

Pioneering Inclusivity: A Narrative Study of the First Inclusive Raudatul Athfal in South Kalimantan

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Abstract

Inclusive education is indispensable for ensuring equitable educational opportunities and rights for children with special needs (CWSNs) to enhance their skills. However, maintaining inclusive schools encounters significant challenges, including limited resources and societal biases against CWSNs. This study centers on the establishment and operation of Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, the first inclusive Raudatul Athfal in South Kalimantan. Employing a qualitative narrative approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. The study highlights the crucial role of the school principal, bolstered by her family's property business and partnerships with therapists and experts in inclusive education, facilitated the school's transition to inclusivity. Despite encountering initial lack of support from the Ministry of Religion and the city government, the school achieved national acclaim for promoting inclusive education in South Kalimantan. This research underscores the principal's dedication and collaborative endeavors in promoting inclusive education and overcoming societal barriers for CWSNs.

Pendidikan inklusif penting untuk memastikan kesempatan pendidikan yang adil dan hak-hak yang setara bagi anak-anak berkebutuhan khusus (ABK) untuk menstimulasi perkembangan mereka. Namun, menyelenggarakan sekolah inklusif menghadapi tantangan signifikan seperti sumber daya yang terbatas dan prasangka sosial terhadap ABK. Penelitian ini berfokus pada pendirian dan penyelenggaraan Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, Raudatul Athfal inklusif pertama di Kalimantan Selatan. Menggunakan pendekatan naratif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen, dan observasi partisipatif. Penelitian ini menyoroti peran kunci kepala sekolah, yang didukung oleh bisnis properti keluarganya dan kolaborasi dengan terapis dan ahli pendidikan inklusif, yang mendukung transformasi inklusif sekolah tersebut. Meskipun awalnya tidak mendapat dukungan dari kementerian agama dan pemerintah kota, sekolah ini mendapatkan pengakuan nasional dalam memajukan pendidikan inklusif di Kalimantan Selatan. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya dedikasi kepala sekolah dan upaya kolaboratif dalam mewujudkan pendidikan inklusif dan mengatasi hambatan sosial terhadap ABK.

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A. Introduction

UNESCO defines inclusion as addressing the diverse needs of all learners by increasing their participation in learning, culture, and society, and reducing exclusion from educational opportunities (Opertti & Brady, 2011). This educational approach posits that students with special needs thrive socially and academically when included in general education classes. Supported by various disciplines like psychology and pedagogy, inclusion aligns with efforts to embrace diversity in school environments and has been integrated into educational policies worldwide (Amor et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, inclusive education is mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which ensures equal educational opportunities for every citizen. Additionally, Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 supports the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities and gifted/talented individuals. Inclusive education entails placing all students, irrespective of challenges they may face, in age-appropriate general education classrooms within their local schools. Here, they receive comprehensive instruction, interventions, and support to achieve success in completing the core curriculum (Hornby, 2014; Mitchell, 2015).

Inclusive education fosters socialization and community integration by providing students with special needs opportunities to interact with their peers who are typically developing. This interaction promotes the development of social skills and positive relationships (Farmer et al., 2019), fostering understanding, acceptance, and empathy towards diversity. Moreover, inclusive education enables students with special needs to access the same academic curriculum as their peers. With additional support such as assistive technology and specialized instruction, they participate fully in classroom activities alongside their peers, promoting their academic growth within inclusive settings (Ahmed, 2018; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016).

Inclusive education is pivotal in reducing stigmatization and fostering positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities by integrating students with special needs into regular classrooms. This integration allows peers to recognize their capabilities and strengths beyond their disabilities, thus challenging negative stereotypes (Nketsia et al., 2016). Achieving effective inclusive classrooms necessitates providing enhanced support and resources to both students with special needs and their educators. This includes specialized training and additional resources tailored to accommodate diverse learning needs within regular classroom settings, ensuring equitable opportunities for all students.

