

Inclusive Education for Special Needs Students in Indonesia: A Review of Policies, Practices and Challenges

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Abstract: This review research study focuses on reviewing the existing policies, methods, and challenges pertaining to inclusive education for special needs students in Indonesia. Following the formulation of appropriate research inquiries at the onset of the study, the researchers conducted extensive searches throughout prominent research databases utilizing certain keywords. Following a comprehensive evaluation, a total of 145 pertinent elements were identified. Subsequently, the researchers systematically reviewed each manuscript and excluded those that were not pertinent to the primary objective of the study. In order to fulfil the specified criteria, the studies were required to be composed in the English language, accessible to a wide range of individuals from 2017 to 2023. Furthermore, these studies were expected to provide explicit responses to the inquiries posed by the researchers, with a particular emphasis on students with special needs, mostly those enrolled in elementary school. The ultimate selection consisted of a compilation of 22 distinct research articles. There is a growing recognition among individuals that the fulfilment of educational requirements for special needs students within inclusive environments holds significant importance. Implementing inclusive policies poses significant challenges due to various factors, including insufficient teacher training, limited availability of resources, and the absence of standardized methods for identifying special needs individuals. There is a recommendation to conduct further study in order to identify optimal strategies for addressing existing challenges and promoting pedagogical approaches that effectively cater to the needs of special needs students in Indonesia.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Policy, Practices, Special Needs Students

A. Introduction

Indonesia has undertaken a range of regulations and activities aimed at fostering the advancement of inclusive education. The government recognizes the utmost importance of ensuring equitable access to education for all students, particularly those who have exceptional abilities (Jusni, 2023; Maguvhe, 2023). Identifying and evaluating special needs students is a crucial step in ensuring equitable access to appropriate educational opportunities. As stated by Efendi (2018), the enhanced

education and skill development of special needs students might indirectly contribute to a nation's sense of pride and self-esteem. According to the 2010 Indonesian population census, a total of 355, 859 school-aged children between the ages of 5 and 18, who were identified as having disabilities, were reported to be enrolled in educational institutions. According to Luk (2013), a significant majority of individuals, specifically 74.6%, have not yet received assistance with their educational pursuits. According to research by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2008, it was found that 20% of children aged 6 to 11 with special needs and 19% of those aged 12 to 17 have access to educational opportunities (Baine, 2013). The difficulty of getting access to educational programs can be attributed as a contributing factor to the relatively low enrolment of special needs children in schools that adequately cater to their unique requirements. An effective strategy for enhancing support for special needs children is to integrate them into mainstream educational institutions with peers who exhibit mild, moderate, or serious special needs (Daulay, 2021).

Inclusive instructional programs for children with disabilities encompass a range of provisions designed to ensure that these individuals are integrated into mainstream educational settings, hence promoting equal opportunities and access to education. According to the United Nations (2006), it is asserted that every individual should possess the capacity to partake in this fundamental entitlement of human existence. Research indicates that inclusive education yields positive outcomes for all students, including those without identified difficulties or challenges. According to K. , C. T. , M. Z. , & N. A. Cologon (2019), it is also beneficial for educators and households. Nevertheless, a significant number of individuals continue to aspire to the establishment of inclusive educational institutions.

When formulating strategies for inclusive education provision, it is imperative to consider various factors, including the diverse range of special needs exhibited by children, such as those with autism, intellectual disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, or exceptional cognitive abilities. Additionally, it is crucial to account for the educational level spanning from kindergarten to college among the student population. Indeed, complications arise when there is a scarcity of infrastructures and other essential resources, rendering them insufficient in quantity (Jusni, 2023). The accessibility of resources, particularly personnel such as educational institutions and adequately educated instructors. They can aid teachers who are having a hard time helping pupils in the school who have disabilities. Certain educators may encounter difficulties while attempting to modify the content of their instructional materials, the physical arrangement of their educational settings, or the inclusive programs they administer, which cater to special needs kids (Florian, 2019; Pit-ten Cate, 2018).

According to Prathama (2022), the implementation of inclusive classrooms for children with particular needs obviates the necessity for additional resources or the establishment of distinct educational facilities, hence potentially resulting in cost savings for educational institutions. Certain architectural elements within a typical

inclusive school setting may be modified to enhance accessibility for children with particular needs, hence facilitating their integration into mainstream classrooms. One advantage of integrating children with particular needs into inclusive schools is that it facilitates their development as valued, equal, and embraced members of the community, alongside their peers (K. Cologon, 2014; Jusni, 2023).

