The classroom challenges and strategies; The reflection of perceived meaning of inclusive education of teachers in inclusive schools

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Keywords	Abstract
Inclusive education, children with special needs, teacher	Educational inclusion is a concept with significant impact in the context of education. It is a concept that aims to provide equal and inclusive education for all students, including those with special needs. This article aims to describe how teachers identify the classroom challenges and strategies as a reflection of their held meanings of inclusive education. The research data was obtained from 20 teachers who filled out short fills from questionnaires distributed online. Data is analyzed using thematic analysis where data is reduced and categorized into themes and subthemes based on similarity. The results show that teachers tend to use stricter view on inclusive education as education intended for children with special needs, while the challenges faced by teachers in the classroom include challenges related to social aspects, such as how to communicate and interact with students with disabilities, understand the needs and character of variations in existing disabilities, and pedagogical challenges, such as providing instruction, material, as well as classroom management. Strategies used by teachers include communication strategies and psychological approaches to deal with the social aspects of the challenges faced, and pedagogical strategies to overcome challenges in classroom teaching. The results of this study show the importance of social and pedagogic competence for teachers in adapting to the complexity in the classroom. This research carries significant implications for inclusive education. With an understanding that many teachers face challenges in understanding and managing the needs of students with special needs, it is important for the education system to provide appropriate training and necessary support.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become part of the expected national Education goals. Inclusive education is an ideal view of the implementation of education, namely ensuring that every child gets their right to education. Haug (2017) states that the debate about inclusion education is no longer about what and why inclusion education is, but how to achieve it.

In Indonesia, the implementation of inclusive education refers to several laws and regulations such as Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, Law No. 8 of 2016 concerning persons with disabilities, and Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 70 2009 on inclusive education for students who have disabilities and have special intelligence and/or talent potential. Each region or province also has its own regulations to regulate its implementation. Examples in East Java are East Java Governor Regulation No. 30 of 2018, concerning the implementation of East Java provincial inclusive education, Surabaya City Regional Regulation, No. 16 of 2012, concerning the implementation of Education, and Surabaya mayor regulation number 47 of 2013, concerning the implementation and management of Education in the city of Surabaya.

However, there are still many things that need to be improved. Some problems such as adequate learning facilities and resources (Efendi, 2018), teachers are not ready to provide the assistance needed for children with mild learning difficulties (Sunardi, 2015), to the experience of students with disabilities who get negative attitudes that arise from their peers and teachers (Poernomo, 2016; Shofwan et al., 2023). Clarke, Embury, Jones, Yssel (2014) mentioned that teachers need to have the skills to help students with disabilities to cope with crises that may occur in schools.

METHODS

Design

This research is descriptive qualitative research. The study aims to understand the challenges and strategies carried out by teachers in responding to the needs of children with special needs at school.

Data collecting method.

Data was collected by distributing an online form where subjects answered several questions related to their experience in interacting with inclusion students. Answers are given in the form of descriptions. The responses analysed in this paper are teachers' answers about the challenges experienced when teaching students with disabilities and the strategies used in teaching students with disabilities.

Data analysis

The answers of the subjects were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method to systematically identify, organize, and provide insight in the form of patterns of understanding obtained from data (Braun &; Clarke, 2012). The steps to perform TA are as follows; (1) familiarize yourself with the data and work to understand it; (2) perform initial coding; (3) search for themes; (4) review potential themes; (5) define and name the theme; (6) produce reports (Braun &; Clarke, 2012).

Research Sample

This study involved 20 teachers from one inclusive private school in Surabaya. The form was distributed using online chat application from a gatekeeper in the school to 37 teachers including regular teachers and inclusion teachers (GPK). However, only 20 teachers responded and filled out the questionnaire. Regular teachers are teachers who do not have a special education background, while inclusion teachers are teachers who are specifically tasked with accompanying children with special needs. No inclusion teacher fills out the form.

The following is a summary of the data of teachers who were the subjects of the study.

