Early Childhood Teachers' Knowledge in Assisting Children with Special Needs in Their Classroom

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Abstract

Indonesia has started to pay attention in inclusive education. The government issues regulations to manage inclusive education system and supported by cities or districts were ready to implement. Salatiga is one of the cities which declared as inclusive city in around 2012. However, after more than five year of its implementation, the initial observations and interviews with early childhood teachers revealed that the implementation of inclusive education faced many challenges, specifically in human resources. Therefore, the researcher made a simple poster and book to help teacher understanding their roles and other parties' role in inclusive education system. The aim of this research is to measure whether the socialization can improve teachers' understanding regarded inclusive education services. The poster and the book were socialized in groups of preschool teachers and groups of playgroup teachers in 4 districts in Salatiga. The statistic test result showed that there was a significant difference of teachers' understanding before after the poster and book socialization. Result of this study suggests that the government needs to build an effective communication system when they set a new policy. Simple tools, such as poster, which cover basic concept and the role of each party, can make significant difference for better policy implementation.

How to cite

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian government has started to pay attention in inclusive education. Several cities, including Salatiga, were appointed as an inclusive city. One feature of an inclusive city is inclusive education service delivered by the inclusive school. In Indonesian context, the term of inclusive school specifically refers to the regular school, which can be accessed by children with special needs (Lukitasari, Sulasmono, dan Iriani, 2017; Permediknas, 2009; Perwali, 2013; Haryono, Syaifudin, dan Widiastuti, 2015; Sulistyadi, 2014). It is quite different with international studies, which have broader coverage for that term (Gonski et al., 2011; Hyde, Carpenter, and Conway, 2010). In international studies inclusive education aim to fight against inequality and inequity in education which are caused by children's background such as different race/ ethnicity, social status (SES), cultural practices, religion, gender, and ability (Ainscow, 2005). In Indonesia, studies related to race/ ethnicity, religion, gender, social status in education are covered in term 'multiculturalism' (Al Arifin, 2012; Arifudin, 2007; Faiqoh, 2015; Fransiska, 2018; Nurmayani, 2013; Soraya, 2013)

Salatiga started the pilot project of inclusive school since 2012. The policy was stated in Salatiga *Perwali (Peraturan Walikota – Mayor Regulation) no. 11 year 2013*. That policy is align with the national policy about inclusive education (*Permendiknas no. 70, 2009*). However, after more than five year of its implementation, the initial observations and interviews with early childhood teachers revealed that the implementation of inclusive education faced many challenges such as:

1. Some of the teachers did not understand the concept of screening, assessment, normative, delayed, and disorder. Sometimes they judge and label the children based on their personal observation. In some case, the professional had not diagnosed the children, yet the teacher had labelled them with "autism", "hyperactivity", and so on.

2. Many teacher claimed that they are not ready for assisting children with special needs in their classroom, yet the school had to accept children with special needs because of the government regulation. Therefore, the children with special needs either treated 'less' or 'excessively'. Less treatment means that the teachers did not prepare anything for the children. There was no Individualizes Education Program (IEP). The child with special needs attended the classroom and watched the learning of other typical children. On the contrary, 'excessive' treatment happened when the teacher tried to do specific therapy without any professional guidance.

Those initial findings indicates that teachers had insufficient knowledge about the implementation of inclusive schools. This is in line with the findings of Nonis (2006) and Tarnoto (2016), which stated that teachers felt they lacked competence in handling and organizing Teaching and Learning Activities for children with special needs. One of the goals of inclusive education is that children with special needs can access high quality of education. However, without an adequate knowledge about children with special needs, a high quality inclusive education service is merely a written goal.

