

## CREATING AN INCLUSION-FRIENDLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR EARLY CHILDREN

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**Abstract:** *Inclusion is that local public schools must provide education with special needs students in regular classes in local schools as optimally as possible, including those with severe and multiple barriers. Inclusion means that children with special needs attend education in kindergartens, childcare facilities, and recreational programs along with normal children of the same age. This research uses a qualitative approach method through literature study. The data collection technique used is a literature study such as journal articles. Based on the results of the discussion, it is stated that the importance of inclusive education in early childhood. Because implementing inclusive education has a positive impact on children's holistic development. This approach encourages better social, academic, and emotional growth for children with special needs and the creation of a more inclusive community, and prepares future generations to appreciate diversity in all aspects of life.*

**Keywords:** *early childhood, learning environment, inclusive education*

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### INTRODUCTION

This golden age in children cannot be missed, because it only occurs once in a child's life. Moreover, this golden age of children can not be repeated in their life. The stimulation that children receive during this period will be very useful for their survival in the future. During this golden age, the importance of education for early childhood to develop the potential that already exists. In this case, to develop or stimulate child development, creative and innovative learning models are needed to boost aspects of child development (cognitive, language, physical-motor, social-emotional, religious and moral values, art) to the maximum and optimal (Imamah & Muqowim, 2020).

Early Childhood Education (EC) is a form of stimulation and encouragement provided to children from birth to the Golden Age (the "Golden Age"), which involves providing educational stimuli to support their physical and spiritual growth and development, preparing them for further education. Early childhood education functions to foster, grow, and develop the full potential of young children optimally, fostering behavior and developing basic skills appropriate to their developmental stage, thus preparing them for further education (Kusyairi et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, the Indonesian education system has not yet accommodated diversity, leading to discrimination within educational institutions based on differences in religion, ethnicity, and even differences in physical and mental abilities among students.

And Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education for students with disabilities and possessing potential intelligence and/or special talents. So far, children with different abilities or limitations (disabled) are provided with special education facilities adjusted to the degree and type of their limitations, called Special Schools (SLB). Unconsciously, the SLB education system has built a dividing wall for children with special needs. This wall has unknowingly hampered the process of getting to know each other between children with disabilities and non-disabled children. Trimo argues that schools that provide inclusive education are educational units that apply a friendly educational philosophy or "welcoming school", are non-discriminatory, and accept diversity. Thus, inclusive schools accept students from diverse backgrounds, whether physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and cultural, which are broadly grouped into three categories of students: normal students, students with special needs, and gifted students.

Inclusion means that local public schools must optimally provide education to students with special needs in regular classes at the local school, including those with severe and complex disabilities. Inclusion means that children with special needs attend kindergarten, childcare, and recreational programs alongside their peers. (Putri, May 2015)

Based on the explanation above, the author is interested in discussing "Creating an Inclusion-Friendly Learning Environment for Early Childhood" because the importance of maintaining and creating a welcoming environment for inclusive education in early childhood will make students comfortable and ready to learn.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Early childhood is a group of children undergoing a unique growth and development process. Children have distinct growth and development patterns (fine and gross motor coordination), thinking skills, creativity, language, and communication, encompassed by intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), spiritual intelligence (SQ), or religious intelligence (RQ), according to the child's growth and developmental stage. Early childhood growth and development need to be directed toward laying the right foundations for holistic human growth and development. (Kurniawan et al., 2018)

Early childhood refers to individuals aged 0-6 years who are undergoing a phase of rapid growth and development. This age is also known as the Golden Age. Early childhood development encompasses all changes that occur within a child, which can be observed across various aspects, including cognitive (mathematics and science), social-emotional skills, language, religious and moral values, art, physical-motor skills, and other intelligences. (Hanim, n.d.)

The learning environment is all the conditions that influence the behavior of the subjects involved in learning, especially teachers and students, who are the spearheads of the learning process in schools. A conducive learning environment significantly influences the growth and development of teachers and students at the school. This learning environment must be considered by all parties to ensure optimal learning outcomes. A child's learning environment must be free from factors that can easily cause stress. (Abdul, 2023)

The learning environment is the educational environment. The learning environment is the place where learning activities take place, and external influences influence the continuity of these activities. A student's learning environment, comprising the family, school, and community environments, influences their learning. The environment can induce changes in human behavior, therefore, schools should create an effective learning environment. (Abdul, 2023)

The learning environment is a crucial component in a child's learning process. It is one of the most common places used as a learning medium in the teaching and learning process and is a key component of the learning process for teachers. The environment has the potential to motivate optimal teacher-student interactions. A comfortable learning environment will help motivate students to learn by fostering curiosity, engaging in appropriate teacher explanations, and also helping them to concretely understand abstract concepts. (Sarnoto & Romli, 2019)

Inclusive education is education that places children with special needs alongside normal children in a regular school. In Indonesia, inclusive education is an educational service system that enrolls children with special needs alongside other normal children in regular schools closest to their homes, ensuring that children with special needs are as close to their environment as possible. (Marta & Suryana, 2019)

According to (Syaodih, 2009), inclusive education is an innovative and strategic educational approach to expand access to education for all children with special needs, including children with disabilities. Inclusive education is a form of education that integrates children with special needs with normal children in general for learning. Inclusive education means that schools must accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social-emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.

