

## Problems and Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*The education service that separated students with disabilities from the mainstream education, is seen as against human rights. This resulted in denial of some basic rights of students with disabilities in education. The notion of inclusive education has shed a light of hope for better education service for students with disabilities. Indonesia officially recognized inclusive education in 2003. This paper intends to examine the problems encountered in the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. Some 238 participants involved in the issue were interviewed. Results indicate that the progress of inclusive education in Indonesia is still sluggish due to limited resources, knowledge and skills required for successful implementation of inclusive education. Attitudinal barriers were identified as the most hurtful experiences among students with special need while teachers' self-confidence in practicing inclusive education was also still low.*

**Keyword:** inclusive, education, children, disabilities, schools, reform, Indonesia

### 1. Introduction

Everyone including people with disabilities both men and women have the right to a proper education without discrimination. Disability can be defined of any restriction that results from impairment and hinders a person from performing an activity within the range considered normal for a normal person (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2005; Heward, 2006). People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full effective participation in the society on equal basis with others (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1, 2006).

In Indonesia, the number of people with disabilities is 2.45% of the total population. Of that number, the highest percentage, 39.97%, is people with multiple domains of difficulties followed by difficulties in vision (29.63%), walking (10.26%), hearing (7.87%), remembering or concentration (6.70%), self-care (2.83%), and communication (2.74%) (Susenas, 2012). Official government data reports that 33% of all children with disabilities in Indonesia (70% boys, 30% girls) live in families earning less than \$2 USD a day while some 70% of all school-aged children who have disabilities are not participating in formal education (Standfast, 2016). Therefore, children with disabilities have limited access to adequate nutrition, clean water, and health services, yet they are more likely to experience poor health. In addition, misconceptions around disabilities often lead to discrimination and the exclusion of people with disabilities in society (Standfast, 2016). Barriers that limit a person with disabilities include negative attitude, discriminative policies and practices, and inaccessible environments as a result of these barriers.

Segregation in education, or the education service that separated students with disabilities from the mainstream education, is seen as against human rights. This resulted in denial of some basic rights of students with disabilities in education. The notion of inclusive education has shed a light of hope for better education service for students with disabilities. The main purpose of inclusive education is to teach students with special needs in regular classes together with other children who are non-defective. According to Staub and Peck (1995), inclusive education is the placement of students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities fully in the regular classroom. The Salamanca Statement (1994; UNESCO, 1994) states that the Inclusive education seeks to address the learning needs of all students; youth and adults with a specific focus on reviews those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The terminology of inclusive education implies that it promotes the process of including students with disabilities into the regular education system where they should join their school-age peers in a learning process that is most advantageous to their needs (USAID, 2010, p.4).

Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all students as individuals by reviewing its curricular organization and provision (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996, p.9). Inclusion or inclusive education is not another term for special education. The underlying concept of inclusive education is not the same with the concept underlying the special education. The concept of inclusive education has similarities as the underlying concept of schools improvement and education for all (Wahyuningsih, 2016). The aim of inclusive education is to remove the historical exclusion within and outside of the school through enactment or modification of legislation, policies and educational management practices in order to promote the reorganization of the educational systems and the acceptance of all students independently of their differences (Rustemier, 2002; Rieser, 2008). Differences among students may be related to disability, gender, color or ethnicity and disability is just one of these differences.

Inclusive education recognizes that these differences are valuable and bring creativity and through them ideas are shared and experienced. Inclusive education constitutes a paradigm based on the concept of social model and human rights that unites difference and equality as inseparable values (Jonsson, 2001). Inclusive education is about transforming systems to be inclusive of everyone and not about inserting persons with disabilities into existing structures (UNICEF, 2009). Effective inclusive education identifies barriers in education systems that hinder the participation of students with disabilities and come up with solutions (Heward, 2006; Hardman et al., 2005; Kochung, 2011). Compulsory segregation in education is seen as against human rights and this view was supported by a number of international human right agreements. These include the UN Declaration on Education for All (1990), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1994), and UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (2006). In various countries worldwide, these international initiatives and documents have played important roles when formulating new strategies and policies in inclusive education.

