Teaching English to Kurdish Students with Special Educational Needs: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract—**The present study aims at investigating teaching English language to Kurdish students with special educational needs in Sulaimani city. The study focuses on the challenges that the teachers and students with special need face in teaching/learning English. Furthermore, the researchers designed two different tools to collect data: an interview for the teachers of English language and a questionnaire to be answered by the students with special needs. The data is collected from Runaki Institute and Hiwa Institute in Sulaimani city during the academic year 2022-2023. Moreover, mixed-method research is used in this study. The quantitative collected data is analyzed using SPSS, meanwhile thematic analysis is used to analyze the qualitative data. The results show that there are many challenges of teaching English to students with special needs which are relevant to curriculum, shortage of resources, lack of teaching training courses, and so on. Finally, the study presents some possible solutions to overcome the challenges facing students and teachers; the solutions are limited to designing special curriculum for English, conducting different training courses by the national and international experts, setting classes in a special way so that the students can get benefit from, and treating each student as an individual.**

Index Terms— **Challenges, Kurdish SEN Students, Parents, Solutions, Teachers.**

I. INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that General Education is one of the categories created under Section 15 of the National Educational System Law of 2003 in which the core curriculum is given using customary teaching methods without the need for supplemental materials. Special education, on the other hand, is the antithesis of general education, and its main objective is to modify the standard teaching strategies to fit specific types of students. Several children may have special needs which are unrecognized or dismissed in the classroom. Depending on individuals' qualities, capacities, and needs, these students have the right to develop and succeed. To achieve this, language teachers should adapt their programs to fulfill and meet the needs of all students, including those with impairments, different levels of language proficiency, learning challenges, skills, and mental issues (Susilowati and Rahayu, 2016). This means that teachers should realize that students with Special Educational Needs (henceforth SEN) have unique educational needs.

The focus of special education is to give specialized instruction to a diverse group of children with special needs. Addressing the needs of this set of students is exceedingly difficult and necessitates highly qualified teachers. Unfortunate, SEN students are frequently served by a special education teaching force that is subject to attrition and change, affecting the educational services they receive (Billingsley, 2004; Boe, et al, 2008; Connelly and Graham, 2009; Johnson and Semmelroth, 2014). This means that SEN students require frequent modifications throughout their studies and in the classroom situation since they usually face obstacles that prevent and/or limit their full and effective participation and engagement in the learning process.

In Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), there are special schools that concentrate on the education of students with SEN. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to integrate these children into the regular school system and other national and international regulations. The amount of students attending SEN schools has reduced and they are attended particularly by children with severe disabilities. A student with special educational needs is a legal term that refers to youngsters who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make learning more problematic for them than for other children their age (Padurean, 2014). Special education began in the eighteenth century, when specific types of SEN, like hearing impairment, were recognized. In the nineteenth century, children with mental problems were included. The emphasis of teachers at the time was on the need for help to make life meaningful for SEN, students (Alkahtani, 2016; Gyasi et al, 2020). According to Padurean (2014), students with SEN find it difficult to adapt to a hostile setting where they are made fun of, learning requires a lot of work, and teachers are not fully prepared to manage these

circumstances and provide the children with the greatest educational assistance. Furthermore, due to the strain of the curriculum, teachers think that it is difficult to deal with SEN students and typical students are deprived of receiving an education of a good level since teaching SEN students require much time in each lesson and they sometimes may not learn.

The current study explores the challenges teachers of English and students with SEN encounter while teaching/learning English. Moreover, it is to identify the strategies teachers use to ensure that students with SEN learn. Additionally, the study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by English language teachers while teaching students with special needs?
2. What are the difficulties Kurdish SEN students face in English lessons?
3. Are there any strategies that the teachers use to overcome the challenges and help SEN students learn?

Finally, teaching English to students with SEN is the most difficult task for the teachers and the students are expected to face many different challenges, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. All these challenges and problems need to be investigated from the perceptions of the students and teachers. In addition, it is worth mentioning that this study is the first attempt in Iraqi Kurdistan Region to investigate teaching English to Kurdish SEN students.

II. STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

According to Delaney and Farley (2016), students with SEN are those students who have significant difficulty in the learning process comparing to the other students with the same age. As Kazmi and Ali (2021) claim, SEN students refer to students who are hearing impaired or hard of hearing, have vision impairment (i.e., visually impaired), have physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, learning challenges, behavioral disorders, or emotional disturbances and have speech or language troubles. Some students struggle with a variety of disabilities and learning problems. As Gyasi et al, (2020) point out, SEN is used to students who, in comparison to children of the same age group, have learning difficulties that make it challenging for them to learn. This means that investigating SEN issues refers to assessing, diagnosing, developing instructional programs, and appropriate teaching/learning strategies as well. Padurean (2014) believes that a SEN is a legal term refers to youngsters who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities that make their learning more problematic than other children their age. Furthermore, to overcome these issues, it is prerequisite to fulfill frequent modifications throughout the studies inside/outside the classroom.

A. Types of SEN

For Satsuk (2020), SEN is a certain difficulty or disability which could be resulted from a real illness (e.g., multiple sclerosis, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.), developmental impairment (e.g., Down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, etc.), behavioral/emotional disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), partial or complete visually impaired, and hearing impaired, or limited hearing.

Many scholars have discussed the different types of SEN students. For example, Snowling (2001), Macintyre (2005), Pennington (2019), Hurst (2012), Delaney and Farley (2016), Adam et al, (2020) point out that the most typical SEN include Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Disorder with hyperactivity (ADHD), Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Behavioral, emotional and social difficulties, Cerebral Palsy, Down's Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, Moderate Learning Difficulties, Physical Disability (PD), Semantic Pragmatic Disorder (SPD), Sensory Impairments, Multi-sensory impairment (MSI), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), and Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) which include Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and, Dyspraxia, Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties (SLCD), Tourette's Syndrome (TS), Hearing impairment (HI), and Visual impairment (VI). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the current study mainly focuses on SEN students who have zero and/or half visually impaired students and hearing impaired and/or hard of hearing students.

