



English Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms for Students with Intellectual Disability

Dewa Ayu Gede Rias Wicha Nofitri, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

I G A Lokita Purnamika Utami, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Luh Gd Rahayu Budiarta, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of English teaching in an inclusive classroom consisting of regular students and a student with intellectual disability at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar. The study aimed to identify the teaching procedures implemented by the teacher, the challenges faced during the teaching and learning process, and the strategies used to overcome those challenges. This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design. The participant was an English teacher who taught ninth-grade students in an inclusive classroom. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews. The findings revealed that the English teaching procedures in the inclusive classroom generally followed three stages: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. Although the teacher applied the same learning process to all students, additional attention was provided to the student with intellectual disability, particularly during reading, pronunciation practice, and group discussion activities. The study also found several challenges, including students' difficulty in maintaining focus and limitations in language mastery. To address these challenges, the teacher implemented several strategies, such as group work activities, peer support, individual assistance, and assigning tasks similar to those given to regular students. The study concludes that inclusive English teaching can be implemented effectively when teachers provide equal learning opportunities while still adapting instruction to students' individual needs.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, English, Intellectual Disability; Students

Corresponding: ayu.rias@undiksha.ac.id

Article History:	Submitted	Revised	Accepted
	May 14 th 2026	June 22 nd 2026	June 25 th 2026

APA Citation: Nofitri, D. A. G. R. W., Utami, I. G. A. L. P., & Budiarta, L. G. R. (2026). English teaching in inclusive classrooms for students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Educational Study*, 6(1), 128-139. <https://doi.org/10.36663/joes.v6i1.1149>

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become one of the major educational movements promoted globally to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, including students with special needs. The concept of inclusive education emphasizes that all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic conditions, have the right to study together in the same educational environment. According to Sumarsih et al. (2022), inclusive education is an open educational system that allows students with special needs to learn together with regular students in the same classroom. Similarly, Mishra (2024) explained that



inclusive classrooms provide equal learning opportunities and encourage participation for students with disabilities within regular educational settings.

In Indonesia, inclusive education has been strongly supported by the government as part of the effort to provide equal access to quality education for all citizens. Law Number 20 concerning the National Education System states that every citizen has equal rights to obtain education regardless of their background or condition. This policy also supports students with special needs to access education in regular schools through inclusive education programs. According to Sari et al. (2022), the Indonesian government has promoted inclusive education since the early 2000s as a continuation of integrated education programs developed previously.

The implementation of inclusive education is important because it helps students with special needs interact socially and academically with regular students. Inclusive classrooms not only provide academic access but also support students' social development, communication skills, and self-confidence. Khofifah and Anugerahwati (2024) stated that inclusive education allows students with special needs to learn and participate in classroom activities together with their peers. Furthermore, inclusive education is expected to reduce discrimination and social exclusion experienced by students with disabilities. Despite the positive goals of inclusive education, its implementation still faces various challenges. One of the main challenges involves teachers' readiness to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. Teachers are expected to teach students with different abilities, learning characteristics, and educational needs within the same classroom environment. According to Putri and Ain (2022), many teachers still experience difficulties in handling students with special needs because they lack preparation and understanding related to inclusive classroom management. Similarly, Tiraeni et al. (2024) found that teachers often face difficulties in selecting appropriate teaching strategies for students with disabilities.

Among various categories of students with special needs, students with intellectual disability require particular attention in the teaching and learning process. Students with intellectual disability generally experience limitations in cognitive functioning, concentration, language development, and adaptive behavior (Nurfitriani & Hidayat, 2020). According to Armianti and Taufan (2024), students with intellectual disability often face challenges in understanding English vocabulary, expressing feelings, and maintaining focus during learning activities. Therefore, teachers in inclusive classrooms need to apply adaptive teaching strategies and provide additional support to help these students participate effectively in classroom activities.

