

## The Orthodoxy of Special Education Among Public, Private, and Islamic Secondary Schools Providing Inclusive Education

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – The extent to which a special education orthodoxy influences teachers' understanding and practicing of the idea of inclusion in teaching and learning is essential to be revealed to construct the meaning of inclusion for the Indonesian context.

**Design/methods/approach** – Thirteen participants of three types of Schools Providing Inclusive Education (SPIE) i.e., Sekolah Harapan (public), Sekolah Mulia (Islamic), and Sekolah Wijaya (private) in the Special Province of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta were selected purposively, and a qualitative case study was conducted using an in-depth interview to gather the data.

**Findings** – All participants articulated inclusive education is a placement for students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) in the general education system. All students with SEND were welcomed in Sekolah Harapan but were then labeled and pulled out to a resource room to be educated separately by a support teacher. In Sekolah Mulia, most students were visually impaired without support teacher provided to assist them. Teaching and learning were very minimal offered various strategies, media, and assessments; mirrored the special education model. Sekolah Wijaya, in contrast, implemented a more inclusive education model, no labeled was marked for students with SEND and promoted an inclusive climate through learning activities.

**Research limitation** – The small number of participants meant that the findings cannot be generalized as the participants cannot be considered representatives of secondary schools in Yogyakarta or Indonesia.

**Originality/value** – Teachers in three SPIE investigated are willing to promote inclusive education although the orthodoxy of special education philosophy still has been flavoring most of the teachers' language in defining and practicing the inclusive concept.

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## Introduction

In realising and achieving the global agenda of Education for All (EFA), supports from world promise under the United Nations agency have been provided (Chabibah, 2012; Juniar et al., 2020; Mulyadi, 2017; Suyahman, 2015). The commitment of Indonesia has been followed by the enactment of the regulations of inclusive education at the national and regional levels (Indrasti & Jalil, 2019; Juniar et al., 2020; Mulyadi, 2017; Rochmansjah, 2020; Yulianto, 2014) and appointing at least one school as a School Providing Inclusive Education (SPIE) in each district. Regardless the moving forward to inclusive education as one of the EFA agendas, however, in school level, teachers in Indonesia pose barriers and challenges to implement the inclusive setting (Yasa & Julianto, 2017) that can be divided into five aspects; namely, old-fashion attitudes, unpreparedness teachers, a rigid curriculum, physical barriers and structural barriers.

Social norms are often the biggest barrier to inclusion (Bakhri et al., 2017; Juniar et al., 2020; USAID, 2013) for Indonesian context. The undesirable attitudes of educators to accept students with SEND still occur (Fitriatun & Nopita, 2017; Juniar et al., 2020; Poernomo, 2016; Suryani & Sudarto, 2014). Similar investigation in Greek by Avramidis and Kalyva (2007); Batsiou et al. (2008) confirm that teachers are a scepticism professional and far from stick to committing to inclusive education. Prejudice against those who are different can lead to discrimination, thus hampering the education process (Nurhayati, 2012). Many schools' policymakers and teachers have not fully understood or believed in inclusive education and these lead the barriers to achieve a real inclusion (Lubis, 2016; Rochmansjah, 2020; Sulistyadi, 2014; Sunardi & Sunaryo, 2011; USAID, 2013).

A large number of inexperienced teachers about working with students with SEND (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014) are considered as other obstacles to the success of inclusive education. Teachers in Indonesia lack of trainings to implement inclusive education (Rochmansjah, 2020; Sartica & Ismanto, 2016); therefore, inclusive education currently does not run as the original concept. The practices of inclusive education more reflect integrative education, where students should adjust to learning, rather than learning that is tailored to their unique needs. A national curriculum that does not offer teacher a place to adjust and modify can be also major barrier for diverse students and to inclusion (Meo, 2008) otherwise a curriculum should be implemented for multilevel and multimodalities (Rahim, 2016).

Many schools in Indonesia including public, private and Islamic schools have not been equipped and met with the standard of an accessible building to properly accommodate students with SEND and the local governments absence to allocate budget in infrastucture (Bakhri et al., 2017; Muazza et al., 2018; Rochmansjah, 2020; Sartica & Ismanto, 2016). Many SPIE in Indonesia are not affordable because they are located in urban areas, whereas more numbers of students with SEND are in rural areas

(Miftakhuddin, 2018). This can create a barrier for particular children to just enter the school building or classroom.