B. SEN Methods of Teaching

More significant than promoting student learning is the utilization of appropriate and efficient methods in the teaching and learning processes. The processes of learning and teaching use a variety of methods. What matters is that the teacher selects the approach that is most effective and appropriate for the student's level when teaching the material. Each field has its own methodologies in addition to general ones (Kurt & Yavuz, 2018). In order to keep the SEN students' independence, teaching strategies in special education often attempt to improve appropriate behavior and decrease improper behavior (Demirok, et al, 2019). This might be accomplished through using the widely used applied behavioral analysis approach in special education. In addition, it is crucial to note that there are a variety of teaching methods adopted in special education (Odom et al., 2005 & Mitchell, 2014). To select the best and most effective teaching method for SEN students, teachers should take a number of points into consideration, for example, the skills to be taught, individual characteristics of the child, educational requirements, learning environments, teaching materials, and accessibility of support services (Kukey et al., 2019).

There are additional SEN teaching methods including direct instruction and natural teaching which begins with activating the students' prior knowledge then teaching them how to do a new task; at the end of the course, the teacher analyzes and grades the results (Wolery et al., 1988; Bechtolt et al., 2014; Blik et al., 2016; Eratay & Yeseriroglu, 2017). In addition, Yasin and Ramli, (2013) describes computer-assisted education which refers to the use of computers or other electronic devices to assist teachers; Uzunboylu and Özcan 2019 focus on sensory-based teaching which refers to any learning activity that integrates two or more sensory strategies to absorb or express information. For Obaid (2013), multisensory approaches have proved to be very beneficial in literacy and language development especially in the connections between sound and sign, word identification, and the use of tactile methods such as tracing on rough or soft surfaces. Moreover, as Wolery et al. (1988) point out, one of the most widely applied methods in

special education, aside from these other teaching strategies, is errorless teaching. The goal of errorless teaching is to attain learning outcomes through the use of exercises and responses rather than mistakes made during teaching. This approach was established based on abilities and concepts. According to BragaKenyon et al. (2017), and Sorakin and Uzunboylu, (2017), these methods were developed due to the fact that using regular teaching methods to teach SEN students results in higher error rates. A positive student-teacher relationship is created when the error level is reduced through errorless teaching technique. Furthermore, to exhibit the goal behaviors in skill training based on errorless teaching methods, cues are given to the student. The cues must be delivered based on a systematic strategy to achieve success. Finally, as Westwood (2011) states, there are two different approaches with several strategies of teaching SEN students which are Teacher-directed Approaches (e.g., Expository Teaching, Interactive Whole-class Teaching, and Direct Instruction) and Student-centred Approaches (e.g., Discovery Learning, Project-based Learning, Resource-based Learning, Problem-based and/or Issues-based Learning, Situated Learning and E-learning).

C. SEN Students in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

SEN students experience several learning obstacles in school in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, including a number of challenges relevant to language skills, reading, writing, counting, listening, responding, support, thinking and so on. Moreover, the length and difficulty level of the curriculum, as well as its incompatibility with the skills of SEN students, are currently the most prominent variables determining learning barriers in the IKR. Furthermore, lack of individual consideration among students separately in the classroom and poor performance of some teachers and special education students lead to lack of communication and collaboration between school and family; this consequently has its own negative impact of the learning/teaching process. Concerning the percentage of learning difficulties in IKR, there is no accurate statistics of learning difficulties among SEN students; they have difficulty since they are highly marginalized, particularly in communities that are poor. Providing SEN students with needs and paying attention to their abilities is not only the family's responsibility rather the government's duty; the IKR government must give these students full attention since they are the national's wealth (Ali, 2021). The current study is an outstanding attempt to highlight the data and statistics relevant to the SEN students in Sulaimani city which can be generalized later to the whole region. The education stakeholders can work seriously on the results, findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. Finally, the majority of the challenges encountered by SEN students and special education teachers during the learning/teaching process are the result of authorities and the educational authorities' failure and or carelessness to make decisions in the best interests of SEN students; the government should offer a suitable atmosphere for SEN students so that they can easily comprehend the courses; the authorities should support special education teachers to become acquainted with contemporary methods of teaching SEN students.

III. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON SEN

Padurean's (2014) study entitled "*Teaching the English Language to Children with Special Educational Needs*" focuses on identifying the most effective strategies for teaching English to SEN children and determining whether they need supportive teacher to participate in foreign language classes in regular classrooms. The study data is collected through a questionnaire of a total of 90 regular student parents, 90 normal students, 10 SEN students, and 10 English teachers. The questionnaire has been used to learn more about how teachers, parents, and students see SEN students. Moreover, the sample students are given a pre-test once the findings were assessed. An English teacher who specializes in teaching English to SEN children has worked with the experimental group. The study concludes that the majority of teachers think that SEN students require more time, more explanations, and different tasks than other students which slow down the pace of teaching. They also acknowledge that they occasionally fail to consider the needs of SEN students because of the pressure of completing the curriculum by the end of the school year. Furthermore, parents believe that their children waste time in class since teachers must explain things to children more than once and they do not want their students to make friends with SEN children when it comes to socializing. Concerning SEN student's idea, the study claims that SEN students prefer taking sport and music rather than other subjects and learning English is not an easy task.