No.	Subject Code	Sex	Duration of Work Experience (Year)
1	S1	F	1
2	S2	F	2
3	S3	F	7
4	S4	F	5
5	S5	F	2
6	S6	F	2
7	S7	F	9
8	S8	F	1
9	S9	M	2
10	S10	M	13
11	S11	M	7
12	S12	M	7
13	S13	M	9
14	S14	M	8
15	S15	F	5
16	S16	M	7
17	S17	M	7.5
18	S18	F	7
19	S19	M	5
20	S20	F	5

Figure 1. data of teachers

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis, 3 major themes were found, namely the meaning of inclusive education, implementation challenges for teachers, and the strategy used by teachers in the face of the challenges. The first theme has 3 sub-themes, which are education for children with special needs, non-discriminatory

education, and comprehensive education. The second theme has 2 sub themes, which are social-related factors, and pedagogic related factors. The third and last theme has two sub-themes, namely social skills and pedagogic skills.

Table 1. Theme Table Overview

THEME	Sub themes	Coding	Data source (by participant (P) number)
The Meaning of Inclusive Education	Education for children with special needs	Students who need mentoring	P1, P7,
		Students who are different from the average	P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P12, P18, P19
	Non-discriminatory education	All have equal rights	P2, P11, P13, P16
		All have equal opportunities	P5, P11, P17
		Equal treatment	P3, P5, P13, P14
	Comprehensive education	Includes regular and disabled students	P2, P15
Implementation challenges for teachers	Social related factors	Ways of communication	P5, P6, P7, P9, P13, P14, P16, P20
		Understand the diverse needs of ABK students	P1, P10
		Understand the behavior and emotions of different ABK students (not learning mood, tantrums	P3, P4, P8, P15
	Pedagogic related factors	Teaching ABK students	P7, P12, P16, P17, P18
		Provide instructions or materials	P3, P7, P11
		Classroom management	P1, P2, P3, P19
Teacher strategies to overcome challenges	Social skills	Start conversation; Find ways to communicate;	P1, P4, P20 P13, P16, P19
		psychological approach (pay more attention, makes students comfortable, paying attention to the psychological state of students, and involved parents)	P2, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P17
		trying to understand character. patient & careful in acting;	P5, P6, P8
	Pedagogic skills	arranging seating;	P15
		give study or game assignments;	P3, P4, P11, P16, P18, P20

Theme 1: the meaning of inclusive education

Inclusive education has been explained with various definition. It is important to understand how teacher perceived inclusive education to understand their attitude toward children in inclusive education. Based on the data, the teachers have different meaning of

inclusive education. Some teachers still believe that inclusive education is an education designed for children with special needs or student that require" assistance" (P1, P7). More teachers mentioned" non-discriminative education", which includes equal rights, equal opportunities and treatment (P2, P3, P5, P11, P13, P14, P16, P17). It is interesting to note that teachers who emphases the meaning to education for special children do not mention the non-discriminatory act.

Other term being used was" comprehensive education", but later added that comprehensive education means including the regular and disabled students (P2, P15).

Theme 2: implementation challenges for teachers

In the face of implementing inclusive education in the classroom teachers reported to face at least two factors; one is social-related and second is pedagogical-related. Social skills are learned actions that help us communicate effectively with others, express our emotions, stand up for our rights, enlist the aid of others when we need it, and decline requests that run counter to our values (Erdogan, Cargit, 2018). Data shows that one of the challenges teachers feel when interacting with students with special needs is the way of communication.

One of the teachers mentioned that the challenge encountered was to build communication so that what was conveyed by the teacher could be understood by ABK students. The communication in question is verbal communication.

"It is difficult to communicate" (P13)

The next challenge is how to understand the needs of diverse inclusion students. The teacher's effort to understand the needs of students can be seen from the teacher's expression about the importance of students to trust and feel comfortable in interacting with the teacher. Teachers seem to view inclusive students as having more psychological needs than their peers, especially in communicating with others.

"How to take action in view of the disorder varies greatly" (P5)

The challenge teachers feel in dealing with inclusion students is understanding the different behaviours and emotions of ABK students.

"... when children with special needs are active in class, namely walking and are not in the mood to learn" (P1)

"When emotions cannot be controlled" (P8)

"Unable to master and know how to overcome them one by one" (P9)

Teachers tend to leave the emotional and behavioral problems of ABK students to the shadow teacher.

