

Strengthening Curriculum Management Capacity for Inclusive Non-Formal Education: A Qualitative Study of Collaborative Mentoring and Teacher Learning in SKB Kabupaten Malang

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Abstract

This study explores how collaborative mentoring enhances curriculum management capacity and teacher learning for inclusive education within non-formal settings. Employing an intrinsic qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis at SKB Kabupaten Malang, Indonesia. Thematic analysis revealed key challenges in conceptualizing inclusive curricula, the transformational role of collaborative mentoring, supporting and inhibiting factors, and changes in teaching practices. Collaborative mentoring fostered reflective dialogue and practical adaptation of learning materials, shifting educators from procedural compliance to responsive inclusive practices. The findings highlight that sustainable capacity building requires not only policy but also consistent mentoring, leadership support, and contextually relevant pedagogical models. This study contributes to the limited literature on inclusive curriculum leadership in community-based non-formal education

1. Introduction

Although the issue of inclusion has been widely discussed in formal education contexts, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding how inclusive practices can be effectively implemented in non-formal education institutions, particularly in developing countries. Previous research has largely focused on individualized learning strategies, whereas aspects of curriculum management especially curriculum leadership in designing and adapting inclusive instruction have received insufficient attention. Additionally, professional development mechanisms such as collaborative mentoring remain underexplored in learning communities like SKB, which are characterized by flexibility, limited resources, and diverse learners.

This study aims to explore how collaborative mentoring practices can strengthen curriculum management capacity in support of inclusive education within non-formal institutions. The primary focus is to uncover the experiences of teachers and curriculum managers throughout the mentoring process, identify enablers and barriers to collaborative mentoring implementation, and describe the resulting changes in instructional practices. The study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of inclusive capacity-building models in the realm of non-formal education.

Inclusive education is a global priority within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, emphasizing equitable and quality education for all. While discussions of inclusive education typically center on formal schools, its relevance in non-formal contexts such as Indonesia's Paket A program is increasingly recognized. This program serves marginalized learners due to poverty, disability, or geographic isolation. However, inclusive curriculum management in this context remains underexplored and under-supported.

Non-formal institutions like Sanggar Kegiatan Belajar (SKB) face systemic challenges: limited resources, unclear guidelines, and minimal professional development. Educators are expected to implement adaptive curricula without adequate institutional support. Despite growing interest in inclusive pedagogy, few studies have examined how curriculum leadership is developed in community-based education, particularly through collaborative mentoring. This study aims to fill

that gap by investigating how collaborative mentoring supports inclusive curriculum management at SKB Kabupaten Malang. It also offers meaningful scholarly contributions in teacher education and professional development, especially in under-researched areas concerning the role of collaborative mentoring in strengthening inclusive curriculum leadership. The findings offer contextual evidence from Indonesia, representing a developing country facing structural challenges in non-formal education. These insights are not only locally relevant but also conceptually transferable to global contexts where community-based education holds significant potential to support inclusive education agendas.

This study integrates three relevant and contemporary theoretical frameworks in the field of inclusive education and teacher professional development. These frameworks complement one another and serve as the conceptual foundation for understanding the dynamics of collaborative mentoring in strengthening inclusive curriculum leadership within non-formal education.

The conclusion drawn from these three theories indicates that enhancing inclusive curriculum management capacity in non-formal education cannot be achieved through fragmented approaches. Instead, it requires the integration of structural renewal grounded in capacity-building theory, reinforcement of social processes within communities of practice, and pedagogical transformation through a comprehensive inclusive approach. Collaborative mentoring serves as a nexus connecting these three elements, enabling teachers not only to understand inclusion as policy or strategy but as part of their professional identity and ongoing reflective practice. Thus, this study not only provides a conceptual foundation for understanding inclusive curriculum development dynamics but also proposes a contextual and replicable praxis model for similar educational environments. This research is grounded in three key theoretical frameworks that are both relevant and current within the studies of inclusive education and teacher professional development. These frameworks are interrelated and form the conceptual basis for examining collaborative mentoring in strengthening inclusive curriculum leadership in non-formal settings.

This theory emphasizes the importance of a systemic approach in developing the capacity of educational institutions through collaborative work, moral commitment, and pedagogical renewal (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In this study, it serves as a reference point for how mentoring interventions can create sustainable professional learning spaces at SKB. Mentoring sessions are designed to build teachers' collaborative skills, foster reflective curriculum leadership, and promote evidence-based practice change. Teachers participate in planning discussions, curriculum strategy formulation, and reflections on their own instructional practices.

