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Building an Inclusive Classroom: Emotional Disturbance and Gender Diversity in Elementary Schools

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan dan strategi dalam menciptakan kelas inklusif yang ramah bagi siswa dengan gangguan emosional dan identitas gender beragam di sekolah dasar. Tujuan ini didasarkan pada merespon kebutuhan akan lingkungan belajar yang aman, suportif, dan responsif terhadap keragaman peserta didik. Metode penelitian pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, melibatkan 35 guru dari sekolah dasar inklusif di Jakarta Timur. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang mencakup tiga aspek utama: tantangan yang dihadapi, pengaruh pendidikan multikultural, dan strategi yang diterapkan dalam mendukung inklusi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para guru menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti keterbatasan sumber daya, kurangnya pemahaman mendalam tentang kebutuhan siswa, serta hambatan dalam komunikasi. Namun demikian, pendidikan multikultural terbukti mampu meningkatkan empati, toleransi, dan keterampilan sosial siswa. Strategi inklusif yang dinilai efektif mencakup adaptasi kurikulum, peningkatan kapasitas guru melalui pelatihan, serta kolaborasi aktif dengan orang tua. Para guru juga melaporkan dampak positif pendidikan inklusif terhadap sikap dan capaian belajar siswa, termasuk peningkatan rasa percaya diri, tanggung jawab sosial, dan kemampuan bekerja sama. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya penyediaan sumber daya yang memadai dan program pelatihan berkelanjutan bagi guru guna memperkuat implementasi pendidikan inklusif di tingkat sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: Kelas Inklusi; Keberagaman Gender; Sekolah Dasar; Gangguan Emosional

Abstract

This research aims to explore the challenges and strategies in creating inclusive classrooms that are friendly to students with emotional disorders and diverse gender identities in primary schools. This goal is based on responding to the need for a learning environment that is safe, supportive, and responsive to student diversity. The research method of a descriptive qualitative approach involved 35 teachers from inclusive elementary schools in East Jakarta. Data were collected through questionnaires that covered three main aspects: the challenges faced, the influence of multicultural education, and the strategies implemented in supporting inclusion. The results show that teachers face various challenges, such as limited resources, lack of a deep understanding of students' needs, and barriers in communication. Nevertheless, multicultural education has been proven to be able to improve students' empathy, tolerance, and social skills. Inclusive strategies that are considered effective include curriculum adaptation, teacher capacity building through training, and active collaboration with parents. Teachers also reported the positive impact of inclusive education on students' attitudes and learning outcomes, including increased self-confidence, social responsibility, and teamwork. These findings underscore the importance of providing adequate resources and ongoing training programs for teachers to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level.

Keywords: Inclusion Class; Gender Diversity; Primary school; Emotional Disorders

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education focuses on providing an environment that supports all students regardless of social, cultural, or special needs (Nilholm, 2021). This is especially important in the context of primary school, where students are at an important stage of development in accepting and appreciating differences (Diab et al., 2017). In Indonesia, an inclusive approach is increasingly relevant in line with the high cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic conditions of students, which requires adjustments to the education system to be able to create a welcoming and adaptive learning environment for all students. This includes special attention to students with emotional disorders as well as those with gender expressions or identities that differ from traditional binary norms (male/female), who often face the risk of discrimination and exclusion in the school environment (Yetti & Jafar, 2022). The implementation of multicultural education in inclusive schools plays an important role in shaping a positive attitude towards diversity (Zamroni et al., 2024). Through this approach, students are taught to appreciate the differences that exist in their environment, including cultural, religious, and gender differences. Multicultural education also encourages the creation of a classroom atmosphere that is more tolerant, fair, and open to diverse perspectives (Aderibigbe et al., 2023), so as to support the achievement of inclusive and socially equitable educational goals.