In the practice, the implementation of inclusive education services involves many parties. The parties involved in the service of providing inclusive education include the Regional Government, Education Department, *Sekolah Luar Biasa/ SLB (Special Education School)* as Resource Centres (RC), *Guru Pendamping Khusus/ (Special Education Teacher),* professionals (paediatricians / psychologists), therapists, heads schools, parents of the students, and teachers (DeVore and Russell, 2007; Haryono, Syaifudin, and Widiastuti, 2015; Meilina, Agustina, and Rhoudoh, 2018; Sulistyadi, 2014; Watson and McCathren, 2009). Nevertheless, teachers play an important role in inclusive education services because they interact with the children every day. They are the party which can ensure that chidren with special needs will get a high quality education services (Cameron et.al., 2014). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand other parties who are also involved in inclusive education services. They also needs to know other parties' roles and authorities, as well as their own limitation. For example, a class teacher might have a student who has been diagnosed with the autism spectrum. By realizing the limitations of her understanding about autism, teachers can work together with professional such as child psychologists to develop the IEP. Without realizing its limitations, the teacher might work alone and provide a learning program that are not suitable for the child's needs.

Based on the existing problems, the author carried out a socialization program to increase teachers' understanding in dealing with children with special needs. This socialization program aimed to equip the classroom teachers with knowledge and proper screening instrument so that they can detect children who have developmental delayed and might potentially get developmental disorder. An early detection can provide the

children with an early intervention that might have a huge impact to their developmental milestones (NECTAC, 2011).

A poster was made as the socialization material. It summarized the holistic chain of how an inclusive education services supported the children with special needs. This poster highlights various parties involved in an inclusive education service system. Furthermore, the poster is equipped with a supplementary book to explain further about the role of each party involved and some important concepts related to the roles. For example, the poster states that the classroom teacher is in charge of conducting early detection (*screening*) and the child psychologist should then conduct a thorough examination (*assessment*). The supplementary book will explain what the difference between screening and assessment is. In addition, the book also provides a screening instrument that can be used by the teachers.
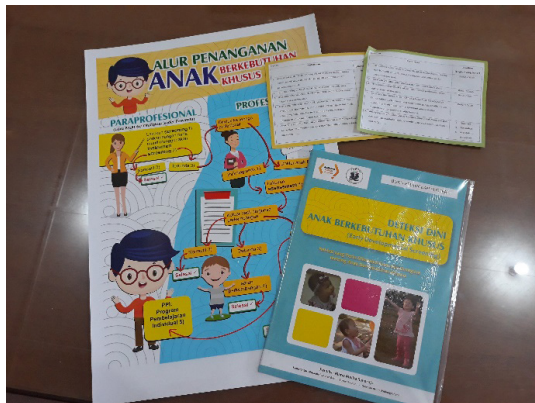
Fig 1. The poster, the supplementary book, and the pre-test post-test form

Beside each party's roles, the book also describes each party's qualification. It is intended to avoid common misunderstandings that often occur. For example, the book explain that a child psychologist is someone who has taken an undergraduate study and completed her professional extension program. Sometimes people assume an undergraduate degree from the psychology department is already a child psychologist. Similarly, a therapist must have a certain qualifications to enter the profession. Sometimes parents of children with special need bring their children to the unqualified therapists.

Overall, the poster and the books were developed for providing a big picture of an inclusive education service system. It covers the initial process of an early detection using a screening instrument, the follow up assessment by the professional parties, up to the creation of IEP.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the socialization program can increase the teachers' understanding about the implementation of the inclusive education services. The aim is to measure whether there was a difference in the teachers' knowledge before and after the socialization process. The poster and book socialization program was carried out to the early childhood teachers (playgroup and kindergarten) in 4 sub-districts of Salatiga. There was 9-month socialization period from February to October 2018. Socialization was conducted at the monthly meetings of the *HIMPAUDI* (playgroup teacher association) and monthly meetings of *IGTKI* (kindergarten teacher association).

The duration of each socialization ranged from 15 to 30 minutes for the content delivery and between 15 and 30 minutes for questions and answers. Important things related to the inclusive education services for the children with special needs presented include: (1) The differences between an early detection (screening) and thorough examination (assessment); (2) The differences between paraprofessional's roles (teachers, parents, POSYANDU volunteers) and professional's roles (e.g. paediatricians, child psychologists); (3) How to use the screening instrument – KTSP; (4) The three possibilities of the assessment results (normative, delayed, disorder); (5) The early intervention (therapy); and (6) The IEP.

