Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities In Indonesia: Dilemma and Suitable Framework for Indonesian Context

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Abstract

The notion of inclusive education has shed a light of hope for better education service for children with disabilities in developing countries including Indonesia. UNESCO defines inclusive education as a system which is centred on various needs of all children through active participation in learning, culture and community by reducing exclusion in education. However, this could be easier said than done in the third world countries like Indonesia. The implementation of inclusive education may create a dilemma for this country with over 200 million population and myriad of problems. In spite of the fact that the legal framework to guarantee the implementation of inclusive education is already in place, Indonesia should be more serious in overcoming all dilemmas and problems in implementing inclusive education and be more willing to learn from other countries’ best practices and implement it within its own framework. This paper will firstly analyse what inclusive education is and its rationale. Secondly it will reflect on transition from special education to inclusive education in Indonesia. Then the dilemma faced by Indonesia in implementing inclusive education will be analysed. Finally, this paper will take some best practices of inclusive education in other countries that Indonesia can put into practice within its own framework.

Keywords: children, disabilities, inclusion, education, schools, reform, Indonesia

I. Introduction

All countries in the world, either developed or developing countries, must have citizens with impairments or disabilities to varying extent. Advancement in technology and knowledge as well as economic prosperity does not necessarily guarantee that a particular country is free from challenges in improving the lives of people with disabilities. Thus every country will always deal with issues related to providing the best services for their citizens with disabilities. One of those services is providing equal and good education.

The education service that children with disabilities had enjoyed in the past in developing countries such as Indonesia was an exclusive system which separated children with special needs from the mainstream education. This resulted in denial of some basic rights of children with disabilities in education. As claimed by the social model of disability, people with disabilities are an oppressed group because their impairments and the oppression they experience are not interrelated. Disability is defined as the social expression, not the form of impairment (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001, p.10). The segregation experienced by children with disabilities in exclusive education is one form of such social oppression.

Fortunately, the notion of inclusive education has shed a light of hope for better education service for children with disabilities in developing countries including Indonesia. UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process which is centred on
various needs of all children through active participation in learning, culture and community by reducing exclusion in education (UNESCO, 2003). In other words, inclusive education is a universal education which creates schools that are responsive to diverse needs of human beings. Regular schools orientated with inclusive education will serve as an effective vehicle in eradicating discrimination, building an inclusive society and creating education for all (UNESCO, 1994).

The practice and rhetoric of inclusive education or inclusion has become an indispensable part of educational reforms in many countries around the world because inclusive education has been acclaimed as a means for creating more accessible schools and the way to building more equitable and inclusive societies. The notion of schools as educating communities is an impetus for transforming education to be more responsive to a changing world characterised by greater human diversity and global interdependence (Lim, 2001). However, this could be easier said than done in the third world countries like Indonesia. The implementation of inclusive education may create a dilemma for this country with over 200 million population and myriad of problems.

In light of the above, this paper will firstly analyse what inclusion or inclusive education is and its rationale. Secondly it will reflect on transition from special education to inclusive education in Indonesia. Then the dilemma faced by Indonesia in implementing inclusive education will be analysed. Finally, this paper will suggest some best practices of inclusive education in other countries that Indonesia can put into practice within its own framework. This could also be a lesson learnt for Indonesia should it seriously wish for better and improved education service for children with disabilities.

Overall, this paper argues that inclusive education will be the best way to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream education as it encourages teachers and all students to accept and be happy with differences and diversity as well as to see it as enrichment to the learning environment (UNESCO, 2003). However, Indonesia should be more serious in overcoming all dilemmas and problems in implementing inclusive education and be more willing to learn from other countries' best practices and implement it within its own framework.

II. Inclusion and its Rationale

The idea that every child has the right to receive education within general school environments appeared for the first time in the decision of US Supreme Court for the case of Brown v. the Boards of Education (1954). This set a model for the racial integration of public schools which was later applied to students with disabilities (Cavallaro and Haney, 1999). Following this decision, the United States mandated that all children with disabilities had their rights to free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Cavallaro and Haney, 1999).

