

Implementation of Inclusive Kindergartens in Indonesia: Benefits and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is the government's effort in providing the right to a decent education for children who have various capabilities not only for regular students but also for students with special needs. The adjustment is aimed at bringing and maintaining a friendly environment and appreciating diversity. At the kindergarten level, the existence of inclusive education is often neglected since kindergarten is not one of educational compulsory programs in Indonesia. In fact, by using the systemic literature review method, this study has revealed that numerous studies have claimed that implementing inclusive education in kindergarten has given significant benefits for all school members. On the other hand, of course, the implementation is then followed by the challenges. The outcome of this study is hoped to provide a template to support access and equity for all children and a reference for implementing high-quality inclusive kindergarten in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Kindergarten, Benefit, Challenges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia 1945 constitution, it is clearly stated that every people in Indonesia has the right to get education. Formal education in Indonesia starts from kindergarten to secondary education. In 2017, there were around 243.771 formal schools in Indonesia, including 91,089 kindergartens and 2,157 special schools [1]. Unfortunately, based on the report in the *globalpublicpolicywatch.org* from [2] it is stated that around 70 percent of special needs children in Indonesia have no access to education. Special schools in Indonesia, which are hoped to accommodate these children, are lacking in numbers and more expensive

than regular schools [3]. To solve the issue, inclusive education, where special needs students can learn together with regular students in one mainstream school setting, is arisen and developed.

Although there is no accurate data about how many inclusive schools in Indonesia, [4] has announced that every city/district in Indonesia should have at least one inclusive school. Many researchers claim that inclusive education will give benefits, not only for special needs students but also for all school components, including in the kindergartens [5][6][7][8]. However, according to [7], implementing inclusion in early childhood education will be tricky. They claim that inclusive education will need

effort from all school members to cater every child's needs in education.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the works of literature related to inclusive kindergarten and to gain the potential information to implement inclusive kindergarten in Indonesia. Besides, the benefits and challenges will be discussed to give careful consideration of the possible directions for the next study and its real implementation.

1.1. Research Question

This study is focusing on responding to the issues "What are the benefits and challenges of implementing inclusive kindergarten in Indonesia?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The slogan 'Education for all' has brought a worldwide inclusive education system. According to reference [4] inclusive education is about a system of education that provides opportunities for students regardless of their special needs to study together with other regular students in mainstream schools. During the implementation of inclusive education, there have been challenges to reach high-quality inclusive education. However, according to [10] inclusive education is about continuously process for all students to study together without barriers among them. In Indonesia, the right of its citizens to get education has been granted by [11] article 31: Paragraph (1) that all Indonesian people has the right to get education. In reality, 70% of special needs children in Indonesia have no access to education [2]. It can happen since many special needs schools have not catered all special needs students in Indonesia. This 70% can be part of numbers of kindergarten students in Indonesia, which are around 4,495,432 students in 2015/2016 [1].

Many kindergartens in Indonesia have been named as inclusive kindergartens despite the meaning given and how its real implementation. One of the reasons to implement inclusive education in kindergartens is that children with special needs can be detected at an early age [12][7].

However, the implementation of inclusive kindergarten in Indonesia seems to be biased. As having a child with special needs in their school, a kindergarten has been known as inclusive kindergarten. As a result, many children with special needs are in kindergarten only as additional students without being actively involved in the learning process.

In developing countries like Indonesia, the existence of an inclusive kindergarten will undoubtedly have a positive impact. For example, children from low social-economic status, they can be considered as special needs children and enter inclusive kindergartens without worrying about being rejected. It is also in line with Competency-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi*) where it states that the purposes of education in kindergarten, which is to help students develop various potentials both psychologically and physically [13]. Many studies reveal how the implementation of inclusive kindergartens gives benefits to all schools' members. However, there are limited studies of inclusive kindergartens in Indonesia, except a few that are published in local journals.

