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THE EXPERIENCES OF ESL LECTURERS IN TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:

The function and responsibilities of language lecturers have emerged as a fundamental topic in language teaching and learning. In addition to educating students, ESL lecturers must also adapt to the ongoing changes in the curriculum and universities' legislation, particularly the principles of inclusive education in Malaysia. With the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), Malaysia is dedicated to fostering inclusive education and enhancing equitable access throughout its educational system including the focus group of students with disabilities. Consequently, the Ministry of Education has introduced the 'Four Special Routes' in 2019, resulting in Malaysian institutions increasingly admitting disabled students into their mainstream educational programs. This required collaboration among lecturers, faculty members, and administrative staff to establish a system that could fully support students with disabilities. Adjustments must be made to accommodate students, including the facilities, teaching and learning methods, and classroom conditions. Nonetheless, ESL lecturers continue to encounter difficulties in managing classrooms with disabled students. This qualitative study employs a transcendental phenomenological approach to investigate the authentic lived experiences of three ESL lecturers at universities when teaching students with disabilities. The findings indicate several issues in ESL classrooms, including challenges in teaching, language assessment, emotions, and unsupportive systems. This has ultimately impacted the standard of the ESL lecturers' performance and instruction and eventually affecting the

teaching and learning quality in ESL classrooms. This study also collects recommendations from ESL lecturers to address the issues.

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to the practice of ensuring equal access to education and learning opportunity for students with disabilities, by accommodating their diverse needs within mainstream educational settings (Arakelyan, 2025). It has become a growing concern in higher education institutions worldwide, aligning with global frameworks emphasize the right of all individuals including those with disabilities to access inclusive education. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) affirms this right at all levels without discrimination. Similarly, UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) advocates for education systems that embrace and accommodate learners regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, or linguistic differences. Despite these, many ESL lecturers continue to face significant challenges when teaching students with disabilities. Numerous studies have shown that they extend beyond language barriers and often include insufficient professional training in special education, limited access to appropriate teaching resources or individualized instruction, and traditional assessment methods that fail to accommodate the needs of disabled students (Ortiz, 2001; Svendby, 2020; Young, 2024; Zahra et al., 2022).

Students with disabilities often face multiple challenges. Thus access to physical spaces, digital materials, and teaching resources is significantly crucial (Kumar, 2025). For those blinds, they need tactile materials such as Braille books, embossed diagrams, and textured object that allow them to read and understand in ways similar to how sighted students use their vision. Deaf students often depend on sign language interpreters to fully understand lessons, and many classrooms are not equipped with suitable audiovisual aids that can support their learning. While autistic students may need structured routine and environment fitted to their sensory sensitivities to remain focused and engaged. Thus, tailored communication strategies are important to help them understand instructions and interact with others. Meanwhile, students with physical disabilities, such as those who are wheelchair-bound require barrier-free facilities including ramps, wide pathways, and adaptive seating arrangements in classroom to allow easy movement and participation. These examples illustrate the need for inclusive strategies and individualised support to enable equitable learning experiences.

This study aims to explore the lived experience of ESL lecturers who have taught students with disabilities in Malaysian higher education institutions. Specifically, it involves three ESL lecturers who have experience teaching students with different types of disabilities. The first lecturer taught the autistic student; the second one worked with a blind student; the third one taught a deaf student with a category 3 hearing impairment, and mentally disabled students. By focusing on their personal narratives, this study seeks to discover the emotional burdens, coping mechanisms, and pedagogical adaptations these educators employ in inclusive ESL classroom.

Although inclusive education policies exist, studies reveal that only a small percentage of higher education institutions have fully implemented inclusive practices in language teaching. Globally, as of 2020, only a small fraction (10%) of countries had legislation promoting complete educational inclusion and some countries still lack systems for gathering, reporting, and utilizing data concerning those left behind (World Bank, 2025). A systematic review indicates that many lecturers in higher education institutions often face internal challenges, such as a lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and confidence, which impede the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Korthals, Willemse, Goei, & Ehren, 2024).

In Malaysia, the implementation of inclusive education continues to face notable challenges despite clear policy goals. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025) set a target for 75% of students with special educational needs (SEN) to be included in mainstream education by 2025 (Tuan Sek & Hui Min, 2024). However, by 2019, only 50.5% of SEN students were enrolled in inclusive programs, revealing a considerable gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes. In the context of higher education, public universities are encouraged to provide inclusive environments through the establishment of Disability Support Offices. Nevertheless, lecturers often encounter obstacles such as limited training in special education, low awareness of relevant disability laws, and a shortage of appropriate teaching materials or assistive technologies (Zaki & Ismail, 2021). Additionally, although some institutions have set up welfare units to support students with special needs, these units typically cater to the general student population, thereby reducing the effectiveness of targeted support. This highlights the urgent need for specialized services and infrastructure that can fully address the diverse needs of students with disabilities in Malaysian universities.