Children with disabilities may be educated within various placement alternatives from special school placement to general settings where most students are developing typically. This is frequently referred to as inclusion. The ideology of inclusive education includes the principle that all children are able to learn together within a supported learning environment (Cavallaro and Haney, 1999).

What is inclusion or inclusive education? Inclusive education is defined as a strategy of addressing and responding to the diverse and various needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within education. The terminology of inclusive education implies that it promotes the
process of including children with disabilities into the regular education system where they should join their school-age peers in a learning process that is most advantageous to their needs (USAID, 2010, p.4). Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all students as individuals by reviewing its curricular organisation and provision (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996, p.9). Thus inclusive education does not only mean integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms but also providing accommodative curriculum.

There are many reasons for society to educate children within group settings. One such reason is that children may develop appropriate social skills. Brinker (1985) found that children with severe disabilities had more episodes of social interaction with their able-bodied peers when educated in inclusive settings. In addition, Evans, Salisbury, Palombaro, Berryman and Hollowood (1992) found that some children having severe disabilities are considered by their non-disabled peers as popular.

Besides, students with disabilities spend less time alone by themselves compared to similar students educated in more traditional special settings (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis and Goetz, 1994). Moreover, several studies have also concluded that integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms has no effect on the performance of all students; the able-bodied students maintain their academic outcomes, test scores and their ratings of social behaviour (Sharpe, York & Knight, 1994; Hendirckson, Shokoohi-Yekta, Hamre-Nietupski & Gable, 1996 in Hobbs & Westling, 1998). Inclusive education in Indonesia emerged out of educational reform on traditional exclusive education. The subsequent section will discuss the transition from special education to inclusive education in Indonesia.

III. From Special Education to Inclusive Education

Special education for people with disabilities was introduced in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period in 1900s. It was in the form of a sheltered workshop for people with vision impairment and special school for the deaf. These private schools were run and funded by concerned Dutch educators in Indonesia. Indonesian government’s initiative to set up specialised education for disabled children within the national education system began in 1954. Education Law number 12 year 1954 was introduced to regulate the provision of special education for disabled children. Prior to 1980s, special schools for disabled children were designated for each different type of disability. These schools were expensive and not all parents could afford it. The year of 1984 witnessed improvement in special education along with the campaign of 6 year compulsory education which obliged all children with disabilities to have at least primary education (Sunardi, 2010, p.19-22).

Such improvements were seen in the establishment of special primary schools for children with disabilities (Sekolah Dasar Luar Biasa [SDLB]). These schools were run by government and children with different types of disability were all included in one school. There were about 200 special primary schools all over Indonesia in that period of time. In addition, a few regular schools were also set up to accommodate only children with vision impairment. These schools were called integrated primary schools (Sunardi, 2010, p.25).

However, further development of special education in Indonesia showed a grim picture. Special education was only provided for children with vision impairment, hearing and speech impairment, physical disability or the combination of any of those (multiple disability). There was no thought nor initiative yet to provide special
education for children with learning disability, developmental disability and mental illness. Such education service was mostly segregating in nature (Sunardi, 2010, p.26). These special schools reinforce segregation and marginalisation of children with disabilities. They are taught within a model that isolates and segregates them. This is an education system based on exclusion and segregation (Porter, 2001).

The Salamanca Framework of Action highlights a move from special education model to inclusive education. It says that the term 'special educational needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties. There is an emerging consensus that children and youths with special education needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children. This has led to the concept of the inclusive school (UNESCO, 1994, p.6).

The term ‘inclusive education’ started to gain attention in 2001 when Directorate for Special Education of Indonesia initiated a pilot project on inclusive education (Nasichin, 2001). The first pilot project of inclusive school was held in Wonosari, Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta (Suroto, 2002). Since then, more discussions and researches appeared to investigate the implementation of inclusive education as an alternative to special education. However, a question remained concerning the term ‘inclusion’ itself as there is no fixed definition of that very term even in the western countries from which this concept originated. It should be understood that inclusive education requires a responsive recognition for differences in individuals. It also entails administrative reforms in education (Sunardi, 2010, p.26).