In 2019, Rezabala and Holgu published "*Adaptations for Teaching Children with Special Educational Needs in ESL Context*" to examine the use of audiovisuals in modifications and adjustments for teaching English to a child who has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. To determine the evolution of the participant's English language skills, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches is used. Moreover, this study presents teaching methods that use games and technology to aid children with physical or intellectual challenges in language learning. The results indicate how the movies keep the participant's attention over time, and how the voice self-recording aids his listening and speaking practice. This situation creates several opportunities to innovate existing adaptations and modifications for improving the teaching and learning process of children with special educational needs in an ESL context.

Khasawneh (2021) published a study entitled research design, "*Problems Teaching English to Deaf Students*" to identify the challenges faced by teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while teaching English to hearing impaired students. 186 teachers' responses to online questionnaires were utilized to gather data. To create a systematic and accurate summary of a population's characteristics and facts, this study employed a descriptive design and a quantitative approach. There were two sections to the questionnaire: the respondents' background information including gender and years of experience and 32 items to measure issues with teaching English to hearing impaired students. The findings showed that there are relatively significant problems with teaching English to hearing impaired children in special education institutions Nevertheless, there are substantial issues with the hearing impaired children themselves in special education schools. Teachers in special education schools have substantial concerns

about issues relating to the learning environment for hearing impaired children. Finally, the study shows that there are no statistically significant differences between English teachers with their gender and years of teaching.

In contrast to the previous studies, this study designed a 19-item questionnaire for SEN students. Moreover, it is important to mention that 4 English teachers from Hiwa and Runaki Institutes were interviewed. All the challenges the teachers and SEN students have with the educational process were discussed and some possible solutions were presented.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STUDY INSTRUMENTS

This study has a mixed-method research design. To investigate the challenges of teaching English to Kurdish SEN students in Sulaimani City, the current study has applied a quantitative and qualitative research design. The first objective was to find the difficulties facing teachers and SEN students while teaching/learning English and present possible solutions. The researchers designed a questionnaire for SEN students; the questionnaire items were translated from English to Kurdish language since the students were not able to comprehend English, and the face validity has been done to the Kurdish version. Moreover, interview questions were designed based on readings of related literature and studies on concepts of challenges and issues in SEN.

A. The Study Sample

The study was conducted in the two institutes of students with special needs in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaimani City. The sample of the study consisted of 30 SEN students and interviewing 4 SEN teachers from two different institutes, namely Hiwa and Runaki. In addition, Hiwa Institute is for the zero and half visually impaired students, while Runaki Institut is for the hearing impaired or hard of hearing students. The study was conducted during the school year 2022-2023. The student's questionnaire consists of 19 Likert Scale items. Moreover, the items are adapted from different exports to be modified and changed according to the currents study aims. Additionally, the student's lack of English comprehension is the main reason of translating the questionnaire into Kurdish and the hearing- impaired students are got assistance through explaining the items using sign language by an expert.

Moreover, conducting interviews is another qualitative strategy that was applied in this study. The interview consists of 17 questions depending on covering the study aims and answering the research questions. The questions include a number of themes and subthemes relevant to teaching English to SEN students. It is worth mentioning that the researchers asked the questions in English, meanwhile the teachers answered the interview questions in Kurdish and the researchers translated their response into English in order to find out the themes and sub-themes of the interview.

B. Validity and Reliability of the Study Instrument

The researchers send the instrument to several specialists in the fields of Applied Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, and TEFL to determine the suitability and practicality of tools (see Appendix C). Furthermore, the tools are translated into Kurdish and given to a number of experts in the field of Special Education, Educational Psychology, and Comparative Literature to determine the clarity and applicability of the Kurdish version of the study tools (see Appendix D). Thus, the study instruments are valid.

Furthermore, Alpha-Cronbach has been used to examine the questionnaire's reliability; the questionnaire reliability is 0.75 confirming that the questionnaire's items are reliable and acceptable since 0.75 is above 0.7 Cronbach's Alpha values. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha based on the standardized items of 0.75 shows that the study instrument's dependability is undoubtedly acceptable.

V.DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT DISCUSSION

A. SEN Teachers' Interview

The researchers attempt to find out the answers of the first and the second research questions through the teachers' interview. In the teacher interviews, 18 themes were first identified, categorized into three main themes and 14 sub-themes. The main themes are methods, course, syllabus, and learning environment. Moreover, depending on subthemes' relevance to the main themes the interview data has been analyzed.

1) Challenges Related to Teaching Methods Training Course and Curriculum

There are numerous strategies that teachers of SEN students should take into consideration to facilitate learning. It is critical to bear in mind that one of the main aims of this study is identifying the teaching strategies used by Kurdish teachers of English who teach SEN students; it is the first research question of the study. According to the data collected from the interview, the teachers do not stick to any set strategies or methods in their teaching. This could be contributed to the fact that the teachers have not participated in any necessary courses or seminars that might familiarize them with the best practices for teaching SEN. Thus, lack of sufficient knowledge regarding teaching in SEN context is considered a main challenge mentioned by the teachers. This has been in accordance with what has been mentioned by Nisa and Kusmiati (2020) that teaching SEN students is not an easy task comparing with the stream education and teachers should participate in up-to-date training course so as to implement the most recent teaching methodology. Furthermore, as the data reveals, out of four English teachers, none of them has ever participated in a SEN teaching training course. This indicates that they do not previous experience of teaching English to SEN students as it has been confirmed by the first teacher (T1) was that "*no, I haven't participated in any training course. We must participate in a training course to be ready to perform better*". In addition, all teachers apply their own distinctive methods in the classroom following each student's particular needs, abilities, and skills. Building on this, one may claim that it would be beneficial to include a seminar on how to teach SEN students during the teachers' academic preparation.