Recognized as a fair and equitable practice, inclusive early childhood education aims to enable every child and family, regardless of ability, to fully participate in various activities as valued members of their community and society (Juvonen et al.,

2019; Shaeffer, 2019). Desired outcomes of inclusive education encompass fostering belonging, nurturing positive social relationships, supporting holistic development, and enabling children to achieve their full potential (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Woodgate et al., 2020) (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Woodgate et al., 2020). To ensure the success of early childhood inclusive education programs, critical aspects such as access to educational opportunities, active participation in learning, and robust policy support must be prioritized (Bartolo et al., 2021). These elements collectively contribute to creating inclusive environments that empower all children to thrive and receive the necessary support for their educational journey. Banjarbaru City in South Kalimantan has shown strong dedication to promoting inclusive education. In late 2017, the mayor, along with school principals and madrasas across various educational levels, officially designated Banjarbaru City as inclusive. This declaration was reinforced by the enactment of Mayor Regulation Number 9 of 2018, which delineates the implementation of inclusive education as a guiding policy for the city.

According to Umi Saroh, head of the Inclusive Education Communication Forum (FKPI), Banjarbaru currently accommodates 70 children with special needs in early childhood education, 22 at the elementary level, 10 in junior high school, and 4 in senior high school. The city's dedication to inclusive education was exemplified when it recognized and awarded 20 schools providing inclusive education during International Autism and Down Syndrome Awareness Day. Hj Rahma Khairita, head of the Banjarbaru City education office, reported that currently, 54 ECEC schools in Banjarbaru identify themselves as inclusive institutions. The city aims to expand this designation to 168 ECEC schools as part of its ongoing efforts to promote inclusive education municipality-wide. These initiatives underscore Banjarbaru City's proactive stance in fostering an inclusive educational environment that caters to the diverse needs of all students, including those with special needs.

Raudhatul Athfal institutions, despite falling outside the education sector's regional budgets due to their classification under the Ministry of Religion and private ownership, face challenges such as limited government support, inadequate teacher stipends, and insufficient resources for enhancing teacher competence and learning facilities (Yahya, 2017). Raudatul Athfal, classified as a first-level educational institution under the Ministry of Religion, operates as a privately owned entity, which results in limited government support for resources, training, and enhancing teacher competence necessary to support learning facilities. These constraints underscore the need for greater assistance in implementing inclusive education at Raudhatul Athfal institutions. Among the 20 Raudatul Athfal institutions in Banjarbaru, which collectively serve 840 students with the support of 106 teachers, only two provide inclusive education. Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani stands out as a notable example of an inclusive madrasah in Banjarbaru, accommodating nine children with special needs.

This research focuses on addressing the significant challenges faced by Raudhatul Athfal institutions, particularly Raudhatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, in their pursuit of inclusive education. The omission of Raudhatul Athfal from regional education sector budgets and the comparatively modest stipends for teachers highlight the insufficient government support for these primary educational institutions under the Ministry of Religion. The study aims to elucidate the specific efforts undertaken by Raudhatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani to implement inclusive education despite limited resources and training opportunities.

Furthermore, the presence of children with special needs at Raudhatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani underscores the importance of inclusive education in meeting diverse learning needs. The research offers valuable insights into the challenges faced and initiatives undertaken at this institution, which can inform policy decisions and interventions aimed at promoting inclusive education in similar contexts. Ultimately, these efforts aim to foster a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all students in Banjarbaru and beyond.

B. Method

This research employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive narrative method, which analyzes stories, narratives, or experiential reports to gain insights into individual or group experiences. Narrative research methods are commonly used in social sciences and humanities to deepen understanding of human experiences. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation.

Stakeholders involved in establishing the first inclusive Raudhatul Athfal in South Kalimantan included the Foundation's director, the Head of Raudhatul Athfal, and six teachers. Their participation aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of inclusion implementation, with the Foundation's leader contributing vision and organizational guidance, and the Raudhatul Athfal leader offering practical expertise. Six educators specializing in different subjects and grade levels shared insights into their challenges and strategies in inclusive settings. Recruitment involved formal invitations and internal announcements, with interview durations ranging from 45 to 120 minutes based on candidates' roles and experience. Engaging all stakeholders aimed to deepen understanding of Raudhatul Athfal's pioneering efforts in South Kalimantan, particularly in promoting inclusivity.

