

Social Inclusivity in Teaching: In Pursuit of Students' Advanced Capabilities

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Abstract:

The study explores social inclusivity in primary schools in Indonesia, focusing on three main elements: acceptance of student diversity, empowerment of student agency, and establishment of democracy in the classroom. This research uses qualitative methods with case study methods. The data collection process obtained from curriculum documents, lesson plans, interviews, and observations are used to describe existing practices and opportunities for increasing social inclusivity. The collected data were analyzed in depth to illustrate existing practices and opportunities for increasing social inclusivity in primary school education settings in Indonesia. The research identifies three important aspects of social inclusivity: accepting diversity, empowering agency and student voices, and upholding democracy. Although the curriculum recognizes diversity and some teaching practices involve student voices, there is still room to promote more intact democratic practices in the classroom. The implication of this study is to emphasize the need for an equitable and participatory learning environment in the context of primary education. The findings emphasize the importance of acknowledging cultural diversity, encouraging student engagement, and strengthening democratic principles in the context of primary education in Indonesia.

Key Words: *Research Competencies, Islamic Education Teachers, Mentoring Models, Digital Technology*

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in shaping an inclusive and equitable society (Medina-García et al., 2020). The integration of social inclusivity concepts into the educational process is crucial to ensuring equal opportunities for every student (Derzhavina et al., 2021). Indonesia, akin to other nations, faces challenges concerning the implementation of inclusive teaching practices, particularly in rural settings.

Probolinggo Regency, a rural area in Indonesia, serves as the focal point of this study. Teachers in this region often encounter resource limitations and insufficient professional training to develop inclusive teaching practices. This raises concerns about their capacity to facilitate an inclusive learning experience for students from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive education, which integrates the concepts of social inclusivity into the educational framework, is an important foundation in providing equal opportunities for every student (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). In Indonesia, as in many other countries, there are a number of obstacles in implementing inclusive

teaching practices, especially in rural areas such as Probolinggo District. Teachers in these areas often face challenges related to limited resources and inadequate professional training to develop inclusive teaching strategies (Kuyini et al., 2020).

This raises concerns over their ability to create inclusive learning experiences for students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (Sanger, 2020). Education in rural environments, especially in Probolinggo District, poses a number of special challenges that go beyond just background conditions; This significantly hinders the effective implementation of inclusive teaching practices. Factors such as inequality of access to educational resources, including limited infrastructure and scarcity of educational equipment, greatly affect the education landscape.

In addition, limited understanding or lack of awareness among educators regarding the needs and diverse backgrounds of their students significantly limits their ability to create inclusive and conducive learning environments (Larios & Zetlin, 2023). Solving these challenges requires a comprehensive effort involving not only resource allocation and infrastructure development, but also comprehensive and ongoing professional training for educators (Chan, 2023). Empowering teachers in rural areas to acquire and implement inclusive pedagogical strategies that meet the diverse needs of their students is crucial (Kubacka & D'Addio, 2020). In addition, increasing educators' understanding of the complex aspects of social inclusivity is key in creating an educational environment that values diversity and actively encourages an inclusive culture (Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021). Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to reducing existing disparities and building an educational landscape that truly embraces and meets the needs of every student (Diana & Zaini, 2023).

Addressing the challenges of social inclusivity in the context of education requires collaborative efforts from various parties, including governments, educational institutions, local communities, and relevant stakeholders (Wijaya et al., 2022). Encouraging synergies among these institutions to provide financial support, initiating training programs for teachers in rural areas, and expanding access to cutting-edge technology and educational resources is crucial (Chuanchen & Zaini, 2023).

Increasing the capacity of educators to deal with student diversity and creating inclusive learning environments is an important prerequisite for equal access to education throughout the country (Zaini et al., 2022). In addition, it is important to emphasize the need for the adoption of supportive policies in creating learning.

Therefore, this research aims to delve deeply into the capacity of teachers in Probolinggo Regency to integrate social inclusivity into their teaching practices. The primary focus lies in understanding how educators tackle challenges in creating a supportive, open, and inclusive learning environment for all students amidst the diversity prevalent in rural settings. In addressing the knowledge gap, this study will further explore the hurdles faced by teachers and

seek solutions and recommendations to support the enhancement of social inclusivity in the learning process within Probolinggo Regency.

The knowledge gap lies in the specific scarcity of data regarding the capabilities of teachers in rural environments, particularly in fostering an inclusive and responsive learning environment tailored to the diversity among students.

