorized into three key aspects: facilities, challenges, and strategies for teaching inclusive classrooms at SDN Junrejo 1. The school provides disabled-friendly facilities, shadow teacher support, and learning media that are adapted based on the SEN students' needs. However, this school still faced some challenges due to the lack of shadow teachers and managing SEN students' tantrums. The school employs several effective strategies, including the use of a source room, thoughtful seating arrangements, and the implementation of differentiated tasks and materials. These strategies create an inclusive environment both for SEN and mainstream students.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, SEN students, pedagogical practices, EFL classroom, mainstream students*

The practice of Inclusive Education (IE) has emerged rapidly over recent years because of the growing demand for educational services for Special Education Needs (SEN) students (Kenny et al., 2020). IE ensures that all students, regardless of their ability, are placed in the same classroom as mainstream students (Akbarovna, 2022). SEN students receive the same quality of instruction, interventions, and support tailored to address their unique requirements which makes them enable to succeed academically and socially alongside their classmates (Colum, 2019; Muñoz Martínez & Porter, 2018).

Historically, the perception of disability has evolved significantly in Indonesia because of the influence of cultural attitudes and educational reforms. The Directorate General of Primary and Secondary Education of the Ministry of National Education issued Circular Letter No. 380/C.C6/MN/2003 on January 20, 2003. This was followed by the issuance of Ministerial Regulation No. 70 in 2009, which further strengthened the development of IE practices in the context of Indonesian education (Nabiela & Ulfatin, 2019). These policies were in line with global agreements such as those made at the World Conference in Salamanca in 1994 and the Dakar Declaration in 2000 (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2024) emphasizing the right to education for all students.

There has been significant progress in incorporating the features or principles of inclusivity within various levels of education in Indonesia, including primary education. Approximately sixty-four percent of SEN students are enrolled in schools, highlighting the urgent need for effective inclusive practices (UNICEF,

2023). Huang (2023) discovered that primary school teachers who exhibit a high level of trait mindfulness are more likely to have a positive attitude toward IE because their increased vigilance fosters stronger empathy and greater confidence in the practice of inclusivity, thus creating an environment conducive to all students.

A previous case study conducted by Baiti et al. (2021) revealed that the State Junior High School 30 and Alam Insan Mulia Junior High School Surabaya demonstrate consistent student management practices with the study's indications. The planning, coaching, assessment, and transfer procedures are implemented in compliance with the education office's regulations as well as the school's vision and mission. However, it was noted that challenges such as cooperation and communication among parents, SEN student coordinators, and teachers inhibit the effective implementation of IE.

Another previous study was conducted by Pramesti et al. (2023), who uncovered that the inclusive practice at one of the junior high schools in Malang faced some challenges in implementing specific strategies and handling tantrums or moody students which shows that patience and sincerity are important. Next, Ummah et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-method study among 34 schools located in eight different regions in East Java., Indonesia. They discovered that Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory influences the beneficial interaction that IE has with everyone involved, including parents, friends, relatives, teachers, and students. The four systems—microsystems, mesosystems, ecosystems, and macrosystems—impact how students develop and how IE is implemented in classrooms for students with various backgrounds.

Currently, around eighteen schools in Batu are listed as inclusive schools. This school is state-based and began to organize IE in 2010. The school not only has some facilities that support the needs of SEN students, such as a source room but also offers four types of service: individual service, tutoring service with a shadow teacher or GPK, full class service only with a classroom teacher, and pullout service which requires students to go out of class in a certain subject. However, the last type of service is temporarily suspended because the school is understaffed. SDN Junrejo 1 welcomes all students, regardless of their educational needs. They serve students with special needs, ranging from categories B, C1, D1, E, H, K, P, and Q. After fourteen years of being an inclusive school, it must face some challenges when dealing with SEN students with unique characteristics. Different teachers may have different ways of addressing or dealing with them.

Therefore, this research aims to investigate the inclusive pedagogical practices in primary schools in Indonesia, specifically in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by examining these research questions.

1. What are the school's facilities or services that support SEN students?
2. What are some challenges faced by English teachers in teaching an inclusive classroom?
3. What are some strategies used by English teachers in teaching an inclusive classroom?