Implementing an inclusive learning paradigm for special needs children in public schools is a complex endeavour fraught with challenges and complications. The educational institution encounters challenges pertaining to its immediate community and legislative representatives, in addition to its internal and exterior environments (Hikmat, 2022). There exists a belief among certain individuals that the integration of special needs children into general education institutions may result in a substantial financial burden for the educational institution, perhaps compromising the academic achievements of students in regular classrooms. The hindrance to the implementation of inclusive education, conversely, is attributed to the issue of teacher stress and the absence of opportunities for professional development ((Maguvhe, 2023). At the extreme end of the spectrum, there exists a viewpoint positing that the inclusion of special needs students inside educational institutions has a detrimental impact on the ease of adhering to and the effectiveness of regular class programs. However, this justification lacks sufficient strength to justify the exclusion of special needs children from mainstream schools. In cases when schools do not prioritize the inclusive approach, they may frequently express disapproval towards schools that deviate from its principles.

Numerous researches have demonstrated that the cognitive processes employed by educators play a pivotal role in the lack of success observed in open education initiatives across several global contexts, including Indonesia. When newly enrolled special needs students commence their educational journey, a prevailing concern among educators is the potential for disruptive behaviour during the initial days of their integration into the learning environment. This perspective is logical in cases where teachers lack adequate training to effectively monitor classroom activities (Efendi, 2018). As a consequence, teachers may experience confusion when they encounter special needs children yet lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address their unique need. There is a common misconception among teachers that special needs children who are integrated into inclusive educational settings will primarily exhibit minor physical impairments and hyperactivity. The issue of inclusive education frequently arises, particularly in the context of its implementation in Indonesia. Children who possess mild physical or mental impairments and require specialized attention are educated within a designated educational institution (Florian, 2019). According to the corresponding articles included in this section, (a) academics are fascinated by how teachers implement inclusive education to help special needs students in learning, and (b) the challenges faced by the teachers in dealing with special needs students through inclusive education to fulfil their special needs.

B. Methods

This section provides an overview of the research methodology employed in the present analysis. The methodology was derived from various authors. Nevertheless, the research conducted by Ahmad (2018) exerted a more substantial influence on the intricate components of the system compared to (Petersen, 2018) study, which served as the foundation for this inquiry. This paper provides a comprehensive account of the procedure for conducting research, including a detailed description of the sequential actions undertaken, as well as the key findings obtained at each stage of the study.

The initial phase of the process was the framing of research questions by the researchers. Once the research questions were formulated, the researchers proceeded to conduct multiple searches in primary research databases, utilizing specific keywords relevant to the topic matter. The overall quantity of objects, accounting for any potential duplication, is 145. The researcher excluded any instances of content that were either duplicates or featured inaccuracies in the authors' names, abstracts, or educational backgrounds. During the succeeding phase of the research process, the researcher thoroughly reviewed all the papers acquired in the preceding phases and excluded those deemed irrelevant to the study's research topics. In order to meet the requirements for inclusion, it was necessary to satisfy the following criteria: It is advisable to compose the study in the English language. The research should be made accessible to the general public throughout the time-frame spanning from 2015 to 2023. The study offers explicit answers to the research inquiries that were formulated in the investigation. It is evident that the focus of the study mostly pertains to children with exceptional needs. The study primarily consisted of participants who were enrolled as junior school students. A total selection of 22 research papers was made based on the existing research questions.

C. Results and Discussion

According to the findings of a research investigation on DRRE programs in Indonesia, it was commonly observed that special needs children were frequently excluded from participation. According to reports provided by educators in Indonesia, the availability of DRRE is frequently limited, resulting in inadequate accessibility for a significant portion of the nation's children. Numerous children express a desire for inclusive DRRE programs that do not discriminate based on certain criteria, but rather provide equal opportunities for all participants (Sheehy, 2022). The Indonesian government aims to enhance the inclusivity of ordinary schools in order to minimize the necessity for specialized educational institutions for special needs students (Wulandari, 2022). The feasibility of integrating impaired children into mainstream educational settings as an alternative to specialized schools is currently under examination, with a focus on assessing its efficacy in meeting the unique requirements

