

The Role of Teachers in Developing Participation of Autistic Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

Aulia Azzahra^{*1}, Anisa Adha², Kharisma Risa Nur Aini³, Minsih⁴

Elementary School Teacher Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

a510210132@student.ums.ac.id¹, a510210136@student.ums.ac.id², a510210140@student.ums.ac.id³,
min139@ums.ac.id⁴

Abstract

Inclusive education is a new perception in the field of education in Indonesia in providing educational services for all students, including children with special needs. Several elementary schools already have educational equality for children with special needs to place them with regular children who are accompanied by special assistant teachers. The purpose of the study was to explain the role of teachers as an effort to develop the participation of children with special needs, especially autistic children in the learning process in regular classes. Qualitative methods were used with a case study design, which aims to understand social phenomena descriptively. Data collection was carried out by direct observation of learning and interviews with homeroom teachers and special assistant teachers for autistic children. The results of the study explained that every child with special needs in a regular class is supervised by a designated assistant teacher. In the context of inclusive schools, assistant teachers play a role in adjusting lessons in class according to the needs of inclusive children, as well as providing assessments based on the child's abilities. Other efforts made include holding competitions with children with special needs as participants, to increase their participation. Therefore, support from the government, educational institutions, and the wider community is needed to achieve the goals of inclusive education.

Keywords: *Autistic Children, Student Participation, Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental need for humans in living their daily lives. Indonesian citizens have the same rights and obligations in obtaining education without scanning their different backgrounds. In accordance with the 1945 Constitution Article 31 Paragraph 1 regarding education, states that every citizen has the right to education. In another regulation regarding equality in education, Law No. 4 of 1997 Article 5 emphasizes that persons with disabilities have equality in various aspects including education. This is reinforced by various international declarations regarding equalization of education. So that it encourages policies that become the basis for fundamental changes in education, especially in inclusive education.

Inclusive education is one of the most inventive and crucial educational schemes in equalizing knowledge, especially for children with special needs. Inclusive education is implemented in the same way as general education practices. Minsih (2021) states that the inclusive education model is an innovative approach in the realm of education that matches the urgency of diverse students. This approach is designed to ensure that all students receive care as well as encouragement that is synchronized with their individual needs and the creation of inclusive learning areas for all learners (Pasaribu et al., 2023) In the implementation of inclusive education, there needs to be a positive contribution in an effort to develop character for regular students. The character of learners can be shaped through learning that takes place in the environment, family school and community life. Schools should accommodate the needs of all children by teaching them not to judge students based on their physical, social, emotional or intellectual conditions.

Autistic children are individuals created by Allah SWT and require special attention and facilities. They often experience delays in making social interactions with the surrounding environment, thus requiring special services Schools, as previously explained, are places to socialize that have various cultural elements, behaviors, and characters. However, many autistic children do not receive adequate education due to a lack of understanding from their parents and the community about the importance of education for them. This often leads to a skeptical view of the presence of autistic children in their social environment.

According to Karningtyas, M. A., the interaction patterns of autistic children can be divided into two models. The first model is one-way interaction, which occurs when there is no prior approach to the child, the child is not in a good mood, and there is no eye contact. The second model is two-way interaction, which occurs when there is a prior approach to the child when the child is in a good mood and there is eye contact. This second model is further divided into verbal and non-verbal interactions. Therefore, communication with autistic children requires different approaches and techniques than communication with regular children.

The implementation of inclusive education requires encouragement by schools that understand the importance of creating a child-friendly environment for all school members. In accordance with Law No 20 of 2003, children with special needs must have equal opportunities in education as other children. The learning process must be able to adapt to the abilities and needs of various students, including children with special needs, so that each child is able to experience development according to their abilities. On the other hand, teachers need to have an adequate understanding of children with special needs and the concept of inclusive education to provide optimal services.

Learning media used in inclusive schools will be one of the factors in creating a pleasant learning atmosphere. So it can be said that, a teacher needs to consider the use of learning media that supports the needs of students. Some examples of media that can be used include the use of magnets when learning magnetic material, flash cards when learning letters, interactive learning videos, puzzle games and so on. (Prastiwi & Abduh, 2023). The use of appropriate media is intended so that students do not feel bored when delivering material (Qorimah & Abduh, 2021).

