INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING ACCESS AND QUALITY OF LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine inclusive education strategies that can improve access and quality of learning for students with special needs. Using the literature research method, this study analyzed a number of relevant journal articles, textbooks and policy documents to identify key principles, strategies and challenges in implementing inclusive education. Through thematic analysis, the study found that inclusive education requires a holistic approach that includes continuous teacher training, curriculum adaptation, integration of assistive technology and the application of differentiated and collaborative learning methods. The results show that the effectiveness of inclusive education depends on schools' readiness to adopt changes in policies and practices and their ability to provide adequate resources. The main challenges identified include limited resources, lack of specialized training for teachers and resistance to changes in teaching practices. Nonetheless, successful inclusive education strategies highlight the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents and students and the importance of continuous program evaluation and adjustment to meet the needs of students with special needs.

Keywords: Strategy, Inclusive Education, Access, Quality of Learning, Students with Special Needs.

Introduction

Inclusive education has become one of the top priorities in the development of education systems in many countries, including Indonesia. Inclusive education is an approach that emphasizes the need to create a learning environment that is supportive and accessible to all students, regardless of their physical, mental, social abilities or special educational needs (Messiou, K. 2017). In line with the internationally recognized Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education has the noble goal of integrating students with special needs into the mainstream education system, so that they

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can benefit equally in terms of access and quality of learning as other students (Lindsay, G. 2003).

Inclusive education has become one of the most important issues in the national education system because it is a prerequisite for creating a just and egalitarian society. The underlying philosophy of inclusive education is the right of every individual to education without exception, including those with special needs (Moriña, A. 2019). In the context of student diversity, inclusive education not only ensures access to education for students with special needs but also integrates them in the same learning environment as other students, breaking down the physical, social and attitudinal barriers that prevent their full participation (Corbett, J. 2002). The policy and implementation of inclusive education in the national education system is important because it provides equal opportunities for all students to develop their potential to the maximum level, which in turn contributes to the development of a more inclusive and sustainable society (Evans, J., & Lunt, I. 2002).

Furthermore, the urgency of inclusive education is reinforced by evolving global and national challenges, such as the increasing population of students with special needs and the need to equip them with relevant skills for the 21st century (Slee, R., & Allan, J. 2001). Inclusive education concerns not only physical access to schools but also how curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation are adapted to meet diverse learning needs. It demands a paradigm shift at all levels of the education system, from policy to classroom practice (Florian, L. 2014). In this context, inclusive education becomes an urgent issue as it is directly related to the quality of a nation's human resources. An education system that is able to implement inclusive education effectively will strengthen the foundation for sustainable development and competition on the global stage by optimizing the potential of every individual, including those with special needs (Armstrong, F. 2007).

Inclusive education therefore plays a vital role in improving access to education for students with special needs. This access includes more than just the ability to enter the school building; it means that students with special needs are given a fair chance to engage in all aspects of learning, along with the support needed to succeed (Artiles, A. J., & Dyson, A. 2005). This involves providing appropriate resources, including assistive technology, modified curriculum and accessible infrastructure, all of which help to create an inclusive learning environment. By removing the barriers that prevent students with special needs from accessing quality education, inclusive education ensures that all children have an equal right to an educational experience that enables them to develop their talents and abilities (Barton, L. 2003).

Regarding the quality of learning, inclusive education demands a more student-centered curriculum and adaptive teaching methods, coupled with an environment that supports diverse learning needs. Teachers trained in inclusive education can utilize diverse techniques and strategies to adapt lessons to reach students with different styles and speeds of understanding (Nilholm, C. 2021). Such a differentiated approach ensures that students with special needs are not just conditioned to take part in learning but become active

participants in the process, showing progress based on their unique abilities. This increases their self-confidence and social skills, which are essential components of a well-rounded high-quality learning experience (Graham, L. J. 2020). The quality of these interactions ensures that inclusive education is not just a planning term but translates into a practice that empowers every student to contribute productively in Society (Slee, R. 2018).

