

OPTIMIZING TEACHING STYLES IN INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUPS: A CASE STUDY AT TALENTA KUDUS

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Abstract: Teaching in inclusive schools is challenging due to the diverse learning needs of students. Children with special needs require different strategies, and in playgroup settings, these differences are even more complex. Inclusive schools aim to bring together children with and without special needs, requiring teachers to apply adaptive, creative, and inclusive teaching styles. This study explores the application of such approaches at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus, focusing on method adaptation, teaching creativity, and inclusive principles. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature review. The findings show that individual adaptation, creative classroom strategies, and a commitment to inclusivity support the success of learning in inclusive settings. However, the study was limited to one school, which may affect its generalizability. Data were mostly from teachers and school leaders, with minimal input from parents and students. Additionally, the research focused on teaching practices without evaluating long-term outcomes for child development.

Keywords: Adaptation, Creativity, Inclusivity, Inclusive School, Teaching Style

A. Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational approach that provides equal learning opportunities for children with special needs (ABK) and children in general. In inclusive schools, teachers are required to be able to adjust teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse students. In the context of playgroups (KB), the challenge is increasingly complex because students are still in the early stages of development that are highly dependent on direct guidance.. In addition, educators have the task of stimulating children's development. Various methods are used to ensure that the learning provided by the school optimally stimulates children's development (Afrianingsih et al., 2021).

Teaching in inclusive schools faces significant challenges, especially due to the diversity of students' learning needs. Children with special needs (ABK) require different teaching strategies than children without special needs, and in the context of playgroups, these differences are even more complex. Teachers must be able to manage heterogeneous classes while maintaining inclusivity and encouraging learning achievement for all children.

Inclusive education has become a major concern in the global education system, including in Indonesia. Educational inclusion aims to ensure that every child, regardless of differences in physical, mental, or cognitive abilities, has the same right to learn in a friendly and supportive educational environment. This concept is important, especially at the early childhood education level, because this period is critical in forming the foundations of holistic child development. So far, early childhood has also been called the golden age, which continues to develop rapidly. (Rohmatun et al., 2023).

Previous studies have shown that the success of inclusive education is highly dependent on teachers' ability to implement adaptive and flexible teaching styles. According to Slee (2020), teachers in inclusive schools must be able to change their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students, from classroom management, material delivery, to evaluation strategies. This flexibility in teaching includes adjusting teaching materials and using learning aids that are appropriate to the individual abilities of children.

In addition to adaptation, creativity in teaching is also an important factor that influences the quality of learning in inclusive

classes. Research by Florian & Black-Hawkins (2019) shows that teachers in inclusive schools who apply creative approaches, such as the use of educational games, collaborative projects, and simple technology, can increase students' active participation. This creativity not only plays a role in maintaining students' interest but also ensures that students with various special needs can interact effectively with their friends in the classroom.

Inclusivity is also an important element in the teaching style in inclusive schools. In UNESCO research (2021), it is emphasized that inclusivity is not only about the physical presence of students with special needs in the classroom, but also about ensuring that they are actively involved in every learning activity. Teachers must ensure that every student gets an equal opportunity to participate and develop, both academically and socially.

KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus is one of the institutions that has committed to implementing inclusive education from an early age, by providing an adequate learning environment for children with special needs and regular children. To support this inclusion goal, teachers in the institution are expected to be able to develop an adaptive, creative, and inclusive teaching style. However, the challenges faced are quite big, especially in terms of maintaining a balance between individual student needs and maintaining overall class cohesion.

Based on this background, this study focuses on efforts to optimize teachers' teaching style at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus by considering three main aspects. Those are adaptation, creativity, and inclusivity. This study aims to describe how teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus adapt teaching methods, apply creativity in inclusive classes, and ensure that inclusivity remains the main principle in the learning process.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The location of the study is KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus, an inclusive school that serves early childhood with various backgrounds and educational needs. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with teachers, direct observation in playgroup classes, and analysis of related documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and student learning outcomes.

