



# BENIFITS OF AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Inclusive education is part of the regional development mission of the Banyuwangi Regency in the 2016-2021 RPJMD "Realizing Accessibility and Quality of Education Services." The aim of this innovation is for all levels of schools to accept children with disabilities or to provide inclusive education. This study aims to determine the social development benefits of an inclusive education program in PAUD Cerdas, Banyuwangi, Indonesia. There were 130 students, 46 of whom had special needs such as ADHD, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, or speech and hearing impairments. The methodology used was Qualitative research was conducted through interviews with a headmaster, teacher, and a student parent. According to the research findings, it appears that the Inclusivity Education Program at PAUD CERDAS has the potential to enhance students social development, including communication skills, independence, and respect. Students' parents demonstrated positive self-esteem by developing patience and gratitude to God. In addition, inclusive education programs for early childhood have a greater potential for social development to continue education to the next level because their golden age is given a positive stimulus. In conclusion, it is believed that an inclusivity education program for early childhood has the potential to enhance social development.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusivity Education, Social development, Early Childhood*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the COVID-19 disaster, learning gaps widen and increase other confirmed inequalities. Inclusivity in education becomes even more important. Therefore, it is time to take into account the exclusionary processes that may stem from disability and other group-based vulnerabilities (de Beco, 2018; Tamim, 2021). As we know that the Goal 4 of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in 2030 are pledges for inclusive, equitable, and equality education for all (UNESCO, 2017). Based on that, one of the primary objectives for many teacher education programs is promoting inclusivity across the UK, USA, Canada, and other highly diverse countries. Promoting inclusivity is a challenge for teacher education programs for preparing teachers who feel confident to handle the diversity and inclusivity in their classroom (DeLuca, 2012).

Individuals with disabilities may encounter various challenges when it comes to being included in society. This may include negative attitudes from the public, lack of knowledge, and misunderstandings about disabilities. Many articles highlighted challenges faced by children, such as difficulty accessing educational placements. Providing opportunities for disabled children to share their experiences using their preferred communication means can offer valuable insights into their lives. It is important to support media professionals in facilitating children to have their voices heard (McAndrew et al., 2021). Inclusion and social justice are important aspects of belonging in a world that is free from poverty, illness, and prejudice. These values rely on interdependence, community, and collaborative efforts. It is important that we collaborate to address the marginalization and exclusion of impoverished and neglected individuals, and to avoid using privilege to exert control. By working together towards a common goal, each other can be free (Hodge, 2017).

The policy internationally and nationally as stipulated in Permendiknas no. 70 of 2009 and Law No.20 of 2003 on article 32, by providing opportunities for students with special needs to acquire education in regular schools (Saputra, 2016). Based on BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics) data, the number of children with special needs reached 1.6 million children in 2017 (Marani, 2017). Inclusive education becomes alternative education to



give opportunities for children who have physical disabilities so they can accept the material in public school. Inclusive education gives children the opportunity to socialize with other normal children and helps them to improve their emotional abilities. From its background, inclusive education is organized. Inclusive education exists as a child-friendly education and provides opportunities for children to develop their academic or nonacademic skills (Hafiz, 2017). Inclusive education, which is a teaching approach, guarantees that disadvantaged students are able to learn alongside their non-disadvantaged peers and have the same opportunities to receive education (Ünal & Yel, 2019).

There are several important points in implementing inclusive education in schools. The first is that every child has different abilities, interests, talents, ethnic backgrounds and so on. Second, every child has the ability to learn. And finally, the education system must meet the needs of children (Murniarti & Anastasia, 2016). Teachers' knowledge of inclusive education is essential to ensure that disabled children's rights are realized with the inclusive education program. positive expectations for all types of students and students with disabilities are one of them (Schuelka et al., 2020). The curriculum for children with special needs must receive attention in the world of education. Their cognition is very different from normal children so the curriculum for them must be different. For example, the learning approach for low vision children is to learn using touch and feeling as modalities. While students with hearing loss, learn by using speech reading and finger spelling (Marani, 2017).