This research would contribute to the professional development programs for teachers which equip them with essential knowledge and skills to teach and support SEN students in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, this research can guide policymakers when formulating policies related to inclusivity in Indonesia's educational system. Ultimately, this research seeks an inclusive educational landscape in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This research used a case study design as it described certain group activities on an in-depth exploration (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). It was suitable for conducting this research because SDN Junrejo 1 has some distinguished characteristics, such as nineteen years of experience managing an inclusive school. Years by year, they have been developing its facilities and programs addressing the needs of SEN students. The case study design was selected because the findings might not be generalized to other inclusive primary schools.

### **Research Subjects**

The setting of this research was undertaken at SDN Junrejo 1, which is located in Batu, East Java, Indonesia. We used convenience sampling because the researchers selected the willing and available participants to be studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The subjects of this research were two classroom teachers, and the SEN students in first grade. The first teacher has English teaching experience in an inclusive school for 5 years which will be called Teacher A afterwards. The second teacher in charge of coordinating the IE management program at the school for 15 years which will be called Teacher B afterwards. The third subject is 10 SEN students in first grade which was given permission by the school as observation subjects. The researchers observed them to understand better the IE program and its implementation in SDN Junrejo

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**Data Collection**

The instruments used in this research were interviews and observation. The interviews were chosen to provide more understanding of ideas or information about the particular topic. The interviews were conducted on 14th October 2024. The particular reason for interviewing Teacher A is certainly to gain a better understanding revolving around the topic of experience in teaching and learning English with SEN students as prompted in Table 1 below. In addition, we interviewed Teacher B to get data about the implementation of IE in SDN Junrejo 1 as stated in Table 2.

Before we conducted the interview session, we provided them with an informed consent form to protect the rights of human participants. We used two smartphones when interviewing each teacher to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the recorded data. One smartphone was used to capture the interview audio, with the other as a backup in case of technical difficulties. This dual-recording strategy allowed us to capture the conversation's intricacies while retaining crucial information. The data collection process lasted for a day, precisely with each interview lasting around 40-60 minutes.

**Table 1. Blueprint Interview for the English Teacher**

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1	Teaching techniques and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning preparations before class</li> <li>Learning media used in the inclusive classroom</li> </ul>
2	Teaching assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The type of assignments in the inclusive classroom</li> <li>The assessment used in the inclusive classroom</li> </ul>
3	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The common challenges faced in teaching inclusive classroom</li> <li>The solutions to address the challenges</li> </ul>
4	Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The experiences of years teaching in the inclusive classroom</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Blueprint Interview for the Coordinator of IE Management**

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1	General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The management of IE in SDN Junrejo 1 Batu</li> </ul>
2	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The infrastructures to support SEN students</li> <li>The services for SEN students</li> </ul>
3	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The common challenges faced in managing IE</li> <li>The solutions to address the challenges</li> </ul>
4	Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience in managing IE for years</li> </ul>

After the interviews, an observation activity was carried out in the EFL class to understand inclusive pedagogical practices in a real classroom setting. The observation had been conducted throughout the teaching and learning activities in the day which is around 60-80 minutes. Notetaking during the observations supported and confirmed the data from the interviews.

**Table 3. Blueprint Observation**

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1	Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The classroom accessibility for SEN students</li> </ul>
2	Teaching techniques and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning material to address different learning needs.</li> <li>Learning media used in the inclusive classroom.</li> </ul>

No.	Aspects	Indicators
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disabled students are included in the learning and teaching activities in the classroom.</li> </ul>
3	Curriculum and adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative format for teaching disabled students (audiobook, digital textbook, use of technology)</li> <li>Accommodations for disabled students (differentiated tasks, sitting arrangement, adding extra time)</li> <li>Alternative assessment.</li> </ul>
4	Social and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer interactions.</li> <li>Sitting arrangement.</li> <li>Shadow teachers' function.</li> </ul>

### Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), there are several steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. First, each interview was transcribed to create a written record which made it easier to examine it. We used technology yet still checked and transcribed manually as several sentences were still unidentified by the technology. After transcription, we read all the data multiple times to explore and gain an overall understanding of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts. The thematic analysis was employed in the coding process to identify key themes within the data so that we could find the answers to the research questions. To enhance credibility, we conducted member-checking by sharing the main findings of the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The School Facilities and Services to Support SEN Students

Throughout the observation and interview, it became known that this school has already helped the SEN students support their mobility and well-being at school. The disabled-friendly facilities are a ramp, a sitting toilet for disabled students, a source room, a shadow teacher, and other facilities related to their particular interests such as musical instruments, sports equipment, and painting equipment. In the class, this school also has disabled-friendly learning media, such as big flashcards with vibrant colors for low-vision students.

Regarding the services, the IE management in SDN Junrejo 1 has designed sufficient programs including new students' admission and their learning process and development until graduation. In accepting new students, the school has its own assessment including identification, development, and academic assessment. The identification is simply to mark which students are SEN students. To get an understanding of how students' ability to communicate, interact, and take care of themselves is, and of what students' learning styles are is the aim of conducting the development assessment. Last, academic assessment is held to know students' achievement regarding the ability to read, write, and calculate.

*"...for the new students' admissions, we conduct an assessment in order to know whether the students are SEN students or not. It is just to identify.... The first one is development assessment. The development here includes their communication and social skills, self-care, and learning style. Then, the academic assessment consists of students' reading, writing, and calculating skills." (TB/Interview)*

In the context of new students' admission in SDN Junrejo 1, the school has been accepting and educating for most disability types including intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental disabilities since the school was built.

*"Coincidentally, talking about what type of disabilities that we have ever educated and serviced counted from 19 years ago, we have accompanied all types of disabilities except blind. Recently, we have categorized disabilities into four categories - intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental disabilities. Now, we accompany all those types in this school." (TB/Interview)*

Moreover, the interview with Teacher B, the coordinator of IE in SDN Junrejo 1, reveals the main services provided by the school to facilitate SEN students. It includes individual service, tutoring service with a shadow teacher or GPK, full class service, and pullout service. Individual service is applied when a SEN student is found to create an uncondusive situation in the class. The student who is in the stated condition will be separated from the class and be behaved by the teacher in the source room. The source room provides a lot of media including toys that potentially help to condition the undisciplined student and also a sufficient environment so the teacher can approach the student. In some cases, SEN students can behave well but need to be scaffolded in following the instructions in the class. In that case, the service of a shadow teacher is required to be done. Additionally, full-class service is a completely inclusive experience in receiving education in the same class as mainstream students. The homeroom teacher fully takes responsibility for supervising the SEN students and modifies the instruction in the class so SEN students are capable of following. The last one is a pull-out service that involves teachers and SEN students to have an additional class. However, this service is no longer applied due to the impact of the lack of human resources.

### **Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Teaching an Inclusive Classroom**

Throughout the observation and interview, there are three main challenges the teacher faces when handling the inclusive classroom. The first challenge is that the absence of shadow teachers makes it difficult to manage the whole classroom, as they have three severely autistic students based on the interview with Teacher A who has been teaching in the school as an IE teacher for five years. To add more, Teacher B stated that the total of SEN students in SDN Junrejo is 45 students while the certified shadow teacher is only one. Besides that, four homeroom teachers fill in the role of shadow teachers, and also an additional shadow teacher from one of the parents. Its unequal numbers of SEN students and shadow teachers have become one of the serious issues in the school.

*“The varied numbers of SEN students give us difficulties in providing services at its best because we have a big total of SEN students, which are 45 students while having only one certified shadow teacher.... For the certified shadow teachers, we only have one. Another is a volunteer from one of the parents. Lastly, we have four homeroom teachers as shadow teachers.” (TB/interview)*

In response to the previous issues, it certainly causes struggles for the teachers in running an instruction. It makes the teacher overwhelmed because it is difficult to manage SEN students when they are throwing tantrums. In practice, teachers have difficulty handling the tantrums of SEN students with autistic disorders.