However, the implementation of inclusive education in the field often faces various challenges. From the lack of resources, both supporting infrastructure and trained human resources, to curriculum and learning methodologies that are not yet fully adaptive and responsive to the needs of student diversity. As a result, despite efforts to increase access to education, the quality of learning received by students with special needs is often still unsatisfactory (Van Mieghem et al., 2020).

Furthermore, stigma and discrimination against students with special needs still occur in many educational settings. This points to the need for effective and innovative strategies in implementing inclusive education, which not only focus on providing access for students with special needs but also on improving the quality of learning that can meet their specific needs (Paseka, A., & Schwab, S. 2020).

Given this situation, this study aims to describe inclusive education strategies that can be applied to improve access and quality of learning for students with special needs. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide practical and applicable recommendations for educators, policy makers and other stakeholders in the education sector, so that inclusive education can become a reality that enriches and improves the existing education system more effectively and inclusively for all.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is literature. The literature research method plays an important role in the academic world because it allows researchers to investigate and analyze certain topics through the collection, identification, compilation, and analysis of various data derived from relevant written sources (Bungin, 2001; Moleong, 2007). This type of research uses an analytical descriptive method and is often followed by research stages outlined in a flow chart to facilitate the depiction of the research process itself (Arikunto, 2013).

Among several specific methods in literature review research, one of the most common is keyword search. This is intended to find the most relevant references to the research topic from various reliable sources such as catalogs, indexes, and online search engines (Reay, 2014; Graue, 2015). By utilizing sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, theses, and so on, literature studies help researchers to collect various pre-existing evidence or opinions related to their research problems and objectives (Sgier, 2012).

Results and Discussion
Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach to the education system that emphasizes the importance of providing access to learning for all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities or special needs (Armstrong, F. 2007). The definition of inclusive education demands the fulfillment of every child's right to a quality education and full participation in the learning process in a mainstream school environment. This approach seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote diversity and acceptance among students, teaching staff and the school community (Artiles, A. J., & Dyson, A. 2005). The goal is to create a supportive learning environment in which every student is given equal opportunity to reach his or her full potential, independent of any physical, social-emotional, intellectual abilities or special educational needs he or she may have (Barton, L. 2003).

The principles of inclusive education include several fundamental values that must be applied to achieve this goal. The first is respect for diversity and individuality, where each student is seen as a unique individual with different potential, needs and learning styles. This requires education to be flexibly designed to meet these diverse needs (Corbett, J. 2002). The second principle is full participation and equity in learning. This means that all students have equal access to resources, activities and learning opportunities, with modifications or additional support provided as needed to ensure their full engagement. Third, inclusive education emphasizes the importance of a supportive community, both inside and outside the classroom, creating a positive and supportive environment that encourages all students to grow and develop (Evans, J., & Lunt, I. 2002). This principle as a whole aims to provide quality education that is inclusive and embraces every student, recognizing and valuing differences as the natural richness of the learning community (Florian, L. 2014).

The fourth important principle of inclusive education is active collaboration among all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students and other support professionals. Through cooperation and open dialogue, all parties work together to identify and meet individual learning needs and overcome barriers that may interfere with the learning process (Graham, L. J. 2020). This collaboration enables the creation of adaptive and innovative educational strategies that aim to enrich the learning experience for all students, regardless of their special educational needs. This principle also ensures that adjustments in the learning environment are not only focused on the individual but also on improving the education system as a whole to be more inclusive and responsive (Lindsay, G. 2003).

Finally, inclusive education recognizes the importance of capacity building and professional development for teachers and school staff. Ongoing education and training are needed to ensure that educators have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to support the success of students with diverse backgrounds and needs. This includes training on differentiated teaching strategies, inclusive classroom management and the use of assistive technology (Messiou, K. 2017). Thus, the principles of inclusive education focus not only on students but also on developing educators as agents of change towards a more inclusive and diversity-embracing education. Incorporating these principles in daily educational practices creates a supportive learning environment where all students,

regardless of their needs or abilities, have the opportunity to learn, develop and thrive alongside their peers.