The researcher also collected written documents such as curricula, educator recruitment processes, and relevant reports, which served as sources of narrative data to uncover emerging patterns or themes. Participatory observation provided direct insights into the experiences of individuals or groups under study, enriching the

narrative data. Data analysis employed thematic analysis to organize, interpret, and categorize recurring themes or patterns in the narrative data. Researchers identified and categorized themes that repeated or showed similarities in stories or narratives, analyzing relationships or patterns that emerged among them. Interpretation and in-depth analysis of findings followed the identification of patterns or themes in the narrative data.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Founding Background

The Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, situated in Guntung Manggis Village, Landasan Ulin District, Banjarbaru, South Kalimantan, is organized by the Cahaya Keluarga Madani Foundation. Mrs. HK serves as the headmaster of this pioneering institution, which is the first Raudatul Athfal (RA) to implement inclusive education at the early childhood education level under the Ministry of Religion in South Kalimantan. The institution adheres to several governmental guidelines, including the Technical Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education for South Kalimantan, Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009, South Kalimantan Governor Regulation No. 065 of 2012, and the Grand Design of the South Kalimantan Inclusion Education Working Group.

Originally established to provide religious education services akin to a madrasa or Islamic boarding school for the local community in Guntung Manggis Village, Landasan Ulin District, Banjarbaru, the Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani Educational Institution initially did not specifically plan to offer inclusive services.

This message is from my late father, who wanted me to establish a madrasa school similar to the one he attended during his childhood, as part of his charitable legacy. When I asked him if he preferred an Integrated Islamic format, which is currently popular, he expressed a desire for it to be like the traditional boarding school he attended. (S.P, Cahaya Keluarga Madani Foundation, 05 October 2022).

The development plan for Madrasah Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani began with community engagement through religious studies, leveraging the area's high religiosity and limited exposure to religious teachings. Led by Guru Ahmad Syairazi Pandi, a student of Abuya Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi Al-Maliki in Mecca, recitations were initiated at the site earmarked for the educational institution. Following positive community response, plans were formalized to establish a madrasa or pesantren at the location.

Established in 2008, Madrasah Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani was situated in a remote area surrounded by natural forests and swamps, distant from urban centers and major settlements. Despite its less strategic location posing logistical challenges, construction proceeded due to limited available land. By 2010, the institution was fully equipped with buildings, facilities, and infrastructure, marking the launch of Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani. Geographical isolation persisted until the construction of Banjarbaru City's ideal hospital nearby in 2014, which catalyzed regional development and accessibility.

The decision to transform the madrasa into an inclusive school was influenced by personal experiences within Mr. SP's family. Mrs. HK, his wife, encountered difficulties enrolling their son, who has special needs, in early childhood education because of inadequate support for his autism. This challenge prompted Mrs. HK to integrate therapy services for children with special needs into the educational institution she founded.

My child was rejected by schools everywhere, and I felt angry and frustrated that there were no suitable educational options for him. I channeled this anger into building an educational institution that could meet the needs of children like him. (H.K, RA Headmaster, 12 October 2022)

Mrs. HK's initiative to introduce therapy services for children with special needs at her educational institution was strongly endorsed by experts after extensive consultations with doctors and therapists who had treated her own children. Their professional advice and support solidified Mrs. HK's determination to establish these services. Initially lacking a local therapy center, she traveled to Banjarmasin, Jakarta, and Bandung for her child's treatment, forging connections with experts in the field. Encouraged by friends to establish a foundation and supported by her parents, Mrs. HK successfully founded an educational institution specifically for children with special needs.

Dispelling negative perceptions and stereotypes about children with special needs is crucial, as they are inaccurate and harmful. Every child, regardless of their abilities, deserves the right to education and support to achieve their full potential. By integrating therapy services into her institution, Mrs. HK promotes inclusive education and challenges these stereotypes. These services empower children with special needs to develop essential skills, enhancing their independence and enabling positive contributions to society. Educating the community about the capabilities and potential of these children is essential for fostering an inclusive and accepting society.

After I decided to provide therapy services for children with special needs, it became apparent that this initiative aligned with the community's needs. Children with special needs are frequently marginalized, perceived as a divine test, and sometimes viewed as burdens on their families. Information about services for these children is not only scarce but also frequently negative and inaccurate. Therefore, my initial challenge was to address public perceptions before proceeding with the actual provision of services for children with special needs. (H.K, RA Headmaster, 12 October 2022)

2. Community Perceptions and Responses to inclusive schools

Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani is an educational institution dedicated to inclusive education and operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion. However, until 2014, it did not receive any assistance despite the specialized nature of its work. Mrs. HK emphasized that her institution faced initial challenges due to a lack of awareness and recognition, particularly within the Ministry of Religion, which resulted in it having to rely solely on support from her family's real estate business through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

Furthermore, Mrs. HK's implementation of inclusive education services at the institution is supported by experts in clinical psychology. However, this approach has attracted criticism from pedagogical experts who argue that emphasizing clinical psychology is not suitable for inclusive schools, advocating instead for a focus on pedagogical aspects. Consequently, the institution she established has faced disapproval, with calls discouraging other schools from following its model or enrolling their students at Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani.

