

The Effects of Inclusive Education on Regular Elementary Students' Academic Performance: A Case Study in Bali Indonesia

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Abstract: *Inclusion education aims to provide equitable educational opportunities for those with unique needs. Individuals with special needs can attend regular school and participate in the same classes as typical pupils. In concept, this notion is quite excellent. In actuality, its question on the academic performance impacts of regular primary school students in regions like Bali remains underexplored. To close the gap, a qualitative research design was used for this study. This study explored how regular elementary students perceive and experience academic activities within an inclusive education setting in Bali, Indonesia. It further examined the challenges and benefits encountered by these students while participating in inclusive education at the elementary level, as well as given the enhancing recommendation. The study was conducted within the context of focusing on inclusive elementary teachers who have 10 years and above of teaching experience in inclusive classrooms in Bali. Interviews were carried out with six educators from two different inclusive schools, using a case study approach. Moreover, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in aiming of investigating the academic experiences of regular elementary students within an inclusive education setting, the challenges and benefits faced by the teachers, and the recommendations for improving the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods. The findings revealed no significant impact on the academic performance of regular students in integrated inclusive settings. However, it highlighted their heightened understanding of academic content, attributed to their role as tutors for special needs peers, which boosted their self-confidence. Additionally, the study identified the development of empathy and disability awareness among students as crucial for fostering a supportive environment in inclusive schools. Beyond academic confidence and empathy, the research uncovered positive outcomes related to learning strategies, encountered challenges, and effective techniques utilized in inclusive learning environments. Notably, hands-on task-based learning emerged as the most effective approach for both regular and special needs students. Furthermore, managing student tantrums and implementing effective teaching activities were identified as challenges, with continuous workshops being the primary technique for addressing them.*

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Education, Young Learners

1. Introduction

Providing equal opportunity for all students, regardless of their skills, is the goal of inclusive education, which is a crucial component in improving schools around the globe. Inclusive education, as implemented through initiatives such as the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools across Indonesia, including Bali, aims to create a supportive learning environment

where every student can thrive. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide a variety of intracurricular learning opportunities, giving students plenty of opportunity to explore ideas and strengthen their skills. By emphasizing flexibility, educators may select from a variety of instructional resources and customize their lessons to each student's specific needs and interests. However, while inclusive education holds promise for enhancing educational outcomes, its question on the academic performance impacts of regular primary school students in regions like Bali remains underexplored. In order to close this gap, this study examines how inclusive education affects Bali's regular primary students' academic performance. Through the identification of obstacles and advantages, the study aims to shed light on how inclusive education influences regular students' academic achievement within the Indonesian context. By evaluating the findings of this investigation, recommendations can be made to improve inclusive learning for regular students, not only in Bali but also in other regions. Furthermore, the need of doing the study stems from Indonesia's long-standing advocacy for inclusive schools. It can be seen from the outline in Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, article 5 paragraph (2) which states "Citizens who have physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and/or social differences have the right to obtain the education." The government has facilitated education for children with special needs, one of which is by establishing inclusive schools. And towards the end of 2008, Indonesia had only 814 inclusive schools catering to approximately 15,181 children with special needs.

Problem of Statement

Recent data from Indonesia's Ministry of Education indicates that inclusive education is being implemented more widely and that schools are being pushed to embrace inclusive practices to promote educational equity (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2023). Despite the rising popularity of inclusive education at the primary level, there is little knowledge of how such environments affect typical students' academic experiences and performance. The integration of students with special needs, especially those with impairments, among typical students is a complicated dynamic. This brings into doubt the effectiveness of inclusive education in creating a helpful learning environment for all students, including normal pupils, whose academic experiences in this setting are often under-examined. Moreover, previous research in the same study, found no significant difference in reading achievement between regular and inclusive education students, using Criterion-Referenced Competency Test outcomes in mathematics and reading at the middle school level (Robert Spence, 2010). However, there has been little study on how inclusive education affects typical primary children, particularly in Bali. To overcome this gap, the purpose of this study is to look into the unique academic experiences of typical primary children in inclusive settings in Bali, identify the problems and benefits they confront, and assess the efficacy of inclusive education at the basic level. The goal is to propose recommendations to improve the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods based on these findings, enhancing educational outcomes for regular students in inclusive classrooms.