Special education for students with disabilities was introduced in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period in 1900s. It was in the form of a sheltered workshop for students with vision impairment and special school for the deaf (Tsaputra, n.d.). These private schools were run and funded by concerned Dutch educators in Indonesia. Indonesian government's initiative to set up specialized education for disabled students within the national education system began in 1954. Education Law number 12 year 1954 was introduced to regulate the provision of special education for disabled students. Prior to 1980s, special schools for disabled children were designated for each different type of disability. These schools were expensive and not all parents could afford it. The year of 1984 witnessed improvement in special education along with the campaign of six-year compulsory educations, which obliged all children with disabilities to have at least primary education (Sunardi, 2010, p.19-22). Such improvements were seen in the establishment of special primary schools for children with disabilities. These schools were run by government and children with different types of disability were all included in one school. Such education service was mostly segregating in nature (Sunardi, 2010, p.26). These special schools reinforce segregation and marginalization of children with disabilities. They are taught within a model that isolates and segregates them. This is an education system based on exclusion and segregation (Porter, 2001). The education service for children with disabilities in the past was an exclusive system that separated children with special needs from the mainstream education. This resulted in denial of some basic rights of children with disabilities in education.

The term 'inclusive education' started to gain attention in 2001 when Indonesian government initiated a pilot project on inclusive education (Nasichin, 2001). Indonesia officially recognized inclusive education when the parliament in 2003 passed Law on National Education System, which stipulates that all citizens with all types of disabilities are compulsorily to participate in inclusive education. In the same year, the government also issued a decree on Inclusive Education for Children with cognitive and physical disabilities. This regulation specifies that inclusive education is an education that guarantees equal access for students with any type of disability to pursue education in general school setting along with non-disabled students (Sunardi, 2010, p.28). However, those laws and regulations do not necessarily guarantee effective and comprehensive implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. In practice, inclusive education is not yet widely accessible to people with disabilities in Indonesia. This is because the lack of information, lack of funds, inadequate infrastructure and cultural conditions of Indonesian culture that tends to regard people with disabilities as a disgrace (Wahyuningsih, 2016). Tsaputra (2014) stated that many schools make efforts to implement inclusive education. However, most of this takes place mainly for primary schools and rarely for secondary schools, and become a dream for tertiary education.

Very often students with disabilities are directed to go to vocational education that provide them with basic skills, such as making handicrafts, painting, massaging etc. In higher education, discrimination was rampant. In 2014, forty state universities in Indonesia were reported to have discriminated the disabilities of the prospective students (Ajisukmo, 2017). The impairment and disabilities of prospective students were included in the eligibility requirements for each study programs at these forty universities. On the website of the 2014 State University Entrance Selection (SNMPTN, 2014), it said that the national university selection committee requires that applicants of particular programs were not deaf, blind, mute, physically disabled or color blind (Muryanto, 2014). The Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta and Brawijaya University in Malang have been pioneering in facilitating students with disabilities. The initiative started by making infrastructures of all buildings in the two universities available to be accessible by the students with disabilities. The two universities have pioneered centres for disability studies and services that provide educational assistance for students. They started by building accessible infrastructure to help students with physical disabilities, and have recruited volunteers to assist students with disabilities in class, and run training programs to build awareness among educators (Afrianty, 2005).

## **2. Methods**

This paper intends to examine the problems encountered in the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia by having interviews with those who involved in the issue. The participants were also asked for some alternative solutions to solve the problems. There were 238 participants interviewed consisting of principals who lead the inclusive schools, teachers, parents and students with special needs as well as representatives of local education office. The interviews were conducted, either in-person or by phone, with participants who live spreading across the country.

Principals were interviewed in particular to obtain information about the constraints in implementing inclusive education and what policy taken by the schools to address the existing barriers. Interviews with teachers were made in order to dig up more information about the problems faced by them in the teaching process while information obtained from the parents of children with special needs become very important because they are the people who can best identify the progress of their children from time to time including complaints over child-related issues that they have encountered in school. Interviews with special needs students who attend mainstream schools were also conducted to find out their feeling and constraints they encountered in the process of learning.

