

Barriers to Effective Policy Implementation for Inclusive Education in Primary Schools

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Abstract: *This descriptive qualitative study investigates the inherent challenges hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education policies at SDN 2 Denggen, specifically focusing on obstacles encountered when providing services for students with special needs (SSNs). Data collection was conducted at the school using observation, interviews, and documentation, drawing from primary informants (the principal, teachers, and SSN parents) and secondary sources (school documents and relevant regulations). The findings reveal that the local implementation of inclusive education faces interrelated systemic barriers. Key obstacles include limited teacher capacity and understanding, a pervasive lack of school preparedness, inadequate physical infrastructure, and misperceptions among various stakeholders. These factors collectively contribute to the suboptimal management of SSNs. The study concludes that strengthening inclusive education requires targeted intervention, primarily through increasing teacher professional development, providing essential supporting facilities, and securing strong administrative support from policymakers. Ultimately, the research recommends that local governments and schools prioritize providing comprehensive support for the program's success.*

Keywords: *inclusive education, students with special needs, implementation challenges.*

Abstrak: Studi kualitatif deskriptif ini meneliti tantangan inheren yang menghambat implementasi efektif kebijakan pendidikan inklusif di SDN 2 Denggen. Fokus utama penelitian adalah hambatan dalam penyediaan layanan bagi siswa berkebutuhan khusus (SBK). Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, dengan melibatkan informan utama (kepala sekolah, guru, dan orang tua SBK) serta data sekunder (dokumen sekolah dan regulasi). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa implementasi inklusi di sekolah tersebut menghadapi kendala sistemik yang saling berkaitan. Hambatan kunci meliputi: keterbatasan kapasitas dan pemahaman guru, kurangnya kesiapan sekolah, infrastruktur fisik yang tidak memadai, dan miskonsepsi di antara pemangku kepentingan. Faktor-faktor ini mengakibatkan pengelolaan SBK yang suboptimal. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan pendidikan inklusif memerlukan intervensi terarah, utamanya melalui peningkatan pengembangan profesional guru, penyediaan fasilitas pendukung esensial, dan dukungan administratif yang kuat dari pembuat kebijakan. Penelitian merekomendasikan agar pemerintah daerah dan sekolah memprioritaskan pemberian dukungan komprehensif untuk keberhasilan program.

Kata kunci: pendidikan inklusif, siswa berkebutuhan khusus, tantangan implementasi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is defined as an educational system framework that guarantees equal opportunities for all children, including Children with Special Needs (ABK), to access quality education without discriminatory practices. The philosophy of this system is rooted in the awareness of human rights, advocating the view that diversity is a necessity (*keniscayaan*) that is mutually complementary, rather than a deviation (Indramurni, 2019). ABK are learners who exhibit significant difficulties or differences across various aspects such as physical, motor, intellectual, social, emotional, or behavioral during their development process, thus necessitating specially designed educational services. This perspective is elaborated upon by J. David Smith (via Indramurni, 2019). Ganda Sumekar further stated that ABK are often classified as "abnormal" children, meaning they differ from general standards, thereby requiring a more intensive approach and attention to support their developmental process (Indramurni, 2019).

The pressing need for inclusive services in East Lombok is underscored by local data presented by Raihanatul Jannah, Curriculum Coordinator for the East Lombok Regency Education and Culture Office (Lombok Research Center, 2024). Based on a 2023 assessment across 30 schools, over 500 children were identified as experiencing functional disabilities. The distribution of these difficulties is highly diverse, including: cognitive impairments (168 children), reading difficulties (167 children), attention deficits (117 children), speech impairments (38 children), fine motor impairments (34 children), gross motor impairments (23 children), emotional impairments (23 children), visual impairments (12 children), and hearing impairments (4 children).

The concept of inclusive education initially developed in Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark, and Norway) during the 1960s, with a primary emphasis on the integration of ABK into the general education system, rather than segregation into separate schools. In the same decade, the United States also adopted the concepts of mainstreaming and least restrictive environments after President John F. Kennedy sent special education experts to study the models developed in Scandinavia (Indramurni, 2019).