"If there is a tantrum and there is no shadow" (P4)

For teachers, delivering material so that students can easily understand it has become a challenge, while for inclusion students, the challenge increases because the verbal skills or ways of communication of inclusion students can differ significantly from their peers. The ability to understand student needs is seen as an important factor that can positively influence student learning.

"... must familiarize students with disabilities so that they will learn and understand our instructions" (P1)

For teachers, the main challenge is to provide teaching to ABK students. Teachers see that ABK students often find it difficult to understand the material when the learning material is equated with regular students, but on the other hand, provide different material as well cause another problem.

"Provide understanding and calm students with disabilities when regular students learn learning materials. Sometimes students with disabilities do not want the material to be differentiated from regular students, but when equated students with disabilities even get angry themselves because they feel they can't" (P3)

"How can what we say be acceptable to students with disabilities" (P18)

Some teachers also admit that they have to manage classroom differently in order to accommodate students with disabilities, which include provide different materials and instructions.

Theme 3: teachers' strategies to overcome challenge.

The first strategy is related to the challenges of communication. The teacher's strategy is to try to initiate conversation and try to find ways to communicate. The strategies used by teachers tend to be more active and take initiative first.

"... train the meaning of words to make them easy to understand" (P6)

Meanwhile, strategies to understand the diverse needs of ABK students include trying to familiarize themselves, as well as taking various approaches psychologically, such as ensuring students feel comfortable, paying attention the psychological condition of students, and pay more attention.

"The approach is psychological, providing comfort, so that students trust and are comfortable to interact with us." (P2)

"... so that students trust us and that it is safe to interact with us" (P2)

"... ... it's just that I pay more attention to the children" (P17)

"Students should be happy of course" (P14)

Personal skills are skills that teachers have to overcome a problem with personal modalities that exist within them.

The strategy used by teachers in dealing with the challenge of understanding the behaviour and emotions of different students with disabilities is to try to understand character, as well as be more patient and careful in acting. Because teachers find it difficult to deal with behavioural and emotional problems that arise, teachers rather trying to prevent these problems from arising.

"It requires a high level of patience and must be persistent in interaction" (P14)

The strategy carried out by teachers to overcome challenges in providing teaching for students with disabilities is to provide special and gradual assistance, by giving different tasks, or giving games in teaching to make it more ease. This strategy shows that teachers want to pay more attention to the psychological condition of students and accommodate the individual needs of students.

"Helping to accompany the learning of students with disabilities so as not to disturb regular students. And provide learning assignments or games to keep students calm and busy on their own." (P3)

"Accompany it by taking a special approach gradually / slowly by understanding what the student needs." (P7)

In addition to these strategies, teachers also provide learning according to student wishes, arrange seats in a certain way, and learn through parents and special teachers.

The definition of inclusive education has been long discussed in education; yet it remained unsettled in consensus (Lindsay, 2007; Göransson, & Nilholm, 2014; Amor, Hagiwara, Shogren, Thompson, Verdugo, Burke, & Aguayo, 2019; Nilholm, 2021). Consensus on definition is crucial in research, since it impact how researchers collect data and make sense of the data. In practical level, it is important to have a clear definition of inclusive education to have a clear goal of what the education is supposed to achieve. It was argued that the different practice in inclusive schools is due to the variety of meaning of inclusion (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Florian, 2005; Finklestein, Sharma, & Furlonger, 2021). Other research within Indonesian context also support the importance of teachers' perception on the meaning of inclusion which will be reflected in their teaching practice (Rante & Tulak, 2020; Budiyanto, Sheehy, Kaye, Rofiah, 2020). The reluctance to accept inclusion philosophy may result in disengagement toward students with special needs in their classroom.

