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The Role of Regular Teachers in Guiding Children with Special Needs and Slow Learner Learning Difficulties in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan inklusi memberikan kesempatan anak berkebutuhan khusus slow learner untuk memperoleh kesamaan pendidikan dalam lingkungan sekolah umum. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran guru di kelas reguler dalam membimbing anak yang menghadapi kesulitan belajar sebagai pembelajar slow learner. Jenis penelitian yakni kualitatif deskriptif, dengan partisipan yang terdiri dari guru kelas, guru mata pelajaran, dan anak slow learner. Metode analisis data melalui wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi. Keabsahan informasi melalui teknik triangulasi sumber. Analisis data melibatkan pengumpulan informasi data, reduksi data, penyajian data dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan dari penelitian ini bahwa para pendidik di ruang kelas memiliki empat peran inti dalam proses belajar mengajar, yakni sebagai demonstrator, pengelola kelas, mediator dan fasilitator, serta evaluator. Keempat fungsi tersebut memiliki timbal balik yang erat dalam meraih prestasi pembelajaran yang optimal. Meski begitu, para guru juga menghadapi kendala bervariasi dalam proses pembelajaran, termasuk siswa slow learner yang mengalami hambatan dalam menyerap materi pelajaran, kesulitan komunikasi, rendahnya konsentrasi dan kesulitan dalam pengerjaan tugas atau keterlambatan dalam pengumpulan. Kesimpulan penelitian ini yaitu pendidik memiliki empat peran utama dalam mengoptimalkan efektivitas pembelajaran. Implikasi penelitian ini guru dapat melaksanakan perannya dalam proses pembelajaran dengan baik.

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education allows learner children with special needs to obtain equal education in a public school environment. This research aims to analyze the role of teachers in regular classes in guiding children who face learning difficulties as slow learners. The type of research is descriptive qualitative, with participants consisting of class teachers, subject teachers, and slow-learner children. Data analysis methods are used through interviews, observation, and documentation. Validity of information through source triangulation techniques. Data analysis involves collecting information, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The findings from this research are that educators in the classroom have four core roles in the teaching and learning process, namely as demonstrators, class managers, mediators and facilitators, and evaluators. These four functions have close reciprocity in achieving optimal learning achievement. However, teachers also need help with the learning process, including slow-learning students who experience obstacles in absorbing lesson material, communication difficulties, low concentration, difficulty completing assignments, or delays in submission. This research concludes that educators have four leading roles in optimizing learning effectiveness. This research implies that teachers can perform well in the learning process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious effort by individuals to optimize human quality through activities implemented consciously to achieve predetermined goals (Novita et al., 2019; Yuliawati, Permana & Lasmawan, 2023). Every individual has rights that must be respected and fulfilled in their lives. The problem teachers face when teaching special needs children slow learners is that slow learners often have difficulty concentrating when studying (Comarú et al., 2021; Wray et al., 2022). Sometimes, when given material, the child does not write it. Sometimes, he is ostracized by the other children. Thus, the role of the

educator is to include a series of behavioral patterns that reflect the identity of a specific job or position (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021). The duties of teachers involve obligations towards children's achievements through interaction to facilitate the learning process (Fajar & Putra, 2021; Sari et al., 2023). Teachers have a prominent influence on determining the success of learning.

The tasks carried out by educators include various aspects, namely the embodiment of a demonstrator, an effective class manager, a mediator, and a facilitator in the learning process and assessment. Therefore, the role of teachers in guiding children's learning steps has a significant impact on learning outcomes, making it a crucial element in education. These four roles must be carried out proportionally and harmoniously because they are closely related to achieving the success of the learning process. In contrast, a regular teacher is an educator who is tasked with providing regular class teaching at school. A class educator carries extensive educational experience (Woodcock et al., 2022). Their duties include creating a conducive learning climate, which inspires children to absorb knowledge in the classroom. In inclusive education, regular teachers play an invaluable role in ensuring that students with special needs and other normal students achieve a deep understanding of their learning process. General education teachers are knowledgeable figures in aspects of daily life, strengths, and needs of children who are suspected of having disabilities or have a history of disabilities (Yada et al., 2022). As pioneers in the world of education, general education teachers have an important role in directing other experts' attention to students suspected of having disabilities.

