The Influence of Educational Background and Teaching Experience on Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Implementing Inclusive Education at Raudhatul Athfal in Semarang Regency

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the differences in the self-efficacy of Raudhatul Athfal (RA) teachers in implementing inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Semarang Regency, considering their educational background and teaching experience. The focus of this research is to understand the extent to which these two variables influence teachers' confidence in delivering inclusive education, which is a crucial element for the success of education for children with special needs (CSN).

Design/methods/approach – This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-comparative design, where data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 115 RA teachers across 16 institutions in Semarang Regency. The instrument used was the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP), which has been tested for validity and reliability. The data were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the impact of educational background and teaching experience on teachers' self-efficacy.

Findings – The findings indicate significant differences in teachers' self-efficacy based on educational background and teaching experience (P < 0.05). Teachers with an S1 (Bachelor's Degree) in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) have higher self-efficacy levels compared to those with a high school/vocational school (SMA/SMK) background and a general S1 (Bachelor's Degree). Moreover, more than five years of teaching experience correlates with an increase in teachers' self-efficacy in managing inclusive education.

Research implications – This research contributes to the limited literature on teacher self-efficacy in the context of inclusive ECE within RA institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The study provides new insights into the factors that influence teachers' confidence in managing inclusive education, particularly in early childhood education.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an approach that ensures all children, including children with special needs (CSN), receive equal education within the same educational environment (Singh, 2017). Teachers in inclusive schools play a crucial role and require a high level of self-efficacy to ensure the success of the learning process that involves all students (Junaidi, 2023; Wilson, 2020). Self-efficacy, defined as teachers' belief in their ability to manage and effectively carry out teaching tasks, has been proven to be an important factor influencing teachers' ability to educate students with disabilities (Forlin, 2014). However, research indicates that regular teachers often still have low levels of self-efficacy in the context of inclusive education. They often feel uncertain and lack the necessary knowledge to manage students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Hashim, 2014).

Low self-efficacy in teachers can negatively impact their approach to handling students, especially those who exhibit behavioral problems or learning difficulties. Teachers with low self-efficacy tend to give up easily, prefer to implement punitive measures, and are more likely to adopt an authoritarian attitude (Evriani, 2019). Conversely, teachers with high self-efficacy are more motivated, enthusiastic, and resilient to stress that arises during the learning process. A teacher's self-efficacy in managing learning greatly influences their ability to teach students with special needs (Saloviita & Almulla, 2024).

The readiness of early childhood education (ECE) teachers to handle CSN is also a major concern. ECE teachers often feel unprepared due to a lack of specific competencies in teaching CSN, which affects their self-efficacy. ECE teachers frequently express difficulties in teaching CSN because the diverse characteristics of students require different approaches (Musdzalifah, 2017). The lack of experience and non-specific educational backgrounds in inclusive education can also influence teachers' confidence in their abilities, even if they have attended training and seminars (Prastadila, 2013).

Implementing inclusive education is not a simple task and requires extensive preparation to ensure its execution aligns with the principles of inclusive education. Several aspects must be prepared, including the readiness of teachers in possessing the competencies and skills to manage inclusive classrooms, a differentiated curriculum tailored to the needs of CSN, as well as support from the school environment and adequate facilities (Alsarawi, 2021).

Although there has been extensive research on teacher self-efficacy, most of these studies focus on higher levels of education such as kindergartens, special elementary schools (SDLB), and special junior high schools (SMPLB) under the Ministry of Education and Culture (Wulandari, 2023). However, research specifically examining teacher self-efficacy in the context of inclusive early childhood education (ECE) in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs is still very limited. Considering that ECE/RA/kindergarten teachers work with children aged 2–6 years, their role as the first educators is crucial, and this requires a high level of self-efficacy to address the challenges involved.

Given this phenomenon, there is a research gap concerning the self-efficacy of RA teachers in the context of providing inclusive ECE services, especially when viewed from their educational background and teaching experience. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the differences in self-efficacy among RA teachers in managing inclusive ECE in Semarang Regency, taking into account the variables of educational background and length of teaching experience. This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the self-efficacy of RA teachers, as well as offer practical implications for improving the competence and readiness of teachers in inclusive education within RA institutions.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative causal-comparative design. Causal-comparative research, also known as ex post facto research, is a type of study in which the researcher does not directly control the independent variables because these variables naturally cannot be manipulated. This design was chosen due to its ability to identify and explain the differences or variations that may exist in the self-efficacy of RA teachers in the context of inclusive education, based on factors such as educational background and length of teaching experience. This design is relevant to addressing the research objective, which focuses on how these two variables influence teacher self-efficacy.

