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The Effectiveness of Teachers' Roles in Supporting Learning for Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Classes

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the effectiveness of teachers' roles in supporting the learning of students with special needs (ABK) in inclusive classes. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation in three inclusive schools in Indonesia and Malaysia. The research findings show that teachers are strategically motivators, facilitators, initiators, and mediators in supporting ABK learning. Teachers can modify the curriculum, teaching strategies, and classroom management based on students' individual needs. In addition, initial assessments are used to analyze student abilities so that learning can be adjusted. Teachers also utilize positive reinforcement, emotional validation, and personal guidance to increase learning motivation. The use of technology, such as TV and LCD, as well as creativity in creating simple learning media, also supports learning success. This study found that collaboration between regular teachers, special education teachers, and parents plays an important role in creating a conducive learning environment. This study contributes by adding perspectives on a holistic approach that integrates academic, social, and emotional aspects in inclusive education. Practical implications include the need for ongoing inclusive teacher training and the development of policies that support the management of inclusive education.

Keywords: Teacher Role, Special Needs Students, Inclusive Class, Inclusive Education, Class Management.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is one solution to fulfill the rights of special needs students (ABK) to receive proper and quality education (Sapon Shevin in Neil, 1994) (O'neil, n.d.). Based on Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 32 Paragraph 1, special education is education designed for students who have difficulty in following the learning process due to physical, emotional, mental, social disorders, or have the potential for intelligence and special talents (Septiana, 2017). This concept is in line with the principle of "Education for All" echoed by UNESCO, which emphasises that every individual, without exception, has the same rights to access education (Goldstein, n.d.).

As the core of inclusive education, teachers play an important role in ensuring learning success (Junaidi et al., 2022). Teachers are required to be able to manage inclusive classes by paying attention to the individual needs of each student. According to Sardiman (2011: 144-146), teachers have various roles, from informants to evaluators, which must be optimized to create a conducive learning atmosphere and support student development. This challenge is even more difficult in inclusive schools, where teachers must integrate the needs of regular and special needs students in one learning environment (Fannisa, 2013).

In the field, inclusive education often faces various challenges that reflect the gap between the ideal concept and practice(Arum et al., 2020; Herawati, 2016). One of the main gaps is teachers' lack of understanding and skills in managing inclusive classes. Teachers in inclusive schools are required to have in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of students with special needs (ABK) and the ability to design appropriate learning strategies (Khayati et al., 2020). However, in reality, many teachers have not received adequate training in inclusive education, so that class management is not optimal (Firdaus, 2010).

In addition, there is still a social stigma in the school environment and society that assumes ABK should study in special schools. This hinders efforts to create a fully inclusive environment. In some inclusive schools, ABK are often not fully accepted by regular students or even by some educators.

Learning support facilities for special needs students are also often inadequate. Many inclusive schools do not have special facilities and infrastructure, such as learning aids, disability-friendly classrooms, or learning materials tailored to the needs of special needs students. This deficiency results in a gap in access to decent education for special needs students compared to regular students.

Furthermore, at the policy level, although the government has regulated inclusive education through regulations such as Permendiknas No. 70 of 2009, its implementation in the field is still far from expectations. This is due to lack of funding, weak supervision, and minimal collaboration between schools, parents, and communities (Khotimah, 2019).

These gaps have a significant impact on ABK learning, such as:

1. ABKs do not actively participate in learning. They often feel alienated because learning methods do not suit their needs.

2. The decline in the quality of inclusive education. Unpreparedness of teachers and limited facilities make the goals of inclusive education difficult to achieve.

3. Increased dropout rates. Special needs students who do not receive adequate support tend to have difficulty surviving in inclusive schools.

By understanding this phenomenon, research on the effectiveness of teachers' roles in supporting ABK learning in inclusive classes becomes very relevant to provide solutions based on data and real needs. This is also an important effort in bridging the gap between policy and implementation of inclusive education.

Previous studies have shown that the success of inclusive education depends on the teacher's ability to manage the class and provide learning that follows the characteristics of special needs students (Anggriana & Trisnani, 2016). However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of teachers' role in inclusive schools, especially in Indonesia. This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring how teachers can implement their roles in supporting the learning of special needs students.

The novelty of this study lies in the approach used to compare the role of teachers in inclusive schools between two countries, namely Indonesia and Indonesia. In addition, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the specific challenges inclusive teachers face and practical solutions to optimize classroom management.

