

Exploration of the Role of Special Mentor Teachers in Supporting the Learning of Grade 4 Students at Al Firdaus Inclusive Elementary School

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to identify and understand the specific role of Special Guidance Teachers (GPK) in supporting the learning process of fourth-grade students at Al Firdaus Inclusive Elementary School.

Methodology: The research employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and direct observation to gather comprehensive data on GPK practices and interactions.

Results: The findings reveal that GPKs play a vital role in addressing the individual needs of students with special conditions by implementing personalized learning strategies, adapting subject content, maintaining active communication with parents, and collaborating with classroom teachers to develop Individual Support Plans (ISPs). These efforts contribute to notable improvements in students' academic performance, adaptive skills, and motivation. However, GPKs also face challenges such as limited resources and time constraints, which can be mitigated through innovative solutions and strong team collaboration.

Applications/Originality/Value: This study highlights the strategic importance of GPKs in inclusive education settings. It emphasizes the need for continuous professional collaboration, resource allocation, and innovation to optimize inclusive practices and ensure that every child receives equitable educational support.

Introduction

Education is the right of all children in Indonesia, and every citizen is entitled to a proper education regardless of economic, social or cultural background. This policy is reinforced by Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System which guarantees equal access to education for all children, including those from underprivileged families, children in remote areas, and children with special needs. The Government of Indonesia is committed to providing equal opportunities for every child to receive quality education, so as to create a generation that is smart, competitive and able to contribute to the development of the nation.

In equalizing education policies, all government efforts continue. One of the government's efforts in the success of education for all children, including children with special needs, is the existence of Special Guidance Teachers (GPK). Special Mentor Teachers are educators who have special expertise and skills in educating and directing children with special needs so that they can learn optimally according to their abilities and potential. GPK is tasked with providing individualized support and guidance tailored to the needs of each student, both in the classroom and outside the classroom, as well as working with class teachers and parents to create an inclusive learning environment and support child development (Marleni et al. 2024).

Surakarta City is one of the cities in the Central Java region that implements inclusive schools in several areas. However, the presence of special guidance teachers (GPK) in Surakarta City schools is still limited. Data shows that only a small number of schools have GPKs, with a total of 299 children with special needs assisted by 31 GPKs spread across 25 public schools. At the early childhood, kindergarten, primary and junior high school levels, there were 28 children with special needs assisted by 6 GPKs in seven early childhood centers and kindergartens, and 233 children with 22 GPKs in 14 primary schools. At the junior high school level, 38 children with disabilities were assisted by three teachers in four schools. This shows that while the role of the GPK is very important in supporting inclusive education in each school, there is still a need to improve access and further support to ensure all children with disabilities receive the assistance they need.

This is reinforced by Haniifah & Efendi's study (2022) emphasizing the importance of the role of Special Mentor Teachers (GPK) in inclusive education, although there are still schools that do not provide GPK due to a lack of adequate human resources to support children with special needs (ABK). The absence of GPKs in inclusive schools can have a

negative impact on the success of the program. Another relevant study from Azmi & Nurmaya (2020) also showed that GPKs play an important role in disciplining students, helping students with learning difficulties, guiding them in solving problems during learning, and training ADHD students' skills according to their potential.

The previous research above has revealed the importance of the role of Special Mentor Teachers (GPK) in inclusive education and the various important tasks they perform. However, there is no research that specifically explores the role of GPK in supporting grade 4 students' learning in inclusive primary schools, especially at Al Firdaus Inclusive Primary School. The novelty in this study is the more in-depth focus on the dynamics and challenges faced by GPKs in supporting Grade 4 students' learning, as well as the concrete impact of their role on students' academic success and social-emotional development. The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the specific role of GPK in supporting grade 4 students' learning at Al Firdaus Inclusive Primary School and to provide recommendations that can improve the effectiveness of inclusive education at the school.

Education is something that can affect the growth, change, and condition of everyone. The changes that occur can develop the potential of students' knowledge, skills, and outlook on life (Pristiwanti, 2022). Education is an effort to increase knowledge obtained from formal and non-formal educational institutions to attract quality resources. (Aziizu, 2015). Education is created in an environment and learning process that allows students to skillfully develop the potential for spiritual strength, self-control, ethics, intelligence, noble personality, and abilities needed for themselves and society (Abd Rahman, 2022). Education is one of the key factors in improving a country's human resources (HR). Of course, superior human resources are based on educational values that are deeply rooted in society (Sanga, 2023).

According to (Winkel in Siregar, 2015) Learning is a set of actions that help students learn by considering extreme circumstances that contribute to the series of internal events experienced. The learning process is the main activity of the school (Junaedi, 2019). Learning as a pedagogical concept can technically be interpreted as a systematic and organized step to foster a learning environment that has the potential to create a learning process that leads to the development of a person's potential as a student (Winataputra, 2014). Learning is a process that involves a series of interactional actions between teachers and students in an educational environment to achieve certain goals (Usman in Junaedi, 2019). Learning is basically an effort to teach something to students, and learning design structures these efforts so that learning behaviors emerge (Sudrajat, 2008).

