




## CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN AN INDONESIAN KINDERGARTEN; A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *This study is a case study exploring the challenges of implementing inclusive education at Star Kindergarten, a private kindergarten in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Data collection was conducted through observations and interviews with two teachers who have students with disabilities in their classes. The data were then analyzed using the three-step analysis method recommended by Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that both students and teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. However, three challenges may hinder the implementation of inclusive education at Star Kindergarten, despite the school serving children from upper-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. These challenges are the teachers' lack of knowledge due to not coming from early childhood education programs, insufficient training provided by the school, and minimal parental support. Professional training for teachers and parent-school collaboration is necessary to support the implementation of inclusive education in kindergarten.*

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

## A. Introduction

The aim of inclusive education is linear with the value of Star Kindergarten (a pseudonym), a private kindergarten school in Indonesia. Star Kindergarten believes that all students have the same right and opportunity to receive education. Therefore, this kindergarten has initiated to implementation of inclusive education. The researcher argues that in practice there are some challenges encountered by this kindergarten regarding the implementation of inclusive education.

Some research mentions some challenges in implementing inclusive education in early childhood education settings in Indonesia such as teachers' lack of knowledge and competence (Ismiatun & Atika, 2020; Muttaqien, 2023; Wulandari & Fatimah, 2023), lack of financial and infrastructure (Ismiatun & Atika, 2020), and lack of support from parents and the government (Ismiatun & Atika, 2020; Safitri & Hijriyani, 2021).

However, it is not clear whether the teachers who participated in those studies are from early childhood education (ECE) background or not. The academic qualification of teachers plays a crucial role in the success of the implantation of inclusive education. In Indonesia, the academic qualifications of ECE teachers are diverse, ranging from senior high school graduates, bachelor's degrees in ECE, and bachelor's degrees in other majors as supported by the study conducted by Anhusadar and Islamiyah (2020). This condition is similar to teachers in Star Kindergarten. Although this private kindergarten is for children from middle- high socio-economic backgrounds, most teachers in Star Kindergarten have bachelor's degrees but varied, not only from early childhood education programs or psychology.

Another limitation of the studies about the implementation of inclusive education conducted by those studies was they did not mention the economic background of the students or parents. Students' or parents' economic background affects how they perceive inclusive education. Therefore, this case study is necessary to be done. It is interesting to explore what can be the challenges of the implementation of inclusive education in Star Kindergarten where the teachers are not from ECE backgrounds and students are from middle-high socio-economic backgrounds.

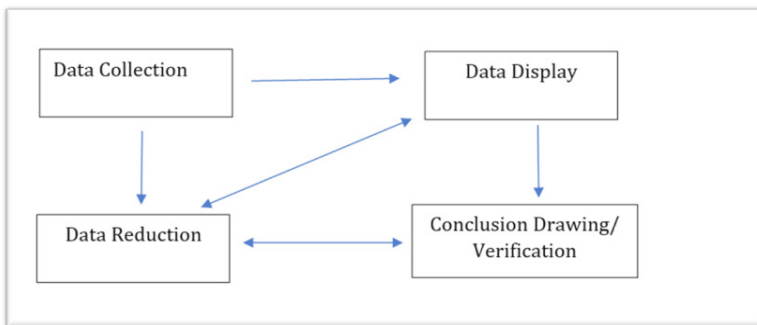
## B. Method

This study used a case study approach to explore the challenges in implementing inclusive education in Star Kindergarten. The case study method is very helpful when it is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of a relevant topic, event, or phenomenon within its organic, real-world setting (Crowe et al., 2011).

The data were collected through observation and interviews. The interviews were conducted with 2 teachers who have a student with disabilities in their class. After the data were gathered, the next process was analyzing the data. The data was analyzed using the three steps of analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) covering data reduction, data display, and conclusion. In the data reduction stage, the researcher compiled the information gathered from the interviews and observation then selected, focused, and simplified the data based on the objective of the research.

The next stage was displaying the data. In this phase, the information gathered from the first stage was compiled. Then, they were presented by the researcher.

The last phase was verification or conclusion drawing. For this phase, the researcher double-checked the conclusions by going back and rereading the interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant literature.



**Figure 1.** Miles and Huberman Qualitative Data Analysis

## C. Result and Discussion

This part will begin with the results of the research. For this part, the researcher will explain the aims of inclusive education in Star Kindergarten. After that, the researcher will

mention some chances and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in Star Kindergarten. After that, discussion will be given to analyze the findings of the research.

