

Teachers' Beliefs in Practicing Inclusive Education; Base Study of Elementary Schools in Banda Aceh

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Abstract- The implementation of inclusive education in Aceh remains ineffective due to deficits in teachers' beliefs about the value of its practice in classrooms. The purpose of this research was to explore teachers' beliefs in practicing inclusive education and the factors influencing them in elementary schools. The participants in this study were 6 classroom teachers from 4 public elementary schools in Banda Aceh. The data gathered for this study was obtained from semi structured in-depth interviews. Teachers hold various kinds of beliefs about inclusive education based on their previous experience, knowledge, self-reflection and awareness, cultural and religious beliefs. They believed the values of inclusive education were in accordance with their faith. However, their conviction about the practice of inclusive education is low and is reflected in their unwillingness to teach in inclusive classrooms due to their lack of knowledge and skills. In addition to the low level of teachers' selfefficacy is the lack of external support from government at district and national level. The government did not set a curriculum for students with special needs. The teachers used the regular curriculum which obviously was not suitable. Moreover, special needs students, teacher training, and grants to support the implementation of inclusive practice were not distributed evenly. Most inclusive schools did not have appropriate facilities.

Key words: teachers' beliefs; inclusive education; elementary schools; Banda Aceh; government support.

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a solution for some education access problems in Indonesia. The foremost aim of inclusive education is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social unity (Specht & Young, 2010), and there are some important issues about teaching practice in inclusive classrooms to explore. Special education schools are limited in number, they're only available in big cities [1].

Therefore, many students with special needs usually underachieve in education because they are not able to go to school [2]. On the other hand, there is a government policy of 6-year compulsory education which obliges all

learners with disabilities to complete primary education at least [2].

Aceh is one of the five provinces chosen as a pilot area for inclusive education in Indonesia since 2012. The Government wants to improve education quality in Aceh, as Aceh experienced civil conflict for approximately around three decades since the 1980s, which led to a decline in education. In addition, the number of teaching staff (teachers, professors) who died in the 2004 tsunami caused education in Aceh to lag behind. However, the implementation of inclusive education in Banda Aceh remains slow with problems related to the teachers' ability to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Most of the teachers in Aceh do not have adequate knowledge to practice the principles of inclusion, as most of them lack skills and have no special educational background. In the previous study by Avramidis and Norwich 2002 [3], it is argued that teachers' education background, skills and experiences will influence teachers' attitudes and beliefs in practicing inclusive education.

Teachers' beliefs have been identified as an important factor which influences teachers' success as well as teachers' practice in inclusive education [4], and others agree[3]. The first step is by having positive beliefs towards inclusion [5]. In addition, teachers' beliefs and practice were influenced by internal factors which consisted of knowledge, experience, self-reflection and awareness. The external factors consisted of policies at school, district, and national level.[6]

The mainstream classroom increasingly becomes the preferred placement option for many students with special needs, as McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges explicated[7]. There are only 15 (20%) out of 71 public schools that implement inclusive education in Banda Aceh since 2012. This indicates that most of the schools were not ready to implement the inclusive education system.

This is the problem which challenges mainstream teacher educators: how best to achieve inclusive education? The success of inclusive education is measured

by its meeting the needs of a diverse student population, which might be dependent upon the beliefs of the teachers providing inclusive service

TABLE 1

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TEACHERS' BELIEFS IN PRACTICING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

1. Internal factors	2. External factors
A. Experience Teaching experience The successful and failure in teaching	A. Classroom Factor Class size Students ability
B. Knowledge Content knowledge Pedagogy knowledge	B. School factors School culture School community
C. Self-awareness and self-reflection	C. District factors Resource of infrastructures Student's admission Teacher training policy Teacher's placement
D. Other beliefs Belief in value of humanity Beliefs in value of faith	D. National level National grant National curriculum

(Brophy and Good, 1986; Haertel and Walberg, 1993, cited in TALIS. E).

This study is intended to answer the question of what kind of teachers' beliefs there are in practicing inclusive education and the factors which may influence teachers' beliefs in the practice of inclusive education in Banda Aceh.

This is the first research related to teachers' beliefs in teaching inclusive classrooms in Banda Aceh, which considers some solutions for teachers in teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. We anticipate that teachers' practices in inclusive education will be directed by their beliefs in the system. Research focusing on their beliefs in inclusive education may be needed to deeply understand the practice of inclusion.

II. METHODS

This research adopted a qualitative method; the procedure of this study is using semistructured in-depth interviews to explore teachers' beliefs in the practice of inclusive education in elementary schools in Banda Aceh. This research was conducted in a very short time with a small number of teachers, hence the results of this qualitative approach does not claim to be a definitive analysis of inclusive education in Aceh.

The interviews were conducted in four different schools in Banda Aceh during September and October 2016. The city of Banda Aceh has the highest number of inclusive schools at elementary level, with 15 inclusive schools from 71 schools. After some observation and "snow ball" recommendations, the researchers selected 4 schools with 6 respondents as the objects of this study. Six teachers of the selected schools were asked voluntarily to participate in the study at least three times each. Five of them are classroom teachers and one is a principal. They were chosen as the participants for this research because their main responsibilities are teaching in inclusive classrooms, and are based on recommendations from their principal.

