

Implementation of Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools in Balikpapan City: Challenges, Solutions, and Impacts

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Abstract: The goal of implementing inclusive education in schools is to guarantee that every student, including those with special needs, receives a high-quality education. This research seeks to evaluate how inclusive education is being carried out in primary schools (SD) in Balikpapan City, with a focus on the challenges faced, solutions proposed, and the effects on student development. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's framework, involving data description, analysis, and drawing conclusions. The findings indicate that inclusive education in Balikpapan City's elementary schools holds significant potential to transform the educational approach for students with special needs in Indonesia. Despite ongoing challenges, with adequate support from schools, the government, and the community, inclusive education can offer equitable and high-quality education to all students. Consequently, the goal of education for all can be realized, allowing students with diverse challenges, including physical, mental, and other limitations, to engage in education.

Keywords: Implementation; Inclusive; Challenges; Solutions; and Impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic right of every citizen, regardless of economic, social, religious, ethnic, gender or physical background, as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003. Because education is the right of every citizen, the government accommodates citizens by providing educational facilities to fulfill their educational rights. There are educational programs for children with special needs that require special attention, namely inclusive education.

Then, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation 48/2023 includes accommodation for students with special needs at early childhood, elementary, secondary, and higher education levels (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). As stated in Article 1, paragraph 17, people with special needs who experience long-term intellectual, physical, sensory and mental limitations impairments that limit their ability to interact with their surroundings and create obstacles to fully participating in their environment.

In a study by Putri and Nugroho mentioned that nonformal education, including inclusive education, has not accommodated all goals, causing resistance, including children who have problems with the law (Putri & Nugroho, 2024). The implementation of inclusive education requires special attention from the government because it requires separate attention and handling. Every region should have inclusive schools so that all citizens can fulfill their educational rights. Among the government's concerns are the provision of educational facilities and human resources.

Inclusive education provides opportunities for all male and female students to complete their basic education evenly, as well as at the education level in general, namely free and quality education. With the existence of equitable education for all elements of society, all citizens can fulfil their educational rights and access education without exception, including persons with disabilities. Mulyasa states that the inclusive education approach aims to provide opportunities, including those with special needs, to learn together in a friendly and supportive environment (Mulyasa, 2019). Attention to inclusive education is conveyed in

Rights of people with special needs (CRPD, 2015), which states that children with Special Education Needs (SEN) have the right to receive general education (Keles et al., 2024).

In this regard, curriculum development must accommodate all students, not only general or non-special needs students but for children who have special needs. The service of these learners in improving the quality of education. The quality of education is determined by the quality of teaching and learning processes. The quality teaching process is determined by several components, as stated by Abdul Salim (Salim, 2010), namely 1. student input, 2. curriculum (teaching materials); and 3. teaching staff, 4. infrastructure facilities, 5. funds, 6 school management, and 7 environments.

The government, in this case the local government, issues local regulations to oversee inclusive implementation education in schools. The Balikpapan city government, through the Mayor's Regulation Number 9 of 2018 concerning the implementation Inclusive education is an education system that provides opportunities for all students with special needs and who have special talents or abilities to participate in learning together with non-special needs students (Balikpapan, 2018).

Leadership and professional competence play a very important role in creating an inclusive school culture and supporting the success of all students, including those with special needs through the contribution of a) the principal encouraging collaboration between educators, parents, and the community, including special needs experts, b) teachers building positive communication with students with special needs and their families, c) the principal's leadership and teacher professional competence creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment, where students feel valued and safe.

Based on the above definition and research, the researcher considers it necessary to conduct a study to examine inclusion-friendly education in Balikpapan City, especially for elementary school students, to ensure that students with physical and mental limitations are accommodated in education. Registration, obstacles faced, and solutions to overcome them require a comprehensive study.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that inclusion-friendly education is an approach that allows every student, including students with special needs, to learn together in regular classes with appropriate support. In Indonesia, the implementation for inclusive education has become one of the educational priorities, especially in areas with rapid development, such as Balikpapan City. This research focuses on the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in Balikpapan City, in terms of challenges, solutions, and impacts, as well as the extent to which teachers and school authorities provide the necessary support.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method in an elementary school in Balikpapan City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and parents and through direct observation in inclusive classes.