Apart from the interviews, data collection for this research was also conducted through participant observations. Robson (2002, p.191) says that a major advantage of observation as a technique is its directness. Researchers in observation do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; but watch what the people do and listen to what they say. In this study, the covert participant strategy is used; researcher participates in the process under investigation but is not identified as a researcher but as a parent seeking out schools for his disabled child.

This study used triangulation in order to increase data reliability. Triangulation technique used in this study is the triangulation of sources and methods. First, triangulation of sources was conducted through collecting similar data from several different data sources, either primary or secondary data sources. On primary data, accounts of the teaching and learning process were recorded from a variety of angles. For example, in order to obtain data on the implementation of inclusive education in schools, interviews with principals, teachers, parents, and students were conducted. On secondary data, this research will use information that already exists, collected by other people or organizations for a different purpose. The main reason for collecting secondary data is to avoid duplicating work that has already been done.

Second, triangulation of method, which collects similar data using different methods, in this study, interview and observation. Observation was conducted with the checklist of every component observed pertaining to teaching and learning process in inclusive schools. Observation was made during the lessons in the classrooms. This technique gave evidence more clearly how teachers delivered the lessons in inclusive setting.

## **3. Results**

Indonesian government provides disabled students two options for their education: first, they can enroll at special-needs schools, or; second, they can study at inclusive schools that are willing to accept students with disabilities. Inclusive education has not been widely applied in the country; despite the fact the government has enacted legislation for inclusive education since 2009.

Only a few schools in big cities have already applied it while the schools in many small towns remain unfamiliar with the principle of inclusive education. However, special-needs schools do not teach curriculums that gratify students with various disabilities, so students with physical disabilities, for example, are taught the same curriculum as students with learning disabilities. Similarly, most of inclusive schools lack the physical facilities necessary for these students, and many teachers have little to no experience working with disabled children.

### **3.1 Problems with inclusive teachers**

The main problem in implementing inclusive education at school is the lack of professional teachers with special skills in inclusive education. As a result, some local governments empower regular or subject teachers, who don't have special skills, to act as inclusive teachers. The government has been conducting some training and workshops to prepare regular teachers to become inclusive ones, but the programs were not yet fulfilling the needs of teachers for skills to be used in the inclusive classrooms. The teachers who teach in an inclusive classroom mostly only have basic knowledge about inclusive education despite the fact that they participated in various levels of training.

The aim of the training was to acknowledge regular teacher to teach in an inclusive classroom. The main content of the training was the introduction to inclusive education and the components related to it such as categories and assessment of students with special needs. The training did not provide sufficient information about students with special needs. The teachers were not trained to have skills and deeper knowledge to teach and handle disabled students. The training only provided the initial knowledge without proper skills. "We are not taught the skill of how to handle the student with special needs. The training was only the introduction to inclusive education." one teacher said.

Interview with some teachers indicated that the lack of knowledge and skill had pushed down their self-confidence in practicing inclusive education. The low level of confidence was reflected in the unwillingness of teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. "If I had an option not to be an inclusive classroom teacher, I would rather not to be." one teacher said. Some teachers decide to avoid being an inclusive teacher; they have numbers of reason such as competencies, facilities, supports, etc. However, school policies have appointed some regular teachers to be inclusive teachers. The placement system of teachers in public schools is quite rigid; teachers are not allowed to reject their teaching placement fairly. The placement decision was made by school management, which then be reported to local government office, and published it as the government decision. As a result, teachers will accept their obligation and learn to believe in their ability in practicing inclusive education (Sabrina & Sansrisna, 2017). Most of the teachers interviewed agree on inclusive education concepts. They believe that every child should get a better education without discrimination. However, when they should teach at inclusive classrooms, they doubted whether they are going to be able to do it.