Children in elementary school face various challenges in their growth and development process, including in the emotional aspect. Emotional disturbances in children often adversely affect their academic performance and social interactions, such as difficulty concentrating, withdrawing from socializing, or experiencing uncontrolled emotional outbursts. Ogundele (2018) highlight that emotional and behavioral disorders in children, such as anxiety and depression, tend to affect their ability to interact positively with peers and teachers, so it is important for teachers to understand and

manage these challenges effectively. On the other hand, gender diversity is still a sensitive issue in elementary schools because of the strong social norms that are binary. In fact, some studies show that support for diverse gender identities can increase students' attachment to school and reduce psychosocial stress. Lack of understanding and inclusive policies are the main challenges in the acceptance of this issue in the primary education environment (Ullman et al., 2017).

Inclusive education in primary schools has become a major concern in Indonesia in an effort to create a fair and equal learning environment for all learners, including those with emotional disorders and diverse gender identities (Yuwono & Mirnawati, 2021). According to Asyari et al. (2023) Most schools still do not have adequate resources to support students with special emotional needs and a variety of gender identities.

In this study, multicultural education is seen as the main tool for promoting tolerance and understanding in inclusive classrooms. Multicultural education in elementary school not only aims to teach students about diversity, but also instills an attitude of mutual respect, empathy, and openness to different identities and experiences (Sarjono et al., 2024). This approach is based on an inclusive education model that includes collaboration between teachers, the development of a responsive curriculum, and the application of learning methodologies that support the active participation of all students (Rosita et al., 2022). This is done to increase mutual respect and prevent conflicts that may arise from differences in backgrounds, including gender and emotional characteristics of students (Handayani et al., 2024). This research aims to explore the challenges of creating inclusive classrooms that are friendly to students with emotional disorders and diverse gender identities, as well as to find strategies that teachers can apply in support of their unique needs.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to describe and understand the realities and challenges in building inclusive classrooms that include gender diversity and emotional disturbances in elementary schools. The descriptive qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate because it provides an opportunity for researchers to examine and analyze the interactions and experiences of students and teachers in an inclusive environment (Nilholm, 2021). Participants in this study consist of teachers and students from several State Elementary Schools in the East Jakarta Region II area that have implemented an inclusive education system. A total of 35 teachers participated, representing a wide range of backgrounds of teaching experience and inclusion training. In addition, the students involved were students from inclusive classes who had a diversity of needs, including students with emotional disorders and diverse gender expressions. The selection of participants was carried out purposively to obtain a variety of perspectives relevant to the focus of the research. Data collection was carried out through the provision of questionnaires, teachers were asked to share their experiences in managing this diversity and provide an overview of the challenges faced (Fine et al., 2020). The questionnaire instruments given to teachers are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Teacher Observation Instruments

Aspects	Indicator
Challenges in building inclusive classrooms	Resource Limitations Lack of Understanding and Positive Attitude Time Limitations Communication Challenges Stigma and Discrimination
The Positive Influence of Multicultural Education	Increased Cultural Awareness Development of Empathy and Tolerance Enhancing a Sense of Unity Strengthening Self-Identity Meningkatkan Keterampilan Sosial

Inclusive Classroom Building Strategies	Curriculum Adaptation Teacher Training Use of Technology and Tools Encouraging Active Student Participation Collaboration with Parents Friendly Classroom Environment
Improved Attitudes and Learning Outcomes	Increased Confidence Academy Capability Enhancement Increasing a sense of social responsibility Improved Collaboration Capabilities Emotional Skills Development

Data is analyzed by the following steps: a) Data Reduction: Data collected from questionnaires, based on predetermined instruments (Staffini et al., 2022); b) Data Presentation: Data that has been grouped is presented in the form of a description; c) Conclusion Drawn: The results of the analysis were summarized to answer the research question, namely the strategies used by teachers in building inclusive classrooms and their impact on students with gender diversity and emotional disorders; d) Data Validity and Validity: The validity of the data is maintained by using data triangulation, which is comparing the results of the questionnaire to ensure the consistency of the information. This is so that the results of the research can provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the implementation of inclusive classes in inclusive elementary schools (Zamroni et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools has challenges as well as significant benefits for students, especially in terms of improving social and emotional understanding and tolerance. The following will be described the results of the research obtained from the respondents consisting of four components.

