



CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: FIELD OBSERVATION RESULTS (INCLUSIVE SCHOOL AT SDN POLEHAN 2)

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools, particularly at SDN Polehan 2, and formulate strategies to overcome these obstacles. The method used is a scoping literature review with data collected through field observations and a review of related research over the past ten years. The results show that the main challenges include the lack of understanding and competence of teachers, limited facilities and infrastructure, as well as resistance from parents and the community. To address this, the school provides teacher training, public outreach, and integration of inclusive values into the curriculum. These findings highlight the importance of synergy between schools, the government, and society in creating a friendly and inclusive learning environment for students with special needs. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable inclusive education policies and practices in Indonesia.

Keywords: Primary School; Inclusive Education; Implementation Challenges

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every Indonesian citizen. This right is stipulated in the 1945 Constitution, particularly in Article 31, Paragraph 1, which states, "Every citizen has the right to education" (Directorate of Education, 2011). Indonesian citizens have the right to receive quality education according to their talents and interests, regardless of social status, economic background, ethnicity, religion, gender, abilities, or other differences. Therefore, the state has the obligation to provide quality educational services to all its citizens without exception, including those with differences in abilities (persons with disabilities).

To respond to this phenomenon, inclusive education has emerged. Inclusive education is an educational system that provides opportunities for all students, without exception, to learn together in regular classrooms (Dhoka et al., 2023). Some regular schools are reluctant to admit them as students, arguing that their teachers are not adequately qualified to guide children with special needs. Special schools are often located far from their homes, resulting in many children with special needs not receiving any education (Pratiwi, 2015). Education should, in essence, shape students into better individuals, with dignity, and capable of responding to increasingly complex challenges of the time. However, as destined by Allah, while some are born physically and mentally complete, others are born as "special" individuals with various physical or psychological limitations.

Inclusive education is an approach that provides equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with special needs (Lestari et al., 2022). This concept is emphasized in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that every citizen has the right to quality education without discrimination. Inclusive education aims to integrate children with special needs into the general school environment, allowing them to learn alongside other children. This approach not only provides access to education but also eliminates stigma and discrimination that may be experienced by children with special needs (Sembung et al., 2023). Implementing inclusive education in primary schools requires special attention, as students at this age still need intensive guidance from educators. The presence of students with special needs in regular classrooms can pose significant challenges for teachers and school management.

Several studies indicate that the main challenges in implementing inclusive education include the lack of teacher understanding and skills in teaching children with special needs, limited facilities, and resistance from parents (Sembung et al., 2023). Munajah et al. (2021) revealed that many teachers still lack the necessary competencies to teach in inclusive classrooms, which is one of the main barriers. In addition, limited infrastructure to support inclusive learning also presents a significant challenge.

The implementation of inclusive education also requires support from various stakeholders, including the government, education offices, and the community (Sembung et al., 2023). Such cooperation is crucial in creating a conducive and supportive learning environment for all students. Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools and formulate effective strategies to overcome them. Thus, it is expected to improve the quality of inclusive education and provide maximum benefits to all students (Sholihah & Chrysoekamto, 2021).

The success of implementing inclusive education policies in schools essentially depends on the understanding of inclusive education by implementers/managers—principals, classroom teachers, subject teachers, special education teachers, and other educational personnel—as well as the availability of adequate resources, including community support, finances, and infrastructure in inclusive schools (Besic et al., 2020). This is supported by most research findings worldwide, which show that many teachers still do not understand or adapt to students with special needs (Elder & Kuja, 2019; Schwab et al., 2019). Although inclusive education policies have positive impacts on both students and the environment, challenges persist in their implementation, such as unqualified teachers, curriculum issues, and lack of facilities to support students with special needs (Zakiah et al., 2021). Therefore, efforts are still needed to optimize inclusive education delivery to support effective and efficient learning for students with special needs.