Lack of knowledge and skills has made many teachers in inclusive schools failed to identify and respond to the needs of children with disabilities. It is found that the teachers who taught in inclusive schools still had difficulties in determining the objectives, materials and methods of learning. They also had difficulties in formulating a flexible curriculum. The teachers felt uncertain about applying a flexible approach because of the absence of a clear guidance on the assessment system. There were many educators assume that the learning target for disabled children was precisely the same as the other normal students. The scoring system is also a factor that is complained of by the teachers. In teaching students with special needs and the other normal students, the teachers are still using the same scoring system. Furthermore, the use of learning media still cannot be maximized due to the lack of facilities provided by the schools. The condition was exacerbated by the unavailability of special teachers and tutors. Out of the 152 teachers who were interviewed only twenty percent who said that the teaching process had been conducted in schools in the form of team teaching consisting regular and special teacher. However, it remained difficult in coordination since it had not been supported by legal clarity about the duties, role and responsibilities of each teacher.

Observations made during this study made visible that teachers gave very little attention to disabled students. They gave the job to their assistant to take care the special needs students. Furthermore, there are many teachers who think that these students have lower intellectual ability compared to normal students. That is why the regular teachers never ask these students to perform together with their normal peers (Poernomo 2016). Nevertheless, there were few teachers who have sufficient knowledge and skill in teaching students with special needs since they had special educational background. Their skills and competencies were useful in helping the school in applying inclusive education.

This type of teachers was responsible for managing the enrollment of the new students with special needs. They also often assisted their colleagues in dealing with special need students. One of them said “In my schools, I have responsibility to manage the data of students with special needs categories. My colleague teachers sometimes made mistakes in categorizing the students with special needs, thus, I gave them a hand and corrected it.”

Most teachers said they agree that special teachers must have special education background combined with sufficient teaching experience rather than forcing regular teachers from the mainstream schools to teach students with special needs. They expected that the inclusive schools could collaborate with special school in recruiting teachers with special education expertise facilitated by the Provincial Education Office. However, Interview with representatives of local education office revealed the fact that training or program to improve teachers’ quality in inclusive schools is still limited both in provincial or national level.

### **3.2 Parents Concerns**

This study revealed that many parents still do not understand inclusive education. Out of 57 parents of children with special needs who were interviewed, some 46 said that the campaign of inclusive education is almost unheard. Interview with parents indicate very low awareness of entitlements to available educational services. They were also unaware that inclusive education means putting their disabled children in mainstream schools. Parents worried that their descendants will be the subjects of ridicule if they have to mingle with normal children.

In another study by Poernomo (2016), lack of campaign of inclusive education is also affecting not only to parents of special needs children but also to the parents of normal children. A mother from Jakarta who was interviewed even said that she felt very offended to know that disabled children must be learning in the same classroom with her normal child. “Why should a disabled child studies in this school? Disabled children should study in special schools.” She said (Poernomo 2016, p147). It is a fact that there is a lack of campaign on inclusive education by central and local governments. The parents of special need students complained that schools and teachers are not doing enough to teach normal students to appreciate the differences and value the brotherhood. The situation led children with special needs feel being discriminated and isolated from their class peers. Five parents who were interviewed even said that their children have no longer confidence, looked unhappy, and more frequent crying after being transferred to the regular schools. They used to be very happy and had good self-confidence when playing and learning with their peers in special schools.

### **3.3 The Worry of Students**

Students interviewed for this research reported that the teachers in inclusive schools seldom gave understanding to all students to appreciate the differences. They found themselves therefore sometimes being ridiculed or being labeled as “stupid” and even bullying by other students. There are even teachers who know that there is a disabled child being bullied but they never take any action and it seems that this is not a serious problem. Consequently special needs students were implicated in emotional isolation that took the form of either being ignored or having difficulty establishing friendships. Rigmalia, an alumnus of inclusive school recalled her experience. “I used to feel sad about my experience of school. I struggled to make friends, and felt I had very little to offer in a friendship. This left me feeling isolated and my self-confidence was very low.” She even dropped out during her first semester in senior high school, which really brought her down. Luckily she had a strong mother who always encouraged and supported her. “In time, I returned to school, and later graduated with a Diploma in Education for Primary Teachers,” she said (Rigmalia, 2012).

