Attending Inclusive EFL Teachers Identity for Students with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract
Although instructional strategies, obstacles, solutions, and technologies designed to assist students with special educational needs (SEN) learning a foreign language were much discussed both in special and inclusive schools, little evidence addresses how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers construct their identities as legitimate inclusive school practitioners as they witnessed and encountered a range of disabilities. To fill this void, this study reports on a narrative inquiry scrutinizing how Indonesian inclusive EFL teachers construct their identity in teaching 15 students with SEN. Drawing upon Johnston's framework of teacher identity, this study showcases how inclusive EFL teachers cultivated a positive rapport with students with SEN through the utilization of a personal approach and the incorporation of humor in teacher-student relation. Regarding professionalism, they perceived it as service-oriented by consistently motivating all of their students, particularly those with SEN, exhibited tolerance for the regular ones, and implemented co-education or peer-mediated instruction strategies. In light of teachers' religious beliefs in English language teaching (ELT), they accomplished well by embedding numerous character values, referred to as *profile pelajar pancasila*, in English classrooms. The implications of this study are to bring potential implementations of specialized teaching strategies training of professional development for inclusive EFL teachers and differentiated assessment for students with SEN.

Keywords: EFL teachers, identity construction, inclusive school, students with SEN

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1. Introduction

Teaching English to students with special educational needs (SEN) has been examined in depth across special need schools (Baharuddin et al., 2022; Hapitri, 2022; Lestari et al., 2022; Upa & Mbato, 2020; Utami et al., 2021), inclusive schools (Chan & Lo, 2016; Masitoh, 2022; Puspitasari, 2019; Sheehy & Budiyanto, 2015), and even distance learning in the Covid-19 outbreak (Arribas et al., 2020, 2021; Asri et al., 2021; Khakim & Septianto, 2021; Kim & Fienup, 2022; Masitoh & Istiqomah, 2023), as communication in different languages provides access to education for learners who struggle due to their physical or cognitive abilities (Block & Cameron, 2002; Nijakowska, 2010). Surprisingly, a new UNICEF report estimates that there are almost 240 million children with disabilities in the world. These children confront numerous hurdles when seeking their rights, one of which is obtaining an education (Kathmandu, 2021). In view of this, the implementation of an inclusive model grants students with SEN, which tend to increase annually (Efendi, 2018), access to a bigger range of services (Slavin, 2011).

Internationally, there is an increasing emphasis on inclusion as the key to supporting the right to education for children with various conditions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), particularly in offline English classes (Hidayah & Morganna, 2019; Murni, 2019; Padurean, 2014; Puspitasari, 2019; Yekti et al., 2019). However, inclusive English classroom instruction is not a walk in the park. English teachers encounter a number of obstacles during the teaching and learning process that call for growth mindset and grit to overcome (Fathi & Soleimani, 2025). One of which is regulating the emotional-behavioral state of students' with SEN (Shilvani et al., 2024; Tiraeni et al., 2024). In the same vein, Puspitasari's (2019) study reveals that lack of teaching resources, classroom and poor learning settings, reduced motivation owing to low pay, and a rigorous curriculum are major problems for English teachers working with students with SEN. Furthermore, they didn't get any training from the government on how to teach students with special needs in the most appropriate ways (Lu et al., 2022; Yekti et al., 2019). Consequently, there is still a need for specialised training and education for teachers who deal with students with SEN (Benko & Martinovic, 2021). By the same token, Feng and Sass (2013) assert that general education teachers lack sufficient in-service professional development and assistance

to enhance their knowledge and skills, hence impacting the academic performance of students with SEN.

