

## **Indonesian Perspectives on Inclusion: Teachers, Parents, and Students Perspective**

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**Abstract:** One of the most significant changes in education over the past few decades has been the movement towards inclusive education. Many schools are encouraged to implement an inclusive approach in accepting and educating students with disabilities. One of the disabilities students encounter in the regular class is learning disability (LD). This study uses a case study approach to examine the perspectives of students with LD, parents of students, and classroom teachers in regular schools that held inclusive education. A number of similarities and differences in perspective between students, parents, and teachers in each case were identified. Similarities and differences in perspective were also found between each case. Some practical implications will emerge from this study.

**Keywords:** inclusion, teachers' perceptions, parents' perceptions, students' perceptions

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most significant changes in education over the past decade has been the movement towards inclusive education. Currently, inclusive education in Indonesia is an idea that has been supported by government policy, which is the Republic of Indonesia Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009 concerning inclusive education for students who have disabilities and have potential intelligence and/or special talent. Thus, schools are encouraged and are required to implement inclusive education that accepts all children, including students with LD.

A number of studies have shown that students with LD do not perform well academically and they make minimal progress in general education classes (Fuchs, Fuchs, Fernstrom, 1993; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998). However, there are also studies that show that students with LD can achieve success in inclusive classes (Chmiliar, 2009). Unfortunately, the question of whether inclusive programs are effective for students with LD can not be answered. Inclusive classrooms are diverse and filled with dynamic settings with lots of connections between students, teachers, and parents. Therefore, it is important to see how stakeholders experience various aspects of inclusion (Schumm & Vaughn, 1998) and examine their perspectives to develop a comprehensive picture of inclusive classes.

Other studies concerning the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students were done by some researchers. Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, and Monsen (2004) found that parents, students, and teachers all reported academic and social benefits in the setting of mainstream/inclusive education. Agreement

among stakeholders regarding the need for students to have some level of self-determination, the need for communication, and the need for administrative support were identified (Lehmann, Bassett, & Sands, 1999). Swedeen (2009) found differences in the meaning of inclusion term among members of stakeholder groups. Chmiliar (2009) examined differences in the perceptions of middle school students, their parents, and their teachers regarding students' self-confidence. After moving to inclusive programs, parents and teachers reported that students displayed increased self-esteem and self-confidence, solidarity, and higher expectations.

Several studies have examined and compared perceptions of social skills according to teachers and students. McLeod, Kolb, and Lister (1994) found that the perception of regular education teachers differed significantly from students with LD regarding to social and school skills that are important for success. Similarly, Pavri and Monda-Amaya (2001) found that teachers and students identified different roles for themselves, also, preferences for social intervention strategies according to teachers and students were different. The different perceptions of students with special education needs and teachers in inclusive classes. He found that students with special needs had lower self-concept scores, and accompanying teachers expressed more negativity regarding inclusion. Students' perceptions of their academic difficulties and this perception changed after learning strategies, with the changes were related to teacher perceptions regarding the strategies students used. Students were more consistent in using strategies after instruction and the teacher considered them to be more strategic.

There are only few studies that examined and compared the perceptions of teachers and parents about inclusion. The perceptions of teachers and parents and they found differences in opinion between the two groups about the future of inclusion, even though the two groups supported inclusion and its continuation. Differences in parents and teacher perceptions of individual transition planning (Chmiliar, 2009).

Based on an analysis of several studies above, there are still a number of gaps or shortcomings in those studies, such as there are still few studies that systematically examine and compare the inclusion experiences of students with LD, their parents, and their regular education teachers. The majority of studies report separate perspectives from each stakeholder group without cross-comparisons. Checking and comparing perspectives are important to get a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion experiences and potential differences between experiences and to identify factors that possibly contribute to or hinder the success of inclusive education programs. Inclusive classrooms are basically complex environments that must involve active participation from all stakeholders to make inclusion programs successful.

The classroom teacher's perception or view of inclusion has been widely discussed in several literatures. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that in general, teachers expressed positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities and saw benefits and positive values in inclusion. However, special education teachers may be more supportive of full inclusion than general education teachers (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2004). Those teachers expressed unpleasant attitude towards teaching students with severe disabilities, but this attitude could change as a result of experience and/or training (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2004).