Literature studies were also conducted to support the analysis of field findings.. The literature study method is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading and recording, and managing research materials.(Juliangkary & Pujilestari, 2022).

Research participants are all people or humans who participate in or take part in a research activity.(Suriani et al., 2023). The research participants consisted of 5 teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus who were experienced in handling inclusive classes, as well as the principal, who was responsible for the inclusive education policy at the school. In addition, several students and their parents were included as participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives on inclusive education. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, where each interview and observation was identified by its theme according to the focus of the research. Parents and students are critical stakeholders in inclusive education, and their voices provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and challenges of inclusion (Florian, dkk, 2021). Below is the grid of the observation and interview instruments:

Observation Instrument Grid			
Aspects that Observed	Indicator	Observation Points	Rating Scale
Teaching Style Adaptation	1. Use of varied teaching methods according to student needs.	1.1 Do teachers use different methods for students with special needs and regular students?	1 (None)-5 (Always done)
	2. Adjustment of materials and teaching aids based on student abilities.	1.2 Does the teacher provide special aids for students with learning difficulties (visual, audio, or kinesthetic)?	1 (None)-5 (Always done)
	3. Grouping students based on learning needs.	1.3 Does the teacher group students based on their needs and abilities?	1 (None)-5 (Always done)

Aspects that Observed	Indicator	Observation Points	Rating Scale
Creativity in Teaching	1. Use of creative methods (such as games, songs, and art) in teaching.	2.1 Does the teacher use creative activities such as games or art in delivering the material?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
	2. Use of simple technology (e.g., projectors, tablets) in learning.	2.2 Does the teacher use simple technology to help students understand the material?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
	3. Use of visual aids or teaching materials in learning activities.	2.3 Does the teacher use visual aids to facilitate students' understanding of the material?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
	1. Involvement of all students in class activities.	3.1 Are all students (including students with special needs) given equal opportunities to participate in activities?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
	2. Teachers' attention to students with special needs during learning activities.	3.2 Do teachers pay more attention to students with special needs when they experience difficulties in classroom activities?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
	3. Use of inclusive language or communication in interactions with students.	3.3 Does the teacher use language or communication that is inclusive and easy to understand for all students, including students with communication disorders?	1 (None) - 5 (Always done)
Inclusivity in Activities			

Aspects that Observed	Indicator	Observation Points	Rating Scale
Social Interaction in the Classroom	1. Interaction between students with special needs and regular students.	4.1 Are students with special needs involved in healthy social interactions with regular students?	1 (None) -5 (Always done)
	2. The role of teachers in facilitating cooperation between students.	4.2 Does the teacher encourage students to work together in heterogeneous groups (regular and special needs students)?	1 (None) -5 (Always done)
	3. The attitude of regular students towards students with special needs.	4.3 Do regular students show positive and supportive attitudes towards students with special needs?	1 (None) -5 (Always done)

Interview Instrument Grid

For Teachers:		
Aspect	Interview Questions	Objective
Teaching Style Adaptation	1. How do you adapt teaching methods for students with special needs and regular students?	Knowing how teachers adapt learning methods.
	2. What are the challenges you face in adapting teaching for children with different needs in an inclusive classroom?	Understanding barriers to adaptive teaching.
	3. How do you identify the individual needs of each student in the class?	Knowing the strategy for identifying student needs.

**Creativity
in Teaching**

4. Do you often use creative methods such as games, songs, or technology in teaching? Can you give an example of a specific situation?

Understanding the application of creativity in teaching.

5. How do you keep students' interest high in a heterogeneous class?

Knowing the efforts to maintain student motivation.

6. Do you feel that using visual aids and technology helps students with special needs understand the material?

Understanding the effectiveness of visual aids and technology.

**Inclusivity
in Activities**

7. How do you ensure that all students, including students with special needs, are involved in every activity in the classroom?

Knowing the efforts to create inclusive activities.

8. How do you handle interactions between special needs students and regular students in the classroom?

Understanding social dynamics between students in the classroom.

9. Do you give special attention or approach to students with special needs when teaching difficult material?

Knowing the level of attention to students with special needs.