This issue is important to examine in order to provide information on the barriers and strategies that can be applied to optimize inclusive education implementation. The results are expected to contribute to enriching the literature on this topic, strengthen concepts and findings of previous studies, and provide practical implications for future progressive research. Additionally, the findings can serve as recommendations or references in developing policies to implement effective inclusive education.

2. Method

This article is based on a systematic review of several studies published within the last ten years. The research method used is a scoping literature review, a type of literature review aimed at addressing a specific research topic by grouping similar research articles and drawing conclusions. The review process refers to the framework developed by Levac et al. (2010), including:

1. Identifying the research questions aligned with the study's objectives;
2. Identifying relevant literature sources from various databases;
3. Selecting literature according to the research topic;
4. Mapping and collecting selected literature;
5. Compiling and reporting the analysis results;
6. Consulting with competent parties.

Literature searches were conducted on Google Scholar, Research Gate, Science Direct, and ERIC using keywords such as "inclusive education," "implementation of inclusive education," and "challenges of inclusive education." Articles were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Related to challenges/barriers in implementing inclusive education in schools;
2. Related to implementation strategies of inclusive education;
3. Written in English;
4. Open-access articles;
5. Downloadable and accessible for public use..

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Lack of Understanding and Teacher Competence

Observations and interviews showed that most teachers at SDN Polehan 2 lacked the competence to effectively teach students with special needs. Teachers struggled to adjust teaching methods and materials to meet students' individual needs, resulting in suboptimal learning. This aligns with Munajah et al. (2021), who found that lack of professional development is a major obstacle to inclusive education. Training provided to teachers is often merely formal and not evaluated for effectiveness (Abongdia et al., 2015). Instead of creating inclusive learning environments, this could lead to exclusivity.

As stated in Permendiknas No. 70/2009, there are eight components that stakeholders of inclusive schools must address: 1) students; 2) curriculum; 3) educators; 4) learning activities; 5) assessment and certification; 6) school management; 7) rewards and sanctions; 8) community empowerment.

Special education teachers must collaborate with classroom teachers—not take over responsibility entirely—to identify, assess, and develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

3.1.2 Limited Facilities and Infrastructure

Facilities supporting inclusive education at SDN Polehan 2 remain limited. There are inadequate accessible classrooms, learning aids, therapy rooms, and inclusive sanitation. This restricts student participation and effective learning, as also reported by Ikramullah and Sirojuddin (2020).

3.1.3 Parental and Community Resistance

While most parents support inclusion, some are in denial about their child's condition or unwilling to cooperate, slowing the child's development. Social stigma and lack of community understanding also hinder inclusion. This was similarly observed at SDN 7 Trienggadeng.

3.2 Discussion

The discussion is focused on relating the data and the results of the analysis with the problem or research objectives and the broader theoretical context. It can also be an answer to the question of why facts are found as in the data. The discussion is written attached to the data discussed. The discussion is tried not to be separate from the data discussed.

3.2.1 School Strategies and Efforts

SDN Polehan 2 has made strategic efforts such as:

1. Teacher training;
2. Integration of inclusive values into the curriculum;
3. Community and parent engagement.

This mirrors efforts at SDN Slerok 2 Tegal. Additional strategies could include awareness programs, partnerships with inclusive education resource centers, and government support (e.g., funding, accessible infrastructure like ramps, lifts, guiding blocks, inclusive public transport, etc.).

These steps help schools embrace diversity and ensure children with special needs no longer have to hide their disabilities but can thrive alongside others (Sari & Hendriani, 2021). At the management level, successful implementation depends on principal and teacher collaboration, along with parental involvement (Ikramullah & Sirojuddin, 2020).

4. Conclusions

Inclusive education in primary schools faces serious challenges such as untrained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and societal resistance. Many teachers are unprepared due to a lack of effective training, and school facilities remain inaccessible. Social support is low due to stigma and poor understanding of inclusion. However, strategic efforts—teacher training, inclusive curricula, and parent/community engagement—are being implemented. The success of inclusive education depends on well-prepared human resources, sufficient infrastructure, and

positive social support. With the right approach, inclusive education can provide fair and equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs.

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