Before the content delivery, all the participants were given a pre-test sheet and asked to fill it in (figure 2). Similarly, they filled out the post-test sheet after listening to the presentation. There were five pre-test and post-test questions. The first question means to examine teachers' understanding about the difference between screening and assessment. The second, the third, and the fourth questions are to look into teachers' understanding about the differences between paraprofessional' roles and professionals' roles. Finally, the fifth question is to examine teachers' knowledge about normative, delayed, and disorder concepts.
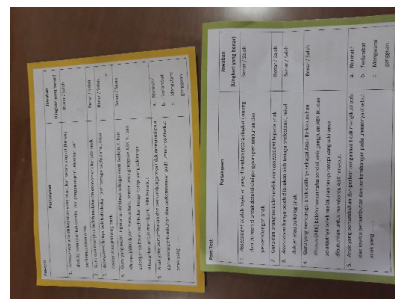
Fig 2. Pre-Test and Post-Test Form

Each question was checked for its validity and its reliability using expert judgement and product moment – IBM SPSS. Result show that all item was valid. However, when all the five items were measured, the cronbach alpha result came between 0,5 and 0,6. It means that the internal consistency (reliability) of the test instrument was categorized as 'poor'. Based on the discussion with the expert, the fifth item can be eliminated. When there were only four item left, the cronbach alpha result in 0.609. It means that the interal consistency (reliability) now become "acceptable (Riadi, 2016).

There were 201 pre-test and 201 post-test forms returned in total. The answer was analysed using statistical program. The Wilcoxon test was used to examine the overall score of the test result. A p-value of .001 was used in the analyses for all tests of significance. The hypothesis for the Wilcoxon statistical result was:

H0 = There is no significant difference of teachers' understanding before and after socialization process.

H1 = There is a significant difference of teachers' understanding before and after socialization process.

If the p-value < 0.001 then H0 is rejected.

In addition, the McNemar test was used to examine each question result. A p-value of .001 was used in the analyses for all tests of significance. The hypothesis for the McNemar statistical result was:

H0 = There is no significant difference of teachers' understanding about concept 'x' in question number 'x' before and after socialization process.

H1 = There is a significant difference of teachers' understanding about concept 'x' in question number 'x' before and after socialization process.

If the p-value < 0.01 then H0 is rejected.

There are at least two limitations in this study. Firstly, the socialization process was carried out in different times and places for each district. The speakers of the socialization were different because there were several speakers. Those differences may affect the results of the pre-test and post-test. The second limitation is that not all the concepts in the presentation/ poster/book are included in the pre-test and post-test questions. For example, the concept of IEP is not covered in the pre-test and post-test questions. During the informal discussion with the teachers, many of them admitted that they did not know what is IEP.

They did not know that children need an IEP to support their learning in regular school. Therefore, there needs to be further research conducted to examine teachers' understanding of IEP.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Wilcoxon test was used to examine the overall score of the test result. This test was used to find out whether there is a difference in teachers' knowledge before and after the socialization process. The p-values of the Wilcoxon test is 0,000 (table 1). The p-value (0,000) <0,001. It means that there is a significant difference in teachers' understanding before and after socialization process. This finding demonstrates that the socialization process provided a useful insight to increase teachers' understanding related inclusive education services.

Table 1. Wilcoxon Statistical Test

	Before and After Socialization
Z	-7.806a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a Based on negative ranks

In addition, the differences in teachers' knowledge for each number in pre-test and post-test were measured using McNemar test. The results of statistical tests for question number 1 indicates that there is a significant difference in teachers' understanding before and after socialization about the dissimilarity of assessment and screening. The answer for question number 1 is in "false / true" form for this following statement: "Assessment is a brief activity (less than 30 minutes) to detect children disorder". Before the socialization, only 92 teachers (45.77%) who answered correctly. After the socialization, there was an increase in the percentage of the correct answers from 46% to 70%.