Globally, recognition of inclusion significantly increased following the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which reinforced the right of every child, including ABK, to adequate education. This commitment was strengthened in 1991 through the "education for all" declaration at the World Conference on Education in Bangkok. The peak of global commitment occurred in 1994 with the issuance of the "Salamanca statement on inclusive education" during the Education Convention in Salamanca, Spain (Phytanza et al., 2023).

Following these international mandates, Indonesia proactively developed inclusive education programs. This began with the 2004 Bandung Declaration, which confirmed the national commitment to moving toward inclusion. This responsiveness is reflected in legal foundations such as Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Indramurni, 2019). Subsequently, the "Bukittinggi Recommendations" produced from an international symposium in 2005 stressed the continuity of inclusive program development as a key strategy to ensure quality and appropriate education for all children.

The implementation of inclusive education programs began rolling out gradually across various regions in Indonesia starting in 2004. Several pioneering provinces included West Sumatra, South Sulawesi, Bali, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), and Central Java. The goal of this program is to integrate ABK into regular schools, aiming to realize a more equitable and quality education for all children (Indramurni, 2019).

Indramurni (2019) confirms that Indonesia has issued specific regulations governing the implementation of inclusion, including Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009. Article 1 of this regulation defines inclusive education as: "An education system that provides opportunities for all students with disabilities and possessing potential intelligence and/or special talents to participate in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general."

At the regional level, East Lombok Regent Regulation No. 3 of 2020 mandates all schools to ensure ABK have equal opportunities to access decent education. However, the policy's execution in East Lombok is constrained by a significant resource gap: the number of Special Guidance Teachers (GPK), currently only 45, is highly inadequate to serve the over 500 children identified with functional disabilities (Raihanatul Jannah, Lombok Research Center, 2024).

The practical application of inclusive education at the operational level still faces numerous constraints, particularly in elementary schools in Selong District, East Lombok Regency. School support for SSNs tends to be limited. Although initiatives exist for supporting facilities such as letter/word cards and reading corners, their capacity and utilization are deemed insufficient to effectively accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. Furthermore, the post-acceptance management of SSNs lacks a structured and sustainable intervention program.

Further observation reveals interaction and communication patterns that indicate a low level of optimism among teachers and parents regarding the developmental potential of ABK. This is evident in unsupported daily approaches, such as the absence of specific learning programs for students with learning difficulties. SSNs are often required to follow regular mainstream learning without adjustments to methods or materials, suggesting their needs are not optimally addressed. On the parental side, active

support for home learning is often lacking, possibly due to limited understanding or low expectations regarding their children's potential. This situation contributes to academic developmental delays and decreased motivation and confidence in the learning process.

Regarding facilities and infrastructure, the physical condition and availability of supporting learning resources in elementary schools are not fully designed to ensure adequate accessibility for students with diverse needs. Limitations in the number and type of appropriate learning media and aids pose significant barriers. Additionally, physical constraints in the school environment, such as limited supporting facilities within classrooms, contribute to the challenge of creating a truly inclusive learning environment.

Given the complexity of the challenges faced by elementary schools in implementing inclusion, this study aims to identify the specific school-level barriers related to inclusive education policy execution. By gaining a deeper understanding of these field constraints, this research is expected to provide clearer insight into the current conditions, thereby assisting schools and local governments in improving implementation effectiveness and ensuring equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their specific needs.

2. METHOD

This investigation employed a qualitative methodology utilizing a descriptive research design. Creswell & Creswell (2023) posit that: "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The research process involves emerging questions and procedures, collecting data in the participants' setting, analyzing the data inductively to build from particulars to general themes, and making interpretations of the meaning of the data." In essence, qualitative research serves to uncover and interpret the significance individuals or groups attribute to a social or humanitarian issue through an iterative process of formulating questions, gathering data within the environment of the participants, and performing inductive analysis to derive overarching themes. Furthermore, Creswell (Prasetya, 2022) identifies descriptive research as a subset of the qualitative approach. Descriptive research is fundamentally aimed at characterizing ongoing events, occurrences, or phenomena. The core focus of this method is on authentic problems as they manifest during the period of the study.