Research Objectives

- i. Investigate the specific academic experiences of regular elementary students within an inclusive education setting and how these experiences influence their performance.
- ii. Identify challenges and benefits by conducting inclusive education at the elementary level, specifically for regular students in Bali.
- iii. Propose recommendations for improving the effectiveness of inclusive learning methods based on research findings.

2. Literature Review

The Importance of Inclusive Schools

In the realm of educational policy and practice, inclusive education has emerged as a foundational concept, emphasizing the importance of providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. As articulated by Emma Halse (2021), an inclusive classroom aims to create an environment where every student has the chance to achieve their full potential through tailored resources, teaching methods, and support. This underscores the notion that with the right opportunities and assistance, every student can thrive academically. To support the success of special education students within the general education classroom, teachers must broaden their scope of goals, assessments, and instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs. Collaboration between special education and general education teachers is crucial in this endeavor. By engaging in open dialogue, exploring various techniques, and participating in professional development opportunities, educators can better address the individual needs of students. Emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts and resource sharing among teachers to effectively meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. Through these collaborative practices and ongoing professional development, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that foster the academic growth and success of all students (Conderman, 2009).

The Method use of Practicing Inclusive Class Setting in Elementary Schools

In the realm of elementary education, the establishment of inclusive classroom settings requires deliberate efforts to cultivate equity, accessibility, and collaboration among students with diverse abilities and backgrounds. And integrating training for educators plays a major role towards creating a better inclusive classroom. Burke and Sutherland (2004) discovered a statistically significant correlation between prior experience and knowledge of students with disabilities and positive attitudes toward inclusion. Furthermore, various strategies instrumental in fostering inclusive classroom environments, encompassing co-teaching models such as team teaching and parallel teaching, which leverage the expertise of two educators to cater to heterogeneous student groups have been integrated into inclusive classrooms. Firstly, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles are employed to design lessons and assessments that accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring equal engagement and expression for all learners. Secondly, Inclusive methods of instruction use a range of instructional forms to accommodate different learning styles and abilities, while adhering to Universal Design for Learning principles. Using "multiple means of representation" and "multiple means of action and expression," teachers may accommodate each student's particular preferences and strengths. To effectively engage students, use a variety of mediums such as literature, oral teaching, kinesthetic exercises, and multimedia presentations. Furthermore, proactive behavior management programs assist decrease disruptive behaviors and promoting a healthy learning environment for all students through clear expectations. And as articulated by Emma Shingleton (2023), developing the scaffolded approach is key to creating an inclusive learning environment.

The Effects of Inclusive Class Settings on Regular Students' Academic Performance

The researcher, Robert Spence (2010), discovered that there was no notable contrast in the reading proficiency between the two groups of regular students while doing the causal-comperative study on the academic performance of regular education students placed. Furthermore, when considering race and gender as influential factors, the researcher observed no significant disparity in reading achievement among the groups. This indicates a level playing field in academic performance among regular students, regardless of demographic variables

such as race or gender. Such findings underscore the importance of inclusive educational practices in promoting equitable opportunities for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds. By eliminating disparities in academic outcomes, inclusive education fosters an environment where each student has the chance to thrive and reach their full potential. Furthermore, Korenich and Fox (2006) found that placing regular education students in inclusive classrooms with special education students had no adverse impact on their academic achievement. And the other study revealed no significant difference in performance between inclusive and non-inclusive courses, including low, average, and high accomplishment levels (Elliott Nkoma, 2022). These results highlighted the need for continued efforts to ensure that educational systems remain inclusive and supportive, providing every student with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed academically.

3. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative method, with semi-structured interviews, and purposive samplings to collect data on teachers' thoughts on inclusive classroom settings and their influence on regular students' academic achievement. To guarantee ethical compliance, participants' written consent will be requested before conducting interviews. These interviews will be conducted individually, allowing for open discussion, and will be videotaped to ensure accuracy. The recordings will be transcribed and thematically examined using the study framework. Six teachers who match predetermined selection criteria and have substantial experience teaching in inclusive schools will be interviewed to offer full narratives for the project. The interviews will be done using Zoom Cloud Meetings to allow for remote participation and effective recording tools. Participants include active teachers from two inclusive schools in Bali, Indonesia, with experience spanning 10 years and above, representing a wide range of subject areas and grade levels to guarantee a thorough grasp of inclusive education in the Indonesian context. The respondents for this study were chosen to represent a range of perspectives and experiences about inclusive education in Bali. To guarantee a range of viewpoints on the experiences of regular elementary students in inclusive environments, two of the oldest inclusive schools in the region were selected. In order to offer more in-depth perspectives on the advantages, difficulties, and suggestions for improving inclusive education, teachers with at least ten years of experience instructing in inclusive classes were specifically chosen. Their broad topic knowledge and wealth of experience guaranteed a deep comprehension of inclusive education techniques and their effects on the social and academic growth of regular students.