The reality in the field is that one of the special needs students who have difficulty learning slow learners in the first grade of SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta has a disorder in one or more basic psychological abilities that include understanding and using language, speaking, and writing which can affect the ability to think, read, count caused by minimal brain dysfunction and developmental aphasia. The learning outcomes obtained by slow learner children can be said to be less than optimal, so in the teaching and learning process, class teachers at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 must have a Special Assistant Teacher to assist in implementing learning for slow learner children. A class teacher's ability to guide special needs children in the first grade of SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta still needs to improve in serving and guiding these children. These students find it difficult to interact with other people, both teachers and their friends. In addition, there are children with special needs in class 1 of SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1. In particular, there are children with learning difficulties known as slow learners. Slow learners refer to students who experience developmental delays and have low or below-average intelligence quotients (IQ), so they need more time to understand the material taught by the teacher. Slow-learner students are physically normal but experience delays in learning and IQ limitations that cause low learning achievement (Pratama et al., 2021). Special strategies are needed to help slow learners in the learning process. These students often have difficulty interacting with others, both with teachers and their classmates. Teachers face obstacles when teaching children with special needs, especially slow learners who often have difficulty concentrating while studying.

An educator's expertise in presenting material to children with special needs is important in determining students' understanding. Children with special needs are those who require a special approach because they experience developmental disabilities, both physical and psychological. Special needs in children include physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. An example is a slow learner (Aziz et al., 2016; Olapane, 2021; Wanabuliandari et al., 2021). Slow learners face learning challenges, making understanding the material take longer than individuals with comparable intelligence potential (Pratama et al., 2021; Widjaningrum & Hamdan, 2022). Slow learner children usually have a less than optimal level of attention and concentration towards all the information presented, so they have poor memory skills because they need help recording information in the long term (Ardianti et al., 2021). Children with special needs can also be defined as children who experience physical, mental, intelligence, and emotional disabilities, thus requiring a special learning approach.

Previous research findings state the analysis of the role of regular teachers in guiding children with special needs who experience learning difficulties. Teachers face challenges and support when interacting with students with special needs in a harmonious classroom environment (Mirzakhmedova et al., 2023; Yada et al., 2022). As the interactive relationship between teachers and students becomes more established, sometimes unexpected obstacles arise in explaining relevant learning materials. The diversity in the classroom requires teachers to involve themselves more intensively, combine innovative ideas, and find learning methods that strengthen the individual diversity of their students (Pratama et al., 2021). The assessment of the performance of SDI Heso teachers in dealing with children with special needs shows that there are significant areas for improvement (Hasibuan et al., 2020; Zubair & Sasongko, 2021). Teachers could be more optimal in handling the special needs of children due to the minimal application of adapted learning approaches, effective strategies, and appropriate learning models. In addition, no con needs to be made to deal with the individual needs of students with special needs in the teaching and learning process

(Aziz et al., 2016). Limited facilities and a lack of teacher education experience in the context of special needs can also cause the inability of teachers to handle these children. There is a significant difference between teacher competence in planning learning for children with special needs and integrated class teachers and special teachers for children with special needs (Ohba & Malenya, 2022). Teachers have extraordinary abilities to provide equal learning services between ordinary students and students with special needs in the same category (Alvarez et al., 2021). However, no specific criteria are applied for teachers to assess the development of children with special needs.

Teachers in inclusive elementary schools have a good attitude towards children with special needs. The challenges of learning for children with special needs are faced with strong determination. Although the path sometimes feels winding, the will to overcome obstacles and provide equal education for every child remains the main focus (Muthmainnah et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2023). How essential is the contribution of parents and special assistants in providing special services for children with special needs in public elementary schools? Parents, as well as being friends, advocates, and instructors, carry out important functions for the development of children.

