The Role of Teachers in Learning for Children with Special Needs in Elementary Schools

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Abstract: Inclusive education ensures equal learning opportunities for children with special needs (ABK). This study explores the role of teachers in educating ABK at SDN Baru 06 Pagi, Jakarta. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that ABK at this school exhibits diverse classifications, including ADHD, dyslexia, slow learners, and intellectual disabilities. Teachers implement individualized learning approaches and inclusive strategies to maximize students' potential, emphasizing differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching methods. Additionally, collaboration with parents plays a crucial role in supporting students' academic and social development. Despite these efforts, several challenges persist, such as limited access to specialized training for teachers and inadequate learning facilities, which hinder the effectiveness of inclusive education. The study underscores the need for continuous professional development programs, government support, and well-equipped learning environments to enhance the quality of education for ABKs. Strengthening teacher competencies and promoting inclusive policies can significantly contribute to fostering an equitable and supportive learning experience. These findings highlight the importance of ongoing improvements in inclusive education practices to ensure that ABK receive the necessary support to reach their full potential.

Keywords: Children with Special Needs, Elementary School, Inclusive Education, Learning Strategies, Teacher's Role

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right for every individual, including children with special needs. The Indonesian Constitution has guaranteed this right through various regulations, such as the 1945 Constitution Article 31 paragraph (1) which states that "every citizen has the right to education," and Article 31 paragraph (2) which confirms that "every citizen is obliged to attend basic education and the government is obliged to finance it." In addition, Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System Article 5 paragraph (1) states that "every citizen has the same right to obtain a quality education". This provision is the basis for the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia, which aims to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to the formal education system.

Inclusive education refers to an approach to learning that accommodates individual differences, including the specific needs of children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are defined as children with special characteristics that differ from children in general, without always indicating mental, emotional, or physical disabilities (Pradipta & Andajani, 2017). Children with disabilities are children who require special handling due to developmental disorders or certain abnormalities (Desiningrum, 2017). Therefore, a sensitive and adaptive pedagogical approach is needed to ensure they can learn optimally (Fontaine et al., 2019).

In the context of basic education, teachers have a central role in ensuring the success of inclusive education. Teachers not only act as educators but also as models who must have integrity, responsibility, and high discipline (Surahman & Mukminan, 2017). Teachers are required to develop learning strategies that are oriented to the individual needs of students and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Lakkala et al., 2021; Norvia et al., 2023). Unfortunately, the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools still faces challenges such as limited training for teachers, lack of appropriate learning resources, and barriers to collaboration between schools and parents (Kaur & Salian, 2024; Zabeli & Gjelaj, 2020).

Several previous studies have highlighted various aspects of inclusive education. The success of inclusive education depends on teachers' readiness to implement adaptive and flexible methods (Julismawati & Eliana, 2024; Kefallinou et al., 2020). Meanwhile, research showed that differentiated learning strategies can increase the participation of children with disabilities in regular classes (Strogilos et al., 2017). However, these studies



have not specifically explored teachers' experiences in dealing with children with disabilities in Indonesian primary schools, especially in the context of SDN Baru 06 Pagi Jakarta.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of teachers in improving the quality of education for children with disabilities at SDN Baru 06 Pagi Jakarta. The study will analyze the challenges teachers face, the learning strategies used, and the impact of the approaches adopted. It is hoped that this research will provide more comprehensive insights for educators, policy makers, and academics in supporting more effective implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia.

METHODS

In this research, the method used is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research is a method that uses a natural setting to interpret phenomena that occur through various existing methods (Denzin et al., 2023). This approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the role of teachers in the learning process of children with special needs (ABK) at SDN Baru 06 Pagi Elementary School, Jakarta. Thus, this research not only describes the phenomenon descriptively but also analyzes the teacher's experience in teaching children with special needs.

This research was conducted on November 7, 2024, at SDN Baru 06 Pagi, Jakarta. The population in this study were all students with special needs who attended SDN Baru 06 Pagi. The sample selection technique used was purposive sampling, where the sample was selected based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this case, the sample consisted of teachers who teach children with disabilities at the school because they have direct experience in implementing inclusive learning strategies.