*“Personally, to be honest, when I was teaching in third grade, there was an autistic student who liked to throw tantrums. That is my challenge and until now I am still not good at dealing with tantrum students. The previous tantrum students didn't hurt themselves. But when he has a tantrum, everyone around him is scratched.” (TA/Interview)*

Based on Teacher A's experience, when SEN students have tantrums, they tend to hurt people around them. If the tantrum is difficult to control, the solution she gives is to call his/her parents to school and send them home as usually only the students' parents can calm them down. However, if the tantrum is still controllable, Teacher A usually provides toys or other activities to calm them down. Then, the last challenge faced by the teacher is to manage the mainstream students and make sure that they get their right to learn comfortably without distraction. Teacher A gave us a statement that when SEN students scream in class, some of their friends feel disturbed.

### **Strategies Used by English Teachers in Teaching an Inclusive Classroom**

As stated previously, one of the issues or challenges relies on the context of the number of shadow teachers or GPK which is only a few. In overcoming the issue, not a little effort has been put in including peer tutoring and training for the teachers. As revealed in the interview with Teacher A, the peer tutoring strategy is to seat SEN students with friends who have high empathy. This strategy is used by the teacher when the situation in the class is too difficult to handle for all of the students both mainstream and SEN students.

*“I usually seat SEN students with students who have high empathy who can really teach that way. So, if I really cannot handle all the students, I ask another student to teach him/her. Of*

*course, by providing understanding. Then when it is finished, he will get enrichment.”*  
(TA/interview)

In its effort to reduce the impacts of a few shadow teachers in the school, the teachers participated in training programs related to IE every once a year. The training programs are usually held by Educational Institutions or private companies. Joining the programs widens and increases teachers' competencies in dealing with SEN students. As a result of the preceding issue, SEN students who are in a tantrum condition create a challenging situation for the teachers to solve. Several strategies have been implemented such as approaching the students, using the source room, and serving a kind of privilege to the SEN students. In this case, the homeroom and shadow teachers are responsible for handling the situation. As a first step, teachers try to approach the undisciplined students by reminding them of their responsibilities such as working on their tasks. When the situation seems too difficult to handle, the source room is used to approach the students more intimately and to relax the students by giving them such media or toys and also therapy. Implementing the theory of behaviorism, teachers also give a kind of reward such as allowing the unconditioned students to go home if they have already finished their task. The reason is SEN students are not able to focus longer and tend to get bored quickly.

Together with the other issues, managing and ensuring that mainstream students get a convenient learning environment is as challenging as the other. To solve this problem, the teachers arranged students' seats to give them ease in supervising and implemented a differentiated task strategy. The seating arrangement is designed based on specific classifications. Four students sitting in a circle in front of the teacher's desk are categorized as slow learners with disabilities, those are students with low intelligence and ADHD. Another three students sitting in the circle behind the slow learners with disabilities desk are groups for severe autism students. Next to the severe autism groups, another four students sitting in a circle are the mainstream students. In front of mainstream student groups, another four students sitting in a circle are categorized as slow learners without disabilities. Besides this group, another four students sitting in a circle close to the wall are categorized as mainstream students. The last group sitting in the back is categorized as mainstream students but has two students who are high-intelligence students. This seating arrangement is arranged because the teacher admitted that this arrangement will make it easier to manage the classroom.

### **Discussion**

As an inclusive school, SDN Junrejo 01 Batu has already built a comfortable environment for SEN students quite well, from the disabled-friendly school facilities, such as ramps, accessible toilets, a source room, an adapted curriculum, differentiated tasks, and shadow teachers. Besides that, the school also encourages its teachers to participate in some training programs that focus on how to conduct and manage an inclusive classroom. This action can be considered as facilitating teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD), emphasizing professional growth which is vital as it equips teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the diverse needs of their students effectively. This is supported by a study from Huang (2023) which discovered that primary school teachers' mindfulness promotes positive attitudes, stronger empathy, and greater confidence, toward IE. By integrating mindfulness, SDN Junrejo 01 can further strengthen its ability to manage inclusive schools, providing inclusive environments for both SEN and mainstream students. Our study aligns with the previous study conducted by Pramesti et al (2023) who found that although inclusive schools are already well-organized, they still have some challenges. From our research and observation, there are some things to consider when practicing inclusive education at SDN Junrejo 01 Batu.