Adopting a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study provides deep insights into the emotional and pedagogical experiences of ESL lecturers. The findings contribute to the literature on inclusive higher education by contextualizing the emotional labour and adaptive strategies used by language educators. Other than that, it is also important that this study could raise the awareness and understanding among the administrators and decision-makers about the professional struggles and emotional burdens experienced by ESL lecturers teaching students with disabilities. Thus, insights from this study can inform policy decisions aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, such as the development of targeted training programs for lecturers and the enhancement of institutional support structures.

Literature Review
This section explores the lived experiences of ESL educators when teaching students with disabilities. Key concepts central to this include ESL instruction, inclusive teaching, disability support, and institutional teaching practices. The review is organized thematically around several key areas: professional identity and role of ESL lecturers, inclusive teaching strategies, and emotional and professional challenges.

Professional Identity and Role
Professional identity refers to an individual's self-concept and sense of belonging to a professional community, shaped by both personal beliefs and external perceptions. The identity of ESL lecturers is built based on how they are perceived by colleagues, which also influences their professional decision making (Farrell, 2017 as stated in Wong, 2022). In inclusive educational contexts, this identity is often tested and reshaped, particularly when lecturers are required to teach students with diverse disabilities.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) offers a useful lens to understand this dynamic. According to this theory, individuals develop self-efficacy, the belief in one's capability to succeed in specific tasks through observational learning, social persuasion, and mastery experiences. ESL lecturers' motivation and confidence in adapting their teaching for students with disabilities are directly influenced by their perceived self-efficacy. Chen, Zhong, Luo, and Lu (2020) affirm that lecturers' motivation and interest in mastering special education knowledge and skills are determined by how they negotiate their identity in complex, inclusive context which help them to accomplish academic success, experience a sense of excitement, and sustain enthusiasm in their teaching roles.

In addition, Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) provides a broader socio-cultural framework to analyse how professional identity developed within institutional systems. ESL lecturers function within complex activity systems that include mediating tool (training, teaching tools), rules (institutional policies), communities (peers and administrator), and division of labour (responsibility sharing). They may experience role confusion, professional isolation, and emotional stress if these systems are misaligned. This was echoed in Savic and Prosic-Santovac (2017) study, which found that the most contributing factors influencing primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of special need students into the mainstream schools appeared to be age, gender, teaching self-efficacy and training. Male teachers, teachers aged 55 years and above, and teachers with low-levels of self-efficacy in their teaching skills had more negative attitude towards inclusive education. Teachers displayed less positive attitude towards inclusion when the students' disabilities are more severe and with those with intellectual, learning and behavioural disabilities. It is also reported that teachers were more comfortable to deal with the disabled students if they felt more competent.

Across these studies, the teachers reported feelings marginalized, ambiguous of the roles and responsibilities, and lack of voice in decision making especially in inclusive education. Therefore, both Social Cognitive Theory and Activity Theory underline the critical importance of institutional backing and professional autonomy in strengthening ESL lecturers' identity and competence in inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive Teaching Strategies:
Inclusive teaching strategies for ESL students with disabilities are gaining significant attention due to growing awareness there is a linguistic diversity in the classroom and the need to provide an equitable access to learning experiences for all students particularly for individuals from marginalized groups. There are two aspects to explore, which are pedagogical adaptation and practical tools, and fair, inclusive language assessment practices.

One theoretical framework that aligns with these goals is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL promotes flexible instructional methods that provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to accommodate the varied learning needs of all students. This concept is especially important for ESL lecturers, who must create instruction that addresses both language proficiency and disability-related needs. The UDL approach encourages the use of culturally and linguistically responsive strategies, including the use of visual aids, multimedia information, and varied activities that enable students to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways.

Piazza, Rao, and Protacio (2015) identify five instructional practices that teachers can adapt to support the needs of students with disabilities. First, promoting dialogue and collaboration that can help develop comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking through shared learning. Second, incorporating visual and multimedia representations visually for students with learning disabilities to better comprehend text. Third, explicit instruction ensures that all students, especially those from marginalized groups, receive clear and direct access to essential knowledge and skills needed for academic and social success. Fourth, inquiry-based learning engages students through contextualized, motivating content. In addition to all strategies, the emphasis is on adaptability to learners' difference which is valuable for ESL lecturers to cater the unique needs of students with disabilities.

