

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN REALIZING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN SPECIAL NEEDS AT SMP NEGERI 03 KARANGANYAR

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Abstract

This research discusses the role of teachers in realizing inclusive education for Children with Special Needs (ABK) at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar. Through qualitative approaches and triangulation techniques, data was obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that teachers play the role of facilitators, motivators, evaluators, and collaborators. The strategies used include differential learning, individualized instruction, the use of visual media, and adaptive classroom management. Teachers also work with psychologists, BK teachers, and parents to accompany ABK as a whole. The obstacles faced include the lack of physical facilities, the lack of optimal assistive technology, and the absence of mentoring programs. Nevertheless, the commitment and competence of teachers are the main factors for the success of inclusive education. This research recommends ongoing training, improved facilities, and cross-professional collaboration to support the right to learn in a fair and meaningful manner.

Keywords: *Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education, Teacher Roles, Junior Schools, Inclusive Learning Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a new change in the world of education that emphasizes the provision of equal learning opportunities for all students, including education for children with special needs (ABK). The concept of inclusive education rejects discrimination, bullying, and supports diversity in the school environment. In Indonesia, inclusive education began to be carried out in line with the government's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Salamanca Declaration (1994) which affirmed that public schools must accept all children, regardless of the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic conditions used.

As explained by Alimin & Permanarian (2005), inclusive schools are a form of educational service that provides opportunities for all children, including children with special needs, to learn together in the same educational environment without discrimination. This concept is based on the principle of equal rights in obtaining education, where every student, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or background, has the right to access decent and meaningful learning. Inclusive schools are not only about accepting children with special needs into regular classes, but also require adjustments in curriculum, learning methods, and flexible evaluation approaches so that all students can develop optimally.

Inclusive education is an idea pioneered by UNESCO, where inclusive education itself comes from the phrase "*Education for All*" which aims to provide education that is friendly to all individuals and open to all individuals without exception. Meanwhile, inclusion education according to Booth and Ainscow (2002) as stated in their book entitled "*Index for Inclusion*", inclusion education is a process to increase the participation and learning of all students, as well as reduce exclusion both from inside and outside the education system. Booth and Ainscow emphasize that inclusion is not just about placing ABK in regular classrooms, but rather creating a learning environment that is flexible, responsive, and centered on student needs.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) through the theory of "*Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*" provides an important foundation in inclusive education that effective learning occurs when students are helped to achieve potential that cannot be achieved on their own, but can be achieved through the guidance of more competent people, for example such as teachers. In this case, teachers play the role of facilitators and mediators of learning who actively adjust their learning approaches according to the abilities and needs of each student, including ABK.

Therefore, teachers are not only required to understand the characteristics of each student, but must also be able to develop learning strategies that aim to adjust to the differences in abilities that students have. Wina Sanjaya (2013:23-32) revealed that teachers have several important roles in the learning process, including: (1) Teachers as facilitators, in this case teachers play a role in providing support so that students can more easily follow the learning process, (2) Teachers as motivators, teachers as motivators play a role in arousing students' enthusiasm for learning and developing their interests and talents, and finally (3) Teachers as evaluators, Teachers in this case have an important role in assessing the extent to which students succeed in understanding the learning material.

In carrying out the role of the main agent in inclusive education, a teacher is required to have competencies that are not only general, but also specific according to the diverse needs of students. According to Hidayat (2009), there are three main abilities that must be possessed by teachers in inclusive schools. First, *General Ability*, which is a general ability that includes personality, religiosity, and the ability to create a learning environment that is safe, comfortable, and respectful of diversity. Second, *Basic Ability*, which is the ability to identify children with special needs, design, implement, and evaluate appropriate learning, collaborate with professionals and parents, and use modern learning methods. Third, *Specific Ability*, which is a special ability needed to handle children with vision, hearing, communication, intellectual, and learning disabilities. These three aspects of ability are very important with the aim that teachers can carry out their role optimally in realizing inclusive education.

However, the reality on the ground shows that teachers are often faced with various challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Limited knowledge of the types of special needs, lack of relevant pedagogic training, and administrative burdens are serious obstacles. Not infrequently, teachers feel unconfident and unprepared to handle the diversity of student needs in one class. On the other hand, school culture and support from colleagues and school management also affect the effectiveness of the role of teachers in realizing inclusive education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study type. I chose this approach because I wanted to understand deeply and thoroughly the role of teachers in implementing inclusive education in SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar because the school has implemented an inclusive learning model and accepts students with special needs. Data processing in this study is carried out through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as confirmation to informants who have been interviewed where the data is analyzed thematically with the stages of collecting data, reducing data, presenting data, and finally by drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the results of interviews and observations of teachers at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, various findings were obtained regarding the role of teachers in realizing inclusive education for children with special needs. The findings reflect the implementation of inclusive education that has been carried out through various roles of teachers, both as facilitators, supervisors, and professional collaborators. In addition, it can also be seen how the implementation of inclusive education includes aspects of social interaction as well as emotional support and communication. The conclusions from the results of the interviews and observations are presented in the following table:

Table of Variables X: The Role of the Teacher

The Role of the Teacher	Conclusion
Facilitator	Teachers adjust the learning method to the character and needs of ABK students.
Learning Resources	Teachers use visual media (images, videos) to help students understand the material.

