

The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education at the early childhood education level plays a crucial role in providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with special needs. It is believed that implementing inclusive education from an early age supports optimal child development and fosters a welcoming and equitable learning environment. However, its implementation in the field still faces several challenges that require further study. This study aims to describe the implementation of inclusive education at early childhood education institutions. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This research was conducted at childhood education institutions in Jurangombo Selatan Village, Magelang City. The results indicate that the implementation of inclusive education at the Early Childhood Education level has not been running optimally. Obstacles experienced by teachers include limited competent teaching staff, fatigue at work, lack of parental openness regarding child development, and less than optimal government support regarding public school facilities and teacher competency improvement. This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and the government to improve the quality of inclusive education at the early childhood education level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Optimizing education, development, and growth of early childhood is strongly supported in Indonesia, one of which is through educational services (Nakajima et al., 2019; Apriyansyah et al., 2024). Public schools, religious-based schools, and civil service schools, among others, provide educational services for normal children in Indonesia. Since the past century, Indonesia has implemented educational services for children with special needs, which initially involved segregated education. Pramarttha stated that there are four types of schools with a segregated system: a) Special schools;

b) Out-of-school schools Typically, these schools operate under a boarding system, while distance or visiting schools and special elementary schools (Hansson et al., 2018; Latifah, 2020) are the other types.

Over time, the Minister of National Education Regulation provides provisions for the creation of justice in learning for normal children and children with special needs by providing inclusive education services. This is stated in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009, which states that the goals of inclusive education are "(1) to provide the widest possible opportunities to all students who have physical, emotional, mental, and social disabilities or have the potential for intelligence and special talents to obtain quality education according to their needs and abilities; (2) to realize the implementation of education that respects diversity and is non-discriminatory for all students as referred to in letter a" (Warminda et al., 2022).

Inclusive education is an educational system that places all children with special needs to participate in regular school learning every day alongside normal children (Khairuddin, 2020; Cologon, 2022). According to Jauhari et al. (2023), inclusive education promotes the values of equality and respect for differences and strengthens diversity in the learning environment. By implementing inclusive education in early childhood education, children with special needs can learn to meet their needs individually as early as possible and learn to socialize more broadly through the initial stages of needs, intellectual, etc., which can be obtained in early childhood education (Dignath et al., 2022; Lindner et al., 2023).

The difference between this study and previous research is the choice of research location. The previous study focused on school units, specifically elementary schools and early childhood education outside Central Java, while the current research will take place at an early childhood education institution in South Jurangombo Village, Magelang City. Furthermore, the previous study used a qualitative case study research method, field research, and correlation. While this study employed a descriptive qualitative research method, the differences in methodology may lead to varying outcomes.

The author's findings and interviews with several early childhood education teachers in Magelang City reveal that many public schools accept children with special needs but do not register as inclusive schools because they feel compelled to comply with government directives. Public schools are concerned that if they reject children with special needs, they will receive a reprimand from the government, and they also face issues of disrepair. Public schools encounter numerous challenges when admitting children with special needs. Some of these challenges include teachers' lack of knowledge about inclusive education, insufficient facilities, and inadequate infrastructure for children with special needs.

The directive from the government regulation indirectly directs every regular school to provide inclusive education, including early childhood education units (Jusni et al., 2023; Novrizal & Manaf, 2024; Somad et al., 2024). If a school does not implement inclusive education, inclusive education for children with special needs, it is feared that what will happen is that children with special needs will not receive optimal educational

services because their peers in their class are different from them, who are normal children (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Romadhoni & Nugroho, 2024; Maryam et al., 2024). Children with special needs often fall behind in their learning due to circumstances and situations that are less supportive of their growth and development compared to their typically developing peers (Mueller, 2021; Casale-Giannola et al., 2023). Therefore, it is critical for early childhood education institutions to implement inclusive education in their respective schools.

Building upon the main problems outlined by the author, this study aims to determine and explain the extent to which teachers implement inclusive education in early childhood education in South Jurangombo Village. Furthermore, this study aims to identify and describe the obstacles teachers face when implementing inclusive education in early childhood education in South Jurangombo Village.