Mitchell and Desai (2005) argue that Indonesia has no commitment towards the inclusive education, proved by the continuing build special schools in every region. Data from Pusat Data dan Teknologi Informasi (2020) show the number of Special Schools (SLB) in the academic year of 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 has significantly boosted from 565 schools to 2,270 schools whereas the regular middle schools have slightly increased from 37,951 to 40,599 schools (in which only 3,817 schools were appointed as inclusive middle schools in 2015/2016). These data indicate that government still concern with the special education system to support the students with SEND, while promoting inclusive education. Notwithstanding, MONE added more support teachers by year to year to help and assist schools providing inclusive education in welcoming and servicing students with SEND (Wahyudi & Kristiawati, 2016).

The fact that dual systems of special and inclusive education are established to support students with SEND; and little research exists that report on teachers' understanding of inclusion in education, therefore, it is important to reveal how the special education orthodoxy influences the Indonesian teachers' understanding of inclusion and how teachers implement the idea of inclusion into teaching and learning practices. Investigating the orthodoxy of special education towards teachers' understanding and experiences has the potential to impact on inclusive educational policies and practices and what needs to change in order to create inclusive education system that fit with Indonesian context.

## Methods

The main rationale behind this paper was the need to uncover voices and contexts to be revealed, which explored the understanding and practice of inclusive education in Indonesian contexts through a qualitative paradigm and focused on an under-research issue. A qualitative case study was employed in three types of SPIE, i.e. public, private and Islamic schools in Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Sekolah Harapan is a public school and has welcomed students with SEND since 1982 as an integrated school and has changed the status as an SPIE pointed by the Department of Education since 2011. Sekolah Mulia is a private Islamic school which historically as a special school for visual impaired students and was appointed as an SPIE in 2008. Sekolah Wijaya is a private school and claims as a multicultural school. Thirteen educators including principals of three SPIE were selected purposively and interviewed individually to gain deeper analysis. Transcripts from all participants were then analysed inductively and deductively according to Yin (2014) to shape the findings into a main theme defining inclusion in education and experiencing this concept into a daily basis of teaching and learning activities.

## Result

All participants in this study believe inclusion in education. This means providing a place for students with SEND to be educated in general classroom alongside their peers to reduce disability discrimination. Additional views, ideas, beliefs, and experiences towards inclusive education of each participant are described as follows.

### 1. Understanding of inclusion

All participants in three SPIE define inclusion similarly, in which welcoming SEND in a general classroom to be educated with their peers to against discrimination. In School Harapan, Rani said that an inclusive setting provides education for students with SEND in their natural environment as they learn with their peers without SEND. Lisa added, “we teach all children, especially who with SEND with heart and we will not discriminate against them, if there any discrimination, it would be in order to benefit them”. Hendri, the principal, however believed that students with SEND better to be educated in special school. Hendri stated:

because of parents do not want their children are labelled as students who have impairment, they [parents] deny that their children are impaired. Those parents then send their children to the public school. It is hard. Only because it is mandated by law, then we should accept those children.

Desi (support teacher) also has the similar belief with Hendri, in which by accepting all students regardless of their condition leads to the barriers to educating them in an appropriate manner, unless they were prepared in a special school. Desi mentioned:

... inclusive setting can be hard for those students [with SEND], unless if they have been prepared in the Special School first. It would be easier for us as a teacher and them as students to cope with difficulties and challenges in learning.

Desi described two examples: 1) students with hearing impairment would not face a language barrier if they were trained first in a special school, because those students would learn lip reading, and when they are welcomed in the SPIE, they can learn easier and able to catch what people said; 2) students with a visual impairment also would face the difficulties because the limitation of learning media in Braille whilst teachers also cannot utilize the Braille. Desi argued an SPIE is matched with students with SEND who have intelligences in average and above, as in her statement:

For children, whose IQ on the average and above, an SPIE is great, because they would be able to develop, achieve what they pursue and continue to high school. But for whose IQ below the average, it's not possible. A special school is

better for those students because in that school students can be taught a lot of skills that can be used for their daily live.