Table 2. McNemar Statistical

	Number of the Correct Answer	
	Before socialisation	After socialisation
Number 1	92 (45,77%)	139 (69,15%)
Number 2	55 (27,36%)	132 (65,67%)
Number 3	95 (47,26%)	154 (76,62%)
Number 4	95 (47,26%)	143 (71,14%)
Number 5	96 (47,76%)	83 (41,29%)

Table 2. McNemar Statistical (continued)

	N	Chi-squarea	Asymp Sig.
		Before and After Socialization	
Number 1	201	37.798	.000
Number 2	201	37.798	.000
Number 3	201	37.798	.000
Number 4	201	29.851	.000
Number 5	201	2.361	.124

a Continuity corrected

Similarly, the results of statistical tests for question number 2 to 4 number 2 reveals that there is a significant difference between teachers' knowledge before and after socialization. Question number 2 to 4 are also in "false/true" form. The statements for question number 2 is "Teachers and parents can do assessment to their children". The statement for question number 3 is "Assessment can only be done by the professional (e.g. paediatrician or child psychologist)". Finally, the statement for question number 4 is "A teacher can do some therapies to a child if she is suspecting that the child might has a special need".

Before socialization, the average of teachers who could answer correctly was around 47, 26 % except for question number 2 (27, 36%). After socialization, the average number of teachers who could answer correctly was increase between 65 – 76%). Furthermore, the McNemar test results showed the p-value is 0.000 for question number 1 to 4. The p-value (0.000) < 0.001 demonstrates that there is a significant change in teachers' knowledge before and after socialization.

However, different result was gathered for question number 5. There is a distinct form for question number 5. The question was "A child who do not follow a typical pattern developmental norm is called ....". The answer can be chosen between "a. Normative, b. Delayed, and c. Having a disorder". The McNemar test results showed a p-value of 0.124. This p-values (0.124)> 0.00 implies that there is no significant change in teachers' knowledge before and after socialization.

Overall, the results of statistical test per item number indicate that there is a significant increase in teachers' understanding before and after socialization program. We can see that the teachers begun to understand the basic definition of assessment and screening through question number 1. Likewise, the teachers started to understand the limits of their roles and authorities compared

to the professional member (paediatricians, child psychologists, or therapists) through the examination of question number 2 to 4.

The difference between screening and assessment concepts is indeed the focus of the socialization program based on the previous problem statements. It is important for the teachers for not labelling the children before the screening and assessment process have been done properly. Shepard, Kagan, and Wurtz (1998) said that screening by a classroom teacher is the initial stage of capturing children's developmental delay or disorder. However, the screening needs to be followed with the assessment conducted by a professional party (Moodie et.al., 2014; Ghazvini, 2005; Sosna and Mastergeorge, 2005; Syverson and Losardo, 2004) as the teachers do not have the qualifications and competences to carry out an assessment.

The poster and book socialization program was carried out because the author has concern with the lack of teachers' knowledge regarding children with special needs in their class. The government is promoting inclusive education intesively, and therefore many regular schools are starting to accept children with special needs in their classroom. Sometimes, it happens that these students have not seek any professional advice, yet the classroom teachers are expected deliver a high quality education for these students. We should bear in our mind that the classroom teachers cannot carry the responsibility of inclusive education services alone. According to the government policy, a classroom teacher need to be supported at least by *Guru Pendamping Khusus (GPK)* to deliver an inclusive education service system (Indriawati, 2013; Rahmaniar, 2016; Tarnoto, 2016).

In various international articles, GPK is known as "Special Education Teacher" or "Special Educators" (DeVore and Russell, 2007; Giovacco-Johnson, 2005; Mitchell, and Ben-Hanania Lenz, 2012; Shaw, 2019). GPK are teachers who are considered to have a proper competence and qualification to provide services for children with special needs. *Pedoman Pendidikan (Tendik)'s* guideline in Zakia (2015) states that GPK in a regular schools can be employed by borrowing from the nearest *Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB)*. SLB is a special school, which provide education services for children with special needs exclusively. A second way to have a GPK in a regular school is by recruiting a new teacher who have a 'Special Education' degree (*Pendidikan Luar Biasa/ PLB*). Finally, the third way to have GPK inn a regular school setting is by appointing a regular teacher who is then given some various training related

to children with special needs.

The role of GPK in a regular school covers various tasks such as designing an assessment instruments, accompanying children with special needs and taking notes during the learning activities, giving an enrichment to the children, giving advices to the classroom teachers regarding the children development, and establishing a coordination system between school and students' parents (Indriawati, 2013; Zakia, 2015). If we look closely, the roles of the GPK are similar to the professional party, especially the child psychologists. In the poster, the child psychologist's roles includes assessing, diagnosing, issuing recommendations for intervention, and providing an IEP documents for children with special needs. Those roles are similar to the roles of GPK, which is to carry out an academic assessment to designing an IEP (Rahmaniar, 2016).