A collective work of Göransson, & Nilholm (e.g. Göransson, & Nilholm 2014; Nilholm and Göransson, 2017) have summarized the definition of inclusion within four categories, which are (A) placement definition, which is a way to perceive inclusion as a placement for students with special need in mainstream education classroom; (B) specified individualised definition, which focuses to meet the social and/or academic needs of students with disabilities or those who required assisstance; (C) general individualised definition, which emphasise the meeting of social and/or academic needs of all pupils; and (D) community definition, which stated that inclusion as "creation of communities with specific characteristics" [Nilholm, 2021, p.268]. Göransson, & Nilholm 2014 further explained that the categories is hierarchical in order where the lower category is more stricter category compared to the latter categories (from A to D).

The present research had found that teachers tend to perceive inclusive education at least in two categories, that are as a placement for students with special needs and specified individualised definition. There are, however, some responses that tend to the third category

of general individualised definition, where teachers emphasised on equal rights and opportunities, which imply to include *all* students (see theme 1). Putting it into Göransson, & Nilholm (2014) classification of inclusive education, the teachers in this study tend to lean toward a more stricter criteria of inclusive education. A similar finding is reported in Rante & Tulak (2020). Teachers' tendency toward the (A) definition is implying that they see inclusion as a method or a way to engage students into general classroom. Therefore, teachers would likely to focus on how to meet the students' with disabilities needs (a presuppose definition of category B) rather than the needs of *all* the students. In other word, teachers would likely to focus on the practical level instead of adopting the inclusive philosophy as accepting and accomodating all students. Another impact of such belief is that teachers would tend to focus on the disabilities of the students with least concern to integrate the philosophy of inclusion into society (Göransson, & Nilholm, 2014).

The way that teachers perceive inclusive education as elaborated above is evidently reflected on the second theme found as a result of this study where teachers were likely to identify the challenges they face toward social and pedagocial-related factors when dealing with students with disabilities in their classroom. Instead of thinking with a broader sense of implementing inclusion within the classroom and make sure that *all* students' needs are accomplished, teachers tend to use a more direct approach to what they see as the subject of inclusion, which is the students with special needs. Using a broader sense of inclusion as a phylosophy, such as the belief that inclusion means equal rights to education, may lead teachers to have different attitude toward students with special needs and their "regular" students.

As discussed earlier, there was indication of connection between teachers' perception to the meaning of inclusive education with the challenges they reported having. As expected, the teachers strategy is dominated with social and pedagogical effort to bond with students with disabilities in their classroom. It is a common approach taken by teachers in Indonesia to use different approach when dealing with students with special needs

compared to their peers with no specific condition (Rachmawati, Nu'man, Widiasmara, & Wibisono, 2016; Efendi, 2018; Upa & Mbato, 2020). Although research likely support differentiated approach to students based on their specific needs, but on the downside it tends to everwhelmed teachers. The idea to have a comprehensive understanding about different types of disabilities and ranges of emotional and behavioral characteristics of special students may lead to lower self-efficacy of teachers (Zee & Koomen, 2016; Yada & Savolainen, 2017; Yada, Leskinen, Savolainen, & Schwab, 2022). It is interesting though, that the social and pedagogical approach that the teachers in this study were using were close reflections of their social and pedagogical competence. The social and pedagogical competence are among the required competence adopted by Indonesian professional teachers. It is a note worthy indication that their professional embodiement of being a teacher had led them in taking the steps to be better in inclusive practices.

It is important to note, however, that the narrow definition of inclusive education used by the participants in this study may affect the research finding. As Göransson, & Nilholm (2014) had worn in their paper, the stricter definition used by the subjects of research surrounding inclusive practices had caused limitation in data finding, since it reduced the many indicators or practices that the stricter criteria had failed to include. In other words, teachers may have other practices, both socially and pedagogically, that are part of the inclusion practice, but had failed to mention it since they hold a narrow definition of inclusive education. It should be aknowldeged that the nature of methodology used in this research was not sufficient to further explore the possibility.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that teachers tend to have a stricter view of inclusive education and rather to focus on dealing with the needs of students with special needs instead of using a broader approach to make sure that all students needs are included, even those that are not identified as having disabilities. The view that the teachers held also reflected in how they identify challenges and strategies they adopt. Further in-depth investigation is needed to examine whether teachers hold phylosophical idea of inclusion and unknowingly apply it in practice.

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