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Building an Inclusive Education for Autistic Children

Fitriyani¹, Silvester Haryono²

^{1,2} STKIP Kusuma Negara, Jakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out inclusive education in schools, especially for schools that are not designated as inclusive schools but there is cooperation with teachers or schools and the government's attention to services for children with disabilities, especially for autistic children to improve communication, social interaction of autistic children with the environment at school. The type of research used is qualitative descriptive with the type of case study research. The subjects in this study are teachers who teach and children with autism who attend inclusive schools, precisely at ABBAKIDS Elementary School, Cipondoh Tangerang. The results of the study show that an inclusive educational environment must be supported by collaboration between parents, teachers, the school environment and also the role of the government that can support and be able to provide a sense of affection, understanding, empathy, and patience in communicating with children with autism. This is done as an effort to increase the sense of confidence and desire to blend in with children with autism with the surrounding environment.

Education, Inclusive, Autism.

Fitriyani07@stkipkusumanegara.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education refers to an educational approach that provides equal opportunities for all children, including children with special needs such as autism, to learn in the same environment. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), inclusive education not only benefits children with disabilities, but also enriches the learning experience for all students (United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization Paris (France), 2005). Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that 1 in 160 children worldwide have autism spectrum disorder (Hakim Zadeh & Costa, 2023) This shows how important it is to create an accessible and educational environment Inclusive.

Inclusive education also plays an important role in building awareness and understanding in the community about autism. By educating students without disabilities about diversity, we can reduce stigma and discrimination

against children with autism. A study conducted by (Landrum, 2017) showed that inclusive classrooms can improve empathy and social skills among students. This is important to build a more tolerant society and respect differences. In addition, inclusive education provides opportunities for children with autism to learn from their peers. Research shows that social interaction with peers contributes to the development of social skills in children with autism (Guralnick, 2011). By engaging in group activities, they can learn how to communicate and collaborate, which are essential skills for daily life. However, to achieve effective inclusive education, adequate training and support for educators are needed. According to research by Avramidis and Norwich (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), many teachers feel unprepared to teach students with special needs. Therefore, it is important to provide a comprehensive training program for teachers so that they can understand and overcome the challenges that children with autism may face.

Overall, inclusive education is not just a concept, but an urgent need in today's educational context. By understanding the importance of inclusive education, we can drive positive changes in the education system that will benefit all children, including those on the autism spectrum. Children with special needs are children with special characteristics that are different from other children in general which usually show mental, emotional and or physical disabilities. Children with special needs can also be interpreted as children who have disabilities or who have disabilities or also children with special talents above other children of their age (Mulyadi & Kresnawaty, 2020a).

The term Inclusive Education in the new paradigm of Education means that education applies not only to general children but also to children *with special needs education*, namely students in schools who experience obstacles in their development both physically, mentally and cognitively. Special education plays an important role in the development of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autistic children often experience challenges in communication, social interaction, and behavior. Therefore, special education is designed to meet their unique needs and help them develop the skills necessary to function optimally in Society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is qualitative descriptive with the type of case study research. The subjects in this study are children with autism who attend inclusive schools, precisely at ABBAKIDS Elementary School, Cipondoh Tangerang. The research subjects were 11 years old and in grade 4 of elementary school. Research by using observation or observation of the subject,

in activities in learning at school, conducting interviews with class teachers and also the principal, the author obtained a lot of information and data through documentation in the form of photos, history and background of the subject from the school, then reduced the data obtained by compiling valid information. The research was conducted on November 18-22, 2024

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The planning of the inclusive education system is greatly influenced by the quality of the learning process, and is based on various components that are related to each other, these components, namely: (1) Curriculum (teaching materials), the curriculum is prepared to help realize the goals of learning, the curriculum is used as the direction of the goals of a learning which in its preparation must be adjusted to the stage of student development, the needs of students and in accordance with the development of science and technology. The inclusive education curriculum uses the regular school curriculum in general which has been modified according to the developmental stage of children with special needs by paying attention to the characteristics and level of intelligence ability of the students. (2) Educators (teachers) need teachers or educators who are able to foster, guide and help students, especially children with special needs. Teachers or educators who can help are resources who are skilled in dealing with children with special needs, usually they are equipped with skills in dealing with students with special needs. (3) Students who need special attention are the main components in the implementation of inclusive education. In educational institutions that organize inclusive education, all students without exception must be actively involved in the management of learning activities so that they are able to create safe and comfortable environmental conditions (Mulyadi & Kresnawaty, 2020b)