The Respondents' Criteria are as follows:

- i. Female
- ii. Indonesian Nationality
- iii. Inclusive elementary teachers in Bali
- iv. Experiencing teaching inclusive classrooms in 10 years and above

Table 1: Background of The Respondents

Respondents	Experience of Teaching	Role in Teaching	Institution
A	12 Years	Homeroom teacher grade 1	Sekolah Dasar Anak Emas
B	14 Years	Islamic study teacher	Sekolah Dasar Anak Emas
C	10 Years	Balinese language teacher	Sekolah Dasar Anak Emas
D	18 Years	Homeroom teacher grade 6	Sekolah Dasar Tunas Daud
E	13 Years	Homeroom teacher grade 1	Sekolah Dasar Tunas Daud
F	10 Years	Homeroom teacher grade 3	Sekolah Dasar Tunas Daud

The present instrument study adopted a qualitative approach alongside a virtual interview format. This methodological design facilitated naturalistic dialogue, mimicking conversational dynamics while guiding responses towards relevant topics relating to participants' perceptions of mental wellness at universities. Open-ended questions were posed during the sessions, allowing respondents to offer self-generated verbalizations, phrases, or sentences in response to each query (13.2 Qualitative Interview Techniques – Scientific Inquiry in Social Work, 2012).

4. Results and Discussions

Findings (1): Regular Students Demonstrated Higher Academic Confidence in Inclusive Learning Settings.

In this finding, 4 out of 6 respondents mentioned on the higher academic confidence of regular elementary students when they are exposed to inclusive class.

Respondent B:

“The regular students have a deep understanding of the materials”

“By often becoming a peer tutor for their inclusive friends (helping shadow teachers), regular children become more understanding of what they are learning.”

Respondent C:

“The regular students are more confident because they often tutor their special needs friends.”

Respondent D:

“The regular students understand the lessons better because they are asked to be tutors in class.”

Respondent F:

“Children are confident since they are asked to become a teacher for their friends.”

Based on the data supplied by respondents in the study paper, it shows that regular students have a full understanding of academic subjects, which might be attributed to their jobs as tutors for peers with special needs. Respondents B, C, D, and F agree that these students not only have a thorough comprehension of the subject matter but also gain confidence from their teaching obligations. These results imply that having normal students serve as tutors not only enhances their personal learning experiences but also boosts their self-confidence and teaching talents, resulting in a more supportive and inclusive educational environment. As Nikta Oktifa (2023) posits, "Self-confidence in teenagers and children will grow if they are given trust." This

assertion underscores the transformative impact of trust and responsibility bestowed upon regular students, leading to their evolution into more confident versions of themselves as they collaborate with their peers with special needs under the guidance of teachers.

Findings (2): Regular Students Exhibit More Empathetic and Conscious in Inclusive Classrooms.

This study indicated that children who learnt in an inclusive context exhibit emphatic and mindful behavior more easily. All responses stated on that.

Respondent A:

“Rather than the academic aspect, it can be seen in aspective that the students have more concern and empathy for their friends.”

“Those children (Regular Students) are educated and aware of disabilities earlier.”

Respondent B:

“...and outside of academics, the regular students have high empathy for their friends.”

Respondent C:

“Children understand the differences and diversity in school better and they are aware of disabilities.”

Respondent D:

“They have high empathy.”

Respondent E:

“Regular children become more aware of disabilities and appreciate God's creation and accept the diversity that exists.”

Respondent F:

“Regular students have high empathy.”

Based on the data supplied by respondents in the study paper, regular children clearly show significant empathy for their peers, displaying heightened awareness of impairments and a stronger respect for diversity within the school community. The research shows that, in addition to their academic pursuits, these students value empathy and inclusion in their relationships with others. Furthermore, Yuni Nurhamida's (2016) findings support these observations, demonstrating that students' cognitive empathy skills are sufficient to understand and respect their peers' exceptional needs and rights. This collective knowledge emphasizes the necessity of instilling empathy and inclusiveness in students, as it helps to create a more helpful and harmonious educational atmosphere in which every individual feels valued and appreciated.