This research aims to:

1. Describes the role of teachers in supporting the learning of students with special needs in inclusive schools.

2. Analyzing the effectiveness of strategies used by teachers in managing inclusive classes.

3. Identifying factors that support and hinder successful learning in inclusive schools.

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of inclusive education policies, improve teacher competence, and serve as a reference for further research in special education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study research type. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate to explore certain social situations, namely the role of teachers in classroom management for students with special needs in inclusive schools. Case studies allow researchers to collect in-depth data on specific phenomena, covering aspects of teachers' classroom management strategies.

The population in this study was not determined quantitatively, but rather refers to the social situation consisting of place, actors, and actions, as explained by Sugiyono (2010). The sample was selected purposively, namely teachers in several inclusive schools, Participants were selected based on their role as informants with deep insight into classroom management in inclusive schools.

The research instruments include observation guidelines, interviews, and documentation compiled based on theoretical studies. Researchers actively participated in observations to observe how teachers manage the class. Interviews were conducted using guidelines designed to explore information about strategies, challenges, and solutions implemented by teachers. Documentation in the form of photographs of learning activities, notes, and other supporting documents was used to complete the data.

Data was collected through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation (Arikunto, 2010). Observations focused on the learning process in inclusive classrooms, including classroom management strategies teachers use. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the teacher's role in creating a supportive learning environment. Documentation was used to support findings with visual or written evidence.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively with an inductive approach. The data obtained were organized, categorized, and synthesized to find relevant patterns or themes. The study followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, including data reduction, presentation, and concluding. To ensure data validity, source and method triangulation techniques were used (Sugiyono, 2010). This technique allows researchers to verify information from various perspectives for accurate and reliable results.

This study was designed to provide a deep understanding of the effectiveness of the teacher's role in supporting the learning of students with special needs. With a systematic approach, it is expected to significantly contribute to the development of inclusive education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the strategic role of teachers in supporting the learning of students with special needs (ABK) in inclusive schools through a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, direct observation of learning activities, and documentation related to classroom management. This approach allows researchers to understand the field context comprehensively and in detail.

Each school has its unique dynamics in implementing the principles of inclusive education. In some schools, regular education teachers collaborate closely with special education teachers. This collaboration not only plays a role in developing learning strategies but also in building synergies that support the development of ABK in a heterogeneous classroom environment.

Teachers act as motivators, facilitators, initiators, and mediators, focusing on managing individual-based learning needs. For example, using initial assessments helps teachers assess student ability so learning methods can be modified to create relevant learning experiences and support students' development. In this case, teachers are not only transmitters of material but also agents of change who pay attention to students' emotional and social dimensions.

In addition, approaches such as reinforcement through rewards, emotional validation, and personal guidance have proven effective in increasing ABK learning motivation. Teachers provide rewards through verbal recognition, symbolic awards, or even adjustments to activities that students like to maintain their enthusiasm.

1. **Classroom Management**

    Teachers in inclusive schools create a conducive learning environment through:

a. Seating Arrangement: Students with intensive guidance needs are placed closer to the teacher, while other students are placed to support each other in learning.

b. Initial Assessment: Analysis of student abilities is conducted at the beginning of learning to determine appropriate learning strategies, including materials and methods modified based on individual needs (Kurniadi & Sunaryo, 2017).

2. **Leadership**

Teachers play a leadership role that focuses on empowering learners through:

a. Motivation and Inspiration: Teachers provide positive reinforcement in various ways, such as symbolic awards (stickers, praise) and co-curricular participation activities to foster students' self-confidence (Febianti, 2018).

b. Emotional Validation: Teachers listen and understand students' emotional states, creating a sense of security that supports the learning process (Astinah et al., 2019).

3. **Suitability of Teacher Competencies**

Teachers demonstrate mastery of pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competencies:

a. Pedagogy: Teachers use a variety of methods, including curriculum modifications to ensure all learners can access meaningful learning (Ntelok et al., 2020).

b. Personality and Social: Teachers create healthy interpersonal relationships with students, colleagues, support staff, and parents.

c. Professional: Teachers understand the teaching material in depth and can modify it to meet students' needs (Mazlinah, 2009).

4. **Creating a Conducive Classroom**

Teachers create a safe and enjoyable learning atmosphere by:

a. Ensure that students do not feel forced to learn.

b. Implement activity modifications based on individual situations and needs to reduce learning stress.

c. Proactively manage conflicts between students to maintain harmony in the classroom environment.

5. **Utilization of Technology**

Modern technology, such as TV, LCD, and other digital media, is a major tool in learning. In some schools, teachers are also creative in using simple teaching aids to complement the limitations of technology. This proves the flexibility and innovation of teachers in creating an interesting and effective learning experience (Naufal, 2020).