1. Challenges in building inclusive classrooms

Table 2. Components of the Challenge in building inclusive classes

No	Indicator	Mean	Presentase
1	Resource Limitations	4,2	84%
2	Lack of Understanding and Positive Attitude	4,0	80%
3	Time Limitations	4,1	82%
4	Communication Challenges	4,1	82%
5	Stigma and Discrimination	4,0	80%

From the data above, indicators of resource limitations, time constraints, and showing a high percentage of approval, Communication Challenges each obtained > 80% with an average score of > 4.0. This underlines these three indicators as the main challenges felt by teachers in developing inclusive classrooms. The discussion of each indicator is described as follows:

Resource Limitations obtained an average score of 4.2, which shows that the majority of teachers feel resource limitations as one of the main challenges. This includes a lack of disability-friendly facilities, such as wheelchair-accessible classrooms, special aids such as text readers, learning audio, or visual emotion cards, as well as a limited number of educators trained to handle the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. A high score indicates that improvements in this aspect will be very important, for example by adding special facilities or conducting intensive training for teachers. These findings are in line with the results of the study Sharma et al. (2016) Examining the use of teaching assistants in inclusive classrooms, shows that unclear roles and lack of communication can hinder effectiveness in inclusive classrooms, particularly in supporting students with special needs.

In contrast, the indicators of lack of understanding and positive attitudes obtained an average score of 4.0. The second indicator shows

that there are challenges in terms of understanding and positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusion, both from teachers, other students, and the surrounding community. These challenges can arise due to a lack of training, limited information, or the influence of socio-cultural values that have not fully embraced diversity. Therefore, in qualitative research, this indicator is not interpreted rigidly, but as an initial guide to dig deeper into the root of the problem through open dialogue with informants. This shows that education and training to raise awareness of the importance of inclusion need to be encouraged. This effort can also involve parents and the wider community to reduce prejudice or inappropriate understanding of students with special needs. The results of this study are supported by relevant findings by Woodcock et al. (2023) highlighting challenges in the implementation of inclusive education, particularly related to teachers' belief in inclusive education and their level of self-efficacy. Teachers with positive beliefs in inclusive education tend to have higher levels of self-efficacy, but factors such as teaching experience and educational qualifications also affect their ability to implement inclusive practices.

The average of time limitations is above 4.0. Time constraint indicators are quite a significant challenge. Many teachers find it difficult to allocate time to accommodate the individual needs of students, especially amid administrative responsibilities and a dense curriculum. These findings suggest the need for better time management strategies or schedule adjustments to accommodate the diversity of students' needs more effectively. In addition, in the indicator of communication challenges with an average of 4.1, it is considered one of the obstacles in creating an inclusive class. Teachers often face difficulties in managing interactions between students with different backgrounds and abilities, which has the potential to affect the classroom

atmosphere. This shows the need for training that focuses on developing effective communication skills and facilitating positive interactions between students.

The last indicator on the challenge component of building inclusive classes, stigma and discrimination obtained an average of 4.0. This shows that there is still a negative perception of students with special needs, both in the school environment and in the community. This can have an impact on students' mental and psychosocial health. To address this, schools need to promote anti-stigma programs and promote socialization about the importance of inclusion, both to students and parents. Various challenges are still obstacles for teachers and schools in building inclusive classrooms as conveyed by Latifah dan Supena (2020) also examines challenges in inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting learning adaptation for children with disabilities in primary schools, including in the provision of adequate facilities and in accordance with the needs of students. In line with research that mentions the importance of facilities tailored to the needs of children with special needs as part of the challenge of building inclusive classrooms (Temon Astawa, 2021).