The researcher served as the principal instrument for data collection in this qualitative study (Meleong, 2021). The researcher was responsible for planning and executing data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and reporting the final results. To structure the data collection, guiding tools included observation guidelines, interview protocols, and documentation records. Data for this study were obtained from two distinct categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data relied on information gathered from key informants within the elementary schools, specifically supervisors, the principal, teachers, and parent representatives, particularly those whose children have special needs. Conversely, secondary data encompassed school records pertaining to inclusive education implementation, relevant inclusive education policies and regulations, and academic reviews from prior research. The Miles and Huberman qualitative data analysis model was applied for data processing, as detailed by Saleh (2017). This model underscores qualitative data analysis as a continuous and iterative process that commences simultaneously with data collection and persists until the conclusion of the study. This methodology seeks to attain a profound comprehension of the studied phenomenon and consists of three essential steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the investigation's outcomes, the special needs student population in the elementary school was exclusively limited to one category: children diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). This specific condition fundamentally dictates the nature of the challenges encountered by the school in executing inclusive education policies. These challenges prominently include: the limited grasp of both inclusive education and dyslexia among teachers and parents, the institutional readiness to deliver suitable learning accommodations, the provision of necessary specialized infrastructure for children with reading difficulties, the existing perceptions held by teachers and parents regarding the potential of

students with dyslexia, and the consistency of ongoing support for these students. These issues are elaborated upon in detail below.

3.1. Teachers' and Parents' Comprehension of Inclusive Education and Specific Learning Difficulties

Interview data revealed variability in teachers' understanding of the inclusive education concept. Some educators interpreted inclusion solely as offering supplemental academic tutoring. This was supported by observations where teachers provided reading support to students with dyslexia outside regular class hours, but these practices lacked strategies specifically optimized for dyslexic learners. Teachers frequently characterized children with dyslexia as students merely "struggling to learn," rather than recognizing them as individuals with specific learning disabilities who require dyslexia-appropriate resources, such as books with large fonts, syllable/word cards, contrasting word cards, embossed letter boards, portable whiteboards, or multisensory audio-visual media. Since observations confirmed the general absence of these specialized media, and documentation lacked records of such adaptive materials, the support provided did not fully meet the educational needs of children with dyslexia. This finding aligns with the research of Anggreani et al. (2024), who highlighted inadequate teacher comprehension of inclusive education as a primary hurdle in elementary school implementation.

The diverse levels of teacher understanding are further influenced by their professional backgrounds and experience. School records confirmed that no educators within the elementary school possessed a background in special education, and interviews indicated that teachers had never received dedicated training for managing students with dyslexia.

Meanwhile, discussions with parents showed a pervasive lack of awareness regarding inclusive education. Many parents explicitly stated they had "never heard of" or "did not know" about either inclusive education or dyslexia itself. This knowledge deficit is exacerbated by the predominantly low formal educational attainment of the parents (mostly elementary or junior high school graduates). Consequently, many parents often mistakenly attribute their child's reading difficulties to laziness or insufficient reading practice, which ultimately results in inadequate support for learning activities at home.

This limited understanding among both teachers and parents highlights a significant discrepancy between inclusive education policy intent and actual practice. The core purpose of inclusive education is not merely integrating special needs students into regular classes, but ensuring the provision of necessary individualized support. This view resonates with Sumarni (Biantoro, 2024), who describes inclusive education as a service offering opportunities for collective learning while respecting individual diversity and needs. Mujiati & Yoenanto (2023) further stress that the presence of special needs students should catalyze the formation of an inclusive culture to guarantee equal rights. In the elementary school context, the current lack of specific knowledge regarding dyslexia among educators and parents renders the existing support insufficient for fully establishing an inclusive culture.