We understand that the criticisms come from good intentions. However, it's important to recognize that children with special needs require an educational approach tailored to their specific needs. (M.L, RA Teacher, 12 November 2022)

In dealing with children with special needs, it is not enough to just use the pedagogical aspect. We need to address their specific needs, such as sensory integration, behavior management, and therapy. Clinical psychology plays a crucial role in addressing these needs. (M.D.A, RA Teacher, 12 November 2022)

We work together with pedagogical experts and clinical psychology to ensure that we provide comprehensive and effective education for our students. As for the negative perception that emerged, I believe that our work speaks for itself. We have seen the progress and improvement in our students, and their parents are satisfied with our service. Inclusive education is not an easy task, but it is a noble and necessary one. We need to work

together, with all our expertise and resources, to provide a better future for children with special needs. (S.R, RA Teacher, 12 November 2022).

Administrators at RA Al-Madani conducted extensive outreach efforts in neighboring villages and sub-districts to identify recipients of therapy services at their specialized educational institution for children with special needs. Despite initial challenges in accessing transparent information from local authorities and community leaders regarding children with special needs, their determination persevered. During community sessions, RA Al-Madani administrators encouraged participants to spread awareness about the availability of free education and services, aiming to garner crucial community support.

Their efforts in socializing initiatives seek to transform societal attitudes toward children with special needs, acknowledging that misconceptions often result in the denial of their fundamental rights, including access to education and developmental opportunities. Initially faced with parental reluctance, primarily rooted in economic concerns, RA Al-Madani administrators gradually gathered information from anonymous sources and personally advocated for the enrollment of ten children at the Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani. This proactive approach underscores their commitment to overcoming ongoing challenges and enhancing services for children with special needs within the community.

3. Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani Supporting Resources

Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani operates primarily on funding from the Cahaya Keluarga Madani Foundation, supplemented by regular contributions from PT Meranti Griya Nusantara, a property and housing company owned by Mrs. HK's extended family. This consolidated financial support has enabled the institution to swiftly construct and equip its facilities, ensuring operational sustainability since its inception. Controlled by Mrs. HK's family, whose shared vision drives rapid development, the entire establishment—from building construction to infrastructure setup—was completed within two years (2008-2010), emphasizing their commitment despite their primary business involvement in the property sector.

While financial stability distinguishes it from many private educational institutions, the primary challenge faced by Mrs. HK remains shifting community perceptions towards children with special needs. Her initial focus centers on advocating that these children possess untapped potential that can flourish with the appropriate support and services. By fostering a positive community outlook, she aims to garner local support and encourage enrollment at Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani.

As the founder of an inclusive school, Mrs. HK confronts the dual challenge

of changing parental perceptions about children with special needs and fostering acceptance among parents of typically developing children. She acknowledges that stigma persists due to insufficient information, support, and services for children with special needs, exacerbated by inadequate resources from governmental and educational institutions for inclusive education.

Mrs. HK recognizes that altering community attitudes towards inclusive education and supporting children with special needs requires patience and persistence. In addition to village outreach campaigns, she has trained religious counselors to advocate for equal educational opportunities. Selected for their influential roles in the community, these counselors leverage religious teachings to promote respect and the significance of inclusive education. Mrs. HK has organized training sessions for Islamic religious instructors to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to educate the community about understanding and supporting children with special needs.

Despite prevalent misconceptions that resign families to their circumstances, attributing their situation to divine will often results in neglecting children's educational needs and perpetuating dependence. Mrs. HK emphasizes the importance of accurate religious perspectives on the rights of children with special needs, countering these misconceptions effectively. With ongoing efforts and the momentum of inclusive education trends, complemented by Banjarbaru City's designation as an inclusive city, significant strides have been made towards enhancing inclusion for children with special needs.