Supervisor	Teachers provide individual instruction and simple tasks for ABK students.
Class Manager	Teachers create an environment that is inclusive, respectful, and empathetic.
Evaluator & Problem Solver	Teachers evaluate and develop flexible learning strategies in collaboration.
Professional Collaborator	Teachers work closely with psychologists and other professionals on a regular basis.
Additional Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage social interaction of children with special needs (ABK). • Have regular communication with parents. • Some aspects such as teacher training, facilities, teacher collaboration, and documentation still need to be improved.

Table Variable Y: The Role of Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs

Aspects of Inclusive Education	Conclusion
Social Interaction	Interaction between ABK and regular students is facilitated through collaborative activities.
Emotional Support & Communication	Teachers maintain active communication with parents of ABK students for development and input.

From this data, it can be concluded that the role of teachers in inclusive education at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar has been running comprehensively, although there are still several aspects that need to be improved such as teacher training, supporting facilities, and documentation of inclusive practices. In general, teachers show a strong commitment to supporting the success of inclusive education through an empathetic, communicative, and collaborative approach.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe and analyze in depth the role of teachers in realizing inclusive education for children with special needs (ABK) at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar. Inclusive education requires the active and comprehensive involvement of all components of the school, especially

teachers who are the main actors in the learning process. Based on the results of interviews with teachers at the school, the following picture was obtained:

Variable X: The Role of the Teacher

1. Adjusting Methods in Learning for Children with Special Needs

One of the important roles of teachers in inclusive education is to adjust learning methods to adapt to the diversity of student needs. At SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, teachers have implemented various learning strategies (*differentiation*), namely adjusting the material and delivery methods based on the level of difficulty, duration of assignment work, and learning media used. The results of the interviews showed that the approach applied was flexible and adjusted to the individual abilities of children with special needs (ABK).

In their role as facilitators, teachers not only deliver materials, but also create an adaptive learning environment that supports the needs of all students, including ABK. Teachers are required to design learning strategies that are able to adjust to the differences in students' characteristics in terms of abilities, learning styles, and special needs. At SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, this has been implemented through adjusting learning methods based on the learning styles of ABK students, both visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, so that learning becomes more effective and meaningful.

Theoretically, this approach is supported by the concept of *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) from Vygotsky (1978), which states that students have a range of abilities between what they can do on their own and those that can be achieved with the help of the teacher. Therefore, teachers need to understand the limits of each student's ZPD to provide appropriate assistance and encourage their progress optimally. The principle of *Differentiated Instruction* developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001) also strengthens this by emphasizing the need to adjust content, processes, products, and learning environments based on students' readiness, interests, and learning styles. In the context of inclusive education, this approach is critical to ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, have equal and meaningful learning opportunities.

2. The Use of Visual Media in Supporting the Learning of Children with Special Needs

Teachers at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar actively utilize various learning media that are tailored to the characteristics of children with special needs (ABK), such as the use of images, videos, and other visual aids. This media is not only used as a learning aid, but also as a means to overcome communication barriers experienced by some ABK students. One of the teachers said that students with communication barriers felt greatly helped through the medium of images and the use of clear body expressions. This approach reflects the application of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) theory put forward by Lev Vygotsky (1978), which states that learning will be more optimal when

students are assisted by adults (teachers) or peers through the provision of temporary assistance (*scaffolding*).

The use of visual media has also proven to be very relevant in inclusive education because it can improve the understanding of ABK students who have difficulty receiving information verbally or text. Visual media allows students to acquire information in a more tangible and easy-to-understand way. This is in line with the *theory of Multiple Intelligences* from Howard Gardner (1983), which states that each individual has a different type of intelligence, one of which is visual-spatial intelligence. Students with this predominance of intelligence tend to understand the material presented through pictures, diagrams, or illustrations more easily than verbal explanations that are abstract.

