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Education for children with special needs in Indonesia

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Abstract. The current paper discusses the issue of educational programs for children with special needs and its implementation in Indonesia. Education for children with special needs is provided because such category of children needs specific treatment or assistance from schools to ensure that would develop optimally overcoming their limitations. This study describes the pattern of special-needs education in Indonesia which allows implementation of the inclusive as well as the segregation approaches, though there are pros and cons for each side. The reality is that in Indonesia, the policy of education for all has not been fully accommodated. However, at least there has been an effort to answer the rights of individuals with special needs through regulation and its implementation in schools in communities. Various factors have caused the inequality of education programs for children with special needs including the paradigm by parents about the importance of programmed educational assistance for family members. In addition, provision for schools that provide programs for special needs still need to be constantly activated or revitalized, especially with regard to the fulfillment of national education standards. Revitalization can be carried out by building new schools, considering the ratio of the number of children with special needs and schools that organize special needs education is still disproportional. Furthermore, education for children with special needs must be planned, organized, monitored and evaluated based on existing quality standards.

1. Introduction

Every individual is unique, having differences from one another. Uniqueness is a reality that must be welcome in order that every person can be appreciated based on each person's existing unique traits. The acceptance and appreciation is a fundamental right that ought to be given to every person and must be implemented in social relations. Thus, every individual, including children, has the right to be treated equally on the basis of human rights. The right to be accepted and respected is not limited by social or economic status, nor by racial, cultural, ethnic, age, gender and even religious background. Neglecting equal rights can be equated as an act of not recognizing that humans have the potential to be transformed to have a better life. Setiawan[1] described Maslow's theory on human nature, where humans must be encouraged to actualize their potential to an optimum level. Thus, humans ought to be perceived as having potential to be able to achieve optimum fulfillment of life goals and consequently, having impact on others. Actualizing potential must be encouraged or each individual empowered to reach ideal totality or integrity.



Other human rights pertaining the right to be received and appreciated is the right to education. Every person has the right to a decent education according to each person's level of development and needs. In the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, article 31, the right to education is explicitly stated. The government of Indonesia implements a 9-year compulsory education policy (from elementary school to junior secondary level). With the suggestion that it would be more ideal if students were to complete high school, thus each child completing the available formal education process at school.

This Educational aspiration by the nation basically echoes acceptance and appreciation to everyone. True education is for all. Education for all implies that no child is denied the opportunity to receive decent education and this includes children with special needs. Chambers, Varoglu, & Kasinskaite[2] explain that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPWD) emphasizes access to education, among others, as an important concern to provide appropriate accommodation to the disabled. This paper explains that education is the right of every child with disability and that this is non-negotiable, rather it is a necessity to be provided. This inclusive educational approach and segregation for children with special needs is the reality of the education system in Indonesia in which there are debates in many circles regarding the optimism and pessimism of both views of education. This paper illustrates how the harmonization of the two views interested in facilitating or accommodating children with special needs.

2. Familiarizing with children with special needs

The term used for people with special has gone through refinements and improvements from time to time. Initially, children who have special needs are labeled with the terms "handicapped", "weak", "subnormal" and other terms that would no longer be appropriate in the the present age when referring to children with special needs. Richard Woolfson[3] states that children who have developmental problems are called special needs, no longer are they called "handicapped" and "subnormal". The change in terminology is based on a number of reasons, including the fact that labeling children as "handicapped" and "subnormal" only expresses children's weaknesses and disadvantages. Labeling is too general and fails to recognize essential differences or levels of development of children. Such labels do not indicate what type of action will be taken to help a child overcome or at least survive in facing developmental difficulties. Moreover, labeling a child with such terms encourages a focus on the child's circumstances rather than treating them on an individual basis.

In Indonesia, the terms "children with special needs" and "people with disabilities" are used according to their respective designations and these terms are frequently used to refer to children who have certain obstacles or difficulties. Regulation Number 8 of 2016[4] defines that persons with disabilities are those who experience physical, intellectual, mental, and/or sensory limitations in the long term, who interact with the environment can experience obstacles and difficulties in participating fully and effectively with other citizens based on equal rights. The term children with special needs has more specific scopes than that definition, namely, that the use of the term disability is to explain the limitations in terms of physical, intellectual, mental, and / or sensory, while the term special needs is intended also to refer to children who have special talents or intelligence (e.g., high IQ). The chairman Center for Data and Statistics of Education and Culture, Bastari, explains that the types of children with special needs consist of blind, deaf, mild mentally disabled, moderate mentally disabled, mild multiple impaired ability, moderate multiple impaired ability, social disorder, speech disorder, hyperactive, special intelligent, gifted special, learning difficulties, victims of drugs, indigo, down syndrome, autism and multiple symptom[5].