### **Aims of Inclusive Education in Star Kindergarten**

Star Kindergarten is a private early childhood education school located in Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia. This kindergarten is established with a good ideology. Students are stimulated not only to succeed in their academics but also to develop their positive character. The school believes that to prepare students for the future, possessing positive character is equally important as mastering academic achievement.

Students' diversity, individual differences, and equal access to education are highly valued in this kindergarten. For this reason, this kindergarten has initiated to accept students with disabilities to be placed in the same class as non-disabled students. In addition, it is considered as one of the ways to teach some values of the school to students, such as tolerance, respect, and acceptance.

However, the school admits that it lacks support services or resources for teaching disabled students particularly those with severe disabilities. In the process of students' enrolment, Star Kindergarten offers a two-hour trial before accepting new students. The trial is conducted by teachers. It is aimed to identify whether students have developed according to their age because the school does not have a health screening program before enrollment to identify whether students have disabilities. As a result, students with disabilities taught in the school commonly have mild disabilities although few of them have moderate disabilities.

### **Chances**

Inclusive education brings some chances for both students with disabilities and students without disabilities in Star Kindergarten. For non-disabled students, inclusive education builds their positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities, such as learning to live together, respecting differences, and empathy.

There was a female student who showed her disabled peer how to play with a certain toy in the class. One male student even becomes the favorite of his friend who has a disability. The

disabled child liked to greet him when he came to school, and they often played and chatted although what he said was sometimes unclear. When his friend had a tantrum, other children asked what happened, but after their teacher explained, they understood and played as usual (researcher's observation notes).

“This is how you play” (a female kid tells her friend with disability how to play blocks)

“Good morning, Rico” (a male disabled kid greets his best friend who just came to the class)

For teachers, having a student with a disability provides a chance for them to learn how to teach disabled students and how to make other students understand when their disabled peers show different behaviors.

“When he cried and had a tantrum, other children look at him, so I told them that his friends need time to calm themselves and everybody is different.” (Star Kindergarten Teacher A)

“This is my first time becoming a supporting teacher in kindergarten. I did not have any experience in teaching disabled students, so I learned from the main teacher. She is more experienced.” (Star Kindergarten Teacher B)

Inclusive education is promoted in the world by UNESCO with its campaign in the Salamanca Statement, Framework for Action, in Spain (UNESCO, 1994). Many countries support inclusive education to be implemented in schools since it is a good concept. It provides an opportunity for all children to have access to education regardless of their condition, economic, social, or cultural background. Indonesia as a multicultural country is one of the countries that also supports this program.

UNESCO as the first organization that promotes the implementation of inclusive education defines inclusive education in the Salamanca Statement Framework for Action as

Schools that accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted

children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities, and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6)

In Indonesia, inclusive education is similar to The Indonesian 1945 Constitution. The Constitution mentions that every citizen has an equal right to receive education. It is linear with the concept of inclusive education. Indonesia also has a national motto of “*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*” which means unity in diversity. Inclusive education that values the diversity of children is considered in line with this motto. Therefore, the Indonesian government supports this program. Some legislation is issued to encourage schools to be inclusive.

The first decree is the Direction Letter of the Directorate General of Primary and Secondary Education No 380/C.66/MN/2003 about special education in regular schools (Sunardi et al., 2011). In this direction letter, each district in Indonesia should implement a minimum of four inclusion schools that consist of one elementary, secondary, general high, and vocational school (Sunardi et al., 2011). This decree is strengthened with another decree six years later.

In 2009, the decree of the Minister of Education No 70-2009 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 70 pada tahun 2009*) about inclusive education for disabled students and gifted students was issued (Sunardi et al., 2011). This decree mentions that inclusive education must be implemented minimum in one high school for every district and a minimum one in primary and secondary schools for each sub-district (Sunardi et al., 2011). Other regulations about inclusive education can also be found in Government Regulation Number 66 of 2010 (*Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 66 Tahun 2010*) as well as a copy of Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 34 of 2010 (*Salinan Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 34 Tahun 2010*).

In the Guidebook for Implementing Integrated ECE in Indonesia, it is stated in the fourth principle that “children with physical and/or mental development disorders have the right to receive ECE services, both in the form of special and inclusive education”. The

section on Principles for Implementing Integrated ECE Programs in the 7<sup>th</sup> principal also states that “Each ECE setting is obliged to try to accommodate children with special needs to the extent of its capacity while still guaranteeing the rights of the children concerned to interact with fellow students reasonably and to be protected from discriminatory treatment from other students, educators, as well as other adults” (Supena et al., 2018).