The implementation of inclusive education in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms can be particularly challenging. English learning already presents difficulties for many Indonesian students due to differences in language systems, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communication patterns. These challenges become more complex when teachers teach students with intellectual disability in inclusive classrooms. Teachers are required not only to teach English materials but also to ensure that students with different learning needs can participate equally in classroom activities. Several previous studies have investigated inclusive



education and English teaching practices in inclusive classrooms. Shilvani et al. (2024) found that teachers in inclusive English classrooms experienced challenges related to students' emotional behavior, concentration, and communication skills. To overcome these challenges, teachers implemented strategies such as differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and building positive relationships with students. Another study conducted by Khofifah and Anugerahwati (2024) reported that teachers used individual assistance, flexible seating arrangements, and repeated explanations to support students with special needs in English learning.

Although many studies have discussed inclusive education in Indonesia, studies specifically focusing on English teaching for students with intellectual disability in junior high school contexts are still limited, especially in Bali. Most previous studies focused broadly on inclusive education or examined inclusive practices in elementary schools. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the implementation of English teaching in an inclusive classroom at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar. The study specifically focused on the procedures of English teaching, the challenges faced by the teacher, and the strategies used to overcome those challenges when teaching students with intellectual disability. This study is expected to contribute to the discussion of inclusive education, particularly in English language teaching contexts. The findings may provide insights for teachers, schools, and future researchers regarding effective teaching practices and classroom management strategies for students with intellectual disability in inclusive classrooms.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding participants' experiences in natural settings (Aytton et al., 2023). The case study approach was chosen because the research focused specifically on one inclusive classroom context at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar. Through this approach, the researcher was able to examine deeply how English teaching was implemented in the classroom and how the teacher handled students with intellectual disability.

Research Setting and Participant

The study was conducted at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar, an inclusive junior high school located in East Denpasar, Bali. The school has implemented an inclusive education program since 2016 and accommodates students with various special educational needs. Based on school records, students with special needs enrolled in the school include those with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorder, and learning difficulties. Most students are classified as having mild to moderate disabilities, allowing them to participate in regular classroom activities with appropriate support.

The participant of this study was one English teacher who taught ninth-grade students in class 9C. She was selected because she had approximately three years of experience teaching



English in inclusive classrooms. Class 9C consisted of regular students and one student with intellectual disability who had been learning alongside peers in the inclusive setting since seventh grade. According to school records and information provided by the teacher, the student was identified as having a mild intellectual disability, characterized by slower cognitive processing, difficulties in understanding abstract concepts, and the need for additional instructional support during classroom activities.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks. The researcher first obtained permission from the school principal and the English teacher to conduct the study. Classroom observations were then carried out during English lessons in class 9C to examine how the teacher implemented instructional strategies in the inclusive classroom. Field notes were used to record teaching activities, teacher-student interactions, classroom management, learning materials, and adaptations provided for the student with intellectual disability. Following the observations, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the English teacher to gain deeper insights into her experiences, challenges, and strategies in teaching English in an inclusive setting. The interview consisted of open-ended questions focusing on lesson planning, instructional methods, classroom adaptations, assessment practices, and support provided to students with special needs. The interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the researcher selected and simplified the data obtained from observations and interviews. Second, the data were organized and presented descriptively to identify patterns and themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings related to English teaching procedures, challenges, and coping strategies in the inclusive classroom. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher applied triangulation by comparing observation and interview data. Member checking was also conducted through interview confirmation with the teacher to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

3. Findings

The findings of this study were obtained through four classroom observations and one semi-structured interview with the English teacher who taught in the inclusive classroom at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar. The observations focused on how the teacher implemented English teaching procedures, the challenges encountered during the teaching and learning process, and the strategies used to support the student with intellectual disability. Based on the observations, the implementation of English teaching in the inclusive classroom was divided into three stages, namely pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. The learning process was generally conducted similarly to regular classrooms; however, the teacher still provided



additional attention and support to the student with intellectual disability during several classroom activities.