3.2. School Readiness in Implementing Inclusive Education

In terms of commitment, the school demonstrated dedication to special needs students. Based on interviews and documented evidence, this commitment is visible in the school's vision and mission focused on developing religious, creative, and high-achieving students who reach their potential a goal that inherently supports the inclusive ideal outlined by Phytanza et al. (2023). Observations, interviews, and documentation confirmed this dedication through daily activities like teacher-led reading guidance and weekly literacy programs. Although these activities were not specifically tailored for dyslexia, they demonstrated a sensitivity to diverse learning needs. Furthermore, the school showed an emergent culture of inclusion among students, evidenced when peers voluntarily assisted classmates struggling with reading.

However, the implementation still faces considerable procedural and administrative obstacles. Interviews indicated the school lacked Individual Learning Programs (IEPs) and specific evaluation metrics for students with dyslexia. This was corroborated by documentation showing the absence of a formal Decree (SK) for inclusive education implementation, internal policies, established IEPs, or specialized evaluation methods. Consequently, the identification of special needs students, including

those with dyslexia, relies solely on informal observations by homeroom teachers, without formal assessment instruments. This situation aligns with Andriyan et al.'s (2023) findings that limited human resources and missing formal policies constitute major barriers to inclusive education implementation.

Furthermore, interviews confirmed that the school does not employ a Special Assistant Teacher (GPK). This fact was supported by school documentation that lacked any record of a GPK. The school explained this is due to the absence of a dedicated budget for a GPK, as the presence of ABK with learning difficulties like dyslexia is not prioritized as an urgent need, despite 9.4% of the 191 students being dyslexic. As a result, intervention relies solely on the initiatives of classroom teachers.

The school's efforts to propose new facility construction were also hindered by conflicting development priorities at other schools, illustrating the need for more concrete policy support from the local government. Although East Lombok Regent Regulation Number 3 of 2020 legally mandates the provision of inclusive education, its execution remains incomplete at the school level. Therefore, despite the school's acknowledgement of the legal mandate, the gap between institutional commitment and administrative support means that the elementary school's overall readiness is still suboptimal.

3.3. Availability of Inclusive Facilities and Infrastructure

Standard public facilities, such as classrooms, furniture, whiteboards, and teacher desks, were readily available. Interviews indicated that the school possessed simple, self-printed, adapted textbooks for dyslexic children. However, classroom observations only noted simpler media like syllable cards and alphabet stickers, while school documentation contained no records of adaptive materials. This inconsistency between interview reports, observations, and documentation suggests that existing media are unofficial and undocumented. Furthermore, the textbooks mentioned in interviews lacked physical or documentary evidence. This confirms that the provision of specialized media depends primarily on teacher initiative and lacks comprehensive, formalized implementation.

Observations and documentation showed that accessible public facilities, such as libraries and LCDs, were available, but their utilization was not optimal. Critically, there were no dedicated rooms or reading corners for individualized tutoring. Interviews confirmed that supporting facilities for individual learning were insufficient. This inadequacy directly compromises the effectiveness of inclusive education, aligning with Munajah et al. (2021), who state that resource availability is vital for successful inclusive implementation.

The fundamental principles of inclusive education require that the learning environment accommodate diverse student needs, including those with specific learning difficulties. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 48 of 2023 on Appropriate Accommodations underscores the necessity of providing adaptive learning facilities and media for students with disabilities. Overall, the available inclusive facilities and infrastructure are accurately categorized as inadequate.

3.4. Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Special Needs Student Potential

The perceptions held by teachers and parents regarding the potential of special needs students at the elementary school remain varied and do not consistently support effective inclusive implementation. The special needs students at this site exclusively fit the category of children with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). Based on interviews and observations, teachers generally displayed concern through providing extra guidance and simple media. This suggests that teachers tend to view reading difficulties as surmountable challenges, rather than absolute limitations a positive perception consistent with the spirit of inclusive education, which Meka et al. (2023) emphasize must accommodate diverse learning needs.