of these individuals. The study revealed that governmental organizations and educational institutions lack adequate funds to properly deal with the requirements of children with disabilities. Furthermore, it was determined that it was imperative for those within the community to foster a more positive perception of children who were born with disabilities. Children who possess disabilities continue to require specialized educational settings in order to adequately prepare for inclusive school environments. There is a recommendation for further investigation to explore the correlation between decentralization and inclusive education, with other significant issues. The study conducted by Fasha and Widowati (2017) states that Indonesian government has formulated the Inclusive Education Policy with the aim of ensuring access to education for all students, including those with impairments. The aforementioned methodology is being utilized as well in Jakarta, the principal urban centre and most populous city inside the territory of Indonesia. As a component of the assessment of this methodology, a government school in Jakarta was selected.

In Indonesia, the establishment of inclusive schools is being undertaken with the aim of providing those who are disabled with educational opportunities (Alvi, 2023). Enhanced facilities and infrastructure are necessary in order to provide adequate assistance for the early years inside these educational institutions. The objective of the *Disability Friendly Schools* initiative is to enhance societal recognition and endorsement of educational institutions that actively accommodate students with disabilities. The study examines the theoretical framework of inclusive education for visually impaired students, with a particular focus on the necessary infrastructure and facilities. The perception of individuals with hearing impairment has undergone a transformation in recent years (Alshahrany, 2020). The inclusion of hearing challenged children in mainstream educational settings has become increasingly prevalent due to increased awareness and support for those with hearing disabilities. The study examines the potential of exergames to enhance the fundamental motor skills of hearing-impaired pupils within inclusive physical education programs in Saudi Arabian primary schools. In this work, a qualitative research approach was employed, incorporating both content analysis and a systematic literature review. The objectives of their study were to draw insights from prior research and propose avenues for further investigation within this domain.

The primary objective of inclusive education is to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their cognitive abilities (Hikmat, 2022). This advances the objectives of equity and non-discrimination. The objective was to ensure equitable educational opportunities for children with disabilities through their integration into mainstream classes. The implementation of this action inadvertently created a barrier characterized by exclusivity. The use of inclusive education approaches engenders a heightened sense of self-worth among students, fosters a more amicable school environment, and upholds their entitlement to a quality education. However, Indonesia's inclusive education system encounters challenges pertaining to student enrolment, teacher qualifications, availability of suitable

infrastructure, and the level of involvement from parents and the wider society. Given that open education is a very nascent concept inside the nation, it is imperative for it to undergo continuous improvement and expansion in order to realize its complete efficacy. Interdisciplinary special education, sometimes referred to as inclusive education, aims to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all pupils, regardless of their inherent abilities (Efendi, 2018). Inclusive education facilitates the integration of children who have special needs into mainstream classrooms, fostering an environment of acceptance that simultaneously nurtures the self-assurance of all students involved. However, the inclusive education system in Indonesia encounters challenges pertaining to student enrolment, teacher qualifications, infrastructure availability, and the level of support from parents and the community.

The objective of the study conducted by Heru (2020) was to examine the utilization of inclusive education for special needs children in the Sidoarjo District. The presence of communication challenges, suboptimal resource allocation, and the organizational framework of the bureaucratic apparatus collectively impede the efficient execution of tasks, despite certain components of the program meeting established benchmarks. The regional administration is addressing these challenges through the allocation of sufficient financial resources, providing guidance to teachers, and promoting community engagement and social cohesion. During the period of the pandemic, special needs children in Indonesia were able to access educational programs through a combination of both online and offline modalities (Sugmawati, 2022). Throughout the duration of the outbreak, parental figures assumed a crucial role as they undertook the responsibilities of instructing, overseeing, nurturing, and guiding their offspring. Despite encountering challenges related to internet gadgets, learning, collaboration, comprehension, and conduct, the presence of parental assistance proved crucial in navigating these difficulties.

The concept of inclusion in education is predicated upon the notion that each individual possesses inherent value, irrespective of the characteristics that render them distinct (Prathama, 2022). The primary objective is to ensure inclusive education for all individuals, with a particular focus on special needs children, commonly referred to as individuals with disabilities. Implementing inclusive education in Indonesia poses significant challenges due to inadequate teacher preparation, a shortage of experienced teachers, limited accessibility to facilities, and the complexities associated with curriculum modification. These challenges pose significant obstacles in ensuring equitable access to education for all children. Interdisciplinary education has been recognized as a valuable approach for children with disabilities, since it facilitates social interaction among peers who share similar age and developmental milestones (Jaswandi, 2019). This research examined the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian preschools with a focus on children with impairments. The research findings indicate that inclusive education has been effectively implemented with regard to various aspects, including the attainment of execution objectives, educational objectives, preparedness of facilities,

school administration, identification and evaluation of children with disabilities, and reporting on learning outcomes and execution progress. However, there exists a pressing demand for an increased number of specialized educators in the field of special education, as well as the development of a tailored educational curriculum to cater to the diverse needs of children with special requirements.