Inclusive education has faced challenges in supporting children with disabilities, which can be attributed to a lack of awareness about disabilities factors, including a lack of awareness about disabilities, low levels of pedagogical skills, and a lack of commitment to the additional activities needed to support learners with disabilities in education. Additionally, there is a lack of available data to monitor the actual situation, and there is no clear structure for coordinating and administering special and inclusive education at all levels. Furthermore, there is an absence of an adequate financing mechanism. One of the challenges facing inclusive education is the lack of infrastructure, facilities, and adapted teaching and learning materials in schools. Additionally, there is a lack of a career structure to support educational professionals with disabilities in mainstream schools and inclusive education resource centers (IERCs) (Šiška et al., 2020).

Dijkstra (2012) said that education plays an important role in social-emotional development, such as fewer psychological problems, higher well-being, and better physical and mental health later in life. Effective inclusive practice in the early years, incorporating high quality programs and transition services have the capacity to enhance equitable practices and promote all children's learning and development. Quality relationships are an essential aspect of collaborative engagement between individual children and teachers, which leads to quality early childhood inclusive education. It is widely acknowledged that children learn best when they collaborate in a network of community. Therefore, it is important to ensure that children are not separated from their relationships, as it may hinder their learning. It is important to consider the interactions that children have with their teachers and peers in order to fully understand and support their developmental and learning conditions. It brings positive relationships, and positive relationships between children can have a positive impact on children's social, emotional and academic aspects (Anwar, 2022; Klibthong et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of inclusive education on early childhood social development. Descriptions from principals, teachers and parents contributed to the role of inclusive education programs on children's social skills. This research can provide positive hope for the development of inclusive education in Indonesia.



## 2. METHODS

The study's methodology was descriptive qualitative. The application of descriptive methods was a deliberate choice in response to the aims and objectives of the study. This choice influences the sampling, data collection, and analysis phases of the study (Doyle et al., 2020). The study utilized purposive sampling was used to select research participants based on their knowledge and experience relevant to the research aims (Ritchie et al., 2013). This study utilized purposive sampling given the limited sample size. The subject research is PAUD Cerdas, an inclusive preschool, as the best model inclusive education in Banyuwangi country for early childhood-education.

The data collection methods used in this descriptive research involved semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews, which are a commonly used approach for descriptive qualitative. Deep interviews were conducted with three sources: Fatmawati, as a founder and headmaster of PAUD Cerdas; Umi Hanik, as a transition class-teacher; and Mukaromah, as a parent student. The interview instrument functioned as a reliable guide for researchers throughout the interviews. The questions were designed to concentrate on classroom learning, the benefits that teachers and parents perceived for children's development, and the challenges encountered during the learning process. The method of analysis is determined by the objectives of the research, and as qualitative descriptive research is typically exploratory in nature, it aims to provide a detailed description of the subject matter (Kim et al., 2017).

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results of the interview with Fatmawati, founder and principal of PAUD Cerdas can be seen below.

**Question:** *When was PAUD Cerdas established and what is its purpose?*

**Answer:** *The school was established on April 9, 2008. At that time, I saw many children around my house playing and not going to school. Their parents did not have the money to send their children to school. On the other hand, some of them were children with disabilities. This encouraged me to establish a free school for them. Many parents appreciated and supported my initiative*

**Question:** *How many students are there?*

**Answer:** *In this school year, there were 130 students, 40 of whom had special needs. There were 4 students with speech and hearing impairment, 4 students with Down syndrome, 4 students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), 5 students with cerebral palsy and speech delay, and the most common was autism.*

**Question:** *What is the curriculum used and how is learning generally in the classroom?*

**Answer:** *We used a merdeka curriculum integrated with Individualized Education Service (IES). A pre-assessment was conducted to determine the child's initial condition. However, we cannot justify the student's condition to their parents, as it is a duty of psychology and we worked with psychology. PAUD Cerdas was established with a focus on social services for normal children and those with special needs. Our program is dedicated to providing a friendly school for all types of students. Here, we find several types of children. It is not only a place where normal children and children with special needs meet, but also where children of different religions, different economic statuses, and different abilities meet. PAUD Cerdas has a transition class for children with special needs who cannot yet socialize with others. We continue to train them to socialize positively or well until they can enter the regular class.*