Data collection techniques in this study included interviews, observation, literature review, and documentation. The main instrument used was an interview sheet that was prepared based on theoretical studies related to inclusive education and the role of teachers in teaching children with disabilities. The interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility in exploring teachers' experiences and perspectives. Observations were conducted using a predetermined protocol based on observation techniques commonly used in educational research (Nuraeni et al., 2020). The literature study referred to various scientific articles, books, and government documents relevant to inclusive education and curriculum policy in Indonesia (Srivastava et al., 2015). Meanwhile, documentation was



used to collect data in the form of records, books, photos, recordings, and videos related to the implementation of inclusive learning in schools.

In this study, the data analysis technique used was a flow analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by filtering the information obtained in order to focus more on aspects that are relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was done in the form of narrative descriptions to provide a clear picture of the research findings. Finally, conclusion drawing was done by identifying the main patterns and themes that emerged from the data that had been collected.

Based on the methods described, this research aims to understand in depth the role of teachers in the learning process of children with disabilities at SDN Baru 06 Pagi, Jakarta. By using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive insight into the challenges faced by teachers, the strategies used, and the impact of inclusive learning on the development of students with disabilities.

RESULTS

Identification and Classification of Children with Special Needs

The study conducted at SDN Baru 06 Pagi identified children with special needs (ABK) across different grade levels. The findings indicate that inclusive education at this school encompasses various classifications of special needs, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, intellectual disabilities, and slow learning difficulties. The study also highlights the diverse challenges faced by these children in the learning process and their potential strengths.

A total of six children with special needs were identified across grades 1 to 6. Among them, one child (16.7%) was diagnosed with ADHD, two children (33.3%) exhibited characteristics of dyslexia, and three children (50%) had intellectual disabilities, including slow learning and moderate intellectual disabilities. These figures illustrate the heterogeneous nature of special needs within the school environment and emphasize the necessity of differentiated instructional strategies.

In grade 1, a student named DH was observed to exhibit symptoms of ADHD, characterized by difficulty focusing, hyperactive behavior, and emotional instability. ADHD, as noted in previous research, often leads to challenges in maintaining



concentration and completing tasks in structured learning environments. The importance of structured interventions in managing hyperactive behavior.

Grade 2 had one child, AAA, who displayed characteristics of dyslexia, particularly in reading difficulties and limited classroom interaction—the neurological basis of dyslexia and its impact on literacy development. Unlike previous studies that focused on phonological interventions, the school currently lacks targeted support for dyslexic students, indicating a gap in existing educational strategies.

In grade 4, a student named HFM was identified as having potential mild intellectual disabilities. The child demonstrated strong visual art skills but struggled with fundamental literacy and numeracy concepts. Visual-based learning approaches were recommended for students with intellectual disabilities.

In Grade 5, two children, AN and AL, showed strengths in reading and writing but had difficulties maintaining focus. AN was categorized as having a moderate intellectual disability, while AL was classified as a slow learner. Slow learners require extended learning time and additional scaffolding to grasp complex concepts. However, one-on-one tutoring and small-group collaborative learning may also enhance engagement for slow learners.

Lastly, grade 6 had a student, RGI, diagnosed with an intellectual disability, specifically characterized by difficulties in information processing and reading comprehension. RGI was also identified with dyslexia, confirming the co-occurrence of intellectual disabilities and literacy difficulties. The school's current approach of using visual aids and numerical exercises aligns with recommendations for multi-sensory instruction.

These findings underscore the necessity for more inclusive teaching approaches tailored to specific needs. Individualized education plans (IEPs) as a key intervention suggest that collaborative classroom strategies and multimodal teaching may also be effective. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these approaches in improving academic outcomes for students with special needs at SDN Baru 06 Pagi.

Teachers' Learning Process in the Classroom

The findings of this study indicate that teachers across different grade levels implement a variety of inclusive learning strategies tailored to the specific needs of students requiring additional support. These strategies include seating arrangements, individualized



approaches, multisensory learning methods, and parental collaboration. The effectiveness of these approaches was observed in improving students' engagement, focus, and comprehension.

In the first-grade classroom, the teacher strategically placed DH near the teacher's desk to facilitate close monitoring and minimize distractions. The use of concrete media, engaging visuals, and audiovisual aids proved effective in sustaining DH's attention during lessons. Additionally, positive reinforcement strategies were employed to encourage task completion and focus, as well as the role of structured classroom environments in supporting students with attention difficulties.