Inclusive education is an educational concept that represents all aspects related to openness in accepting children with special needs to obtain basic rights as citizens and is a strategy in promoting effective universal education because it can create schools that are responsive to the diverse actual needs of children and society. (Lattu, 2017)

## **METHOD**

This research is literature-based, categorized as library research. Library research is research that collects data from various sources.

The approach used in this study is qualitative, emphasizing analysis on the process of drawing comparative conclusions and analyzing the dynamics of the relationships between observed phenomena using scientific logic. Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written words from the people observed, not expressed in the terms used in qualitative research.

According to (Darmalaksana, 2020), this research is a qualitative study using library research. The research stages were carried out by collecting both primary and secondary sources. This study classified data based on research formulas. In the next stage, data processing and/or reference citations were carried out to present research findings, abstracted to obtain comprehensive information, and interpreted to generate knowledge for drawing conclusions.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Education is a fundamental need for every human being and continues throughout life, potentially turning them into dangerous creatures. Education can be considered a deliberate, planned, designed, and organized process based on applicable regulations, particularly statutory regulations agreed upon by society. (Adhani & Hanifah, 2017)

Implementing inclusive education programs provides benefits for both children with special needs and children with disabilities in general. Implementing inclusive education programs can stimulate development and instill character values in children, such as helping each other and playing together with children with special needs, recognizing and appreciating differences, developing responsibility and self-confidence, and developing social skills. (Wulandari et al., 2024)

Inclusive education is a learning model that integrates children with special needs to learn together with their peers, as in regular schools. Inclusive education is expected to prevent children with special needs from being marginalized and enable them to develop their potential. The willingness to accept children with special needs, who have unique characteristics and require support, requires a strategy to be able to help them develop their skills. The educational standards applied to dealing with children with special needs are very different from those applied to normal children, because their needs and developmental stages are also different. The methods used are also expected to open the door to their respective intelligence. Because each child has different potential brought by their genes and environment.

According to Government Regulation No. 70 of 2009, the objectives of inclusive education are: (1) Realizing the implementation of education that respects sustainability and is non-discriminatory for all students. (2) Providing the broadest possible opportunities for students with physical, emotional, mental, and social disabilities or possessing exceptional intelligence and/or talents to obtain quality educational potential according to their needs and abilities.

With inclusive education, both regular children and children with special needs (ABK) can develop a sense of mutual respect, despite their physical, emotional, mental, and social differences. Currently, there are not many schools offering inclusive education. This is because implementing inclusive education requires significant preparation, including services, facilities and infrastructure, and a special curriculum for inclusive education. Schools that implement inclusive education must create a comfortable and safe learning environment for children and prepare appropriate learning methods and strategies. (Ulfaturrizqiyah, 2023)

The implementation of inclusive education has a positive impact on children's holistic development. This approach encourages better social, academic, and emotional growth for children with special needs. Therefore, it is important to continue promoting and supporting inclusive education to create an inclusive, equitable, and beneficial environment for all children.

Facilitating student learning means striving to develop all of their potential, including talent, intelligence, and interests. Motivation, as the name suggests, is an effort to foster students' interest in learning, encouraging them to enthusiastically engage in the learning process. The next form of educational psychology implementation involves creating an effective environment or atmosphere that allows each student to develop optimally, without experiencing emotional issues that could disrupt the learning process. Several impacts of an inclusive learning environment include:

1. For Students

This study found that social relationships among students in the context of inclusive education play a crucial role. An environment that supports social engagement and collaboration between students with special needs and their peers can have a positive impact on their social development. Furthermore, the study also highlights the role of parents in supporting inclusive education, particularly in understanding their children's needs and actively participating in the learning process. From a psychological perspective, this study found that inclusive education can positively impact the identity development of students with special needs. By feeling accepted and accepted in the learning environment, these students can build a stronger sense of self-esteem and confidence in facing academic and social challenges. The psychology of inclusive education also takes into account any special needs students may have, such as emotional support or counseling, to ensure

that the educational environment can effectively respond to these needs. (Amahoru & Edi, 2023)

2. For Teachers

Teachers, as the primary agents in the learning process, have a responsibility to understand the needs of each student, develop responsive teaching strategies, and facilitate collaboration between students. Similarly, school administrators have a crucial role in creating policies and support systems that support inclusive education at the institutional level. Parents, as partners in education, need to be actively involved in supporting their children's needs and collaborating with schools to create an inclusive environment. (Amahoru & Edi, 2023)

3. For the Environment and Society

Inclusive education also creates opportunities for the development of social and adaptive skills for all children. Interactions between children of varying abilities help create an inclusive social environment and value mutually supportive learning. Therefore, incorporating cultural equality creates a more inclusive society and prepares future generations to appreciate diversity in all aspects of life. (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024)

## CONCLUSION

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that implementing an inclusive education program provides benefits for both children with special needs and children with disabilities. Implementing an inclusive education program can stimulate development and instill character values in children, such as helping each other and playing together with children with special needs, recognizing and appreciating differences, developing responsibility and self-confidence, and developing social skills.

Facilitating student learning means striving to develop their full potential, including talents, intelligence, and interests. Motivation, as the name suggests, is an effort to foster students' interest in learning so that they are enthusiastic about the learning process. The next form of educational psychology implementation is creating an effective environment or atmosphere so that each student can develop optimally, without experiencing emotional problems that could disrupt the learning process.

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