**Question:** *What are the challenges faced in inclusive education?*

**Answer:** *The inclusive education program is the most challenging because of the many characteristics of students. Therefore, we must be patient with the students and always expect cooperation from their parents. Teachers must have a strong heart, mentality, and physical strength, as well as constantly upgrade their*



knowledge. Our institution focuses on the social aspects of students, while the aspects of handling disorders must be one by one in conjunction with psychology.

**Question:** *What is the educational background of the teachers at PAUD Cerdas?*

**Answer:** *Our teachers had diverse educational backgrounds. We had 24 permanent and volunteer teachers. Some had a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, psychology, special education graduates, and high school graduates. However, we provide training to all our teachers through conferences or any training education as an effort to ensure them as GPK (Guru Pembimbing Khusus/ Special Guidance Teacher). PAUD Cerdas operates as a social institution in which our school does not charge students fees. Parents pay what they can because of the school's dedication to help children obtain an education.*

**Question:** *What are the challenges faced in inclusive education?*

**Answer:** *The inclusive education program is the most challenging because of the many characteristics of students. Therefore, we must be patient with the students and always expect cooperation from their parents. Teachers must have a strong heart, mentality, and physical strength, as well as constantly upgrade their knowledge. Our institution focuses on the social aspects of students, while the aspects of handling disorders must be one by one in conjunction with psychology. Many children with special needs are not accepted by other schools, and our school has become the reference school. There are many positive social aspects that children experience. The earlier the problem is addressed, the better is the outcome. Children with mild and moderate impairments showed positive social attitudes and were ready to continue to the next school level.*

The results of an interview with Ummi Hanik (52 years old), a transitional class teacher, early childhood education graduated, who has worked at PAUD Cerdas for 16 years, can be seen below.

**Question:** *What is the transition class?*

**Answer:** *The name of the transition class at the PAUD Cerdas is Salmon Class. This class is specifically for children who have severe special needs that prevent them from socializing with others. It is like they have their own world. There were 14 students with several conditions, such as autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome.*

**Question:** *When can students in transition classes move into regular classes?*

**Answer:** *If they have good independence, they can get to know or socialize with others despite having fewer communication skills.*

**Question:** *How is learning in transitional class?*

**Answer:** *There are 3 teachers who assisted students in the class. We worked together to design a teaching plan that suits the needs of the students because each student is handled differently. We could not force a student or several students to leave the class. To handle this, there are teachers who accompany students outside the classroom and teachers in the classroom with other students.*

**Question:** *What are the challenges faced by transition classes?*

**Answer:** *Teachers should be taught sincerely. We work sincerely because our salary is what parents can afford. This is because our institution is in the social field.*

The results of the interview with Mukaromah (34 years old) as a parent, having a regular student with hyperactivity, Muhammad Ibrahim (4 years old), can be seen below.

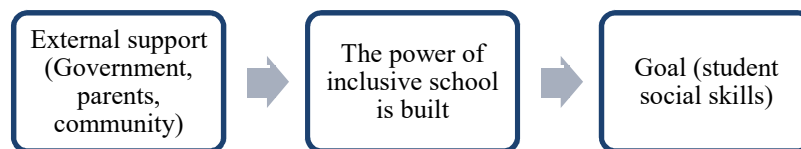
**Question:** *Why do you choose PAUD Cerdas for your child's school?*

**Answer:** *I got many positive things when I sent my child. PAUD Cerdas is a school where children with special needs meet regular students. There are ADHD, Down syndrome, autism, speech, and hearing impairment, and it brings positive social skills for my child. PAUD Cerdas has many sincere and patient teachers compared with*