**Social
Interaction**

10. How do you encourage regular students to interact with special needs students?

Knowing how to facilitate inclusive social interactions.

11. How do regular students respond to students with special needs in your class?

Understanding regular students' attitudes towards inclusivity.

For Principals:

Aspect	Interview Questions	Objective
Inclusion Policy	1. How does the school policy support inclusive education at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus?	Understanding institutional support for inclusivity.
	2. What are the main challenges faced by schools in implementing inclusive education, especially in playgroups?	Knowing the obstacles to implementing inclusion in schools.
Teacher Training	3. What type of training is provided to teachers to support inclusive teaching at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus?	Knowing the form of training for teachers related to inclusivity.
	4. How does the school monitor and evaluate teachers' success in implementing adaptive, creative, and inclusive teaching styles in the classroom?	Understanding teacher performance evaluation mechanisms.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Teaching Style Adaptation

Based on the results of observations at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus, teachers showed quite good abilities in adapting teaching styles according to the needs of students in heterogeneous playgroups. In the indicator of the use of varied teaching methods, as many as 80% of learning activities used different methods for regular students and students with special needs. The most frequently used methods were visual and kinesthetic approaches, such as the use of images, visual aids, and physical activities involving simple movements.

Teachers also demonstrated good ability to adapt teaching materials based on students' abilities. In 75% of the activities observed, teaching materials for students with special needs were simplified, for example, by providing larger images, using bright colors to attract attention, and additional time for completing

assignments. Grouping students based on learning needs was also seen in about 70% of the activities, where students with better abilities helped students who were slower in understanding the material.

From the interviews with teachers, they conveyed that one of the main challenges in adapting teaching is the need to quickly understand the individual needs of each student. Teachers said that grouping students based on special needs helps create a more supportive environment, but sometimes it is difficult to maintain consistency in the application of adaptive methods due to limited time. Ms. V stated:

“Every child has a different learning rhythm, so we need to make sure that we give enough attention to each individual, especially children with special needs who often need more time to understand instructions,” said one teacher. Another teacher emphasized that understanding each child’s emotional condition is equally important, as it greatly affects their ability to engage and respond during learning activities.”

2. Creativity in Teaching

Creativity in teaching is also very visible in KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus. Teachers use various creative methods in delivering materials, such as educational games, singing, and fine arts. In about 85% of the activities observed, teachers used games and songs to reinforce understanding of basic concepts, such as colors, shapes, and numbers. For example, in number recognition, teachers used simple songs involving hand movements to help students remember. In addition, some teachers also utilized loose parts—such as bottle caps, buttons, sticks, and fabric pieces—as open-ended materials to stimulate children’s curiosity and cognitive skills. These materials were often used in sorting, counting, and building activities, allowing children, including those with special needs, to explore concepts at their own pace and learning style.

The use of simple technology, such as projectors and other visual aids, was also seen in 60% of the activities observed. Teachers used projected images to explain certain concepts that were abstract to students. Visual aids, such as puppets and toys, were also often used to explain more complex concepts, such as

emotions and social interactions.

Teachers stated that creativity is very necessary in teaching in inclusive classes. Mrs. M said:

Kids in playgroups are very visual and kinesthetic. I always try to make lessons more lively by incorporating music, pictures, and games, especially to help special needs children feel more comfortable in the classroom."

However, teachers also acknowledged that limited technological resources sometimes become a barrier to increasing creativity. Although there are some technologies available, they feel that more tools are needed to expand the variety of creative methods that can be used in teaching. To overcome this limitation, teachers have turned to alternative educational tools such as APE (Alat Permainan Edukatif), which include puzzles made of wood or cardboard, number and letter blocks, picture cards, felt boards, and storytelling props. These non-digital media have proven effective in supporting early childhood development, as they allow children to learn through tactile, visual, and interactive experiences without relying on screens or electronic devices.