A further issue that inclusive EFL teachers in middle school face has to do with learning tasks, as Murni (2019) looked into. Her study concludes that the English teachers' instructional techniques ignored slow learners and attention deficit students. This study recommends that English teachers should design and vary their classroom management tactics to suit students with varying characteristics. In contrast, despite certain limits, it has been documented that EFL teachers in other junior high schools are sufficiently competent to apply some instructional strategies, i.e. cooperative learning, peer-tutoring, active learning, to direct instruction in EFL inclusive classrooms (Hidayah & Morganna, 2019) and extra classes for students with SEN gain basic life skills (Pramesti et al., 2023). Ford (2013) also suggests a number of ways to help teach students with learning disabilities in inclusive classes. These include co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and instruction and interventions facilitated by peers. Additionally, Padurean (2014) has examined experimentally the impact of several instructional strategies in an English inclusive classroom. The students with SEN do better on English tests and have better attitudes toward the language.

Taking into account the aforesaid controversial studies about teachers' challenges, skills, and strategies in teaching English to students with SEN, it is believed that cultivating knowledge and skills for inclusion is contingent upon a teacher's identity development as an inclusive practitioner (Chan & Lo, 2016) for long years of trials and errors to initiate active coping strategies (Hajmalek & Basiri, 2022). Moreover, the significance of teacher identity has grown because it influences classroom practice (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Singh & Richards, 2006). However, this has not been thoroughly researched. To date, Chan and Lo (2016) have investigated how three primary TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) educators develop their identities while implementing Hong Kong's inclusive education policy. This study considers discourse, self-positioning, and social context to be important factors in teacher identity construction; however, the participants were recent Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) graduates. Consequently, there is a dearth of research within inclusive schools regarding identity construction as non-negotiable pedagogical cornerstone (Miller, 2009) for in-service EFL teachers in teaching

students with SEN in a more diverse setting.

This current study is a novel attempt, for the first time, to fill a significant gap regarding EFL teachers' identity construction in teaching students with SEN in an inclusive secondary school particularly in the Indonesian context using Johnston's (2003) framework discussing three aspects, i.e. teacher-student relation, professionalism, and religious beliefs in ELT. In addition, Indonesia whose motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) has been enacting an inclusive education since 2008 under the direction of the Directorate of Special School Development. Examining the identification of EFL teachers who promote inclusivity is crucial because they play a key role in fostering inclusion (Morley et al., 2005) and their classroom actions can demonstrate their role as catalysts for change (Richard, 2021). An in-depth examination of how EFL teachers construct their identity in inclusive situations might significantly enhance our comprehension of the intricacies of teaching in such settings (Borko & Putnam, 1996).

To achieve the purpose of this study, a research question has been formulated in accordance with the study's framework: How do EFL teachers construct their identity in terms of teacher- student relation, professionalism, and religious beliefs in teaching students with SEN in an inclusive school?

2. Literature Review

This study focuses on EFL teachers' identity construction within Johnston' (2003) framework employed in teaching students with SEN in inclusive environments. Here, language and other forms of social interaction, including a workplace promoting identity development (Flores, 2001), are used to negotiate identity as a constantly shifting concept. In a nutshell, this theoretical framework delves deeply into three dimensions of teacher identity that are rich in value dynamics. These are the teacher-student relation, professionalism, and religious belief in ELT.

2.1. Teacher-student Relation

Because establishing a positive relationship with students is critical to the success of the teaching-learning process in the classroom (Varga, 2017) such as students' engagement through teacher-student rapport and teacher support (Shakki, 2022), recent studies (Irfiana et al., 2021; Rahman & Kurniawan, 2022; Syahabuddin et al., 2020) have focused on this issue, particularly in inclusive settings (Santos et al., 2016; Soba, 2021). A teacher's decision regarding the teacher-student relationship is heavily influenced by the teacher's identity (Beijaard et al., 2000). Johnston (2003) divides teacher-student relation into two aspects; teachers' interest in their students' life outside of schoolwork and the shifting balance of authority and solidarity as a teacher's career progresses. A sense of humor, suggested by Aydan (2015), is one approach to prepare the path for wholesome student-teacher relationships.