In addition, research by Mitchell (2015) also emphasized the importance of providing various forms of material representation in learning to reach the diverse needs of students. Teachers are required not only to use conventional text-based or oral methods, but also to integrate various visual media so that the learning process becomes more inclusive and effective. The use of this diverse media provides an opportunity for all students, including ABK, to better understand the subject matter according to their respective characteristics and learning styles.

Overall, the use of visual media in inclusive education at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar not only facilitates access to information for ABK, but also becomes a pedagogical strategy that adjusts between differences in intelligence and student learning preferences. Thus, the learning process can take place optimally, inclusively, and oriented to the individual needs of students.

3. Individualized Instruction as an Inclusive Learning Strategy

Based on the results of an interview that has been conducted with one of the teachers at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, it is known that teachers at the school use an individualized learning approach which is very important to apply in the context of inclusive education. Teachers realize that each student, especially children with special needs (ABK), has different learning speeds and learning styles. Therefore, the use of uniform learning methods is considered less effective to reach the needs of all students. As a solution, teachers provide personalized instructions, such as simplifying assignments, providing additional explanations, or providing material in a format that is easier for children to understand.

This method is in line with the theory of social interaction in learning expressed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that effective learning occurs when students receive help from more experienced people, such as teachers or peers. In this context, teachers act as facilitators who

provide direct support (scaffolding) to help students reach their potential development zone (*Zone of Proximal Development*).

Furthermore, the theory from Loreman (2010) also strengthens this finding, where he emphasizes that the success of inclusive education is largely determined by the ability of teachers to adapt teaching strategies to individual students' needs. Teachers who are able to provide personalized instruction not only help ABK students understand the material, but also foster a sense of appreciation and attention. This contributes to increased learning motivation and active involvement of students in the learning process, which is the main foundation for creating a truly inclusive learning environment.

4. Teachers as Inclusive Classroom Managers for Children with Special Needs

Inclusive classroom management not only relies on technical skills, but it is also important to create a supportive, safe, and respectful atmosphere. In inclusive education, teachers play a role not only in maintaining order, but also in building a comfortable learning environment that respects diversity, including for Children with Special Needs (ABK).

According to Bandura (1977) through *Social Learning Theory*, students' behavior is influenced by the examples they see in the social environment. When teachers show empathy and acceptance, students tend to imitate these attitudes. At SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, teachers prefer to understand the causes of ABK students' behavior before responding, by exploring whether their actions are triggered by discomfort, difficulty understanding instructions, or emotional needs. This approach is in line with Carl Rogers' view of the importance of open and supportive relationships between teachers and students. Through positive communication, teachers can adjust learning strategies according to students' needs. For example, when ABK students show certain behaviors, teachers respond personally and empathically.

5. The Role of Teachers as Evaluators and Problem Solvers in Inclusive Education

In the context of inclusive education, the role of teachers is not only limited to delivering materials, but also includes the ability to evaluate the learning process in an ongoing manner and provide solutions to various challenges faced by students, especially children with special needs (ABK). Evaluation is an important instrument to ensure that the learning provided is truly in accordance with the individual needs of students.

Furthermore, Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasize the importance of collaboration in inclusive education, especially in the evaluation and problem-solving process. Collaboration between teachers, BK teachers, homeroom teachers, and even parents and other experts is an important factor in creating a comprehensive evaluation. Through this collaboration, teachers can quickly identify the

obstacles students face and devise appropriate steps. It also strengthens the role of teachers as *problem solvers*, actively seeking solutions to ensure that every student has an optimal and inclusive learning experience.

6. Teachers as Professional Collaborators

In the context of inclusive education, collaboration includes close cooperation between a variety of professionals, such as teachers, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and various other parties involved in student teaching and development. Friend and Cook (2007) explained that cooperation between professions can enrich the teaching strategies used by teachers. Through this collaboration, teachers not only gain deeper insights into the needs and challenges faced by ABK students, but also gain an understanding of more appropriate approaches or methods to support their development.

In addition, in the context of ecological systems theory put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1979), child development is considered optimal if there is a positive interaction between various systems around him, such as family, school, community, and other social systems. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that children develop in an environmental context that consists of various systems that interact with each other. In this case, collaboration between professionals in schools is indispensable to ensure that ABK students not only receive academic support, but also emotional, social, and physical support that suits their needs.

B. Variable Y: Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs

1. Social Interaction

The role of teachers in encouraging healthy social interaction between students greatly determines the success of inclusive education. At SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, teachers encourage social interaction through mixed group activities (*heterogeneous*) involving ABK students and regular students. Teachers design group work or small discussions that consist of various characteristics of students, aiming for them to learn to understand each other and work together. This approach is in line with the ideas of Booth & Ainscow (2002) in *the Index for Inclusion*, which emphasizes that inclusion is not only about the physical presence of ABK in the classroom, but also about their active participation in the whole of school life.