2. METHOD

The research design used was qualitative research with descriptive methods. This design was chosen based on the research objective of obtaining an in-depth overview of the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood education institutions. Therefore, naturalistic, factual data that can be accurately interpreted is required. The descriptive method involves fact-finding with precise interpretation, thus ensuring relevance to the focus of this research.

The research subjects consisted of teachers, principals, and parents of children with special needs and regular children attending early childhood education institutions in the South Jurangombo subdistrict. The research was conducted at two institutions, namely Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80, located in the South Magelang sub-district, Magelang City, Central Java Province. The demographic characteristics of the informants included the professional background of the early childhood education teachers, teaching experience, and the status of parents as guardians of both children with special needs and regular children.

The research instrument was the researcher herself, assisted by supporting instruments such as observation sheets, interview guides, and document review. Other tools such as devices, stationery, and cameras were used to support the data collection process. Data validity was strengthened through source and time triangulation. The data collection procedure includes three main techniques, namely observation of classroom learning activities, in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and parents, and documentation in the form of institutional records and photos of activities.

The data analysis technique uses the opinion of Miles and Huberman (1992), which includes three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The qualitative research steps taken in this study refer to the general flow of qualitative research, namely: 1) Determining the focus of the research; 2) Determining the location and subject of the research; 3) Collecting data through observation, interviews, and documentation; 4) Conducting data analysis

simultaneously from the beginning to the end of the research; 5) Conducting triangulation to test the validity of the data; 6) Compiling the research results in the form of an in-depth description.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research was conducted at the Early Childhood Education institution located in South Jurangombo Village, specifically at two accredited places: Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80, both of which have received a B accreditation. Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80 are schools that accept children with special needs, and in the daily teaching and learning system, they combine children with special needs with normal children in the same class. Figures 1 and 2 present documentation of Private Islamic Kindergarten Asy Syaffa' 2 and Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80.



Figure 1. Documentation of Private Islamic Kindergarten Asy Syaffa' 2



Figure 2. Documentation Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80

Researchers conducted observations, interviews, and documentation searches to collect information/data regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80, Magelang City. At Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2, respondents who were willing to provide answers to researchers consisted of 1 principal, 5 class teachers, and 1 special assistant teacher. The informants at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 consisted of 1 parent of a normal child and 2 parents of children with special needs.

As for Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80, respondents who provided answers consisted of 1 principal who is also a class teacher and 1 class teacher. Informants at Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80 included 2 parents of normal children and 1 parent of a child with special needs. Table 1 of respondents and informants who provided answers to researchers is as follows.

Table 1. Respondent and Informant Explanation

Responden	Status	Informan	Status
SBN	Headmaster Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2	IF	Parents of children with special needs at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2
YF	Headmaster Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80	P	Parents of children at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2
AS	Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2	T	Parents of children at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2
EH	Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2	M	Parents of children at Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80
LS	Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2	M	Parents of children at Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80
NI	Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2	D	Parents of children with special needs at Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80
A	Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2		
WA	Shadow Teacher at Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2		

Data found through interviews, observations, and documentation were collected from October 2024 to January 2025. All data/information and research results will be explained through documentation, observation results, and narratives that have been integrated with coding. The following presents the results of interviews with the principal.

Researcher : Good morning, Principal. Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this research. Could you please introduce yourself and provide a general overview of the educational institution you lead?

Headmaster : Good morning. I am the Principal of AsySyaffa' 2 Private Islamic Kindergarten. Our school is an early childhood education institution committed to providing quality education for children in the South Jurangombo District.

Researcher : Okay, thank you. In the context of inclusive education, how would you define inclusive education and what is the primary goal of your educational institution in implementing inclusive education?