Another way to build a good relationship between teacher and student is to be aware of the students' abilities in terms of academic achievement, interest, and personal issues (Syahabuddin et al., 2020). Research shows that students who feel like they are loved, valued, and supported by their teachers are less likely to be depressed or have low self-esteem (Conner et al., 2014). Consequently, they are more likely to be engaged because teachers concern for their well-being is fundamental to their emotional connection to the classroom (Cooper & Miness, 2014). For students to feel socially included in inclusive settings, they should see their schools as safe places to learn and get help. This depends on how well they get along with their teachers and peers (Pastore & Luder, 2021). Therefore, in order to foster a humanistic environment, the institution must encourage regular students to be more supportive of students with SEN in their capacity as peers (Cantos et al., 2022).

2.2. Professionalism

As professional identity is viewed as a constant source of contention (Maclure, 1993), it becomes an essential instrument of comprehending what it means to be a teacher in changing situations (Day, 2011). Teacher professional identity provides a framework for teachers to build their own beliefs about how to be, perform, and comprehend their work and place in society (Sachs, 2005). Johnston (2003) contends

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that addressing professionalism in ELT proves beneficial because it renders us think about a conflict between who we are as teachers and what our work is all about. It starts to take shape when teachers learn how to teach, practice, and improve their awareness as a continuous process (Rostami et al., 2021). Spreading the ideas of inclusive education, as the focus of this study, has actualized the need to study such a phenomenon as professional competence of teachers in inclusive education.

Since teachers' professional competences are the focus point of inclusive education (Kristiana & Hendriani, 2018), this leads to a number of emergent current studies (Deniz & İlik, 2021; Durdukoca, 2021). Durdukoca's (2021) study involving 203 teachers in schools concludes that their professional competencies regarding inclusive education are at a high level. In contrast, professional development competencies related to inclusion of English teachers are moderate among 95 subject teachers (Deniz & İlik, 2021). A large amount of research in the topic (Agusti, 2019; O Murchu, 2011; Riano, 2017; Rohmatullaili, 2023) have only focused on English teachers' teaching practices in inclusive schools as one of their professional competences. Actually, there are five more areas where teachers of students with SEN need to develop professionally: traits of disabled students, formal and informal evaluation, customised curriculum and instruction, direct follow-up and referrals among service providers, and use of educational resources (Lasaten et al., 2014). There is currently very little insights on delivering a professional skills framework in an inclusive environment. Accordingly, this study employs Zulfija's et al., (2013) professional skills framework based on a competence approach incorporating motivational orientation, information, and operational components for teachers working with SEN students in inclusive education.

2.3. Religious Belief in ELT

Mambu (2017) reveals in an exploratory study that religious values can be incorporated into ELT in a critical and reflexive manner. This lends credence to Johnston's (2003) contention that religious instructors' beliefs influence their classroom and school performance. Religious beliefs are often the most personal, the most profoundly held, and the most intrinsically linked to our identity, he confirms.

Furthermore, Foye's (2014) survey acknowledges that religion's role in ELT classrooms should not be excluded for the reason it is a great tool for developing students' character (Prasetyo et al., 2023); however, how its implementation is negotiated in EFL inclusive classrooms is still not adequately documented. In addition, Vaccino-Salvadore (2024) suggests that the pedagogical potential of both teachers and students should be maximised by valuing and understanding religious identities as an essential component of language teacher identities. The current study endeavours to address this research call by examining the professional lived experiences of two inclusive EFL teachers in the context of teaching students with SEN in Indonesia.