Based on analysis of several studies ranged from 1958 to 1995, teachers often reported that they did not have sufficient time or training in order to teach in inclusive classrooms. Lack of training could lead to low self-esteem and guilt (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Meanwhile, teachers working in an inclusive collaborative environment reported positive attitudes and results.

There are several studies that have examined the perspectives of parents of students with LD. Many parents reported positive support for inclusive class placement (Myles & Simpson, 1990) because they reported increased self-esteem, opportunities for socialization, increased student enjoyment, participation, as well as positive social and emotional outcomes (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). However, parental reluctance to reintegration has also been reported. (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2004) found that parents expressed preference for inclusive classroom settings,

but when involved in the arrangement, they were actually more satisfied with separate services. Parents have expressed continuing need to engage with school, positive and negative experiences with school, and social care. Leyser and Kirk (2004) further noted parents' concerns about social isolation, negative attitudes, quality of teaching, and teacher training and skills in inclusive classes.

Students with disabilities have strong individual perceptions about their school placement (Shah, 2007). They like inclusive classrooms because they are more suitable and more fun to find friends (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). They have preference for working in small groups and doing work harder in inclusive and more accepted classrooms. They also have a higher self-perception, and more satisfying relationships (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). On the other hand, students with LD like to attend the learning room because they get additional assistance and are involved in activities. However, they are concerned about activities that are skipped in the regular education class (Padeliadu & Zigmond, 1996). Students can choose to receive special instructions outside the regular class (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998) because they can concentrate better and get help easily.

## METHOD

This study aims to explore how students with LD, their teachers, and their parents perceive inclusion. A descriptive qualitative method was used in this study, with a case study approach.

This study involved three students with LD in inclusive classes, in the 6C and 6D classes of BPI Bandung Elementary School, two general class teachers where both of them were vice-principal of the students, and three parents of the LD students. Three case studies were carried out with data collection techniques through both oral and written interviews with the data collected from students with LD, their class teacher, and the parents of the students.

A case study analysis framework was used as data analyzing technique. As stated by (Shah, 2007) that if the purpose of the case study analysis is to collect comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information about each interesting case, then each case analysis includes all interview data and field notes collected during the interview process. The collected data became the initial capital in the study. In this study, testing the validity of the data was done by means of data triangulation. The steps in conducting data analysis were data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Data were compiled into a comprehensive description that includes all the main information used in case analysis and case

studies. Each analysis of individual case studies began with a description of each student, teacher, and parent's perspective. Finally, case studies were integrated in all cases, exploring similarities and differences between students, teachers, and parents.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Case Study 1*

Student - Nayla was 11 years old, sitting in class 6C. She showed that she liked 6C class because she had lots of friends and the teachers were nice to her. She reported that if she had trouble, she could talk to her teachers which made her life easier. The only thing she did not like was those who loved to tease about her weight. Nayla reported that completing homework assignments alone was very difficult. She also said that working with her partner friends was very helpful because "she/he can help me when I can't do homework, and I'm happy ... ha ... ha ...". She spoke positively about how the teacher gave her additional helps on tests, copies of notes, reduced number of test questions, and modified homework assignments.

Teacher – Nayla's teacher, Ms. M, has been teaching for 15 years. Ms. M was a class teacher and homeroom teacher at 6C. In this class, there were 30 students and there were three students with special needs. Ms. M expressed her commitment to inclusion, and although she received support from a special accompanying teacher (GPK), she felt uncomfortable when the children in her class experienced severe problems. According to her, Nayla was quite successful in class and had many friends. Shee felt that Nayla also had irritability which sometimes interfered with her learning. Ms. M mentioned that she adjusted the learning in the classroom by giving extra time for homework and re-implementation (tests), modification of exam questions, and assistance from GPK. Based on the interview, Ms. M showed that routine contact with parents was still lacking, as it only happened at the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester when distributing report cards, although for certain things they often communicated via whatsapp (wa), and that meetings to discuss the Education Plan The PPI for Nayla this year has never been held specifically with Nayla's parents. But her parents once said, at the beginning of the semester, that they trusted and gave up entirely on school policy.