The limited coverage of the region and schools previously involved only a few schools in Balikpapan. Future exploration could include more schools with different characteristics (public, private, suburban, and remote schools). The research conducted could further highlight the curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities or autism.

In addition, a literature review related to inclusive education policy in Indonesia and local government support through the Balikpapan Mayor Regulation was conducted. To facilitate the obtaining of information from informants, we used research instruments in the form of observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation. To obtain credible data, the researcher used Miles and Huberman's theoretical analysis, namely data reduction, data display, and verification (Muri, 2017).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding(s)

The implementation of inclusive education is an alternative for learners experiencing physical, emotional, mental, social, and intellectual limitations. However, some students with special needs can outperform those who grow physically well. The existence of schools implementing inclusive education provides an opportunity for Children with Special Needs (ABK) to join regular learners to obtain the same education as non-School of Special Needs (SLB) learners. Inclusive education in Balikpapan city is spread across several sub-districts at the Elementary School (SD), Junior High School (SMP), and Senior High School (SMA) levels.

All individuals with disabilities have the right to receive education without discrimination. In general, inclusive education is implemented to address such learning difficulties. Learning difficulties are caused by several factors, such as brain dysfunction, genetic factors, environment, and malnutrition, and include biochemistry (Hasmyati. dkk., 2022).

The problems faced by inclusive children include difficulties in learning, counting, writing, and socializing. Difficulties in learning are caused by several internal factors, such as physiology (hearing, vision, and movement disorders). These conditions significantly affect learning. Psychologically, a low IQ greatly affects motivation and interest in learning. External factors such as social conditions were also considered. In this case, parents influence children's education in the family. Non-social factors include the relationship between the learning environment at school and the community environment, which lacks community support for interaction (Setyaningsih et al., 2022). Inclusive children also need special guidance services (Waskitoningtyas et al., 2022).

This study found that the implementation of inclusive education in Balikpapan City still faces several challenges, such as a lack of teacher training in managing inclusive classes, limited resources, and uneven support among schools. However, schools that have successfully implemented inclusive education show a significant increase in the participation and achievement of students with special needs, such as Sekolah Dasar Negeri 08 Balikpapan Selatan, and have become a reference for inclusive education. The challenges of inclusive education in Balikpapan are as follows:

1. The lack of human resources results in difficulties for educational units in accepting students with inclusive backgrounds. Teachers in charge of handling children with special needs are generally ordinary teachers who have teaching duties like other teachers and also provide education and assistance to inclusive students.
2. The study also revealed challenges in implementing inclusive education, such as the lack of financial and technical support from the government and specialized facilities in schools. Some schools do not have special assistant teachers trained to handle students with special needs; therefore, the teaching load becomes heavy for regular classroom teachers.
3. Difficulties in adjusting the curriculum and teaching methods Teachers involved in this study reported that adjusting the curriculum to meet the needs of all students is a major challenge. Adjusting teaching methods, such as providing developmentally appropriate materials for students with special needs, requires more time and effort. Some teachers also complained about the lack of adequate training in inclusive education. Because some schools do not have specialized inclusive teachers, they need training in both teaching methods and adjusting the materials provided to the students.

4. **Lack of parental involvement:** Lack of parental involvement can hinder the development of children in an inclusive system. The role of parents in assisting those with disabilities is a challenge for the education of children with special needs, which should be the responsibility of parents in the family environment. However, it was found that parents did not give maximum attention to their children for several reasons, such as busy parents, so they left it entirely to the school.
5. **Influence of a negative social environment:** An unsupportive social environment can hinder the social development of children with disabilities. This is a challenge because there is no one to befriend them in their environment. In addition, the community stigmatizes children with disabilities, which is an obstacle to their acceptance of children with disabilities by the school community and wider society.

While the study identified several obstacles in implementing inclusive education in Balikpapan City, it has also highlighted the positive effects on the growth of students with special needs. Data gathered from interviews and observations reveal that there is an improvement in the social interactions of students with special needs within inclusive classrooms. These students have become more adaptable and confident in communicating with peers who do not have special needs. This progress is facilitated by a classroom environment that encourages the active involvement of all students without discrimination. In line with (Salma et al., 2024) increasing social interactions of students with special needs in inclusive classes through teacher support.