3. Inclusivity in Class Activities

The inclusiveness aspect in classroom activities also showed positive results. In about 90% of the activities observed, all students, both regular and special needs, were given equal opportunities to participate in the activities. Teachers actively invited students with special needs to be involved in discussions or games that were played. For example, when there were group play activities, students with special needs were always included and given roles that were appropriate to their abilities. Teachers seemed very responsive to individual needs, for example, providing repeat instructions or physical assistance when students with special needs had difficulty participating in activities.

The use of inclusive language and friendly communication was also evident in almost all interactions. Teachers often used body language and gestures to help students with special needs understand instructions. In 80% of the activities observed, teachers used simple sentences and repetition to ensure that all

students, especially those with communication difficulties, could follow the lesson.

Teachers stated that one of the main challenges in maintaining inclusivity is ensuring that regular students do not feel overwhelmed by the needs of students with special needs. They must balance attention between regular students and students with special needs so that all students feel comfortable. One teacher explained:

"We have to be very careful to create a supportive atmosphere for all students. There are times when regular students get frustrated when things are slower, but we always try to teach empathy and helping each other."

Teachers also emphasized the importance of additional training to improve skills in managing inclusive classes. Based on observations, some forms of supplementary training that have been implemented include regular in-house workshops on inclusive learning strategies, peer mentoring sessions where experienced teachers share practical tips, and simulation-based training focused on handling behavioral challenges. These activities are usually conducted once a month and facilitated by the school principal or external inclusive education consultants. Teachers expressed that such training helps them feel more confident and better prepared to address the diverse needs of their students.

They felt that although there had been efforts to provide equal attention to all students, there was still room for improvement, especially in terms of managing emotions and social interactions between regular students and students with special needs. This is because children who have lower emotional development are at greater risk of experiencing difficulties in learning, social interaction, and self-control.(Amalia & Hariyanti, 2022).

4. Social Interaction in the Classroom

Social interactions between regular students and students with special needs were seen to be quite positive in the classroom. In about 75% of the activities observed, regular students showed positive attitudes towards students with special needs. For example, in group activities, regular students actively helped their friends who had motor or cognitive difficulties. Teachers

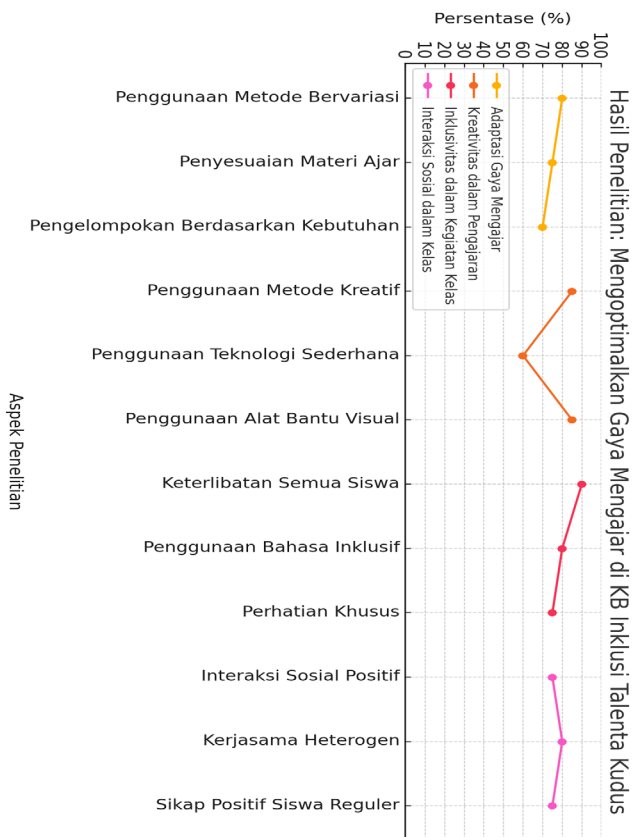
also consistently encouraged collaboration between students with different abilities, creating a more inclusive classroom atmosphere.

From the interviews with teachers, they revealed that one of the approaches they use to facilitate social interaction is through heterogeneous group division. Teachers feel that group-based learning helps regular students better understand and accept differences between students. Ms. N stated:

"We always try to mix regular students with special needs students in groups so they can learn from each other. This also helps regular students become more patient and empathetic."

