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Implementation of Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs in Public Schools: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: This article examines the implementation of inclusive education in public schools through interviews with teachers, parents, and students with special needs. The study finds that despite the adoption of inclusive policies, challenges remain in terms of resources, teacher training, and social acceptance within the school environment. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 teachers, 10 parents, and 5 students with special needs in public schools in Indonesia. The findings highlight that while inclusive education promotes equal learning opportunities, the lack of adequate support systems, specialized teaching strategies, and societal awareness hinders its effectiveness. Teachers struggle with adapting curricula and managing diverse learning needs due to insufficient training and resources. Parents express mixed perspectives regarding the success of inclusion, citing both benefits and concerns about their children's academic and social development. Meanwhile, students with special needs often face difficulties in peer interactions and classroom participation. This study underscores the importance of comprehensive policy support, professional development for educators, and collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Training, Social Acceptance, Educational Policy, Curriculum Adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational approach that aims to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, have equal access to quality education. The core principle of inclusive education is the absence of discrimination against anyone, emphasizing that every child has the right to the same learning opportunities in a supportive and welcoming educational environment. This approach not only accommodates students with special needs but also fosters a more equitable and flexible education system for all learners (A. Syafi'i, Arifin, et al., 2024).

Despite the global recognition of inclusive education and its integration into various educational policies, its implementation in public schools still faces numerous challenges. One of

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the primary obstacles is the limited resources available to support inclusive education. Many schools lack adequate facilities, such as accessible classrooms for students with physical disabilities, assistive technologies, or specially designed learning tools for students with special needs(Ayyubi et al., 2025).

The lack of teacher training is a crucial factor that hinders the success of inclusive education. Many teachers in public schools have not received sufficient training to address the needs of students with disabilities or other special requirements. An inflexible curriculum and less adaptive teaching methods also pose significant challenges in supporting the success of inclusive education. Without proper training, teachers often struggle to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate the needs of all students in the classroom(Habibulloh, 2024).

Beyond internal factors within the educational environment, social acceptance from the community and school surroundings also significantly impacts the success of inclusive education. There are still negative stigmas and stereotypes about students with special needs, leading to their lack of acceptance in school environments. A lack of public awareness and understanding of the importance of inclusive education often results in direct or indirect discrimination against children with special needs. Therefore, efforts to raise public awareness about the significance of inclusive education are essential(Muzakki et al., 2023).

Inclusive education is not merely about providing opportunities for children with special needs to study in public schools; it also contributes to the broader formation of a more inclusive and equitable education system. Effective implementation of inclusive education can bring benefits to all stakeholders in the education system. For students with special needs, inclusive education provides opportunities to interact with their peers in the same environment, enhancing their social skills and self-confidence. It also helps reduce stigma and discrimination, allowing students with special needs to feel more accepted in society(Sholeh, Azah, et al., 2024).

For students without special needs, inclusive education broadens their experience in understanding and accepting differences. It fosters empathy, tolerance, and social skills. Diversity



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in an inclusive classroom also enriches the learning experience, as students can learn from various perspectives and challenges faced by their peers(Maesyaroh, 2024).

For educators, inclusive education requires them to develop more innovative and flexible teaching methods. This enhances their professional competencies in addressing diverse student characteristics. Moreover, for schools and the education system as a whole, inclusive education encourages the development of policies that are more responsive to the needs of all students, creating a more adaptive and equitable learning environment(K. Syafi'i & Ikwandi, 2023).

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how inclusive education is implemented in public schools. The primary focus is to identify the key challenges in implementing inclusive education, including aspects of policy, resources, teacher readiness, and social acceptance by the community and school environment. Additionally, this research seeks to explore strategies to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach(Lewis, 2015). This approach was chosen to understand the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of respondents regarding the implementation of inclusive education in public schools in Indonesia. The study involves 15 teachers, 10 parents, and 5 students with special needs as the main participants.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis(Shull et al., 2008).

In-depth Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted directly with teachers, parents, and students with special needs to explore their experiences, perceptions, and the obstacles they face in inclusive education. This technique allows the researcher to gain deeper insights into the respondents' views on the inclusive education system.