GPK needs to understand the conditions of diverse learners because it will affect the learning of inclusive children who use various learning resources to support learning (Abduh, 2023). Therefore, the learning media used needs to consider the material and the needs of students. Minsih (2021) states that fun learning is learning where there is communication between students, teachers, and the environment so that conditions conducive to learning in the classroom will be created. (Habibah et al., 2024). In preparing subject learning programs, teachers should understand the characteristics of each student. Therefore, the teacher's role in managing the classroom is considered important in creating healthy relationships in an inclusive classroom. Classroom management includes teachers' efforts to foster a child-friendly environment for learners and establish good interpersonal relationships.

Teachers are expected to encourage desired student behavior so as to create a harmonious and productive learning atmosphere. Teachers who are qualified to assist inclusive children are called Special Assistance Teachers (GPK) who are tasked with providing assistance for students with special needs in inclusive education while the children are in the school environment. Ajuwon explained that inclusive schools need to be supported by qualified teaching staff so that the teaching that will be carried out will be designed to meet the needs of students.

The purpose of this study is to find out and explain the role of a teacher in an effort to develop the achievement and participation of children with special needs in inclusive schools. This problem covers children with special needs who are in inclusive schools that are considered to have obstacles in several ways so that they need to get special education services separately. The provision of these educational services is carried out by class teachers and special assistant teachers in every step of the activities of children with special needs. With the assistance provided by teachers to children with special needs, it is hoped that children will have social interactions with regular children so as to develop children's participation in the formal education environment.

METHODS

The method used in this research uses a qualitative approach. The type of research used is a case study with descriptive data results. The qualitative approach has natural characteristics (natural setting) and occurs naturally in research because the concept of qualitative research emphasizes the data collection process (Ahmadi, 2016: 15). In qualitative research, it will focus on the process of obtaining data directly through field observations and interviews.

The data used in this study are primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained based on interviews in accordance with the design of the instrument, while secondary data was collected from several books and journals of previous research in accordance with the main topic of the research. This research uses an analysis technique that follows three procedures according to Miles and Huberman's theory. First, data reduction which includes summarizing and looking for relevant important things. Second, data presentation using tables based on interview results. Third, data verification which involves making conclusions based on valid evidence and field conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are based on interviews with class teachers, special assistant teachers, and observations of learning in regular classes. Based on the interview results, children with special needs who are placed in regular classes have a maximum limit of 3 children per class. Children with special needs at MIM PK Kartasura will receive a special assistant teacher who is tasked with assisting children with special needs in understanding the material in class, accompanying them to the bathroom, and accompanying them from arrival at school to return home.

Table 1. Interview Results

Informant's initials	Aspects	Results
R	Teacher role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class teacher plays a role in getting all students in the class to be active. • The class teacher plays a role in uniting normal students with autistic students. • The class teacher has the role of providing the same subject matter between normal students and students with autism.
	Teacher strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers generalize normal students with autistic students in class • teachers give the same tasks to both normal and autistic students • The teacher triggers all students in the class with games that can make students active. • The teacher gives feedback to students who ask questions in class, both normal and autistic students. • The teacher manages the class responsively so that all students are active in the class. • The teacher gives feedback to students if they ask questions but is still assisted by the shadow teacher.
B	Teacher role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class teacher plays a role in getting all students in the class to be active. • The class teacher plays a role in uniting normal students with autistic students. • The class teacher has the role of providing the same subject matter between normal students and students with autism.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher triggers all students in the class with games that can make students active. • The teacher gives feedback to students who ask questions in class, both normal and autistic students. • The teacher manages the class responsively so that all students are active in the class. • The teacher gives feedback to students if they ask questions but is still assisted by the shadow teacher.
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Autistic children with disabilities have a fickle attitude; in the morning they may feel excited about learning in class, but in the afternoon they do not want to learn in class. So the solution that can be given is to invite them out of the classroom so as not to disturb the concentration of other friends. The learning hours that are carried out while at school are also different.

As is the case at MIM PK Kartasura, which is one of the inclusive schools where children with disabilities will be in the same class with ordinary students in regular classes. Each child with special needs will have their own accompanying teacher. At MIM PK Kartasura, each regular class only contains a maximum of 3 inclusion children. Each teacher will have their own roles and strategies in teaching children with special needs that are adjusted to the abilities of each child. The role of this teacher is very important to increase participation and develop the achievements of children with special needs in the classroom.

In addition, the role of the Special Assistance Teacher (GPK) is also very necessary to assist the learning process of children with disabilities in the classroom. Therefore, GPK will collaborate with class teachers in supporting the learning process of children with special needs such as autism so that these children also get the same education as ordinary children in the classroom. Therefore, the class teacher will provide the same subjects for ordinary children and children with disabilities, by not differentiating these subjects, it is hoped that children with disabilities will be able to feel equal in studying.