Existing knowledge inadequately details the specific strategies employed by rural educators to facilitate social inclusivity, adjust teaching methods to cater to diverse student needs, and articulate the challenges encountered in rural contexts (Madondo, 2021). Prior research has provided broader insights into education in rural settings but lacked a focused examination of practices specifically related to social inclusivity and responsiveness to student diversity (DeMatthews et al., 2021). In essence, comprehensive information delineating the precise actions taken by rural teachers to establish inclusive learning environments and respond to the diverse needs of students remains limited (Robinson et al., 2020).

The novelty in this research lies in its comprehensive exploration of the integration of social inclusivity into pedagogical practices specifically within the context of Probolinggo Regency. While prior studies have broadly addressed educational challenges in rural areas, this research delves deeper into the precise strategies employed by educators to create inclusive learning environments tailored to the diverse student population.

This research aims to thoroughly investigate the capabilities of educators in Probolinggo Regency to integrate social inclusivity into their pedagogical methods. The primary focus is on evaluating teachers' proficiency in creating a learning environment that is not only supportive and open but also inclusive for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds or diversities. The study will scrutinize various aspects of teaching practices used by educators in Probolinggo Regency. This encompasses an in-depth analysis of their teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and the extent to which they adapt their approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. Additionally, the study will explore the methods and resources utilized by teachers to create an inclusive environment, including the integration of various teaching materials, activities, and interactions fostering a sense of ownership and participation among students with differing backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employs a qualitative case study approach to delve into the perceptions and experiences of remote rural teachers concerning social inclusivity within their curriculum and teaching practices (Alam, 2021). This qualitative design aims to explore specific settings, interpretations, and the creation of meaning within the context of the Probolinggo regency. The population under study includes remote rural teachers within Indonesia's

Probolinggo regency. Eight teachers were selected based on their seniority, each with over five years of teaching experience, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the teachers' perspectives within this specific setting.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of curricular documents, including curriculum frameworks, teacher syllabi, and lesson plans. Interviews were conducted subsequent to classroom observations and document reviews, allowing participants to reflect more comprehensively and facilitating an exploration of their practices in context (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Content analysis was employed to critically examine teacher responses pertaining to social inclusivity in teaching and learning practices (Birgili & Oğuz, 2021). This method enabled the systematic examination of large narrative data sets, breaking them down into smaller content units. The systematic coding and categorizing approach facilitated the exploration of textual information, identifying patterns indicative of the research questions, and cross-checking data content with the study's focus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the study are arranged as categories based on identified themes. Three major categorical aspects of social inclusivity emerged from the data: the capability to embrace student diversity, the capability to enable student agency and voice and the capability to establish deliberative democracy in the classroom.

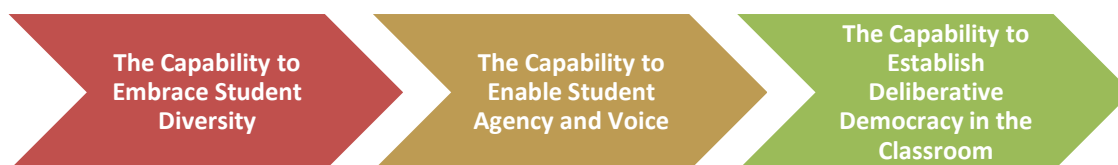


Figure 1. Capability to establish deliberative democracy in the classroom

The Capability to Embrace Student Diversity

In Probolinggo Regency, Indonesia, embracing student diversity that accounts for students' cultures and experiences is reflected in the 2013 Curriculum, which constitutes the teacher syllabi, developed by teachers of state and private primary schools in the regency through the teacher network association. The construction of the 2013 Curriculum encompasses standard competence (learning goals) and basic competence (learning objectives) of the Curriculum Framework constructed by a team from the National Education Standard Board.

The Indonesian government's preface to the document highlights that "in developing curriculum, school teachers need to consider the interests and uniqueness of locality, schools and students". This means that cultural diversity in Indonesia is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of different ethnic

groups and societies; it ought to be recognised and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations. The Indonesian school system is based on the nationalist view of education as a means of uniting people within diverse languages, cultures and religions (Leigh, 1991). Hence, government expectations are that classroom teachers need to use students' diverse cultural characteristics as the foundation for designing and implementing curriculum and instruction. In doing so, it is believed that the advancement of individuals' capabilities to respect human diversity will be enabled.