Parents – Nayla's Mother explained that Nayla had experienced difficulties in the first few years of schooling and as a result, Nayla was negative and very sad. When entering fourth grade, Nayla was accompanied by GPK who was in school, Nayla also liked to get additional or remedial specifically from her GPK. Nayla's mother regularly had to help Nayla while

doing her homework. But according to her, currently in 6th grade, Nayla seemed to have made good progress, because she liked her teacher and seemed to be getting better at her study. According to Nayla's mother, there were many difficulties in school occurred because of the lack of communication between teachers and her, from year to year. Nayla's mother said that the communication with the teacher so far was good and smooth, but it had never been discussed about Nayla's PPI. She expressed uncertainty about how to be involved in the process of drafting the PPI, she believed fully in the teacher and the school.

### *Case Study 2*

Student - Kayla was 11 years old, sitting in class 6C. Kayla explained that she was happy in this class because many of her friends and homerooms were good. She mentioned that she did not like the accompanying teacher (his GPK, Ms. A) who gave her an additional class to learn reading. She also did not like being teased at school because it really frustrated her. Kayla stated that this year was more difficult than previous years, but she was able to focus more and have made progress in the academic field. She reported that she often experienced frustration in completing class assignments and homework. Kayla reported that her teacher helped her by explaining the lesson, but she often got left behind by her friends. She reported that she liked the learning aid class because she got more help and fun activities, especially if her teacher was Mr. Agus (one of the GPK who sometimes accompanies Kayla). However, she also wanted to progress academically so that she no longer had to attend study help classrooms: She said, "If I can't always learn, surely I will go back to extra class because I need it".

Teacher - Kayla's teacher, Ms. M, has been teaching for 15 years. Ms. M was a class teacher and homeroom teacher at 6C. In that class, there were 30 students and there were three students with special needs including Kayla and Nayla. Ms. M expressed her commitment to inclusion, and although she received support from a special accompanying teacher (GPK), she felt uncomfortable when the children in her class experienced severe problems. The students with LD got a learning aid class for reading and math from the GPK in the school. Ms. M felt that "the inclusion of children with LD is very beneficial for everyone. However, if children continue to struggle with their learning they cannot be involved with any activities ... I think inclusion is not a good hope". Ms. M reported that Kayla had a little problem when following class rules and group work. Ms. M reported that she had not succeeded with the modification of the exam questions because Kayla was still often facing difficulties to read and understand what she was reading. She had limited communication contacts with Kayla's parents because her mother was busy working and rarely communicated with her.

Parents – Kayla’s mother stated that school was always a struggle for Kayla. Since grade 1 Kayla often returned before school was over due to various causes. Kayla’s mother reported that they were still very dependent on the accompanying teacher who helped with Kayla’s lessons. She felt that “this year might be the most difficult and Kayla really needs help”. She had a minimal involvement in Kayla’s learning program because she was “busy with her work”, but she believed and submitted her education policy of Kayla to her teachers at school.

### *Case Study 3*

Student - Keiko was 12 years old, sitting on the 6th class. She reported that the best thing about this year was that she was in the 6D classroom and did not have to go to additional classes for study assistance. Keiko also liked to have friends in class and reported that the teacher’s help was very important. Keiko said that learning aid was good for making her “learn better and harder” and to be able to “concentrate”. This 6 year class was a good class. Keiko said that “homework is something that is not fun because it makes me really frustrated”. She showed that her teacher reduced the number of questions of daily tests and final exams. When doing group work with her friends, Keiko was happy because it made her able to do the task faster.

Teacher - Keiko’s teacher, Mr. Ar, has been teaching for 20 years. Mr. Ar was a classroom teacher and homeroom teacher. In his class, there were 28 students and there were two students with special needs, and one of them was Tegar. Mr. Ar was a teacher who participated in the inclusion team at school. He expressed a positive perspective on inclusion, according to students with special needs to get more help and progress by being in a regular classroom than the idea if they were placed in a special class. He also added that Keiko “has a pair of friends ... and he seems very happy”. Mr. Ar explained that he reduced the number of jobs or exam questions that Keiko had to solve by almost half compared to her other friends, and adjusted her expectations in terms of the quality of work. Keiko’s homeworks were also reduced, in relevance with her abilities. Mr. Ar reported that he had regular contact (good communication) with all parents, including Keiko’s parents, although he had never discussed specifically about PPI for Keiko.