- Headmaster : For us, inclusive education means creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all children, without exception, including children with special needs. Our primary goal is to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to learn and develop according to their potential.*
- Researcher : How does your educational institution implement inclusive education in its daily activities? Are there any specific programs or activities designed to support inclusive education?*
- Headmaster : We have several programs and activities designed to support inclusive education, such as curriculum modifications, the use of diverse learning methods, and the provision of appropriate resources for children with special needs. We also collaborate with parents and communities to ensure that every child receives the support they need.*
- Researcher : What challenges do educational institutions face in implementing inclusive education? How do educational institutions address these challenges?*
- Headmaster : Our main challenges are limited resources and a lack of training for teachers in managing inclusive classrooms. To address this, we strive to increase teacher capacity through training and workshops and seek support from communities and organizations concerned with inclusive education.*
- Researcher : Thank you for your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the implementation of inclusive education in educational institutions?*
- Headmaster : I hope this research can contribute to increased awareness and understanding of the importance of inclusive education, as well as provide useful recommendations for educational institutions and the government in improving the quality of inclusive education.*
- Researcher : Thank you, sir/madam. This interview was very beneficial for our research.*

The following presents the results of interviews with the teachers.

- Researcher : Good morning, Teachers. Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this research. Could you please introduce yourself and provide an overview of your teaching experience in early childhood education institutions?*
- Teacher : Good morning. I am a teacher at Kindergarten Kemala Bhayangkari 80. I have been teaching in early childhood education institutions for several years and have experience teaching children with various needs and abilities.*
- Researcher : Okay, thank you. When teaching in an inclusive classroom, how do you modify the curriculum and learning methods to meet the needs of children with special needs?*
- Teacher : I strive to modify the curriculum and learning methods to suit the needs and abilities of each child. I use a variety of learning methods, such as project-based learning and cooperative learning, to facilitate children's active participation in the learning process.*
- Researcher : How do you identify the needs of children with special needs and provide appropriate support?*
- Teacher : I conduct observations and assessments of children to identify their needs. I also collaborate with parents and support teams to develop learning plans tailored to each child's needs.*

- Researcher* : What challenges do you face in teaching in inclusive classrooms? How do you overcome these challenges?
- Teacher* : My main challenge is managing a heterogeneous classroom and meeting the needs of children with varying abilities and needs. To overcome this, I strive to improve my teaching skills through training and workshops, as well as seeking support from fellow teachers and support teams.
- Researcher* : How do you assess the success of implementing inclusive education in educational institutions? What indicators of success do you use?
- Teacher* : I assess the success of implementing inclusive education based on children's active participation in the learning process, their improvement in abilities, and parental satisfaction. I also use assessments and evaluations to monitor children's progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Researcher* : Thank you for your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the implementation of inclusive education in educational institutions?
- Teacher* : I hope this research can contribute to increased awareness and understanding of the importance of inclusive education, as well as provide useful recommendations for educational institutions and the government in improving the quality of inclusive education.
- Researcher* : Thank you, Sir. This interview has been very helpful for our research.

Additionally, the following presents the results of interviews with the parents of students.

- Researcher* : Good morning, Sir/Madam. Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this research. Could you please introduce yourself and provide a general description of your child who attends an early childhood education institution?
- Parents of Students* : Good morning. I am the parent of a child attending an early childhood education institution. My child attends the Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and has special needs that require special support in the learning process.
- Researcher* : Okay, thank you. How would you assess the implementation of inclusive education at the early childhood education institution where your child attends? Do you feel that your child's needs are being met?
- Parents of Students* : I feel that the early childhood education institution has tried to meet my child's needs well. The teachers at the school are very caring and provide support that is appropriate to my child's needs.
- Researcher* : What do you expect from early childhood education institutions in supporting inclusive education?
- Parents of Students* : I hope that early childhood education institutions can continue to improve the quality of inclusive education and provide better support for children with special needs. I also hope that educational institutions can collaborate with parents to monitor children's progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Researcher* : How would you rate communication between parents and teachers in early childhood education institutions? Do you feel that this communication is effective?

