

Roles and Challenges of Educators in Inclusive Education and Speciality Schools in Indonesia

Atiek Nilangsari¹, Syafita Maulidya², Jihan Rahma Indah Puspa Sari³, Safi'at Intan Nur Halimah⁴

Special Education Department, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia¹⁻⁴

Corresponding author : 24010915001@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This article discusses the roles, types, competencies and challenges faced by educators in the context of inclusive education and speciality schools in Indonesia. Based on a review of national regulations, educational theory and empirical conditions in the field, educators are required to have adequate professional and social competencies to provide quality education services for all learners, including those with special needs. This paper also examines the gap between policy and implementation in the field and presents strategies for continuous development for educators to improve the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia.

Keywords: teaching staff, inclusive education, teacher competence, special school, special mentor teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global agenda in an effort to realise equitable and fair education for all children, including children with special needs. A number of studies have shown that the quality of inclusive education is highly dependent on the readiness and competence of educators. For example, a study by Florian and Spratt (2013) states that the success of inclusive education is strongly influenced by teachers' confidence and understanding of inclusive pedagogies. Sharma et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of pre-service and in-service training to prepare teachers to deal with the diverse needs of students in the classroom.

In Indonesia, inclusive education is regulated through Permendiknas No. 70/2009, which requires regular schools to provide services for students with special needs. Research by Puspita and Prasetyo (2022) showed that most teachers have not had training in inclusive education. Studies by Winardi et al. (2021) and Sari et al. (2020) also revealed low teacher skills in developing Individual Learning Programmes (IEPs) and conducting special needs assessments.

In addition, research by Agustin et al. (2020) and Susanto (2019) noted that regular teachers tend to experience difficulties in collaboration with special assistance teachers (GPK), due to limited knowledge and overlapping roles. A study in SLB by Yuliana and Nurhadi (2021) underlined the importance of teachers' special education background in supporting the effectiveness of learning interventions. However, data from GoodStats (2023) shows that the distribution of special education teachers and GPKs in Indonesia is still very uneven, with a predominance in urban areas.

Other research by Ramdhani et al. (2018) and Ningsih (2022) suggested that administrative burdens, lack of technological support and emotional distress hindered teachers' performance in providing optimal inclusive services. Meanwhile, a study by Widodo and Mumpuni (2023) showed that private inclusive schools perform better than public schools because they are supported by special services departments and professional staff.

While there have been many studies that address aspects of teacher competencies and challenges in inclusive education, most of these studies are descriptive and limited to specific aspects such as teacher perceptions or technical training. There are not many studies that comprehensively integrate regulatory reviews, empirical conditions and educator development strategies in inclusive and special schools into one framework. In addition, these studies have not reached many 3T areas and are limited in exploring

sustainable professional development approaches based on local needs. Therefore, research is needed that offers a synthesised approach between policy, practice in the field and contextualised teacher capacity building solutions.

This research aims to analyse the roles and competencies that educators should have in the context of inclusive education and special schools, identify the main challenges faced by educators based on empirical findings in various regions of Indonesia, and formulate sustainable professional development strategies that are relevant to contextual needs in the field. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the strengthening of inclusive education practices and the formulation of national educator capacity building policies.

METHOD

This research used a **descriptive qualitative** approach by combining document analysis, literature review, and field interviews. Data was collected from:

1. Review of national regulations: Law No. 20/2003, Law No. 14/2005, Government Regulation No. 19/2017, Permendiknas No. 70/2009, Permendikbud No. 58/2020.
2. Interviews with teachers in inclusive and special schools in East Java, West Java and Sulawesi.
3. Relevant articles.

The analysis was conducted thematically to identify competency issues, distribution, and educator development strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Competence and Strategic Role of Educators

This research shows that the strategic role of educators in inclusive education and speciality schools includes functions as teachers, mentors, facilitators, collaborators, and innovators. In inclusive schools, teachers not only deliver materials, but also adapt the curriculum, develop Individualized educational Programs (IEPs), and collaborate with Special education teachers, parents, and therapists. These competencies refer to national regulations such as Permendiknas No 70 of 2009 and Permendikbud No 58 of 2020, which require inclusive schools to provide trained educators.