2. The Positive Influence of Multicultural Education

Table 3. Components of the Positive Influence of Multicultural Education

No	Indicator	Mean	Presentase
1	Increased Cultural Awareness	3.7	74%
2	Development of Empathy and Tolerance	3.9	78%
3	Enhancing a Sense of Unity	3.8	76%
4	Strengthening Self-Identity	3.8	76%
5	Improving Social Skills	3.9	78%

The percentage data showed that the indicators of Development of Empathy and Tolerance and Improving Social Skills had the highest score with a percentage of > 77% compared to the indicator of Increasing Cultural Awareness with the lowest score with a percentage of <75%, indicating the need for strengthening in increasing cultural awareness in an inclusive classroom environment. The following are the findings of each indicator.

In the indicator of increasing cultural awareness, an average score of 3.7 was obtained. These findings suggest that teachers tend to agree that multicultural education has increased cultural awareness in inclusive classrooms. However, this score is the lowest among other aspects, which may indicate a greater challenge in fostering a deeper understanding of different cultures. Factors such as limited time for cultural discussions or the lack of multicultural teaching materials may affect the achievement of these aspects optimally.

The average score in the second indicator, namely the development of empathy and tolerance, obtained a score of 3.9, this was assessed positively by the teachers. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that multicultural education helps students become more empathetic and tolerant of differences in inclusive classrooms. In addition, these findings suggest that an inclusive approach is effective in building emotional sensitivity and understanding between students, which is important in creating a learning environment that supports all learners.

In the indicator of increasing the sense of unity, a score of 3.8 was obtained. This indicates that inclusive education encourages students to see the similarities between them and feel part of the classroom community. Teachers see that multicultural education has played a role in reducing differences and increasing the spirit of collaboration, so that students can work together without feeling isolated because of differences.

The self-identity strengthening indicator obtained an average score of 3.8, indicating that most teachers agree that multicultural education helps students value their own identity. This aspect is important, as it helps students to feel more confident and proud of their background, which in turn increases their active participation in the class. However, because there are still respondents who choose to be neutral or disagree, this can indicate that some students may still face challenges in expressing their identity in class.

Likewise, the indicator of improving social skills obtained an average score of 3.9. The social skills aspect gets the highest score along with the development of empathy and tolerance, which is 3.9. Teachers consider that multicultural education is very helpful in improving communication skills and cooperation between students. This suggests that inclusive and multicultural classrooms facilitate interactions that support important social skills for students, such as effective communication and appreciation of differences, which will be useful for students in their daily lives and in the future. These findings are in line with the findings Ainscow (2020) found that inclusive strategies can promote social cohesion and better educational outcomes in diverse environments.

3. Inclusive Classroom Building Strategies

Table 4. Components of an Inclusive Class Building Strategy

No	Indicator	Mean	Presentase
1	Curriculum Adaptation	3,51	70,2%
2	Teacher Training	3,86	77,2%
3	Use of Technology and Tools	3,46	69,2%
4	Encouraging Active Student Participation	3,86	77,2%
5	Collaboration with Parents	3,43	68,6%
6	Friendly Classroom Environment	4,09	81,8%

Overall, the results of the questionnaire showed that teachers tended to feel that key aspects of building inclusive classrooms had been well implemented, especially in creating a welcoming and supportive environment. However, the aspect of collaboration with parents and the use of technology and tools still needs more attention to achieve optimal effectiveness in inclusive learning. The following will be described the findings of each indicator in the strategic component of building an inclusive class.

The main indicator is that curriculum adaptation gets an average score of 3.51, this average score shows that most teachers agree that curriculum adaptation has been implemented well to support the needs of students in inclusive classes. However, this score also indicates that there are some teachers who feel that curriculum adaptation can still be improved. This shows the need for further review and development in adapting the curriculum to be more inclusive for all students.

The second indicator is that teacher training obtained an average of 3.86, Teacher training is seen as quite effective in preparing educators to manage inclusive classrooms. The majority of teachers feel that they receive sufficient support from inclusion-related training, although further improvements can be made, such as in terms of frequency or specialization of training. These findings are in line with the results of the study (Lestarinigrum, 2017) highlighting the strategy for implementing inclusive education in early childhood education by paying attention to the needs of diverse facilities and teacher competencies.

