

# Classroom Teacher's Perspective on the Practice and Challenges of Inclusive Education in Inclusive Elementary Schools: A Qualitative Study

Felista Putri Valentina<sup>1</sup>, Candra Utama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>State University of Malang

<sup>2</sup>Department of Elementary School Teacher Education, State University of Malang, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author, email: [1felista.putri.2301516@students.um.ac.id](mailto:1felista.putri.2301516@students.um.ac.id) ,

[2candra.utama.pasca@um.ac.id](mailto:2candra.utama.pasca@um.ac.id)

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## Abstract

This study discusses the perspective of classroom teachers on the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. This research aims to understand how teachers conduct inclusive education, identify the strategies used, and the challenges faced in the process. By using a qualitative approach through interviews and observations. This study, involving one classroom teacher named Mrs. Nova and one accompanying teacher who is teaching in third grade, observation was carried out with regular students and five students with special needs, one of whom went home due to emotional disorders. The results of the study show that teachers have implemented learning strategies that adapt to the needs of students with special needs through individual learning programs (PPI) and differentiation approaches. However, the implementation of inclusive education still faces challenges such as limited teacher competence, inadequate infrastructure, and low parental involvement. Ongoing training and support from various parties is needed to create an inclusive and sustainable learning environment.

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a form of fulfilling the right to obtain a decent and equal education for all without discrimination. In elementary schools, inclusive education is carried out by accommodating the needs of all students, children with special needs (ABK) can learn in the same environment as regular students (Ana, n.d.). The goal is for every student to get access to quality education. Inclusive education also provides an equal learning environment for children with special needs so that they have the same opportunity as all children to reach their developmental potential and can actively participate in the home environment of schools and communities without worrying about differences in physical, emotional, intellectual, social and other conditions. Elementary schools have an important role in the implementation of inclusive education as a process of socialization and character formation in students (Baroroh and Rukiyati 2022). In diverse environments, students can adapt to create tolerance and diversity from an early age.

The operational order in regular schools has many that have implemented inclusive education. However, in reality, schools are still not aware of the concept of being an inclusive school. Inclusion schools need to make adjustments to curriculum adaptations. In elementary schools, there are still many errors in practice related to understanding the meaning of inclusive education so that it is a misconception in teaching. Internal school policies as well as the curriculum and learning carried out sometimes children with special needs are still isolated in their classes (Harfiani 2021). The success of inclusive education in elementary schools is highly dependent on the principal and the readiness of classroom teachers. Not only that, the various needs of students must be considered, related to various facilities and infrastructure must be adequate, children with special needs need special aids in the learning process so that they can follow well (David Wijaya 2019). Although inclusive education provides good benefits for students with special needs and ordinary children, inclusive education has challenges in its implementation.

*In practice, the implementation of inclusive education is not only based on policies and the readiness of facilities and infrastructure in schools, but the role of teachers is also important in the success of inclusive schools, because classroom teachers who conduct social interactions with students, manage classrooms,*

and carry out the learning process in accordance with strategies to accommodate the individual needs of diverse students. However, it seems that there are still many teachers who do not understand in depth how to practice in the classroom. This illustrates that even though teachers have tried to differentiate learning, the approach used is still trial and error because not all teachers have received special training (Fitriani, Trisnamansyah, & Insan, 2022).

Positive teacher perceptions will encourage the realization of an inclusive learning environment, while negative perceptions will hinder the integration of students with special needs (ABK) in regular classrooms. The main obstacle to the realization of inclusive education is the lack of perspective with teachers regarding the concept of inclusive schools and the existence of children with special needs. This gap can affect teachers' learning patterns and abilities that are not in accordance with the concept of inclusive schools (Otradiksa, 2016) Understanding the perspective of classroom teachers will provide insight as an evaluation and strengthen inclusive education learning practices.

In this article, we explore the classroom teacher's perspective on how to implement inclusive education in one of the primary schools in the city of Malang. This research is expected to contribute to the development of policies and teacher training that are more responsive to the needs of inclusive students in elementary schools.