In Sekolah Mulia, Tina and Ita mentioned: “inclusion means involves or includes students with disabilities into regular classes”. Ali (principal) said inclusion means “offering opportunities for children with SEND to study whenever and wherever with anyone”. On the other hand, Sari stated that: “inclusive is a special and different from most, typical, and normal; but that special tends to a negative not positive thing”.

In Sekolah Wijaya, Risna defined inclusion as an effort to be survived in providing learning for varied learner. Sinta mentioned that inclusion is a diversity in wider circumstances, not only in physical and cognitive matter; accepting the diversity, and students understand that all their friends are different. Indah (principal) said inclusion means accommodating all children; inviting them to learn with enthusiasm and fun; accepting the differences; and respecting each other. Andri has understood that “inclusion is negotiation”. She told that inclusive does not mean only for students with SEND, but for all students. She mentioned:

Inclusion is not merely for students with disabilities, but for all, as the original meaning. But, as we know, in our [Indonesian] regulation and for lots of documentations, is still used the term of *anak berkebutuhan khusus* (students with special needs). We will shift it and back to the original meaning of inclusion, although in this school, no significant difference about that name.

## 2. Labelling

Sekolah Harapan labelled children with SEND and send them to inclusion resource room to be given an additional lesson and skills every Friday and Saturday. In fact, Lisa and Rani stated that children with SEND prefer not to be labelled, they are embarrassed with that status, they did not admit their disabilities and sometimes they did not attend the supplementary lesson. In other experiences, Desi mentioned that children with SEND tend to be difficult to socialize and they usually join and gather with their peers who have SEND, even they are more likely to be individualized.

As SEND in Sekolah Mulia were all visually impaired, a label for them was already tagged and those students feel confident although they were labelled.

Sekolah Wijaya has tried to eliminate the label of students with special needs, as Andri mentioned:

We are starting to eliminate [the label] not only for students with SEND, but for all children. We have started to leave it ... to eliminate it [terms of children with SEND] because we realize that support is needed by everyone, and every child is different.

### 3. School climate

Sekolah Harapan has embraced the inclusive education system in an integrative model as indicated this school applied co-teaching, pull-out, and push-in teaching approaches. Rani and Erra claimed that the collaborative teaching with the support teacher was very rarely to be conducted, and the support teacher more likely to pull the students out and give them the additional lessons. Desi argued that almost teachers in School Harapan have been teaching independently and the collaboration has been made with her as the support teacher only in the way of giving the teachers advice and suggestion about the teaching strategies that would be best for children with SEND. Lisa claimed that the support teacher provides services for students with SEND in two days a week and with this limitation, pull-out system has been chosen as the best form of inclusion especially in the way to teach students who struggle with lessons, such as math, science, and English. Besides pull-out, this school also implements the push-in system. The support teacher also works within the classroom to specifically address academic skills, such as science.

Since Sekolah Harapan has welcomed students with SEND, this school offers supportive policy, culture, and structure to promote an inclusive atmosphere. Data reveal that every prospective student who apply to study in this school will be accepted regardless their condition (or disabilities). Sekolah Harapan also has a policy that all students should go to the next grade and graduated even though they have not mastered some subjects. All teachers in Sekolah Harapan have been asked to provide appropriate learning approaches and supports that suit for each student, especially those with special needs, though adequate trainings have not been fully provided. All teacher participants of Sekolah Harapan claimed they had a series of training on the implementation of inclusive education, but they said it should be in continued programs. Rani claimed that training often has been offered limited to persons who in charge in the *Divisi Pendidikan Inklusif* (Division of Inclusive Education), not for all teachers.

*Divisi Pendidikan Inklusif* has a role to design and produce policies and programs for students with SEND in Sekolah Harapan. Members of this division collaborate with the support teacher in making academic and non-academic activities and programs for students with SEND, such as diagnostic test, language skill for students with hearing impairments and sport, music, and art. And for some reasons, principal held the belief that the main responsibility for meeting the needs of the students with SEND lays with the support teacher and that division.

In Sekolah Mulia, special education was mostly portrayed the teaching and learning activities. The way students with SEND accessed the curriculum and learned subjects was by a very specialized approach. This because of limited understanding of principal, teachers and staffs, and limited training to teach and support students with SEND. There is no special education teacher that was provided to help SEND and to

work together with subject teachers. The subject teachers should make an instructional planning, deliver materials, and assess students with SEND in their own ways, without collaborative work with the support teacher. The sekolah Mulia runs special programs for students with SEND, especially those who are visually impaired, i.e. Quran Recitation, Reading and Writing the Braille, Orientation and Mobility (OM), Activity of Daily Living (ADL), Massage and Reflexology.