3. METHOD

The data gained for this study is collected by a systemic literature review. Systemic literature review method analyses comprehensive literature related to the research topic [9]. All supportive pieces of literature are gathered from great literature books, journal articles, reports, conference papers, government documents, and electronic resources, both from Indonesian and the global publishers.

3.1. Procedure and Selection of Studies

To gain in-depth result of the study, some studies published in the last 15 years were presented and discussed, except one from 2003 study with the background of other country for the need of example comparison. Most of the literatures were found in google scholar database using the terms of “inclusive kindergarten in Indonesia”, “benefits of implementing inclusive education”, and “challenges in inclusive education”.

A regulation about implementing inclusive education in Indonesia was also discussed. In addition, to add essential information, some trusted articles on the websites were also discussed. There is no special criteria in selecting the studies, as long as they were relevant, valid, and reliable to this study, they were all included to get more comprehensive finding.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the implementation of inclusive education is believed to bring benefits not only for special needs children but also for regular children, teachers, schools and community. However, following the benefits, some challenges also arise from these parties involved in inclusive education at the kindergartens.

4.1. Benefits of the implementation of inclusive education in kindergartens

4.1.1. Special needs children

For children with special needs, the main thing is that their children's human rights are fulfilled [14][8][5]. According to UNESCO, all children have the right to receive a type of education that does not discriminate against the background of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, culture, and other conditions [14]. Also, children with special needs who are in inclusive schools are usually able to show achievement and feel acknowledged for their existence [14][7][15].

Another advantage is about becoming a part of social group. In an inclusive kindergarten, there are many children with various abilities, then, children with special needs can see the behavior of their regular peers and learn from them [6]. Children with special needs in kindergarten also get the opportunity to develop their potential if their teachers know how to deal and teach them with appropriate program [16][8][17].

4.1.2. Regular children

In inclusive education, differences are a source of learning for children. All children are accustomed to being in an environment where every individual is different. Children who do not have special needs can model positive prosocial and communication skills and demonstrate everyday routines that young children with disabilities can imitate [6][15].

Many studies reveal that the advantages of inclusive education for regular children are developing character education like growing empathy, respecting individual differences, fostering mutual respect, and help [6][18][15]. Classmates can also help children with special needs to develop social relationships and increase their motivation to be part of classroom activities [6][15].

4.1.3. Teachers

A good teacher naturally wants all students to learn and achieve optimal performance. In an inclusive kindergarten, teachers are motivated to learn about inclusive education since teachers realize that not all students are responded to in the same way and approach [14]. Besides that, a teacher in inclusive kindergarten will appreciate the diversity of students and provide opportunities for children to explore in various ways, provide support and appreciate the work of children by not comparing it with others [19].

In inclusive kindergarten, teachers have the opportunity to learn in facilitating children with various uniqueness [5].

In addition, teachers can practice creativity in providing meaningful learning for all students.

4.1.4. Kindergartens

As an inclusive kindergarten, the existence of an inclusive education system can provide comprehensive services that will allow all children to get educational services [20]. In line with this, inclusive kindergartens have participated in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) in the field of education in national development. Specifically, the SDGs in the fourth goal is ensuring equitable inclusive education.

Reference [14] states that inclusive education is a system of educational services that requires that all children with disabilities be served in the nearest schools, in regular classes with friends their age. Many children with special needs are served their education because of the existence of inclusive education institutions. By implementing an inclusive system of education, inclusive kindergartens also participate in and build awareness of diversity, eradicate discrimination and exclusion pressure [21][5].

4.1.5. Family and Community

The existence of inclusive education contributes to participating in and building inclusive communities [7][15]. By having an inclusive kindergarten in an area of the community, community can take part in keeping and supporting families who have children with special needs like giving them support and helping them if they need some help related to their special needs children. Besides, inclusive education in general including inclusive kindergarten will empower people in collaboration and partnerships to provide rights equitable and quality education [21][5].