4. Realizing inclusive educators

Mrs. HK's recognition of the crucial need for well-trained teachers capable of providing high-quality education and care for children with special needs prompted her to personally finance the training of eight teachers. These educators were equipped with essential skills in handling special needs children, developing personalized learning programs, and employing therapeutic practices. Given the scarcity of inclusive education experts in Banjarbaru, Mrs. HK covered all training expenses to ensure these teachers were adequately prepared despite financial constraints.

Initially, the teachers at Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani lacked specialized training for inclusive education, prompting Mrs. HK to organize in-house training sessions and enlist external experts like Dr. Tri Gunadi for comprehensive instruction on special needs care. Collaborations with Professor Dr. Andremeza, an expert in child brain development, and Ms. Ane Gracia, a mentor from Jakarta, culminated in the development of applied neuroscience modules endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Mrs. HK financed these initiatives, mindful of the teachers' modest incomes, illustrating her proactive approach to elevating

educational standards at her institution.

Despite these efforts, the eight teachers who had been groomed to lead inclusive education at Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani ultimately resigned when opportunities for civil service positions in special needs education opened elsewhere. Mrs. HK reluctantly accepted their decisions, understanding that compelling them to stay would not foster optimal performance or personal growth. This turnover highlights the ongoing challenges in retaining skilled educators in specialized fields, despite dedicated efforts to nurture expertise within the institution.

8 teachers who were trained for inclusive education at Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani decided to resign in order to take the Civil Servant Candidate (CPNS) test for the formation of Special Education Teacher (SLB). (T, RA deputy head for academic affairs, 19 October 2022).

Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani faced prolonged challenges in recruiting educators with expertise in inclusive education or special needs schools. However, the declaration of Banjarbaru City as an inclusive city in 2017 marked a turning point, easing their recruitment efforts. This designation brought significant public awareness to the importance of inclusive education for all children, including those with special needs. Moreover, the relocation of the PLB study program from Banjarmasin to Banjarbaru facilitated rapid dissemination of information about teaching staff opportunities, attracting interested candidates.

Initially, perceptions among the newly recruited teaching staff at Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani did not always align with the Foundation's vision and mission. Some educators viewed the inclusion label merely as an indicator of having children with special needs, while others conflated inclusion with SLB (Special Need School). To address these misconceptions and deepen their understanding of inclusive education, Mrs. HK employed a straightforward approach. She invited staff to analyze case studies, provide responses, and design activities aimed at solving these cases. This method encouraged critical reflection and alignment with the institution's inclusive education principles, fostering a unified approach among the teaching staff.

Mrs. HK provide various case studies to candidates who register and observe how they think and act towards children with special needs while designing appropriate learning programs. Initially, not all teachers had the same perceptions of inclusive education, so I provide outreach to educators and education staff. (LW, RA expert practitioner, 07 November 2022)

In 2022, Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani has 17 teachers, including 4 class teachers, six assistant teachers, and seven special assistant teachers.

Out of these teachers, 16 have appropriate educational backgrounds, with 10 having backgrounds in bachelor of early childhood education, 6 in bachelor of special education, and 1 in Psychology. There is only 1 teacher who has a mismatched background, with a Bachelor of Elementary School Teacher Education background. The Foundation has taken measures, especially for teachers with inappropriate educational backgrounds, to provide books on inclusive education and invite them for comparative studies to enrich their insights on best practices for implementing inclusive education in other educational institutions.

5. Branding and Promotion strategy

Mrs. HK oversees the management of Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani primarily through corporate social responsibility initiatives from her company, facing limited support from local government and the overseeing Ministry of Religion. Recognizing the potential impact of governmental backing on the institution's growth and public perception, Mrs. HK leveraged her longstanding relationship with Banjarbaru's independent mayor, H. Najmi Adhani. This strategic approach garnered further recognition when Mrs. HK was nominated for the Astra World Award in 2014, underscoring the institution's pioneering role in inclusive education despite finishing as the runner-up. She emphasized the importance of advocacy for inclusive education over other community initiatives acknowledged in the competition. Initially skeptical about media coverage from Tempo Media, Mrs. HK found their comprehensive approach credible, stressing the need for broader support, including from the Ministry of Religion, to combat societal biases against children with special needs. Support from individuals and organizations across Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya further highlighted the institution's expanding influence.

