

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Inclusive School: Issues of Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Students

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Abstract

This research sought to examine the difficulties encountered by educators and students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the context of English language learning. Instructing students with ADHD presents a myriad of challenges, particularly in the realm of foreign language acquisition. Educators experience heightened stress levels in response to these challenges, as considerable energy and time are expended in addressing the unique needs of students with ADHD. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, this study enlisted the participation of three educators responsible for fifth and eighth-grade classes within inclusive educational settings. Data were gathered through structured interviews with the educators, direct observation of the teaching and learning processes, and scrutiny of pertinent documents. The findings illuminated several challenges faced by English teachers, including time and energy constraints, emotional and behavioral issues, failure to meet educational targets, and a limited mastery of effective teaching methodologies. Notwithstanding the myriad challenges encountered, educators expressed a sense of satisfaction and joy in the process of teaching students with ADHD.

Keywords: *TEFL; Inclusive School; ADHD; Issues*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh pendidik dan siswa dengan Gangguan Hiperaktivitas dan Defisit Perhatian (ADHD) dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Mendidik siswa dengan ADHD menimbulkan berbagai tantangan, terutama dalam pengakuisisi bahasa asing. Pendidik mengalami tingkat stres yang tinggi sebagai tanggapan terhadap tantangan ini, karena energi dan waktu yang cukup dihabiskan untuk mengatasi kebutuhan unik siswa dengan ADHD. Menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini melibatkan partisipasi

tiga pendidik yang bertanggung jawab terhadap kelas-kelas kelima dan kedelapan dalam pengaturan pendidikan inklusif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terstruktur dengan pendidik, observasi langsung terhadap proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran, serta pemeriksaan dokumen yang relevan. Temuan mengungkapkan beberapa tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru bahasa Inggris, termasuk keterbatasan waktu dan energi, masalah emosional dan perilaku, ketidakmampuan mencapai target pendidikan, dan penguasaan metodologi pengajaran yang terbatas. Meskipun berbagai tantangan tersebut, pendidik menyatakan rasa puas dan kegembiraan dalam proses mengajar siswa dengan ADHD.

Kata Kunci: *TEFL; Sekolah Inklusif; ADHD; Masalah*

Introduction

In the context of the Industry 4.0 era, the acquisition of a foreign language is increasingly deemed obligatory in certain professional domains to augment knowledge. Foreign languages, particularly English, play a pivotal role in facilitating international communication across diverse sectors such as development, technology, economics, and education. Additionally, foreign languages contribute significantly to the enrichment of school curricula and foster a nuanced understanding of foreign cultures, as asserted by Thanasoulas (2001). In Indonesia, the predominant foreign language employed for educational purposes is English, necessitating proficiency in order for students to competitively engage on the international stage.

Remarkably, the mandate for English instruction extends beyond conventional schools to encompass all educational institutions, including special and inclusive schools, reflecting a governmental commitment to ensure English proficiency among all students (Marope and Kaga, 2015). This inclusivity underscores the principle that every student, irrespective of religious, ethnic, social status, or ability-related differences, possesses an equal right and opportunity to learn English. Even students with disabilities are entitled to tailored services in English learning, which may include specific teaching strategies catering to their unique circumstances. The universal implementation of English instruction across all schools is envisaged as a means to equip students with the skills required to master the language.

However, implementing English learning in Indonesia is not without challenges, primarily stemming from the fact that English is a foreign language with limited application in daily communication within the local context (Khan, 2011). Teaching English as a foreign language, particularly in areas where English is minimally utilized, poses inherent difficulties. Various challenges are encountered by educators in public schools, including insufficient teacher training,

limited mastery of diverse teaching methods, language proficiency issues, challenges in integrating information technology (IT) into instruction, and a deficit in continuous professional development opportunities (Songbatumis, 2017). Gaikhorst et al. (2017) assert that the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English are compounded by factors such as student motivation and individual differences. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure effective English language instruction and proficiency among students in Indonesia.

