Inclusive Education : Challenges and Opportunities for Multicultural Societies

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is an approach that emphasizes the importance of equal access to education for all individuals, including those with special needs, in the context of Indonesia's multicultural society. This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing inclusive education in Islamic educational institutions. The method used is a literature study, by analyzing various sources of literature, including books, journal articles, and related policy documents. The results of the study indicate that the main challenges in inclusive education include limited resources, stigma, and discrimination against Children with Special Needs (ABK). However, there are opportunities to improve collaboration between communities and develop more inclusive performance. The implications of this study emphasize the need for educational policies that are responsive to the needs of diversity and the active role of the government and society in creating a friendly learning environment for all individuals. By encouraging the values of equality, justice, and respect for differences, inclusive education has the potential to contribute to building a more harmonious and tolerant society. Through the implementation of inclusive education based on Islamic principles, it is hoped that an inclusive learning atmosphere will be created, allowing all individuals to participate and develop optimally in an environment that supports diversity. This research is expected to be a reference for developing better education policies in the future.

Keywords: education; inclusion ; Islam ; multicultural

A. INTRODUCTION

Education is one form of effort to improve the quality of human resources (Al-Attas, 1996). In Indonesia, which is known as a multicultural country with diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions, the implementation of inclusive education is becoming increasingly relevant. This diverse society faces unique challenges in creating an education system that is not only inclusive but also respects and embraces differences (Wathoni, 2013). Inclusive education refers to practices to ensure that children with disabilities have equal opportunities in education, just like their peers who are not disabled (Basiran, 2023).

In Islamic teachings, the values of justice, equality, and recognition of the dignity of each individual are highly emphasized. The Qur'an teaches that everyone has the right to receive a decent education to benefit themselves and society (Parnawi & Syahrani, 2024). However, implementing inclusive education in Islamic institutions still faces various challenges (Mirrota, 2024). Social stereotypes, stigma against individuals with special needs, and limited educational infrastructure are some of the obstacles that need to be overcome. In addition, educational policies that do not fully support inclusion can also worsen the situation, causing children who should receive quality education to be marginalized (Nurhadipa et al., 2024).

To advance inclusive education, there is great potential to foster collaboration between key players, including the government, educational institutions, and the wider community (Parnawi & Syahrani, 2024). To achieve this, a concerted effort is needed to support policies that promote inclusion and implement best practices from schools that have successfully integrated inclusive education models (Mansir, 2021). Active community participation, coupled with strong institutional commitment, is essential to creating an education system that meets the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities. In addition, Indonesia's multicultural society also has an essential role in promoting inclusivity (Nugroho, 2023). By prioritizing the values of mutual respect, empathy, and understanding of diversity, a society prosperous in cultural and religious differences can create an educational environment that embraces all individuals and fosters inclusivity at every level (Jannah et al., 2021).

This study seeks to highlight the specific challenges that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia and highlight opportunities to improve the current system. One of the main focuses of this study is to understand the barriers that prevent the education system from fully embracing inclusivity, such as social, institutional, and policy barriers. At the same time, this study underscores the importance of recognizing opportunities for reform, especially when considering the cultural and religious values that define the Islamic context in Indonesia. The hope is to create a more effective and sustainable approach to inclusion by integrating solutions that align with these values. The ultimate goal is to develop an educational environment that accommodates students with different abilities and fosters a sense of harmony and respect in Indonesia's multicultural society. In this way, inclusive education can be a bridge to a more integrated and equitable learning experience for all students.

B. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach to explore the concept of inclusive education, focusing on the challenges and opportunities present in Indonesia's diverse society (Kusumastuti, 2019). This approach was chosen for its ability to gather and analyze information from various relevant literature. The data sources include scholarly works, books, and policy documents related to inclusive education.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher will describe the data and research results regarding the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education in a multicultural society. The results of this study were obtained through a literature study, in which the researcher analyzed various sources of literature, articles, and previous research relevant to this topic. Through this approach, the researcher can identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities that arise in the implementation of inclusive education.

This study focuses on issues related to implementing inclusive education in a diverse society and how this diversity can affect the quality of education. Using qualitative analysis, the researcher attempts to describe the complexity of the reality of inclusive education. This literature study aims to provide a deep understanding of the challenges faced and the opportunities that can be utilized to realize effective inclusive education. The descriptive data produced will include various perspectives and experiences from various sources, so it is expected to contribute significantly to the development of inclusive education in a multicultural society.