Parents - Keiko’s mother explained that Keiko began to show learning problems at the age of 7 or 8 years, and began to get help from a companion teacher when she was in grade 3. Learning assistance from GPK was very helpful. Keiko’s mother said, “I thought Keiko only had one friend who was relatively close at school, apparently she had many close friends and had very good relations with her teachers.” She felt

that “this year ... was better than last year” especially because she consistently accompanied Keiko. She was very concerned with homework assigned and often helped Keiko to complete her homework. She felt that Keiko did not have to have a PPI in this 6th grade.

### *Comparison among Students*

The three students were one boy with LD and two girls with LD. All three sit in the 6th grade of regular schools that hold inclusive education. Kayla and Nayla regularly got additional learning classes for enrichment or remedial, which were adjusted to their needs. In addition, Keiko this year no longer received the additional class. All students considered that one of the things they liked most was having friends in regular classes. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998; Vaughn & Klingner 1998). Four out of five students reported that the best thing this year was their teacher; they talked about how their teacher helped and supported them in class, and described the positive feedback they received. In all these cases, one of the most important aspects of inclusive classrooms in the perceptions of students was the teacher. Freeman, Stoch, Chan, and Hutchinson (2004) found similar results in a retrospective study of adults with learning difficulties. They found that strong teacher-student relationships were a significant factor in secondary school completion. Perhaps the relationship students develop with the teacher, and how this relationship is felt by students, is an important field that must be considered in inclusive classes.

Two students mentioned that this year was the best year compared to previous years, while one student felt that grade 6 was more difficult than previous years. This finding is possible because the needs of students were currently being filled with preparations to face the National Examination, but the positive relationship they had with their teachers and colleagues greatly helped the learning process.

The students in this study described a number of class adaptations they received. They got a reduction in the number of test questions or exams and a reduction in homework assignments. Students in this study stated different perspectives on adjusted assignments and terms of group work. Some students with LD preferred that no adaptation be made, while the others accepted the adaptation assessments. These findings indicate the need to match class adaptations to the strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of each student, rather than using the same approach for all of students..

The students’ perspective in this study regarding homework was similar to that stated in the literature. Students found homework to be a slow, difficult, and frustrating process (Nelson, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi,

& Sawyer, 1998) and reported satisfaction or the need to have the opportunity to complete homework in schools where they could access assistance and support from the teachers. Homework was a source of concern for students with LD so that policies in an inclusive classroom need to be considered.

#### *Comparison among Teachers*

This study reveals that the teacher's perspective on the inclusion of students with disabilities into the classroom is similar to the perspective expressed in the literature. The teachers in the study reported positive perspectives on inclusion (Bunch et al., 1997). Two of the teachers reported reluctance to teach students with severe disabilities and all teachers indicated that lack of time was a major problem (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). One teacher also pointed out that he/she believed schools should provide inclusive experiences and improvement support because inclusive classes were better for these students.

In contrast to previous studies that identified concerns about whether effective strategies were implemented in inclusive classrooms (Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995), the teachers in this study used class adaptation in tests, assignments, homework, and motivational supports.

The teachers also discussed how they applied each of these classroom adaptations depending on the individual needs of each student with LD. However, no teacher reported the teaching and learning strategies in the classroom. This finding is consistent with the literature (Zigmond & Baker, 1997), where teachers reported making routine adaptations, such as variations in material, grouping arrangements and learning goals. It is important that general education teachers who teach students with LD in their class do more than reduce classroom requirements. This is necessary to provide instruction in learning strategies and provide some improvement support for learning difficulties.