The next indicator is the use of Technology and Tools with an average score of 3.46, showing a perception that tends to be positive, but with some challenges in the application of technology and tools in the classroom. There are indications that the tools or technology provided may not be

fully adequate for students with special needs, which means improvements in facilities and tools are essential to support inclusive learning. In line with research McNicholl et al. (2021) It shows that the use of assistive technology for students with special needs in higher education has a positive impact, but it also faces various obstacles in its implementation. The research identified that assistive technologies, such as accessibility software and assistive devices, have helped students access learning more independently and actively engage in the classroom.

In the indicator of encouraging active participation, aiswa obtained an average score of 3.86, this is proof that teachers are trying to encourage active participation from all students in inclusive classes. This means that efforts to get all students actively involved in teaching and learning activities are quite effective, although there is still room for improvement, especially in paying attention to methods that can facilitate different learning styles and needs. The findings are relevant to the research by Nagro et al. (2018) Demonstrated that group response strategies to encourage student engagement in inclusive classrooms have a positive impact on encouraging active participation. These strategies, such as giving all students the opportunity to answer simultaneously or using other methods that involve the entire class, allow each student to actively engage in the learning process and prevent neglect in particular students.

In contrast, the indicator of collaboration with parents obtained the lowest score with an average: 3.43, this is a finding that collaboration between teachers and parents still needs to be improved. Possible challenges include communication constraints, time, or parents' understanding of the need for inclusive education. The results of this study are supported by Paccaud et al. (2021) In her research, she revealed parents' perspectives on collaboration

between family and school, focusing on their level of satisfaction. The results of this study show that despite efforts to involve families in inclusive education, there are still obstacles in parents' communication and understanding of their role in supporting children with special needs. These barriers often involve time constraints, ineffective communication, or differing views about student needs.

Moreover Mitchell (2014) In her book, she emphasizes the importance of evidence-based strategies in inclusive education, including close collaboration between teachers and parents to achieve optimal learning outcomes. She highlighted that this collaboration is crucial because parents have a deep understanding of their child's unique needs, which when integrated with inclusive teaching strategies, can improve learning outcomes.

In the indicator of a friendly classroom environment, it scores with the highest average, this reflects that most teachers feel that a friendly classroom environment has been successfully implemented. Teachers strive to create a supportive and welcoming classroom atmosphere for all students, which is important for students with a variety of backgrounds and special needs. The results of this study are relevant to previous findings by the Research by Kuyini et al. (2020) which examines teachers' confidence, attitudes, and concerns in Ghana regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The results showed that teachers generally have a high level of confidence in creating a welcoming classroom environment, but they also face challenges in meeting the specific needs of students. Despite concerns about a lack of support and resources, teachers still strive to create a supportive atmosphere for all students.

Meanwhile, the findings are supported by Lalak Muslimin and Muqowim (2021) which discusses the role of school principals in

supporting inclusive education policies at the elementary school level in Indonesia. They emphasized that the support of the principal is essential in creating an inclusive school culture. Proactive principals provide supportive policies and facilities, allowing teachers to build a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment for students with special needs.

4. Improved Attitudes and Learning Outcomes

Table 5. Improved Attitudes and Learning Outcomes

No	Indicator	Mean	Presentase
1	Increased Confidence	3,83	76,6%
2	Academy Capability Enhancement	3,63	72,6%
3	Increasing a sense of social responsibility	3,89	77,8%
4	Improved Collaboration Capabilities	3,94	78,8%
5	Emotional Skills Development	3,89	77,8%

Overall, teachers view inclusive education as an effective approach in developing various important aspects in students. The Collaboration Ability Improvement aspect obtained the highest score, which shows that inclusive education is very effective in strengthening cooperation skills. The Academic Ability Improvement aspect obtained the lowest score, which may be due to the stronger focus of inclusive education on social and emotional skills than academics. The following is a description of indicators on the components of improving attitudes and learning outcomes.