Source	Study source	Key Findings	Relevance to Research
Ana (n.d.)	The concept of inclusive education	Inclusive education provides opportunities for ABK to study with regular students in the same environment.	Provide a conceptual basis for the goals and principles of inclusion.
Baroroh & Rukiyati (2022)	The role of primary schools in inclusive education	Elementary schools play an important role in socialization and character building through a learning environment that respects diversity.	Showing the importance of implementing inclusive education from an early age.
Harfiani (2021)	Implementation and errors of inclusion practices	Many schools do not yet fully understand the concept of inclusion; There are still mistakes in the curriculum and internal policies.	Uncovering the gap between inclusion policies and practices in the field.
Fitriani, Trisnamansyah & Insan (2022)	Teachers' understanding of inclusion	Many teachers have not yet had a deep understanding of how to implement an inclusive approach in learning.	Emphasizing the need to increase the capacity of teachers in the implementation of inclusion.
Otradiksa (2016)	Teachers' understanding of inclusion	Negative perceptions of teachers can hinder the integration of ABK in the regular classroom.	Underlining the importance of teachers' perspectives in the success of inclusive education.
David Wijaya (2019)	School readiness & student needs	Inclusive education requires the support of school principals, teacher readiness, and adequate infrastructure.	Showing the factors that support the success of inclusive education.

## 2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through two main methods, namely semi-structural interviews and direct observation in the classroom. Semi-structural interviews are used to dig up important information from classroom teachers to the perspective of inclusive

education implementation by asking open-ended questions that develop according to the informant's responses. Interviews and observations were conducted in one session with one meeting at the same time. The interview was conducted directly with the third grade teacher of SDN 1 Summersari whose name is Mrs. Nova. The duration of the interview was about 24 minutes and 8 seconds. Questions were asked about teachers' understanding of inclusive education concepts, experience in dealing with students with special needs, challenges faced, and learning strategies implemented in the classroom. Assessments used in education reform

This study also uses direct observation techniques in the third grade to see how the learning process takes place in inclusive schools. The observation of one accompanying teacher who was in the classroom to help students with special needs as well as all third grade students (regular students and five children with special needs who went home early due to the emotional recurrence of one child) as the subjects of the study were observed. Through observation, contextual data will be obtained to support the results of the interview. As well as being able to understand learning dynamics that are not verbally expressed by the informant.

The instruments used in this study include semi-structural interview guidelines that contain a list of open-ended questions to direct discussions during the interview, as well as observation sheets used to systematically record behavior and interactions in the classroom, voice recorders used to store data if there is information that has not been recorded, and timers to determine the duration of the interview. These two techniques are used simultaneously as a triangulation method to improve the accuracy of the data obtained, to increase the validity of the data, this study applies the triangulation technique by cross-verifying the data from the interview results and observation notes.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Results

This research was conducted at SDN 1 Summersari through the results of classroom observations and classroom teacher interviews regarding practices and challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education. According to the results of interviews and observations, there were five children with special needs who had various autistic conditions, difficulty controlling emotions. Difficulty focusing and receiving learning (ADHD), Difficulty reading (dyslexia). Three out of five received help from the shadow teacher. While the other two are handled by classroom teachers who are still considered to be able to participate in learning independently and also because of family economic limitations. The teacher explained, *"The two do not use shadow because they can still follow the lessons even though they are in accordance with their abilities, their parents' economic limitations are also not able to pay the accompanying teacher."* This shows that there are economic obstacles in the implementation of ideal inclusive education.

Inclusive education practices have been applied in the learning process, especially in the third grade. Classroom teachers treat students equally without discrimination between students with special and regular needs both physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. In fact, ordinary children can get along well in class. This can be reflected in the seating arrangement where children with special needs are spread among ordinary children, through their social interaction they cooperate and help each other. No bullying or discriminatory treatment of children with special needs was found, so the classroom environment is said to be sufficiently supportive of inclusive values. Teachers do not distinguish between ABK students and regular students. Teacher's statement *"My seats are random, so children can help each other. The important thing is that they are comfortable and do not disturb each other,"* said the teacher. This strategy reflects efforts to create an equal learning environment. Interestingly, the social interaction between students was also quite good, where there was no ridicule or bullying behavior against the ABK. The teacher stated, *"Alhamdulillah, the children here respect each other, even though there are tantrums, their friends help with it,"* said the third-grade teacher.

The existence of shadow teachers (companions) plays a role in helping especially children who have difficulties in learning. Shadow teachers provide additional instruction to students with special

needs, emotional and social support. However, classroom teachers still provide the main briefing on learning objectives, adjustment of learning methods through adjusted learning approaches and modified curriculum. The teacher prepares lesson plans for regular students and PPI which are used as a reference for the learning needs of each ABK. The teacher admitted that it was difficult to compile PPI for each student with special needs. *"If there are five ABK children in my class, it means that I have to make five special learning modules. Honestly, it's quite heavy,"* said the classroom teacher. Therefore, not all classes are able to implement PPI consistently. Some teachers choose to simplify the material according to the students' abilities.