This emotional attitudinal barrier is contributed not only by fellow students but also their parents. In fact there are parents who forbid their children make friends with children with special needs. Rigmalia, now an inclusive teacher in Bandung, elaborated her experience receiving Rina, a student with visual impairment, for the first time in her class (Rigmalia, 2012). “I called the parents and asked for their permission to let their children sit with Rina. Most of the parents were fine with having a student with a visual impairment in the class, but some had trouble with the idea. One parent told me that they would be watching the quality of my teaching. I felt much challenged; I was under pressure to guarantee the quality of my teaching”. Rigmalia said. According to Amiruddin, a 18-year-old blind student who attended state inclusive high schools in Makassar, he often had to put up with negative comments from other students and teachers complained about his performance in class but they never offered additional support (extra tutorials, for example) or equipment or adapted materials to help him participate. He said he was tolerated in the inclusive school but almost no efforts were made to ensure his experience was inclusive.

Observations in some schools showed that special needs children in regular schools still faced environmental barriers associated with the existing facilities at the school. The main problem is that the classroom and other facilities (laboratory, library, and restroom) were separated by different floor. This is a barrier for children with wheel chairs to move up or down without lift. Students with wheel chair find a lot of problems to get in and out of toilets since in many mainstream schools toilets are not equipped with facilities for special needs students. They have to ask for help when going to the restroom. Children with wheel chairs also complained that the location of the library is on the different floor. "I feel bad when I have to ask for help to other people to lift me up to the library in the second floor. So, I rarely go to the library." one student said. There is also a lack of knowledge and understanding or effort on the part of the staff or educational system. In the session of art and culture, for example, teachers never ask special needs students to choose what they want to perform but they assign them to certain activities considered appropriate for them. These exceptional students said they sometimes felt being treated discriminatively by the teachers (Poernomo 2016, p147). From the interviews, it can be seen that students with disabilities still have to adjust to the system implemented in schools.

### **3.4 Principals and Government Officials**

Interviews with school principals were conducted to get information regarding the school policy focusing on the obstacles faced in carrying out inclusive education. Some 23 principals being interviewed said that they often meet difficulties when they should establish policies related to the needs of those children. Principals said they found difficulties to train the teachers and educational staff in order to be pro-active and friendly towards students with special needs. Teachers and staff at the schools have not been fully able to disseminate the values of friendship and tolerance to the students in order to accept their friends with special needs. They added that the role of government to expedite the implementation of inclusive education considered to be less attention and less proactive to the real problems in the field.

Local government officials said most regular schools appointed to be inclusive schools have yet to complete the facilities needed, adding that the government lacked budget to furnish the schools with facilities for students with disabilities. "Only a very small number of regular schools are willing to accept children with disabilities. These few schools mostly refuse children with intellectual disability." one local government official said in an interview. He said the refusal is due to several reasons such as the unavailability of trained teachers and lack of special facilities for children with intellectual disabilities.

Most teachers think that these special children with intellectual disability need a class with a small number of students, a special curriculum and individual educational program. The problem for Indonesia is that the majority of children with intellectual disabilities live in villages or rural areas whereas the limited number of special schools mostly located in the capital city of provinces or regencies. There are many children with disabilities have not been able to enroll in the school closest to their residence, as not all public schools are ready to accept children with disabilities because the school do not have sufficient competence in providing educational services to children with disabilities and the unavailability of special teachers and tutors.

## **4. Discussion**

Many children with disabilities experience discrimination, violence, neglect and exploitation from their families and the environment around them. It requires huge efforts to protect these children. It is very important for children with disabilities to grow up safely and have a decent life, just like for all other children. School is a place where all children participate and are treated equally. The government provides disabled students two options for their education: first, they can enroll at special-needs schools, or; second, they can study at inclusive schools that are willing to accept students with disabilities.

The number of special schools in Indonesia is still very limited, mostly located in the capital city of provinces or regencies whereas majority of children with disabilities live in villages or rural areas. Sending these children to special schools is more costly than to regular schools; meanwhile most of them come from families with low social-economic level. For this reason, inclusive schools are very important to students with disabilities. Inclusive schools are not just about getting children with disabilities to attend regular schools; inclusive schools should be able to make all students recognize and appreciate the differences between them. The basic principal for an inclusive school is that each child is respected regardless of his other disability and challenges.