The findings of this study provide a general overview of the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools in Balikpapan City. However, it is important to note that these findings may apply differently in the context of inclusive classrooms, which present more complex learning dynamics, particularly among students with specific learning challenges, such as intellectual disabilities, behavioral disorders, or specific accessibility needs. Variations in student needs can influence the effectiveness of strategies, pedagogical approaches, and support provided by schools (Munir, 2025).

Discussion(s)

Education is the right of every citizen, and citizens are entitled to equal educational services. Persons with disabilities are citizens entitled to equal quality education services, as mentioned in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture, Research and Technology 48/2023 Article 2 Paragraph 1 concerning Appropriate Accommodation for Students with Special Needs in Elementary, Middle, and Higher Education Units (Kemendikbudristek 2023). The Balikpapan city government then established an inclusive education service, with each sub-district having at least one elementary school that accepts inclusive students.

Inclusive education operates on the belief that schools should cater to all students, irrespective of perceived differences, disabilities, or variations in social, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds (Notice, 2022). This implies that the aim of inclusive education is to ensure that everyone can access education without acknowledging any distinctions among them. Additionally, to realize inclusive education, it is important to understand its principles, which include the characteristics of inclusive education: collaboration in teaching, grouping, modification (content, assessment, scope, learning environment, teaching, process, materials, and products), requiring individual motivation and feedback, and support (Lindner & Schwab, 2020).

According to Wahyuno et al., the implementation of learning for children with special needs or inclusive requires its own methods and strategies because it has behavior that is not like in general (Wahyuno et al., 2014). Children with special needs usually disturb friends, are lazy to learn, and sometimes busy themselves without paying attention to the learning process. In addition, children with special needs are difficult to manage and are hyperactive. These conditions are obstacles for teachers in guiding students. Another obstacle is the lack of separate rooms for regular students.

This emphasizes the importance of providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities at all educational levels. The implementation of this policy aims to create an inclusive learning environment that supports the development of each individual's potential. This regulation is expected to reduce the gap in access to education and increase the participation of learners with disabilities in the national educational system. The Balikpapan City government then established an inclusive education service, with each sub-district having at least one primary school accepting inclusive students.

Legally, the 1945 Constitution addresses education for children with special needs in Article 31. It states that every citizen is entitled to education, and paragraph 2 specifies that all citizens must complete basic education, with the government responsible for funding it. According to Article 48 of the Child Protection Law Number 23 of 2002, it is the duty of the government, families, and parents to ensure that children have access to educational opportunities.

In Balikpapan, the admission of students with physical, mental, intellectual, and sensory disabilities for a long time has provisions, as mentioned by several informants in this study. Terms and conditions, such as having an IQ level of at least 80, indicate the existence of certain cognitive limits in the admission of children with disabilities, possibly so that they can follow the curriculum with minimal adaptation. Mild autism: This criterion indicates selection based on the severity of the child's condition. Children with mild autism tend to be more adaptable to inclusive education systems than those with severe autism. A special psychological assessment was conducted as an instrument to ensure that students were mentally and emotionally prepared for an inclusive educational environment.

Therefore, the school only accepts low-level inclusive students who can participate in regular classes. To ensure school and teacher readiness, a diagnostic assessment is conducted by a psychology bureau before students are accepted

Some of the solutions identified in this study include continuous training for teachers, improved school facilities, and collaboration with parents and special-education experts. The results also show that students with special needs who study in inclusive classrooms show improvements in their social and emotional aspects in addition to academic development. From the results of this study, some important aspects of the implementation of inclusive education should be reflected upon and further developed for inclusive education.

1. Improving the quality of teacher training

Based on the findings regarding teachers' lack of skills in dealing with students with special needs, it is crucial for local governments to improve the quality of teacher training. Intensive training on inclusive education will help teachers understand how to adapt teaching materials and methods for all students. Special certification programs for inclusive education must also be implemented. In line with Naeemy & Yoneda that children with special needs also need an inclusive learning model (Naeemy & Yoneda, 2024).