Meanwhile, special guidance teachers also play a role in designing and implementing special programs, preparing individual learning plans, adjusting teaching materials, conducting evaluations, and making reports on programs and the development of children with special needs. These roles synergize to ensure that most students with special needs in public elementary schools receive quality services. This adjustment includes using appropriate methods, strategies, materials, and learning media. Teachers in inclusive schools need help, especially the need for educational facilitators capable of caring for students with special needs. The quality of inclusive assistance teachers provide in elementary schools could be improved. Regular educators and special school assistants have united in harmony. They collaborate with full solidarity to pay attention to matters related to the learning of children with special needs in grade one. This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in regular classes in guiding children who face learning difficulties as slow learners.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted at Tunggulsari 1 Elementary School in Laweyan District, Surakarta, held in February. The type of research is descriptive qualitative, with participants consisting of class teachers, subject teachers, and slow-learner children. In this study, the researcher conducted observations on the implementation of the learning process in the first grade, which includes the role of the class teacher in the learning process, implementation of learning, evaluation activities, and follow-up of the learning process. Data analysis methods include interviews with first-grade teachers who have students with special needs, direct observation to analyze the learning series in the classroom, and documentation to obtain information about the conditions of students and teachers during learning. Data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion are part of the data analysis. The reliability of the research data was tested using source triangulation to test the validity of the data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The role of class teachers in guiding children with special needs who have difficulty learning slow learners in Elementary School. Research conducted at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta showed that there were students in the slow learner category, with minimal achievement in each subject and requiring extra time in the learning process. This slow learner phenomenon visualizes individuals with low intelligence in learning but not individuals with mental retardation. Obstacles and efforts of class teachers in guiding children with special needs who have difficulty learning slow learners in Elementary School. The observations and interviews revealed that class teachers at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta faced various obstacles in guiding learner children in the learning process. These obstacles include the absence of special assistant teachers and the need for more understanding of class teachers in guiding learner children. As a result, class teachers are forced to double as special assistant teachers for slow learner children, which sometimes disrupts class conduciveness. In addition, there need to be more special learning media for children with special needs and a lack of preparation of special lesson plans for slow learner children. Although teachers modify materials, time allocation, and assessments, the curriculum implemented in this school needs to significantly differentiate learning between regular students and students with special needs. There is also a problem of the need for more self-awareness of slow learner students in studying seriously, as well as lack of student concentration on teachers and learning materials. In facing these obstacles, teachers must take certain actions and efforts to improve the learning process. Special teacher

assistants must ensure that guidance for children with special needs runs optimally. Teachers must also be dedicated to fostering the potential and imagination of these children with special needs, motivating them to realize their dreams. Teachers can adapt a curriculum or learning plan specifically designed for these children with special needs and use learning media tailored to their needs. In addition, teachers have an important responsibility in implementing special programs aimed at learner children. Based on the findings conducted at Tunggulsari 1 Elementary School, Surakarta, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Research Results

No.	The Role of the Teacher	Description
1.	Teacher as Demonstrator	 a. Class teachers interact more with regular students b. Class teachers focus more on delivering material to regular students c. Teachers are not too involved in the learning process d. The teaching modules or lesson plans used by teachers are still the same as for regular students e. The material given by teachers to students is still the same as for regular students
2.	Teacher as Class Manager	 f. Exploration of inclusive education for children with special needs with regular friends remains consistent a. Teachers are less able to control a conducive class b. The interaction between slow learner children and regular children is not good c. Slow learner children are more often passive in class d. Teachers provide interludes of games so that children can focus on learning again
3.	Teacher as Mediator and Facilitator	 a. The teacher conducts apperception activities before learning begins b. The learning media provided by the teacher to students is good enough c. Communication between educators and slow-learner students does not seem to run smoothly d. The teacher repeats the material after the lesson is over
4.	Teacher as Evaluator	a. The teacher assesses slow learner students and general students by assigning identical things.b. The teacher gives remedial questions for slow learner children.

Discussion

From the study results at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta, several important findings were found regarding the role of class teachers in guiding children with special needs who experience learning difficulties as slow learners. The role of teachers in guiding children with special needs who have learning difficulties as slow learners in Elementary Schools. The role of teachers as class teacher demonstrators in supporting students with special needs who have learning difficulties as slow learners is not optimal. The areas for improvement of class teachers are that they interact and communicate more often with normal students and are more focused on delivering learning materials to these students. As a result, understanding students with special needs who experience learning difficulties, especially in terms of learning materials, needs to be achieved optimally because teachers prioritize attention to regular students. The educator's task as proof of work must be carried out with mastery and development of teaching substance, as well as learning materials that aim to determine student achievement, especially for those who have special needs who face physical, mental, intelligence, and emotional obstacles that require a special learning approach (Hasibuan et al., 2020; Wanabuliandari et al., 2021). Thus, it is inevitable that they need an education specifically designed to address the learning challenges they face and meet the unique needs of each child individually (Lieung et al., 2021).

However, it is revealed that in Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta Elementary School, the learning approach for students with special needs remains in line with the approach applied to ordinary students. Therefore, the presence of a teacher in the classroom has extraordinary significance in presenting a customized learning experience that is fully based on the needs and capabilities of individual students with special needs. At an ideal level, the teacher's approach should vary according to the special needs of each student (Syaiful Bahri Djamarah, 2001: 49). The advantages possessed by teachers are that when presenting learning materials, teachers provide a relaxed and not too rigid approach, to facilitate optimal understanding for children. Teachers always involve apperception to create high interest in the teaching