2.2. Sample/Participants

The research was conducted at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions throughout Semarang Regency from September 18, 2023, to October 16, 2023. According to data from the Chairman of the Semarang Regency Raudhatul Athfal Teachers Association (PD IGRA), there are 212 RA institutions with a total of 686 teachers. The sample for this study was initially determined using the GPower 3.1.9.7 application, which recommended 20 institutions with a total of 115 RA teachers across 16 institutions. Respondents were selected using a random sampling technique to ensure good representation of the population studied. However, due to field constraints, four institutions declined participation due to accreditation preparation, resulting in a final sample of 16 RA institutions. The following table details the institutions included in the sample:

 Table 1. Sample of RA Institutions in Semarang Regency

Institution Name	Number of Teachers	Number of Children with Special Needs
RA Falahul Mukminin 01	6	3
RA Miftahul Falah	5	3
RA Masyithoh	5	2
RA Miftahun Najihin	6	4
RA Bintang Sembilan	4	4
RA Tarbiyatul Ulum	4	3
RA Nurul Huda 01	12	5
RA Haji Soebandi	13	3
RA Nurul Falah	8	2
RA Kusuma Mulya 02	9	4
RA Nyatnyono 02	10	5
RA Al Muhajirin	6	4
RA Al-Falah	6	4
RA Al Hikmah	11	3
RA Mluweh	5	2
RA Balitasari	5	2
Total	115	51
	RA Falahul Mukminin 01 RA Miftahul Falah RA Masyithoh RA Miftahun Najihin RA Bintang Sembilan RA Tarbiyatul Ulum RA Nurul Huda 01 RA Haji Soebandi RA Nurul Falah RA Kusuma Mulya 02 RA Nyatnyono 02 RA Al Muhajirin RA Al-Falah RA Al Hikmah RA Mluweh RA Balitasari	RA Falahul Mukminin 01 6 RA Miftahul Falah 5 RA Masyithoh 5 RA Miftahun Najihin 6 RA Bintang Sembilan 4 RA Tarbiyatul Ulum 4 RA Nurul Huda 01 12 RA Haji Soebandi 13 RA Nurul Falah 8 RA Kusuma Mulya 02 9 RA Nyatnyono 02 10 RA Al Muhajirin 6 RA Al-Falah 6 RA Al Hikmah 11 RA Mluweh 5 RA Balitasari 5

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed to the respondents. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire based on the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale, which covers three dimensions: efficacy in inclusive teaching (efficacy to use inclusive instructions), efficacy in collaboration, and efficacy in managing behavior (Park, 2016). This instrument was selected due to its relevance in measuring teachers' confidence in their ability to manage inclusive classrooms, which is the main focus of this study. Before use, the instrument was tested for construct validity and reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.821 (> 0.6), indicating a good level of reliability.

Table 2. TEIP Instrument Blueprint

Dimension	Item Numbers	Number Items	of	Example Item
Efficacy in inclusive teaching	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	6		"I am able to provide alternative explanations or examples when students are confused."
Efficacy in collaboration	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	6		"I can inform families about how they can help their children learn well at school."
Efficacy in managing behavior	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18	6		"I can control disruptive behavior in the classroom."
Total		18		

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a significance level of 5% (α = 0.05). This technique was chosen because it allows for testing the interaction between two independent variables, namely educational background and length of teaching experience, in influencing teachers' self-efficacy. Using two-way ANOVA, this study can determine whether there are significant differences in teachers' self-efficacy based on the combination of these two variables and identify which factor has the greatest influence.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the relevant institutions. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality of respondents' data was strictly maintained throughout the research. Respondents were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. The data collected were processed and reported anonymously to ensure the privacy and security of respondents' personal information.

3. Results

3.1. Data Description

This study collected data through the distribution of questionnaires to 16 RA institutions selected via random sampling. The respondents were teachers at RA institutions that enroll children with special needs annually. Before using the questionnaire, construct validity and reliability tests were conducted. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a value of 0.821, indicating that all items in the questionnaire are reliable (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.6). The hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using a two-way analysis of variance (Two-Way ANOVA) with a significance level of 5% (α = 0.05).

3.2. Educational Background Data

Educational background is an important factor in education, particularly for teachers. The data on the respondents' educational background are as follows:

Table 3. Educational Background of Respondents

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
High School / Vocational School (SMA/SMK)	14	12%
Bachelor's Degree (S1) - General	40	35%
Bachelor's Degree (S1) - Early Childhood Education (PAUD)	61	53%
Total	115	100%

The table above shows that the majority of respondents have a background in Early Childhood Education (S1 PAUD) (53%) and General Studies (35%), while the remainder have a background in High School/Vocational School (12%). This indicates that most RA teachers in Semarang Regency possess higher education relevant to early childhood teaching, especially in the context of inclusive education.