Approaches that support language instruction are particularly helpful for students with disabilities (García & Tyler, 2010). One specific strategy that aligns with the theory is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), an approach that helps learning more meaningful for students with disabilities. It means using students' cultural knowledge, past experiences, and ways of learning to create lessons that connect with them and improve their learning (Gay, 2002). Implementing CRT requires teachers to shift their focus from viewing students through their limitations to focusing on the students' strengths. This approach is particularly important for students who are struggling not only with language barriers but also with learning difficulties. Adapting to their life background will boost the students' confidence, makes learning more effective

Students with disabilities are expected to be served in the least restrictive environment. They must have meaningful access similar to those students without disabilities, where possible (Liu, Ward, Thurlow, & Christensen, 2017). The fact that each student's disability affects their second language learning in different ways, their learning and assessment needs can be very unique. To make sure assessment results are accurate and useful, teachers need to consider how disability and language development are connected when evaluating students (Liu & Barrera & Shyyan et al. as cited in Liu et al., 2017). A shift from one-size-fits-all to differentiated, culturally informed, and accessible pedagogies are essentially important in inclusive education. It is not just about the tools but transformation of mindset

Improving achievement outcomes of students is crucial to maintain the success of educating them to high standard. Thus, it is the role of education agencies and policy makers to improve test performance, designing and implementing comprehensive and accessible assessment policies that address the specific needs of students with disabilities. Modifying test formats is recommended to accommodate the students' needs. This can be done by reading questions to the students, allowing extra time, and performance-based tasks rather than the existing practice.

Emotional and Professional Challenges
ESL lecturers working in inclusive university setting often face range of emotional and professional challenges when teaching students with disabilities which certainly demands linguistic and special needs instruction. This often causes emotional stress such as burnout, fatigue and heightened anxiety among them. Inclusion work becomes emotionally taxing when support from institution is fragmented, recognition and resources are lacking.

Critical Pedagogy as proposed by Paulo Freire (2000), offers a powerful lens through which to understand these struggles. It emphasizes education as a tool for social transformation and urges educators to recognize and challenge oppressive systems. Lecturers frequently have to deal with institutional policies that are not well-suited to accommodate a diverse learners. When it comes to inclusive ESL instruction, it gives ESL teachers the confidence to see themselves as inclusionary agents in addition to teachers, actively tackling structural obstacles to fair education. Therefore, maintaining inclusive behaviours requires emotional resilience and inner values.

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to regain psychological strength and emotional stability when confronted with challenging environment (Gu & Day, 2013). It has become a critical idea in understanding how teachers cope with the demands of teaching, particularly in high-stress environments such as when teaching students with disabilities (Downing, 2017). The transition into inclusive teaching is shaped not only by formal training but also by the level of collegial collaboration available in the institution (Wong, 2022).

Supportive environment helps a stronger sense of professional identity and ease the emotional burden carried by those teachers in the demanding teaching circumstances. According to Downing (2017), special education teachers are less likely to quit the field if they have resilience attribute. This attribute allows them to be more optimistic in managing feelings, stress and challenges in the workplace. Teachers' capacity to be resilient in adverse circumstances can be nurtured by the intellectual, social, and organisational environment. Thus, workplace conditions and institutional support enable ESL lecturers to stay and progress in their careers.

The intensity and complexity of the responsibilities and conditions of special education, thus demanding more supports from the institutions. Also findings from the same study, special education teachers identified three categories of people who have a strong influence on their resilience, wellness and teaching performance. These people are their students, their administrators, and their colleagues. collegial collaborations play a crucial role in new teacher identity, as well as their transition and continued development.

Objectives
This study intends to explore the experiences of ESL lecturers in teaching students with disabilities at university. This helps to understand the challenges and suggestions from the perspectives of language lecturers.

Methodology
This study utilises a qualitative methodology grounded in transcendental phenomenological research, following the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. This study examines the transcendental experiences of ESL lecturers teaching students with different disabilities at universities through semi-structured interviews. A thorough semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants across two semesters. They were additionally instructed to provide journal entries chronicling their experiences. These two instruments provide extensive data collection grounded in genuine experiences. The principal objective of this study is to investigate the experiences of these language lecturers. The data was examined from the interviews and journals utilising Atlas.ti 24 software. The participants were selected from three distinct colleges in Malaysia, each having experience in instructing diverse categories of students with

impairments. The demographic characteristics of the participants are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Participant	Year of teaching experiences	Category of SWD taught	Skills taught in ESL classroom	Instrument
A	12 years	Learning disability (Autism)	Speaking and listening	Interviews & Journal Entries
B	10 years	Visual disability (Total Blind)	Academic Writing	Interviews & Journal Entries
C	4 years	Hearing and mental disabilities	Speaking and presentation	Interviews & Journal Entries