Character values are values that connect a person with their true nature and instill in students certain moral or personal values, including elements of knowledge, awareness, willingness, and action to implement these values (Afrina, 2023). Thus, character values consciously and deliberately direct humans to create traits that distinguish them from each other. There are 18 types of character values that come from religion, Pancasila, culture, and national goals. The life of society, nation, and state is highly dependent on the formation of the character of the nation. Therefore, it is appropriate that education and the development of the nation's character have a solid foundation in the Constitution (Antari, 2020).

Character development education is a form of education that helps develop ethical, moral, and responsible attitudes and instills a sense of love in students by showing and setting examples of good character (Ahmadi, 2021). Characters that must be instilled in students include love for Allah and the universe and its contents, responsibility, discipline and independence, honesty, respect and courtesy, compassion, care and cooperation, confidence and creativity, hard work and unyieldingness, justice and leadership, kindness and humility, tolerance, love of peace and unity.

Textbooks are school books that contain selected materials about a certain subject in written form, meet certain requirements for teaching and learning activities and are systematically arranged for processing (A.J. Loveridge in Asri, 2017). Textbooks are one of the learning resources that are always present in every learning method to achieve the learning goals required by the curriculum (Kusuma, 2018). The need for textbooks is the most important thing. Schools need books other than textbooks to teach students to develop their intellectual abilities (Bebby in Mudzakir, 2010). A textbook is an educational material that is systematically arranged consisting of a set of materials and explanations of a subject approved by the Ministry of Education (Soesilo, 2020). According to (Nisja, 2018) The success of learning also depends on the textbooks used by students. Language textbooks should be easy for students to understand, and good and effective writing should help students understand the content of the textbooks.

Previous relevant research was conducted by Meilani (2020) and Asrial (2023). Suherja (2022) conducted relevant research on Indonesian Textbooks Based on Character Education Through Active Learning for Elementary School Students. Saddhono (2018) also conducted a similar research on Cultural Elements in Indonesian Textbooks as a Foreign Language (BIPA) in Indonesia. Relevant research was also carried out by Pratiwi et al. (2023). In 2018, Rahayuningtyas also conducted a similar study on the value of characters in textbooks. Not only that, Haryati (2017) also researched the value of character.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with the aim of exploring in depth the events that occur naturally at SD AI AL FIRDAUS, Banjarsari District, Surakarta City. The research subjects are the principal of SD Al Firdaus and the Special Guidance Teacher (GPK) who handles grade 4, these subjects were chosen because they have relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under study. The research design relied on in-depth interviews with the principal and GPK to obtain descriptive and analytical qualitative information. Primary data was collected through direct interviews

and observations, while secondary data was obtained from documentation studies of related literature. Data analysis was conducted using an analytical descriptive approach to generate a deep understanding of the complex and dynamic problems observed. This method was chosen to gain a more natural and in-depth understanding of the specific research context.

Result and Discussion

Specific Role of Specialized Mentor Teacher

The role of the Classroom Supervisor Teacher (GPK) in supporting the learning of grade 4 students at SD Al Firdaus is very important, especially in facilitating the individual needs of students with various special conditions. They apply a variety of strategies and methods that are tailored to ensure that each student can learn effectively according to their potential and needs, as revealed by Mrs. Solikhah, one of the GPKs who specifically handles grade 4 as follows,

“As a GPK, my role is crucial in ensuring that every student in class 4 gets an education that suits their needs, especially students with special conditions. I work closely with the class teacher to identify students' individual needs, both in terms of academic and social-emotional learning.”

From the explanation above, it can be seen that the role of GPK is crucial in the running of the inclusive education system. In carrying out the process, GPK has several strategies, including the following,

“One of the main strategies I employ is the use of various modifications in learning. For example, I often adapt course materials to suit students' different learning styles. I also actively communicate with parents to understand more about their child's needs at home and at school. In addition, I work closely with the inclusive education team to develop individual support plans (ISPs) that help ensure that every student feels included and supported in this Grade 4 learning environment. One example I recently experienced was with a student who had difficulty in understanding conventional math. By integrating visual elements and the use of customized math aids, we were able to improve his understanding and confidence in solving math problems. This not only improved his performance academically but also helped build a stronger sense of confidence in him.”