Since 2010, the Indonesian government has promoted the incorporation of religious values into character education (Qoyyimah, 2016). Character values are not explicitly taught, but are integrated into the teaching and learning process, self-development activity, and school culture (Ministry of National Education, 2010). Conforming to Pratiwi's et al. (2021) study, 15 of the 18-character traits in the 2013 curriculum were taught in an implicit manner during English lessons. The Indonesian government has announced and recommended the Merdeka curriculum for all education levels since 2022. This curriculum includes a project for bolstering the *profil pelajar pancasila* as character values, which encompass six competencies. They are; (1) faith, dread of God, and good attitude; (2) global diversity; (3) independence; (4) creativity; and (5) mutual cooperation; (6) and critical reasoning (Panduan Pengembangan Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, 2021). Teachers' faith can impact their professional identity, pedagogical practice, classroom decision-making, and relationship with students (Baurain, 2013; Vaccino-Salvadore (2024). Thus, these six-character traits can help EFL teachers who work in an inclusive setting show their religious or faith-based beliefs while teaching students with SEN.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The main focus of this study focuses is on the personal stories Indonesian EFL teachers teaching students with SEN. To get deeper into comprehensive data

pertaining to the participants' understanding of the identity formation process, the narrative inquiry design was selected as the primary approach for investigating experience as a narrative and as the fundamental framework for conceptualizing experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narratives empower us figure out who we are and bring us together during hard times (McCammon & Smigiel, 2004). When teaching students with SEN in inclusive schools, teachers have to deal with a wide range of disabilities. This is to ensure education can continue for everyone so that all can perform well. As Nussbaum (1990) argues, narrative eventually provides the readers the chance to actively participate in the cultivation of practical wisdom. This is achieved by immersing the reader in a moral quandary within a classroom setting, thereby involving them in a comparable cognitive exercise. Through this process, readers are afforded the chance to confront a challenge, carefully deliberate on its specificities, employ a conceptual framework, and envision potential outcomes.

3.2. Participants

This study involved two in-service EFL teachers, Firda and Yasin (pseudonyms), in one of secondary inclusive schools in East Java, Indonesia. At the time of the study, Firda was in her thirties and has been teaching English in the inclusive school since 2018. She taught ninth graders, 9B, comprised of 33 students. Within this cohort, six of them had special educational needs (SEN) i.e., 3 deaf students and 3 slow learners, while the rest were ordinary students. Curriculum for 2013 was implemented in ninth grade. Yasin was the second participant to take part in the study. He was in his forties and began his career as an inclusive elementary school teacher in 2010. He was assigned to a secondary inclusive school in 2016 until now, where the setting of this study took place. He was a 7th and 8th grade teacher. In grade 7, there were six students with SEN, two slow learners, one with a speech disorder, and three with mental disabilities, and the Merdeka curriculum was used. In grade 8, there were three students with SEN, two slow learners, and one student with hearing impairment, and the curriculum was 2013.

In accordance with the purposeful sampling approach, Firda and Yasin were specifically selected to partake in this study's endeavor based on their extensive

background in teaching English students with SEN within an inclusive educational setting. Moreover, students in English inclusive classrooms have encountered a range of disabilities, which have provided them with valuable experiences to navigate and overcome. Furthermore, a secondary inclusive school in Kediri, East Java, Indonesia was also selected as the study's site due to writers' familiarity with it. In response to this, Emilia (2010) asserts that establishing a sense of familiarity between the researcher and the study situation promotes a more authentic research process and mitigates any potential for contrived behavior from teachers or students.

3.3   Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was executed at the completion of the second semester in the academic year 2022/2023. Prior to commencing the data gathering process, an institutional letter of ethical approval issue was obtained. Subsequently, Firda, the participant, was personally provided with a comprehensive explanation of the intricacies of this study, encompassing its objectives, the procedure employed for data collecting, and other pertinent details. Yasin, the second participant, received confirmation of this occurrence through text messages due to his professional obligations. As a result, the participants' informed consent was obtained both orally and in written form. The data were obtained via semi-structured interviews conducted in a face- to-face setting. In accordance with Barkhuizen (2014), the predominant method of conducting interviews in narrative inquiry is the one being referred to. Furthermore, multiple chat-based interviews were also accomplished to elicit more detail information that was not covered during the face-to face interview.