Current models of inclusive education reflect efforts to create supportive and empowering learning environments for all students. One model that has received attention is "co-teaching" or collaborative teaching, where two or more teachers, often one general subject teacher and one special education teacher, work together in a classroom (Ko et al., tth) This model allows for the delivery of more focused and differentiated instruction, ensuring that students' individual learning needs can be addressed more effectively. The co-teaching approach allows for the creation of flexible and adaptive learning strategies, supports students with special needs without separating them from their classmates, and promotes an enriching inclusive learning experience for all students (Lee, D. 2023).

The second model that is gaining popularity is the "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL) approach. UDL is an educational framework that aims to improve access to learning for all individuals, taking into account the diverse ways in which students interact with learning content. The model emphasizes the importance of providing multiple ways of representation (presenting information), expression (students showing what they know), and engagement (motivating students), with the aim of removing barriers to learning and maximizing learning achievement for each student (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). By applying UDL principles, schools can create a more inclusive learning environment that is able to adapt to the various learning preferences and needs of its students, thus supporting the success of all students regardless of their ability or background.

Innovations in educational technology also play an important role in promoting more effective inclusive education models. The use of assistive technologies, such as text reader software, touch-based communication boards and educational apps designed to meet specific needs, has brought significant changes in the way educators support all students (Sitopu et al., 2024). These technologies enable students with special needs to be more independent in their learning, encourage active participation in class, and provide wider access to the curriculum. It supports equity in the teaching and learning process, ensuring that students have equal opportunities to engage in learning, collaborate with their peers, and reach their full potential (Guna et al., 2024).

In addition, current models of inclusive education emphasize the importance of emotionally and socially supportive learning environments. Approaches such as social and emotional education (SEL) are becoming increasingly integrated to help develop skills such as self-awareness, emotion management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Hairiyanto et al., 2024). Through this approach, schools strive to create caring and inclusive learning communities where all students feel accepted, valued and understood. It is not just about expanding access to education for students with special needs but also about building a school culture that promotes empathy, diversity and inclusion (Ross, 2022; Binsaleh & Binsaleh, 2020).

In conclusion, current models of inclusive education focus on developing practices and environments that support diverse learning and individual student needs. Through an integrated approach of collaborative teaching, universal design for learning, utilization of assistive technology, and a focus on social and emotional development, schools are changing the way education is delivered to realize a truly inclusive education system. This approach allows every student, no matter their background or needs, to get a quality, relevant and meaningful education in an environment that promotes their growth and success.

Special Needs and Learning Diversity

Students with special needs are individuals who require special consideration and adaptation in the education system because they may face challenges in learning, communication, behavior, and daily tasks caused by various physical, cognitive, psychological, sensory or medical conditions (Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. 2020). The classification of students with special needs can be diverse and broad, covering a wide spectrum such as learning disabilities, communication disorders, autistic spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, growth disorders, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and complex health needs (Johnston, V., & Collum, D. 2020). The presence of a specific diagnosis is not the only criterion for identification as a student with special needs; sometimes, these needs can be recognized through educational assessments due to their difficulties in fitting in or following the standard curriculum without additional support (Aslan, 2017).

The characteristics of individuals with special needs vary greatly depending on the type and level of need of each student. For example, students with learning disorders such as dyslexia may have difficulty in reading, spelling, or processing oral and written information, requiring more visual or kinesthetic methods of instruction (Malcom, S. M. 2013). On the other hand, students with autism spectrum disorder may exhibit uniqueness in social interaction, communication and sometimes unpredictable behavior, requiring a stable and structured learning environment and consistent approach. Students with physical limitations may require physical environment accommodations-such as wheelchair access, adjustable desks, or assistive technology-to participate fully in the classroom. To meet these needs, educators need to be aware of individual differences and be ready to adapt their approach, ensuring all students receive the support necessary for success in education (Kaczorowski et al., 2023).