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Direct Observations: In addition to interviews, direct observations were conducted in the school environment to observe learning activities in inclusive classrooms, interactions between regular students and students with special needs, and the support provided by educators. These observations aim to understand how inclusive education is implemented in daily practice and to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the field.

Document Analysis: Documentation also plays an important role in data collection. The researcher examines various policy documents, curricula, and inclusive education programs implemented in public schools. Analyzing these documents helps understand the regulations and strategies that have been implemented to support inclusive education and assess their alignment with actual practices in schools.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using a phenomenological approach (Patton, 2014).

Transcription and Coding: The analysis process begins with interview transcription, where recorded interviews are transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Then, a coding process is carried out to identify the main themes emerging from the collected data. The identified themes include experiences, challenges, and strategies used in inclusive education.

Identifying Patterns and Themes: The next step is to identify patterns and themes by grouping findings based on similarities and differences in interviews and observations. This allows the researcher to find common patterns that emerge from respondents' experiences.

Interpretation of Findings: Once patterns and themes are identified, the findings are interpreted by structuring them within the context of inclusive education and connecting them with relevant theories.

Data Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, several data validation strategies were applied (Yin, 2009):



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Source Triangulation: Data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were compared to ensure information consistency.

Member Checking: The interview results were reconfirmed with participants to ensure that the interpretations made were in accordance with their experiences.

Audit Trail: A detailed record of the research process, including decision-making and data analysis, was provided so that it could be verified by others.

Expert Discussions: Discussions with inclusive education experts were also conducted to gain additional perspectives and avoid researcher bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach aimed at ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, can learn together in the same environment. This concept not only benefits students with special needs but also regular students, who can learn about diversity, empathy, and cooperation. In this study, interviews with 15 teachers in public schools in Indonesia revealed that they generally acknowledge the benefits of inclusive education in enhancing students' social interactions and academic development. Teachers believe that inclusive education helps students better understand individual differences and develop a higher level of tolerance.

Although inclusive education brings many benefits, teachers also face various challenges in its implementation. One of the main obstacles they encounter is the lack of adequate training in handling students with special needs. Most teachers feel that the training they receive is largely theoretical and does not sufficiently equip them with practical skills applicable in the classroom (Johnson et al., 2024). They expressed that training materials often do not cover concrete strategies for managing inclusive classrooms, adapting curricula, or providing teaching approaches that suit the needs of students with special needs. As a result, many teachers feel unconfident in teaching in an inclusive environment and have to seek additional information independently.



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Some teachers take the initiative to develop their skills through various means, such as attending online seminars, discussing with fellow teachers who have experience in inclusive education, or reading relevant literature (A. Syafi'i, Nur, et al., 2024). However, time constraints and limited access to educational resources often hinder their efforts to enhance their competencies. Additionally, some schools have yet to provide continuous training programs, leaving teachers to struggle on their own to gain a deeper understanding of how to educate students with special needs.

Apart from the lack of training, resource limitations also pose a major challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers complain about the scarcity of supportive facilities, such as appropriate learning aids, special assistants, and access to psychologists or therapists who can help address students' specific needs (Lestari, et al., 2024). In many schools, class sizes are quite large, making it difficult for teachers to provide sufficient attention to each student, particularly those requiring special learning approaches.

The lack of special assistants is another common issue faced by teachers. In inclusive education, the presence of assistants is crucial in helping students with special needs adapt to their learning environment (Azah et al., 2024). However, many schools do not have enough assistants, leaving teachers to handle all student needs on their own. This increases teachers' workload and can affect the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

Beyond internal school factors, the lack of a well-structured inclusive education policy also presents a challenge for teachers. Some schools still do not have a clear system for accommodating students with special needs (Sholeh et al., 2024). The absence of concrete guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education forces teachers to find their own ways to adapt their teaching methods. In reality, clear policies and government support are essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including the government, schools, and the community, are necessary. One of the steps that can be taken is enhancing teacher training programs that are more practical and application-based. These training sessions should cover



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teaching strategies suited to students with special needs, inclusive classroom management, and skills in assessing students' development(Abror et al., 2024).