In an interview with a Special Assistance Teacher (GPK) class 4 above, it is revealed that the main strategy implemented is modifications in learning to accommodate diverse learning styles. In addition, close collaboration with parents and the inclusive education team is used to develop individual support plans (ISPs), ensuring all students feel included and supported. The collaboration between the GPK and the class teacher is crucial in carrying out this implementation, ensuring that the inclusive approach can be effectively applied in the classroom and creating a supportive learning environment for all students as expressed below,

“Cooperation with the class teacher is very important. We collaborate regularly to evaluate students' progress and adjust learning approaches according to their needs. The class teacher provides insight into classroom dynamics and I provide suggestions and strategies to support individual students. This lays the foundation for effective collaboration in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. I would like to say that inclusive education inclusion is not just about meeting the needs of students with special conditions, but also about building a community where every individual is valued and supported. Parents and communities can help by understanding the importance of inclusion and supporting schools' efforts in creating an environment that accepts differences. With strong collaboration, we can give every student a fair chance to grow and develop to their potential.”

An interview with a grade 4 GPK revealed the importance of collaboration between GPKs and class teachers in supporting inclusive education. They collaborate to evaluate student progress and align learning approaches to individual needs, creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all students. This approach focuses not only on meeting the needs of students with special conditions but also on building a community that values diversity. With parental and community support and strong collaboration, schools can provide a fair chance for every student to develop to their full potential.

Challenges and dynamics in supporting learning

In carrying out learning, there are certainly major challenges faced by GPKs, especially in assisting grade 4 students. These include limited resources, time management, and the integration of diverse learning methods according to the individual needs of students, as reiterated by Mrs. Solikhah GPK grade 4 below.

“Sure. One of the main challenges we face is limited resources. This school has limitations in obtaining learning materials that suit the individual needs of diverse students. For example, we often have to improvise or adapt existing teaching materials to suit the needs of students with different levels of ability and learning styles.”

Based on the interviews above, it appears that one of the main challenges faced is limited resources. The school often struggles to find learning materials that are suitable for the individual needs of students with varying levels of ability and learning styles. Ms Solikhah noted that improvisation and adjustments to existing teaching materials have become routine in an effort to meet these needs. This limitation also has an impact on time management, where Ms. Solikhah has to divide time carefully to provide appropriate assistance to each student, as expressed below.

“Yes, time management is also quite challenging. I have to divide my time wisely to give enough attention to each student. This is sometimes difficult to do because each student requires a different level of assistance in the learning process.”

Based on the interview results above, time management is one of the main challenges in her role as a Special Assistance Teacher (GPK) in grade 4 at SD Al Firdaus. Mrs. Solikhah stated that a judicious division of time is essential to provide adequate attention to each student, especially considering that each student has a different level of assistance in the learning process. This shows the complexity of ensuring that each student gets the appropriate support they need. In addition, another challenge faced is the integration of diverse learning methods, which is key in effectively meeting students' individual learning needs.

“Integrating diverse learning methods according to students' individual needs is also a challenge. I need to ensure that the learning methods I choose not only fulfill the curriculum but are also effective in facilitating the learning of students with different learning styles. This requires me to keep learning and looking for innovative approaches. One thing I would like to add is the importance of collaborative support between regular teachers and teachers with different learning styles. GPK in this inclusive school. Good collaboration goes a long way in overcoming these challenges and providing a better learning experience for all students.”

Based on the interview results above, the integration of diverse learning methods according to students' individual needs is a major challenge in her role as a Special Assistance Teacher (GPK) in inclusive schools. Mrs. Solikhah emphasizes the importance of choosing learning methods that not only meet the curriculum but are also effective in facilitating the learning of students with different learning styles. To overcome this challenge, Ms. Solikhah develops adaptability and innovation in learning approaches. In addition, she also highlighted the importance of solid collaboration between regular teachers and GPKs in providing the best support for all students in an inclusive environment. This collaboration not only helps overcome practical challenges such as time management and limited resources, but also enriches the overall learning experience of students.

The Impact of GPK's role on students' academic success and social emotional development

In integrating Gerakan Pemantapan Kualitas (GPK) in the Grade 4 learning process, there is a significant impact on students' academic achievement and social-emotional changes. Through the implementation of GPK, students not only improve their understanding of the subject matter, but also develop social skills such as teamwork, leadership, and empathy, as explained by Mr. Syamsudin Istanto below,

“Of course, the GPK program at SD Al Firdaus is indeed one of the important pillars in improving the academic outcomes and social-emotional development of our Grade 4 students. We see a significant impact from this GPK intervention. Academically, we noted a notable improvement in students' adaptive skills achievement. The students showed progress in facing challenges learning, both in solving problems and completing tasks more independently.”