Table 1: Demographic and Participants' Experiences

Data Analysis

In transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher must not project their subjectivity throughout the whole study (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Therefore, the research questions must be answered thoroughly from the viewpoint of participants with no interference from the researcher's preconception (Larkin & Adu, 2022). To maintain the epoche or bracketing as the core component of transcendental phenomenology, this study adapted Moustakas' (1994) 8 steps of data analysis as illustrated in Figure 1. This allows researchers to bracket personal subjectivity by curbing the predisposition and prejudgement in data analysis. These steps are chosen for their systematic ways of exploring a phenomenon through in-depth analysis without involving researcher's personal evaluation. The analytical procedures were later continued by concentrating on the 'what' (the textural) and 'how' (the structural) of the depicted events. The textural forms focus on what had happened to the participants or what was the experience. The structural forms depicted how the experiences happened. These two constructions were later synthesis to produce the essence of lived experiences.
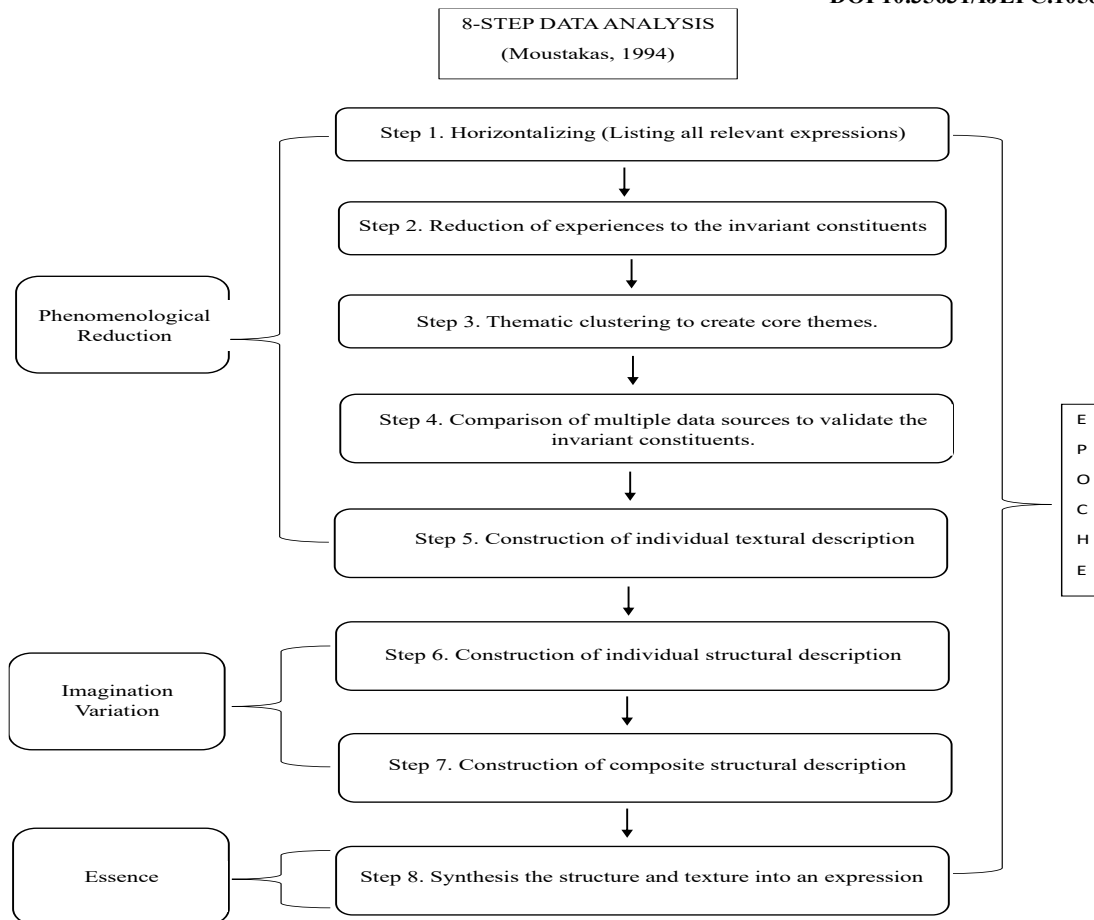
Figure 1: The 8-Step Transcendental Phenomenology Data Analysis (Moustakas, 1994)

Findings

Participant A (PA)

Textural Description

Teaching	*"I tried many materials…allow cool down times"*
Assessment	*"I adjusted the speaking assessment myself"*
Emotion/Knowledge	*"I have no knowledge how to deal with students with autism". "I was panicking a bit"*
University System	*"The admin never told me…the head of department too…I was in the dark"*
Suggestions	*"The university has to give some training to us"*

Structural Description

Participant A (PA) was a senior female lecturer with 12 years of experience in teaching English at a public university in Malaysia. The interview and journal entries indicated that PA continues to encounter difficulties in instructing students with impairments, even with her considerable teaching experience. During the two semesters, PA had two students with disabilities in her class, specifically categorised as having hearing impairments and learning problems (autism).