Inclusive education in Indonesia is officially recognised in Law number 20 Year 2003 on National Education System which stipulates that all citizens with all types of disabilities are compulsorily provided with inclusive education. In the same year, the Minister for National Education also issued a decree on Inclusive Education for Children with Physical and Cognitive Disabilities. This regulation specifies that inclusive education is an education that provides equal access for children with any type of disability to enjoy education in general school setting along with non-disabled students (Sunardi, 2010, p.28). However, those laws and regulations do not necessarily guarantee effective and comprehensive implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. There is a dilemma to face.

**IV. The Dilemma Faced**

As assured in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and other supporting bylaws, every citizen has the right to obtain education as well as the citizens with disabilities who are entitled to education designed to meet their special needs. Such educational needs are met with the establishment of special schools but they still exclude children with disabilities from the mainstream (Hadis, 2005). The new orientation towards more inclusive education which has been going on in developed countries has also motivated Indonesia to reform its educational system for children with disabilities. Inclusive education is expected as an ideal vehicle to accommodate education for all. However, only a very small number of regular schools are willing to accept children with disabilities. These few schools mostly refuse children with intellectual disability. Their refusal is due to several reasons such as the unavailability of trained teachers and lack of special facilities for children with intellectual disabilities. Most teachers think that these special children need a special curriculum and individual educational program, a class with a very
limited number of students and the parents’ approval to integrate their children in a regular class. (Hadis, 2005).

The problem for Indonesia is that the number of special schools are still very limited, mostly located in the capital city of provinces or regencies whereas majority of children with intellectual disabilities live in villages or rural areas. Statistic record reveals that only 29,104 children with intellectual disabilities are admitted to special schools across 32 provinces in Indonesia. This is merely a small fraction of the total number of children with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia which is 1,460,333. It is also given the fact that this number is larger than the other types of disabilities. Another problem is that sending these children to special schools is more costly than to regular schools, meanwhile most of them come from families with low social-economic level (Hadis, 2005).

A centralised education policy also contributes to the problem. It fails to accommodate students’ different backgrounds and needs. The curriculum is rigid and content-laden. Limiting the scope and including inclusive education into such a curriculum is not an easy task. Consequently, designing teaching materials that cover diverse needs and backgrounds of students has become dilemmatic (Sugiharto, 2008). Does it mean that inclusive education is impossible to implement effectively in Indonesia? Of course it does not. There are ample best practices from other countries to learn from in order to develop a suitable framework of inclusive education in Indonesian context.

V. Lesson Learnt from Other Countries and Suitable Framework for Indonesian Context

Inclusive educational practices are being advocated internationally. UNESCO and the OECD have also decided that inclusion is the favoured approach to providing schooling for students with disabilities. It is widely recognised that successful inclusions also require conditions that contribute to overall school improvement and high levels of achievement for all children (Porter, 2001). For children with disabilities, this recognition of protecting rights and enhancing opportunities means improvement in access to and availability of services, introduction of income support for their carers and more mainstreaming of education. Deinstitutionalisation would be the consequential and significant outcome (AIWH, 2004). This is seen in several developed as well as developing countries. Governments that seem to be the most progressive with the education system reform are generally also the most open towards inclusive education as indicated by their national strategic plans (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia). Besides, countries that are concentrating on big changes in the national level such as curriculum revision (Bosnia, Kosovo and Georgia), an aggressive school construction initiative (Azerbaijan), major textbook overhaul (Georgia and Moldova) and large-scale teacher training efforts (Serbia) appear to receive the issue of inclusion more willingly (USAID, 2010). In the last two decades, there has been a strong movement in Australia towards educating children with disabilities in mainstream schools and mainstream classes. Research has shown the benefit that children with disabilities gain from participating in mainstream educational settings (Foreman in AIWH, 2004). Such best practices from other countries show that implementation of inclusive education requires a total paradigm shift which may include changes in attitudes, policy and classroom level interventions (Rieser, 2008).
The concept of inclusion is unquestionably valuable to many countries that implement it. However, its desired effects will be limited when perspectives on inclusion are not promoted to be situated within local conditions and circumstances (Lim, 2011). In Indonesian context, inclusive education access in the sense that every single child with a disability should enrol in regular schools, as in accordance with the basic principle of inclusive schools that ‘all children should learn together wherever possible regardless of any difficulties or differences they have,’ is still very difficult to implement. In other words, implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia is still in a very early stage (Hadis, 2005).