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition characterized by impaired social communication as well as limited and repetitive behaviors. This disorder is considered a neurodevelopmental disorder because it is associated with neurological changes that can begin in the early prenatal or postnatal period, altering the typical pattern of a child's development, and giving rise to chronic signs and symptoms that usually appear in early childhood and have the potential to have long-term consequences. In recent decades, autism has been conceptualized as a set of strictly defined behaviors, usually accompanied by intellectual disorders. Today, autism is recognized as a spectrum, ranging from mild to severe, in which behaviors vary greatly and the majority of children who fall into the spectrum have average to above-average intellectual abilities. Here, the authors discuss ASD risk factors, their epidemiology, common

accompanying conditions, evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes (Christensen & Zubler, 2020).

Specific Educational Roles, include Approaches that allow for teaching focused on students' abilities and interests. For example, the use of visual and experiential teaching methods is often more effective for autistic children. This is related to the existence of an early intervention program that aims to help children learn in terms of basic skills. The interventions carried out include teaching in social skills, communication and adaptive behavior (Hirota & King, 2023). The faster the intervention is diagnosed and stimulated, the greater the effectiveness in the development of communication and language as well as social interaction in autistic children (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Special education programs that also prioritize the development of social skills to help autistic children to interact with peers and adults are through group activities so that children can get the opportunity to practice communication and build social relationships. The involvement of the role of the family is the most important factor in the learning process, where the education of parents and families in providing additional support for children will help create a consistent environment between the environment at home, especially at home and at school.

Special education for autistic children includes not only academic aspects, but also social, emotional, and behavioral development. With a personalized approach, family support, and the use of technology, special education can help autistic children reach their potential and contribute to society. Difficulty engaging in social interactions with peers and adults, as well as building social relationships has always been one of the hallmarks of autism. Interventional approaches that have been used in education to improve social outcomes for children and adolescents with autism often use adult- and individual-led skills training, peer-mediated approaches, and group-conducted social skills training. Schools as a context for implementing interventions, where practical activities in schools are a challenge for school programs to be able to provide inclusive education that is able to produce positive results, especially for autistic children, the complexity of school settings which although the characteristics and special education arrangements are only widely applied to schools designated as inclusive education maintainers, so a coordination is needed and Good cooperation that is able to involve the role of schools, parents and the community to be able to overcome the gaps that exist in the learning process, especially towards the treatment and stigma of children with special needs (Odom et al., 2021).

Building an inclusive environment for autistic children is an important step in creating an effective and supportive education. The school environment must be designed in such a way that it can meet the needs of different types of learners. According to research by (Hattie, 2008), a positive learning environment can increase student motivation and engagement. Therefore, it is important for schools to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for autistic children. One way to build an inclusive environment is to provide a quiet and comfortable space for autistic children who may be overstimulated. This space can be used as a place to rest or calm down when children feel anxious or depressed. Research by (Kearney & Albano, 2004) shows that children who have access to quiet spaces are able to manage their emotions better and return to learning activities with better focus. In addition, training for educators on autism and inclusive education strategies is also very important. With a good understanding of autism, teachers can identify students' specific needs and tailor their teaching. A study by Simpson (2004) shows that teachers trained in inclusive education can provide better support for autistic children, thereby improving their learning outcomes.

Collaboration between schools and communities can also contribute to the development of an inclusive environment. Schools can work with local organizations to provide additional resources and support for children with autism and their families. For example, mentoring programs that involve regular students and autistic children can help develop positive relationships and mutual understanding between them. It is most important to involve autistic children in the decision-making process related to their education. Giving children a voice in determining how they learn can increase their sense of belonging and involvement in education. By building an inclusive environment, we can create a supportive education for children with autism, helping them reach their full potential and contribute to society.



