

Empowering Educational Equality Through Inclusive Education: Evidence From Lecturers In Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract

Citizens have a right to education. The existence of inclusive education plays a pivotal role in empowering educational equality for all people. The present case study aims to explore the teaching experiences of lecturers in empowering educational equality through inclusive education in Indonesian Islamic higher education, particularly in the Islamic Counselling Guidance Department where a student has a disability. Further, the challenges during the practices of inclusive education were explored. Using a narrative inquiry study, data from the study were gathered through narrative interviews with two lecturers who implemented inclusive education in Indonesian Islamic higher education. The findings of the study revealed that they implemented inclusive education to empower educational equality for students particularly those with disabilities through several ways including facilitating accessible teaching and learning processes, coordinating with students to assist those with disabilities, especially in discussing materials, and helping them when they find difficulties in learning. Meanwhile, several challenges during the implementation of inclusive education include a lack of educators having training about inclusive education, a lack of facilities enhancing the teaching and learning for those with disabilities, a lack of assistive technologies such as Braille materials, and the need for collaboration between parents and university members to empower a better inclusive education. The study implies the need for the campus to provide better facilities and dedicated lecturers who have training in inclusive education to enhance educational equality.

Keywords: *Citizenship, Educational Equality, Inclusive Education, Indonesian Islamic Higher Education*

A. Introduction

In recent decades, inclusive education has gained much attention in the educational world. In the context of higher education, in the academic year of 2012/2013, 221.190 students with disabilities enrolled in higher education based on the statistics agency students' record (Bunbury, 2020). However, it is not easy to define the term inclusive education. for instance, it is defined as one way to foster student diversity which focuses on human rights in which all people gain the same rights in education (Ntombela, 2013). In addition, inclusive education challenges attitudes, methodologies, environment, and curriculum to address students' needs, particularly those with disabilities, and foster them to be active in the learning process (Terzi, 2014). Apart from the definition of inclusive education, it promotes implications for how educational institutions provide supporting facilities to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Previous scholars have undertaken several studies in conjunction with inclusive education. Zhang et al. (2019) explore the perception of Chinese teachers in utilizing Response to Intervention (RTI) in inclusive education in the preschool context. In their findings study, they provide recommendations for universities in China to improve courses of special education for pre-service teachers majoring in preschool education to foster skills and information related to inclusive education by holding training, workshops, and other academic forums. Kalyanpur (2008) unravels the policy and stipulation of service in India which resulted in inappropriate practice and financial aspects that could hinder the programs initiated by the government, especially in inclusive education proven by the undetected children with disabilities. Furthermore, Stepaniuk (2019) through his literature review study explores the practice of inclusive education in Eastern European countries and former Soviet to investigate the situation needed for the system of education to become more inclusive. Tracey et al. (2021) unravel the importance of providing teacher training to foster skills in inclusive education in Papua New Guinea and their challenges. Wise et al. (2020) explore the management, strategy, and function conducted by the universities in the context of inclusive higher education resulting in the need for managing stakeholders and others in enhancing the program of inclusive education.

The above previous studies emphasize the practice of inclusive education in the school's contexts including preschool and high school. Nonetheless, the practice of inclusive education in higher education particularly Islamic higher education has gained less attention. This paper, therefore, aims to explore the teaching experiences of lecturers in Indonesian Islamic higher education in practicing inclusive education to empower educational equality and their challenges. More importantly, through the narrative inquiry, the implication of the study is discussed in this study.

B. Method

The present study aims to uncover lecturers' teaching experiences in empowering educational equality through inclusive education in Islamic higher education in the Islamic counseling guidance department. This study adopted a narrative inquiry method to explore the lecturers' teaching experiences in inclusive education and the challenges. As advocated by Creswell (2012), the purpose of narrative study is to unravel individuals through their experiences and stories. In addition, it allows us to obtain information from lecturers' teaching experiences (Dayal et al., 2021).

This kind of design has also provided an understanding of how the participants uncover their stories of lives, and how these experiences are enhanced by the broader institutional (Clandinin, 2006). In this regard, I employed narrative interviews to gain fruitful insight into the teaching experiences of the lecturers in inclusive education and the challenges they have during the practice.

Concerning the recruitment of participants, I selected two lecturers of Islamic higher education to participate in this study. They are female lecturers identified as Lecturer 1, and Lecturer 2. Lecturer 1 is 45 years old and Lecturer 2 is 34 years old. They were chosen for the reasonable considerations of accessibility, openness, and availability. In accordance with teaching experience, Lecturer 1 had 15 years. Meanwhile, Lecturer 2 had 8 years of teaching experience in higher education. In terms of inclusive education, they have the same teaching experiences for one year in inclusive education especially in the academic year 2023. Concerning their educational background, they all have master's degrees.