Our analysis of participant teacher's syllabi and lesson plans indicates instruction that potentially creates opportunities for teachers to value student diversity. The issues of socio-cultural diversity and explorations of students' life experiences are integrated into the documents as learning objectives and/or topic themes. In the Year 4 Syllabus of Civics, for instance, teachers include a learning objective that encourages students 'to express local social cultures in the form of an essay'. Likewise, in the Year 4 Syllabus of Indonesian Language, teachers explore students' life experiences through instruction which asks students to 'write about their daily life experiences and ideals', and 'solve simple problems of their daily lives'. Further, in the Year 4 Lesson Plan of Civics, teachers include a topic theme on 'nature's look and social diversity'.

Some teacher participants in this study suggest that a good teacher does not only focus on implementing such documents as syllabi and lesson plans, but also seek to understand students' backgrounds and characteristics. A teacher participant, Fatin, says:

A good teacher is a teacher who can manage and control the class well. Apart from mastery of teaching materials ... a must for a teacher, a teacher should be able to manage the class and recognise students' diverse characteristics and competencies (I_Fatin_2023).

Fatin indicates that a teacher has particular duties and responsibilities that relate to the implementation of syllabi and lessons and recognition of diverse characteristics of students. This may suggest Fatin's belief in the authority of teachers to complete designated tasks in order to be effective in managing classrooms. In pursuit of changes in society, teaching requires more than transference of content knowledge through delivery of syllabi and lesson plans; rather, it needs to incorporate the ways these resources are converted into capabilities with regard to students' diverse identities.

Nonetheless, in the context of teaching, formalist behaviour management can lead to the dominance of guided instruction by teachers. This kind of teaching practice is referred to as removing students' agency or tendency to engage with their learning. Despite its possible necessity, behavioural teaching in itself is insufficient to establish an effective learning environment as it constitutes one aspect in a teacher's repertoire of practice maintaining that students have to be perfect in how they go about their studies and they cannot

afford to make a mistake. In other words, this form of teaching practice potentially impedes students' capabilities to advance.

Most participating teachers in this study suggested that embracing student diversity also relates to accommodating their diverse competencies. These teachers make an effort to bridge the gap between lower and higher achieving students. Their strategies for addressing this gap involve utilizing a range of teaching methods, for instance, implementing differentiated instruction and carrying out after-school teaching activities. On this point, Amir observes that some students do not achieve well, and in response, "I'll change the method, I'll use combined methods". Interestingly, this teacher refers to the significance of teaching with multiple methods to enhance learning. This strategy may not directly speak to a socially just method, yet it potentially leads to it. Effectively employed, multiple teaching methods enable the recognition of multiple learning preferences amongst students and encourages them to think about the same topics in multiple ways.

In terms of the implementation of differentiated instruction, Santi elaborates, "I ask the students that can't read and write to come forward. I teach them how to read and write on my own while continuing teaching for the students that already can read and write". Santi's commentary implies that she not only recognises students' marked differences of not reading and writing, but also attempts to manage these differences in order to meet the individual needs of students, particularly those who have learning difficulties in literacy. Differentiated instruction offers access to the most suitable learning opportunities that are in proportion with a student's capability to learn as well as bridging the gap between higher and lower achieving students. Further, to accommodate students' diverse competencies, Amir states:

...Outside the class, I provide help [and] after-school teaching activities for lower achieving students, the ones that haven't achieved well in the classroom. I do this here at school or at home, I mean, I usually go to each student's home, giving motivation and guidance and studying together (I_Amir_2023).

Amir's motive for doing this is altruistic as he is not paid. Amir's commentary implies that he employs a home-visit strategy simply for helping his lower achieving students, not for gaining additional income. Parents in Indonesia's remote rural Probolinggo area are mostly receptive to teachers visiting their homes, in the sense that they are not suspicious of teacher interest in coming to their houses. Home visits can build stronger partnerships between parents and their children's teachers. Parents and teachers are major stakeholders in the learning process, and know the children/students best. Rather than blaming each other for students not achieving well, for instance, teachers and parents get together, share and support each other in raising and educating their children/students.

Such modes of learning tend to place an emphasis on memorizing and regurgitating ideas or facts rather than strengthening learning outcomes and developing learning skills. Students achieve from active participation in schooling and pedagogical practices that value student difference. Teachers need to provide students with opportunities to critically engage with a variety of knowledge and “to learn to demonstrate an ability to think in [problematic], collective and creative ways”. Central to the attainment of productive performance is the practice of communicating, collaborating and negotiating within classroom activities. Teachers are responsible for creating learning environments that focus on students’ capabilities to share ideas with their peers and that make the work of individual students the product of group processes.