Five questions, the participants' background, teaching strategies, relation with the students with SEN, struggles to be professional, and how religious belief shaping their inclusive practices, referring to Johnston' (2003) framework were posed in a relaxed and conversational manner to the participants regarding their experiences teaching English to students with SEN in inclusive education. This framework is utilized because one of its dimensions, namely teachers' religious beliefs in ELT, corresponds to the Indonesian context, in which teachers serve as religious role models in English classrooms. A single interview to each participant was performed

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in Bahasa in order to provide a more comfortable expression of the participants' experiences. For Firda, it took 42 minutes and for Yasin, it took 74 minutes. They were audio- recorded, and the researchers took notes as the interviews progressed. The information gathered was fully transcribed into English. Next, the transcriptions underwent a process of highlighting and coding, guided by three distinct overarching categories as outlined by Johnston (2003), the teacher-student relation, professionalism, and religious beliefs in ELT. A member check was conducted in order to validate the precision of the data and mitigate the risk of data misinterpretation. Both Firda and Yasin acknowledged that all of this study's findings are precisely right. Ultimately, the results were examined for interpretation.

4. Result

This section investigates various extracts of data to analyse how two EFL teachers develop their identities while educating students with SEN in an Indonesian inclusive school. More specifically, the findings of this study are constructed in the following ways based on data analysis of EFL teachers teaching students with SEN in an inclusive school: (1) the teacher-student relation; (2) professionalism; and (3) religious beliefs in ELT.

4.1. Teacher-student Relation

In light of inclusive EFL classrooms, both Firda and Yasin confirmed that they had to work hard to build bonding between them and the students with SEN since most of them were introvert and had expressive language impairment. Moreover, no shadow teachers have been hired for students with SEN at the school. To overcome this situation, relying on the establishment of a teacher-student relationship characterized by emotional connection is crucial in fostering a sense of comfort among students with SEN towards both their teachers and peers, Firda, the EFL teacher of the ninth-graders, and Yasin, the EFL teacher of the seventh- and eighth-graders, employed a similar strategy, personal approaches, to foster a positive relationship with students with SEN, thereby encouraging them to feel a sense of

belonging in an inclusive environment.

"I approached my students with SEN personally during the English teaching and learning process. I saw them one by one to check if they could follow the lessons on the day and completed an activity (Firda and Yasin)."

Furthermore, Firda admitted that her focus was more on slow learners due to their limited cognitive abilities than on deaf students.

"I was pleased with my deaf students because they were cooperative and able to interpret my lip movements as instruction. surprisingly, one of the regular students in my class is proficient in sign language, so she assisted her deaf classmates with further explanations. In contrast, my slow-learner students were primarily passive and required intensive guidance to complete my straightforward instructions (Firda)."

In a similar vein, Yasin developed a positive teacher-student relationship with his SEN students in seventh and eighth grade through a personalized approach. As evidenced by his narratives, he was additionally eager to create a humorous EFL environment to encourage engaging learning.

"In addition to my personal approach to students with SEN in the EFL inclusive classroom, I adopted humor to motivate both them and the regular students. When they were taught English in a humorous style, they chuckled, had fun, and eventually came to like it. In my all-inclusive classroom, it worked wonderfully (Yasin)."

Based on the aforementioned findings, it is evident that inclusive EFL teachers can meet the needs of students with SEN during the teaching and learning process. Using proportional personal approaches, they instilled in students with SEN a sense of trust and open-mindedness that they are cared for, valued, respected, and supported. As a consequence, they were able to follow the English teachers' instruction based on their disabilities, but they were not completely dependent on the teachers.

4.2. Professionalism

One of Firda and Yasin's main obstacles in teaching students with SEN was

understanding each student's needs depending on their disability. The inclusive school, which served as the study's setting required all students with SEN who had various disabilities to sit in the same class. As a result, English teachers had to work harder to deal with them. In their interviews, Firda and Yasin, the inclusive EFL teachers in this study, did not completely assert themselves as professional teachers. Nonetheless, they endeavored to become professional teachers by providing exceptional services to the students with SEN in English classes. They initially encouraged the students with SEN to study English by communicating and interacting with them effectively.