Moreover, the challenges confronted by educators in English instruction extend beyond public schools to inclusive schools, where a diverse student population with various conditions is present. The multifaceted challenges in inclusive schools encompass issues such as a lack of confidence when teaching in inclusive settings, a dearth of feedback from supervisors, the necessity to adapt the curriculum to accommodate the unique needs of children with special needs, and a shortage of inclusive education training. Ahmed's study in 2018 highlighted common challenges faced by teachers, including issues related to teaching material and curriculum structure, limited time availability, parental expectations, behavioral concerns, motivation of students, fostering self-esteem, and addressing emotional issues in children. Consequently, the challenges encountered by teachers in inclusive schools may be more varied and intricate compared to those in public schools.

Giangreco (2013) defines an inclusive school as an environment where everyone is accepted and supported by all members to meet educational needs. Inclusive schools admit children with special needs and implement an educational service system tailored to both children with and without special needs through adaptations in curriculum, learning approaches, assessments, and infrastructure. UNESCO characterizes inclusive education as a process that addresses diverse student needs by enhancing participation in learning, culture, and society, thereby reducing exclusion in the realm of education. According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009, students with various conditions, encompassing physical, emotional, mental, social, and/or potential intelligence or special talents, are entitled to educational services that align with their needs and rights. Therefore, inclusive education necessitates alterations in content, approaches, and strategies, guided by the belief that the State bears the responsibility to cater to the diverse needs of all students. Students with special needs include those who are visually impaired, deaf, speech-impaired, mentally retarded, physically disabled, slow learners, and individuals with autism.

Moreover, some students with special needs encounter challenges in their academic performance, particularly those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is a condition that results in difficulties focusing and excessive hyperactivity. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), individuals with ADHD exhibit patterns of inattention,

impulsivity, and hyperactivity that impede their daily activities. Research by Richard and colleagues in the 1990s indicates that students with ADHD struggle with selective attention, the ability to prioritize relevant stimuli over irrelevant ones (Zental, 2005), thereby influencing their academic performance. Students with ADHD often achieve lower scores than their undiagnosed peers (Loe & Feldman, 2007), exhibit higher rates of absenteeism, and face an increased risk of dropping out of school (Barbarese et al., 2007), leading to a diminished likelihood of pursuing higher education (DuPaul et al., 2009).

Individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) encounter impediments in the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language, manifesting in challenges encompassing text comprehension during reading, text production in writing, listening comprehension, and oral communication in English. Johnson et al. (2012) posit a noteworthy deficiency in reading comprehension among students with ADHD, denoting a suboptimal performance in their ability to comprehend textual information. Barkley (2006) underscores the prevalent issue of forgetting the content of previously read material, necessitating repetitive engagement with the text or an extended period for comprehension (Robin, 1998). This is further substantiated by Brock and Knapp's findings in 1996, indicating lower reading scores for students with ADHD compared to their non-ADHD peers.

Moreover, challenges extend to the domain of writing for students with ADHD, as elucidated by Re and Cornoldi (2010). These challenges encompass deficiencies in spelling, a diminished utilization of adjectives, increased repetition, restricted ideation, constrained vocabulary, and a deficiency in meeting task requirements (Re et al., 2007). The auditory-verbal information processing limitations inherent in students with ADHD, as indicated by Mapou (2008), impede listening comprehension. These students struggle to capture detailed explanations from teachers, focusing on and recalling only select portions of spoken information. The oral proficiency of students with ADHD is further hampered, characterized by ungrammatical speech patterns and a propensity for errors, attributed to their constrained vocabulary and grammatical knowledge relative to undiagnosed students (Renz et al., 2003).

