Teaching An Inclusive Education in EFL Setting: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Inclusive education is highly essential to provide equitable quality education and is included as one of the courses in the curriculum of the English Language Education Study Program of Ganesha University of Education since the year 2021. In spite of having been a part of the curriculum for three years, no research was conducted on how the course is implemented. The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies used by the lecturer to teach the course. The research was in the form of a phenomenological design. There were 31 students and one lecturer involved in the study. The data was collected for one semester in 2023, and the techniques of data collection were observation, deep interviews, and document study. The data were analyzed qualitatively. The findings show that in one semester, the lecturer applied a strategy of teaching and learning process abbreviated as GROWFIT, which stands for guide (orientation), research (independent study), observe (to learn from real-world environments), workshop (presenting ideas in a workshop-style setting), feedback (engaging in discussion and providing feedback), improve (reviewing and refining skills based on feedback), and think (synthesizing knowledge in final projects and showcasing critical thinking). The implementation of GROWFIT yields positive perspectives from the students, and all the students passed the course. It is implied that the GROWFIT model implemented was essentially effective in enhancing students' understanding about inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an education system that provides opportunities for all students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to participate in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general. It aims to provide the widest possible opportunity to all students who have physical, emotional,

mental, and social disabilities, or have the potential of intelligence and/or special talents to obtain quality education in accordance with their needs and abilities; realize the implementation of education that respects diversity, and is non-discriminatory for all students (Regulation of the Minister of National Education of The Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009). The implementation of inclusive education is found beneficial because regular students demonstrate appreciation for differences, are open to inviting students with special needs to participate in class activities, are curious about their condition, show appreciation for their talents and abilities, and have a strong desire to help (Kocha & Senapathy, 2022; Roldán et al., 2021; Utomo & Thaibah, 2021).

Despite obvious benefits of implementing inclusive classroom, some studies reveal that teachers face some challenges while educating students with special needs (Apriliyanti, 2023; Collins & Ferri, 2016; Puspitasari, 2019). The primary causes of the issues were recognized as time consumption, a lack of labor, a lack of training and knowledge, and restricted resources (Ngadni et al., 2023; Nurkhamidah et al., 2024). The same thing was also conveyed by English teachers when they were given a questionnaire about their perspective on inclusive education: they reported having difficulty teaching students with special needs who were integrated into regular classes. They stated that they had never learned about inclusive education before (Padmadewi et al., 2024).

In response to this situation, Genesha University of Education requires all study programs to incorporate inclusive education into their curricula beginning in 2024, and it has been offered as an elective subject in the English Education study program since 2021. It is envisaged that inclusive education, as a study program for prospective teachers, will provide students with the pedagogical abilities required to teach in inclusive classrooms. Despite being part of the curriculum since 2021, no research has been conducted on the lecturer's teaching strategies for delivering the inclusive education course. As a result, the purpose of this study is to examine the lecturer's pedagogical strategies for teaching the course as part of the English language education curriculum. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:
1. What are the strategies implemented by English lecturer in teaching inclusive education?
2. How do students perceive the strategies implemented?

METHOD
Design, Setting and Participants

The study was conducted based on a qualitative approach in the form of phenomenological investigation. A phenomenological study aims at investigating and exploring how individual experience a certain phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The setting was English language Education study program towards the students who were taking inclusive education as an elective course. The study involved all students taking the course in the year of 2023. The course was offered for the 7th semester students. There were 31 students chose and attended the class and one lecturer taught the course.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through observation, interviews and document study. The observation was conducted for every week in one semester to capture the phenomena of the

teaching learning process. Interviews were carried out towards the lecturer and also the students attended the class. The data were also collected by analysing the comments provided by the students in the system of SIAK (Academic Information System) of Ganesha University of Education. The collected data were analysed using thematic approach which consists of reading and understanding the qualitative data, identifying the theme, coding the data, and interpreting the theme. Researchers provide meaning or interpretation to these themes, which reflect the essence of the participants' subjective experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data analysis results reveal that the course intends to improve students' competency in inclusive education as well as their inclusive awareness when dealing with students who have unique characteristics. The course covers inclusive education concepts, its types, special needs students and their characteristics, and English teaching methodologies and strategies. Students are also required to do school visits as part of their coursework. The instructor assigned students to review and summarize videos, present their report in workshops, and complete a final project to assess their learning outcomes. To teach all of the topics, the lecturer employs a variety of teaching strategies, which are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. The summary about strategies used by the lecturer to instruct the course in one semester.

