

## Improving Teachers' Understanding of Inclusive Education

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### Abstract

*The existence of inclusive education in Indonesia plays a central role in achieving equitable and inclusive education for all students. This article identifies and formulates problems related to teachers' low understanding of the concept of inclusion, limited resources and variations in understanding of the concept of inclusion among educators. These challenges create barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education across educational institutions. Through an in-depth literature review and analysis, this article offers a number of solutions, including improved teacher training programs, collaboration between stakeholders and improved access to inclusive learning information and resources. It concludes that changes need to be made at the policy, education institution and community levels to create a sustainable inclusive education environment that benefits all students in Indonesia. As such, this article contributes to an in-depth understanding of the challenges and solutions in the context of inclusive education in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, teachers, challenges of inclusive education*

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### Introduction

The existence of inclusive education in Indonesia has become a significant highlight in the effort to achieve inclusive and equitable education for all students. (Lestari et al., 2022). Since its official introduction in 2003, inclusive education in Indonesia has grown rapidly. This reflects the government's commitment to creating a more inclusive education system where every student, regardless of background, needs or abilities, has equal access to quality education. Since then, concrete steps have been taken to realize this vision of inclusion. (Agus et al., 2022). Inclusive schools began to be established, creating environments that facilitate shared learning between students with and without special needs.

The importance of inclusive education as a key element of educational development in Indonesia is increasingly felt, especially in accommodating student diversity. (Lestari et al., 2022). This policy not only includes the provision of appropriate physical facilities, but also demands a paradigm shift in teaching methods and interactions in the educational environment. Teachers are empowered to understand the individual needs of each student and develop inclusive teaching strategies, creating an environment that supports growth and development for all. Organizing collaborative activities and providing opportunities for each student to actively participate in learning can enhance an inclusive climate in the classroom. The Inclusive Learning approach focuses on equal access and opportunities for all students to learn and develop. Teachers use learning strategies designed to accommodate individual learning needs and differences,

including the use of learning materials that are accessible to all students. Cooperation and collaboration between teachers, students and school staff are essential in creating an inclusive environment. (Andajani, 2022).

Although still faced with a number of challenges, including limited resources and diverse understanding among educators, concrete steps have been taken to improve the accessibility and quality of education for children with special needs. Children with special needs have specificities and needs that are different from other normal children. These different specialties include physical, mental, intellectual, social or emotional specialties, in which education requires specific handling. (Fakhiratunnisa et al., 2022).. Specifically, resource limitations include physical, financial and human aspects. Many inclusive schools still face infrastructure constraints that do not fully support the needs of students with special needs, such as building accessibility, toilet facilities and adequate classrooms. Financial constraints also often limit the implementation of inclusion programs, hindering the provision of teaching materials and other support needed to create an appropriate learning environment. Learning media is a supporting medium used in learning strategies in which there is learning material. With the media, it is hoped that it can stimulate children in the learning process (Nasrin Nabila, 2020). For children with various limitations, learning media is a tool that plays a very important role in achieving learning goals. Therefore, teachers should prepare learning media before learning that is tailored to the needs of children.

In addition, the diverse understanding among educators poses a serious challenge. Some teachers may not fully understand the principles of inclusion and appropriate teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse students. Inclusive teaching involves adjusting learning approaches, strategies and materials to meet the individual needs of students. This includes the use of diverse teaching methods, relevant teaching materials and adaptive assessment. One example of adaptive physical education is the process of educating through movement activities for the rate of growth and development of both physical and psychological in order to optimize all potential abilities, physical skills adapted to the abilities and limitations of children, intelligence, physical, social, cultural, emotional, and sense of beauty. (Widiyanto & Putra, 2021). To achieve the goal of education, namely the formation of a whole person. Teachers also play a role in creating an inclusive classroom environment, where all students feel accepted, valued and supported. Inclusive teaching does not only focus on students with special needs, but also involves all students in the learning process. It promotes collaboration, interaction and understanding between students from different backgrounds. Through inclusive teaching, students can learn to appreciate differences, build positive relationships, and develop important social skills. (Active et al., 2023). Inclusive teaching is based on the principle of inclusion, which is the principle that every individual has the right to engage in learning and contribute according to their potential. The ultimate goal is to create an educational environment that respects diversity, builds equality and results in success for all students. This difference in level of understanding can create uncertainty in implementing inclusive practices in the classroom, which in turn can affect the quality of education received by students with special needs. Consistent and ongoing teacher

training in inclusion is crucial to overcoming these barriers, so that every teacher has adequate understanding and the necessary skills to support the success of every student.