Discussion

While inclusive education offers many benefits, there are a number of challenges that must be faced to make it happen. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate resources and support in schools. Many schools in developing countries do not have adequate facilities to support children with special needs, including autism. This includes a lack of educational aids, classrooms that are not friendly to children with disabilities, and a lack of physical accessibility. In addition, many teachers have not received enough training to teach students with autism. A study by Scruggs and Mastropieri (2007) showed that only about 30% of teachers feel confident in teaching students with special needs. This uncertainty can result in ineffective teaching and can worsen the learning experience of children with autism. Therefore, there needs to be a better and continuous training program for educators to improve their skills in teaching children with autism. Another challenge faced is the negative attitude of the community and even from parents towards inclusive education. Many parents are worried that their children who do not have disabilities will be disturbed by the presence of children with autism in the same class. Research by McLeskey & Waldron, 2002 shows that these negative attitudes are often caused by a lack of understanding of autism and the benefits of inclusive education. Therefore, it is important to conduct awareness campaigns that can help change people's perspectives on inclusive education. In addition, a rigid and inflexible curriculum is also an obstacle in inclusive education. Many schools still implement traditional curricula that do not consider the specific needs of students with autism. A differentiated curriculum can help meet the diverse needs of students, including those with autism. Therefore, it is important to develop a curriculum that is more inclusive and can be tailored to the needs of each student.

Finally, support from the government and educational institutions is also very important in building inclusive education. Without supportive policies and adequate funding, efforts to create an inclusive learning environment will be difficult to realize. Strategies to Realize Inclusive Education To realize inclusive education for children with autism, various strategies that can be applied at the school level and education policies are needed. One of the effective strategies is the implementation of a collaboration-based teaching model. According to research by (Friend & Cook, 1992), collaborative teaching between regular teachers and special education teachers can improve the learning outcomes of students with autism. This model allows both teachers to share knowledge and skills with each other, as well as create a more supportive learning environment for all students. It is also important to develop early

intervention programs that can help children with autism from an early age. Research shows that early intervention can improve the social, communication, and academic skills of children with autism (Dawson et al., 2010). By focusing efforts on early intervention, we can help children with autism to better integrate in an inclusive educational environment. In addition, involving parents in the educational process of their children is also an important strategy. According to research by (Epstein, 2001), parental involvement in their children's education can increase students' motivation and academic success. Schools need to provide effective communication channels between teachers and parents, as well as provide the support and information needed to help children with autism. The use of technology can also be an effective tool in inclusive education. Many apps and software are specifically designed to support the learning of children with autism, such as communication apps that can help them express themselves. Technology can improve student engagement and learning outcomes with special needs. Therefore, schools must utilize technology to support the learning of children with autism. Periodic evaluation and supervision of the inclusive education programs implemented. This aims to ensure that the strategies used are effective and can meet the needs of all students.

The role of the Government and Education Policy is crucial in supporting inclusive education for children with autism. Inclusive education policies must be a priority on the government's agenda to ensure that all children, without exception, have equal access to quality education. The government also needs to develop clear regulations regarding inclusive education. Laws that support the rights of children with disabilities, such as Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities in Indonesia, must be properly implemented. This policy must include aspects such as teacher training, the provision of friendly facilities for children with disabilities, and supervision of the implementation of inclusive education in schools. In addition, the government should collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-governmental organizations to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive education. This collaboration can create more effective programs in supporting children with autism and their families.

The government also needs to provide incentives for schools that successfully implement inclusive education well. For example, providing awards or additional funding for schools that are able to create inclusive learning environments and support students with autism. This can encourage other schools to follow in their footsteps and improve the overall quality of inclusive education. In conclusion, building inclusive education for children

with autism is a complex but very important challenge. Inclusive education not only benefits children with disabilities, but also for the entire community by creating a more tolerant and respectful environment for differences. To achieve this goal, cooperation between the government, schools, parents, and the community is needed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the planning and implementation of an inclusive education system for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is influenced by several interconnected components, including curriculum design, educator competence, and student engagement. An effective curriculum for inclusive education must be adapted to the developmental stages and needs of children with special needs, ensuring that it fosters both academic and social growth. Teachers need specialized skills to guide and support these children, while the active involvement of parents and the community is essential in creating a supportive learning environment. Early intervention programs are crucial for improving social, communication, and adaptive behaviors in children with ASD, and collaboration among educators, families, and local organizations is key to fostering positive relationships and ensuring the success of inclusive education.

However, challenges such as insufficient resources, negative societal attitudes, and rigid curricula hinder the full realization of inclusive education. Overcoming these barriers requires continued teacher training, the development of more flexible and differentiated curricula, and stronger government support, including policy development and funding. Strategies such as collaborative teaching, early intervention, and the integration of technology can further enhance the learning experience of children with autism. The government's role in providing regulations, incentives, and collaboration with NGOs is crucial in driving the success of inclusive education. In sum, the establishment of an inclusive education system for children with autism not only benefits those with special needs but also promotes a more tolerant and respectful society.

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