Table 1. Observation Results of English Teaching Procedures

Meeting	Pre-Activity	Whilst-Activity	Post-Activity
Meeting 1	The teacher greeted students, checked attendance, reviewed previous material, and introduced a new topic about report text.	The teacher explained the structure of report text, asked students to write notes, and instructed students to read examples from the textbook. The student with intellectual disability received assistance in pronouncing English words correctly.	The teacher gave several questions related to the material and provided opportunities for the student with intellectual disability to answer. The class ended after the bell rang.
Meeting 2	The teacher greeted students, checked attendance, and conducted a Quizizz game to review previous material. The teacher helped the student with intellectual disability operate the Quizizz application. Students were then divided into groups consisting of 5–6 members.	Students worked in groups to create report text scripts. The teacher walked around the classroom to monitor group discussions and assist students when necessary. The student with intellectual disability was intentionally included in group activities.	Group discussion activities continued until the end of the lesson. The teacher then closed the class.
Meeting 3	The teacher greeted students, checked attendance, and instructed students to sit with their group members.	Students continued discussing and completing their report text scripts. The teacher monitored classroom activities and checked students' progress.	The teacher ended the meeting and reminded students to prepare for presentations in the following meeting.
Meeting 4	The teacher greeted students, checked attendance, and asked	Students presented their report text projects in front of the class. The teacher	The teacher assigned homework related to positive, negative, and interrogative



students to prepare for presentations. encouraged students to listen respectfully to each presentation. After the presentation session, the teacher reviewed the material and explained sentence structures and tenses. sentences before ending the class.

The observation results indicate that the teacher implemented classroom activities systematically through organized teaching stages. During the pre-activity stage, the teacher consistently prepared students for learning through greetings, attendance checking, reviewing previous materials, and organizing classroom activities. This stage was important for building students' readiness before entering the main lesson. During the whilst-activity stage, the teacher focused on the main learning activities such as explaining materials, conducting group discussions, reading texts, and asking students to present their work. The teacher also provided additional support to the student with intellectual disability during several activities. For example, during reading activities, the teacher directly assisted the student in pronouncing difficult English words. In addition, during group discussions, the teacher ensured that the student with intellectual disability participated actively with other group members.

The post-activity stage mainly consisted of classroom review sessions, homework assignments, and lesson closure. The teacher also provided opportunities for all students, including the student with intellectual disability, to participate in answering questions related to the lesson.

The findings from the interview also supported the observation data. According to the teacher, the learning process in the inclusive classroom was generally implemented equally for all students. However, the student with intellectual disability still required additional support during several learning activities. The teacher stated:

“For now, since the intellectual disability student is slower in the learning process, the teaching and learning process is equal among all students. The student with intellectual disability learns the same material as the other students.”

The statement indicates that the teacher attempted to maintain equal learning opportunities for all students while still considering the student's individual needs. The findings showed that the English teaching procedures in the inclusive classroom followed three main stages: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. These stages were implemented consistently across the four classroom meetings.

Challenges in Teaching English in the Inclusive Classroom



The observation and interview results revealed several challenges experienced by the teacher during the implementation of English teaching in the inclusive classroom.

Table 2. Challenges Identified

Challenges	Observation Findings
Difficulty maintaining students' focus	The student with intellectual disability occasionally lost focus during learning activities and needed repeated reminders from the teacher to pay attention to classroom discussions and tasks.
Difficulty in language mastery	The student experienced challenges in pronouncing English words correctly during reading activities and sometimes needed hints from the teacher when answering questions. Compared to regular students, the student with intellectual disability required more time to understand instructions and complete classroom activities.
Slow learning process	

One of the major challenges identified in this study was maintaining the student's concentration during classroom activities. During observations, the student with intellectual disability occasionally became distracted during discussions and learning tasks. Consequently, the teacher frequently reminded and guided the student to stay engaged in the lesson. Another challenge involved language mastery, especially pronunciation and vocabulary understanding. During reading sessions, the student with intellectual disability often struggled to pronounce English words correctly. The teacher therefore needed to provide direct pronunciation assistance and repeated explanations.

The interview findings also showed that the teacher considered the learning process of the student with intellectual disability to be slower than that of regular students. The teacher explained that the student often needed more detailed explanations and additional time to understand classroom materials. The findings revealed several challenges faced by the teacher during the English teaching process in the inclusive classroom.

Another major challenge was maintaining the student's focus during learning activities. The student with intellectual disability sometimes became distracted during classroom activities and required repeated guidance from the teacher. During observation, the teacher frequently reminded the student to pay attention and participate in group discussions. Another challenge involved language mastery, particularly pronunciation and vocabulary understanding. The student with intellectual disability often had difficulty pronouncing English words correctly during reading sessions. In addition, the student sometimes struggled to understand classroom instructions and lesson materials. The interview results also confirmed



these findings. According to the teacher, students with intellectual disability required more time to understand English materials compared to regular students.