The role of the teacher in developing children's participation can be done in the form of inviting to socialize with children with special needs, this will make children not to discriminate against friends. If this is already running then what the teacher must do next is address the learning strategies of ordinary children and children with disabilities. The strategies used by teachers include managing classroom conditions to be active, conducive and innovative. Therefore, at the beginning of learning, usually filled with games that can increase the activeness of students and enjoy the learning that is done.

Table 2. Observation Results

Aspects	Results
The role of the shadow teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The shadow teacher is very supportive of the students - Shadow teachers also always help students when there are difficulties - Shadow teachers help students to be active in class - Shadow teachers help students be active with other friends in the class
Student interaction in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some children are seen to be active in class by doing the tasks given by the teacher. - Some autistic children can communicate well with their classmates. - Some autistic children are less able to mingle with their friends due to autistic disorders. - Students in the class do not differentiate between autistic students - Students in the classroom actively participate with the autistic child during learning.

Shadow teachers are influential in assisting students, especially students with autistic disorders. They play an important role in ensuring that autistic students can actively participate in classroom learning activities. Shadow teachers do not only support students in academic matters but also when interacting with friends. Some autistic students can interact with their friends. This is a sign that shadow teachers have a role to play in increasing autistic children's participation and achievement in the classroom.

An inclusive classroom environment is essential in supporting the development of autistic students. Students in the classroom do not differentiate autistic students from other students, they are active with autistic children during learning. This shows that acceptance from classmates also influences the creation of a comfortable learning environment for autistic children. In addition, the positive influence of the shadow teacher can be seen in the academic achievement of students, which can be seen from the ability of children to complete assignments from class teachers well. Therefore, it can be said that support from shadow teachers and an inclusive classroom environment can improve students' academic achievement. Good support and collaboration between shadow teachers, students and the classroom environment have a significant impact on the development of autistic students at school.

Raymond, 2004 in his research stated that the inability to use language in communication can make autistic children shout, which will feel confusing among people who do not have an understanding of children with special needs. (Azis et al., 2021). They will communicate in their own way, for example by doing something repeatedly, hurting themselves, and shouting. Paul (2008) argues that autistic children will produce echolalia, which is a condition when people with autism imitate repeatedly the words they hear even though they do not know the meaning of the words.

Services that can be provided to autistic children include various types of therapy, such as speech therapy, biomedical, behavioral, and play therapy. These interventions can be implemented anytime and anywhere, as well as through education. In Indonesia, the concept of inclusive education has been recognized as one of the government's efforts to equalize the right to education for all citizens. Because learners in inclusive schools have diverse backgrounds and abilities, it is important to create an optimal learning environment for all learners. (Abdullah, 2023).

Inclusive schools will present equality between children with special needs to deliver material in 1 class with regular children but with special assistance. (Liani et al., 2021) Therefore, as an educator, it should require special strategies according to the needs of students. In the context of inclusive education, learning must pay attention to principles that are in accordance with students so that learning can be carried out optimally and get results in accordance with learning objectives. Teachers must interact directly with children with special needs to tell about their daily lives, starting when in the school environment and at home. So it can be said that communication between teachers and students is not only about learning, but also includes how their daily lives are told to the teacher. (Putri & Hamdan, 2021)

The success of learning is supported by careful planning, maximum implementation, and regular evaluation. Learning evaluation helps teachers identify obstacles that arise during the teaching and learning process, as well as a measure of the success of a learning activity. The results of this evaluation will be used to compile a report on the improvement of student learning outcomes and become a reference when designing the next lesson. Therefore, learning planning, implementation and evaluation are the determining factors of inclusive education for children with special needs, including autistic children. (Abdullah, 2023).

The learning model for children with disabilities is designed to enable them to interact in a social environment. The effectiveness of using the inclusive education curriculum and the independent curriculum to increase children's participation and achievement is crucial to the concept of inclusive schools in Indonesia. The inclusive curriculum will illustrate the importance of curriculum differences as the basis for implementing inclusive schools in classroom learning.

While the concept of an independent curriculum will emphasize the activities of students in an effort to develop their independence when learning takes place. (Ilmiah et al., 2023).