The first one is about the seating arrangement strategy implemented by the teachers. They arranged the students' seats based on their ability, a group full of mainstream students on one side and a group of SEN students on the other side. This arrangement tends to highlight social isolation. Although the teacher has justified her strategy, to make it easier to manage, we offer another solution which is to carefully blend SEN and mainstream students. They can sit together without classification. Van den Berg and Stoltz (2018) conducted a study where the experimental group's seating arrangement was designed and found that over time children with externalizing behavior (reactive/aggressive behaviors, hyperactivity, and impulsivity) showed fewer externalizing problems and were better liked by their seatmates. Even though it seems harder to manage at first, we believe that over time, mainstream students will build their empathetic nature toward their friends, especially those who need special care or treatment. Furthermore, mainstream students could help the teachers by giving peer tutoring or even emotional support for SEN students.

Each teacher might have different ways to overcome challenges in teaching an inclusive classroom. Some would give them toys or any other activities to calm SEN students down so disruption can be

minimized. Others would let them express their feelings through screaming and crying. This is in line with the previous research conducted by Pramesti et al. (2023) teachers might face some challenges when handling tantrums or moody SEN students. Addressing this condition, having a smaller number of SEN students in a classroom would create a more effective classroom environment. Yuwono and Okech (2021) discovered that class size matters to teachers especially those who are not well-trained to manage SEN students in large classes. Throughout observation, there were seven SEN students in a classroom with one teacher only. Mostly, students who experience tantrums are students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is a disorder that includes cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social, including the inability to interact with people around them. This condition is caused by a gradual decline in cognitive abilities (Desiningrum, 2016).

To improve SEN students' participation in the class and to prevent them from being in a tantrum condition, one or more strategies can be added to the existing instructional design. In the previous practice being observed, the teacher tried to approach the SEN student who was in a tantrum by repeating and giving examples of the task he should do. The task was to write animals that start with the letter "K". The teacher used a visual aid and oral explanation. Using the student's point of view, the instruction could not really attract the student to be involved. One strategy that can be used to engage the student is to implement multimodal literacy. Multimodal literacy has several modes including words, pictures, music and sounds, dance and movement, etc (Taylor & Leung, 2019). Several studies revealed how impactful the use of various modes of multimodal literacy is. Apriani et al (2024) revealed that the implementation of digital multimodal increases young learners' involvement, learning outcomes, and also 4Cs skills including critical thinking, communicating, collaborating, and creating.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To summarize, the recent study revealed that the practice of IE in SDN Junrejo 1 has been designed as compatible as possible to meet the needs of all students including SEN students. The school has provided sufficient facilities and infrastructure including a ramp, toilet seat, source room, instructional media, etc. Besides that, the school had programmed the core of its services toward SEN students including individual service, tutoring service with a shadow teacher or GPK, full class service, and pullout service. In accepting new students, the school already has its assessment. The assessment consists of identification, intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental assessment so that the teacher can design instruction. Despite efforts to implement IE, the school still faces several challenges including the lack of shadow teachers, the massive number of SEN students, the struggle to guarantee a conducive learning environment, and the demands from the parents. To overcome these issues, especially one that is related to the learning process of all students, the teacher had tried to apply several strategies such as differentiated tasks, privilege given to SEN students, seating arrangement based on such classification, involving mainstream students and parents, and so forth.

Based on the findings, room for improvement is open widely in several aspects that potentially reduce or erase the challenges. The first suggestion is related to seating arrangement which is to create a more inclusive environment in the classroom by mingling the SEN students with mainstream students. Regarding the lack of shadow teachers in the school, researchers suggest that limiting the number of students in one classroom has the potential to solve the issues. Lastly, to prevent an unconducive situation, teachers can apply multimodal literacy so that it can approach students' interests in the learning process. In short, the present study provides practical suggestions and insights in its aim to improve the institution and its staff in creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

The limitations of this study are the participation of only one classroom which is first grade and no interview section specifically for SEN students. Future research can investigate the practice of IE in each grade, starting from first to sixth grade, while also interviewing the experiences and feelings of intended SEN students. These can broaden the horizon of inclusive pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms and provide robust data.

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