Despite the Indonesian government's endeavours to establish educational initiatives catering to children with disabilities, ensuring fair access and maintaining consistently excellent standards across all participating children remains challenging (Hasugian, 2019). One of the challenges is to the insufficient availability of educational institutions equipped to cater to the instructional demands of special needs children. Moreover, even the extant schools may not possess the necessary preparedness to adequately address the unique requirements of such children. Another concern that arises is the scarcity of specialized instructors in the field of special education. Furthermore, it is conceivable that certain parents may lack an understanding of the necessity of tailored instruction for their offspring, or alternatively, they may have financial constraints that prevent them from accessing such educational opportunities. Notwithstanding the aforementioned problems, the Indonesian government is resolute in its dedication to ensuring universal access to education and fostering academic achievement among all children. Special needs children are inclined to being admitted into educational institutions that employ inclusive education practices in Indonesia. A research investigation was conducted by Jaswandi (2019) to ascertain the level of inclusivity exhibited towards special needs children within early childhood school settings. The research was conducted within an open preschool program that shown a notable degree of student reception. The findings of this study indicate that special needs children are favourably received by their peers.

Concerns have arisen regarding the adequacy of study and appropriate assistance available to facilitate the optimal development of special needs children, given the increasing prevalence of such cases. Numerous professionals are providing their skills individually and in a fragmented manner, resulting in an ineffective and disorganized present strategy (Jusni, 2023). Parents, educators, and community members responsible for the upbringing of children frequently experience a sense of powerlessness due to insufficient knowledge and support. Frequently, children in these circumstances encounter instances of discrimination and encounter barriers in accessing equitable health and educational services compared to their peers. The objective of the study was to examine the challenges associated with special needs services, encompassing the difficulties encountered by parents, teachers, and practitioners, as well as the proposed solutions to address these challenges. The objective of the study by Syamsi (2021) was to examine the potential utilization of indigenous knowledge in enhancing the efficacy of character education programs in inclusive elementary schools. In order to acquire the necessary information, we conducted interviews, engaged in observational activities, and extensively reviewed pertinent scholarly literature. The data underwent a qualitative descriptive analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that inclusive primary educational institutions ought to incorporate conventional children's activities into their curriculum as a means to impart character education that aligns with the cultural knowledge of the local community. In order to enhance character education programs, educators should develop and distribute a diverse selection of children's games derived from the local community.

The objective of the study conducted by (Luthfiyani & Suryana, 2024), was to examine the extent to which inclusive education approaches were used in Islamic institutions (Madrasah) located in the province of Banten. The research findings prompted a modification of the curriculum model in order to more effectively cater to the requirements of special needs children. All children possess an inherent entitlement to receive an inclusive education, irrespective of any special educational need they may have. Legislation has been enacted in Indonesia to ensure the preservation of this entitlement; yet, challenges persist in effectively implementing inclusive education Amin et al. (2024). The difficulties at hand can be deconstructed into distinct components, namely cultural and societal concerns, apprehensions over norms and regulations, and insufficient assistance. Collaboration among these prominent individuals is important in order to address these challenges and ensure equitable access to education of superior quality for all students (Suhendri, 2020).

The rapid advancement of technology and the emergence of Society 5.0 have significantly impacted the field of education, particularly in relation to open education. The study conducted by Mansur (2023) showed the development of inclusive education learning plans that adhere to Indonesian national education standards and align with the principles of Society 5.0. The research findings indicate that Society 5.0 aligns with the expansion of inclusive learning systems and adheres to the national education standards in Indonesia. These standards encompass various elements, including standardized procedures, criteria for instructor qualifications, and infrastructure prerequisites. In the past, Indonesia had a system of segregated schools, but it has now transitioned to a more inclusive educational framework that prioritizes the recognition and celebration of the nation's diverse cultural heritage. The individuals who subscribe to humanism and prioritize the recognition of diversity among individuals have played a pivotal role in facilitating this paradigmatic transformation. Significant progress has been made in addressing many issues; yet, numerous challenges remain unresolved. Ensuring access to quality education and appropriate support for all special needs children is a challenging endeavour.