Strategies Used to Overcome the Challenges

To address the challenges encountered during the learning process, the teacher implemented several instructional and classroom management strategies.

Table 3. Strategies to Overcome Challenges

Strategies	Observation Findings
Group work activities	The teacher placed the student with intellectual disability in groups with regular students to encourage collaboration and peer support.
Individual assistance	The teacher directly assisted the student during pronunciation activities and provided hints during question-and-answer sessions.
Equal learning tasks	The student with intellectual disability received assignments and homework similar to those given to regular students.
Encouraging participation	The teacher provided opportunities for the student with intellectual disability to answer questions and participate in presentations.

One of the primary strategies applied by the teacher was collaborative group work. During classroom observations, the teacher intentionally grouped the student with intellectual disability together with supportive regular students. This strategy allowed the student to interact socially with classmates while also receiving academic assistance from peers. The teacher also implemented individual assistance during learning activities. For instance, during reading sessions, the teacher corrected pronunciation directly and guided the student step-by-step when difficulties appeared. During classroom discussions, the teacher also provided hints and prompts to help the student answer questions. Another important strategy involved providing equal learning opportunities. Although the student with intellectual disability needed additional support, the teacher still assigned similar classroom tasks and homework to all students. According to the teacher, giving equal assignments was important for maintaining the student’s confidence and sense of participation in the classroom. The teacher also encouraged classroom participation by involving the student with intellectual disability in question-and-answer sessions, group work, and presentations. This strategy was intended to improve the student’s self-confidence and interaction with classmates. To address the challenges encountered during the teaching process, the teacher implemented several strategies.

One important strategy was the use of group work activities. The teacher placed the student with intellectual disability in groups with supportive regular students. Through group discussions, the student received assistance from peers in understanding classroom tasks and participating in learning activities. The teacher also provided individual support during classroom activities. For example, the teacher helped the student pronounce difficult English



words and gave hints when asking questions. This assistance helped the student participate more actively in classroom activities. Although the student with intellectual disability required additional support, the teacher still provided equal learning opportunities. Homework and classroom tasks given to the student were generally similar to those assigned to regular students. According to the teacher, this strategy helped maintain the student's confidence and motivation. The teacher consistently encouraged the student with intellectual disability to participate in classroom discussions, answer questions, and present group work. This approach was intended to improve the student's confidence and social interaction with classmates.

3. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that inclusive English teaching can be implemented effectively through equal learning opportunities combined with adaptive instructional support. Although the teacher applied similar teaching procedures for all students, additional assistance was provided to accommodate the learning needs of the student with intellectual disability. The implementation of pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity stages reflects the standard structure of English language teaching commonly practiced in Indonesian classrooms. However, the teacher adapted several classroom activities by providing individual guidance, peer support, and continuous encouragement to ensure active participation. This finding is consistent with Khofifah and Anugerahwati (2024), who found that EFL teachers in inclusive classrooms frequently employ flexible instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs. Similarly, Tiraeni et al. (2024) reported that effective inclusive teaching requires teachers to modify instructional practices while maintaining equal learning opportunities for all students. This finding is also supported by Padmadewi et al. (2024), who emphasized that inclusive learning requires systematic and adaptive instructional approaches that accommodate learner diversity while promoting active participation. Their study introduced the GROWFIT model, which incorporates guidance, observation, feedback, and continuous improvement to enhance understanding of inclusive education. Although conducted in a teacher education context, the findings highlight the importance of structured teaching strategies in supporting inclusive learning environments. These findings suggest that successful inclusion does not necessarily require separate instruction but rather appropriate pedagogical adjustments within regular classroom activities.