At the semester's commencement, PA acknowledged that she had never been made aware of any students with disabilities in her class. She was responsible for teaching proficiency skills in listening, speaking and writing in the two semesters. Nonetheless, the learning difficulties remained unrecognised until the third week of the semester.

Instructing autistic student proved to be rather arduous for her due to her lack of knowledge regarding specialised methodologies or strategies. However, the issue arose when the student with learning impairments (autism) struggled to integrate with their peers. besides having short attention span in class, group activities were also challenging due to the student with disabilities' (SWD) inadequate communication skills with other group members.

> *"I did not know that I have an autistic student… I was quite surprised… the student with autism could not work well with the others… at first, I did not know anything about the disabilities… I read on my own to find out how to approach the student, as none of my colleagues have any experiences teaching autistic students."*

Throughout lessons, the student with disabilities frequently exhibited distraction and provided irrelevant remarks and comments, resulting in discomfort for others. PA often had to mediate the difficult situations and sought to elucidate the circumstances to all parties concerned. At that moment, PA was finally understanding that the SWD necessitated specific conditions to concentrate in class. She ultimately succeeded in limiting her speech lessons to no more than 20 minutes. PA ultimately employed many strategies to address the demands of SWD, including offering additional teaching alternatives and materials, such as spoken lessons, movies, demonstrations with hand gestures, and multiple 'cool down' periods for her students.

> *" In week 3, I started to create new materials, as he (SWD) would usually get distracted in the middle of the lesson… he would give remarks that made others feel awkward… but it's not his fault… I tried explaining this to the rest. Some understand, but some don't... They would just ignore him. I don't think this is right either."*

PA never regarded it as a hindrance. She, however, conveyed regret for her failure to accommodate the SWD. All other students declined to participate in the speaking assessment, leading to the SWD taking the speaking test separately. Due to his significant social skill shortcomings, PA made adjustments by including students from another class as group members (who were not evaluated) and allowed the SWD more preparation time prior to the test. The university however, reprimanded her and gave a warning for failing to comply with the examination standards. PA was disheartened by the situation, asserting that no one was willing to offer her a conclusive answer on how to resolve the matter. Ultimately, PA was tasked with independently implementing modifications in her teaching.

> *"I was really frustrated... They kept on saying, Wait… When I did the assessment, they reprimanded me for not following the rules… I thought I was making an adjustment… or else, he would not get any marks… so which adjustment is accepted?"*

Due to this, PA decided to just follow the assessment requirement for the later tests. Though she herself felt that it was unfair for the autistic students (due to being left by his group member), she tried her best to provide additional exercises and speaking practices for the SWD. Since she could not make any adjustment with the test, she opted for polishing the SWD's speaking skills by teaching him techniques in discussion and content elaboration.

> *" I tried my best... I could not do anything with the test… I was warned once, I don't want to get the second warning…I just train him alone…how to agree and disagree*

during discussion… having extra consultation for him. He did well in speaking activities with others besides his own classmates."

PA sincerely wished that university would exhibit more tolerance to modifications and adaptations to assist students with disabilities. She perceived the university's policy as ambiguous, allowing excessive interpretation which could subsequently dismiss by the institution. She anticipated specialised training for language lecturers, particularly with the modification of assessments for students with disabilities. Establishing criteria is crucial, as ESL subjects encompass competency areas that directly influence the performance of students with disabilities.

> *"Language lecturers need guidance, and it has to come from the university. We can do the research on our own, but who can guarantee that it is the right one? We are teaching the skills… When it comes to syllabus and assessment adjustment, there should be formal guidance and guidelines."*

Participant B (PB)

Textural Description

Teaching	*' I read every word in the slides'*
Assessment	*'Let him submit the voice recording'*
Emotion/Knowledge	*'I don't know how to read braille'. 'I feel bad'*
University System	*'Totally unsupportive…no one wants to tell me anything'*
Suggestions	*'All parties need to work together…don't left the language lecturers alone'*

Structural Description

Participant B (PB) had a decade of experience as an ESL lecturer at a public university. She had experience instructing students with physical and visual disabilities. While she encountered few issues with physically challenged students, her most significant hurdle throughout her ten years of teaching arose when she was assigned a class with a student who was completely blind. At the commencement of the semester, she was not notified that a visually disabled student would be enrolling in her ESL course. Therefore, she was startled to receive the student in her class. PB acknowledged a lack of prior knowledge on the existence of a visually disabled student in her class, resulting in no preparation whatsoever. Later, she expressed her disappointment of having to navigate the lesson independently, devoid of any help or clarification from her department.

In class, PB encountered difficulties in adapting to the instructional methods, particularly regarding her teaching approach and resources. While conducting an academic writing class, it presented a significant challenge to instruct a blind student among a group of non-disabled peers. During the initial adjustment period of three weeks, she was uncertain about how to effectively teach a blind student. She consulted her department coordinator and resource person regarding the specific code, but unfortunately, there was no success.