The government and schools must ensure the availability of adequate resources to support inclusive education. The provision of learning aids, special assistants, and access to psychological and therapy services should be a priority in inclusive education policies. With sufficient support, teachers can teach more effectively in an inclusive setting and provide a better learning experience for all students. The success of inclusive education does not rely solely on individual teacher efforts but also on the support of the entire education system. With well-planned strategies, appropriate policies, and cooperation among all involved parties, inclusive education can be implemented more effectively and provide optimal benefits for all students.

Parents' Perspective on Inclusive Education

Parents play a crucial role in the success of inclusive education, as they contribute to supporting their children both at home and at school. In this study, interviews with parents of both special needs students and regular students revealed differing views on the effectiveness of inclusive education. Some parents fully support this policy, recognizing the social and academic benefits it offers their children. However, others remain skeptical about its effectiveness, particularly due to the lack of adequate support in the implementation of inclusion programs in schools.

Parents who support inclusive education believe that this policy provides their children with the opportunity to grow in a more diverse and inclusive environment. They argue that interactions between special needs students and regular students help improve social skills and empathy. Additionally, parents observe that their children become more confident as they feel accepted in the school environment without discrimination(Ab Rahman, 2024). Some parents of special needs students stated that their children have shown positive social development and have greater opportunities to learn from their peers.

Beyond social benefits, some parents also believe that inclusive education positively impacts their children's academic development. With broader interactions, special needs students can



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become more motivated to learn and participate in academic activities with greater confidence. On the other hand, regular students also benefit from the system, as they learn to better understand individual differences and develop teamwork skills in a heterogeneous environment(Sholeh, 2023a). Parents who support inclusive education believe that schools implementing this policy can create a more inclusive and equitable educational culture for all students.

Not all parents have a positive view of inclusive education. Some parents of special needs students feel that the system does not fully meet their children's needs. They express concerns that the teaching methods used in class are not flexible enough to accommodate their children's individual requirements(Habibulloh et al., 2024). The lack of specialized assistants and limited school resources are also major concerns. Some parents feel that their children struggle to keep up with lessons due to the absence of personalized guidance tailored to their needs. As a result, they believe their children face greater academic challenges compared to receiving education in a more specialized setting, such as a special needs school.

Some parents of regular students also voice concerns about the implementation of inclusive education. They worry that teachers may devote more attention to special needs students, potentially limiting the academic guidance provided to their own children(A. Syafi'i & El-Yunusi, 2024). Some parents feel that in inclusive classrooms, the pace of learning may slow down due to the need to accommodate diverse student needs. They also express concerns about potential disruptions in the teaching and learning process if special needs students require greater attention from teachers.

Many parents feel that they lack sufficient information and education about the concept of inclusive education. Some state that schools have not provided enough understanding of how inclusive education can be effectively implemented. The lack of communication between schools and parents makes some parents uncertain about whether inclusive education truly benefits their children(Satyawati & Dwikurnaningsih, 2024). As a result, they emphasize the importance of better socialization and education regarding this concept so that all parties can understand and support the inclusive education system more effectively.



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To address these challenges, greater efforts are needed to build parents' understanding and trust in inclusive education. Schools should enhance communication with parents through discussion forums, seminars, or specialized training sessions to help them understand how inclusion is implemented and how they can support their children in the learning process (Riveira, et al., 2014). Additionally, support from the government and educational institutions in providing adequate facilities and specialized assistants is essential for the effective implementation of inclusive education.

Parents' perspectives on inclusive education vary widely and are influenced by multiple factors, including personal experiences, school support, and the effectiveness of inclusion policies. With strong collaboration between schools, teachers, and parents, inclusive education can become a better solution for all students, both special needs and regular students. Strong support from all parties will enable the creation of a more inclusive, equitable learning environment that benefits children's overall development.