However, teachers also realize that this social interaction can still be improved. Some regular students still seem awkward or uncomfortable interacting with students with special needs. Therefore, teachers hope that there will be more training programs or additional activities that can strengthen regular students' understanding and empathy towards their friends with special needs.

The results of this study indicate that the teaching style at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus has been optimized well through adaptation, creativity, and inclusivity. Teachers can adjust teaching methods, utilize creativity in delivering materials, and ensure that every student is involved in learning activities. Although there have been significant efforts to create an inclusive learning environment, several challenges still need to be overcome, especially in terms of teacher training and the provision of more adequate technological aids. More clearly illustrated in the form of a curve as follows:



1. Adaptation of Teaching Styles (Adaptation of Teaching Styles):
 - o Effective use of varied methods (80%),
 - o Adjustment of teaching materials (75%),
 - o Grouping based on needs (70%).
2. Creativity in Teaching (Creativity in Teaching):
 - o Use of creative methods like games and songs (85%),
 - o Utilization of simple technology (60%),
 - o Use of visual aids (85%).
3. Inclusivity in Classroom Activities:
 - o Ensuring all students' involvement (90%),
 - o Use of inclusive language and communication (80%),

- o Special attention to students with special needs (75%).
- 4. Social Interaction:
 - o Positive social interactions between regular and special needs students (75%),
 - o Collaboration in heterogeneous groups (80%),
 - o Positive attitudes of regular students toward special needs students (75%).

This curve provides an overview of how well the inclusive teaching approach is implemented across various aspects of learning.

Discussion

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was found that teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus effectively implemented flexible and inclusive methods, but still faced several challenges that needed to be overcome. The children in this inclusive playgroup have various special needs, including developmental delays, speech and language difficulties, and mild cognitive impairments. In response to these diverse needs, teachers adapted their teaching methods by using individualized approaches such as multisensory learning, repetition, and scaffolding techniques, combined with media like tactile loose parts, visual aids, and interactive games. The relevance between the types of special needs and the chosen teaching strategies and media positively impacts the achievement of early childhood education learning goals, such as fostering cognitive development, language skills, social-emotional growth, and creativity. By addressing individual differences through appropriate methods and media, the inclusive classroom supports holistic development and ensures that all children can progress according to the PAUD curriculum objectives :

1. Adaptation of Teaching Style

Adaptation of teaching styles is essential in inclusive education to ensure that all students, both regular and special needs, can engage and understand the material being taught. The results of this study indicate that 80% of activities at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus use a variety of methods, while 75% of the teaching

materials have been adapted to students' abilities, especially with the use of visual aids. Recent research by Sharma and Loreman (2019) emphasizes the importance of teaching differentiation in inclusive classes. Teachers are expected to be able to adapt teaching methods to the diverse needs of students to support more effective and creative learning. At KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus, adaptation is carried out by simplifying instructions, using visual aids, and giving assignments that are appropriate to the individual abilities of students, especially children with special needs. However, in interviews, several teachers stated that the main challenges in adapting were limited time and resources. This is consistent with the findings of Parey et al. (2021), which showed that teachers in the context of inclusive education often lack the time to optimally adapt teaching materials and methods for each student. In addition, the challenges in managing heterogeneous classes are also obstacles, especially when having to give special attention to students with special needs. However, it should be noted again that providing appropriate education will form a positive sense of good and directed learning that will become their foundation in continuing the next level of education (Hidayah & Aflahani, 2024).