Inclusive education for Indonesia would be: 1) a continuous process and effort to discover the means to cope and respond to the various individual needs of children; 2) paying serious attention to the methods or approaches in eradicating any obstacles to the learning process of children with disabilities; 3) regular schools should enable children with disabilities to participate actively and obtain knowledge that is essential for their future life and 4) designed and directed mainly for children who are marginalised, excluded and in need of special education (Hadis, 2005).

In light of the above, the overall goal would be ensuring that school is a place where all children participate and are treated equally. This entails a change in perception on education. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems so as to respond to the diversity of learners. It means enhancing the quality of education by improving teachers’ effectiveness, promoting learning-centred methodologies, developing appropriate textbooks and learning materials and making sure that schools are safe and healthy for all children. Besides, strengthening links with the community is of great importance as well. To put it in another way, relationships among teachers, students, parents and community at large are fundamental for developing inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 1995).

A framework developed for use as a conceptual guide to the network of relationships and factors in inclusive education was proposed in ‘Inclusive Education: An EFA (Education for All) Strategy for All Children’ (World Bank, 2004). In the framework, input factors are those things which affect access to school for children with disabilities such as students, school, family and community. Education reforms to implement inclusive education must address these issues in innovative ways. The most challenging access issues to overcome are finding, identifying and encouraging children with disabilities to go to school, student characteristics (degree and types of disability), conditions of teachers’ work, negative attitudes of parents and communities as well as lack of political will reflected by attitudes of government officials (USAID, 2010).

Programming for inclusive education should be flexible and offer opportunities to move across between options as children’s status and abilities change. Placement should be concentrated on a diverse continuum of services where children are placed in the least restrictive and most inclusive educational environment which will fully support their learning needs. Approaches to such programming include: 1) one track where all children are placed in general education schools; 2) two track in which education services for children with disabilities are offered as a distinct education system such as special schools functioning in parallel to the general schools; 3) multi-track in which children can move fluidly between placement options depending on their needs and achievements. For instance, self-contained classrooms attached to mainstream schools enable students to enjoy special
assistance in their own classroom while placing them in an environment to join mainstream students for other activities (Mooij, T and E. Smeets in USAID, 2010).

Last but not least, sufficient funding is also a key to successful implementation of inclusive education. Adequate and targeted amounts of funding are imperative in the levels of school and community for the initial program start-up and continuation, staff incentives and salaries, parent/caretaker support, training, special equipment and community organisations/services. One thing that Indonesian government needs to keep in mind is that while initial inclusive education program start-up costs might be large, they will be more efficiently used in the longer run as they benefit a large number of students. However, large funding is not continuously required for inclusive education programming as it should ultimately be seen as benefitting the general education program (USAID, 2010). Thus it all eventually depends on the government’s political will and seriousness in investing in and putting enormous efforts in the successful implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

VI. Conclusion

The development of inclusive education in Indonesia is indeed a bit left behind compared to progressive implementation of inclusive education in other countries. It is seen in limited resources, knowledge and skills required for successful implementation of inclusive education. The existing curricula of general education have yet to fully accommodate different needs of children with disabilities. It gives an impression as if inclusive education were merely an experimental program. This is a dilemma. However, there should be a solution to this problem. Other countries’ best practices could serve as lessons to learn to develop a suitable framework of implementing inclusive education in Indonesia. Legal framework to guarantee the implementation of inclusive education is already in place but it is not enough. It all depends now on Indonesian government’s seriousness to implement the stages of inclusive education consistently from its socialisation to evaluation and to adopt the real meaning of inclusive education that is to provide education for all.

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References