All academic and non-academic activities in Sekolah Wijaya were designed to promote inclusive and multicultural cultures as this mentioned by Andri. All participants of Sekolah Wijaya asserted the support teacher is the “backbone” of the inclusive practices. Previously, the support teacher always available in the classroom to help and assist the students with SEND, but more recently they work with students with SEND as per request. A collaborative teaching between the subject teacher and the support teacher is the most preferable teaching and learning mode. Subject and support teachers share their responsibilities towards students with SEND at the planning stage, such as developing lesson plans, creating individual worksheets and assessment forms. Sekolah Wijaya offers various supporting programs for all students, namely: Excursion, Student Led Conference, Community Service and Live In, Leadership Camp, Caring for Mangrove, School Fair, Work Experience, and Intensive Camp/Interreligious Program. To help running the inclusive education program, the Sekolah Wijaya provides the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), a center for research, publication, and training on inclusive and multicultural education.

## Discussion

The mutual influences between inclusion discourses and the philosophy of special education create and produce a unique interpretation of inclusive education concepts among Indonesian teachers that can be very poles apart from current Western definitions. The analysis of participants’ responses indicates that most of them are an integrationist and few of them understand the Western idea of inclusive education. The understanding of teachers in this study is mostly still aimed at welcoming children with SEND in a regular school to provide education rights and better access to education and against discrimination, as these also mentioned in Efthymiou et al. (2017) study. Inclusive education for children with SEND is not yet understood as a way to reduce barriers to participation in learning and to improve the quality of education services, but likely as a placement for students with SEND in general classroom. Haug (2016) argues this perspective is the dominant criterion of inclusion; even though the students with SEND placement is not a guarantee making inclusion happened (Rahardja, 2010, p. 84). The lack of clear understanding of inclusive education as the main finding of this study, such as identifying students who face difficulties in learning as a student who need “additional” and “differences” treatment, creates a situation where exclusion often occurs in the name of inclusion (Florian, 2010, p. 63).

Findings of his study confirm that defining inclusion in Indonesia is a problematic, because it used for many purposes and in many ways. Some participants refer inclusive education as the approach to gain the number of students with SEND to be educated in general school while maintaining special schools, as practiced in School Harapan. In particular, teacher participants argue that the inclusive education realization depends on the students' type of disability and how their ability meets the general classroom activities, in which similar to the Nurhayati (2012) study mentioning that Indonesian students with SEND should adapt to the curriculum and school environment. Sekolah Harapan has promoted inclusion with imprecise portrait (simply as integration) where included students with SEND in a general classroom (Sanagi, 2016) and allowed withdrawing the individual or small group of students in specific time to be given additional task and work, in which has different meaning from Western concept. For Western, inclusive education must be understood as an extension of this definition not as a decision on the student's placement, but rather as a school philosophy to minimize the barriers to participation and provide genuinely education for every student. This definition is nearly has been understanding and practicing in Sekolah Wijaya. Participants of Sekolah Wijaya defined inclusive education as not merely placing students with SEND with their peers, but how they educated all students based on their needs.

How the special education orthodoxy affects the teachers practicing of inclusive education concept can be seen through their teaching and learning practices. In School Harapan, teachers claim a pull-out system is the best way to educate students with SEND as the limitation of support teacher present and serve students with SEND only two days on every Friday and Saturday. Some teacher participants argue that students with SEND are mostly the support teacher's responsibility. These shreds of evidence suggest that in teachers' understanding, integration system in the form of pull-out classes is thought to be equivalent to inclusion. However, while most teachers stand on the integrationist perspectives, it is worth noting that one of them also offers an understanding of inclusion as students with SEND participate actively in the classroom environment and they are being welcomed by their peers including within the society. For Sekolah Wijaya, collaboration between subject teachers and support teachers greatly set up when they welcome students with SEND. The collaboration initiates before the semester begin, in the planning session and along the teaching activities.