However, inclusive education access in the sense that every single child with a disability should enroll in regular schools, as in accordance with the basic principle of inclusive schools that all children should learn together wherever possible regardless of any difficulties or differences they have is still very difficult to implement. In other words, implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia is still in a very early stage (Tsaputra, 2014).

This study found that the confidence of teachers in practicing inclusive education, especially in elementary schools in small cities, were still low. This phenomenon was illustrated by their low level of self-confidence which was reflected in the unwillingness some of them to teach in inclusive classrooms. Most of the teachers were hesitant in accepting the task as inclusive teachers because they were aware of their lack of knowledge and skill to teach in an inclusive classroom. This was because they did not have a special education background. Hence, they had to accept the task reluctantly because some of them were civil servants who used to accept the duty without questioning since rejection may affect their career in the civil service (Sabrina & Sansrisna, 2017). Therefore, the teachers had to accept the duty to teach in inclusive classrooms even though they found it objectionable. On the other hand, there were expert teachers who had extensive teaching experiences and had attended a series of training sessions on inclusion. This skilled teacher often assisted their colleagues in dealing with special need students.

Data showed that among disabled students attitudinal barriers were identified as the most deteriorous of their school experiences. Students who have experienced these negative things said they have to put up with the unpleasant treatment not only from their peers, but also from their teachers. In order to solve this problem, schools need to socialize the sensitivity and disability awareness training that should be conducted periodically and fully attended by teachers (Rowley & Kelly, 1993). This program includes highlighting individual differences as well as commonalities, ensuring that students with disabilities understand that they have the right to be included, they also have a right for social acceptance (Poernomo, 2016). The development of inclusive education in Indonesia is indeed a bit sluggish due to limited resources, knowledge and skills required for successful implementation of inclusive education. The existing curricula of general education have yet to fully accommodate different needs of children with disabilities. It gives an impression as if inclusive education were merely an experimental program. This is a dilemma. However, there should be a solution to this problem (Tsaputra, 2014). Most teachers who teach in inclusive classroom only have basic knowledge about inclusive education which led them to have less belief and become inappropriate to practice in inclusive classroom.

Legal framework to guarantee the implementation of inclusive education is already in place but it is not enough. It all depends now on Indonesian government's seriousness to implement the stages of inclusive education consistently starting from its campaign to implementation, to evaluation and to adopt the real meaning of inclusive education that is to provide education for all. In order to make sure that school become a place where all children participate and are treated equally, there must be a change in perception on education. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems that is capable to respond to the diversity of learners. Inclusive education means enhancing the quality of education by improving teachers' effectiveness, promoting learning-centred methodologies, developing appropriate textbooks and learning materials and making sure that schools are safe and healthy for all children. Besides, strengthening links with the community is of great importance as well. To put it in another way, relationships among teachers, students, parents and community at large are fundamental for developing inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 1995).

Students with disabilities need supports from the environment. The management of the school all the way up to higher education play important role in implementing inclusive education. Budget allocation and infrastructure of all buildings at the educational institutions should consider the implementation of inclusive education. This depends on the leadership of the school and university. Awareness of teachers and administrative staffs toward person with disabilities is important in order to reduce stigma. However, skills in delivering knowledge to students with disabilities are also important. Therefore, raising awareness as well as skills in providing services to students with disabilities is important.

## **5. Conclusions**

Inclusive education has recently gained a degree of recognition in Indonesia. Legal framework to guarantee the implementation of inclusive education is already in place but it is not sufficient. However, levels of understanding and depths of engagement were still low.

The progress of inclusive education is still sluggish due to limited resources, knowledge and skills required for successful implementation of inclusive education. Attitudinal barriers were identified as the most detritus experiences among students with special need. They experienced these negative things from their peers and sometimes from their teachers. Schools need to socialize the sensitivity and disability awareness training conducted periodically and fully attended by teachers. Teachers' self-confidence in practicing inclusive education was still low because they lack of knowledge and skill to teach in an inclusive classroom. This was because they did not have a special education background. The existing curriculum of general education has yet to fully accommodate different needs of children with disabilities. It all depends now on Indonesian government's real efforts to implement the stages of inclusive education consistently starting from campaign program, implementation and evaluation and to adopt the real meaning of inclusive education that is to provide education for all.

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