The Communities of Practice theory posits that professional teacher learning occurs socially within communities that share experiences and values (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Collaborative mentoring, in this context, is seen as a community of practice where meaning is exchanged, professional identity is reinforced, and inclusive learning strategies are negotiated. Weekly mentoring forums facilitate interaction among teachers and mentors, encouraging experience sharing and social learning. Observations are directed at capturing the dynamics of this community how inclusion is discussed, professional identities shaped, and collaborative norms developed collectively.

The inclusive pedagogy framework offers a pedagogical orientation in which instruction is designed to include all learners, not just those identified with special needs (Florian, Rouse, & Spratt, 2023). This approach guides tutors in developing and adjusting curricula that are adaptive and responsive to the diverse needs of Paket A learners. This is reflected in the identification and documentation of curriculum adaptations made by tutors to respond to varied student needs. Interviews focus on how teachers design learning that reaches all students and how they implement universal design principles in practice. This approach ensures that inclusive pedagogy is not merely a response to special needs but a reflective and transformative instructional method.

Integrating these three frameworks, the study frames collaborative mentoring not just as a technical strategy but as a transformative process for building inclusive and contextual curriculum leadership in non-formal education.

7. Method

This study employed an intrinsic qualitative case study design (Stake, 1995) to explore how collaborative mentoring strengthens inclusive curriculum leadership in non-formal education. The research was conducted at SKB Kabupaten Malang, East Java, Indonesia, from June 17 to July 17, 2025. The focus was on a mentoring program implemented as part of teacher professional development in the Paket A (equivalent to primary education) non-formal program.

2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected using three methods: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Twelve participants were selected purposively, including tutors, program coordinators, and SKB leaders. Interviews explored perceptions of inclusion, experiences in collaborative mentoring, and changes in pedagogical practices. Observations were conducted during mentoring sessions and curriculum meetings to understand social interaction dynamics, mentor-mentee collaboration, and inclusive strategies discussed. Document analysis covered lesson plans, teaching materials, tutor reflections, and curriculum documents.

This combination of methods allowed for data triangulation and enriched insights into mentoring implementation. Data collection tools were adapted based on the research focus, with interviews ranging from 45 to 70 minutes. Field notes and audio recordings were transcribed for analysis.

2.2 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were analyzed thematically following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), involving five stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading; (2) generating initial codes; (3) identifying and categorizing themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; and (5) interpreting the themes in relation to the theoretical framework. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in organizing and coding the data. To ensure the credibility of findings, the study applied methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Researchers maintained reflexivity throughout the analysis and validated interpretations with participants.

In addition to thematic analysis, a critical analytical approach was used to examine power dynamics, institutional discourse, and structural barriers affecting inclusive curriculum implementation. This lens enabled a deeper understanding of how collaborative mentoring challenged traditional hierarchies and promoted teacher agency. It also contextualized the inclusive practices observed as both pedagogical and political acts of transformation.

8. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Four major themes were identified, reflecting the challenges and transformations experienced during the collaborative mentoring process.

Table 3.1 Collaborative Mentoring Process

Theme	Description
Misconceptions of Inclusive Education	Initial understanding was limited to special needs education, lacking broader inclusivity concepts.
Transformative Role of Mentoring	Mentoring sessions facilitated reflective practices and professional growth.
Enablers and Constraints	Institutional support and time allocation influenced mentoring outcomes.
Changes in Teaching Practices	Tutors adapted instructional strategies and demonstrated increased confidence.

Prior to presenting narrative findings, the following table summarizes the key themes derived from the data analysis. Collaborative mentoring fostered a shift in educators' perceptions of inclusion. Initially, most tutors equated inclusion solely with disability, lacking broader awareness of socio-economic and cultural diversity. As the mentoring sessions progressed, participants began to understand inclusion as responsiveness to all forms of learner diversity, including different learning styles, backgrounds, and challenges. The mentoring process provided a dialogic and reflective space, enabling tutors to negotiate meaning and reconstruct their instructional roles. Furthermore,

mentoring contributed significantly to tutor agency and professional identity development. Tutors began independently designing differentiated instruction, adapting lesson plans, and contextualizing learning materials. Weekly mentoring sessions and shared reflections helped build a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. While structural barriers such as administrative load and limited resources persisted, mentoring empowered tutors to enact change within their immediate instructional context. In addition, data was obtained from experience before providing assistance, which is presented in the following image