Classroom learning diversity reflects differences in the way students understand, process and retain information. These differences can be influenced by various factors such as cultural background, special needs, learning styles, motivation, and students' personal experiences (Tubagus et al., 2023). As a result, "one-size-fits-all" learning approaches are often ineffective in addressing these diverse learning needs. This has prompted educators to adopt more inclusive and differential learning approaches, which allow all students, no matter their background or needs, to fully engage in the learning process (Aslan & Shiong,

2023). Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emphasize providing multiple ways of material representation, expression by students, and interaction in learning to cover diverse learning needs, thus encouraging active participation from all students (Rose, D. 2000).

Furthermore, learning diversity urges educators to be more reflective and adaptive in their teaching methodologies. Teachers are required to plan lessons that not only enrich knowledge but also build students' skills and abilities to think critically, cooperate and solve problems (Nurdiana et al., 2023). This could include the use of technology in the classroom, collaborative projects, problem-based learning, and continuous formative assessment, where each student has the opportunity to demonstrate understanding in his or her own way (Sarmila et al., 2023). By understanding and embracing learning diversity, educators can facilitate a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment, where all students feel valued and supported in their learning process (Haddar et al., 2023). Thus, the impact of learning diversity on learning approaches is an evolution from traditional ways of teaching to more holistic and responsive practices that embrace the uniqueness of each individual.

Inclusive Learning Strategies

An inclusive learning approach aims to create a learning environment that recognizes and embraces individual differences among all students. It ensures that every student, regardless of ability or special needs, has equal opportunities to learn, develop and succeed (MANEA, A. D., & STAN, C. 2021). To encourage this, one of the key strategies is the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a framework that promotes flexible teaching by offering a range of options in how information is delivered, how students demonstrate their understanding, and how they engage with learning materials (Suntsova, A. 2021). This approach encourages the use of a variety of teaching methods and educational technologies to address different learning preferences, as well as improving accessibility for students who have sensory or physical needs.

In addition to UDL, inclusive learning also requires a differentiated approach, allowing teachers to customize instruction based on students' ability levels, interests and individual needs. This method focuses on providing a variety of choices in learning activities, tasks, and assessments (Bintang et al., 2024). This approach encourages the use of diverse small learning groups, where students with different abilities and backgrounds can work together and learn from each other. Teachers can also utilize formative assessment to understand students' learning progress over time and to modify teaching strategies in a timely manner (Ni'mah, U. N. I., & Mustofa, T. A. 2024). Thus, approaches and methods in inclusive learning create a supportive environment where diversity is recognized as a strength, not a barrier, and where each student is given the tools and support necessary to reach their full potential.

Following on from differentiation and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) methods, another important aspect of inclusive learning is the development of social and emotional skills. This learning focuses not only on cognitive and instructional materials, but also on

students' personal development, such as empathy, cooperation and self-regulation. This is important to support positive interactions between students with diverse needs and backgrounds (Wibowo, S. A., & Thaariq, Z. Z. A. 2023). Approaches such as social and emotional learning (SEL) can be integrated in the curriculum to help students develop social awareness, manage emotions and build healthy relationships. This creates a supportive and accepting learning community where students feel safe and valued (Mardianty et al., 2017).

In addition, family and community engagement plays a crucial role in supporting inclusive learning. It helps to ensure that all students receive consistent support both at school and at home. Educators can work with families to build individualized learning plans that tailor education to students' specific needs (Araujo et al., 2022). In addition, building partnerships with community organizations and support services can provide additional resources and interventions that enrich the learning experience for students in need. This includes professional training for teachers on how to address special education needs and providing access to assistive technologies that can enhance students' learning abilities (Muñoz Martínez, Y., & Porter, G. L. 2020).

Overall, approaches and methods in inclusive learning bring about a transformation not only in the way material is taught, but also in how the learning environment is designed to meet the needs of each student. By adopting the principles of inclusivity, education becomes more flexible, responsive and empathetic- creating a platform for every student to pursue excellence in an environment that supports and embraces their diversity (Rasmitadila et al., 2022).