Despite the definition of inclusive education mentioned by UNESCO, in practice, some scholars interpret the notion of inclusive education differently. According to Jauhari (2017) inclusive education means Inclusive education is an approach to innovative and strategic education to expand access to education for all children with special needs, including children people with disabilities. While other scholars, Yeo et al. (2011) argue that inclusive education is “the practice of educating most children in the same classroom, including children with intellectual, emotional, or physical disabilities” (p. 144). Although inclusive education is interpreted differently, it can be argued that the aim is similar. It provides equal opportunity for all children to have access to education.

However, for this essay, the term inclusive education is used to define including students with disabilities to learn together with non-disabled students in the same classroom. There are two considerations why this study focuses on disabled students. The first reason is that students with disabilities have a potential risk of being socially isolated. The second reason is disabled students sometimes endure some barriers in their school (Sheehy & Budiyanto, 2014).

For non-disabled students, inclusive education builds their positive attitudes toward students with disabilities. They develop their tolerance, acceptance, respect, and awareness to their friends with disabilities (Cairns & McClatchey, 2013). Meanwhile, for disabled students, inclusive education is believed to support them to receive better academic achievement, compared to when they have to learn in a segregated setting or special education (Cairns & McClatchey, 2013). Furthermore, concerning the context of this study, which is in a kindergarten, it is considered that it is important to implement inclusive education in early childhood education. Kindergarten is the first formal education stage where

students develop friendships with their friends.

Nonetheless, some challenges are also found during the research. In the implementation of inclusive education in Star Kindergarten, the school faces two challenges from the teachers and one challenge from the parents.

## **Challenges**

### **Lack of Knowledge and Training**

A teacher is one of the factors involved in implementing inclusive education. Moreover, the teacher is believed as the most significant factor and determines the success of inclusive education (Juntak et al., 2023). It means that the teacher has a key role that will influence whether the implementation of inclusive education is successful or failed. However, most teachers in Star Kindergarten do not graduate from ECE major or special education.

“I have a Bachelor’s degree in English Education. I like children, that is why I work here. I like when students with disabilities can study with non-disabled students. I think it helps children to understand that everybody is different and that it is okay. But I did not learn how to teach students with special needs when I studied.” (Star Kindergarten Teacher A)

Most teachers in Star Kindergarten have bachelor’s degrees from other majors, not in ECE. They did not receive knowledge of the implementation of inclusive education in the universities. To improve teachers’ skills and knowledge, the school must provide training for teachers. However, the school only provides a short training course for teachers.

“I have been teaching here for two years. We had training. I remember I attended a workshop on how to teach children with special needs. The speaker is a lecturer from a reputable university but only a day.” (Star Kindergarten Teacher B)

Lack of knowledge of inclusion from teachers can be a challenge in implementing inclusive education successfully (Juntak et al., 2023). Indonesian universities do not prepare pre-service teachers to teach in inclusion (Sunardi et al., 2011). Consequently,



inclusive education is not included in the curriculum of Indonesian universities for general teachers. This is a contradictory condition. The government of Indonesia, in its decrees explained earlier in this essay, encourages inclusive education to be implemented in schools. The encouragement is also emphasized in the National Conference, Bandung Declaration, Indonesia Towards Inclusive Education.

Implement and develop inclusive education supported by good synergy and productive cooperation among stakeholders particularly the government, educational institutions, related institutions, business world and industry, and parents as well as society (Bandung Declaration, 2004 as cited in Ediyanto et al., 2021)

In inclusion schools, teachers are expected to possess the ability to adapt to the curriculum, understand the learning style, and know how to stimulate students with disabilities. Moreover, teachers should be able to create learning materials and provide instructions and assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This condition may lead teachers to a difficult situation. Teachers in Star Kindergarten did not possess the knowledge and skill in inclusion because they did not receive knowledge and lacked adequate training from the school. However, they are expected to adapt to the curriculum and help students with disabilities to meet their needs and optimize their potential.

Bhatnagar and Das (2014) argue that teachers' positive attitudes influence the success of inclusion. They believe that teachers who possess more positive attitudes toward disabled students will determine the success of the implementation of inclusion. This argument is questionable. In daily experience, although an employee has a positive attitude and willingness to work hard without possessing skills and knowledge, they may not be successfully hired by an employer.