The challenges identified in this study, particularly difficulties in maintaining focus, limited language mastery, and slow learning progress, are consistent with previous studies concerning students with intellectual disability. Nurfitriani and Hidayat (2020) explained that students with intellectual disability commonly experience limitations in concentration, memory, and language development, which may affect their academic performance. Likewise, Armianti and Taufan (2024) found that students with intellectual disability often encounter difficulties in vocabulary acquisition and English communication skills. The present study further revealed that the student experienced pronunciation difficulties and hesitation when speaking English. According to the teacher, the student was often reluctant to pronounce words because of a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. This finding highlights that



English learning challenges among students with intellectual disability involve not only cognitive aspects but also emotional factors that may influence classroom participation and language use. These findings support Anidi and Anlianna (2022), who argued that students with intellectual disability frequently encounter barriers in communication and learning processes that require additional instructional support. Therefore, teachers need to provide both academic assistance and emotional encouragement to facilitate students' engagement in language learning activities.

Another important finding concerns the use of collaborative learning and peer support. The teacher intentionally placed the student with intellectual disability in heterogeneous groups to encourage interaction and participation during classroom activities. This finding supports Archana (2022), who argued that heterogeneous grouping promotes social interaction and inclusive participation among students with different abilities. The finding is also supported by Shilvani et al. (2024), who reported that peer-assisted learning can help students with special needs engage more actively in English learning activities while fostering positive social relationships. Similarly, Putri et al. (2026) found that peer support played a significant role in facilitating the social, emotional, and academic development of students with hearing impairments in an inclusive classroom in Bali. Their study further revealed that regular interaction among students promoted empathy, mutual understanding, and a stronger sense of inclusion. Although the present study involved a student with intellectual disability rather than a hearing-impaired student, the findings similarly demonstrate that peer support can serve as an important mechanism for promoting participation and engagement in inclusive classrooms. Through collaborative learning, the student with intellectual disability received both academic assistance and emotional support from classmates, enabling greater participation in classroom discussions and group projects. These findings further indicate that inclusive classrooms can function as supportive learning communities where students learn not only from teachers but also from their peers.

Furthermore, the findings reveal the teacher's commitment to the principles of inclusive education by providing equal learning opportunities while still accommodating individual needs. The teacher did not separate the student with intellectual disability from regular students but instead encouraged participation in the same learning activities. This practice reflects the fundamental principle of inclusive education, which emphasizes equal access, participation, and belonging for all learners (Sumarsih et al., 2022). Similar findings were reported by Mishra (2024), who found that positive teacher attitudes and inclusive instructional practices play a significant role in promoting meaningful participation among students with special educational needs. In addition, Padmadewi et al. (2024) emphasized that effective inclusive education requires systematic instructional strategies, continuous reflection, and ongoing feedback to support diverse learners. Their study demonstrated that structured approaches such as the GROWFIT model can enhance understanding and implementation of inclusive practices. The findings of the present study indicate that the teacher attempted to balance equal treatment with individualized support, enabling the student with intellectual disability to participate in learning



activities alongside peers. This practice reflects the essence of inclusive education, which seeks to create learning environments where all students are valued and supported according to their needs.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate the need for greater teacher preparation and professional development related to inclusive education. Consistent with Shilvani et al. (2024) and Tiraeni et al. (2024), this study suggests that teachers require continuous training and institutional support to effectively address the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of students in inclusive English classrooms. Padmadewi et al. (2024) further demonstrated that educators benefit from structured learning experiences that develop both theoretical understanding and practical skills related to inclusive education. Given the increasing implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian schools, teachers need opportunities to enhance their competence in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and strategies for supporting students with diverse learning needs. Therefore, ongoing professional development programs focusing on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and English language teaching for students with special needs are essential to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education practices.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study investigated the implementation of English teaching in an inclusive classroom consisting of regular students and a student with intellectual disability at SMP PGRI 6 Denpasar. The findings showed that the teacher implemented English teaching through three stages: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity. Although the learning process was generally conducted equally for all students, the teacher provided additional support to the student with intellectual disability during reading activities, group discussions, and classroom participation. The study also identified several challenges faced by the teacher, particularly difficulties related to maintaining students' focus and language mastery. To overcome these challenges, the teacher applied strategies such as group work, peer support, individual assistance, equal learning opportunities, and encouragement of student participation. Overall, the findings indicate that inclusive English teaching can be implemented successfully when teachers combine equal treatment with adaptive support strategies. This study contributes to the growing discussion of inclusive education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of English teaching for students with intellectual disability

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