and learning process. This apperception strategy can take the form of various creative games, interactive question and answer sessions, or reviewing previous concepts illustrated through specific examples relevant to their daily lives. In addition, teachers also provide songs to achieve the desired results. By applying this perception, teachers support students who need more time to absorb and understand the material. The existence of apperception as an important activity at the initial stage of learning significantly facilitates the process of accepting the learning concept that the teacher has conveyed to students. The role of the teacher as a class manager at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta uses a learning method that involves using rewards as motivation for children. In an enthusiastic atmosphere, the teacher inscribes incentives to students to encourage their motivation to learn while still paying attention to children who are slow learners. Slow learner students often carry out inactive tasks in the learning process and only become spectators when playing, even though their friends show jokes. As class managers, educators must hone diverse skills and strategies to organize the class so that students feel diversity in learning. The variety of learning will positively affect students (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021; Widjaningrum & Hamdan, 2022). Teachers are important in managing classroom situations to create a conducive teaching and learning environment and align it with the school environment.

The role of teachers as mediators and facilitators in a series of learning is the existence of teachers who move and facilitate the creation of an effective learning process. As intermediaries, educators ideally have the skills to select suitable educational aids, while as facilitators, teachers should be able to present various learning resources, such as literature, journals, and scientific publications (González & Ramírez, 2022; Ma et al., 2024). Learning technology plays a crucial role in facilitating understanding and clear instructions. In addition, this approach is also able to create an unmatched appeal for those who absorb information at a low speed. That way, the knowledge absorbed by children will be easily embedded in their minds. As a result, the learning process can achieve the desired goals brilliantly. In addition, as a facilitator, one of a teacher's important responsibilities is managing interactions with students during teaching and learning activities. At SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta, the interaction between the class teacher and slow learner children can not run smoothly. Children feel embarrassed to express their opinions; often, they just keep quiet, so they feel afraid and embarrassed to interact with the teacher. Several aspects must be applied effectively and accurately by educators in communication, for example, when students are involved in question and answer sessions when educators and students share personal experiences, when educators assign tasks to students, and when there is a dialogue between educators and students. The quality of positive interactions between educators and students during the learning process significantly impacts student achievement. The occurrence of a two-way dialogue indicates that the knowledge absorbed by students through teachers has been received with full understanding. The role of teachers as evaluators at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta: class teachers provide evaluations to children with slow learning levels and regular children with the same assignments. Although children with slow learning levels sometimes cannot complete assignments at the time of collection, teachers provide additional duration for collecting assignments exclusively for slow learners. This step is taken to optimize their learning outcomes and provide special assistance. Children with slow learning levels have difficulty learning because their learning process is very slow, taking longer than regular children (Mu, 2021; Yao et al., 2021). The role of an educator as an arbiter/evaluator is essential to be implemented to continue the steps to be taken in the next teaching or correct the learning process that was not optimal in the previous period. Educators must act as extraordinary assessors in the learning journey. Educators need to conduct evaluations of students by assigning tasks at the end of each learning material, aiming to provide students with a more detailed understanding of the material that has been instructed.

Obstacles and efforts of teachers in guiding children with special needs who have difficulty learning slow learners in Elementary Schools. Obstacles are obstacles or obstacles that limit or hinder the achievement of goals. In this context, researchers will discuss the obstacles class teachers face in guiding children with special needs who have difficulty learning (slow learners). Obstacles in learning refer to obstacles that hinder the smooth running of the learning process, which can involve human factors (teachers and students), institutional factors (classroom environment), and instructional factors (lack of teaching aids) (Wanabuliandari et al., 2021; Widjaningrum & Hamdan, 2022). Learning barriers and challenges refer to obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of learning implementation or unresolved issues in the learning process. One of the difficulties that often arise in dealing with children with special needs is the lack of specialized teacher assistants and the limited understanding of regular teachers in guiding children with special needs. This phenomenon becomes clear when class teachers and subject teachers carry out teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Class teachers face several obstacles in guiding children with special needs who experience learning difficulties as slow learners at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta during the learning process. In facing these challenges, teachers certainly have various steps or efforts to overcome obstacles in the learning process. As a demonstrator, what educators must do in

presenting material in the learning process is to prepare lesson plans or learning modules and prepare learning devices. The lesson plan or learning module implemented by educators at SD Negeri Tunggulsari 1 Surakarta has not undergone special adaptation for students with special needs who experience learning difficulties as slow learners so the material given to students with special needs is still similar to that of regular students in general. Based on research, teachers often face obstacles as demonstrators, such as limited knowledge in dealing with special needs children who experience learning difficulties as slow learners. These children also have difficulty distinguishing subjects, so they sometimes lag in the learning process, such as writing, compared to their friends. Sometimes, they also have difficulty reading, writing, and arithmetic, so special needs children cannot fully follow the learning process but only observe their friends. However, when delivering material to students, teachers provide special assistance to learner children by re-explaining the learning material that has been delivered. In many cases, slow learner children indicate low learning outcomes and face difficulties in reading, writing, arithmetic, and memorizing. Therefore, teachers provide special assistance after delivering learning materials to other students. Children who learn slowly generally have different characteristics from children in general. They tend to forget learning information that has just been received easily, have difficulty concentrating when disturbances, are passive, quiet, lack initiative, and are less sensitive to the surrounding environment (Ohba & Malenya, 2022; Yao et al., 2021).