According to Johnson & Johnson (1994), cooperation in learning can also increase empathy, understanding, and acceptance of differences. Collaborative activities provide opportunities for ABK to interact directly with their classmates, strengthen inclusive social relationships and reduce awkwardness between ABK and regular students. This collaborative learning not only improves academic achievement, but also strengthens students' social skills, such as communication,

cooperation, and empathy, creating an environment that supports equality and acceptance of all differences.

2. Emotional and Communication Support

The results of the interviews showed that teachers at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar maintained active communication with parents of ABK students through regular meetings and phone calls when necessary. This communication strengthens the relationship between home and school in supporting the overall student learning process. This approach reflects the principles of Ecological Systems Theory from Bronfenbrenner (1979), which emphasizes that the interaction between *the microsystem* (family) and *the mesosystem* (school) greatly influences children's cognitive and social development.

Furthermore, this is also in line with Epstein's (2001) view of the importance of *family-school partnership* in inclusive education. When teachers routinely provide progress reports and are open to feedback from parents, the educational process becomes two-way, participatory, and sustainable. The active involvement of families and schools simultaneously creates an optimal support system, strengthening a learning environment that is responsive to the needs of children, especially for children with disabilities.

However, based on the results of interviews and observations, there are still several shortcomings that are challenges in realizing comprehensive inclusive education. Some of the shortcomings that I can describe include:

3. Mentoring Program Not Available

The mentoring program is an effort to involve regular students (non-ABK) in supporting ABK friends, both in academic and social aspects. Regular students who are trained as *peer mentors* can help create a more welcoming and open environment for diversity. Unfortunately, in this school there is no official program that directs the active involvement of regular students in assisting ABK. In fact, the participation of peer students has a great influence on the success of inclusive education, especially in building empathy and healthy social interaction.

4. School Physical Facilities Are Not Fully Inclusive

Physical facilities are an important element in supporting comfort and accessibility for ABK students, especially those with mobility barriers (such as wheelchair users). Some of the elements that should be available in inclusive schools include ramps (ramps), disability-friendly toilets, and easy access to classrooms. However, at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, this facility is not fully available or evenly distributed. This can be a real physical obstacle for ABK students to participate in school activities on an equal footing with their friends.

5. The use of assistive technology has not been maximized

Assistive technology is a device or application designed to help students with special needs access learning, such as a text reader device, hearing aid, or visual learning application. This technology can increase the independence and understanding of ABK students. However, at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar, the use of this technology is still limited. Teachers have not fully utilized special devices or applications to support the learning process of ABK students, either due to limited resources, training, and facilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that teachers have a strategic and complex role in supporting the implementation of inclusive education, especially at SMP Negeri 03 Karanganyar which has become one of the pioneers in the implementation of inclusive learning at the junior high school level. The role of teachers is not only limited to facilitators, but includes various important roles that directly affect the success of learning for children with special needs (ABK). Teachers act as facilitators who create an inclusive and responsive learning environment through differentiation approaches, the use of visual media, and the provision of individualized instruction according to the needs of students.

In addition, teachers also play a role in classroom management that supports a safe and empathetic learning atmosphere, as well as as evaluators and problem solvers in overcoming learning obstacles for ABK students. Teachers conduct continuous evaluations and collaborate with various parties, such as BK teachers, psychologists, and parents, to design appropriate learning solutions. This collaborative approach strengthens the inclusive education support system as a whole.

Thus, the success of inclusive education is highly dependent on the competence, readiness, and commitment of teachers in carrying out adaptive roles that are able to answer the needs of each student. Teachers who have professionalism, high empathy, and collaborative skills are the key to creating an inclusive learning environment and developing the potential of all students.

SUGGESTION

To support the optimization of the teacher's role, several strategic suggestions can be proposed. First, schools and governments need to increase access to practice-based continuing education that is relevant to the context of inclusive education. Second, the provision of learning facilities such as visual aids, assistive technology, and multisensory materials must be improved to support the diversity of learning styles of ABK students. Third, cross-professional collaboration

between teachers, psychologists, therapists, and school counselors needs to be strengthened to create a comprehensive support system.

Fourth, the importance of open and intensive communication between teachers and parents must continue to be fostered, as this supports a better understanding of students' conditions and development. Fifth, periodic evaluation of the implementation of inclusive education needs to be carried out in a reflective manner and involves all stakeholders, so that the strategies implemented are always relevant and adaptive to real needs in the field.

By implementing these suggestions consistently, it is hoped that inclusive education in schools can run more optimally, so that all students, including ABK, get their right to enjoy a fair, meaningful, and empowering education.

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