The government of Indonesia has demonstrated a commitment to the implementation of inclusive education (Wulandari, 2022). The overarching objective is to provide equal educational opportunities to all children, including special needs children. The aforementioned policy, which is mandatory for all children, exhibits deficiencies that have been identified in previous scholarly investigations (Fasha & Widowati, 2017). The challenges encompass insufficient preparedness on the part of the government

and schools, inadequate availability of resources, and insufficient training for instructors (Efendi, 2018; Prathama, 2022; Sugmawati, 2022). The available study provides insights into both negative and positive aspects. On the one hand, it highlights the inequitable treatment of individuals with disabilities and the hindrances posed by bureaucratic processes. On the other hand, it sheds light on the potential benefits of financial resources and specialized training for educators. Scholars emphasize the significance of fostering a sense of acceptance among children throughout their early experiences in inclusive preschools, as well as the crucial role it plays in facilitating the development of character in inclusive primary schools. This assertion holds validity despite the presence of challenges, such as the presence of inexperienced teachers and difficulties in adapting instructional materials. The implementation of supportive policies is often challenging due to factors such as inadequate infrastructure and ineffective governmental management. Nevertheless, potential solutions to the aforementioned issues include enhanced communication strategies, improved availability of financial resources, and the implementation of inclusive learning frameworks that effectively cater to the diverse requirements of society. The overarching objective is to establish educational institutions that foster inclusivity, aiming to support students not just in achieving academic success but also in cultivating a sense of belonging and empowerment in their personal life.

Indonesia has made significant strides in achieving its objective of inclusive education for special needs adolescents through the implementation of legislative measures such as the National Law on Education and the National Action Plan for Disability (Malik, 2021). These initiatives aim to facilitate the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream educational settings alongside their non-disabled peers. However, persistent challenges persist due to the decentralized nature of the system, resulting in divergent implementation throughout different regions (Maufuriyah, 2018; Kurniawan & Nurhasanah, 2020; Suhendri, 2020). Certain educational institutions employ inclusive education strategies, which encompass the recruitment of special education instructors and auxiliary personnel. The efficacy of these programs is contingent upon the community's familiarity with them, the level of commitment exhibited by the educators, and the extent of available resources. Numerous educational institutions encounter challenges in implementing novel policies due to insufficient finances, inadequately qualified personnel, or inadequate facilities. The necessity of awareness campaigns arises from the prevailing societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, which pose challenges to their acceptance and integration. Insufficient centralization within the educational system results in an inequitable distribution of tools and facilities. The incorporation of many learning styles within the curriculum is a considerable challenge, necessitating substantial investments of time and financial resources (Efendi, 2018; Heru, 2020; Prathama, 2022; Sugmawati, 2022). In order to facilitate the implementation of open education, it is imperative that schools and parents collaborate in a concerted manner. Nevertheless, ensuring parental involvement, particularly in rural areas, is a significant challenge. In summary, Indonesia has achieved significant strides in the realm of inclusive

education. However, there remains much room for improvement in order to enhance overall effectiveness, particularly with regard to resource allocation, teacher training, and the incorporation of social considerations.

D. Conclusions

The Inclusive Education Policy in Indonesia aims to ensure access to education for all students, including those with limited needs. The implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia faces various challenges, including teacher qualifications, infrastructure, and support from parents and the community. Inclusive education also aims to increase students' sense of self-esteem, create a more welcoming school environment, and fulfil their right to quality education.

Despite the progress, many challenges remain unresolved, such as the availability of adequate facilities and appropriate teacher training. Policy implementation is often hampered by a lack of infrastructure and ineffective government management. Potential solutions include better communication strategies, increased availability of funds, and inclusive learning frameworks that meet the needs of diverse communities.

Indonesia has made significant strides in inclusive education through national legislation and a national action plan for disability. However, challenges remain due to the decentralized system, resulting in different implementations in different regions. Awareness campaigns and collaboration between schools and parents are essential for the success of inclusive education. While much progress has been made, there is still plenty of room for improvement in terms of resource distribution, teacher training, and the integration of social considerations.

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