> *" I ask them (coordinator and resource person)… The feedback that I got was, 'try your best…you are the chosen one…' it was so frustrating for me not being able to do anything. I was clueless… how to teach a blind student academic writing?'*

Despite the scarcity of resources and materials, PB tried to adapt to the situation by vocally explaining all the materials she had prepared. She tried reading every word in her notes and modulated her voice to ensure her visually disabled student could accurately record the lecture. The materials for the class, specifically designed for blind students (printed materials in Braille), were only available in the fourth week of the semester. Consequently, she continued to consult with the SWD to ensure that he comprehended the lesson. Her course encompassed the requirement of submitting an outline and drafts for writing and eventually writing a full essay.

> *"It was so frustrating for me not to be able to do much. The student only receives the braille material in week 4. Even after that, I would still have to explain to him everything that I put in the slides… It was quite challenging since the material (braille) was an outdated version. I have added more materials in my class but sadly could not share them with him (SWD).*

Although she considered teaching to be challenging, the evaluation in class posed a distinct difficulty that left her feeling entirely powerless. The core syllabus for the class focused on academic writing, necessitating that students engage both individually and collaboratively to complete a formative assessment of their writing skills. The evaluation consisted of an individual essay submission and a collaborative writing project conducted in pairs. PB encountered challenges with the individual submission due to the essay being presented in braille. As she was unable to read it, she decided to request that the SWD provide the voice recording of the essay. During this event, PB did not obtain any assistance from her faculty.

> *"I was in a very stressful condition throughout the semester…I don't know what to do and no one knows anything when asked. I was left to fend for myself…I don't know whether I am doing the right thing…I am ready to learn but no one tells me anything".*

PB communicated her dissatisfaction with the academics and the university management. Despite her familiarity with the university's disability policy, she never considered that she was confronting the 'war' alone, devoid of references and guidance. She found it unjust that she received no guidance regarding the appropriate approach to support the blind student as she had not been trained or provided with any information. It was unjust to both her and the SWD in her class. While she acknowledged that all students with disabilities deserved equal educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers, she believed it was unreasonable to place the weight on language lecturers to implement adaptations in the ESL classroom without any support or assistance. Ultimately, both SWD and she experienced frustration with the system.

> *"Being unprepared is the core of my problem… but I was not trained nor guided… I am willing to learn, but no course was ever offered… I felt bad for my student. This semester has made me feel most helpless in my 10 years of teaching."*

In the context of inclusive education, PB firmly recommended that all stakeholders, including university administration, the student affairs department, faculty, and lecturers, collaborate effectively. She regarded herself as the frontline to directly deal with SWD and thus deserved to be armed with knowledge on how to handle different types of disabled students in the future. She firmly contended that language instructors must not to be devoid of guidance, particularly about the disabilities that directly influence specific proficiency skills, given that the curriculum and evaluation were significantly dependent on students' performance in such skills. PB contended that the university was inadequately prepared to address the special requirements of SWD in the classroom.

"If the university wants to accept more SWD, there should be more preparation... I think the focus in most universities in Malaysia is just on facilities but not much in terms of teaching approach… On the surface, it looks like we are there. But the reality is, we are not ready."

Participant C (PC)

Textural Description

Teaching	*'Speak louder and never turn my back while speaking'*
Assessment	*'Adjust the sitting arrangement for speaking'* *'Let her present without audience'*
Emotion/Knowledge	*'I know a little bit on how to handle SWD'*
University System	*'I was not informed about the SWD presence in class* *'the policy is very clear but not much guidance'*
Suggestions	*' there must be formal guidelines'*

Structural Description

Participant C (PC) was designated to instruct two students with disabilities related to hearing and mental disabilities. She stated that having two students with disabilities in her class presented particular challenges to her teaching. Like the prior participants in this study, PC was likewise unaware of the existence of the two SWD in her class. PC successfully discovered the SWD status for her hearing disabled student in week 8. Consequently, she was unable to make significant adjustments for the student. Nevertheless, PC attempted to modify her teaching by restricting her movement in the classroom and enhancing the clarity and volume of her voice. Due to the student's unilateral hearing impairment, PC positioned herself at the centre of the classroom to minimise echo and facilitate lip-reading for her student. Although markedly apart from her typical pedagogical approach, PC worked to address the demands of the SWD within the remaining six weeks. She had considerable frustration for not having been informed sooner and felt remorseful towards the SWD.

"I found out about the student in week 8… quite late since I had covered most lessons. During the remaining 6 weeks, I asked him what he needs and tried to adjust… I limit my movement since he (SWD) has to turn his head to follow my voice… I felt guilty."