From the discussion above, we can conclude that GPK also plays an important role in inclusive education services. *Tendik's* guideline on the previous discussion pointed that GPK is someone who has proper qualifications and competence than regular teacher does in dealing with children with special needs. Schools that claim in providing an inclusion service without having any GPK will put the children at risk by giving a low quality services. The GPK supports in the inclusive education system can minimize the classroom teachers' confusion when assisting with children with special needs. GPK serves a similar function as the child psychologist yet they are more accessible (in terms of number, location, and cost). However, it turned out that several studies revealed that some schools had difficulty in accessing "authentic' GPK (Anjaryati, 2011; Subagya, 2012). In his study, Sulistyadi (2014) used a term 'authentic" to describe someone who graduates from PLB major and holds a PLB degree. They usually work as special educators in SLB after their graduation. Because of the limitation to the 'authentic' GPK, the most common way in employing a GPK in inclusive schools is through the third method listed in Tendik Guidelines. School will appointed some regular teachers and provide them with some trainings related to children with special needs. We will use a term 'adopted-GPK' for the next following discussion (Widyawati, 2017).

Various trainings were given in attempt to increase adopted-GPK's knowledge so that they can facilitate children with special needs in an inclusive school (Ariastuti and Herawati, 2016). However, it turns out that the adopted-GPK still feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge and necessary competencies in performing their roles as GPK. Moreover, many of them are still confuse with their roles. The author predict that there are at least two main factors contributed to the situation. Firstly, the time of enrichment / training provided could not match that authentic-GPK who were graduates from PLB major (4-year study time). Secondly, the less amount of time will certainly has impact on the breadth and depth of content coverages. In addition, Giovacco-Johnson (2005) explained that even teachers who took special education (special educators) had problems in their first year of work. This shows that becoming a GPK is not an easy thing. It is hard for people who have appropriate academic qualifications and it is harder for those who only receive a short period of trainings. The implementation of inclusive education services is well intentioned, as it is stated in the goal of Permendiknas (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional* – National no 70 of 2009. Nevertheless, the government and the parties involved need to seek effective strategies in delivering appropriate practices for children with special needs so that they will not be neglected in the regular schools.

CONCLUSION

Result of this study indicates that the government needs to build an effective information system when issuing a new policy. This study showed that even after almost eight year (2012-2019) since Salatiga local government committed to administer an inclusive education service, most of the teachers are still lacking in basic understanding of some important concepts such as the concept of disorder, delay, normative, assessment, screening, paraprofessional and professional roles. The statistical analysis showed that less than 50% teachers who attended the socialization program were able to answer questions related to these concepts correctly. This finding is in line various studies, which stated that teachers have problems for assisting children with special needs in their classroom. Therefore, they did not differentiate any learning materials for children with special needs (Mastuti, 2014; Utami, 2015; Vasthi, 2018) despite the fact that the children will be greatly supported by the availability of adapted instruction (Rakap and Parlak, 2011). It would be very unfortunate if the teachers' commitment to the inclusive education implementation (Nonis, 2006; Subagya, 2014) did not receive any support from government, special education teachers, or professional team. Further reseach related to Individualizes Education Program (IEP) in sup-

porting children with special needs in the regular classroom is highly recommended.

Furthermore, result of this study also demonstrated that simple tools such as one page poster could become an effective communication tools when the government issues a policy to the targeted groups. Most of the time, public have a hard time to understand the government policy because it is usually written as an official document with lots of words and some difficult terms. An informative poster with interesting pictures and simple words can be used to summarize the important concepts of the policy and to help the targeted groups have a better understanding of the new policy.

Another important finding is that the government needs a better measurement process to evaluate their policy after several years of its implementation. A survey or a simple questionnaire can provide a valuable feedback to examine how well the implementation of the policy. The feedback might also tell what strategies can be taken to overcome a difficult situation in the implementation process.

Acknowledgments

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