Inclusive Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani employs various digital and print media channels to promote itself, prominently using its website and Facebook accounts to showcase its vision, mission, facilities, curriculum offerings, and inclusive services. These efforts aim to underscore the institution's commitment to inclusive education. Social media, particularly Facebook, serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a direct communication channel between parents and the institution, facilitating prompt responses to feedback. Positive testimonials from parents regarding their children's educational experiences further enhance the institution's reputation and credibility.

Beyond managing the institution, Mrs. HK actively champions inclusive education in broader contexts. She participates in numerous organizations, seminars, and outreach programs, establishing herself as a knowledgeable advocate for inclusive education within madrasas, educational institutions, and other organizations. Mrs. NJ highlights Mrs. HK's significant contributions to advancing inclusive education

in Banjarbaru City, evidenced by her frequent involvement in seminars focusing on children with special needs at both school and university levels. Mrs. HK played a pivotal role in Banjarbaru City's declaration as an inclusive city in August 2017.

Since this declaration, Banjarbaru City has witnessed a marked increase in inclusive schools. The local government has prioritized enhancing the quality of Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers through increased incentives and regular training sessions. Mrs. HK collaborates closely with the Banjarbaru City Education Office and the Psychology Study Program to conduct annual assessments of students with special needs, funded through the city's budget. These collaborative efforts underscore Mrs. HK's steadfast commitment to advancing inclusive education practices and support systems within her community.

6. Discussion

Initially, Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani lacked support from both the Ministry of Religion and the city government. However, early childhood inclusive education aims to create a learning-rich environment that supports the developmental potential of all children, including those with special needs. Government support is crucial in fostering such environments. Early childhood inclusive education involves a program where both regular and special-needs children learn and develop together (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014). Inclusive education in early childhood refers to including all children in a class or group regardless of ethnicity, language, religion, culture, economic status, or other differences caused by different psychophysical disabilities (Dapudong, 2014; Florian et al., 2014). This means not only the physical presence or passive involvement but active participation in all activities within the group or institution in the same way as all other children with this distinctive development.

Strong financial backing has been instrumental in sustaining Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani despite the absence of government support. Moreover, forging relationships with national experts in inclusive education, cultivating personal ties with stakeholders, and achieving notable national accolades have garnered substantial backing for the institution. These elements underscore the pivotal role of individual initiative and collaborative efforts in realizing inclusive education and overcoming societal barriers for individuals with disabilities. Ainscow's research (2020) emphasizes the crucial role of policymakers and practitioners in expanding their vision and assuming responsibility to translate aspirations into concrete outcomes (Ainscow, 2020). The headmaster of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani epitomizes unwavering commitment to establishing an inclusive educational environment. This highlights that the institution's status as a model for inclusive schooling results from concerted efforts among school administrators, teachers, and parents, collectively working towards this common goal.

The foundation and school of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani recognize the critical importance of well-trained teachers in delivering quality education and care to children with special needs. Florian underscores the significance of "additional support" and "adaptive pedagogical methods" in special needs education, emphasizing its resource-oriented approach tailored to learners' specific needs (Florian, 2019). Despite financial constraints, the headmaster of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani personally financed the training of eight teachers, including bringing in external experts from outside Banjarbaru to enhance their skills in managing children with special needs.

It is essential to note that inclusive education extends beyond mere inclusion of all children in the same program, regardless of disabilities. It necessitates access to and support from specialists, such as through early intervention programs. Early intervention aims to enhance cognitive abilities, emotional and physical development, and mitigate disabilities (Guralnick, 2017; Spittle et al., 2015). These programs cater to children with biological or social risk factors that contribute to disabilities, addressing individual differences early on.

Research by DeMatthews et al. (2021), focusing on school headmasters like Vargas, Pineda, and Jones, underscores the importance of enhancing teachers' skills to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (DeMatthews et al., 2021). It highlights the role of headmasters in driving the development of high-quality individualized education programs (IEPs) through top-down leadership, emphasizing planning and oversight to support teachers and staff. This leadership style aligns with the approach taken by the headmaster of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, as previously discussed.

Management at Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani has conducted socialization initiatives aimed at shifting community perceptions of children with special needs and encouraging access to appropriate services. Negative societal attitudes often lead to the neglect of these children's rights, including their right to education. Individuals with disabilities constitute the largest minority globally (WHO, 2011) (World Health Organization, 2016) and face significant marginalization (UNICEF, 2013). Creating an inclusive environment involves teachers advocating for the rights of children with special needs and fostering full participation of their families in all aspects of traditional educational settings within their communities (Haines et al., 2015). This requires identifying and eliminating barriers to their participation and restructuring educational and social norms to promote acceptance and value of diversity within communities and societies (Florian et al., 2014).