In an effort to improve teachers' competencies, schools organize various internal training sessions and workshops related to children's social-emotional issues and inclusive learning strategies. In addition, facilities are made more inclusive-friendly, such as adaptive classrooms, learning aids, and a barrier-free environment.

Efforts to improve teachers' competence in dealing with children with disabilities are carried out through the following:

- a. Training for teachers of children with disabilities: Teachers receive special training to understand the needs of inclusive students.
- b. Inclusive education regulations: indicates the importance of policies as guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education. For example, the Balikpapan City government supports inclusive education with Regulation No. 9 of 2018 on the implementation of inclusive education. Schools follow this regulation by developing appropriate policies, including the provision of special funds for teacher training.

Although the academy does not have a special schoolteacher for children with disabilities, the academy tries to ameliorate the capability of being preceptors through training and participating in good practices. However, scholars are appointed to the psychology office for recommendations on applicable treatment if there are cases that can not be handled. The class used remains the same as the regular classes, but there are adaptations to services and learning targets according to the eventuality of each pupil. In addition, the approach is carried out, *videlicet* by laboriously approaching the schoolteacher by understanding each character of scholars with special requirements. With the approach of defining the characteristics of children with special requirements, preceptors can design further effective literacy. Also schoolteacher training on handling scholars with special requirements so that running can be done effectively (Julianti et al., 2023).

A teacher implements inclusive learning by implementing differentiated and individualized learning. The differentiated implementation practices by Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger, as mentioned in Katharina-Theresa Lindner and Susanne Schwab's research, are Collaboration and Teamwork, Organizational Practice, Practice, Determining Progress, Instructional Practice (Lindner & Schwab, 2020b). Therefore, teachers have methods and strategies to deal with students with diverse behaviors.

2. *Parent-Student Collaboration*

The role of parents in inclusive education cannot be ignored. This research shows that good collaboration between schools and parents can improve the achievement and well-being of students with special needs. Therefore, programs that involve parents directly in the education process need to be improved. The results of collaboration between parents and schools, especially teachers who directly guide students, have a positive influence, as seen from the results of interviews with parents. The results of the research by Ahmad Budi Santoso et al. (Santoso et al., 2024). Finding that the collaboration of teachers and parents is very influential on the academic development of deaf children, teachers act as motivators at school and parents play the main supporting role at home in terms of learning, teaching intense communication and socializing in the community with peers (Indriawati et al., 2022).

From the parents' perspective, the positive impact of inclusive education is quite visible in children's development. Children show improvement in prayer memorization, vocabulary and social skills. However, parents' involvement in monitoring children's social interactions is limited because children are directly cared for by their grandmothers after school. Nonetheless, at home, the child has started to be able to perform various simple tasks, such as putting the dishes away after eating, putting away toys, and helping with household

chores. In addition, after attending therapy, the child made progress in recognizing symbols and reading more fluently. Parents also observed that the child was better able to manage his emotions and anger, and showed better socialization skills.

In the process of assisting children with special needs, parents have a strategy as stated by Lubna et al., namely parents being patient in caring for children with special needs, being observant, namely parents must be observant and responsive to children when they do deviant actions, then creative and responsive (Lubna, 2021). Creative in the sense that parents train their children by giving various tasks to melatik motor and pedagogy (Sugianto, 2024). Furthermore, responsive means that parents pay attention to the needs of their children, including paying attention to the child's behavior.

3. *Strengthening Inclusive Education Policy In terms of Policy*

This study recommends increasing the budget allocation for inclusive education, including for teacher training, provision of specialized facilities, and technology-based learning aids. The local government of Balikpapan City is expected to provide clearer guidelines and more concrete support for schools that want to implement an inclusive curriculum (Muhammad et al., 2024). The success of inclusive education requires the cooperation of all parties: schools, teachers, parents, and the government. The government is present as the regulation holder to issue policies for the implementation of inclusive education (Alfikri & Khodijah, 2022).