Regarding the challenges relevant to the curriculum, it is noted that Sunrise Program is taught by teachers and the quality of teaching is influenced by how the curriculum is developed, planned, applied, and evaluated. This can be considered one of the most noticeable challenges, since Sunrise is designed for

general education. The majority of teachers claim that this program is not appropriate for SEN students since none of the activities of Sunrise Program is suitable for the students, in the two institutes in Sulaimani city, who have special difficulties, including the hearing impaired, speech impaired, and zero-visually impaired students. Due to SEN student's inability to hear listen or speak to read, the first and second teacher (i.e., 50%) state that they focus exclusively on writing and speaking in sign language while teaching the skills, and very little focus on reading and writing skills; most of the students at Runaki Institute are visually impaired students, meanwhile the teachers of Hiwa Institute claim that

"We can teach the four skills while teaching English and most students can listen and understand; they can write letters, but generally speaking, writing is the most difficult skill for them because the majority of the students at Hiwa Institute are speech impaired, hearing impaired, and hard of hearing students." (T 3)

2) Challenges of Learning Environment

The uncomfortable material they teach is harming the teachers, SEN students, and even the students' parents. However, the teachers do not only depend on the textbook, they rather attempt to use additional items to help the SEN students understand the lesson better. All of the teachers (i.e., %100) provide the SEN students with more examples of the subjects and also use authentic materials while teaching the English language. Furthermore, the teachers also highlight that individual learning is much more practical and helpful SEN students than learning in a group because every student is diverse and has a wide range of abilities. This claim has also been confirmed by Uzunboylu and Özcan (2019).

Additionally, all teachers (i.e., 100%) state that due to the students' special needs especially hearing impaired and speech impaired, the students cannot hear or talk and must instead focus on what they see. Thus, it is the teachers' responsibility to explain subjects using signs and pictures to help them comprehend. Despite the fact, that the majority of teachers (i.e., %75) ensure that SEN students can learn English very well by motivating teachers and families to learn, whereas, one of the teachers (i.e., %25) believes that "*the SEN students can learn English, but they will not be like a normal student; they can only learn most simply vocabularies and some grammatical rules*". Moreover, It is important to point out that the teachers describe several challenges they encounter; they argue that teaching English in general, particularly speaking, writing, and reading skills, is difficult especially for visually impaired and hearing impaired students. Hence, half of the students get bored in the class. Besides, teachers believe that the time allocated for lessons is insufficient to effectively teach SEN students. All of these may indicate inappropriate teaching/learning environment. The teachers' quotes in the interview are evidence to support this claim:

"The learning environment has a significant impact on students' learning outcomes. The learning environment was completely inappropriate for learning. Schools' open areas and noise, individual needs, inappropriate temperature, inadequate lighting, poorly placed boards, and the wrong classroom layout are all potential distractions for students in the classroom" (T 2)

Likewise, the third teacher claims that

"The educational environment of our institute is very bad; we have some small things just for grades one and two to help the students learn the letters and two projectors which are not enough for SEN students and teachers. So, we only try to teach them with the simplest ways" (T 3)

These challenges make the teachers unable to follow the lesson plan. In other words, the environment has negatively affected the teachers' plan. All teachers (i.e., %100) claim that they usually struggle to stick to the lesson plan; the environmental factors must be taken into account which is a challenges by itself.

Concerning how teachers' views on individual differences among SEN students and whether their gender makes any differentness regarding the learning/teaching process, 50% of the teachers claim that SEN students understand the subject differently than other students with the same institute, particularly zero visually impaired students who require more time to learn than others. In other words, due to the students' different special needs, teachers always face challenges even among the same class. In addition, 50% of teachers take the students' individual differences into consideration and this can be noticed as a challenge for them. With regard to gender, the majority of teachers (i.e., 75%) believe that gender has no significant effects on the teaching process.

Additionally, successful special education teachers must fully understand SEN students' talents and needs. Thus, assessment is not an easy process in SEN context since SEN students are complicated students with distinct needs. Assessment is an essential part in special education and Kurdish teachers of English language are not able to assess their SEN students the way they intend. Assessment is one of the sub-themes that the teachers discussed in the interview; 50% of the teachers argue that they "*cannot assess them in all the skills, because their situation is different from other students*" (T 4). Meanwhile, the other half state the opposite.

"We assess them in all skills daily and monthly, and we have first and second-course exams; we read the exam paper and explain to questions and we also give the students much time to answer the questions, we as a teacher consider their needs into account." (T 2)

Building on the teachers' claim, one can state that due to the students' needs, teachers should focus on the students and the learning environment during the assessment process.

Another problematic theme is offering the online classes. According to 75% of the teachers, online classes cannot be offered in Kurdish SEN context since the majority of students do not have access to the net and their special needs make the challenge much more complicated. This means online classes are ineffective for teaching English in SEN context. On the other hand, only 25% of the teachers believe that online can be used as an appropriate alternative to teach SEN students. To confirm this claim, T 4 state that "*I have taught SEN students English online during the pandemic Covid-19 and I did not have problems.*"

3) Teachers' Perspectives on Parental Challenges

The positive relationship between parents and teachers can be considered a crucial element in the learning process that

helps students learn more successfully. This may lead one to claim that to guarantee the success of learning/teaching process, all SEN students need the support of their teachers and families since some students have specific requirements that needs additional support. As the interview data reveals, 100% of teacher of English believe that good relationship between them and SEN students' parents is of educational significance and value. In addition, all teachers believe that SEN students who are supported by their parents perform better compare to those who do not have this support. Furthermore, this relationship is also important since the parent will be notified on students' progress and improvement. This result has also been confirmed by Loughran (2008) and Balli (2016) in non-Kurdish SEN context.