"Teaching English to students with SEN does not necessitate high test scores or advanced English abilities; rather, the goal is to make them willing and eager to study English and socialize with their peers. Therefore, we always motivate them and meet their demands by establishing robust contact and engagement with them (Firda and Yasin)."

In addition, Firda and Yasin consistently urge regular students to embrace students with SEN as classmates in order to foster an inclusive learning atmosphere.

"In our English classes, we can guarantee that the students with SEN are not bullied. We constantly and repeatedly remind all of my students to respect and assist one another (Firda and Yasin)."

Second, Firda and Yasin did not develop any inclusive teaching strategies because they had not received training in inclusive English teaching for a secondary school. Instead, they used group works for ninth graders and pair works for seventh and eighth graders to facilitate co- education or peer-mediated instruction between students with SEN and the regular ones. They managed this activity by visiting each group in turn.

"I basically taught my students with SEN English in the same way that I taught my other students. I instructed my students to work in groups when doing exercises. Each group must include students with SEN. By doing so, they could interact with their peers and receive assistance from other students as they learned to complete the activities in English (Firda)".

"It is hard to implement a differentiated learning strategy in my English classes due to the presence of SEN students with a range of disabilities. A viable alternative was to have the students practice in pairs. They could learn jointly and correct one another's errors (Yasin)."

Third deals with English assessment in inclusive education. Firda and Yasin both stated that they considered the students' conditions when assessing the students with SEN. They typically provided the students with SEN simpler and maybe repeated instructions, gave them more time to accomplish the same tasks as their peers and graded them on fewer and lower-level goals.

"We believe that the teachers' flexibility in an inclusive context is critical. We modified both formative and summative English assessments at the end of the semester, such as reducing the number of questions on exercises, simplifying instructions, or implementing a specific scoring rubric, because we had a thorough understanding of proficiency levels of our students with SEN (Firda and Yasin)."

"Ideally, inclusive teachers should develop customised question items for assessing students with SEN. However, I do not have enough time to do it because I have several school-related responsibilities. As a result, I have alternate options, such as grading for lower-level goals, as I previously described (Yasin)."

Another significant finding uncovered by this study reveals that Firda and Yasin persistently pursued the goal of inclusion through their active engagement, personal growth, and dedicated efforts in implementing inclusive English classes into their regular classroom routines.

"Every new school year, before I started teaching English to students with SEN, I talked to the school's psychologist, talked in depth with their teachers from the previous grade, and learned a lot from the SEN students themselves about how to work with them (Firda)."

"I've learned a lot reading literature about inclusion, but I've learned the most from seeing the lives of my students with SEN and making decisions based on that (Yasin)."

4.3.   Religious beliefs in ELT

Despite the fact that its curriculum was altered from the *2013* curriculum to the *Merdeka* curriculum, character values have been one of the aims of Indonesian education. As role models in the classroom, teachers are accountable for incorporating religious principles into character education, as the Indonesian government has declared. When it comes to English education, students must not only be competent at it but also have high character values. As religious EFL teachers, Firda and Yasin have been required to comply with this national mandate. However. teaching English to students with SEN in inclusive classes and implicitly instilling several positive traits based on the students' needs and circumstances was complex due to those students' disabilities. Firda and Yasin have simplified this process by choosing a small number of core values to emphasize while teaching English to students with SEN.

"I have been emphasizing to my students with SEN an independent value that can be realized by having the confidence to learn and practice English. I greatly admired their endeavors to learn English. As previously explained, I encouraged the regular students to be tolerant, socially responsible, and collaborative during group exercises with the students with SEN (Firda)."