To ensure and improve the services of children with special needs (ABK) students in the city of Balikpapan, the government issued a Mayoral Regulation, namely Balikpapan Mayoral Regulation No. 9/2018 on the Implementation of Inclusive Education. Inclusive education is for all children with disabilities who are registered in early childhood education and basic education units. The implementation of the regulation is implemented by each education unit in accordance with the applicable provisions by making rules in the education unit as a derivative of the regulation.

4. *Application of Technology*

In Inclusive Learning Technological innovation is proven to help improve the quality of learning in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, schools in Balikpapan City may consider a wider application of educational technology, such as learning management systems (LMS) that allow students with special needs to learn in a more interactive way and according to their abilities. Schools also utilize technology in learning, such as the use of projectors and speakers to support individualized learning methods. The use of technology plays a role in improving the effectiveness of learning for children with special needs (Astari et al., 2018).

- a. Digital examination system: the school has introduced a digitized examination system for students. This shows that there is digitalization in the process of evaluating students' learning (Jaya et al., 2021), including inclusive learners.
- b. In addition to the system implemented by schools with inclusive programs, there is also a "smart class" program from the Education Office: An indication of technology-based innovation from the government to support inclusive learning.
- c. Use of mobile phones (Android/iOS): Utilization of mobile devices in inclusive learning, which can provide wider accessibility for learners. The implementation of inclusive education requires special attention because there are obstacles in the implementation of learning. In order for children with special needs to receive material well, the teacher in carrying out learning uses an assistance strategy. The strategies used are: 1) Peer tutors: This approach involves peers as mentors, helping in social

interactions and in learning activities such as completing subject assignments; 2) Academic and social mentoring indicates that support focuses not only on academic aspects but also on developing social skills. This means that learners are assisted in interacting with others, including friends and the school environment; and 3) Interaction with peers: Children with disabilities are encouraged to socialize to develop emotionally and socially.

By addressing these challenges, the implementation of inclusive education in Balikpapan City can become a more effective and sustainable model to ensure equitable education for all students, whether they have special needs or not. This article not only identifies common challenges in implementing inclusive education (Aprilia et al., 2022), such as lack of teacher training and limited resources, but also provides concrete solutions that have been tested in the field. For example, continuous training for teachers, improved school facilities, government policies, collaboration with parents and special education experts. Then the introduction and use of technology to keep up with and adjust the curriculum and materials based on students' levels and abilities. Schools also play a crucial role in supporting inclusive education (Casmudi et al., 2025; Sugianto, 2025).

Transformational leadership and professional teacher competence have proven to be two key factors in supporting the realization of inclusive values in elementary schools in Balikpapan City. School leaders with an inclusive vision are able to build a school culture that values diversity, encourages collaboration between stakeholders, and creates policies that support all students, including those with special needs. Furthermore, teachers competent in inclusive pedagogy play a crucial role in implementing learning strategies that are adaptive, communicative, and responsive to individual student needs. The collaboration between transformative leadership and adequate teacher capacity is the main foundation for addressing challenges and optimizing the positive impact of inclusive education at the elementary school level. In line with Kurniawan et al., that the contribution of the principal and teachers can improve the quality of learning (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

The implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools in Balikpapan City faces various multidimensional challenges, ranging from limited resources to issues of awareness about diversity in education. However, the role of inclusive leadership and teaching competence are two crucial elements that can ensure equitable outcomes for all students, especially those with special needs. This is in line with Yuyun et al., regarding the readiness of schools in terms of facilities and infrastructure for children with special needs (Yuyun et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education in Balikpapan City's elementary schools holds significant potential to transform the educational approach for students with special needs in Indonesia. Despite ongoing challenges, with adequate support from schools, the government, and the community, inclusive education can offer equitable and high-quality education to all students. Consequently, the goal of education for all can be realized, allowing students with diverse challenges, including physical, mental, and other limitations, to engage in education.

Further research is needed to explicitly address inclusive education settings in relation to the diversity of student characteristics, including aspects of special learning needs, socio-cultural backgrounds, and psychosocial conditions that influence their engagement in the learning process. Such studies are expected to provide deeper insights into classroom management strategies, school policies, and pedagogical approaches that are adaptive to student heterogeneity.

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