Norma (2021) explains that in adaptive learning for children with special needs, classrooms, classroom management, programs, and services available must be tailored to student needs. Teachers need to have strategies to increase the participation of inclusive children by using learning that is varied and not monotonous. The development of inclusive education practices must be accompanied by the application of increasingly creative learning principles. Creative learning not only considers the physical condition of students with special needs, but also emphasizes the principles of inclusive education that can be integrated with various teaching media used. (Yuwono, 2021). This is expected to create a comfortable and friendly learning environment for all school members, including autistic children.

As is the case at MIM PK Kartasura which unites inclusion students with ordinary students. This does not reduce the sense of participation of inclusion children in the classroom. The existence of regular classes filled with inclusive children actually makes all students participate in class. In addition, giving praise to children will help increase children's participation and motivation to learn when classroom learning takes place. (Berlinda & Naryoso). Praise can be given when learners are able to complete tasks well and correctly. Sadirman states that praise is a form of positive reinforcement and is able to provide stimulus for students when given in time.

(Iswari et al.) In an effort to increase participation as well as social skills of autistic children when communicating, participating in learning, as well as interacting with peers, good collaboration between parents, homeroom teachers, as well as GPK is needed. One of the forms of communication used in the communication process between accompanying teachers and student guardians is counseling. Counseling is a form of communication that is widely used in the world of education which is usually used in overcoming the problems of someone who needs help by way of assistance. With counseling communication, it is hoped that maximum cooperation can occur between the school and student guardians as well as accompanying teachers so that they can find out the growth and development of autistic children. (Berlinda & Naryoso,).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Children with special needs (ABK) are children with conditions that have special gaps from regular children, both in terms of certain deficiencies and advantages. They require special treatment that is tailored to their condition. Inclusive education, a new concept in Indonesia, aims to remove barriers to the full participation of all students, including those with disabilities, in the learning process. At MIM PK Kartasura, children with disabilities who are in regular classes receive assistance from a special assistant teacher who helps them with learning and daily activities. Based on the results of research involving interviews with class teachers, special assistant teachers and observations of the learning process in the classroom, it can be concluded that the presence of special assistant teachers (GPK) is influential in assisting children to be able to increase the participation and achievement of children with special needs, especially autistic students at MIM PK Kartasura. (Sondakh & Sya, 2022).

Autistic children with disabilities have a fickle attitude; in the morning they may feel excited about learning in class, but in the afternoon they do not want to learn in class. So the solution that can be given is to invite them out of the classroom so as not to disturb the concentration of other friends. The learning hours that are carried out while at school also differ. As in MIM PK Kartasura, which is one of the inclusive schools where children with special needs will be in the same class with ordinary students in regular classes. Each child with special needs will have their own accompanying teacher. At MIM PK Kartasura, each regular class only contains a maximum of 3 inclusion children. Each teacher will have their own roles and strategies in teaching children with special needs that are adjusted to the abilities of each child. The role of this teacher is very important to increase participation and develop the achievements of children with special needs in the classroom.

In addition, the role of the Special Assistance Teacher (GPK) is also very necessary to assist the learning process of children with disabilities in the classroom. Therefore, GPK will collaborate with class teachers in supporting the learning process of children with special needs such as autism so that these children also get the same education as ordinary children in the classroom. Therefore, the class teacher will provide the same subjects for ordinary children and children with disabilities, by not differentiating these subjects, it is hoped that children with disabilities will be able to feel equal in studying. The role of the teacher in developing children's participation can be done in the form of inviting to socialize with children with special needs, this will make children not to discriminate against friends. If this is already running then what the teacher must do next is address the learning strategies of ordinary children and children with disabilities. The strategies used by teachers include managing classroom conditions to be active, conducive and innovative. Therefore, at the beginning of learning, usually filled with games that can increase the activeness of students and enjoy the learning that is done.

Special assistant teachers play an important role in supporting students with disabilities in both academic and social aspects. They help students understand the material, accompany them in their daily activities and ensure that they continue to actively participate in class. Students in the class do not differentiate autistic students from other students, showing inclusiveness and mutual respect. This is reinforced by the teacher's strategy of equalizing normal students and autistic students in the provision of materials and assignments, as well as the use of games to spark student activeness. The positive impact of the presence of special assistant teachers can be seen in students' academic achievement. Some children, including autistic children, are able to do well on assignments thanks to this support. Good support and collaboration between the support teacher, class teacher and students creates an effective learning environment for autistic students, helping them to develop academically and socially. Overall, this study shows that the inclusive strategy implemented at MIM PK Kartasura, with the support of special assistant teachers, is effective in increasing the participation and achievement of children with special needs.

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