While Firda had already incorporated several character values into ninth-grade inclusive English classes, Yasin instilled others in seventh- and eighth-graders.

"To all of my students, I have continually promoted the motto "all mistakes are better than no mistakes but no doing." They have to be brave and strive many times to practice English. In a pleasant environment, they could work hard to learn English while having fun. We celebrated when they made mistakes. They didn't have to be shy. We respect one another's distinctive characteristics, particularly those with SEN (Yasin)."

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how two EFL teachers, Firda and Yasin (pseudonyms), built their identities in an inclusive school. The findings of Johnston's

(2003) framework indicate three dimensions of teacher identity that are particularly rich in value dynamics. To begin, the teacher-student interaction is a vital part of teacher identity. In practice, the inclusive EFL teachers used a one-on-one approach with the students with SEN as the major strategy during the English classes. They argue that this is the best option because the inclusive school where they work does not offer co-teaching, as advocated by Soba (2021), which requires both general and special-education teachers to collaborate in order to successfully complete the school curriculum. Despite the fact that the previous study (Santos et al., 2016) claims that teachers' relationships with students with SEN are more dependent than regular ones, this personal approach do not completely make the students with SEN dependent because the EFL inclusive teachers in this current study balance their authority and solidarity, as suggested by Johnston (2003).

Yasin, the inclusive EFL teacher teaching in the 7th and 8th grade, occupied humor as another approach for creating a positive teacher- student relationship. This supports Aydan's (2015) conclusion that humor is associated with individuals being more tolerant and flexible, and it has been shown to alleviate or lessen the impact of unpleasant events such as anxiety, sadness, stress, and tension. Furthermore, Yasin remarked that he could potentially make English classes more enjoyable by incorporating humor into the subject explanation or the students' practices. In this regard, students with SEN are most likely engaged because they are emotionally tied to the English classroom activities (Cooper & Miness, 2014). This explains why keeping a good relationship with students with SEN matters as one way for EFL teachers to deal with the difficulties they face in an inclusive school (Shilvani et al., 2024).

In an inclusive school, it is highly probable that children with SEN are provided with a shadow teacher to support them throughout the learning process. In a study conducted by Tiraeni et al. (2024), a shadow teacher can assist EFL teachers in determining the appropriate learning materials for students with SEN based on their individual abilities. Although the study's findings found that the inclusive school where Firda and Yasin work did not have shadow teachers, they were able to alter their teaching practices when dealing with students with SEN. It is conceivable that the EFL teachers in this study regard themselves as professional practitioners of

inclusive pedagogy through their experience and occupation (Sheesy & Budiyanto, 2015).

The second finding addresses professionalism, precisely the extent to which professional identity is integrated with language teacher identity. On one level, Firda and Yasin were both equally committed to facilitating the English learning needs of students with SEN by motivating them and fostering effective communication and interaction, thereby enabling the identification of students' aptitudes in terms of academic achievement, areas of interest, and personal challenges (Syahabuddin et al., 2020). As peers of students with SEN, regular students are always expected to demonstrate tolerance. This orientation corresponds with the value of an inclusive classroom, which necessitates a genuine and profound embrace of all individuals in their variety of needs, backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses in the classroom (Santos et al., 2016). Due to a lack of training as other EFL teachers in other countries (Cantos et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022), Firda and Yasin did not specify any distinct teaching strategies for students with SEN in their lesson preparations. This finding is consistent with what Yekti et al. (2019) uncover, namely that EFL teachers in inclusive secondary schools require more training in inclusive teaching strategies.

On the other hand, the implementation of co-education or peer-mediated instruction by the EFL teachers between the students with SEN and the regular ones through pair and group works as one of the beneficial strategies in teaching inclusive classrooms, as stressed by Ford (2013) and Zulfija's et al. (2013), may be related to the explanation of the present study's attainment in teaching English to the students with SEN in the inclusive school. Students with SEN could study and socialize comfortably by learning English from their peers, and they would not be hesitant to participate in their own ways, with the teacher's assistance. This finding supports previous studies (Riano, 2017; Rohmatullaili, 2023) on the benefits of cooperative learning for students with SEN in inclusive EFL classrooms, particularly in junior high school, despite the fact that its implementation in the context of the present study was simplified due to the students with SEN's more diverse disabilities.