3. Inclusive education and segregation

Every child is valuable and has the ability to learn, including children with special needs. Because of this, they have the right to get proper education like other children in general. The purpose of education for children with special needs is to ensure that they can have the opportunity to develop their potential optimally, to practice creativity, to encourage them to remain optimistic in living life, to equip them with

a number of skills in order to reach a level of independence and to allow them an opportunity interact in community life.

Children need educational services that suit their individual needs. There are two approaches of education for children with special needs in Indonesia, namely inclusive education and segregation. An inclusive education program means that it is integrated with public/regular schools, while segregation refers to separate - extraordinary schools. Inclusive education is a type of education that integrates children with special needs with other children in general. While segregation education is a type of education specifically organized to accommodate children with special needs but separate from public/regular schools. With regard to these two types of special needs education, Hetherington and Parke[6] put forward a major problem in America in the 1970s regarding whether children with special needs should be placed in separate schools or integrated into regular classes. In the mid-1970s there was a change in policy in which children with disabilities were allowed to study in public schools, with the idea that integrating children with special needs would result in high levels of achievement both academically and socially. Another reason was to intervene in the life of the children with special needs from isolated classes to public schools to help them adapt and overcome problems in the real world where they are expected to live in one day. Finally, integration helps children without special needs to understand individual differences with the hope that this would help reduce stereotyping the other children with special needs. Problems related to the types of education that are most suitable for children with special needs such as in the United States are also experienced in Indonesia. However, both types of education are implemented and allowed by the government in its management. In the past, special school education had a major place in society for children with special needs. Inclusive education began to be accommodated at least through the Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003[7] concerning the National Education System article 32, elaborated through the derivative of education regulations and policies.

Education services for children with special needs have actually received attention by the government and also the public response, particularly in the establishment of several inclusive schools and also segregation (special schools) in several regions in Indonesia. This can be seen in the data by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2008 that there are 925 schools providing inclusive education in Indonesia[8]. The data in 2017 shows that there were 32,000 inclusive schools across various regions in Indonesia[9]. While in 2015/2016 the organizers of segregation education (extraordinary schools) have reached 1,962 schools[10], and in 2016/2017 there were 2,070 schools[11], or an increase of around 5.5%. However, the number of inclusive schools and special schools is still inadequate when compared to the number of children with special needs which reaches around 1.6 million children [7]. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration that in the attachment of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation number 4 of 2017[12] concerning Special Protection for Children with Disabilities it is explained that there are still many children with disabilities who have not received educational services.

Nonetheless, attention in education services with special needs, specifically with the provision of schools can be seen in the National Education Ministerial Regulation Number 70 of 2009[13] which stipulates that schools that have inclusive education must have at least one for each level (elementary, junior high and high school) in each sub-district, and the school was appointed by the local government. However, in reality, not all regions that already have schools that carry inclusive education and schools are extraordinary. This can be caused by various complex factors.

Based on the above, this becomes a joint effort that needs to be taken seriously, both by the government and the community as managers of special needs education. The formulation of the guarantee of access to education for children with special needs is actually stipulated in laws or policies related to it. However, at the level of implementation in the community, this education program requires productive synergy and quality in its management. Various problems distort the management of special needs education in Indonesia. The problem can be seen in the inaccurate paradigm held by parents towards their family members who have special needs so that they do not entrust the school to provide special education services, the limitations of teachers with adequate academic qualifications to educate children

with special needs, the readiness of public schools in managing education for children with special needs (inclusive schools) - curriculum, education evaluation system, learning media, and learning methods, limitations of inclusive schools and special schools (segregation) in various regions in Indonesia and funding that is not small to improve school quality holistically. In the context of inclusive education, the various problems are confirmed by a research conducted by Handayani and Rahardian[14] regarding the various difficulties faced in the implementation of inclusive education. They concluded that aspects of the difficulties included lack of supporting facilities, limited competence and skills of teachers, the unaccommodating curriculum system to the presence of children with disabilities.

4. Conclusion

Children with special needs have the right to access education and get the same or equal treatment as other children in general. Parents can choose which type of school they will entrust their child to in order to receive adequate education. Both the inclusive view and segregation view of education have great interests, namely accommodating the interests or needs of children with special needs, in other words, fulfilling the goals of education for children with special needs. However, among the various critical considerations are, first, the paradigm of parents who have special-needs children should be changed, and thus the task of educating such children can be done through professional education services by formal schooling system. This implicates that it is time that parents to open up to educational services system in Indonesia in the management of special needs education. Second, the government must constantly procure or recruit and develop professionals (i.e., teachers), especially in schools that implement inclusive education. Such in-service training program is aimed at helping teachers adjust or modify the curriculum according to the characteristics of the class, for example. Third, the provision or addition of new special-needs schools should be the focus of attention with the purpose of giving such children adequate services. Fourth, government programs should synergize with schools that carry out special needs education. Fifth, in the advent of advancement of educational technology and its application in developed countries, special-needs education in Indonesia needs to be increasingly active in applying the technological sophistication to improve teaching in schools.

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