The strategy of teaching and learning	Students' activities	Topic	Description
Guide (Orientation)	Guiding students through course objectives and expectations	Inclusive Education: definitions and characteristics, and differentiated instruction.	In-campus teaching
Research (Independent Study)	Encouraging independent study and research	Characteristics of special needs students	At-home independent learning through self-exploration
Observe (School Visits)	Conducting intensive observation and learning from real-world environment	Methods and strategies of teaching special need students	School visits to special schools or institutions who provide education for special need students
Workshop (Presentation)	Presenting information in a workshop-style setting	Reporting the results of school visits through seminar and workshop	Coming back to classroom for sharing the results of the school visits
Feedback (Discussion)	Engaging in discussions with peers and sharing/providing feedback	The methods and strategies used by teachers at the school observed and discussed pertaining to the theories	Discussing and having questions and answer sessions to explore more about teaching learning process at the schools.
Improve (Review)	Reflecting/Reviewing and refining knowledge and skills based on feedback	Improving and refining the knowledge of media, procedure and assessment in teaching	Reviewing the strategies used at school pertaining to related theories

		English for special need students	
Think (Final Project	Synthesizing knowledge in a final project, showcasing critical thinking.	Final project : Making Individual Education Plans, Making teaching scenario for students with special needs.	At-home task and independent learning for writing final project.

Table 1 shows that the lecturer taught students using 7 stages which are abbreviated as GROWFIT. According to the findings of the observation and interview, it can be stated that the lecturer supports student-centred learning, where students are given more latitude to conduct independent research to synthesize the material and express their critical point of view in the form of a final project report. The diagram of the flow of the teaching steps is stated in the following figure.

Figure 1. The flow of GROWFIT stages of teaching
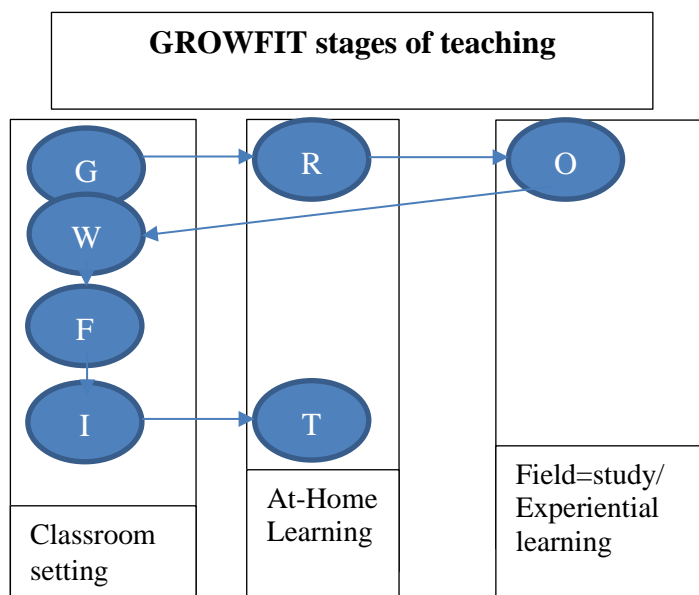
The instructional procedures depicted in Figure 1 demonstrate how multitier and multimodal strategies are utilized in the process of teaching and learning. Multimodality is indicated by the use of more than one mode of learning. The lecturer uses direct instructions when she guides the students at the beginning of the session to give conceptual orientation about special needs education and differentiated instruction, carries out workshop and classroom discussions, gives freedom through the use of independent at-home learning where students investigate materials about the characteristics of special needs students through videos and literature reviews, and experiential learning where students are required to conduct in-depth observations and teacher interviews by having school visits outside of the university. All strategies include three sources, such as the classroom, at-home learning, and the actual world. These three sources are multitiered in nature.

The findings also reveal that the students have a very good attitude toward the activities they had to complete within one semester, including the requirement to undertake school visits and in-depth observations.