In tandem with these linguistic challenges, educators contend that teaching English to students with ADHD is a formidable undertaking. Greene et al. (2002) highlight the heightened stress levels experienced by teachers when instructing students with ADHD, a sentiment not mirrored in their interactions with non-ADHD counterparts. The dearth of training specific to ADHD-related issues compounds the complexity of providing effective instructional guidelines (Westling, 2010). Consequently, teachers often express an unpreparedness to adequately support students demonstrating ADHD characteristics (Martinussen & Major, 2011). Previous research

underscores the time and energy-intensive nature of teaching students with ADHD (Madalinska-Michalak & Bavli, 2018), with a risk of impeding the overall teaching and learning process if undue focus is placed solely on students with ADHD. Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to systematically examine the challenges faced by both educators and students with ADHD in the process of English language acquisition. The identification and elucidation of these challenges are imperative to inform subsequent research efforts aimed at devising efficacious interventions and solutions.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design employing the phenomenological method. The investigation involved three educators instructing students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Yogyakarta. The participants comprised a fifth-grade teacher from an elementary school and two teachers from distinct junior high schools, each responsible for eighth-grade students with ADHD. Data collection instruments encompassed an interview guide and field notes. The researcher conducted interviews, observations, and document analyses to gather comprehensive data. During data analysis, a systematic approach was undertaken, involving the summarization, selection, and concentration on relevant information derived from participant interactions. Subsequently, the researcher categorized the outcomes obtained from interviews, observations, and data analyses, presenting the findings in the form of a narrative text that is well-interpreted.

Result and Discussion

In an inclusive school, teachers need to teach regular students and students with special needs in the same atmosphere. As it is known that regular students and special needs students have striking differences. However, the goal of the inclusive school is to provide opportunities for all students who have physical, emotional, mental, social, or intellectual disabilities, or special talents to obtain quality education according to their needs (Kustawan, 2012). Therefore, schools are not permitted to discriminate against students based on social status, economic status, religion, race, and ability of each individual (Purbani, 2013). In addition, the model of inclusive schools in Indonesia that are used to research is a regular class (full inclusion). It is related to the theory from Darma and Rusyidi (2013) that regular class (full inclusion) refers to students with special needs study with normal students throughout the day in regular classes using the same curriculum. It means that students with special needs should receive the same treatment and material as regular students.

Special needs students that commonly come to inclusive schools are diagnosed as autistic, deaf, slow learning, mentally retarded, and Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The focus of this study is ADHD students because they commonly face a problem in learning foreign languages (Turketi, 2010). The problem that often arises is difficulty in facing English skills. According to APA (2013), ADHD refers to individuals who show patterns of attention, impulse, and behavior that are overly active in daily activities. Therefore, teachers are more likely to assume that ADHD students are difficult to regulate in terms of intelligence, personality, and behavior (Batzle et al., 2010). According to the teachers' assumptions, it indicates that every teacher has a point of view toward ADHD students. The researcher gave a name code to the participant such as P1 for elementary school teacher, then P2 and P3 for junior high school teachers. In line with that, the participants (P1, P2, and P3) of this study give the opinion that students with ADHD difficult to pay attention and always move around. They cannot regulate their behavior. P2 adds an opinion that the condition and the treatment of parents and elementary teachers can be the factor for them to be hyperactive. The opinion from the teachers relates to the definition presented by APA (2013).

Moreover, students with ADHD have three types include inattentive, hyperactive, and impulsive, and the combination of inattentive, hyperactive, and impulsive (APA, 2014). According to the finding, two students show the characteristics that tend to combination type and one student tends to inattentive type. Two students with combination type cannot sit down for a long time. They always move around, make noise, and disturb their friends. Besides cannot manage the behavior, they also cannot pay attention and out of focus to the teachers' explanation. Afterward, a student with the inattentive type cannot respond to the questions. He has trouble communicating both ways. Those students' behavior is supported by a study by Reaser, Prevatt, Petcher, and Proctor (2007) who found that students with ADHD have characteristics such as poor concentration skills and inability to self regulate. This previous study has similar to the current study because students with ADHD are out of focus and fail to control themselves.