B. Analysis and Discussion of the Students' Questionnaire

The current sub-section attempts to answer the third research question; for this purpose, a 19-items questionnaire was completed by 30 SEN students at Hiwa and Runaki institutes. In order to analyze the items in a better way, the questionnaire items are divided into different subtopics relevant to the main one.

1) SEN Student's Perspectives on Learning Environment Challenges

The first item of the questionnaire is to shed light on the acoustics problem inside the classroom. According to the collected data, most of the SEN students agreed that there are a lot of acoustic problems facing them during English class lesson. Table 1 shows that most of the students agree on the existence of this challenge with the mode of 2 and the mean of 2.17; the SEN students are deviated in 1.315 from the mean. Thus, it recognizes that the physical environment of the classroom was not appropriate for teaching SEN students. This means that 70% of SEN students agreed that they did not have an appropriate educational setting for learning English.

TABLE 1
CHALLENGES RELATED TO LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Items	Options' Frequency					Mean	Mode	Sd
	SA	A	N	D	SD			
1. There is a classroom acoustics problem in an educational setting face deaf or hard of hearing students.	10	11	3	4	2	2.17	1	1.315
2. The classroom's physical environment is suitable for learning English to Special Educational Needs (SENs).	5	15	7	3	0	3.77	4	1.223
3. I get board in the process of learning English.	15	10	4	1	0	2.10	2	1.185
4. There are audio materials that we can hear the correct pronunciation of the sounds and words.	14	6	6	4	0	3.63	4	1.299
5. At my school, the facilities are available so as I can make use of them to improve my English.	2	5	3	11	9	3.77	4	0.817

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Sd = Standard Deviation

Meanwhile, for only %13.3 of the students, the educational environment was comfortable for learning English. The other students (i.e., %16.7) chose the neutral concept for responding to the item. Another challenge is lack of authentic materials. The majority of students (i.e., %53.3) disagree that enough authentic materials were used during English language lesson. The majority of students asserted that teachers of English occasionally utilize two projectors to listen to dialogues for the visually impaired students, but since the hearing impaired students are unable to use them, the teacher brings some pictures to them instead to make the subject simpler to understand. However, according to %23.3 of the students, they did not have not any problems related to authentic materials; out of 30 students, 7 of them (i.e., %23.3) selected neutral.

Based on their responses to different items, many students did not agree on the facilities available for SEN students to be used to improve their English proficiency. The following table shows that most SEN students selected option 4, which is shown in the mode statistics, and the mean of SEN students' answers is close to 3.77; this indicates that they selected the neutral option, with a deviation of 0.817. Moreover, due to all these learning environment challenges, SEN students always lose interest inside English lessons. As the data reveals, 80% of students were unhappy during English learning process. Although, only 5 students (i.e., %16.7) did not have any difficulties, and only one student (i.e., %3.3) was neutral about the process. This means that the teachers face challenges since the majority of their students are not happy with the class atmosphere; this consequently has a negative impact of the students' performance, progress, and satisfaction. The following table shows the mean, mode, and standard deviation of the SEN students' questionnaire and their option selection for the first fifth items of the questionnaire.

2) Challenges Related to the Teaching/Teachers

Several items related to English teachers were prepared for the SEN students in the questionnaire. The SEN students highlighted that they usually misunderstand the teacher due to lip-reading/residual hearing, in response to item no. 7. The mode in Table 2 reveals that the majority of students selected option 2 which indicates that they agree in misunderstanding the teacher due to the lip-reading/residual hearing difficulty. The mean of all the students for this question is close to 1.87 while the SEN students deviate around 0.819 from the mean.

Another item was about using the first language of the SEN students by the English teacher during teaching process. Out of 30 students, 24 of them (i.e., %80) agree that their English teachers always use the first language during the lesson whenever the students need it; the rest of SEN students, which constitute %20, chose a neutral option for this item. Likewise, the motivation of the teacher SEN students is another important item; most SEN claimed that the teachers always motivate all SEN students. As table 2 presents, most of the students agreed in this regard and they chose option 2 which represents in the mode, and some other of the SEN responses were close to 2.20 which has been shown in the mean, and the SEN students deviated in 0.961 from the mean. Out of 30 SEN students, 29 of them %96.7 agreed with the needs of parents' motivation to learn the English language. Only one student (i.e., %3.3) was the neutral in this regard.

The majority of SEN students agreed that during the lesson, their English teacher was very patient and explained everything to the SEN students. Most of the students chose option 1 which shows in the mode in table 2 and the mean was close to 1.87 and the responses all deviated from 0.9 to the mean. The students with special needs believed that there was always an appropriate interpretation service that would successfully communicate the lesson in their primary language. In this regard, 16 of them (i.e., 53.3%) agreed that there was an adequate interpretation in English class that makes it much easier to follow the lesson. Six students which means 20% selected the neutral option, while the rest (i.e., 26.7%) disagreed. Fortunately, this goes in accordance with what has been mentioned by Downs et al. (2000) that teachers should use one of the various interpreters: American Sign Language (ASL), oral, tactile, or cued speech; teachers will be referred to as interpreters for this education. Regarding entertainment activities inside/outside classes, it is believed that this is a great opportunity to improve and develop their English language proficiency since the majority of SEN students (i.e., 18 among 30) were not satisfied and believed that they need more entertainment activities inside and outside the classroom especially in English lessons. Statistically speaking, the majority of the student responses were within the range of 1.23 as indicated by the mean in table 2, and it is obvious that the majority of the SEN students agreed with this statement as