Social Challenges Faced by Students with Special Needs

Inclusive education provides students with special needs the opportunity to learn in the same environment as regular students, allowing them to develop both academic and social skills more broadly. In this study, students with special needs who participated in interviews shared their experiences regarding the inclusive education system in public schools. Most students felt supported by inclusive education because it allowed them to interact with their peers, build social relationships, and learn in a more diverse environment. They believed that being in a regular school helped them feel more accepted in society and boosted their confidence in communication and participation in school activities.

Despite the clear benefits of inclusive education, students with special needs also face complex social challenges. One of the main challenges they encounter is the lack of understanding and acceptance from their peers (Mahmud, 2015). Some students with special needs reported experiencing bullying or discriminatory treatment from their classmates, either directly or indirectly. The discrimination they faced included teasing, social exclusion, or even being ignored



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by their peers. As a result, some students felt awkward and struggled to form friendships, especially when they perceived unfair treatment in their school's social environment.

In addition to bullying, students with special needs also face difficulties in building broader social relationships. While some classmates are supportive, many regular students still lack sufficient understanding of their conditions (Gigante & Firestone, 2008). Some students with special needs felt that their peers were often unsure about how to interact with them, making communication more challenging. The lack of education on diversity in schools leads to misunderstandings that hinder the social integration of students with special needs.

Another challenge faced by students with special needs is the feeling of alienation in both academic and non-academic activities. Some students stated that the teaching methods used in class were often not fully adapted to their needs (Veletsianos et al., 2021). For example, students with hearing impairments struggled to understand lessons if teachers did not provide visual explanations or use appropriate assistive tools. Similarly, students with sensory processing disorders found it difficult to follow lessons in the same way as their peers. This mismatch in teaching methods made them feel left behind and less confident in academic activities.

Beyond academics, alienation was also felt in extracurricular activities. Many students with special needs found it difficult to actively participate in activities outside the classroom due to a lack of available facilities and support. For instance, students with physical disabilities faced obstacles in joining sports activities, while students with social developmental disorders felt awkward in team-based activities. The limited accessibility in various school activities further marginalized them, despite their desire to be involved and share the same experiences as their peers.

Support from teachers and the school environment is crucial in addressing these social challenges. Some students with special needs who felt supported by their teachers and peers reported more positive experiences in inclusive education. Teachers who actively educate regular students about the importance of inclusivity can help create a more welcoming social environment



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for all students. Additionally, schools can organize socialization programs that encourage regular students to better understand and appreciate differences among their peers.

To improve the experience of students with special needs in inclusive education, concrete steps must be taken to enhance their social conditions at school (Karnadi et al., 2023). One approach is to provide training for regular students on how to interact with peers who have special needs. Schools can also establish peer mentoring or support groups to help students with special needs navigate their social environment. Furthermore, improving facilities and policies that support their participation in all aspects of school life—including academic and extracurricular activities—is essential.

The social challenges faced by students with special needs in inclusive education are not easy to overcome. However, through collaboration between teachers, students, and school administrators, a more inclusive environment can be created. By increasing understanding and social support within schools, students with special needs can fully benefit from the inclusive education system and have greater opportunities for social and academic development.

Efforts to Improve the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an effort to provide equal opportunities for all students, including those with special needs, to receive a quality education. Although this concept has been implemented in various schools, challenges in its execution are still frequently encountered. Therefore, strategic steps are needed to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education so that its benefits can be optimally felt by all stakeholders, including students with special needs, regular students, teachers, and parents.

One of the key steps in improving the effectiveness of inclusive education is enhancing teacher training. Teachers play a central role in creating a supportive learning environment for all students. Therefore, the government and schools need to provide more comprehensive training programs for teachers to better prepare them for teaching students with special needs. This training should cover practical aspects such as differentiated teaching strategies, inclusive classroom management techniques, and effective communication skills with students with special needs.



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Additionally, teachers should be equipped with knowledge on how to address the social and emotional challenges faced by students in an inclusive education system. With adequate competencies, teachers can be more confident in managing the dynamics of an inclusive classroom and ensuring that all students receive the attention they need.