1. **The Concept of Inclusive Education**
   a. *Definition of Inclusive Education*

Inclusion includes integrating children with special needs (ABK) into various aspects of the educational experience, including the curriculum, school environment, social interactions, and self-awareness. This integration allows these students to participate in school life fully (Setiawan, 2023). The concept of inclusive education is characterized by a system that requires children with special needs to attend school in their neighborhood and attend regular classes with their friends. Schools that adopt inclusive education practices are structured to support the presence of all students in one class, ensuring that no one is left behind (Frondizi, 2001).

This educational philosophy believes every child deserves access to equitable and high-quality educational opportunities without discrimination. The inclusive education framework ensures that all students, including those with disabilities,

receive the necessary educational resources and support tailored to their needs (Budiyanto, 2017). As a result, inclusive education highlights the critical role of integrating students with special needs into the classroom with their peers, fostering collaboration and mutual learning (Rosyidi, 2009). This approach benefits students with special needs and enriches the educational experience for all learners by promoting diversity and understanding in the classroom environment (Budiyanto, 2017).

Inclusive education is a comprehensive educational framework designed to provide access to learning for all individuals in society, regardless of their physical or mental background (Ika et al., 2023). This model is considered a promising strategy to transform the education system that often marginalizes children with special needs (Munawir et al., 2024). In addition, inclusive education underlines the importance of anti-discrimination measures, ensuring that all students enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It also aims to expand access to education for everyone, thereby fostering an environment where diversity is valued and all learners can thrive (Sudarto, 2017).

b. Basic Principles of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education has a strong foundation at the international and national levels. Internationally, the ideology of inclusive education was introduced at the World Conference by UNESCO in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. The conference affirmed UNESCO's commitment to education for all, emphasizing the importance of education for children and adolescents who need education in the regular education system (Ahmad, 2019).

The fundamental principle of inclusive education emphasizes that all children should have the opportunity to learn together without discrimination. Regular schools must be equipped to meet the needs of diverse students, including those marginalized from accessing education (Rosyidi, 2009). This is also reflected in the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees every citizen's right to receive equal education.

c. Objectives of Inclusive Education

The objectives of inclusive education are regulated in the Indonesian Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 Article 2, which includes: (1) providing the widest possible access to all students who have physical, emotional, mental, and social disabilities, or who have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to obtain quality education according to their needs and abilities; (2) realizing the implementation of education that respects diversity and is non-discriminatory for all students (Farah et al., 2022).

According to Budiyanto, the objectives of inclusive education can be divided into general and specific objectives. The general objective is to provide broad access to education to all children, especially children with special needs. While specific objectives include increasing effectiveness in the implementation of education, learning outcomes, empowerment of local cultural values, and increasing the role of parents, society, and government in the field of education (Budiyanto, 2017).

Arfin Murtie also stated that the objectives of inclusive education include: 1) Training student independence, especially for students with special needs who can be educated. 2) Increasing the self-confidence of students with special needs. 3) Increasing a sense of solidarity and good social relations among regular students. 4) Developing the interests and talents of regular students. 5) Optimizing the potential of students with special needs. 6) Creating harmony in community life between regular students and children with special needs (Murtie, 2016).

2. Challenges in Inclusive Education

Implementing inclusive education is not easy. There are various challenges that must be faced, both from the school environment and from outside, which can hinder the creation of effective inclusive education. One of the main obstacles is the teaching staff. Teachers play a crucial role in inclusive education, but they often lack understanding of children with special needs and the skills needed to deal with them. In addition, the attitude of some teachers towards children with special needs is often less than supportive. The challenges in inclusive education can vary, but some common problems that are often faced in its implementation include:

a. General Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education often faces various challenges that hinder the implementation process. Some of these challenges include:

1). Lack of Supporting Facilities: Many schools do not have the facilities needed to support students with special needs, such as physical accessibility and appropriate learning equipment.

2). Limited Teacher Knowledge and Skills: Teachers in inclusive schools often do not have adequate training to handle the various needs of students, which can lead to suboptimal teaching and learning processes. (Ananda et al., 2023).

b. Special challenges for children with special needs

Children with special needs face more specific challenges, including:

1). Social and Emotional Challenges: Many children with special needs feel isolated or unaccepted by their peers, which can impact their mental health.

2). Learning and Skills Development Challenges: Difficulty keeping up with course material and developing social and academic skills.