TABLE 2
CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE TEACHERS FROM STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Items	Options' Frequency					Mean	Mode	Sd
	SA	A	N	D	SD			
6. My teacher considers my situation in the evaluation process.	6	15	4	5	0	1.90	2	1.029
7. Students with special needs may misunderstand their teacher because of Lip-Reading/Residual Hearing.	4	11	8	5	2	2.67	2	1.155
8. My teacher over-uses of native language in the classroom.	3	18	5	4	0	2.07	2	0.868
9. My teacher encourages me inside/outside the classroom.	16	6	4	2	2	2.10	2	1.185
10. There is always an appropriate interpretation service that will effectively communicate the lesson in their primary language.	19	8	5	1	0	2.20	2	0.961
11. My teacher can fix all the barriers while learning process.	16	7	4	2	1	3.03	4	1.129
12. My teacher ignores exercises of reading.	16	3	8	3	0	1.40	1	0.932
13. The students need more entertainment activity inside/outside the classroom to develop and improve their English.	15	3	10	2	0	2.47	3	1.106
14. The teacher explains everything and he/she is very patient with us.	16	3	4	5	2	3.40	4	1.329
15. My parent motivates me for teaching English language.	15	5	4	5	1	3.43	3	0.935

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Sd = Standard Deviation

indicated by the mode of Table 2. In addition, the student responses differed from the mean by 0.504. This indicates that schools and institutes of SEN students should pay much attention to the educational atmosphere and specifying enough space for the students' entertainment.

Unfortunately, the majority of Kurdish students in SEN context were not capable to communicate in class or read text from textbooks since the English teachers do not provide them with this opportunity. To familiarize SEN students with this type of activity, the teachers themselves read the activities several times. As the data shows, only %16.7 of SEN students agreed that they can read since this skill is not ignored by the teachers. Meanwhile, %43.6 of students claimed that the teacher ignores reading activities when teaching English and student % 36.7 were neutral about this concern. Additionally, one of the important points in teaching English to SEN students is taking SEN students' situation and case into consideration during the assessment process. For this purpose, several students agreed that their teacher was aware of the student's special situation during the examination process. In table 2, the answers of the SEN students were close to 2.40 as it is shown in the mean of the item, the mode presents that most of the students agreed because they selected the score 1, and their response deviated by 1.163 from the mean. Despite these issues, the English teacher makes an effort to remove obstacles from the English learning process. Luckily, the majority of SEN students (i.e., %49.6) agreed that the teacher could overcome obstacles while teaching English, whereas %16.6 students disagreed, and %33.3 of students were neutral. Generally speaking, it is not an easy task to overcome all obstacles of SEN context by teachers since they need official support from the government. The mean, mode, and standard deviation from item 6 to item 15 are listed in the following table.

3) Curriculum and/or Syllabus Challenges from the Student's Perspective

It is worth noting that the curriculum and/or syllabus at both the Hiwa and Runaki Institutes for SEN students were one of the biggest challenges. During the teachers' interviews, the researchers noticed that most of the problems facing SEN students and teachers were due to the curriculum and the syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education of Iraqi Kurdistan Region Government. The problem is that this curriculum is designed for public education and its level of difficulty is not appropriate for SEN students; this makes English textbook inappropriate. Regarding this issue, 28 students (i.e., %94) were very concerned that the English textbook (i.e., Sunrise Program) was not suitable for them, meanwhile only 2 students (i.e., %6) agreed with the syllabus they were studying. Due to this, many SEN students experienced a lot of negative feelings, had low self-esteem, and did not like learning a second language. To determine whether SEN students experience the constant loss of confidence they encounter when studying English, the researchers designed an item. As it is presented in table 3, the majority of students with special needs selected option 2 meaning that they felt low self-confidence due to the numerous difficulties they encounter in English lessons. Furthermore, the mean of the majority of students' responses was close to 1.90 and their answers deviated by 1.029 from the mean. This issue should be fixed

since it can be considered the most important one. In other words, it is not possible to teach/learn a second/foreign language without an appropriate curriculum and well-designed syllabus. Kauliņa, et al, (2016) state that inaccurate or delayed diagnosis of a certain issue in SEN context may result in highlighting a number of different problems; this can psychologically affect the SEN students' support.

In addition, another separate item is to explore the SEN students' perception whether the English language class was excessively lengthy. 21 students (i.e., 70%) had difficulty with

TABLE 3
CURRICULUM AND/OR SYLLABUS CHALLENGES FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Items	Options' Frequency					Mean	Mode	Sd
	SA	A	N	D	SD			
16. The SEN's lack of confidence is one of the problems they face during learning process.	1	8	7	12	2	1.40	1	0.932
17. Most of the students are interesting in learning second language.	13	15	2	0	0	1.90	2	1.029
18. The syllabus we have is somehow difficult for special education needs situation.	6	3	10	8	3	2.17	2	1.117
19. The lesson period is long.	9	6	5	6	4	3.03	4	1.129

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Sd = Standard Deviation

the English lesson period, whereas 20% of them which mean six students only had no troubles with the period; only three students selected neutral option. Item no. 17 is to investigate whether SEN students are interested in learning a second language despite having all these issues. The majority of SEN students did not agree with this statement; this indicated that they disagree and do not enjoy learning a second language. Additionally, the students' answer was close to 3.03 and deviated from the mean by 1.129. The following table presents items frequency and the statistics for items 16, 17, 18, and 19.