The first indicator is an increase in self-confidence with an average score of 3.83, meaning that teachers generally agree that inclusive education can increase students' confidence. This shows that inclusive education helps students feel accepted and valued in the classroom environment, which ultimately

strengthens their confidence in active participation. The findings are relevant to the findings Francisco et al. (2020) which reviews the importance of inclusion-centered education to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students. They emphasize that teaching that facilitates social interaction and appreciation of differences can improve positive attitudes and student learning outcomes.

Another indicator, namely the improvement of academic ability with an average score of 3.63, shows the view of teachers who tend to agree that inclusive education contributes positively to students' academic abilities. Although the impact appears to be lower than other aspects, it indicates that inclusive education can still drive academic improvement, although it may focus more on developing social and emotional skills. Relevant to research Hehir and Pascucci (2016) who found that inclusive classes can improve reading and math skills, increase attendance rates, and reduce behavioral problems, which benefits all students.

In contrast to the indicator of increasing the sense of social responsibility with an average score of 3.89, teachers consider that inclusive education is quite effective in fostering a sense of social responsibility among students. Inclusive education seems to make students more sensitive to the different needs of their peers, as well as creating an environment that supports social values such as empathy and responsibility. These results are supported by studies Wilson et al. (2020) focuses on the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy levels and student learning outcomes in inclusive classrooms. Results show that teachers with higher levels of efficacy tend to use teaching methods that are inclusive and have a positive impact on their students' attitudes and academic outcomes, especially in the context of inclusion involving emotional and gender diversity.

The fourth indicator in the component of improving attitudes and learning outcomes, namely the increase in collaboration ability, obtained the highest average score, which is 3.94, indicating that teachers strongly agree that inclusive education is able to improve students' collaboration skills. This reflects that an inclusive classroom environment encourages healthy social interaction, teamwork, and better understanding among students with diverse backgrounds and needs. This strengthening of collaboration skills will also be very beneficial for students in the future, both in academics and social life. Relevant research findings by Basit and Puspitarini (2020) highlighting the importance of developing ecological character in inclusive schools, which also focus on forming collaborative attitudes among students. In this context, inclusive education not only supports academic achievement but also encourages positive social interaction and collaboration between students. This research shows that an inclusive approach strengthens students' collaborative abilities, allowing them to work well together despite their differences in backgrounds and needs.

The last indicator in this component, namely the development of emotional skills, obtained an average score of 3.89, which shows that teachers consider inclusive education to have a positive impact on developing students' emotional skills. Inclusive education makes students better able to recognize and manage their own emotions, as well as increase empathy for the feelings of others, which is an important skill in managing social and personal relationships. These findings are supported by a research study by Szumski, Smogorzewska, and Karwowski (2017) Research in their meta-analysis showing that inclusive classes are not only beneficial for students with special needs but also have a positive impact on students without special needs, including in terms of emotional skills. The study found that

inclusive education encourages students to develop higher empathy and emotional awareness, as they become accustomed to interacting with peers from different backgrounds and needs. This inclusive environment facilitates students' ability to recognize and manage emotions, which is essential in building healthy social and personal relationships.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This research shows that inclusive and multicultural education in primary schools is very important to support students with emotional disorders and gender diversity, despite challenges such as limited resources, suboptimal understanding of inclusion, time constraints, communication challenges, and stigma and discrimination. The results of the study emphasized the positive benefits of a multicultural approach, such as increased empathy, tolerance, and social skills of students in an inclusive environment. In addition, inclusive education assists students in increasing their confidence, social responsibility, and collaborative abilities.

The strategies implemented by teachers, including curriculum adaptation, training, the use of assistive technology, and collaboration with parents, are considered important to create a learning environment that supports diversity. Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools and related parties improve facilities and training for teachers in order to maximize inclusive classroom management. Anti-stigma and diversity education programs also need to be promoted to reduce discrimination and increase cultural awareness among students and the surrounding community. In addition, collaboration with parents and a flexible curriculum approach are needed so that the needs of students from various backgrounds can be optimally accommodated. With the support of resources and a more inclusive approach, multicultural education is expected to be able to form students who are more empathetic,

tolerant, and ready to interact in a diverse society.

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