- Parents of Students :** *I feel that communication between parents and teachers in early childhood education institutions is quite good. Teachers always provide information about my child's progress and seek my input as a parent.*
- Researcher :** *What challenges do you face as a parent of a child with special needs in supporting inclusive education?*
- Parents of Students :** *My main challenge is ensuring that my child receives appropriate support and continuously monitoring my child's progress. I also hope that educational institutions can provide better support for parents in understanding the needs of children with special needs.*
- Researcher :** *Thank you for your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood education institutions?*
- Parents of Students :** *I hope that this research can contribute to increasing awareness and understanding of the importance of inclusive education, as well as providing useful recommendations for educational institutions and the government in improving the quality of inclusive education. Thank you, sir/madam. This interview was very useful for our research.*
- Researcher :** *Good morning, Sir/Madam. Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for this research. Could you please introduce yourself and provide a general description of your child who attends an early childhood education institution?*



Figure 3. MOU between Private Islamic Kindergarten AsySyaffa' 2 and the Psychology Bureau



Figure 4. Classroom learning with Special Guidance Teacher

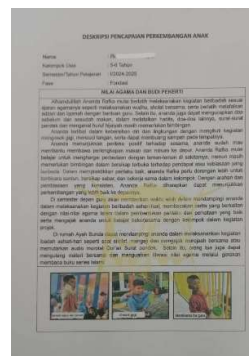


Figure 5. Children with Special Needs Report Documentation

The findings in this study encompass several aspects, including: a) general Early Childhood Education institutions that serve children with special needs have implemented screening Early Detection of Growth and Development collaborates with psychology bureaus to find out about children's growth and development, b) general Early Childhood Education institutions that serve children with special needs are still not optimal in providing services shadow teacher which is in accordance with the required qualifications, c) the assessment standards for children with special needs are different from those for normal children of the same age, specifically for children with special needs the assessment standards are adjusted to the abilities of each child with special needs, d) there is an increase in competency for teachers related to inclusive education.

The obstacles experienced by teachers at Early Childhood Education institutions in South Jurangombo Village are quite diverse, namely the lack of competent educators to handle children with special needs, fatigue in work, parents who are less open about their children's development, and the state, which has not facilitated public schools to maximize inclusive education, such as by holding less detailed competency improvements for educators and education personnel. The efforts made by the school to overcome the existing obstacles are: providing special assistant teachers even though they do not meet the Special Guidance Teacher qualifications, conducting Early Detection of Growth and Development screening during New Student Admissions, and, as a driving school, providing input to the Education Office through facilitators and supervisors.

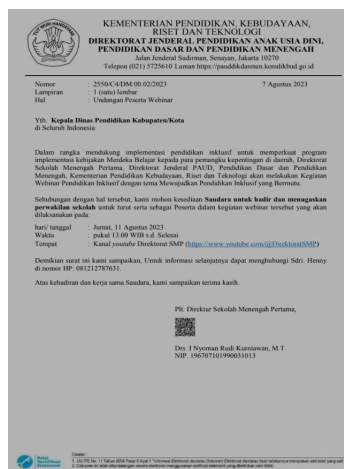


Figure 6. Competency Training Invitation Inclusive Education



Figure 7. Follow-up sharing session Inclusive Education socialization of Inclusive Education

Discussion

The learning facilities supporting inclusive education at Early Childhood Education institutions in South Jurangombo Subdistrict currently include the provision of special guidance teachers or shadow teachers and procurement screening. During the Introduction to Education for Special Needs program, students with special needs are

still assigned different levels based on their needs and abilities. This supports [Yuniarni et al.'s \(2023\)](#) statement that providing learning facilities is one of the elements contributing to the successful implementation of inclusive education in an educational unit.

Assessments for students must be carried out in accordance with the statement contained in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 66 of 2013 on Educational Assessment Standards; assessments given to students, both for normal children and children with special needs, must be objective, accountable, and informative ([Permendikbud, 2013](#)). Teachers working at early childhood education institutions in South Jurangombo Village conduct assessments for children with special needs differently than for normal children in general. For children with special needs, their assessment is based on the achievement standards for their age level lowered to below and adjusted to their abilities. This message has also been conveyed by teachers to parents of students with special needs. Teachers lower assessments for children with special needs because their development differs from that of normal children. Additionally, the school has empowered teachers by allowing them to determine the specific provisions for assessing children with special needs.