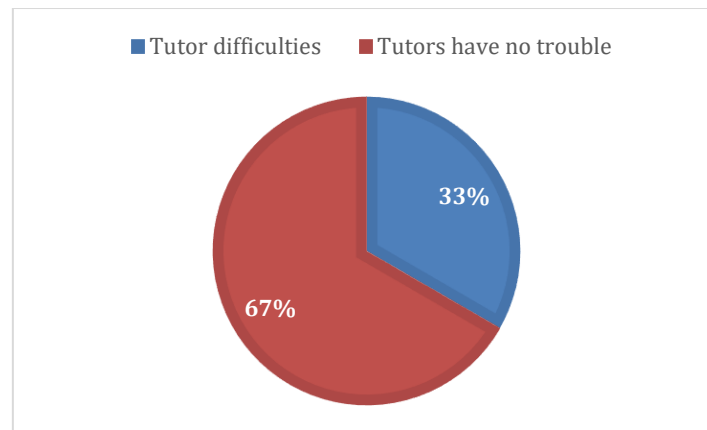


Figure 1. Tutor Experiences in Developing Inclusive Curriculum

Based on the data contained in the pie chart, from a total of 12 tutors involved in the mentoring program, 33.3% or 5 tutors experienced difficulties in preparing an inclusive curriculum before participating in the collaborative mentoring program. The difficulties experienced were related to understanding the principles of the inclusive curriculum and the inability to adapt the learning required by students with diverse needs. However, this condition changed after participating in a series of collaborative mentoring program activities, all tutors reported a significant increase in understanding, skills and confidence in developing an inclusive curriculum. The tutors reported that the collaborative process conducted by the mentors, discussions between tutors and concrete examples helped to open new insights and made it easier to implement the process of designing a curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to students' needs.

3.2 Discussion

One of the primary benefits of collaborative mentoring is its ability to create a safe and dialogic space where tutors can reflect on their practices without judgment. As noted by Avalos (2011), collaborative professional environments strengthen teacher agency and critical reflection. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) further highlight that communities of practice provide social frameworks for learning through participation, while Graham et al. (2022) affirm that reflective mentoring supports the development of inclusive professional identities. The findings of this study reinforce the notion that top-down curriculum reforms are insufficient for building inclusive practices, especially in non-formal settings (Miles & Singal, 2010). Collaborative mentoring serves as a bridge between policy and practice, creating opportunities for educators to reinterpret inclusion based on their local realities. It encourages autonomy, reflective inquiry, and innovation in instructional strategies, contributing to inclusive learning environments. A critical analysis of mentoring interactions revealed that such spaces also disrupted institutional power dynamics. Tutors gained greater voice in curriculum planning and began to challenge rigid hierarchies. This aligns with the work of Webster et al. (2021), who emphasize the transformative potential of peer-based mentoring in fostering inclusive and democratic educational cultures.

These findings have important implications for policy and practice in non-formal inclusive education. They highlight the necessity of structured, sustained professional development programs like collaborative mentoring, which effectively build capacity in complex areas. Policymakers should integrate such models, ensuring dedicated time and resources. The critical role of leadership commitment is also evident; supportive management is instrumental in enabling mentoring

programs and fostering an environment for adaptation and innovation. Furthermore, the importance of resource sharing and co-creation of adapted materials suggests a need for platforms facilitating the exchange of successful inclusive pedagogical strategies among non-formal education providers.

Despite these insights, the study has limitations. As a qualitative intrinsic case study in a single SKB, its findings are context-specific, and direct generalizability should be approached with caution. Reliance on self-reported perceptions, though triangulated, may introduce subjective bias. The short observation duration also limited capturing long-term changes. Future research could employ mixed-methods or comparative studies across diverse non-formal settings to validate and broaden these findings. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess long-term impact and sustainability. Research should also explore specific training and support mechanisms for mentors, and delve deeper into the pedagogical strategies developed by educators through mentoring, providing practical examples for others.

3.3. Conclusion

This study highlights that collaborative mentoring significantly contributes to strengthening teachers' capacity in developing inclusive and contextual curricula. Through reflective and dialogic engagement, tutors transformed their understanding of inclusion and implemented practices aligned with learner diversity. Mentoring not only enhanced individual competencies but also fostered curriculum leadership at the institutional level. The findings suggest that policy frameworks should support the institutionalization of collaborative mentoring as part of continuous professional development in non-formal education. SKBs and similar institutions are encouraged to establish sustained mentoring systems and build communities of practice to support inclusive pedagogical change. This approach demonstrates efficacy not only in technical skill-building but also in shaping reflective, socially responsive educators.

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