Table 2. The example of a guided observation sheet used during school visit

Observability aspect	Description / Explanation	Statement (Please provide any photos for validation) and additional explanations if needed
Types of schools (separate or inclusive schools) • If Inclusive, which type of inclusive system is implemented • Types of special needs students taught in schools, and their characteristics (please provide pictures if possible). Applied treatment system • How are students with special needs taught? • What are the characteristics of students • Is there a shadow teacher or just use a regular teacher? • How are parents involved in the learning process of students with special needs? Teaching methods of English/language/communication skills • Teaching techniques used • Media used • Specific problems often faced by students and teacher solutions Planning/teaching/assessment documents applied • Is there an individualized education plan for each student? • How this teaching document was created Assessment • Types of assessments • How the assessment is conducted, • How the results of the assessment are communicated to stakeholders, • Assessment examples		

To ensure that students grasp the focus of their observations and learn optimally, they are given observation sheets to use as a guide when carrying out activities at school. The sheet, as shown in Table 2, acts as a scaffold for how the activities must be carried out during the school visits.

Figure 2. The students' achievement at the end of the semester

The students achievement at the end of the semester

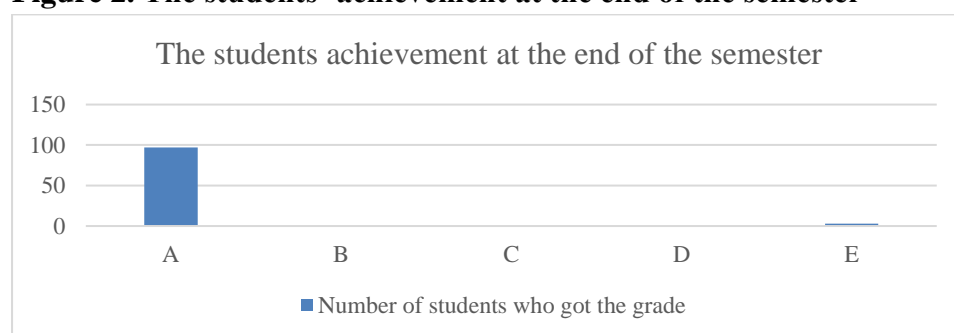■ Number of students who got the grade

Figure 2 demonstrates that the use of multimodal and multitier teaching approaches resulted in students passing the course and getting A grades and 1 student got E because of unattendance during the process of teaching and learning. The results of the interviews with the students demonstrate that the course is clearly stimulating. They believed they had an excellent knowledge of special needs students after visiting schools and witnessing their conditions first-hand, which impacted them greatly. The school visits made them aware of the students' strengths and limitations, as well as helped them enhance their knowledge, which resulted in good grades at the end of the semester.

Based on the learning processes employed, it seems that the GROWFIT model of teaching implemented by the lecturer has been successfully conducted. The activities provide the students with the chance to explore their own knowledge. The strategies of teaching emphasize three key principles that the lecturer employs: student-centred learning and differentiated instruction, incorporating inclusivity into all aspects of instruction whenever possible, and fostering the growth of students' competencies via projects and hands-on learning. Implementing students-centred learning and differentiated instruction in inclusive education is important in order to promote individualized learning, active participation, positive learning environment (Mitchell, 2014; Padmadewi, 2013). All of the learning processes are demanded to build the students' knowledge and skills about inclusive education which is significantly essential. This is consistent with earlier studies demonstrating that teaching students in inclusive classrooms necessitates special classroom teaching skills (Padmadewi et al., 2023; Padmadewi & Artini, 2017). According to Triviño-Amigo et al., (2022), continual professional development for teachers leads to better inclusive education outcomes.

The GROWFIT model of teaching is started by giving guidance in the form of orientation offered implicitly as the first stage of teaching to embrace inclusion principles. A conceptual orientation represents a consistent perspective on teaching, and learning to teach that guides the practical activities of teacher education (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The instructor does not only impart knowledge of the idea but also helps the students become more conscious of inclusivity by elucidating the nature of differences in the classroom, including social backgrounds, places of origin, and native languages, as well as abilities that should be recognized, valued, and respected.