The assessment of English in an all-inclusive school setting is another concern. The results of this study reveal that EFL teachers adapted their assessment strategies

to better accommodate the needs of their students with SEN. For example, due to time pressure, similar to a study of Benko and Martinovic (2021), Yasin, one of the EFL teachers in this study, indicated that he graded for lower-level goals instead of preparing customised English tasks for the students with SEN. This data shows how important it is for teachers to be adaptable in an inclusive classroom (O Murchu, 2011). Furthermore, this finding is consistent with prior studies (Sheehy & Budiyanto, 2015; Yekti et al., 2019) asserting that a specific assessment required to be carried out when teaching (English) students with SEN in inclusive schools in order to address the students' disabilities. Regarding teachers' flexibility, Firda and Yasin have been learning from their students with SEN. This aligns with Flores' (2001) assertion that experiences in the workplace have a significant influence on how teachers develop their identities.

The third component of Johnston's framework is the role of religious beliefs in ELT, particularly in relation to the teachers' spiritual identity. As mandated by Indonesian government both in *2013* curriculum and *Merdeka* curriculum, all teachers in all levels have to instill character values into a teaching and learning process in the classroom. As the EFL teachers having a religious belief, Firda and Yasin have been inculcating those values as stated in national curriculum during teaching English to the students with SEN in the inclusive school. This reflects what Johnston (2003) and Vaccino-Salvadore (2024) claim that religious teachers' beliefs influence their professional identity, pedagogy, and classroom practices. Based on *2013* curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2010), Firda and Yasin instilled hard-working, independent, social caring, and tolerant values. They, additionally, imparted moral values to strengthen *profil pelajar pancasila* of global diversity, independence, and mutual cooperation in the *Merdeka* curriculum (Panduan Pengembangan Projek Penguatan Profil Pancasila, 2021). All these values could motivate students with SEN and regular students to do better in inclusive English classrooms.

6. Conclusion

This study was the first to examine the identity of EFL teachers in inclusive education for students with SEN in Indonesia. Based on the findings and discussion, the in-

service EFL teachers, Firda and Yasin adhered to three components of Johnston's framework (2003). In light of the teacher-student relationship, Firda and Yasin effectively cultivated a positive rapport with students with SEN within inclusive English classrooms through the utilization of a personal approach and the incorporation of humor. Firda and Yasin perceive professionalism as being centered towards service. Consequently, they consistently motivated all of their students, particularly those with SEN, exhibited tolerance for the regular ones, and implemented co-education or peer-mediated instruction strategies. In terms of teachers' religious beliefs in ELT, Firda and Yasin accomplished well by embedding numerous character values or *projek penguatan profil pelajar pancasila* (P5) in their English classrooms, as mandated by Indonesian curriculum.

Some practical implications can be proposed based on the study's findings. First, other than peer-mediated instruction, the inclusive EFL teachers did not use any other distinctive strategies in teaching English to students with SEN. It implies that the majority of EFL teachers teaching English in inclusive schools require specialized training for professional development to achieve better results. Second, the adaptability of the EFL teachers was essential for English assessments in inclusive schools. It indicates that the government must conduct a specialized assessment in order to address various disabilities of the students with SEN. Third, EFL teachers must continue to emphasize tolerance in inclusive classes. It suggests that not only teachers, but also all students' parents, are necessary to promote tolerance in order to prevent bullying. One limitation of this study is that the participants were all from a single institution. As a result, more diverse settings are advised to complement robust data for further investigations and to broaden some valuable inputs in narrative inquiry studies.

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