The Capability to Enable Student Agency and Voice

The concepts of agency and voice are interwoven and constitute fundamental aspects of the educational process. Voice represents an embodiment of agency, where both entail students’ desires to actively engage, discuss, inquire, and share their experiences. The ability to express oneself and aspire to achieve more forms the basis for various other capacities. The capability of having a voice breaks the silence and passivity among students, thereby fostering autonomy, active engagement, and self-assurance in their learning journey.

Upon analyzing the syllabi and lesson plans of participating teachers, it is evident that these documents do not explicitly focus on empowering students’ agency and voices. However, they present opportunities for educators to acknowledge and value these aspects. For example, in the Year 4 Lesson Plan of Arabic Language, teachers are encouraged to initiate lessons by prompting students to share personal details such as names and addresses through a questioning and answering technique. If teachers incorporate open-ended questions that allow for diverse answers or opinions, it could potentially create opportunities for dialogic exchanges in teaching and learning.

The analysis of curricular materials reveals a consistent pattern in the use of terminology that potentially positions students as active contributors to their learning process. In specific instances, the Year 4 Syllabus of Indonesian Language emphasizes students’ capability to orally describe pictures, the Year 3 Syllabus of Islamic Law focuses on students’ ability to discuss the requirements for performing prayers, and the Year 4 Syllabus of Arabic Language underscores students’ capacity to demonstrate spoken texts.

These terminologies—such as “describe,” “discuss,” and “demonstrate”—denote active engagement, portraying actions that students can execute. Integrating these terms into lesson plans signifies an essential initial phase in stimulating student involvement and fostering creativity. This engagement not only allows teachers to attentively listen to students’ voices but also acknowledges these voices as pivotal elements in promoting participatory democracy and, more significantly, in nurturing students’ capabilities.

Interviews with participating teachers in this research indicate their awareness of different voices that may be present during teaching and learning. Harun for instance states,

"They [students] usually have different opinions on factual problems. ...we explain based on their opinions".

Similarly, Fatin states,

"In my teaching, if their [the student's] opinion is right, I agree with them, then I provide the enhancement of their understanding".

Fatin qualified this statement about students being 'right', stating:

"I have to be positive about what my students say; what they say might be right" (Fatin).

In addition, Amir appears to be very favourable towards the display of student voice(s):

"Teachers should accept criticism from their students; if it is good criticism, teachers have to accept it".

These comments imply a commitment to valuing student agency and voice, and indeed on occasion acting on what students actively critique. Determined efforts have been made by these teachers to empower students through voice. Empowering students by listening to their voices, opinions and aspirations is an essential part of achieving social inclusivity through education. Accommodating students' voices and aspirations can underpin the possibilities for further expansion of students' capabilities. In addition, by listening to student voice, faulty assumptions of students' immaturity and lack of social skills are avoided. Moreover, the valuing of student voice can be integrated into a topic theme. As Harun states:

In the Indonesian Language subject, there is a topic called 'factual problems. I ask my students to find factual problems at school, home, and in society. Next, I ask them to deliver their opinion on the problems and think of the solution.

Harun's commentary demonstrates implementation of a problem-based learning approach, which drives students forward by privileging their voice. Problem-based learning potentially affords opportunities for understanding from a student perspective and develops critical thinking (I_Harun_2023).

The Capability to Establish Deliberative Democracy in the Classroom

Analysis of local teachers' curricular documents indicates that most topics do not specifically address issues of democracy, even in subjects like Civics or Social Science. However, there are several topics in these documents that potentially establish democratic practices in the classroom. For instance, in the

Year 4 Syllabus of Civics, one standard competency includes "recognizing State institutions such as House of Representatives, Presidency, Supreme Court, and so forth." Correspondingly, the learning objectives are hopeful that students can identify government institutions at a central level, hold discussions about the authority and responsibility of societal institutions, and create newspaper clippings about government institutions at a central level.

However, merely recognizing, mentioning, identifying, discussing, and creating clippings about State institutions might be insufficient to realize democracy in the classroom. Teachers need to integrate their own experiences of real democratic practices in Indonesia into their teaching. For example, members of the People's Representative Council in Indonesia are elected through legislative elections once every five years, in which teachers, as adult citizens with voting rights, participate. Sharing these experiential stories about their involvement in democracy could be significant for students to understand the practicalities of democracy.