C. Discussion of the Results

According to the analyzed data, the teachers of English at Hiwa Institute for the Hearing Impaired Students and Runaki Institute for the Visually Impaired Students do not implement a particular education method for students with disabilities and instead tailor their lessons to the student's needs and experiences. This could be attributed to the fact that there are no certain courses for teachers who teach SEN students. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the relevant authorities to facilitate the provision of a special course that presents appropriate methods for teachers who work at special education institutes in order to give SEN students opportunity to learn as much as possible. Furthermore, English teachers of SEN students confront numerous challenges and barriers on a regular basis during the teaching process due to a variety of reasons, including lack of a particular curriculum for SEN students in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, lack of competent and well trained staff in the special education sector to train teachers in order to develop the students' abilities, and inappropriate educational environment. To overcome these challenges, stakeholders in

SEN institutes and Ministry of Education can conduct a national conference on designing SEN curriculum; this could be done with consultant of international experts in the fields. In addition, there should be continuous training online and in-person training courses for teachers of SEN students and institutes administrative staff; this could be very useful for the students, teachers, and institutes manager. Moreover, the government should work on designing/building appropriate institutes for special education paying much attention to educational purposes and entertainment spaces in order to increase the students' learning level and find out special abilities students have. These could be helpful to fix issues relevant not to English subject only rather to all different subjects SEN students take.

Without a doubt, SEN students face different challenges while studying/learning the English language. Unfortunately, as the data reveals, a very small fraction of students do not have problems with the curriculum/syllabus of English lessons since they claim that they have learned English. Whereas, the majority of students suffer from the Sunrise Program. In addition to the curriculum, SEN students face a variety of other challenges, including their poor ability to comprehend topics they take, lack of modern and appropriate sound system specialized for teaching SEN students, inappropriateness of the environment of SEN education, and lack of suitable learning materials and equipment to aid students in the learning process. The majority of students' challenges can be solved with the support of stakeholders of Ministry of Education; this can be done with building a modernized institute for SEN education.

CONCLUSIONS

Depending on the analyses of the questionnaires and interview data, the current study has come up with a number of conclusions which reveal some challenges including various impairments, curriculum, lack of self-assurance, shortage of resources, teaching method, and so on. Moreover, due to the fact that most teachers who teach SEN students have not received any special needs education training, they believe they are unqualified to educate these children; to have effective teaching strategies, they need specific training related to special educational needs students. In addition, normal students and children with impairments have distinct teaching methodologies. Students with disabilities require special education; not all teaching strategies are appropriate for them. As teachers understand their students' needs and talents, they can devise teaching strategies that are acceptable for them. Furthermore, the most important point that should be taken into consideration by the stakeholders of education is modifying/changing the current learning environment to a better one since teachers and SEN students claim that this environment is not appropriate for students with special educational needs. Additionally, parental involvement in the education of special needs children benefits everyone. In a nutshell, parental involvement in special education means better services and outcomes for children with disabilities. Finally, the study also concludes that the government has not provided teachers and SEN students with basics and requirements of teaching/learning in SEN context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on its conclusions, the current study presents a number of recommendations to relevant to investigating teaching English to Kurdish students with special educational needs in Sulaimani city. The recommendations should be taken into consideration in order to overcome the challenges in this regard; the recommendations are listed below.

1. Teachers of English should be more creative in teaching in a way to make SEN students more active in English classes. This cannot be achieved without participating in a training course or some online/in-person seminars by national/international experts.

2. Ministry of Education should train teachers of special education institutes and school to be able to select the most practical curriculum and/or syllabus for teaching English taking into account the students' and their parents' feedback.

3. The administration of institutes/schools should implement the required measures to address the challenges raised by the teachers to help them create a successful learning environment.

4. Institutes/schools should to provide teachers and students with some types of equipment for educational activities, such as media in teaching-learning activities and the sources of the materials.

5. It is the duty of the Ministry of Education and the experts in this field to set up a method for students with disabilities so that teachers can follow it while teaching SEN students.

6. Iraqi Kurdistan Region Government should provide schools for gifted students to take advantage of their abilities.

7. Teachers of English should concentrate on the individual differences among SEN students.

8. Second/foreign language learning should be promoted in schools and educational environment with standard and appropriate method for SEN students.

9. To lessen the challenges that SEN students face, the government must strive diligently. It ought to be one of the main topics of discussion in the Kurdistan Regional Parliament meeting.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Dear teachers of English,

You are kindly asked to answer the following questions which are designed to investigate how English is taught at the institutes specialised for students with special needs in Sulaimani city. Your answer will be kept confidential. Thanks for your cooperation.

The researchers

Questions:

1. Do you depend on a textbook only while teaching English? How do you teach the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing? Do you use authentic materials?

2. What is a specific method you follow? Do you follow your lesson plan every day? Do you believe that the lesson period is enough to teach English?

3. Have you participated in any training course relevant to teaching English for special educational needs?

4. How can you consider the individual differences among SENs into account? Do make any difference relevant to gender in teaching English?

5. Do you believe that the educational environment of your institute is comfortable for teaching English for SEN? Are there some instruments and tools that help your students get the lesson easier?

6. There is a claim saying that SEN students cannot learn English. What do you say concerning this? Do you motivate your students while teaching English? How?

7. To what extent maintaining a parent-teacher relationship is important in process of teaching English to SEN?

8. How do you assess the students? Do you assess them in all skills? Do you consider the SENs students' situation in the assessment process?

9. Which one is more practical and helpful individual learning or learning in a group while teaching English for SENs? Why?