Therefore, teachers need to have various methods to create a fun learning atmosphere. However, teachers often face obstacles in managing the class. For example, children who learn slowly start to lose focus in following the lesson, are distracted by their activities, or are reluctant to participate in learning. Even so, teachers always try to invite these children to discuss and give quizzes to reinforce the material. When faced with obstacles like this, teachers often remind children to refocus and provide variations, such as games or songs, to raise the spirits of children who learn slowly. Play therapy applies play strategies to facilitate learning enhancement in the younger generation. This innovative approach focuses on overcoming obstacles that may occur in the learning aspect, including physical challenges, mental anxiety, difficulties in social interaction, and communication barriers. By involving interesting, interactive, and fun game elements, play therapy provides a creative solution to reduce or even eliminate these obstacles. As mediators and facilitators, teachers must prepare concrete learning media appropriate to the child's environment. Educators must create synergy between learning and the surrounding environment to achieve unmatched concreteness (González-pérez & Ramírez-montoya, 2022; Miaz et al., 2019). However, teachers often face obstacles as mediators and facilitators, especially when using learning media is not optimal for children who learn slowly. Regarding interaction, children who learn slowly often have difficulty expressing things they do not understand. In addition, when teachers talk to children who learn slowly, the responses they give are often not based on the teacher's questions; sometimes, they keep quiet. Children with special needs face challenges in terms of communication, both in gaining an understanding of other people's dialogue and in expressing their thoughts (Aziz et al., 2016). Thus, children who learn slowly often have difficulty communicating.

In their role as evaluators, teachers need to evaluate the learning that is carried out. The evaluation given to children who learn slowly and regular children is generally the same, namely by giving questions. However, children who learn slowly often have difficulty understanding descriptive questions, especially when asked to work on math problems like story problems. They often feel confused, so they only look at their friends without working on the problems, so teachers need help giving assessments. Children who experience delays in the learning process often face challenges completing their assignments, especially compared to children at normal developmental levels. Therefore, teachers must provide extra guidance by providing continuous practice and organizing special mentoring for these children. This remedial process aims to provide them with additional value and equal opportunities. Before carrying out remedial, the teacher will also review the material taught. The mission behind implementing remedial sessions is to facilitate students who face challenges in the learning process, including those who experience slower learning speeds, to achieve the desired learning achievements through recovery and improvement efforts, both in learning and developing their characters. The findings of this study are reinforced by previous studies stating that integrated class teachers have excellent classroom management skills and can work together with special teachers for children with special needs. To guide children with special needs in the learning process (Aziz et al., 2016; Heny Asdaningsih & Yuli Erviana, 2022; Yahya, R. N N, P. S., Jannah & Prihantini, 2021). Challenges and weaknesses in the role of regular teachers, namely combining regular students with students with special needs in one regular class, present obstacles such as lack of special methods, strategies, and approaches and teacher limitations caused by limited facilities and lack of appropriate educational backgrounds. All of these are highlighted problems that must be addressed seriously. This study implies that teachers can carry out their roles in the learning process well.

4. CONCLUSION

Educators have four main roles in optimizing the effectiveness of learning. First, as a demonstrator, teachers deliver teaching materials evenly to students with different learning speeds without distinguishing between students who learn slowly and students with normal capabilities. However, the approach is different in providing special assistance to slow learners. Second, as a class manager, teachers realize that children face challenges absorbing material in all subjects, especially mathematics. However, educators foster intellectual spirit in children by creating a collaborative environment that inspires each other, especially when slow learners experience obstacles that require more effort. Third, as mediators and facilitators, teachers interact well with children who learn slowly and with normal children to improve learning effectiveness, including through questions and answers during the learning process. Fourth, as evaluators, educators conduct learning evaluations from beginning to end. Educators design the next steps and interact with parents. Evaluation is implemented by asking students questions and providing special remedial measures to slow learners. Furthermore, the obstacle experienced by class teachers is that children who learn slowly need help receiving learning materials.

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