In contrast, interviews with parents revealed that many struggled to fully understand their children's condition, attributing this to limited educational backgrounds and busy work schedules. Parental statements expressing feeling "tired of thinking about it" or accepting their children's "inadequacies," alongside a tendency to delegate all educational responsibility to the school, signal feelings of mental exhaustion and hopelessness. This condition directly impedes successful inclusive education, which relies heavily on the active participation of all stakeholders, as Qistan & Swandi (2024) assert that parental perceptions are crucial for inclusion success.

Another significant issue is the tendency of some teachers and parents to mistakenly attribute reading difficulties in dyslexic children to lack of motivation or laziness. This is scientifically inaccurate, as dyslexia results from differences in how the brain processes language, not a lack of desire to learn. This misconception risks leading to inappropriate teaching and parenting strategies, potentially diminishing a child's self-confidence and hindering literacy development. Interviews indicated that this misunderstanding stems from the predominantly low educational attainment of parents and the lack of specific dyslexia training for teachers. This is structurally reinforced by the documentary evidence showing no educators with special education credentials.

This situation confirms that accurate perceptions are vital for fostering the potential of children with dyslexia. Positive perceptions cultivate a supportive environment, whereas incorrect beliefs can severely limit a child's development. Therefore, improving perceptions and supporting dyslexic children requires an integrated strategy, including enhanced teacher capacity, continuous parental outreach, and strengthened school-family collaboration, as highlighted by Kriswanto et al. (2023) regarding the importance of principal leadership and strong parental partnerships.

3.5. Ongoing Care for Students with Special Needs

Based on observations, intervention for dyslexic children was provided primarily through teacher-initiated reading guidance. Interviews and school documentation also confirmed the existence of weekly literacy activities. However, these activities were designed for the general student body and lacked specific tailoring for children with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia.

Interviews and documentation confirmed that the school lacks a Special Assistant Teacher (GPK) and a dedicated program framework for dyslexic children. Consequently, treatment is executed solely through the initiatives of individual classroom teachers, without the structure of a planned, specific program for special needs students. Documentation also noted an existing partnership with the Regional Library for literacy program assistance, which should offer supplemental support for dyslexic children. However, observations and interviews did not reveal evidence of this collaboration, suggesting that the documented partnership is either not routinely implemented or has ceased functioning.

Thus, the ongoing care for special needs students in elementary schools is categorized as suboptimal. The care provided is limited to individual teacher initiative, preventing the full realization of ideal support, as stated by Anjasari (Angreni & Sari, 2020), who defines inclusive education as both acceptance and the provision of support services tailored to the child's specific needs.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings within the elementary school, the student population with special needs is restricted to a single category: children with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). Despite this singular focus, the implementation of inclusive education faces manifold challenges. The limited understanding of both teachers and parents regarding inclusive education and dyslexia results in minimal participation in tailoring support to children's specific needs. Furthermore, school readiness is suboptimal, evidenced by the absence of formal policies, Individual Learning Programs (IEPs), specialized evaluations, or a Special Assistant Teacher (GPK). Adaptive learning facilities and dyslexia-friendly infrastructure are also inadequate, while existing general facilities are underutilized. Compounding these issues is the misperception among some teachers and parents that reading difficulties are a motivational issue, which widens the support gap. The accumulation of these barriers means that existing student management remains reliant solely on individual teacher efforts and has not been formalized into a sustainable, structured program.

5. RECOMMENADTIONS

To strengthen the implementation of inclusive education and address identified barriers, action must be taken across three critical areas:

5.1. Teacher Capacity Development

Local authorities must mandate and fund specialized professional training focused on evidence-based, multisensory teaching methodologies for specific learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia), moving beyond general inclusion awareness.

5.2. Resource Provision

Dedicated budgets must be allocated to procure and develop adaptive learning media and resources (e.g., tactile tools, specialized visual aids). Priority should be given to establishing accessible resource centers or dedicated tutoring spaces for individualized intervention.

5.3. Policy and Administrative Support

The local government must enforce its inclusion mandate (Reg. No. 3 of 2020) by budgeting for and formally assigning Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) to schools. This ensures the policy is supported by necessary staffing and financial commitment, transforming implementation from initiative-based to systemic.

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