For second-grade students, the teacher adopted a combination of reinforcement strategies and interactive learning methods. AAA, a student requiring additional reading support, was given extended time and utilized visual aids such as picture cards to recognize letters and words. Visual supports enhance literacy skills in young learners. Furthermore, a multisensory learning approach was integrated by incorporating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods, the benefits of engaging multiple senses in learning. Additionally, collaboration with parents played a crucial role, ensuring consistency between home and school learning environments.

In the fourth-grade classroom, inclusive strategies focused on leveraging students' interests to facilitate learning. The case of H, who demonstrated a strong inclination toward drawing, highlights the efficacy of interest-driven learning. By integrating drawing activities into literacy and numeracy lessons, the teacher was able to enhance H's engagement and comprehension. Using student interests as a scaffold for learning has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation and learning outcomes.

Fifth-grade students, particularly AN and AL, benefitted from structured and multisensory learning approaches. The teacher implemented strategies such as breaking down complex materials into smaller segments, using visual schedules, and incorporating auditory and kinesthetic learning. Students with attention difficulties perform better when information is presented in manageable portions with clear, time-bound tasks. The integration of hands-on learning activities further reinforced knowledge retention.

For sixth-grade students, such as RGI, the implementation of differentiated instruction through customized teaching modules proved effective in addressing individual learning needs. The multisensory approach employed, which included visual,



auditory, and repetitive strategies, advocated for differentiated learning environments to cater to diverse cognitive processing styles. Furthermore, the emphasis on structured progression—introducing foundational concepts before advancing to complex ones—demonstrated improved comprehension. The provision of a quiet and structured learning environment was also beneficial, minimizing external distractions for learners with focus-related challenges.

Principal's Management Policy

The findings from the interviews reveal a complex interplay between the principal's management policy and the practical implementation of differentiated mathematics learning in elementary schools. Principals play a crucial role in shaping the teaching environment through their leadership strategies, resource allocation, and policy enforcement. However, while their policies are designed to support differentiated learning, several challenges persist in actual classroom implementation.

Teachers generally acknowledge that the principal's management approach provides a structured framework for differentiated instruction. This includes ensuring adequate lesson planning, facilitating professional development, and encouraging collaboration among educators. In schools where the principal emphasizes instructional leadership, teachers report having more opportunities to engage in workshops, peer discussions, and resource-sharing initiatives aimed at enhancing their ability to implement differentiation strategies effectively. Additionally, some principals actively support differentiated instruction by allocating school funds for additional teaching materials and digital resources, thus allowing teachers to cater to the varied learning needs of students.

Despite these supportive measures, several hindering factors were identified. Many teachers struggle with high student-to-teacher ratios, making it difficult to address individual learning needs effectively. The lack of sufficient instructional time and administrative burdens further limit their ability to implement differentiated strategies. Additionally, some principals, while supportive in principle, are constrained by limited school budgets, making it challenging to provide sustained professional development programs or invest in specialized learning resources.

Teachers also noted varying levels of commitment from school leaders in monitoring and evaluating differentiated learning practices. In schools where principals



actively engage in classroom observations and provide constructive feedback, teachers feel more motivated and supported in their efforts. Conversely, in schools where such oversight is minimal, differentiated learning tends to be implemented inconsistently, with teachers relying more on traditional, one-size-fits-all instructional approaches.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of a collaborative school culture. Schools with strong leadership foster an environment where teachers can share best practices, experiment with innovative teaching methods, and receive continuous support. However, in cases where school policies do not explicitly encourage collaboration, teachers often feel isolated in their efforts to implement differentiated instruction.

Overall, the findings suggest that the principal's management policy significantly influences the extent and effectiveness of differentiated instruction. While supportive policies and leadership initiatives can enhance implementation, challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and inconsistent monitoring continue to pose significant barriers. Addressing these issues requires a more comprehensive approach, where school leaders not only establish supportive policies but also ensure their practical application through sustained investment in teacher training, resource allocation, and instructional oversight.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the growing body of literature on inclusive education, highlighting the necessity of structured environments, multisensory engagement, and individualized instruction (Cosentino & Giannakos, 2023). Differentiated mathematics instruction, particularly in classrooms with diverse learning needs, requires a combination of clear policies, well-supported teachers, and adaptable teaching strategies. The study findings illustrate that while school principals have established management policies that support inclusion, their effectiveness in practice varies due to resource constraints, teacher preparedness, and classroom dynamics.