## **Methods**

This research uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to investigate and develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges and existence of inclusive education in educational institutions in Indonesia. By focusing on current scholarly literature, SLR enables the identification of trends, findings and gaps in previous research. The main objective is to provide a comprehensive and objective picture of the role of inclusive education teachers in Indonesian educational institutions. The SLR also makes it possible to identify measures to address the problems of inclusive education as proposed by previous studies.

The Systematic Literature Review method involves systematic steps to collect, evaluate, and synthesize scientific literature relevant to the research topic. The first step is to formulate a clear and specific research question to guide the literature search. Afterward, a structured literature search was conducted using scientific databases and digital libraries. Careful selection of inclusion and exclusion criteria was made to ensure relevant and high-quality literature. A critical analysis and evaluation of each selected piece of literature was then conducted, focusing on its methodology, findings and contributions. The results of the analysis were then compiled and synthesized to produce a holistic understanding of the existence and development of inclusive education in Indonesia.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is an approach in the education system that aims to provide equal access, participation and learning experiences for all students, including those with special educational needs or other uniqueness. The concept emphasizes the incorporation of students with special needs into the general education environment as much as possible, so that they can learn together with their peers who do not have special needs. (Nasrin Nabila, 2020). The importance of inclusive education provides opportunities for all individuals who have diversity regardless of background to achieve equal opportunities in obtaining quality education. The implementation of inclusive education requires various supports from all parties, both internal and external to the school. (Anafiah & Andini, 2018).. The success of inclusive education will help complete basic education and provide opportunities for all children without exception to get a proper education.

Inclusive education is a government policy in seeking education that can be enjoyed by every citizen in order to obtain equal distribution of education regardless of children with special needs and children in general so that they can go to school and get a decent and quality education for the future of their lives. (Darma & Rusyidi, 2015). Inclusive education is not just about being physical and geographical, but also about supporting individual differences, understanding diverse learning needs, and creating learning environments that support the development of all students. This approach involves

providing resources, support and adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse students so that they can reach their full potential without experiencing segregation or discrimination. The environment created is very supportive for children with special needs, they can learn from the spontaneous interaction of their peers, especially from social and emotional aspects. As for children without special needs, it gives them the opportunity to learn to empathize, be helpful and have concern. In addition, there is other evidence that those without special needs have good achievements without feeling the slightest disturbance. The implementation of an inclusive school system is one of the conditions that must be met to build an inclusive society. A society that respects each other and upholds the values of diversity as a reality of life.

Inclusive education seeks to create an inclusive society that values and celebrates diversity and ensures that every individual, regardless of difference, has an equal opportunity to receive a quality education.

The history of inclusive education in Indonesia reflects the development and evolution of the education system in an effort to achieve accessibility and equity for all students, including those with special educational needs. Special education grew out of an early realization that some children need a type of education that is different from typical or ordinary education in order to reach their potential. (Fauzan et al., 2021). Here are some key points in the history of inclusive education in Indonesia:

1. Pre-2003 Era

Prior to 2003, Indonesia had an education system that tended to adopt a segregative model, where students with special needs were often placed in separate special education institutions.

2. Introduction of Inclusion Policy (2003)

In 2003, the Government of Indonesia issued a policy to introduce inclusive education as part of efforts towards more equitable and inclusive education. This policy urges educational institutions to accept and integrate students with special needs into the general education environment as much as possible.

3. Strengthening Inclusion Policy (2010s)

During the 2010s, the Government of Indonesia made further efforts to strengthen inclusive education policies. Various regulations and technical guidelines were established to support the implementation of inclusive practices at all levels of education.

4. Increase in Inclusive Schools (2010s to present)

Over the past decade, the number of inclusive schools in Indonesia has increased. The establishment of more inclusive schools aims to create more opportunities for students with special needs to learn together with mainstream students.

5. Teacher and Facilitator Training (2010s to present)

Improving teachers' understanding and skills in supporting inclusive education has been a key focus. Training and professional development programs for teachers and education facilitators have been strengthened to improve the quality of inclusion implementation in classrooms.

The history of inclusive education in Indonesia reflects the transition from a segregative model to an inclusive approach, in line with the spirit of equality and equity in education.

#### Teacher Challenges in Inclusive Education

The challenges in implementing inclusive education in Indonesia from the teachers' perspective involve several critical aspects. These challenges will become obstacles to the creation of inclusive education. First, teachers' or educators' diverse understanding of the concept of inclusion is a major obstacle. (Or et al., 2023). Some teachers may not fully understand the strategies and principles of inclusion, which can make it difficult for them to create a suitable learning environment for all students. The lack of adequate training in this regard complicates this challenge, given the complexity of diverse students' needs and changing pedagogical demands. Furthermore, the uncertainty in implementing inclusive teaching strategies can result in inequalities in students' learning experiences, prompting the need for further efforts to strengthen teacher capacity.