PC have some information regarding the management of SWD in the classroom. Based on her experiences from the previous semester, her university consistently urged all lecturers to remain alert regarding the SWD. Despite being unaware of their existence in her class, PC effectively addressed the various needs of both hearing and mentally disabled students. She promptly modifies her class to accommodate the hearing-impaired student, particularly in the evaluation, by rearranging the seating for the speaking test and restricting group size to three students. She additionally arranged an alternative venue for the hearing assessment by performing it in a computer lab with a better-quality audio system.

"I asked him what he wanted; I had to make sure… I grouped him with only three students so that the turn-taking would not be too complex… He took the listening test in the computer lab since the speaker there is clearer and louder."

PC discovered her student's mental health issues during an oral presentation in week 5. Her student was diagnosed with depressive and severe anxiety disorders. During the presentation, the SWD experienced an anxiety attack and was unable to proceed. PC subsequently

rescheduled the presentation, permitting the SWD to present alone in the classroom, as she would have anxiety in the presence of a larger crowd.

> *"She suddenly trembled and had trouble breathing…I immediately stop the presentation and let her calm down (taking meds and resting) … It was quite chaotic… I had some experiences and knowledge, so I allowed her to present alone… My colleagues usually help me to accommodate the SWD."*

PC was fortunate as her colleagues frequently engage in discussions regarding the strategies for managing the SWD. Consequently, upon facing such a circumstance, PC was capable of implementing modifications and providing support to the SWD. Although the institution did not offer explicit instructions, the majority of language lecturers in her department periodically conducted sharing sessions to disseminate information regarding Universal Design for Learning (UDL). She also stated that the policy for students with impairments was adequately disseminated, however the majority of lecturers obtained information from the sharing sessions.

> *"The language lecturers in my department will share their experiences and knowledge during meetings and sharing sessions…our own initiative. That's why most of us know what to do… The admin does not provide much guidance. We do it on our own."*

Given the circumstances at her university, PC firmly supported for the establishment of uniform guidelines for lecturers to prevent inconsistencies in the administration of assessments and tests. The university should notify the presence of students with disabilities prior to the beginning of the semester to provide adequate preparation of materials and instruction.

Essence Of Experiences

From the textural and structural description above, an essence of the ESL lecturers' experiences in teaching students with disabilities is represented in the diagram below.
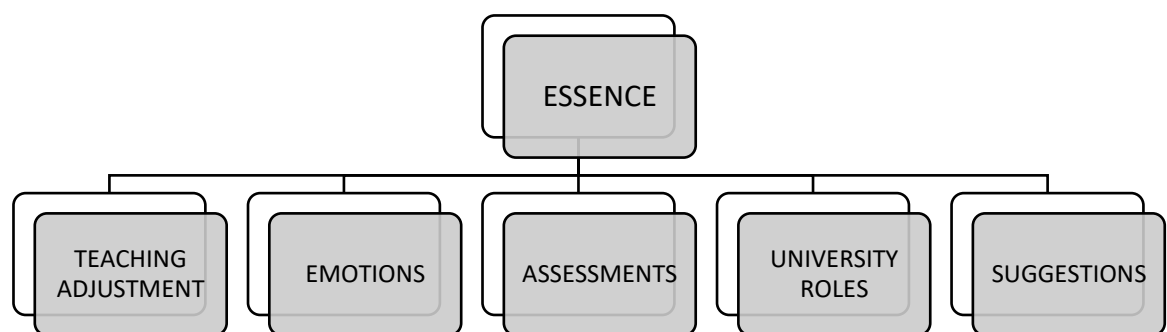

Figure 2: The Essence of ESL Lecturers' Experiences

Discussion

The essence of ESL educators' experiences at Malaysian universities comprises five key elements. All three participants were seen to use various modifications to accommodate the requirements of students with disabilities (SWD) in their classroom. This approach include modifying instructional methods and providing a diverse array of materials deemed appropriate for the students. The participants primarily attempted to make modifications and support the students despite lacking adequate knowledge and direction from the universities. Most adjustments were made based on their general understanding and prior experiences.

Cheatham and Barnett (2016) suggested that modifications in materials and instruction facilitate enhanced learning for students with disabilities; hence, all participants have adapted their teaching to accommodate the requirements of certain disabilities. PA worked to modify her instruction for autistic student by prioritising social and communication skills, while PB altered her teaching approach and adapted assignments and assessments for the blind student. PC had effectively facilitated speaking tests for students with hearing and mental disabilities. This indicates that adapted inclusive instruction was modified to accommodate the diverse requirements of students with disabilities. Scott et al. (2015) indicated that students with disabilities necessitate a supportive environment tailored to various disabilities; it was observed that the three ESL lecturers inadvertently created such conditions for their students, albeit without adequate guidance and understanding. They inadvertently adopted culturally responsive teaching (CRT) to optimise the potential of students with disabilities (SWD), as suggested by Gay (2010). This also demonstrates their significant devotion and ingenuity as language instructors in their efforts to provide the best for students with disabilities, despite minimal support from the universities. Considering their academic backgrounds, these language lecturers were capable of effectively adapting to Universal Design for Learning, albeit perhaps subconsciously.