The implementation of educational technology in support of inclusive learning has opened up new avenues in the way educators design and deliver instruction. Technologies such as literacy software can help students with learning difficulties in reading and writing, while math calculation and visualization applications can greatly support the understanding of students with numerical dyslexia (Tuhuteru et al., 2023). For students with hearing needs, technologies such as text-to-speech and voice amplification systems increase the accessibility of subject matter. On the other hand, online learning platforms and apps that support project-based learning allow teachers to present course materials in multiple modes (audio, visual, kinesthetic) to suit students' different learning styles. Collaborative features in educational technology also support inclusive group learning, enabling interaction between students with different abilities in one discussion forum or shared project (Aslan & Pong, 2023).

Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI) and adaptive learning offer great potential in personalizing learning, where the system can adjust the difficulty of the material and how it is presented based on feedback from student performance. This goes a long way in tailoring learning and assessment to meet the unique needs of each individual, ensuring that every student can develop to their potential (Astuti et al., 2023). Given these benefits, it is imperative for educational institutions to invest in teacher training for the effective use of

these educational technologies, together with the supporting infrastructure, to maximize the potential of inclusive learning and enrich the learning experience of all students.

In conclusion, educational technology has a crucial role to play in supporting the achievement of inclusive learning goals. By providing tools that enable personalization of learning, improve accessibility, and open up new opportunities for collaboration and interaction, educational technology not only increases student engagement and understanding, but also supports the development of diverse and inclusive learning communities. For this reason, an integrated approach involving teacher training, investment in technology, and collaboration with families and communities, is key in fully utilizing the potential of technology to shape learning environments that embrace and value the uniqueness of each student.

Strategy Effectiveness in Improving Access and Quality

Inclusive learning strategies designed to meet the needs of students with special needs have a significant impact on their learning experiences and outcomes. Firstly, by adopting techniques such as differentiation of learning, use of assistive technology, and adapted didactic approaches, students with special needs gain better access to the same subject matter and learning opportunities as their peers (Rowe et al., 2021). This not only increases their engagement in the learning process, but also helps in supporting the development of independence and self-confidence (Bright et al., 2017). For example, the use of tablets or educational software specifically designed for students with autism spectrum disorder can help in strengthening communication and social skills, reducing frustration and increasing learning motivation.

Furthermore, effective implementation of inclusive learning strategies also contributes to building a more tolerant, empathetic and supportive learning environment among all students. Students without special needs can learn the importance of diversity, empathy and cooperation when they interact and learn alongside their peers with special needs (Ningrum, N. A. 2022). This not only helps students with special needs feel accepted and valued in the school environment, but also enriches the learning experience for all students by preparing them to live in a diverse society. Through these interactions, understanding and awareness of diversity and inclusion issues increase, creating a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment where every student, regardless of their individual needs, can grow and develop (Nugroho, A., & Mareza, L. 2016).

Furthermore, the impact of inclusive learning strategies on students with special needs is also seen in their academic outcomes and long-term success. By providing individualized and focused support, students with special needs can overcome many of the learning barriers they face, which in turn can improve their learning outcomes (Fridayati et al., 2022). Flexible curriculum adjustments and fair assessments ensure that these students are assessed on their abilities, not their limitations. These positive outcomes often carry repercussions far into their futures, increasing opportunities for further education and

employment opportunities. In addition, the expertise and skills developed in an inclusive environment, such as adaptability and resilience, are valuable and can translate to many aspects of life after school (Aydin & Gürol, 2019).

Finally, inclusive learning strategies also impact teachers and parents. Teachers develop a deeper understanding of practices that support student diversity and success (M. Arif, 2012). This can lead to innovations in teaching and closer collaboration with colleagues and with parents to support student needs (Y. M. Arif et al., 2024). Parents of students with special needs feel more cared for and valued when they see their child getting the right support. Strong, partnership-based family-school relationships are an added asset in helping students with special needs reach their full potential. Overall, inclusive learning strategies not only impact individual learners but also strengthen the unity of the educational community as a system oriented towards the success of each of its members (Mulyani, T. 2020).