6. **Teacher-Student Personal Relationships**

eachers play a vital role in building deep personal relationships where students feel valued and heard. Teachers encourage openness by validating students' feelings and offering emotional support. These interactions not only help students learn better but also build their self-confidence.

This study shows that teachers in inclusive schools have a strategic role that includes classroom management and holistic student empowerment. The success of ABK learning depends on the teacher's ability to integrate academic, social, and emotional aspects into the learning process.

Research Contribution:

a. Providing insights for teacher training in inclusive education.

b. Assist policy makers in designing programs and policies that comprehensively support inclusive education.

c. To be a reference in developing individual needs-based learning methods relevant to ABK.

With this deeper approach, the research results emphasize the importance of teachers as inclusion agents who play an active role in supporting educational success for all groups, especially special needs students.

This study reveals that the effectiveness of the teacher's role in supporting the learning of students with special needs (ABK) in inclusive classes is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to carry out various strategic roles. Based on data analysis, several important points are the main findings:

1. Classroom Management

Teachers in inclusive schools have a central role in creating a conducive learning environment. This is done through analyzing student needs (initial assessment) and adjusting teaching strategies. Teachers do not only focus on the academic dimension but also pay attention to students' social and emotional aspects. These results indicate that inclusive classroom management cannot be equated with regular classes because it requires a more personal and flexible approach.

2. Teacher Leadership

Teachers motivate students through positive reinforcement and emotional validation (Oktiani, 2017). This not only increases student engagement in learning but also builds self-confidence. In situations of conflict or emotional challenges, teachers act as mediators, demonstrating deep empathy. This approach is effective in creating a safe and comfortable learning climate.

3. Teacher Competence

Teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence by modifying the curriculum and learning strategies to suit the needs of special needs students. Social competence is seen in their ability to communicate effectively with students, parents, and support staff. Teacher personality competence is also a key factor in building healthy relationships and providing good role models (Klaassen, 2002).

4. Utilization of Technology

The use of technology is one of the significant innovations. Teachers use digital media such as TV and LCD to make learning more interesting. On the other hand, creativity in utilizing simple teaching aids shows the teacher's ability to adapt to limited facilities (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018).

5. Teacher-Student Relationships

Teachers actively build personal relationships that support openness and trust. Students feel valued, which has a positive impact on their engagement in learning (Basith, 2024).

The effectiveness of the teacher's role in an inclusive classroom involves a combination of carefully designed instructional approaches and supportive interpersonal interactions. This indicates that inclusive education is about providing access to special needs students and ensuring that they receive adequate support to develop holistically.

Effective teachers focus on academic achievement and become companions in building students' self-confidence and independence. These findings emphasize the importance of comprehensive and ongoing teacher training in inclusive education.

In this discussion, several key findings highlight teachers' important role in classroom management. First, teachers have a great responsibility in creating an effective learning environment (Mintarsih, 2017)Classroom management includes various aspects, such as curriculum planning, setting procedures, and monitoring student progress. Although teachers in Indonesia use different strategies, their main goal is to achieve optimal learning outcomes for all students.

Furthermore, the teacher's role as a leader in the classroom is crucial. Teachers not only act as teachers but also as motivators, facilitators, and inspirers. In this context, it is important for teachers to create an active and conducive learning atmosphere. For example, in Malaysia, teachers really pay attention to students' feelings when providing motivation so as to avoid jealousy between them. This shows that teachers' emotional sensitivity towards students is the key to creating positive interactions.

Teacher competence is also an important focus in this finding. Every teacher must have four competencies: professional, pedagogical, social, and personality competencies. These four competencies are interrelated and very important for improving the quality of teaching. Teachers who understand and are able to apply these four aspects will be more effective in managing the class and supporting student development (Adhayati et al., 2016).

Furthermore, teachers' dedication and personality are central to their duties. Teachers must carry out their responsibilities with a calling of conscience and have a noble personality. This dedication becomes increasingly important, especially in providing quality education for students with special needs, where extra attention and patience are needed.

Finally, creating a conducive classroom situation is an equally important aspect. Teachers must create a safe and comfortable classroom atmosphere for students (Winataputra, 1998). The social-

emotional approach is very important in this regard, as it can help build good relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves. By building a positive classroom climate, teachers can facilitate more effective and enjoyable learning for all students.

Overall, these findings suggest that successful classroom management is highly dependent on teachers' active role in creating a supportive learning environment and on their own competencies and personalities.