One key finding is the challenge of supporting students with ADHD in mathematics learning. ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs focus and impulse control, which aligns with the observed characteristics of students such as DH, who exhibit hyperactivity and difficulty maintaining attention (Pranjić et al., 2023). The practical implications of this condition in a mathematics classroom include struggles with task



completion, difficulty following multi-step problem-solving processes, and frequent distractions. Consistent with prior research, strategies such as breaking down complex problems into smaller tasks and using visual instructional aids (Castro-Alonso et al., 2021) were found to be effective in engaging students with ADHD. However, findings also highlight that while some teachers attempt to implement these strategies, limitations such as large class sizes and limited instructional time hinder their consistent application. This suggests a need for enhanced support mechanisms, including co-teaching models and individualized learning plans (Iacono et al., 2023).

Similarly, students with learning disabilities (LD), such as dyslexia, encounter significant barriers in mathematics, particularly in understanding mathematical symbols and word problems. The difficulties experienced in the classification of dyslexia-related challenges include struggles with recognizing numbers and comprehending mathematical vocabulary (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2024). Previous studies emphasize the effectiveness of structured literacy-based interventions for students with dyslexia (Gharaibeh & Dukmak, 2022), which is consistent with the finding that incorporating phonics-based mathematical instruction and multisensory learning significantly improves engagement. However, the study also reveals that many teachers lack specialized training in dyslexia interventions, resulting in inconsistent implementation. This aligns with the findings that argue that without targeted professional development, teachers may default to conventional teaching methods that fail to address the needs of students with LD (Lipka et al., 2019; Widiada et al., 2021).

For students with mild intellectual disabilities, such as H, the study demonstrates that their cognitive limitations significantly impact their ability to grasp abstract mathematical concepts. The theory of intellectual disability suggests that students with an IQ range of 50-70 require concrete, repetitive, and visually supported instruction to enhance learning outcomes. In line with this theory, the study found that using visual representations, manipulatives, and hands-on activities helped improve H's mathematical comprehension. This aligns with recent research indicating that students with intellectual disabilities benefit from scaffolded instruction and peer-assisted learning models (Damastuti, 2020). However, the research also highlights the gap between policy and practice, as many schools lack sufficient resources to provide specialized instructional materials or one-on-one support for these students.



Beyond individual student needs, the study highlights broader systemic challenges in implementing differentiated mathematics instruction. While Permendikbud No. 70 of 2009 mandates inclusive education, findings suggest that policy implementation remains inconsistent across schools. This echoes the argument that inclusion policies must be accompanied by robust monitoring mechanisms and ongoing teacher training (Romadhon & Supena, 2021). The findings also emphasize the role of school leadership in fostering a collaborative teaching culture. Schools where principals actively support differentiation through professional development and resource allocation report higher success rates in implementing inclusive teaching practices. Conversely, in schools where leadership engagement is minimal, differentiation is often left to individual teacher initiative, leading to inconsistencies in student support.

Recent studies on inclusive education suggest that a holistic approach—combining structured teaching strategies, parental involvement, and student interest-driven learning—yields the best outcomes (Chen et al., 2023). The study findings support this notion, demonstrating that students engage more actively when learning is connected to their interests. This is particularly relevant for students with specific learning disorders who, despite their challenges, often exhibit strong engagement in areas of personal interest. As noted by the American Psychiatric Association, children with learning disabilities can excel in non-traditional academic areas when instruction is tailored to their strengths.

Overall, the study highlights that while inclusive education policies provide a foundational framework, their practical implementation is hindered by structural barriers such as large class sizes, limited resources, and insufficient teacher training. Addressing these issues requires a more integrated approach, including increased investment in specialized training programs, enhanced collaboration between teachers and school administrators, and the adoption of evidence-based teaching strategies. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of these interventions, assessing how sustained differentiated instruction influences long-term academic performance and student development in inclusive settings.



CONCLUSION

Based on our group observations, children with special needs exhibit diverse characteristics, including specific learning difficulties, slow cognitive development, and attention disorders such as ADHD. These variations highlight the necessity of targeted instructional strategies and individualized support in inclusive classrooms. This study underscores the critical role of teachers and schools in facilitating effective learning experiences for students with special needs. Schools must prioritize inclusive education by providing continuous professional development for teachers and ensuring adequate facilities and infrastructure to accommodate diverse learning needs. By fostering a structured, supportive, and adaptable learning environment, inclusive education can enhance academic and social outcomes for children with special needs. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies and assess how differentiated interventions can be refined to better support students with various learning challenges.

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