2. Creativity in Teaching

Creativity plays an important role in optimizing teaching styles, especially in early childhood education in inclusive schools. At KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus, 85% of activities use creative methods such as games, songs, and art to increase student engagement. This creative approach not only increases student motivation but also helps them understand difficult concepts through more enjoyable methods. Research conducted by Runco (2020) shows that creativity in teaching can increase student engagement and understanding, especially in an inclusive context where the variation in learning needs is very high. This is also reinforced by the statement stating that interesting and enjoyable learning methods can be realized through the role of teachers who design learning activities creatively, so that children can develop optimally (Amalia & Afrianingsih, 2023). Creativity also allows teachers to design engaging teaching strategies for students with special needs who often require unconventional approaches to understand the material. However, as mentioned by teachers in

interviews, the use of simple technology, such as projectors and visual media, in 60% of activities is still constrained by limited resources. A study by Tan and Ong (2022) found that one of the barriers to developing creativity in teaching is limited access to technology and aids, especially in schools with limited budgets. Even so, teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus still try to utilize simple tools such as pictures, dolls, and toys to enrich students' learning experiences.

3. Inclusivity in Class Activities

Inclusivity in learning at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus is reflected in the involvement of all students, both regular and special needs, in 90% of learning activities. Teachers ensure that every student gets the same opportunity to participate in various activities, and they also use inclusive language and communication that can be understood by students with various abilities.

According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2021), inclusivity in inclusive classes should create an environment where every student, regardless of their abilities, feels accepted and valued. This is also emphasized in a study by Forlin et al. (2020), which found that teachers who prioritize inclusivity tend to create a more positive and supportive learning environment for students with various needs. Teachers also influence their students who still need to be guided and directed properly (Nofita, 2023). Teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus also pay special attention to students with special needs by providing additional instruction or physical assistance in 75% of activities. This is supported by research by Waitoller and Artiles (2022), which highlights the importance of additional support in inclusive education to ensure that students with special needs can fully participate in learning activities. However, in interviews, several teachers stated that there are still challenges in maintaining a balance between the needs of regular students and students with special needs. This is by the findings of Sharma and Sokal (2020), who found that managing inclusive classes requires special skills to ensure that all students feel supported without feeling left out.

4. Social Interaction in Class

Positive social interaction between regular students and students with special needs is one indicator of the success of

inclusion in KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus. In 75% of activities, regular students showed a positive attitude and openness towards students with special needs. Teachers also actively encourage cooperation in heterogeneous groups, where students with various abilities can learn and support each other.

Research by De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2019) shows that positive social interactions in inclusive classes can strengthen empathy and togetherness among students. Teachers at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus create an environment that supports these interactions through heterogeneous grouping in 80% of activities, which allows regular students to learn to interact with students with special needs. This study is also in line with the findings of Wang et al. (2020), which emphasize that heterogeneous grouping can help develop students' social skills and increase acceptance among students with different abilities. However, teachers also noted that some regular students were still awkward in interacting with students with special needs, especially at the beginning of the activity. This is in line with research by Schwab et al. (2022), which shows that although social interactions in inclusive classes tend to be positive, further learning is still needed for regular students so that they are more comfortable and open to differences in ability.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the teaching style at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus has been optimized through adaptation, creativity, and inclusivity. Although there are still some challenges, such as limited resources and time, teachers have succeeded in creating a supportive learning environment for students with diverse needs. The use of adaptive, creative methods and special attention to inclusivity has helped create a positive and inclusive learning experience at KB Inklusi Talenta Kudus. This study confirms that to achieve success in inclusive education, teachers need to continue to develop flexible and innovative methods while ensuring that each student feels supported and valued in their learning process. Because education is not only intended for those who are normal but also for those with special needs, education is able to develop and direct the thinking process of each individual to progress (Salmah, Fitriani Khoirunnisa, Nur Panesya, 2024).

D. Conclusion

However, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single inclusive playgroup, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other inclusive settings with different characteristics. Second, the data collection primarily relied on interviews and observations with teachers and school leaders, while the perspectives of parents and students were less explored. Third, the study focused mostly on teaching style and classroom practices, with limited attention to the long-term outcomes of inclusive education on children's development.

Based on these limitations, future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies in multiple inclusive education settings to compare teaching styles and their effectiveness. It is also recommended to include a broader range of participants, such as parents and students, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the inclusive education experience. Additionally, longitudinal studies that assess the impact of inclusive teaching methods on children's developmental progress would provide valuable insights to improve practices in early childhood inclusive education.

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