Thus, attention to detail in inclusive learning approaches creates a virtuous circle that benefits students, educators, parents and the wider community. The educational platform becomes a living example of social integration that promotes equality, fairness and equal opportunities for all.

Challenges and Barriers to Inclusive Learning Strategies

While inclusive learning strategies have many benefits, there are also significant challenges and barriers to implementation. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of adequate resources and training for educators. Teachers are often prepared to teach in homogenous classrooms and may not have the specialized knowledge or training to identify and meet the needs of diverse populations (Sukomardojo, T. 2023). This can result in difficulties in modifying the curriculum, using assistive technology and implementing effective differentiation strategies. In addition, inclusive classrooms can have high student-to-teacher ratios, making individualized education more challenging to implement. These limitations often result in teachers experiencing pressure and stress, which can negatively affect the classroom climate and students' learning experiences (Sholeh, M. I. 2023).

Another obstacle often encountered is resistance from some concerned parties who may still be attached to traditional views of the education system. For example, parents of children without special needs may worry that the presence of students with special needs in the classroom could distract teachers and lower academic standards. Other school communities may not fully understand or support the concept of inclusive education, thus failing to provide the necessary support to the initiative (Hanifah et al., 2021). This may involve a lack of necessary accommodations in the learning environment and a lack of cooperation between teachers, support staff and management. The tendency to isolate or not fully integrate students also remains an issue, potentially reducing the effectiveness of inclusive approaches. Overcoming these barriers requires greater cooperation from various

stakeholders, as well as increased awareness and commitment to the values of inclusiveness in education (Winda et al., 2024).

Addressing the challenges of inclusive learning requires a holistic and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders in the education system. One important step is the development and implementation of education policies that support inclusion, along with adequate access to resources (Mirrota, D. D. 2024). This includes sufficient funding for teacher training, assistive technology, as well as physical changes to school infrastructure to make it more accessible. Ongoing professional training is essential to equip teachers with effective teaching strategies and techniques for inclusive classroom environments (Park, 2009). This education and training should include differentiation techniques, the use of technology in education, and how to identify and overcome barriers to student learning (Widjaja & Aslan, 2022).

In addition, promoting awareness and understanding of inclusion among students, parents and the wider community is another important step. Workshops, seminars and educational materials can be used to emphasize the importance of inclusive education and reduce the stigma associated with special needs (Mahessa et al., 2024). Developing strong partnerships between schools and families is essential as support from home can significantly strengthen inclusive education efforts. Also, collaboration with community organizations and other educational institutions can provide additional resources and support for schools striving to become more inclusive (Irawan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, continuous evaluation and assessment of inclusive learning programs can help identify emerging issues and barriers and facilitate continuous improvement of learning practices (Mulia, 2022). Feedback from teachers, students and parents is invaluable in this evaluation process. Technology can be an invaluable tool in this process, both to improve access to learning materials for students with special needs and to monitor and assess the learning process and student progress.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is an approach that focuses on improving access and quality of learning for all students, including those with special needs. Research findings show that effective inclusive education requires comprehensive changes in school policies, curriculum, teaching methods and learning environments. Required strategies include continuous teacher training, adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse students, integrating assistive technology and implementing differentiated practices in the classroom. Key challenges include limited resources, lack of specialized training for teachers, and high teacher-to-student ratios. A collaborative approach and support from all stakeholders is needed to overcome these barriers and ensure a learning environment that supports inclusion.

Furthermore, the success of inclusive education strategies also depends on awareness and attitude change within the school community. Research shows the

importance of building partnerships between school and home, as well as promoting inclusion through education and stigma reduction. Continuous evaluation and assessment of inclusive programs can help in identifying successes and shortcomings, allowing for necessary adjustments and improvements. The use of technology to aid and monitor learning is crucial, as well as ongoing teacher professional development to support teaching and learning practices that are inclusive and responsive to individual student differences.

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