After knowing the types of students, a researcher found the ADHD student's problems in learning English. In writing, the students cannot make sentences. They just copy the text to their books. They have difficulty expressing their idea. Martinussen, et al. (2005) report that the difficulties faced by students with ADHD are in written expression and language functioning. It is supported by the statements from Mayes, Calhoun, and Crowel (2007) who say that 65.1% of students with ADHD have significant problems with written expression. In addition, student of P2 cannot express the ideas during the writing and student of P3 also has a problem in making essays. He difficult to arrange the sentences, so he just copies the text without giving an idea. It is in line with the finding of Reid and

Lienemann who state that students with ADHD have problems in a short essay. It indicates that the students' problems in writing are supported by other researchers.

Students with ADHD also have problems in reading. Breslue et al. (2009) agree with this statement because they report that students with ADHD have significant difficulties with their reading. The students face difficulty to comprehend the text. They cannot grasp the meaning of the text. It is because they cannot pay attention and out of focus on the text. The students of all participants can read a simple text, but they cannot remember the point of the text because they forgot what they just read. They also lack of vocabulary. It makes them difficult to understand the meaning of the text. Julkowski and Stolzenberg (1991) assert that students with ADHD perform reading comprehension poorly. It is supported by the study from Johnson, Reid, and Manson (2012) that students with ADHD have difficulty with reading comprehension. It can be concluded that students with ADHD have a real problem in comprehending a text because they are lack of vocabulary and out of focus in the reading process.

In addition, speaking may be a difficult part of learning English for some students with ADHD. Students need to have a lot of vocabulary to speak English. According to the finding of this study, student of P1 just imitating what the teacher said. He often makes mistakes in pronouncing words. For example in the word "car", he pronounces it like "kar". It makes the teacher repeats the word more than twice. Renz (2003) states that the speech of students with ADHD is often ungrammatical and make many mistakes because they are unable to correct the speech quickly. According to the student of P1, he makes mistakes in pronouncing the words because he just can imitate what the teacher said. A statement from Renz (2003) does not occur in this study because all the students cannot produce English speech. They just repeat the words or sentences that the teacher said. Moreover, student of P1 often speaks with a loud voice. He read aloud the text written by the teacher on the board. Tannock (2005) states that this problem is related to the immature motor system that they have. It means that some students with ADHD cannot control their voice during the speaking. Moreover, students of P2 and P3 also have problems speaking English. Student of P2 and P3 are lack of vocabulary so that they cannot speak English fluently. They feel unconfident to speak English because they do not know the English words. This problem is supported by Turketi (2010). He states that speaking errors will occur more frequently when learning a foreign language because the vocabulary and grammar knowledge of foreign languages is more limited than the mother tongue. In addition, the researcher agrees with the statement of Turketi because the foreign language limitations faced by students with ADHD make them less confident in speaking English. The limitations they face also derive from the habit of using English because it is not used in daily communication.

Another problem that arises for students with ADHD in learning English is listening skills. The students of all participants can listen to the instructions very well, but they fail to receive the meaning and the point of the instructions. They just follow the instructions until it ends without understanding the main idea or the topic. This problem is supported by Mapou (2009) who conveys that students with ADHD have problems with listening comprehension because they have a weak range of auditory-verbal information. It means that students with ADHD can listen to the information only in a short period. It is because too much information makes their brain complicated so that they cannot choose the important and unimportant information.

In addition, the teachers also face challenges in teaching English to students with ADHD. According to P1 and P2, they lack time and energy because students with ADHD have to be given more repetitive material than regular students. Teachers also have to handle student behavior from the beginning to the end of the lesson so that the available time will be used up to overcome student behavior. P1 admitted that she was confused about teaching material to students with ADHD. Moreover, P2 also has challenges in handling student behavior. Student of P2 is hyperactive in a dominant way so that their behavior can hinder learning and teaching activities in class. For P3, the challenge faced is the achievement of learning targets. The learning target that was planned was not achieved properly so that she needed more time to teach classes with ADHD students.