The implementation of inclusive education practices will certainly not be that easy, there are several challenges as obstacles. First, the limitation of teacher competence in certain learning strategies, even though there has been training, there are still many teachers who do not know in depth about the inclusive school system. As stated by grade 3 teachers, *"Many teachers in inclusion schools do not have special training in handling students with special needs. The teacher remains so I learn as I go, see from my daily experience in the classroom. So sometimes I feel less confident in providing the right teaching according to the needs of each student."* This statement shows that the limitations of training have a direct impact on teachers' readiness to prepare learning modules, prepare Individual Learning Programs (PPI), and handle inclusive classroom dynamics.

Second, the limitations of facilities and infrastructure, students with special needs need special learning aids, even though the school is adequate enough to have a therapy room and other aids but shadow teachers are still not optimal, only how many have them, due to economic limitations or students with special needs who are considered to still be able to handle without a teacher's companion. Limited infrastructure is also a serious obstacle, especially in providing appropriate learning aids. The teacher said, *"If there are tools, it's better, but yes, we are still sober. So sometimes I draw myself on the board so that the ABK children can understand."* The role of shadow teachers is also very important in bridging learning materials. *"If the companion usually helps explain it again using pictures or real objects, the child will understand faster,"* said one of the shadow teachers.

Third, the difference in academic and social abilities, teachers must be able to balance between ABK and regular, adequate resources are needed. Finally, there is a lack of understanding and involvement of parents, sometimes parents still do not receive decisions from analyses and assessments that show that their child falls under special needs, and force them to follow regular learning. The teacher revealed, *"Sometimes parents don't accept that their children are told that they are ABK, they force them to just follow the usual lessons, even though their children are not necessarily able to follow that rhythm."* This lack of acceptance not only affects the learning process in schools, but also hinders collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting children's development. Not only that, parents also do not always provide reinforcement at home and only rely on teachers when they are at school.

Overcoming the existing challenges, the school has tried to provide the best, such as collaborating with universities in the implementation of psychological assessments. In the context of assessment, teachers use the results of initial observations and collaborate with external parties, such as UMM. *"We first test through an assessment from UMM and an IQ test, so that we don't misdiagnose. Because children who seem ordinary can be children with special needs, or vice versa,"* explained the teacher. This strategy is used so that the interventions provided are more targeted and not only based on conjectures. Teacher coaching on inclusive education practices, involving children with special needs to participate in extracurriculars together with the help of their respective shadow teachers.

However, continuous training, getting attention from the government, improving facilities, the contribution of classroom teachers, parents, and the community will increase the benefits of sustainable inclusive education.

Aspects	Interview and Observation Results
Inclusive Education Practices	Teachers treat regular students and ABK equally. Adjustment of learning with PPI and RPP, but sometimes teachers simplify the material according to the abilities of children with special needs.

	Support from accompanying teachers, but some children do not have an accompanying teacher because they can still be handled by classroom teachers and some are constrained by the economy.
Environmental Support	The classroom environment supports inclusion values. No discrimination/bullying was found. Social interaction went well between students.
Challenges Faced	Limitations of teacher competence in inclusion strategies. The infrastructure is not fully adequate. Differences in students' academic and social abilities. Low parental involvement.
Overcoming Challenges	Teacher training related to inclusive education. Cooperation with universities for psychological assessment. Involving ABK students in extracurricular activities.

### 3.2. Discussion

The practice of implementing inclusive education in elementary schools is an important concern in the world of education in Indonesia, especially in an effort to create an inclusive and comfortable learning environment for all with the principles of fairness and equal access for students. This research has been conducted at SDN 1 Sumbersari which has implemented inclusive education with several adaptations in learning, classroom management, social-emotional approaches and facilities that require facilities and infrastructure for every student with special and regular needs. One of the practices used in this school is that teachers and students do not discriminate based on the background of special needs but treat them equally. This can be seen from daily learning and social interaction in the classroom which reflects the values of tolerance and cooperation. The seating arrangements made by the teacher are highly appreciated. Teachers provide opportunities for students with special needs to spread out with regular students. Classroom teachers are not only in charge of delivering material but also preparing Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) for regular students and Individual Learning Programs (PPI) for children with special needs. Using different learning principles allows all students to get learning according to their needs and they can develop according to their potential and abilities (Amalia 2023).