In addition to teacher training, the provision of adequate resources is also a crucial factor in improving the effectiveness of inclusive education. Schools require support in the form of learning aids tailored to the needs of students with special needs, such as Braille books, interactive learning software, and hearing aids for students with hearing impairments. Furthermore, the presence of specialized support personnel, such as teaching assistants or therapists, can help students with special needs participate more optimally in learning activities(Sholeh, 2023). Schools should also have access to professionals, such as psychologists and therapists, who can provide interventions for students struggling with the learning process. With sufficient resources, inclusive education can run more effectively and provide maximum benefits for all students.

Another equally important step is educating and raising awareness among parents and regular students. A lack of understanding of inclusive education often becomes an obstacle in creating a supportive environment for students with special needs. Therefore, schools need to organize various awareness programs involving parents, regular students, and educators to help them comprehend the concept of inclusive education more thoroughly(Efendi & Sholeh, 2023). Seminars, workshops, and discussion groups can serve as platforms for parents and students to gain clearer insights into the importance of inclusion and how to interact with students with special needs. With adequate education, it is expected that the parents of regular students will be more accepting and supportive of inclusive policies, while regular students can develop greater empathy and tolerance toward their peers with special needs.

Beyond academic aspects, psychosocial support for students with special needs is also a crucial factor that must be addressed. Many students with special needs face challenges in adapting to the school environment, both academically and socially. Therefore, schools should provide psychological and social support services, such as mentoring programs, counseling services, and



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support groups, to help them overcome the difficulties they encounter. With adequate psychosocial support, students with special needs can adapt more easily and feel more comfortable in their learning environment.

Apart from the above efforts, the effectiveness of inclusive education can also be improved through a more systematic and collaborative approach among various stakeholders. The government, schools, teachers, parents, and the broader education community must work together to create a truly inclusive education system that provides maximum benefits for all students (Syafi'i et al., 2024). The government can support inclusive education through progressive policies and adequate budget allocations for the development of facilities and support resources. Schools, on the other hand, must ensure that inclusive policies are consistently implemented and supported by all educators. Meanwhile, parents and the community should actively participate in fostering inclusivity within schools so that all students can learn in a comfortable and accepting environment.

With more systematic and collaborative efforts from various parties, inclusive education in public schools is expected to be more effective and provide maximum benefits for all students, whether they have special needs or not. Well-managed inclusive education not only helps students with special needs develop their potential but also instills values of solidarity, tolerance, and empathy within the school environment. Thus, inclusive education can serve as a foundation for the creation of a more inclusive, fair, and equitable society for all individuals, without exception.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education in public schools provides an opportunity for students with special needs to learn alongside regular students in the same environment. This approach offers many benefits, such as improving social skills, boosting self-confidence, and fostering acceptance within society. However, the implementation of inclusive education still faces various challenges from teachers, parents, and students themselves. Teachers, who act as facilitators in inclusive education, often feel they lack adequate training in handling students with special needs. The training materials,



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which are still largely theoretical and lack practical application, pose a major challenge, requiring teachers to seek additional information on their own. Additionally, limited resources, such as specialized support staff, learning aids, and psychological support, also hinder the effective management of inclusive classrooms.

From the perspective of parents, there are diverse views on inclusive education. While many support it due to the social and academic benefits for their children, others doubt its effectiveness if not accompanied by sufficient support. Some parents of students with special needs feel that their children still struggle to follow the lessons, while parents of regular students worry that inclusion may hinder their children's academic progress. Students with special needs face significant social challenges, such as a lack of understanding and acceptance from peers and the risk of bullying. They also experience difficulties in participating in academic and extracurricular activities due to insufficient facilities and support tailored to their needs.

To enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education, strategic steps such as improving teacher training, providing adequate resources, and educating parents and regular students about the importance of inclusion are necessary. Additionally, psychosocial support for students with special needs through counseling services and mentoring programs should be strengthened. Through cooperation among various parties, including the government, schools, teachers, and parents, inclusive education can be implemented more effectively. The success of inclusive education benefits not only students with special needs but also contributes to creating a more tolerant, inclusive, and fair school environment for all students.

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