Empirical Findings: Qualification and Distribution Inequality

Based on the review and interviews, it was found that:

- a. Only about 14.8% of inclusive schools have a special educational teachers.
- b. Most regular teachers have not had specialised training in inclusive education.
- c. In special schools, the majority of teachers come from an special education background, but the distribution of educators is still concentrated in big cities.
- d. The 3T (underdeveloped, frontier and outermost) areas experience a shortage of competent teachers to deal with children with special needs, both in inclusive schools and special schools.

This finding is in line with data from GoodStats (2023) and the results of Puspita & Prasetyo's study (2022), which show that the gap between policy and implementation remains a serious challenge.

Educator Challenges in the Field

Some of the main challenges faced by educators in inclusive and specialised education include:

- a. Competence is limited in managing adaptive learning and identifying the needs of children with disabilities.
- b. High administrative burden that reduces time for learning preparation.
- c. The distribution of educators is uneven, with dominance in big cities.
- d. Low welfare, especially for honorary teachers, which affects work motivation.
- e. The lack of training in modern technology and pedagogy means that many teachers are unprepared for the demands of the curriculum and the digitisation of education.

This is reinforced by literature such as Agustin et al. (2020) and Susanto (2019), which highlight the issue of role overlap and work pressure on regular teachers in inclusive schools

Development Efforts and Sustainable Solutions

To overcome these obstacles, teacher professional development must be carried out on an ongoing basis, including through:

- a. On-the-job training such as mentoring, job rotations and visits to flagship inclusive schools.
- b. Off-the-job training through certified courses, further studies, seminars and online training.
- c. Regular supervision and evaluation, which includes feedback from the principal, fellow teachers and learners.
- d. Utilisation of technology for self-training and digital individualize educational program development.
- e. Incentivising teachers who work in underdeveloped, frontier and outermost areas or with children with high complexity.

Private inclusive schools such as *Cita Hati* and *Masa Depan Cerah* perform better because they have specialised education departments and multidisciplinary professional teams (psychologists, Special educational teachers, therapists). This suggests that institutional support and organisational structures are critical to the success of inclusive services.

Research Implications

The study concludes that the success of inclusive and specialised education depends on:

- a. Strengthening regulations based on implementation in the field.
- b. Reorient teacher training to be contextualised and in line with local needs.
- c. Collaboration between parties in supporting educators (education office, universities, NGOs).
- d. Evaluate affirmative policies for the distribution of educators to underserved areas.

The implications are important for education policy makers and teacher training institutions in designing a more equitable, adaptive and inclusive education system.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the success of inclusive education and speciality schools is largely determined by the competence, strategic role and adequate distribution of educators. Although national regulations have regulated the implementation of inclusive education, the implementation still faces major challenges, especially related to the low level of teacher training, inequality in the distribution of educators, and limited support in underdeveloped, frontier and outermost areas. Teachers in inclusive schools and special schools are not only teachers, but also facilitators, collaborators and innovators who must be able to adapt learning to the needs of children with special needs.

The main challenges include limited competence in managing adaptive learning, high administrative burden, lack of technology training, and suboptimal teacher welfare. To address these issues, sustainable professional development strategies through training, supervision, technology utilisation and special incentives for teachers in underserved areas are needed. Collaboration between the government, educational institutions and community organizations is also key in strengthening the capacity and motivation of educators.

Thus, strengthening field practice-based regulations, reorienting contextualised teacher training, and evaluating educator distribution policies are important steps to realising more equitable, adaptive and inclusive education in Indonesia.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AN and SM: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft (Introduction and Method), and Formal Analysis (Results). SINH and JRIPS i: Writing - Original Draft (Discussion and Conclusion), and Visualisation

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence and other assistive technologies were not excessively utilized in the research and writing processes of this manuscript.

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