The implementation of inclusive education has various challenges. The challenge that is often faced is the limited competence of teachers in understanding and implementing inclusive defense strategies as a whole (Tuzahara, Andriani, and Hania 2024). The existence of teacher training is still not fully optimal in terms of understanding pedagogic approaches that are in accordance with the needs of children with special needs. There is still a need for sustainability training that focuses more on additive practices and is responsive to individual differences (Saputro et al. 2024). Limited infrastructure facilities are an obstacle to the implementation of inclusive education. The provision of inadequate facilities in terms of therapy rooms, assistive devices and accompanying teachers is uneven. There needs to be attention from several parties to help in terms of infrastructure. The needs of different students and students in schools should be an important concern in education (Salma and Najibah 2025). Especially the accompanying teacher every student must have at least each student have a special accompanying teacher, but financial limitations are an obstacle. While only some use accompanying teachers, others are still handled by classroom teachers (Tuzahara, Andriani, and Hania 2024). This can hinder the effectiveness of learning for students with complex needs where limited facilities and human resources are the dominant factors that affect the quality of inclusive education implementation in primary schools (Agustina and Rahaju 2021).

The difference in the academic and social abilities of children with special and regular needs is a challenge for classroom teachers. Teachers must be able to balance their attention and approach so that all students can actively participate in learning, if not paid attention to, this inequality can hinder the

achievement of competence from both children with special needs and regular needs (PHILADELPHIA 2022). In addition, the challenge of low involvement of parents of students with special needs with cases of rejection of psychological assessments and forcing their children to attend regular classes without any adaptation, so that teachers will have difficulty adjusting to ordinary children who should get facilities according to their needs, so that learning is difficult to accept (Harfiani 2021). Assistance in strengthening learning at home must be needed. However, not many parents can accompany their children because they are busy working. Parental involvement plays a very important role in supporting the learning process of children with special needs in emotional, social and academic aspects (Wardani and Dwiningrum 2021).

Overcoming these challenges, the school seeks to collaborate with external parties such as universities in the implementation of psychological assessments, carry out teacher training so that learning can be carried out effectively and appropriately (Harfiani 2021). Teacher training in the context of inclusive education must be sustainable and based on real needs in the field. In addition, improved facilities, government policy support, and collaboration between schools and communities are needed to create a comprehensive and sustainable inclusive education system (Az-Zahra et al. 2024). Include children with special needs in extracurricular activities to develop their abilities outside of academics. These efforts are not enough if they are not accompanied by systemic and sustainable policy support. Therefore, further exploration of the Implications of inclusive education policy, especially in the aspect of teacher professional development. Need Ongoing training that is practical and field-based, It is not just an administrative formality. In addition, the government needs to provide Operational policy support, such as the provision of budgets, mentoring regulations, and incentives for inclusive schools.

### 3.3. Conclusion

The implementation of inclusive education at SDN 1 Summersari has shown a commitment to creating an equitable and welcoming learning environment for diverse students. Classroom teachers play a major role in conducting inclusive learning by preparing lesson plans for regular students and PPI for students with special needs, as well as applying different learning approaches. However, there are significant challenges, especially in terms of teacher competence, limited infrastructure, differences in abilities between students, and lack of parental involvement. The efforts that have been made by schools such as cooperation with universities and teacher training are positive steps, but they are not enough if they are not supported systemically and sustainably. The implementation of inclusive education requires synergy between teachers, schools, parents, the community, and policy support from the government so that the principle of inclusivity can be realized in real life in the world of basic education.

This study shows the importance of the role of teachers in inclusive education, but there are still limitations in competencies and supporting facilities. Therefore, continuous teacher training and the provision of adequate learning facilities are required. In addition, cooperation between schools, parents, and the government must be improved so that inclusive education runs optimally. The disadvantage of this study lies in its narrow scope, which is only conducted in one school with limited subjects. This makes generalization of research results limited.

This study still has limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the results such as this study is limited to one inclusive elementary school, namely SDN 1 Summersari, and involves informants who are relatively limited to one class and one teacher. This condition makes the findings not fully representative of the variety of inclusive education practices in other elementary schools that may have different characteristics, challenges, or approaches. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve more schools and informants so that the results are more representative with a wider sample of teachers, students, and parents. With a more diverse scope, the results of the research are expected to be more representative and generalizable, and able to provide a more complete picture of the implementation of inclusive education at the elementary school level.

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