10. Have you ever taught English for SENs online? If yes, what challenges have you faced?

APPENDIX B: THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear students,
This questionnaire is designed to investigate teaching/learning English at your institute. Please answer all items through choosing one option only. Your answer will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. Thanks for your cooperation.
The researchers

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. At my institute, there is a classroom acoustics problem face deaf or hard of hearing students.					
7. The classroom's physical environment is suitable for learning English to Special Educational Needs (SENs).					
8. I get board in the process of learning English.					
9. There are audio materials that we can hear the correct pronunciation of the sounds and words.					
10. At my institute, the facilities are available so as I can make use of them to improve my English.					
11. My teacher considers my situation in the evaluation process.					
12. Students with special needs may misunderstand their teacher because of Lip-Reading/Residual Hearing.					
13. My teacher over-uses of native language in the classroom.					
14. My teacher encourages me inside/outside the classroom.					
15. There is always an appropriate interpretation service that will effectively communicate the lesson in their primary language.					
16. My teacher can fix all the barriers while learning process.					
17. My teacher ignores exercises of reading.					
18. The students need more entertainment activity inside/outside the classroom to develop and improve their English.					
19. The teacher explains everything and he/she is very patient with us.					

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My parent motivates me for learning the English language.					
2. The SEN's lack of confidence is one of the problems they face during the learning process.					
3. Most of the students are interesting in learning a second language.					
4. The current syllabus is difficult for special education needs situation.					
5. The lesson period is long.					

APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTION OF JURORS OF THE

Names & Academic Rank	Specialty	Place of Work
Prof. Dr. Fatimah Rashid Hasan	Applied Linguistics	Salahaddin University-Erbil
Asst. Prof. Dr. Azad Hasan Fatah	Cognitive Linguistics	University of Sulaimani.
Asst. Prof. Dr. Habib Soleimani	TEFL	University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj
Asst. Prof. Dr. Jamal Ali Omer	Applied Linguistics	University of Raparin
Asst. Prof. Dr. Inaad Mutlib Sayer	Psycholinguistics	University of Human Development

ENGLISH VERSION OF THE STUDY TOOLS

APPENDIX D: DESCRIPTION OF JURORS OF THE KURDISH BVERSION OF THE STUDY TOOLS

Names & Academic Rank	Specialty	Place of Work
Asst. Prof. Dr. Araz Hakem Radha	Educational Psychology	Salahaddin University-Erbil
Asst. Prof. Dr. Nazira Salih Muhammed	Special Education	University of Sulaimani
Asst. Prof. Bestoon Arif Aziz	Comparative Literature	University of Sulaimani

APPENDIX E: THE KURDISH VERSION OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

خوێندکاری بەڕێز،

ئەم ڕاپرسییە بە مەبەستی لێکۆڵینەوە لە وتنەوە و فێربوونی ئینگلیزی لە پەیمانگاکەت دانراوە. تکایە وەڵامی هەموو بڕگەکان بدەرەوە، لە ڕێی هەڵبژاردنی تەنها یەک بژاردەوە. وەڵامەکەت بە نهێنی پارێزراو دەبێت و تەنها بۆ مەبەستی توێژینەوە بەکاردێ. سوپاس بۆ هاوکارییت.
توێژەران

ژ	بڕگەکان	زۆر ماوتر	ماوتر	مامناوەند	کەم	زۆر کەم
١	لە پەیمانگاکەمدا، چەندین کێشەی دەنگ رووبەرووی خوێندکارانی نابیست یان کەمبیست دەبنەوە.					
٢	ژینگەی پۆل گونجاوە بۆ فێربوونی زمانی ئینگلیزی.					
٣	لە کاتی فێربوونی زمانی ئینگلیزی، بێزاردەم.					
٤	ئامێر و کەرەستەی دەنگی هەیە، کە دەتوانین بە هۆیانەوە گۆڕکردنی دروستی دەنگ و وشەکان بیستین.					
٥	لە پەیمانگاکەمدا، ئاسانکاری دەبینکراوە تا بتوانم بەکاریانبێنم بۆ باشترکردنی ئینگلیزییەکەم.					
٦	لەکاتی هەڵسەنگاندنەکاندا، مامۆستا رەچاوی باردۆخی تایبەتم دەکات.					
٧	دەشێت خوێندکارانی خاوەنپێداویستی تایبەت لە مامۆستا تێنەگەن، بەهۆی جوڵەی لێو یان کەمبوونەوەی توانای بیستن.					
٨	مامۆستا زۆرتر زمانی دایک بەکاردەهێنێت لە ناو پۆڵدا.					
٩	لە ناوەوە و دەرەوەی پۆڵ، مامۆستا هاندەدات.					
١٠	هەمیشە رافەکەریک(کەسیک)-ی گونجاو هەیە لە پۆڵدا، کە وانەکە بەشێوەیەکی کاریگەر دەگەیەنێت بە خوێندکار بە زمانی خۆیان.					
١١	لە کاتی فێربوندا، مامۆستا چارەی هەموو ئاستەنگکییەکان دەکات.					
١٢	مامۆستا راهێنانەکانی خوێندنەوە پشتگوێ دەخات.					
١٣	لە ناوەوە و دەرەوەی پۆڵ، بۆ گەشەسەندن و بەرەوپێشچوونی زمانی ئینگلیزی، خوێندکاران پێویستیان بە چەند چالاکییەکی چێژبەخش هەیە					
١٤	مامۆستا هەموو شتێکیان بۆ رووندەکاتەوە و زۆر ئارام و لەسەرخۆیە لەگەڵیان.					
١٥	دایک و باوکم هاندەرمن لە فێربوونی زمانی ئینگلیزی.					
١٦	بڕوابەخۆنەبوونی خوێندکارانی خاوەنپێداویستی تایبەت یەکێکە لەو کێشانەی رووبەرووی خوێندکاران دەبێتەوە لەکاتی فێربووندا.					
١٧	زۆرینەی خوێندکاران حەز بە فێربوونی زمانی دووەم دەکەن.					
١٨	بەرنامەی خوێندن (مەنهەج)ی ئێستا قورسە بۆ خوێندکارانی خاوەنپێداویستی تایبەت.					
١٩	ماوەی وانەی زمانی ئینگلیزی زۆرە.					