To better service for pupils with SEND, teachers in Sekolah Harapan have identified and labelled them with Student with Special Needs (*Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus/ABK*) or inclusion children (*siswa inklusi*). This situation creates a dilemma because if a child is labelled by a SEND student, the risk of negative labelling and stigma even bullying might happen, but if not, teachers face difficulties in meeting their needs that might result in not giving the appropriate service; which is called as the 'dilemma of difference' by Norwich (2014, p. 19). In contrast, the labelling system to students with SEND in Sekolah Wijaya has been abolished and teachers prefer to point them by their names. According



to inclusive education perspective, tagging a label and a stigma towards students with SEND must be avoided, however, this concern is considered to a dilemmatic attitude. Being stigmatized does not necessarily consequence from labelling but is associated with the fact that some students differ from others because of their disabilities. Farrell (2014) therefore suggests avoiding the labelling of SEND children can be done by focusing on all students and their “social experiences” (p. 65).

While one of the promises of inclusive education is that students with SEND are being included in general classrooms together with their peers without disabilities, Warnock (2005) states inclusion is not about physically attendance, but more the sense of belonging. For some children with SEND in School Harapan, their feeling of belonging and they are being included are a result of placement in a resource room called inclusion room than a general classroom, although some students who have great confidence can socialize with others in better ways. This study confirms that children with SEND are generally more comfortable with peers who have similar interests, ability, and disability than the general same age peers. As said by Kauffman and Badar (2014), being close to peers does not essentially result in “meaningful interactions” (p. 14 – 15).

As all participants define inclusion in various ways, it is difficult to construct the meaning of inclusion for Indonesian context. This difficulty caused by many aspects, such as “education background, social class, economic status, religious and cultural beliefs” (Kamenopoulou, 2018, p. 131); “the developmental phase of the country” (Srivastava et al., 2015, p. 180); and “the language of donor agency provider” (Carrington et al., 2019, p. 2). Another issue is many Indonesian regulations have not been addressed the inclusive education concept (Handayani & Rahadian, 2013) and in many educational providers, the term of special education has been replaced with inclusive education without any real alteration in policy and practice. These adopted policies caused many assumptions, beliefs and perspective about inclusive education within teachers in Indonesia. Their understanding and interpreting the definition of inclusive education are not accurate which effect the irregularities and broad range variety in practices of inclusive education concept among the Indonesian teachers (Nurhayati, 2012). This study shows that the inclusive education has been understood as an alternative to special education. Miles and Singal (2010) point out that some developed countries need a long journey towards EFA movements and including children with SEND under the concern of ministry of education and then to become genuinely inclusive.

This study implies to gain teachers attitudes, knowledge and skills to welcome and include students with a huge range of SEND in their classrooms, to minimize the role and support of support teacher, pre-service and in-service trainings are must be conducted and opportunities for professional careers development should be provided (Lewis & Bagree, 2013), besides other supports staff are still needed to implement a full inclusion policy effectively. Teacher competencies in serving students with SEND including making an inclusive environment is a very important issue because teachers can apply their

knowledge and skills to children directly. School can start with identifying opportunities and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education, increasing real participation of everyone, partnerships, and continuous evaluation to answer the challenges of EFA. The development of inclusive education is not sufficiently supported by personal commitment, but also an adequate system. Thus, SPIE can be an effective medium in shaping an inclusive society and eliminating the orthodoxy of special education.

## Conclusion

The Indonesian journey to achieving a genuine inclusion for all students faces barriers, challenges and long path. The findings of this study point out that teachers in three types of SPIE (public, private and Islamic) in Indonesia have different point of view in defining and practicing inclusion in education. Most of teacher participants are prominently influenced by the special education philosophy, while few others nearly understand and implementing inclusive education of Western concept. Those who are under the special education orthodoxy define inclusive education as including students with SEND into the regular classroom to learn and socialise with their peers without SEND. The idea of tagging the students with SEND is a way to give them better services though some of those students tend to reject the label. Teaching and learning practices is conducted in a pull-out system in resource room. Therefore, rather inclusion, they adapted the integration model. In private school, no label has been attached to students with SEND and collaborative between subject and support teacher is the most preferable teaching style. In this school, inclusive setting has been flavouring the school's activities and all students have been given choice to develop their potential and school facilitate them with various modalities. The results of this study must be interpreted with caution given the limitations of this study. Specifically, participants were taken from one province of Indonesia, namely Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, which cannot be pondered as representative of the Indonesia.

## Declarations

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The authors declare that no conflict of interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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