3.3. Teaching Experience Data

Teaching experience is a crucial indicator in assessing a teacher's capabilities. The data on the respondents' teaching experience are as follows:

Table 4. Respondents' Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 1 Year	10	10%
1 - 5 Years	27	22%
> 5 Years	78	68%
Total	115	100%

The majority of respondents have more than 5 years of teaching experience (68%), indicating that most RA teachers in Semarang Regency have considerable experience in educating young children, including those with special needs. This suggests they have likely faced various challenges in the learning process, including in an inclusive setting.

3.4. Categories of Teacher Self-Efficacy Scores in Implementing Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) Services

Teacher self-efficacy scores in implementing inclusive ECE services were categorized to understand the level of confidence teachers have in delivering these services. The categorization is as follows:

Table 5. Categories of Teacher Self-Efficacy Scores

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Self-Efficacy Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 44	Low	0	0%
45 - 73	Moderate	6	5.22%
74 - 102	High	109	94.78%

The majority of respondents (94.78%) have high self-efficacy in delivering inclusive ECE services, indicating that most teachers feel confident in their ability to manage inclusive education. This is consistent with the theory that teacher confidence plays a significant role in the successful implementation of inclusive education (Forlin, 2014).

3.5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a two-way ANOVA to examine the effects of educational background and teaching experience on teachers' self-efficacy in delivering inclusive ECE services. The results of the two-way ANOVA are as follows:

Table 6. Two-Way ANOVA Output

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Variable	Category	М	SD	F	Р		
Educational	SMA	83.43	9.501	3.319	< 0.05		
Background							
	S1 General	83.62	5.806				
	S1 PAUD	86.10	5.737				
Teaching	< 1 Year	83.30	9.187	3.395	< 0.05		
Experience							
	1 - 5 Years	83.37	6.362				
	> 5 Years	84.92	6.008				
Educational	-	-	-	6.774	< 0.01		
Background *							
Teaching							
Experience							

The ANOVA results indicate significant differences in teacher self-efficacy based on educational background and teaching experience (P < 0.05). Teachers with a background in S1 PAUD have higher self-efficacy compared to those with S1 General and SMA/SMK educational backgrounds. This is consistent with previous studies showing that more specialized education (such as S1 PAUD) enhances readiness and confidence in implementing inclusive education.

3.6. Pairwise Comparison Test Results

The following are the pairwise comparison test results, examining the differences between groups in the variables of educational background and teaching experience:

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Variable	Pair	MD	SE	P
Educational Background	SMA – S1 General	-0.19	1.754	> 0.05
	SMA – S1 PAUD	-2.67	1.837	> 0.05
	S1 General – S1 PAUD	-2.48	1.204	> 0.05
Teaching Experience	< 1 year – 1 to 5 years	0.43	2.190	> 0.05
	< 1 year – > 5 years	-1.12	1.988	> 0.05
	1 to 5 years – > 5 years	-1.55	1.321	> 0.05

The pairwise comparison test results show no significant differences in teacher self-efficacy based on the combination of educational background and teaching experience (P > 0.05). Although there is variation in mean differences, these results suggest that educational background and teaching experience tend to independently influence self-efficacy, without significant interaction between the two variables.

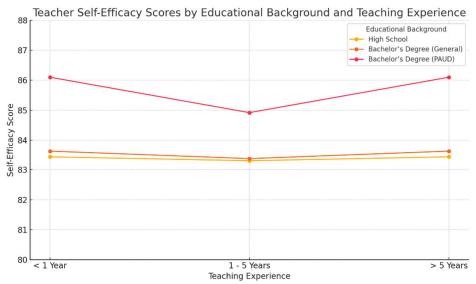


Figure 1: Plot Diagram

The diagram above illustrates that the self-efficacy of teachers with a high school education tends to decrease after teaching for 1-5 years. Teachers with a General S1 background experience an increase in efficacy during the same period, although their efficacy remains lower than that of teachers with an S1 PAUD background. Teachers with an S1 PAUD background show consistent efficacy improvement with increased teaching experience.

This study shows that educational background and teaching experience significantly influence RA teachers' self-efficacy in delivering inclusive ECE services in Semarang Regency. Teachers with an S1 PAUD background have higher self-efficacy levels compared to those with S1 General and SMA/SMK educational backgrounds. Teaching experience also plays an important role, with efficacy tending to increase with more years of teaching experience. These findings support the theory that more specialized education and longer teaching experience enhance teachers' confidence and readiness in implementing inclusive education.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that professional development and training programs for RA teachers focus more on enhancing competencies in inclusive education, particularly for teachers with less specific educational backgrounds. Additionally, greater support in terms of resources and ongoing training is needed to strengthen teacher self-efficacy, ensuring they are better prepared to face the challenges of inclusive education.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the self-efficacy levels of RA (Raudhatul Athfal) teachers in implementing inclusive early childhood education (ECE) services, examining the influence of educational background and teaching experience on their self-efficacy. The results indicate that the majority of RA teachers in Semarang Regency have high levels of self-efficacy, particularly those with more than five years of teaching experience. This finding aligns with previous research, which demonstrated that experience working with students with special needs can enhance teachers' self-efficacy (Woodcock, 2012).