If we analyze classroom management, several aspects need to be considered to create an effective learning environment. First, the balance between structured and flexible approaches is very important. An approach that is too rigid can hinder students' creativity, while an approach that is too loose can reduce discipline. Therefore, teachers need to be able to adjust the methods used based on the needs and conditions of the students. This allows students to learn in a way that is more appropriate to their learning style.

Furthermore, the role of emotion in education cannot be ignored. Classroom management is not only related to academic aspects, but also to the emotional relationship between teachers and students. A good relationship can increase students' motivation and participation in learning. Therefore, teachers need to be trained in effective interpersonal and communication skills to build positive relationships with students.

Continuous professional development is also key to improving teacher competency. In the ever-evolving world of education, teachers are expected to always update their knowledge and skills. Regular training and professional development will help teachers remain relevant and effective in their teaching.

Cultural context also plays an important role in classroom management practices. Countries have different values and norms, which can influence how teachers manage their classrooms. For example, in Finland, freedom of teaching is considered very important in supporting student creativity. Therefore, understanding the local context is essential in implementing effective teaching strategies.

Finally, the influence of technology in learning cannot be ignored. The use of technology can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching. However, teachers need to be trained to use technology optimally to improve the quality of learning and not just rely on the tool. Skills in using technology must be part of teacher professional development.

In conclusion, classroom management's success highly depends on teachers' active role in creating a conducive learning environment. Teacher competence, dedication, and the ability to adapt to students' needs are key to achieving the expected educational goals. This analysis underlines the importance of professional development, emotional relationships, and cultural context in education, all of which contribute to the effectiveness of classroom management.

Based on the above explanation, we can see that several previous studies provide valuable insights related to inclusive education, and the findings of this study have many similarities with these studies. Giangreco (2013), for example, identified that the success of inclusive education is highly dependent on teacher competence in designing learning that is appropriate to the needs of students

with special needs (ABK) (Giangreco, 2013). This study strengthens this view by showing that teachers in inclusive schools can modify the curriculum and learning strategies to create relevant and supportive learning experiences. Fannisa (2013) highlights the various challenges teachers face in inclusive schools, especially in understanding the characteristics of ABK and finding appropriate teaching strategies (Fannisa, 2013). This study aligns with these findings, where teachers utilise initial assessments to identify individual student needs. In addition, this study offers an innovative approach in the form of emotional validation, which has proven effective in creating healthy relationships between teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

Several main findings can be drawn from the research that has been conducted. First, the role of teachers as class managers is very important, because the presence of teachers who are active and involved in the learning process has a direct effect on student learning outcomes, with great involvement, teachers can increase student participation, which in turn improves their learning outcomes (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Furthermore, teachers' classroom management is influenced by the situation and conditions in the classroom. In this case, the approach applied, both structured (high structure decision) and flexible (low structure decision), needs to be adjusted to the classroom context to be more effective. This shows that teachers must be sensitive to the dynamics that occur in the classroom.

Teacher leadership ability is also a key factor in classroom management. Teachers who can carry out leadership functions as motivators, facilitators, and inspirers are crucial to achieving learning goals. The quality of teacher leadership contributes directly to the effectiveness of classroom management.

Furthermore, good teacher competence is directly related to learning management (Rahman et al., 2023)This ability affects students individually and all parties involved in education, including parents. Therefore, developing teacher competence is very important.

In addition, the personality and attitude of the teacher's dedication play an important role in the teaching process. Teachers who teach sincerely and attentively will be more effective in delivering material to students. A good personality helps create a positive learning atmosphere essential for student success.

To create a safe and conducive learning environment, teachers also need to conduct initial assessments, especially for students with special needs (Hamzah et al., 2020)This step is very important so that all students feel safe and comfortable in the learning process and can participate optimally.

Considering these findings, several recommendations for policy makers are made. First, school principals can create policies that support the improvement of teacher competence in classroom management, especially for students with special needs in inclusive schools. This policy can include training and professional development for teachers to carry out their duties effectively.

In addition, preparing a curriculum that is more flexible and responsive to the needs of students, especially those with special needs, is necessary. This will increase the effectiveness of classroom management and support student success in the teaching and learning process.

This study also has some limitations. The limited focus on classroom management in inclusive schools and the involvement of respondents from only two countries may affect the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this study did not examine external factors that may influence classroom management in depth. Moreover, the limitations of this study include the relatively small number of respondents from the interviews. Therefore, this study requires more respondents to avoid bias in the research. For further research, it is suggested that the survey involve more respondents from various educational backgrounds and contexts. Researchers are also advised to dig deeper into different sources and references related to classroom management and explore external factors that can affect the learning process. Thus, future research results are expected to provide a more comprehensive contribution to improving the quality of education.

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