4.2. Challenge of the implementation of inclusive education in kindergartens

4.2.1. Children with/without special needs

Reference [16] mentions that one of the reasons to include special needs children in regular kindergarten is by not looking at children's disability, but rather to consider them as special children who also can study like children without disability. However, in reality, the implementation of inclusive system in kindergarten is not easy as seen and said.

Children with severe disabilities can be an issue for the class [20]. Without the right teaching and approach, these children will make the class problematic for everyone. As a result, special needs children need special treatment [5][20]. With inappropriate learning, special needs children will have no advantage in inclusive kindergartens. Another issue is at the kindergarten level; a child's 'inner guide' is different from teachers' teaching plan [15]. Teachers can ask students to do 'A,' but children might do 'B' in the kindergartens. This condition is undoubtedly more challenging to apply to children with special needs.

4.2.2. Teachers

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education have been widely discussed. Unfortunately, a correct understanding and attitude towards inclusive schools in kindergartens are considered as barriers in implementing inclusive schools, including kindergartens [5][12][20]. This issue can happen since many teachers do not get skills and knowledge to deal with children from various abilities and disabilities.

Another problem in implementing inclusive kindergartens in Indonesia is the persistence of perceptions about children with special needs with negative stigma, e.g. "disabled children", which raises the tendency for marginalization of children with special needs, including racism [22][5][20]. The following issue results in providing the 'right' learning for all students [5][12][15].

4.2.3. Kindergartens

According to [23] and supported by studies from [5] and [20] the main issue for schools in implementing inclusive schools, including kindergartens, is about the support system for inclusive education, including policies and infrastructures. Reference [23] mentions that this support system includes both the school's internal support system starts from the principal's leadership, teacher's competence and school climate, and the school's external support system such as the government with policies or rules regarding the availability of inclusive education, the community involved in the implementation of inclusive education, and the schooling system based on government policies namely the application of school-based management, education unit level curriculum, also the application of life skills.

Scholars also mention that preparing professional teachers in dealing with children with special needs is what schools need to do [17][5][12][20]. Also, inclusive schools also need to be aware of establishing continuous and active collaboration with other professions related to services for children with special needs, such as psychologists, therapists, government, and non-government health services [7][20].

4.2.4. Family and Community

Community involvement is important in fostering a conducive environment for children with special needs so that a sense of community awareness about inclusive education services [24]. However, building awareness of an inclusive society is still challenging [24][15][20]. One of the issues is the negative attitude and isolation of special needs children and their families [7][20][25]. Many regions, especially in developing countries like Indonesia, still consider that having children with special needs as a curse or an embarrassment.

Another issue comes from low-income families [26][20]. Reference [26] explains that low-income families may find

it difficult to call for doctors or therapists to identify the disabilities for their children, and as a result, when children enter kindergarten, their teachers cannot do anything towards these children.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Conclusion

Through a comprehensive literature review, this article has revealed that numerous studies have claimed that implementing inclusive education in kindergarten gives significant benefits for all school members and the community. As an ongoing process, there will inevitably be challenges in implementing inclusive education. It is clearly seen that the biggest challenge comes from the support system in every kindergarten. Now, scholars in Indonesia need to take real steps to minimize these challenges to create high-quality inclusive education in kindergarten.

5.1. Recommendation

Based on the findings in this study, further research, primarily based on field researches are needed to gain more comprehensive findings of the similar study. In addition, as has been discussed in challenge section, many teachers in inclusive schools consider that they have negative attitudes towards students with special needs in regular classrooms because they lack of knowledge and skills to teach students with diversity. Therefore, professional development for kindergarten teachers in inclusive education is also essential to be held, especially by government and community.

Beside implementing professional development for kindergarten teachers in inclusive education, community also can actively ask for government's more attention in inclusive education, such as supervision of the inclusive school's policy, more budget, and building supportive

infrastructure for inclusive schools, including kindergartens.

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