The data transcribed the verbatim responses into written form. This means that all the informants' answers were carefully read and codified into themes which would allow the researchers to analyze it. The categories and codes were divided into two factor types (internal or external) that influence teachers' beliefs in practicing inclusive education. The interviews were guided by two general topics: 1. Teacher's beliefs in teacher's competencies to teach in inclusive classroom. 2. Teacher's beliefs in implementing inclusive teacher's interpretation of beliefs by own meaning making. education values in inclusive classroom. The answers were codified into the two factors and categories: The in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how participants make sense of their experiences and self-interpreting beings which means that they are actively engaged in interpreting the events, objects, and people in their lives. The data was categorized based on the indicators above and the teacher's answers toward the inclusive phenomenon were used to understand the teacher's interpretation of beliefs by their own meaning making.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the implementation of inclusive education in Banda Aceh was influenced by internal and external factors. See the following diagram which gives the categories within these factors, and reports their efficacy.

Teachers' beliefs were formed by their knowledge, experience, self-reflection and awareness, and other beliefs which made them rely on their responsibility as a teacher. This finding is in line with the previous research by Pajares,[8] that teachers' beliefs in practicing inclusive education is influenced by internal factors. However, the teachers doubt their practice inclusive education because of a lag of support for facilities, grant etcetera from government. We also found a similarity with Fives,[8] in the external factors, such as government support and school support which influence inclusive practice.

A. Internal Factors

First, beliefs were formed by teaching experience. The teachers believe that their previous experience in teaching in regular classrooms or inclusive classrooms will help them to interact with special needs students. For instance, there were some difficulties in educating the students with mental and physical disabilities in the same classroom as regular students. On the other hand, there were success stories of achievement in teaching. Hence, the failure and success that the teachers achieved will strengthen their beliefs in practicing inclusive education, as they learn from it.

Second was a belief in knowledge: knowledge about subject content, pedagogical knowledge, natural intuition and help available from colleagues. The content and pedagogical knowledge of inclusive education that they have is very limited and varies based on the type of training they have followed. Some of them suggested that they rely on their natural intuition in teaching which comes from their previous knowledge and experiences. In addition, some teachers have experience as parents which helps them recognize the students' psychological situations. This has sharpened their empathy to respect pupils including special needs students.

The teachers found it very helpful if there were colleagues accompanying them in teaching inclusive class. Colleagues can come from other institutions, or be an assistant or a fellow teacher at the school. Their limited knowledge leads to the need for help from others becoming very important. Consequently, even though they lack knowledge as inclusive education teachers, such availability has contributed to their beliefs about implementing inclusive education.

The third belief was in self-awareness and reflection. They were aware that they did not have adequate capacity to teach in inclusive classrooms. Although they did not have an educational background in special education, they used their general skills in practicing inclusive education. Teachers usually reflect after their teaching which elevates their awareness of their content and pedagogical knowledge.

Other beliefs include religion and values of human rights. In Aceh daily life, the teachers are strongly influenced by their cultural and religious background, including their beliefs in teaching. At least 95 percent of the population of Aceh is Muslim, including the respondents to this study. They believe the values of inclusive education are in accordance with their faith. The concept of human rights contained in the Holy Quran has no distinction between those who are disabled and the normal in everyday life. Another value the teachers believe is related to their faith is that every kindness will gain merit and reward from God. This belief becomes the motivation for the teachers in the daily teaching practice in inclusive classroom.

B. External Factors

School factors consist of the curriculum, government funding, the teachers' capacity development program, school policies, and class sizes. All those factors may cause problems in the implementation of inclusive education if the implementation does not fully support the needs. If the teachers get sufficient support from these external factors, it is thought possible to elevate their beliefs. The most significant support should come from the government, as it will influence many aspects in practicing inclusive education in Aceh.

The Aceh government's willingness to support education with an appropriate curriculum was questionable. As evidence, there were limited training sessions related to curriculum for inclusion. After 4 years of implementation of inclusive education, there has been no suitable curriculum for inclusion. Consequently, the teachers required implementing the same curriculum as for regular students, which is problematic as it is impossible to gain maximal achievement in the learning process. Therefore, the governments should prioritize a curriculum for student inclusion as soon as possible.

However, the teachers desperately demand the facilities to support them as it will increase their confidence and motivation. It may cause teachers to be hesitant/doubt towards inclusive education. Even though there was not full support of the inclusive practice as expected, teachers held their beliefs toward their experience, knowledge, self-reflection and other beliefs to encourage their teaching practice in inclusive education. This is in line with previous research about government support toward inclusive education, which found that government support to the inclusive education is still low[9].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our research identified that teachers' beliefs in practicing inclusive education in Banda Aceh is still low. On the other hand, the teachers agreed with the concept and the implementation of inclusive education, when the support systems are provided well. Even though the external factors did not support their teaching practice appropriately, yet the teachers still taught eagerly. This was especially caused by the aforementioned internal level factors. There was an efficacy imbalance between internal and external level factors in supporting inclusive education in Banda Aceh.

The impact of this research for future is divided into four levels. First, from internal factors, there is potential for teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in inclusive practices. Second, at the school level, school management should enhance teachers' capacity in teaching the students with special needs by supporting the teachers' discussion forum, parenting socialization about inclusion to

support inclusive practice at school, as well as organizing teachers' reflection of inclusive practice in a teacher's portfolio. Third, from district level factors, some policies should be reviewed, such as the distribution of students with special needs to inclusive schools and developing the partnership between special schools and inclusive schools. Fourth, from national level factors, Indonesian education institutions should review and analyze the national policies related to the special teachers in inclusive school placement, organize the distribution of teachers' training to all teachers in inclusive schools, and review the distribution of the budget to all-inclusive schools equally.

Finally, for future research, from teacher side, it is recommended to investigate by qualitative and quantitative methodology the risk of teachers' beliefs and practice towards inclusive education becoming negative unless support is improved. To also, more information is needed about government officers of Aceh roles in implementing inclusive education in Banda Aceh.

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