Findings (3): Inclusive Education Challenges: Home-School Collaboration, Special Needs' Tantrums, and The essential of Parental Involvement and Teacher Workshops

Effective interaction between parents and teachers can be challenging at times, as can dealing with special needs students' outbursts in class. This study's replies focus mostly on these concerns.

Respondent A:

“Having coordination with parents sometimes becomes an obstacle, especially in terms of getting their children used to the good things taught at school to be practiced at home.”

Respondent B:

“In preparing effective and efficient learning for children with regular and special needs.”

Respondent C:

“Prepare learning strategies; teaching aids, and when children with special needs have tantrums in class.”

Respondent D:

“Children with special needs who have tantrums in class”

Respondent F:

“Communicating with parents, sometimes parents rarely attend socialization events held by the school.”

Based on the data supplied by respondents in the study paper, the respondents' results suggest major barriers to developing successful home-school collaboration and addressing various learning requirements, particularly for children with special needs. Respondent A emphasizes the difficulty of working with parents to ensure that beneficial habits taught at school are consistently applied in the home environment. This highlights a critical gap between school and home environments, which impedes the reinforcing of vital skills and values gained in the classroom. Respondent B emphasizes the importance of planning learning experiences for both regular and special needs children, requiring educators to use strategies that are not only effective but also efficient in accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities, thereby ensuring an inclusive educational environment. While respondent C emphasizes the significance of creating individualized learning tactics specifically teaching aids, particularly for children with special needs who may exhibit tantrums in class. Addressing these behaviors necessitates proactive steps and specific ways that accommodate individual needs while ensuring a positive learning environment for all. Furthermore, responses D and F provide additional insight into the complexity of inclusive education. Respondent D emphasizes the unique problem of managing tantrums in children with special needs in the school context, highlighting the importance of effective interventions to address disruptive behaviors while providing a supportive learning environment. Respondent F adds insight on the topic of parental participation, stating that some parents may not actively participate in school events or socializing activities, thereby jeopardizing successful home-school communication and collaboration. In fact, parents' collaboration is essential to the success of children's education. Knowing teachers with limited time and resources may find it challenging to provide emotional support and customized education while maintaining strong academic standards (Thompkins & Deloney, 1995). Therefore, these findings prove the importance of holistic methods, as home-school coordination can be challenging to implement, dealing with student tantrums, even if handled by the shadow teacher, and developing the most effective teaching strategies, including teaching aids for both regular and special needs.

On the other hand, according to this study, some changes, such as workshops and increased awareness of prenatal engagement, are crucial.

Respondent A:

“Monthly and annual workshops as well as Learning Communities; inclusive sharing program among teachers.”

“Joining intensive meetings with parents once a month and also a Home Visit program which is carried out at least once a year”

Respondent B:

“Workshops, by inviting experts in the field of inclusion from outside every few months, and there is also a Learning Community program that provides sharing sessions with other inclusive teachers.”

“Communicate with the homeroom teacher, and the homeroom teacher will communicate directly with the parents.”

Respondent C:

“Workshop at the beginning of every semester”

“According to established procedures, it will be communicated to the homeroom teacher (The communication term with parents)”

Respondent D:

“A workshop from the foundation once a year.”

“One to one communication with parents, and also continuous education regarding class conditions.”

Respondent E:

“Workshop.”

“Communicate with parents directly or via chat.”

Respondent F:

“Workshop from the school”

“Communicate with parents directly or via chat.”

Based on the data supplied by respondents in the study paper, it highlights the importance of workshops and collaborative activities in promoting inclusive education. Respondents A, B, and C emphasize the effectiveness of workshops, learning communities, and communication channels in providing teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for inclusive practice. These sites offer professional development opportunities, allowing educators to keep up to date on best practices and creative inclusion techniques. Furthermore, as Respondent A said, intense meetings with parents and home visit programs promote direct involvement between instructors and families, building a deeper awareness of children's needs and encouraging collaborative partnerships to support their learning journey. Similarly, Respondent B emphasized the necessity of communication between instructors and homeroom teachers, who act as intermediaries in interacting with parents, thereby ensuring a cohesive approach to inclusive education. Furthermore, Respondents D, E, and F highlight the importance of workshops and direct connection with parents in encouraging inclusive behaviors. While seminars conducted by the school or external experts give useful insights and training opportunities, one-on-one interaction with parents allows instructors to address particular problems and personalize assistance to each student's requirements. These findings underscore educators' comprehensive strategy of combining formal training and individual interactions to build inclusive classroom settings. As well known that inclusion requires educators to apply individualized education, accommodate emotional needs, and offer professional assistance within a bigger framework (Andrew J. Collins, 2015). By encouraging cooperation among teachers, parents, and stakeholders, these efforts not only increase teacher capacity but also expand the support network for children with various learning needs, resulting in a more inclusive and supportive educational ecosystem.