Regarding the major, Lecturer 1 is majoring in Islamic counselling and lecturer 2 is majoring in English education.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Teaching experiences of lecturers in inclusive education

As stated earlier, lecturers have teaching experiences in inclusive education in the Islamic counselling guidance department started in August 2024. It was the first time for them to teach in an inclusive class where there was a student with disabilities who was blind. The following descriptions elaborate on the teaching experiences of lecturers in inclusive education.

2. Teaching experiences of Lecturer 1 in inclusive education

Lecturer 1 taught an introduction to counselling in inclusive education. She implemented their teaching practice using a variety of teaching methods, techniques, and strategies to meet students' needs, particularly for a student with a disability. In addition, she tried to provide equality in education for all students based on the students' characteristics. For instance, she always gives teaching reflections on materials at the end of the class by boosting all students including a student with a disability. Furthermore, they are all asked to deliver opinions, ideas, and arguments in their teaching reflection. Concerning teaching methods, she adopted various methods including discussion, reflection, demonstration, questions and answers, lecturing, and others. In conjunction with media, she used PowerPoint to deliver materials. Meanwhile, in the process of assessments, she was flexible in giving assignments to students. For instance, in the process of the mid-term test, she gave some questions related to counselling materials. In this matter, students can finish their assignments at home so that they have more time to write down the answers. Moreover, she gave a choice for a student with a disability based on his characteristics and needs. For example, he could submit the answer through recorded voice, or in written form by asking for help from others to do the assignment. As evidenced by the following excerpt:

Lecturer 1:

I have teaching experiences for more than 15 years. However, it is my first time teaching a student with a disability in an inclusive class,

particularly in the Islamic counselling guidance department. In the teaching practice, I used several teaching methods including demonstration, discussion, lecturing, question and answers, reflection, and so on. Meanwhile, I used media of power point present the materials. To provide educational equality for all students, I asked students to deliver their opinions, ideas, and arguments related to the materials we discussed at the end of the class. Also, I gave the same chance to a student with a disability to give his opinion as a teaching reflection. Following assessments, I also provide the same chance for all students to access the assignment. In this matter, I gave a list of questions related to counselling materials. They were all asked to do the assignment in the written form. However, I gave flexibility to a student with a disability to do the assignment based on his capability and need. For instance, he can submit the assignment through recorded voice, video, or in written form using technological assistance as long as the answer is correct.

The above excerpt reveals that Lecturer 1 tried to provide educational equality in her class by understanding the students' characteristics and needs including a student with a disability. In this regard, she has implemented the principle of inclusive education which appreciates diversity and promotes more accessible chances for all students including a student with disabilities based on their characteristics and needs (Wahyuningsih, 2016). The practice of inclusive education could be said as something new, particularly in the context of Islamic higher education. Therefore, the university should accomplish the students' needs, staff, and lecturers and respond to the needs of stakeholders in providing a better inclusive education (Wise et al., 2020). Some previous studies focus on exploring inclusive education in schools' contexts including preschool, secondary schools, and so on. For instance, Bartolo et al., (2021) developed an ecosystem model to teach in the context of early childhood education. In addition, Zhang et al., (2019) explore perceptions of teachers in China to the utilization of response to intervention in the context of preschools.

3. Teaching experiences of Lecturer 2 in inclusive education

Lecturer 2 taught English in an Islamic higher education for 8 years. However, it was the first time for her to teach English in inclusive education, especially in the academic year 2023. She adopted several teaching methods and media in enhancing the process of English language teaching in inclusive education including discussion, brainstorming, question and answers, lecturing, demonstration, and so on. Also, she used teaching media such as PowerPoint, English videos, case studies, pictures, and so on. The materials include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and English texts which cover listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In terms of assessment, she adopted various forms including spoken and written forms. For instance, she asked all students including those with disabilities to mention examples of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs using the game. In this sense, they felt enthusiastic to answer the questions. Meanwhile, in the written form, students can identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs from the English texts and write them down through discussion with colleagues. Concerning a student with a disability, she gave the flexibility to answer the questions through recorded voice or others based on his capability and needs. It is evidenced through the following excerpt:

Lecturer 2:

Honestly, it is my first-time teaching student with a disability. During the teaching practice, I used various teaching methods and media to meet students' needs including the student with disabilities. The teaching methods include discussion, brainstorming, questions and answers, games, and so on. I also used teaching media including English videos, pictures, reality, PowerPoint, and others. In terms of assessment, I gave assignments both in spoken and written forms. I asked students to have a group discussion to find nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs and reported them in front of the class. In a spoken form, I asked students to deliver something using English. In this regard, I gave the same chance to all students to do the assignment based on their characteristics including the student with a disability. For example, I

gave flexibility for him to do the assignment through question and answer directly in spoken form of the limitation of writing.