To achieve success in inclusive early childhood education, it is crucial for teachers, managers, parents, and the wider community to comprehend and embrace the concept of inclusion, respect differences, and actively support inclusive practices

(Al Hazmi & Ahmad, 2018; Sira et al., 2018). However, research indicates that societal constructs often portray children with disabilities negatively, influencing parents of typically developing children to adopt attitudes that perpetuate exclusion and discrimination in early childhood education settings and broader community environments (Cunnah, 2015; Ditchman et al., 2016; Keith et al., 2015).

According to findings from Paseka & Schwab, parents generally exhibit positive attitudes toward including students with physical or learning disabilities but are more ambivalent toward those with behavioral or mental disabilities (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). In classrooms where students with special educational needs (SEN) are included, parents report experiencing more inclusive teaching practices, such as teachers recognizing strengths and providing appropriate support. Conversely, parents whose children attend regular classes without SEN students perceive less inclusivity.

Inclusive education settings are widely recognized as beneficial for children with special needs, their typically developing peers, teaching staff, and overall school climate. Research consistently demonstrates significant cognitive and social developmental benefits for children with special needs in inclusive environments alongside their peers (Hehir et al., 2016). Additionally, inclusion has been shown to positively impact teachers by enhancing their understanding of individual student needs and strengths.

Despite teachers generally supporting inclusive education, many express concerns about their preparedness to effectively teach in inclusive classrooms. Studies highlight that teachers who have received specific training in inclusion tend to exhibit more positive attitudes toward students with special needs (U. Sharma & Sokal, 2016). However, challenges persist globally in implementing inclusive preschool education, including issues related to the ambiguous definition of disability, inadequate assessment tools for identifying children with special needs, and the need for professionalization through qualified educators and sufficient learning infrastructure (A. Sharma, 2015).

Moreover, research underscores that children with special needs in inclusive classrooms often require more support, such as individualized education plans, teacher assistants, and additional educational materials, compared to their peers in separate educational settings (A. Sharma, 2015). These findings underscore the ongoing efforts needed to enhance inclusivity in early childhood education and address the diverse needs of all learners effectively. Lawrence et al., highlighted the positive impacts of inclusive education on children with special needs (Lawrence et al., 2016), demonstrating significant advancements in literacy and social skills development (Whalon et al., 2015). Their interaction with typically developing peers not only benefits children with special needs but also fosters positive attitudes

among their peers towards inclusivity.

Within the context of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, overseen by the Ministry of Religion, this research underscores the school's pioneering role in early childhood inclusive education. Despite challenges such as societal biases, the school remains dedicated to providing comprehensive support for children with special needs. Transforming societal perceptions is essential for the success of inclusive education initiatives, emphasizing the need for robust financial support, collaboration with inclusive education experts, and engagement with stakeholders.

D. Conclusion

Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani, the first pilot inclusion school for early childhood education under the Ministry of Religion in South Kalimantan, is dedicated to providing inclusive education for children with special needs. The school supports all students' learning and development by offering diverse facilities such as educational games and stimulation media. This study's findings suggest several recommendations. Firstly, the Ministry of Religion should formulate policies that promote an inclusive education environment at Raudatul Athfal, including allocating specific funds, providing technical guidance, and offering training for teachers involved in inclusive education. These measures represent the Ministry's support for educational institutions under its purview.

Effective inclusive education also necessitates collaboration among various stakeholders, including experts in inclusive education, therapists, psychologists, and medical professionals. To enhance collaboration, schools can establish partnerships with relevant institutions to support inclusive education initiatives. Furthermore, the private sector should play a role by providing sponsorship or financial assistance to schools implementing inclusive education.

Additionally, the study recommends that the headmaster of Raudatul Athfal Ulumul Qur'an Al-Madani share the school's successful experience in pioneering inclusive education with other communities and institutions. This sharing can inspire and encourage other institutions to adopt inclusive education practices. Lastly, societal efforts are crucial in raising awareness about inclusive education, particularly concerning children with special needs, aiming to mitigate societal biases against them.

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