The analysis of participating teachers' lesson plans indicates that their teaching methods seem to have relatively repeated patterns and few variations. Despite these repeated patterns and little variation, there are elements in the lesson plans that reveal teachers' attempts to pursue a democratic classroom. Most lesson plans list particular character values that are to be integrated into their teaching, values broadly similar to those of democratic values, such as being responsible, independent, active, creative, and persistent. Teachers need to apply teaching approaches that encourage rich dialogue and promote interactive discussions so that students will perceive knowledge as a socially constructed process.

Interviews with participating teachers indicate that their responses to the matter of deliberative democracy in the classroom cluster around several issues: accommodating students' proposals for how the classroom works and runs, widening students' participation, and establishing a relationship with the parents of their students. For example, Anton illustrates a democratic strategy to involve students in making important decisions by stating,

"...we have our own rules, class rules, based on negotiation with students, formation of class captain, introduction, and arrangement of class structures. I accommodate their proposals and discuss them until we come to a decision (I-Anton_2023)."

Another way that teachers' comments indicate deliberative democracy in the classroom is related to the expansion of students' participation. Harun exemplifies the ideals for encouraging students to participate more actively in learning by providing freedom to choose and develop critical thinking, stating,

"As an example, I would like my students to write a poem. Then, in groups or individually I ask them to write it based on the theme that they choose by themselves (I_Harun_2023)."

Finally, teachers also incorporate establishing a relationship with students' parents to elevate deliberative democracy in the classroom.

Rani notes, "...we have a meeting with parents at the beginning of the semester, and we ask them, we consult with them as to their children." Similarly, Anton states, "Here we have a parent association. I use this forum to accommodate and discuss problems of students (I_Rani_2023)."

These statements reflect school and teacher efforts to involve parents in the improvement of students' learning outcomes, providing a sense of ownership, which is foundational in facilitating democratic arrangements in the classroom.

However, some teachers' teaching practices revealed basic didactic teacher-centered approaches that did not align with the ideals of a democratic classroom. Such practices undermine the potential for a process-oriented pedagogy that encourages rich dialogue and promotes interactive discussions among students.

This research identifies three main dimensions of social inclusivity in educational contexts: the ability to embrace student diversity, empower student agency and voice, and establish deliberative democracy in the classroom. The utilized curriculum reflects efforts to acknowledge and accept student diversity by integrating local cultural themes into learning objectives, encouraging participation. Although not explicitly focusing on empowering student agency and voice, the curriculum provides opportunities for recognition and appreciation of these aspects. Teachers engage in endeavors to uphold democracy within the classroom by involving students in decision-making, expanding their participation, and fostering parent-teacher relationships, despite some didactic teaching practices that do not align with the ideals of a democratic classroom.

This research makes a significant contribution to the field of education by identifying three primary dimensions of social inclusivity within the educational context: the ability to embrace student diversity, empower student agency and voice, and establish deliberative democracy within the classroom. These findings offer deep insights into how curricula and teaching practices can be enhanced to better address student diversity, enable active student participation, and reinforce democratic values within learning environments. The implications of this study provide a robust foundation for developing more inclusive curricula and teaching practices that consider student diversity and empower student participation in the educational process.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study underscores the pivotal role of social inclusivity within educational settings by illuminating key aspects such as embracing student diversity, fostering student agency and voice, and

establishing deliberative democracy in the classroom. The findings emphasize the significance of curriculum development and teaching strategies that prioritize acknowledging diverse student backgrounds, empowering student participation, and instilling democratic values. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of social inclusivity in education, this research underscores the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse student needs and enable active student engagement, thereby contributing to more equitable and participatory educational practices.

For future research endeavors, it is recommended to delve deeper into the implementation and effectiveness of specific pedagogical approaches or interventions aimed at enhancing social inclusivity in diverse educational settings. Exploring the impact of targeted teaching strategies on embracing student diversity, empowering student agency and voice, and fostering deliberative democracy within classrooms could provide valuable insights. Additionally, investigating the correlation between inclusive educational practices and academic performance or socio-emotional development could further illuminate the benefits and potential challenges associated with promoting social inclusivity in education. Moreover, comparative studies across various cultural or regional contexts would offer a broader perspective on the applicability and adaptation of inclusive teaching methodologies in diverse educational settings.

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