The Early Childhood Education institution in South Jurangombo Village categorizes obstacles into two categories: internal and external. [Ummah et al. \(2023\)](#) assert that both internal and external obstacles can hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Internal obstacles include the lack of educators with special qualifications to handle children with special needs ([Zagona et al., 2017](#)). An external obstacle to implementing inclusive education is the government's failure to facilitate public schools in optimally educating children with special needs, particularly by not providing psychologists, therapists, or counselors in each school.

One way to overcome barriers to implementing inclusive education is by providing dedicated assistant teachers ([Ahsan et al., 2012](#); [Mngo & Mngo, 2018](#); [Woodcock et al., 2022](#)). This aligns with one of the requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding inclusive education, which is the existence of a shadow teacher. In addition, the school also conducts Early Detection of Growth and Development screening during the new student admissions and provides input to the government to maximize inclusive education in the school, as well as communicating this to the principal and the head of the Foundation.

One of the obstacles experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in early childhood is the lack of competent educators to handle children with special needs. This is consistent with research conducted by [Breyer et al. \(2021\)](#), [Telaumbanua and Hardiman \(2024\)](#), which found that the obstacles to implementing inclusive education are teacher assistants who lack qualifications and adequate resources. Furthermore, teachers face challenges such as fatigue and parents' lack of openness about their children's development.

Apart from that, there are several differences between the results of this study and previous research. In a study conducted by [Wardhani \(2023\)](#), the obstacle experienced by schools was the lack of special assistant teachers for children with special needs.

Meanwhile, at the Early Childhood Education institution in South Jurangombo Village, special assistant teachers were available, although they did not meet the qualifications. In line with this, a study conducted by [Sakti \(2020\)](#), [Stites et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that many early childhood education teachers were still not ready to accept children with special needs. Meanwhile, at the Early Childhood Education institution in South Jurangombo Village, although not yet ready, they were able to accept children with special needs.

This research offers several theoretical, practical, and applied benefits. Theoretically, the results are expected to broaden knowledge and insight, particularly regarding inclusive education in early childhood education. Additionally, this research provides theoretical impacts that are expected to broaden knowledge and insight, especially regarding inclusive education in early childhood education. The practical benefits of this research are that it can provide information and updates for teachers in implementing inclusive education for early childhood; for schools, it can be used as a reference for other research related to this issue. In terms of application, this research has an impact on improving teacher competence, creating a friendly and adaptive school environment, and enabling early detection and timely intervention so that inclusive education in schools can be more optimal.

4. CONCLUSION

This research provides inclusive education at early childhood education institutions in the South Jurangombo sub-district, which is not optimal. This is because these early childhood education institutions do not have special assistant teachers who meet the qualifications for children with special needs, and training or competency improvement for educators and education personnel is not detailed regarding inclusive education. In addition, the obstacles experienced by teachers at early childhood education institutions in the South Jurangombo sub-district are quite diverse, namely the lack of competent educators to handle special needs, fatigue in work, some parents being less open about their children's development, and the state not facilitating public schools to maximize inclusive education, such as holding competency improvement that is not detailed for educators and education personnel. The efforts made by schools to overcome existing obstacles include providing special assistant teachers even though they do not meet the special assistant teachers' qualifications, procurement screening, early detection of growth and development during the new student admissions period, and, as a driving school, providing input to the Education Office through facilitators and supervisors.

As suggestion, we need to regularly evaluate the implementation of inclusive education to enhance the quality of learning in the future. Early childhood education institutions are expected to provide learning media and technology that support the implementation of inclusive education, especially in meeting the learning needs of children with special needs. The provision of adaptive learning media and supporting technology can create a learning environment that is friendly to children with special needs, helping teachers educate them more optimally. This step is also important to create an equal learning environment for all children, including normal children and those with special needs.

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