As part of the second teaching phase, students are given the task of self-exploration on the characteristics of children with special needs. In order to help the students to understand their strengths and limitations, the lecturer assigns them to view movies and videos about students with special needs. The purpose of the videos is to help the students understand abstract ideas that aren't always clear-cut and easy to comprehend. Teachers must understand the physical, moral, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual qualities of pupils with special needs in order to demonstrate pedagogic competence (Apriliyanti, 2023; Cooc, 2019; Smith & Taylor, 2010).

Watching video and conducting self-exploration are conducted as at-home independent learning where students are given freedom to carry out the activity to exercise self-directed learning as well as providing the opportunity to do learning autonomy. The freedom provides flexibility not only in terms of time management and types of videos they can choose but also on how acquire the information. Another important usage of video is the use of video as an

essential stage of learning because it allows students to directly observe the features of children with special needs. The utilization of authentic photographs in the video, as well as real-life experiences, help to put abstract information into much more understandable concepts. In line with this, Bock et al., (2024) emphasize the importance of research-based knowledge for the students' learning.

The next step is to assign students to conduct field studies on experiential learning through school visits. When they tour schools and undertake in-depth observations, they obtain a better idea of how the teaching and learning process should be carried out. The importance of experiential learning is stated by Kong (2021) which is also in line with Kolb and Kolb (2017). Experiential learning is meant to offer students opportunities to not only watch the implementation of the teaching and learning process for special needs pupils but also to raise their knowledge of inclusivity. During school visits, the students use a guided observation sheet to collect data and information. The page serves as a scaffold for them to observe and collect information. At the end of the school visit, the students are required to produce a report that would be discussed at a workshop in the classroom.

The workshop was developed to provide students with seminar-based learning in which each student engages in active and collaborative learning activities, such as observing or working directly in a relevant location. Workshop is very important to gain hand-on experience needed for acquiring knowledge. The workshop promotes the students' opportunities to share and discuss ideas and shows their critical points of view. Through The GROWFIT model of teaching, workshop is an important stage where students are required to share knowledge and work collaboratively. The next stage is to generate feedback based on the students' discussions. This activity is crucial because it entails talks and question-and-answer sessions to learn more about the teaching-learning process in the schools visited. The task requires the ability to generate high-order thoughts as well as synthesize information.

After examining each student's opinions during the discussion sessions, they are urged to use the comments to enhance and refine their knowledge of procedures and assessment while teaching English to children with special needs. Students are encouraged to consider the criticism and apply it to relevant theories. Each of them acquires new information as a result of the comments on the data gathered from the school visits. Feedback is essential in developing the knowledge and skills needed for learning and teaching (Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020), and it has a strong impact on students' theoretical and practical learning abilities (Thurlings et al., 2013).

The activities were concluded by asking the students to create a final project in the form of generating new teaching and learning strategies based on a theme, selecting the type of media to use, and deciding on the type of assessment to use. López (2023) and Ukah et al., (2023) both emphasize the relevance of a final project at the end of a course. The fact that all of the students passed the course, received great grades, and felt quite pleased about it suggests that the teaching-learning process was successful. Even though the study was successful in ensuring that every student passed the course, it was limited to a descriptive analysis of the teaching methodologies; as a result, it should be recommended for further research. Despite its limits, it is implied that the teaching strategies used have the ability to improve students' active learning, which leads to self-directed learning—which is crucial for fostering inclusion awareness as

well as the development of students' own competences, which is in line with Ioannidi (2023), who emphasizes inclusive pedagogy as a student-cantered approach.

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed at exploring the strategies used by lecturer in teaching inclusive education in EFL context and explored how the students perceived the strategies implemented. The lecturer employs strategies that support student-centered learning and differentiated instruction adapting the GROWFIT model. These include providing orientation guidance, asking students to conduct independent research on specific topics, having them visit schools to observe activities, and requiring them to bring their findings to a workshop. Following the session, the lecturer asks the students to provide feedback, improve their knowledge, and think more deeply by completing a final project. At the end of the semester, it is assessed that all students pass the course, accomplish excellently, and have positive perceptions. It is inferred that the strategies work well for increasing students' competency. However, the study was limited by its focus on a single class and lecturer, suggesting the need for further research across different settings and subjects. Future studies could explore how other disciplines implement inclusive education and the long-term impacts of such approaches on student outcomes. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education practices in higher education and underscores the need for continuous improvement in teaching strategies to accommodate diverse student needs.

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