Based on an interview with the Principal of SD Al Firdaus, the Classroom Tutor Program (GPK) plays an important role in improving academic outcomes as well as the social-emotional development of Grade 4 students. The implementation of GPK significantly improves students' adaptive skills, which is reflected in their ability to overcome learning challenges more independently. In addition, there was an increase in students' learning motivation as follows,

“Students' learning motivation has also improved significantly. They have become more enthusiastic and eager to participate in lessons, especially because of the personal approach and support provided by their Class Tutor Teacher. There are also positive changes in interaction with other friends. Students are not only learning in class, but also learning to interact better with peers and teachers. This is very important in building their independence and communication skills.”

Based on an interview with the Principal of SD Al Firdaus, It was found that students' learning motivation improved significantly thanks to the personalized approach and intensive support from the Class Tutor. This not only made students more enthusiastic and eager to take part in lessons, but also positively affected their social interactions. Students not only learn in class, but also develop the ability to interact with peers and teachers, which is an important step in building their independence and communication skills in the school environment. This shows that GPK not only plays a role in the academic aspect, but also significantly improves the social-emotional quality of students in the SD Al Firdaus learning environment.

Discussion

Guru Pembimbing Khusus (GPK) plays an important role in supporting the learning of students with special needs in inclusive primary schools. GPK helps students with special needs to access the same curriculum as other students through various learning strategies that are tailored to individual needs. For example, GPKs often use more interactive and visual teaching methods to help students understand the subject matter. This is in accordance with Ningrum's research. (2022) which shows that the use of diverse learning strategies can improve the understanding and engagement of students with special needs.

In addition, GPKs also contribute to creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all students. They work closely with class teachers and other school staff to ensure that all students feel welcome and valued. GPKs also involve parents in the learning process, providing advice and support so that parents can support their children's learning at home. This is in line with Martoguhun and colleagues' research (2022) which showed that parental involvement in children's education can improve academic outcomes and emotional well-being of students with special needs.

Finally, GPKs play a key role in assessing and monitoring the academic progress of students with special needs. They use various assessment tools and techniques to identify students' learning needs and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. Continuous assessment assists GPKs in providing constructive feedback to students and classroom teachers, so as to direct more targeted interventions. This is in line with Hadi and colleagues' research (2022) which shows that continuous and adaptive assessment is critical to improving the participation and academic achievement of students with special needs.

Inclusive learning in schools presents various challenges for Special Assistance Teachers (GPK), especially in assisting students with special needs. One of the main challenges is the limited resources that are available. GPKs often face a lack of learning aids, inadequate learning materials and a lack of technical support. This hinders an effective learning process and has an impact on student development. This is in accordance with Sari & Hendriani's research (2021) which shows that limited resources are one of the main obstacles in implementing inclusive education.

Time management is also a significant challenge for GPKs. GPK's duties are not only limited to assisting students, but also involve coordinating with class teachers, parents, and preparing individual learning plans. The disproportionate division of time between administrative tasks and direct assistance often makes it difficult for GPKs to give full attention to each student. This is in line with research by Yunita and colleagues (2019) which shows that effective time management is critical to the success of inclusive education.

The integration of diverse learning methods according to individual student needs is also a big challenge. GPKs are required to understand and apply a variety of different learning methods, depending on the characteristics and needs of each student. Not all GPKs have adequate training in this regard, so there is often a mismatch between the methods used and the needs of students. This is in line with Rizqianti and colleagues' research (2022) which shows that adequate training for GPKs is essential to ensure the successful implementation of learning methods.

The role of *Guru Pembimbing Khusus* (GPK) has a significant impact on students' academic success and social-emotional development. Interventions carried out by GPK are able to increase students' achievement of adaptive skills, which are important in facing the challenges of learning and daily life. This is in line with Nabillah and colleagues' research (2023) which shows that specialized guidance can help students develop effective learning strategies and improve their academic outcomes. In addition, the presence of GPK in schools is able to increase students' motivation to learn. This motivation plays an important role in maintaining students' consistency and enthusiasm in learning, thus leading to improved academic performance.

Not only in the academic aspect, GPK intervention also contributes to students' social-emotional development. GPK assists students in developing social interaction skills, both inside and outside the learning environment. This is in accordance with research by Wulandari and colleagues (2024) which shows that positive social interactions can improve students' emotional well-being and strengthen relationships between friends. In addition, guidance from GPKs helps students manage their emotions, so that they are able to cope better with stressful situations. Thus, the role of GPK is crucial in creating a learning environment that supports students' holistic development, both in terms of academic and socio-emotional aspects.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the role of the Special Supervisor Teacher (GPK) is crucial in supporting the learning of grade 4 students at Al Firdaus Inclusive Elementary School. GPK plays an important role in adapting learning strategies to suit students' individual needs, creating an inclusive learning environment, and assessing and monitoring students' progress. The challenges faced by GPKs include limited resources and effective time management, yet their interventions have been successful in improving students' academic achievement and social-emotional skills. Therefore, increased training and support for GPKs is necessary to ensure the success of inclusive education.

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