The above elaborations denote that Lecturer 2 tried to provide the same opportunity for learning for all students including the student with disability like Lecturer 1. Moreover, she adopted various teaching media and techniques to accommodate students' needs particularly the student with a disability. It is also reflected in the ways she gave assignments and evaluations to students by considering the flexibility of learning and the characteristics of students. This finding is strengthened by Wahyuningsih (2016) emphasizes that teachers should understand the needs of students in inclusive education and provide equality during the teaching process. More importantly, understanding students' characters in the teaching and learning process is crucial for enhancing positive emotions among students (Wahyuningsih, 2017a, 2017b).

D. Challenges experienced by the lecturers during teaching in inclusive education

Based on the interviews with two lecturers, they found some challenges during teaching in inclusive education including:

a. Lack of social awareness among students with their peer with a disability

Developing an inclusive environment is important to enhance a successful inclusive education. It can be established through developing social awareness among students in inclusive education. Based on the interviews with two participants, they advocated that most students in inclusive classes lacked social awareness of the student with a disability. In this matter, only one or two students showed their social awareness to help the student with a disability during the practice of inclusive education that can be actualized by building cooperation, offering help, and so on. Therefore, this becomes one of the challenges that hinders successful inclusive education. Supporting social awareness is needed to foster a better inclusive education. This finding is in accordance with Kaur et al., (2017) emphasizing that building a positive learning environment and creating social awareness in inclusive education is badly needed.

b. Lack of facilities to enhance a successful inclusive education

One of the challenges that the lecturers found in practicing inclusive education is the lack of facilities provided by the university. Based on the interviews, the lecturers emphasized that the lack of facilities is one of the factors hindering successful inclusive education in the higher education context including the building is not friendly for students with disabilities, the crowded parking areas that can hinder students with disability to get access into the building and can hinder the process of building the independent character. Further, there are no technological tools accomplished with the application of Braille writing so the student with a disability cannot access the process of teaching and learning easily. This is in line with the study conducted by Zabeli et al. (2021) that some barriers to the implementation of inclusive education include lack of facilities, lack of funding support, difficulty in accessing the facilities, and so on.

c. Lack of training for lecturers in inclusive education

Based on the interviews, the lecturers emphasized that they lacked training such as workshops and seminars related to the practice of inclusive education in Islamic higher education. Indeed, it was their first time teaching in inclusive education. Moreover, they need knowledge and information regarding the appropriate teaching methods, media, approaches, assessment, and evaluation that could be adopted in inclusive classes. Teaching approaches often remain inadequate in inclusive education (Savvidou, 2011).

d. Lack of professional staff or experts to help students with disabilities

Professional staff or expert in inclusive education is needed to enhance students with disability access to the teaching and learning process. Indeed, there are no professional staff and experts in inclusive education provided by the university. Therefore, this becomes one of the challenges encountered by lecturers in teaching in inclusive education. As asserted by Tracey et al. (2021), lack of access especially in terms of professionals is the barrier to inclusive education. Therefore, the a need for universities to cooperate with professional experts as well as stakeholders to support inclusive education (Wise et al., 2020).

The findings of the study offer implications including the need for students to increase their social awareness with their peers with a disability, the need for the university to provide better facilities in enhancing inclusive education, the

need for the university to provide training such as workshops and seminar in relation to teaching in inclusive education for lecturers to develop their competence, and the need for the university to provide professional staff and expert in inclusive education and building cooperation with stakeholders.

E. Conclusion

Educational equality is the right for people including those with disabilities. The present study aims to uncover the teaching experiences of lecturers in Islamic higher education in inclusive education. Based on the interviews, the lecturers implemented the teaching and learning process in inclusive education by considering the characteristics and the needs of students. Furthermore, they adopted various teaching methods, media, and assessments to enhance the teaching and learning process. However, they experienced challenges during teaching in inclusive education including a lack of social awareness among students with their peer with disability, a lack of facilities to enhance a successful inclusive education, a lack of training for lecturers in inclusive education, and a lack of professional staff or expert to help students with disabilities. The implications of the study include the need for students to increase their social awareness with their peer with a disability, the need for the university to provide better facilities in enhancing inclusive education, the need for the university to provide training such as workshops and seminars in relation to teaching in inclusive education for lecturers to develop their competence, and the need for the university to provide professional staff and expert in inclusive education and building cooperation with stakeholders.

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