It also happens when teachers are willing to help students with disabilities, but teachers do not possess the knowledge about what kind of disabilities students have, how to create teaching materials that are suitable for those students, or how to give different instructions to help students with disabilities understand the material given. Although teachers have positive

attitudes toward inclusive education, the lack of knowledge and skills about it can still be a barrier to helping disabled students maximize their potential.

### **Lack of Parent's Support**

Another challenge in implementing inclusive education in Star Kindergarten is from parents. Some parents of non-disabled students have the opinion that students with disabilities may have negative effects on their children. They are afraid that students with disabilities can be dangerous for their children, or that their children may imitate the behavior of students with disabilities (researcher's observation notes).

These are interesting findings. Most parents in Star Kindergarten are from middle-high socio-economic backgrounds. It can be assumed that they are well-educated. However, they still possess negative assumptions toward disabled students.

A challenge from some parents of students with disabilities is also encountered by teachers. Sometimes parents of disabled students do not provide adequate information about the condition of their children, particularly when their children have mild disabilities that might not be easily identified by the school in the trial, prior an enrollment. Maybe parents are afraid that the school or teachers will not accept their children when they describe their children's condition.

"My supporting teacher and I noticed that this kid is different from his peers. So, I made an appointment with his mother. Usually only his nanny drops and picks him. I told his mother about his kid's behavior in the class. Then, she said that his kid is different. So, I told her to discuss further about the kid with my kindergarten principal." (Star Kindergarten's teacher A)

Lack of support from parents can be a challenge in inclusion schools. Negative perceptions and rejection against the implementation of inclusive education can be caused by a lack of experience in dealing with children with special needs, as well as a lack of understanding especially among parents of regular or non-disabled children (Suastariyani & Tirtayani, 2019).

The perception from parents of regular children will be contradictory to the goal and value that the school wants to

achieve by implementing inclusion. For disabled students, this situation may lead them to be socially isolated. Therefore, the aims of inclusive education implemented in Star Kindergarten such as building children's tolerance, acceptance, and understanding toward each other will be difficult to achieve. For non-disabled students, they may encounter a difficult position. On one hand, teachers and the school encourage them to build friendships with disabled students. On the other hand, their parents remind them of the contrary.

A study conducted by Munisa et al. (2022) found that some parents tended not to talk in terms of their children's disabilities. Some reasons such as negative societal response to children with disabilities, make parents isolate their children or do not accept that their children have disabilities. Children are hidden from society because their parents are ashamed to have a disabled child.

Parents are a primary source of information about children. Lack of information from parents about the condition of their children can be an obstacle for teachers to anticipate earlier to adjust teaching materials and instructions to meet the needs of those students or to manage the behavior of disabled students.

From the findings of this research, it can be learned that inclusive education does not stop when the school accepts students with disabilities. It is not just a matter of implementing inclusion in the school, but this is a matter of how it is implemented well to ensure students with disabilities receive equity and social justice. Some actions need to be taken in Star Kindergarten to address those challenges otherwise social justice and equity as the purpose of inclusive education will only remain in concept but not in practice. However, the researcher also realizes that the data found from this research cannot be generalized to other kindergarten schools that implement inclusive education in Indonesia. The number of participants was also small despite the researcher's effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the data by checking the data through observation and interviews. Further research can be done by involving more middle socio-economic backgrounds and kindergartens concerning similar issues.

## D. Conclusion

Research on the implementation of inclusive education that involves middle-high socio-economic backgrounds and teachers' educational backgrounds is still limited in the context of ECE in Indonesia. The findings of this research shed light on the implementation of inclusive education in Star Kindergarten where students from middle-high socio-economic backgrounds face some challenges despite positive attitudes toward inclusive education possessed by students and teachers. Some challenges are, that teachers are not from an ECE program, they do not have sufficient training, and lack of support from parents. To address those challenges, some recommendations are suggested. Firstly, the policymakers of Indonesia should make a policy for Indonesian universities to include inclusive education in pre-service teachers' courses and curriculum so pre-service teachers will be well-prepared when they should teach in inclusion schools. Secondly, the school should provide ongoing professional development for teachers when the school is willing to implement inclusive education. Particularly when most teachers are general educators. Lastly, a collaboration between parents and the school is needed. Schools should be proactive in communicating the value and the aim of inclusive education to parents and explain how support from parents is necessary to implement inclusive education successfully.

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