Secondly, limited resources are a serious obstacle to implementing inclusive practices in the classroom. Apart from teachers, inclusive education requires good facilities and infrastructure. Good facilities and infrastructure do require a lot. This is because schools have to adapt to a wide range of needs of children with different special needs such as hearing aids, embossed books, and so on that must be adapted to the conditions of children with disabilities. (Or et al., 2023). Many teachers feel limited in terms of support, whether in the form of specialized assistants, support equipment or specialized training to manage the diverse needs of students. Inadequate infrastructure, such as non-inclusion-friendly classrooms, can also be a barrier to teachers providing equitable education. Limited financial resources in some educational institutions add to the difficulties, forcing teachers to find creative solutions to provide individualized support for students with special needs. Thus, these challenges underscore the importance of allocating adequate resources and ongoing support for teachers to address the multiple needs that arise in the context of inclusion.

The role of teachers in the context of inclusive education in Indonesia is crucial in creating an equitable and supportive learning environment for all students. (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022).. As learning facilitators, teachers are faced with the task of accommodating the needs of diverse students, including those with special needs. This includes adjusting teaching methods, using appropriate teaching materials, and providing individualized support. As mentors, teachers not only provide direction, but also give constructive feedback to students with special needs, help them overcome learning barriers, and stimulate learning motivation. Guidance and counseling in schools helps students with special needs in efforts to find self-concept, coordinate with other experts, counsel their families, help the development of children with special needs to develop effectively, have independent living skills, and develop hobbies, as well as develop social and personal skills. (Lattu, 2018).

In addition, the teacher's role also includes close collaboration with a variety of related parties, including school staff, special education experts and parents (Nursalim, 2020). Through this collaboration, teachers can create an inclusive environment that supports

the holistic development of each student. Teachers are expected to implement inclusive teaching practices by using diverse strategies so that each student can learn effectively. (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022).. Regular knowledge updates and training are important components of the teacher's role, ensuring that they remain current with developments in inclusive education theory and practice. As advocates for inclusive education, teachers also have a responsibility to champion better understanding at the institutional and community levels, overcome stigma and contribute to positive changes in policies and perceptions related to inclusion in Indonesian education.

#### Improving Teachers' Ability to Implement Inclusive Education

To overcome teachers' low understanding of inclusive education, several solutions can be implemented:

##### 1. Regular Training Program

Implementing regular training programs that focus on inclusive education principles and inclusive teaching strategies is essential. This training should include an in-depth understanding of the needs of students with special needs, curriculum adaptation strategies and inclusive classroom management techniques. (Sulastri et al., 2020)..

##### 2. Collaborative Training

Encourage collaborative training between teachers who have successfully implemented inclusive practices and those who need additional support. By sharing experiences and successful strategies, teachers can support each other and improve their understanding.

##### 3. Mentor-Mentee System

Establish a mentor-mentee system among teachers where teachers who have a better understanding of inclusive education can mentor and provide support to their colleagues who need additional guidance.

##### 4. Integrating Inclusion in the Teacher Training Curriculum

Ensure that inclusive education issues are thoroughly integrated in the teacher training curriculum. This will ensure that any teacher new to the profession has a solid understanding of inclusion from the outset.

##### 5. Learning Resources and Materials

Provide resources and learning materials that are easily accessible and can be used by teachers to improve their understanding. This can include online modules, manuals and other resources that support understanding of inclusion concepts.

##### 6. Workshops and Seminars

Organize regular workshops and seminars attended by inclusive education experts and experienced practitioners. Such events can provide teachers with new insights, discuss challenges and provide practical strategies. (Dudung, 2018).

##### 7. Improved Access to Information

Ensure that teachers have easy access to up-to-date information on developments in the field of inclusive education. This could involve establishing professional networks, online discussion groups or information-sharing platforms.

Through a combination of these solutions, it is hoped that teachers' understanding of inclusive education can be improved, helping them to integrate more effective inclusion practices in their daily teaching.

## Conclusion

By identifying and formulating problems related to inclusive education in Indonesia, it can be concluded that the existence of inclusive education in educational institutions requires serious attention and holistic solutions. The main challenges faced involve teachers' low understanding of the concept of inclusion, limited resources and variations in the understanding of the concept of inclusion among educators. These issues create barriers in realizing equitable and effective inclusive education across Indonesia. In formulating solutions, measures such as improving teacher training programs, collaboration between stakeholders and increasing access to information and resources for inclusive learning are key to improving teacher understanding and overcoming implementation constraints. Thus, there needs to be a concerted effort from the government, educational institutions and communities to create a sustainable and empowering inclusive education environment for all students in Indonesia.

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