The high level of self-efficacy among RA teachers with more than five years of teaching experience suggests that teaching experience significantly impacts teachers' confidence in delivering inclusive education. This is further supported by the finding that educational background, particularly for teachers with a General S1 (Bachelor's Degree) or S1 PAUD degree, greatly contributes to self-efficacy. This study supports findings that educational background and training are key factors in shaping teachers' self-efficacy (Hartman, 2010).

These findings are consistent with other studies emphasizing the importance of formal education and training in enhancing teacher self-efficacy. For instance, research by Gotshall and Stefanou showed that prolonged training has a significant impact on teachers' self-efficacy, especially in the context of inclusive education. However, other studies found that teaching experience and educational background do not always correlate with teacher self-efficacy (Paneque, 2006). These findings highlight the complexity of factors influencing self-efficacy, where teaching experience and formal education play crucial roles but may not be the sole determinants.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the theory that teacher self-efficacy is influenced by the knowledge and practical experience gained through education and training (Na, 2024). In the context of inclusive education, knowledge of children's special needs and the ability to apply this knowledge in daily practice are critical (Woolfson, 2024). This suggests that self-efficacy theory must consider the interaction between formal education, experience, and contextualization in inclusive practice.

These findings have significant practical implications for policy development and teacher training programs. RA teachers with only a high school education are advised to seek mentorship from experts or pursue further education to enhance their self-efficacy (Adaka, 2022). Additionally, teachers with a General S1 (Bachelor's Degree) or S1 PAUD background need additional training specifically tailored to the implementation of inclusive ECE services. Thus, improving teacher self-efficacy can be achieved through a combination of continuing education and sustained practical experience.

This study has several limitations, particularly the sample being limited to a single region, Semarang Regency, which may not allow the findings to be fully generalized to broader contexts. Additionally, this study focused more on the quantity of teaching experience and educational background without delving deeper into the quality of that experience. Future research could expand the scope by including more regions and considering additional variables such as institutional support and work environment.

Given these limitations, future research should include a broader range of regions and consider variations in socio-economic and cultural conditions. Additionally, further exploration of how institutional

support and teacher collaboration can enhance self-efficacy in the context of inclusive education would be beneficial. In-depth research on the quality of training and its impact on self-efficacy would also make a significant contribution to the development of theory and practice in this field.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of educational background and teaching experience in shaping the self-efficacy of RA teachers in delivering inclusive ECE services. With adequate education and sufficient practical experience, teachers are better prepared to face the challenges of inclusive education. These findings make a significant contribution to efforts to improve the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia by emphasizing the need for ongoing training and advanced education for RA teachers.

5. Conclusion

This study successfully identified and analyzed the differences in self-efficacy among RA (Raudhatul Athfal) teachers in delivering inclusive ECE services in Semarang Regency. The results show that educational background and length of teaching experience significantly influence teachers' self-efficacy levels. Teachers with an S1 (Bachelor's Degree) PAUD background and more than five years of teaching experience have higher self-efficacy in implementing inclusive education compared to teachers with a high school or General S1 background.

These findings affirm that more specific education and longer teaching experience play crucial roles in building teachers' confidence in the context of inclusive education. High self-efficacy enables teachers to manage inclusive classrooms more effectively, ultimately improving the quality of education for children with special needs.

However, this study also has limitations, particularly related to the geographical scope, which was limited to Semarang Regency, potentially limiting the generalizability of the results to broader contexts. Additionally, the focus on the quantity of teaching experience and educational background did not fully explore the quality of that experience.

The practical implications of this study are clear: there is an urgent need to enhance training and further education for RA teachers, especially those without a specific background in inclusive education. Training programs focused on developing inclusive competencies and providing ongoing support to teachers, both in the form of mentoring and resources, are crucial.

For future research, it is recommended that this study be expanded to other regions, taking into account various socio-economic and cultural conditions. Furthermore, exploring the role of institutional support and teacher collaboration could provide additional insights into factors that strengthen teacher self-efficacy in the context of inclusive education. Future research should also consider the quality of training and its impact on improving self-efficacy, which would make a significant contribution to the development of theory and practice of inclusive education in Indonesia.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Nuri Isfiastuti initiated the idea and all activities in this research paper. Ali Formen and Sunawan as the parties who have been guiding the completion of the research paper.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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