3). Challenges for Professionals Working in Inclusive Settings: Lack of proper training for professionals working in inclusive schools can hinder their effectiveness in supporting these children.

c. *Human Resources Challenges*

In accordance with Article 21 and Article 20 paragraphs (2) and (4), the establishment of Disability Service Units in early childhood education, basic education and secondary education requires:

1). Human Resource Recruitment: It is important to recruit teaching staff who are trained in inclusive education.

2). Competency Improvement: Improving the skills of Service Unit officers to support inclusive education.

The lack of trained teachers is a serious problem. Inclusive education in Indonesia is still hampered by the lack of teacher knowledge about children with special needs (ABK), minimal skills in dealing with children with special needs (ABK), and the attitude of teachers who tend to look down on children with special needs (ABK) (Nurhadipa et al., 2024). Teachers need to have special knowledge and skills, which require adequate and ongoing training.

d. *Stereotypes and Stigma*

Culture and public perception of disability are still not entirely positive in some areas in Indonesia. Stereotypes and stigmas against students with disabilities can hinder their participation in inclusive education.

e. *Policy*

Although there are regulations supporting inclusive education in Indonesia, their implementation is often inconsistent across regions. Some regions may not fully implement this policy or may not have sufficient infrastructure to support it. Therefore, Article 20 paragraphs (3) and (4) concerning the creation of policies that facilitate the formation and implementation of Disability Service Units are very important (Nurhadipa et al., 2024).

3. **Opportunities in Inclusive Education**

a. *Values in Islam*

1). Equality

Equality is a basic principle in Islam that affirms that every individual has the same value before Allah SWT. In the context of inclusive education,

equality means providing equal access to everyone to learning opportunities and personal development, regardless of background, gender, social status, or physical and mental conditions. The Qur'an emphasizes that all people, both men and women, have equal rights in society and education (QS. Al-Hujurat/49:13). Therefore, inclusive education must ensure equal access for every individual (Parnawi & Syahrani, 2024).

2). Justice

Justice is one of the main principles in Islam that is very important in the development of inclusive education. In the context of education, justice means ensuring that every individual is treated fairly and gets the support needed to reach their full potential without discrimination (Rosyidi, 2009). With this approach, inclusive education can help all learners, including those with special needs, to develop optimally.

3). Acceptance

Acceptance is an important principle in Islam that serves as the foundation for building inclusive education. Education must accept and value the diversity of individuals, regardless of their background, abilities, or needs. In Islamic teachings, acceptance is reflected in the values of compassion and respect for human dignity. Therefore, inclusive education in Islam must create an environment that accepts all individuals (Jannah et al., 2021).

b. *Learning Models*

Inclusive education learning models that are adapted to the needs of students, both normal and those with special needs, include:

1). Regular class model (fully inclusive): This model integrates Special Needs Students (PDBK) with Regular Students (PDR) in one class. In this model, all students are treated equally, without any special treatment for PDBK, unless they do not experience significant intellectual disabilities.

2). Cluster Model: In this model, PDBK are grouped separately but still learn together with PDR. PDBK get support from mentors who help them overcome difficulties in the learning process (Jannah et al., 2021).

3). Pull Out Model, This model involves PDBK being moved to a separate room to receive certain learning materials with special guidance by teachers. This aims to provide learning that is more in line with their needs, especially if there are disparities when learning in regular classes (Fitrianah, 2018).

c. *Role of Society*

1). Government Partners: The community functions as a government partner in supporting the implementation of the inclusive education model.

2). Expanding Access to Education: The community can contribute to increasing access to education and employment opportunities for children with special needs.

3). Awareness of Children's Rights: The community has a responsibility to raise awareness of children's rights to education.

4). Social Control: The community also plays a role in carrying out social control over government policies related to education.

5). Identification of Children with Special Needs: The community helps in identifying children with special needs who have not received education in their environment.

6). Place/Container of Learning: The community can function as a place or container for learning for students.

7). Source of Information and Knowledge: The community acts as a source of information, knowledge, and practical experience that supports schools in creating an inclusive learning environment that is friendly (Chairani et al., 2024).

D. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education offers many opportunities to create a fair and welcoming learning environment for all individuals, including those with special needs. By prioritizing the values of equality, justice, and acceptance, inclusive education not only fulfills the basic right of every child to receive quality education, but also creates a more inclusive and harmonious society. Various learning models, such as regular classes, cluster models, and pull-outs, provide flexibility in meeting the unique needs of each learner. Community involvement, especially parents and communities, is crucial in supporting the implementation of inclusive education, both through partnerships with the government, expanding access to education, and raising awareness of children's rights.

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