In addition, P3 also experiences challenges related to emotional issues. P3 have to teach according to the mood of the students. If a student with ADHD is not in the mood to attend lessons, then P3 can't force him. The challenges faced by those participants are in line with the previous study conducted by Ahammed (2018). His study found that there were seven challenges faced by teachers when teaching learners with a disability such as teaching material and curriculum structure, building self-esteem, lack of time, behavioral issue, expectations from parents, motivating the students, and emotional issues of the children. The finding of this study has similarities with the previous study in some challenges including lack of time, behavioral issue, and emotional issue of the children. It is also supported by Michalak & Bavli (2018) that the challenge faced by the teacher in teaching English is lack of time. Moreover, Hasan & Elhasan (2015) state that student with ADHD has emotional problems such as lack of interaction, lack of sense of self-confidence, less of activity, emotional confusion, emotional distraction, and sadness. Those are in line with the problems faced by student of P3. Her student is lack of interaction. It means that the study of Hasan & Elhasan (2015) is supported the findings of this study, especially to the problems faced by P3. Moreover, self-efficacy is highlighted to ensure optimal learning outcomes for students (Andrian & Yul, 2023).

However, the current study adds that the challenges faced by teachers also came from not achieving learning targets. Apart from that, the challenge faced by P1 which he did not know how to

teach students with ADHD also has similarities with the previous study conducted by Songbatumis (2017). He found that teachers' challenges in teaching English are the shortage of teachers' training, language proficiency issue, limited mastery of teaching methods, unfamiliarity with IT, and lack of professional development. The similarity of this study and a previous study by Songbatumis is the limited mastery of teaching methods. So teaching English to students with special needs including students with ADHD requires mastery of strategies, methods, and techniques.

Every teacher has a belief in teaching students with ADHD. Based on the findings, P1 feels confused about teaching students with ADHD. She has difficulty in handling student's behavior. It means that she feels not enjoy it when a student with ADHD comes to the regular class because she does not know how to teach and handle him. It relates to the study from Greene et al. (2002) who report that students with ADHD are significantly more stressed to teach than their classmates without ADHD. Moreover, Martinussen et al. (2011) also supported that the teachers feel that they were not ready to support their students who have ADHD characteristics. A statement from Martinussen et al. has similarities with this study that P1 looks unprepared in teaching students with ADHD because he is still confused about how to convey English material. In contrast, P2 and P3 feel to enjoy teaching students with ADHD even though they have to consume more time and energy. P2 feels enjoy because almost 50 percent of her students are students with special needs, so she can handle it smoothly. For P3, she feels fun because her student is not hyperactive predominantly. These are supported by the study from Padurean (2014). The result of his study showed that teachers can teach regular children simultaneously with special needs children. Thus, the theory from Greene et al. and Martinussen et al. have differences from the findings of this study, especially in the case of P1 and P2. It indicates that not all teachers feel stress in teaching students with ADHD.

Conclusion

In the realm of English language instruction for students with special needs, educators contend with an array of challenges. The findings of this investigation disclose that instructors encountering the task of imparting English education to students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) grapple with challenges such as time and energy constraints, emotional and behavioral issues, failure to meet educational targets, and a restricted mastery of pedagogical techniques. A noteworthy observation emerged from the study, as one teacher responded unfavorably to the challenges, citing inadequacies in her teaching methods and difficulty in managing the behavioral aspects of students with ADHD. In contrast, other educators demonstrated adeptness in their response, attributable to their prior experience in instructing students with special needs, enabling them to effectively manage classroom dynamics.

Consequent to these observations, recommendations emanating from the study are directed towards educators, urging a heightened understanding of the challenges encountered by students diagnosed with ADHD in the process of learning English. Furthermore, the study underscores the imperative for educational institutions to conduct specialized training programs focused on English language instruction tailored to students with special needs. Such initiatives are envisaged to furnish educators with viable solutions to the pedagogical impediments they confront in the course of teaching students with ADHD.

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