All teachers in this study had years of teaching experience. Moreover, since 2007, their schools have begun to accept students with special needs. All teachers agreed on the importance of having the opportunity and time to collaborate with GPK to solve problems and plan learning as a team. This finding is consistent with the report by Minke, Bear, Deemer, and Griffin (1996). Collaboration in inclusive settings can enrich teaching experience, help program teacher plans for students with special needs, and help overcome challenges in the classroom.

#### *Comparison among Parents*

The parents in this study explained in detail the difficulties their children experienced in the early grades, and described the difficulties in accessing

support for their children. Soodak and Erwin (2000) also reported that the initial bad experiences of parents lead to negative perspectives. This statement highlights the importance of having a process in kindergarten and class 1 to identify children who experience difficulties in school and provide appropriate support for them.

All parents reported that they had never discussed PPI for their children, stated that they were not familiar with and uncertain about the purpose of the PPI, and even one parent felt that his/her child did not need to have an PPI. This finding is very concerning and has been reported previously in the literature (Green & Shinn, 1994). It seems that more effort is needed to inform parents about the PPI and involve them in the process of drafting the PPI. If parents are included in the process as partners, then perhaps the progress reported to the goals and objectives will be easier to remember and relevant to them.

The parents in this study reported major challenges in handling homework and the time commitment and responsibilities involved in homework and dealing with school problems. Duhaney and Salend (2000) reported similar results.

All parents in this study reported that the current school placement in inclusive classes was the best, although in some cases it was also the most difficult year. This may be due to an increase in their children's self-esteem, expanded social relations and interactions, increased desire to participate in group activities, and in some cases increase values and attitudes in inclusive programs. This may also be due to the good relationships reported by students with teachers now or because nowadays classrooms have many adaptations that help students participate in class activities.

#### *Comparison among Case Studies*

A number of similarities and differences were found in a general perspective among the three case studies. There were differences in views between teachers and parents regarding the content and process of PPI in most case studies. This finding shows that although teachers feel they are doing adequate work related to PPI, this perception is not necessarily the same with those of parents of students. As mentioned earlier, this shows that there may be a need for schools to involve parents in the process of drafting PPI.

In comparing the perspectives of stakeholders in this study, similarities were found about how students experienced progress during school and students' socialization and friendship abilities. Similarities in the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers regarding students' social abilities. Conversely, other studies (McLeod et al., 1994; Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001) found differences in the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers regarding the social position and friendship of students with LD.

The results of this study show some practical implications for schools. Parents in this study wanted to be partners in the inclusive education process and committed time and energy to ensuring the success of their children in school. Unfortunately, information from schools to parents is still severely limited. Based on those parents' experience, it is important for schools to provide information to parents regarding their role in the process of drafting the PPI as well as encouragement and opportunities to become active partners. It is also important that parents and teachers have the opportunity to share a general perspective to more effectively determine the needs of their children.

This is evident from this study that students with LD can provide very valuable information about their experiences in inclusive classes. Adaptation or experience felt negatively by students can have a negative impact on them. Conversely, knowledge of the adaptation felt by students can help teachers build a positive and successful learning environment and contribute to the development and evaluation of programs, which allows students to take an active part in the educational process (Shah, 2007).

The teachers in this study identified the need for adequate planning time and access to collaborate with GPK colleagues. Unfortunately, the current funding problem at school makes it very difficult for school administration to provide the time and professional support needed. They need to find new and innovative ways to build collaboration in schools. This requires joint efforts by leadership personnel to create and grow an environment where collaboration can develop.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study illustrate that each stakeholder in an inclusive class has a different perspective. Similarities and important differences in perspective were found in this study. Consideration of stakeholder perspectives in inclusive classrooms can help identify barriers to inclusion, provide information on strategies in inclusive and effective classrooms, and provide a basis for discussion of how perceptions might be used to improve services in inclusive classroom settings.

Although this study provides insights related to the perspective of students, parents, and inclusive classroom teachers, the conclusions from this study cannot be generalized because the research setting is only in one inclusive school in the city of Bandung. In addition, all classrooms and teachers have been recommended by principals for participation in this study, so there is a possibility that researchers are referred to teachers who show positive attitudes and practices towards inclusion. Although there may be some bias in the selection of research participants, all participants freely discussed their issues and perspectives during the interview process.

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