Findings (4): Hands-On Task is The Effective Learning Strategy in Inclusive Classrooms.

Out of six respondents, half thought that task-based and hands-on tasks represented the best approaches to use in inclusive settings.

Respondent A:

“Games and observation; real word activity using hands on.”

Respondent D:

“The learning strategy uses hands-on task learning, adapted and modified to suit the special needs in the class.”

Respondent F:

“By using hands-on task learning that is applicable to all groups (Regular and Special Needs”

Based on the data supplied by respondents in the study paper, respondent A emphasizes the wide use of hands-on tasks such as games, observation exercises, and real-world projects to provide engaging and practical learning experiences that appeal to a variety of learning styles. Respondent D emphasizes the adaptation of hands-on task learning to special education students' individual requirements, as well as the need of personalized instructional practices in creating a supportive learning environment that fosters academic success for all learners. Furthermore, Respondent F's remark highlights the universal application of hands-on activity learning in increasing inclusion across student groups. Educators may guarantee that all learners have access to meaningful learning experiences by assigning hands-on assignments that are relevant and interesting to both mainstream and special needs students. These findings highlight the transformative power of hands-on, task-based learning strategies in improving collaboration, skill development, and academic success in a variety of classroom settings, enabling educators to create dynamic and inclusive learning environments that promote equity and excellence in education. Moreover, by integrating the hands-learning the students are facilitated by various learning styles. “Hands-on learning allows for equal visibility of common learning styles in the classroom. Some children learn best by looking at visuals, some by listening to a parent or teacher speak, and some by reading and writing about a given topic. These are called visual, auditory, and reading/writing learning styles, respectively.” (Lydia Martin.2022.friendscentral.org, 21 August 2020).

Finally, based on an in-depth analysis of the 4 findings in this study, it is obvious that students in inclusive classrooms have much better levels of empathy and awareness than their counterparts in non-inclusive environments. This increased awareness appears as a better comprehension of disability and a higher compassion for diversity in the educational setting, resulting in a more supportive and harmonious learning environment. The findings suggest that ordinary students in inclusive settings have higher academic confidence and competency, owing to their responsibilities as peer tutors for students with special needs. This tutoring experience not only improves their understanding of academic subjects, but it also increases their confidence and teaching abilities, all of which contribute to academic achievement for all students. However, the implementation of inclusive education brings obstacles, such as managing contact with parents, developing appropriate teaching aids, and dealing with disruptive conduct in class. Various solutions, including continuous professional development and sharing sessions, are advised to promote innovation and successful methods in inclusive education

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude, the study suggests that integrating children with special needs into ordinary classrooms had no significant influence on their classmates' academic ability while providing major benefits to typical students, such as improved academic knowledge and self-esteem. These findings are consistent with prior studies (McCarty, 2006) and highlight the potential of inclusive education to provide fair opportunities for all students. To optimize the benefits of inclusive education, numerous recommendations are made: prioritize continual professional development for teachers, use government resources to promote inclusive efforts, and undertake further research into beneficial techniques. Furthermore, fostering parental participation and experimenting with various teaching styles customized to different learning requirements are critical. Investigating the impact of technology in increasing accessibility and performing cross-cultural studies on inclusive practices can help to develop global inclusive education. By following these principles and research goals, stakeholders and future researchers may work together to build more inclusive and supportive educational environments for all children. Beyond recommendations for school stakeholders, future researchers are encouraged to explore critical areas in inclusive education. These include investigating the long-term effects of inclusionary policies on students' academic performance, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. And analyzing different teaching strategies catered to different learning requirements and evaluating how technology might improve accessibility for students with impairments. Finally, this study faced limitations due to the physical distance between the researchers in Malaysia and the respondents in Bali, which necessitated the use of Zoom Cloud Meetings for interviews. While this method enabled remote participation, conducting face-to-face interviews could have offered a more seamless experience and avoiding the internet connectivity issues potential. Future studies might consider in-person interviews to enhance the quality and depth of the data collected.

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