Nonetheless, their emotional experiences in managing the SWD should not be underestimated. All three ESL teachers in this study expressed feeling devastated, frustrated, and guilty for, firstly, discovering the SWD condition later, and secondly, being uncertain about their course of action. The emotional strain and frustration experienced by lecturers and teachers instructing students with disabilities directly impact their teaching efficacy and may last for an extended duration. The presence of students with disabilities in the classroom necessitates significant mental preparation, and the inability to manage the associated stress may adversely affect the lecturer's emotional well-being. The finding predominantly indicated a significant feeling of frustration among the language lecturers due to their limited capacity to provide assistance. The sentiment of helplessness was particularly evident for PA and PB which may be related to specific aspects of readiness. Valle-Florez et al. (2021) indicated that a lecturer's willingness and readiness to instruct students with disabilities are crucial, as mental preparation does not occur immediately. Wong (2022) asserts that institutions have to assist instructors in cultivating their mental well-being. Consequently, discovering the presence of students with disabilities in their class halfway through the semester has inadvertently diminished their teaching passion and resulted in an unpleasant experience throughout the semester.

An additional crucial aspect to emphasise is the university's responsibility to offer support to language instructors. ESL lessons encompass linguistic skills that directly assess students' competency. Adjustments in assessments are essential for disabled students with restricted capacity to demonstrate their proficiency. All participants were noted to receive no guidance. There was no training, workshops, or briefings conducted to support the language lecturers, leaving them largely independent. The other two participants lacked any assistance or information, in contrast to PC, who possessed some knowledge from collaborative sessions with her colleagues. Hazlin Falina Rosli, Safura Ahmad Sabri, and Nurfikhriah Takril (2022) emphasised the importance of lecturers in enhancing the learning experience by accommodating the specific needs of impaired students, including adapting their instructional approaches. Nevertheless, PA claimed that she received warnings following the implementation of the change. This raises the question of who or whose entity is accountable for gatekeeping and ensuring the appropriate adjustments and accommodations for the SWD.

Most language instructors, as well as the institution, are largely oblivious to the necessary accommodations for different disabilities. If unskilled ESL lecturers are permitted to make decisions, Malaysian universities will undoubtedly experience an increase in unwarranted modifications and concessions in educating students with disabilities. This specific issue has created a gap in the implementation of disability policies at the majority of universities in Malaysia.

The suggestions that came from all participants mostly focused on actions their particular universities may do to alleviate the challenges faced by ESL lecturers when teaching students with disabilities. The participants' collective request for their universities to offer training for ESL lecturers indicates that these lecturers are unsure about the exact ways to address challenges in classrooms with SWD. Nur Ain Nabisya Azmi, Wan Arnidawati Wan Abdullah, and Asmidawati Ashari (2021) assert that disability policies must be effectively implemented to support not only students with disabilities but also their lecturers. Nevertheless, the majority of universities have not yet established adequate or current guidelines for all stakeholders involved with SWD. All participants emphatically called for the development of a syllabus and assessment standards to support them.

Conclusion

This study presents the lived experiences of ESL lecturers derived from a phenomenological analysis of their teaching practices with students who have disabilities in Malaysian universities. The essence of experiences was found to revolve around teaching adjustment, emotions, assessments, university roles, and suggestions. In terms of the contribution to a teaching practice, this study presented new strategies and adaptations to teach disabled students based on the ESL lecturers' experiences. This is particularly essential as a reference while dealing with autistic, visual, mental and hearing disabilities students in ESL classrooms. It should also be noted that building mentoring systems or emotional resilience training for lecturers is of utmost importance to support their emotional labour, and reforming assessment may inspire more inclusive and accessible forms of language assessments suitable for students with disabilities. This study also presents some examples to adjust with the language assessments based on the different types of disabilities. However, the findings are also limited to only four types of disabilities with three ESL lecturers, thus further research should be conducted to cover more extensive scope of disabilities.

The complexity of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities requires that effective communication and collaboration across lecturers and institutions be a priority. It may be concluded that despite the efforts of Malaysian universities to attain inclusive education and advance the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, numerous concerns must be adequately addressed, beginning with the lecturers in the classroom. Most institutions have undoubtedly made substantial efforts to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Nonetheless, the extent of coverage in classroom adjustments remains very basic about teaching and learning. Malaysian universities are predominantly equipped with policies; however, there is a deficiency in the protection and assurance for their implementation.

Acknowledgement

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