*regular schools. My son is in dolphin class and has a hyperactive disorder, does not like to learn in class, and likes to hit his friends. Alhamdulillah, my child's improvement of attitude, like independence, can speak more politely, apologize, tell back what he studied in the class, and know what is and is not allowed. In addition, I became more patient as a parent of my child, and I am more grateful to God with God's grace. Here, I found many parents who had children with more severe disorders than my own. A parenting seminar was held once a month at PAUD Cerdas. So, I as a parent get many positive things here.*

The interview results from the interviewees show that PAUD Cerdas implements inclusive education well. As we know, the concept of an inclusive education framework is that children with special needs can participate in the education process together with other children. Inclusive education provides learning environments for disadvantaged students and good self-esteem about themselves (Ünal & Yel, 2019). PAUD Cerdas is supported by the Banyuwangi District Education Office as Banyuwangi District was declared an Inclusion District on August 27, 2014, and has received Inclusion Certification from the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. In addition to local government, psychologists, communities and parents also support and cooperate with PAUD Cerdas as inclusive education so that PAUD Cerdas is awarded as the best inclusive education model for early childhood in Banyuwangi District. In line with Olusakin et al. (2008), to build strength in serving the needs of children, every school must work together with parents and the whole community (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Building on the strengths of inclusive education programs

Based on the results of the interview with Fatmawati as the principal of PAUD Cerdas, it can be seen that PAUD Cerdas applies IES (Individualized Education Service). IES is one of the inclusive education services in addition to FEP (Full Education Service) and MES (Modification Education Service). Service delivery is based on the results of student identification and assessment. IES is a service where students with special needs follow the learning process together with normal students under the guidance of GPK (Special Guidance Teacher) (Hapsari, 2019).

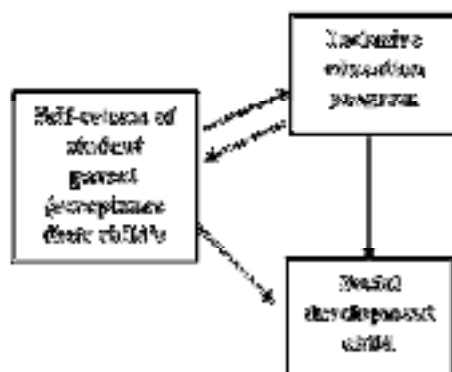
PAUD Cerdas has a transition class called Salmon Class. This class is specifically for children who have severe special needs that prevent them from socializing with others. If the children in this class show good development of independence, they can get to know or socialize with others despite having less communication skills, they can move to the regular class. Teachers work together to design a teaching plan that suits the needs of the students as each student is handled differently. The existence of transition classes provides social development for students. In addition, I assume that the golden age period of early childhood provides additional strength to improve their social skills. Every child has a period called the "golden age" as a golden period for children to develop their character and intellect. Based on this, the role of the teacher is very important and using the right strategy for different types of students (Abdurrahman, 2012). As mentioned by Klibthong et al. (2014) in the introduction, effective inclusive practices such as transition services in early childhood can enhance equitable practices and promote children's learning and development. Collaboration between individuals, peers and teachers





can lead to quality early childhood inclusive education. Inclusive education provides a collaborative space for them and brings them into positive relationships. Positive relationships will develop children's social, emotional and academic skills.

Interviews with parents showed that inclusive education has a positive impact on their self-esteem. The positive self-esteem they receive leads to their acceptance of their child's condition. In addition, parents also support the inclusion program and its positive impact on their children's social skills. Feedback connection between each others can be seen in figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Positive relationship between parents and inclusive program for social development of child

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the role of inclusive education programs on early childhood social development. The results of interviews with principals, teachers and parents at PAUD Cerdas, the best model of inclusive education in Banyuwangi regency, are as follows:

1. Government, community and parental support can give strength to inclusive education programs
2. The golden age is the golden period for developing students' intelligence and social skills.
3. Transition class is one of the programs that can improve students' social development
4. Collaboration between students with special needs, normal students and teachers can improve social skills
5. Inclusive education provides positive self-esteem for parents in accepting their child's condition. It can also improve students' social development.

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