

Inclusive School Management: Transforming Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that inclusive education provides equal opportunities for special needs students to learn alongside many other students in the same environment, fostering an attitude of respect for differences and providing services to each child based on their specific needs. However, poor infrastructure, such as network issues, power outages, inaccessibility and unavailability, and a lack of digital skills, impedes online education. Therefore, the current study was aimed at finding out the differences in learning after and before the COVID-19 pandemic. This study adopted a mixed-method design, with a qualitative phenomenological method employing in-depth interviews and a cross-sectional design employing a pre-posttest design for quantitative data, with a population consisting of all-inclusive school teachers from settings. The samples of this research were special assistant teachers teach with a total of three teachers per inclusive school for quantitative data and a minimum of eight teachers per inclusive school until for qualitative data. The data analysis was undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of quantitative analysis, a t-test was run to determine the difference in learning before and after the COVID-19 and a descriptive analysis for qualitative data. A triangulation was also employed after the data were collected for validation. Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that the administration of inclusive schools has begun to adapt to the current pandemic conditions, which necessitate the completion of all teaching and learning activities online. The current study has a number of implications and limitations.

Keywords

COVID-19, Inclusive Schools, Online Learning

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Introduction

It is widely accepted that inclusive education provides equal opportunities for special needs students to learn alongside many other students in the same environment, fostering an attitude of respect for differences and providing services to each child based on their specific needs (Vazquez & Greenfield, 2021). As a result, the special needs learning model Individualization of children in inclusive schools is required to meet the needs of diverse learners (Coogler, Storie, & Rahn, 2021; Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Wibowo, 2016), including students with disabilities can support improvements in teaching practices that benefit all students. Students with disabilities are increasingly being educated alongside their non-disabled peers around the world, a practice known as inclusion (Hehir et al., 2016). Effective inclusion of students with disabilities necessitates the development of capacities by teachers and school administrators to support the individual strengths and needs of all students, not just students with disabilities. (Anaby, Ianni, Héguy, & Camden, 2020; Klimaitis & Mullen, 2020) The literature shows that, in most cases, studying with disabled students does not harm non-disabled children. Several studies, on the other hand, have found that non-disabled students who are taught in inclusive classrooms have positive attitudes and are more accepting of people who are different from themselves. Teachers with more training experience than others tend to have more positive beliefs about the impact of inclusive education on children with and without disabilities (Nilgün, AKSOY, & ARSLANTAŞ, 2021; You, Kim, & Shin, 2019). Moreover, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Serafini et al., 2021). This crisis is not about health crisis, but it affects every aspect of life, including education (Sohrabi et al., 2020). The COVID-19 has had a detrimental influence on education, including degraded learning, reduced access to educational and research facilities, job loss, and higher student debt. The situation encapsulates the difficulty that authorities have in deciding whether to close schools (to reduce contact and save lives) or to keep them open (allowing workers to work and maintaining the economy) (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Since then, the so-called traditional learning has been replaced by online learning. This necessitates children, parents, and teachers changing their everyday routines to accommodate new and unforeseen educational realities. These parents describes the problems they have faced as teachers, as well as the implications of such a situation: causing stress as a result of greater negative activation while studying at home (Letzel, Pozas, & Schneider, 2020). One of the activities of school management, especially inclusive schools, is to consider the learning context (Specht et al., 2016). The data in the literature reveal that many instructors and students are relying on technology to provide continuing online learning during this pandemic. However, poor infrastructure, such as network issues, power outages, inaccessibility and unavailability, and a lack of digital skills, impedes online education. Thus, COVID-19 has had a disastrous effect on the education sector, and all educational institutions, educators, and learners must adopt technology and enhance their digital abilities in order to keep up with emerging global trends and realities in education (Onyema et al., 2020; Zee & Koomen, 2016). In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Indonesian government has taken measures to prevent the virus's spread. The Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, for example, has issued regulations to address this situation. In Lampung, in particular, the implementation of inclusive education has been based on reactive action in response to the phenomenon that prompted the formation of a working group for the province. This condition necessitates that the implementation be based on planning that ensures the time context, as well as systematic and systemic mapping of the work area, with the development of measurable success indicators (Lin, Ke, Zhang, Yan, & Wu). As a result, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hoped that inclusive education management, particularly in the context of learning, will be considered. This entails developing designs, learning processes, and assessing learning. The inclusive school design plan consists of a lesson plan and an individual teaching program, with the individual teaching program being used specifically for individuals but designed by a special tutor/teacher. The methods, media, materials, and language used all contribute to the teaching and learning process. At the learning evaluation stage, an assessment in the form of a written assessment, product, and portfolio is required (Fitria, 2012). Moreover, based on our preliminary study, the average achievement of the implementation of inclusive education in Lampung was still below the ideal or expected score, although some schools had exceeded it as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Lampung in 2016

No.	Aspect	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Average Score	Ideal Score
1	Institution	28.93	70	49.465	63.93
2	Curriculum	25	79.17	52.085	64.585
3	Learning	31.82	65.15	48.485	64.395
4	Evaluation	5.56	79.17	42.365	45.145
5	Student	21.79	57.05	39.42	50.315
6	Human Resources	22.92	72.92	47.92	59.38
7	Infrastructure	12.5	50	31.25	37.5
8	Community participation	17.86	50	33.93	42.86
9	Financing	17.86	64.29	41.075	50.005

Table 1 above clearly explains that the evaluation aspect falls into both the lowest category and that of the highest. Therefore, the preliminary finding was the foundation for the current research research, particularly in the context of learning in the pandemic era. During this pandemic, parents, students, and teachers should expect to face a number of learning challenges. It is reported that some obstacles are experienced by students, teachers, and parents in their online teaching and learning activities, such as a lack of technological mastery, additional cost for the Internet subscription, additional work for parents in assisting children in learning, communication and socialization between students, teachers, and parents, are reduced, and working hours for teachers are not limited (Purwanto et al., 2020). It is reported that several inclusive schools have their own learning strategies during this time of crisis, e.g., by implementing the so-called 5M learning. The first M stands for memanusiakan hubungan or humanizing relationships refers to fostering positive interactions among teachers, students, and parents. The second M is memahami konsep or understanding concepts referring to explaining the goals and process of learning to parents. The third M is membangun keberlanjutan, which refers to ensuring long-term success by reflecting with parents. The fourth M refers to memilih tantangan, choosing challenges by offering a variety of learning activities based on student needs and flexible learning hours. Finally, the last M is memberdayakan konteks or empowering context through the use of resources at home as learning resources. In this way, the use of the 5M distance learning strategy helps teachers and parents collaborate in educating students with special needs so that they can learn and be productive during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sholikhati, Prayogo, & Santoso, 2021).

Methods

This study adopted a mixed-method design, with a qualitative phenomenological method employing in-depth interviews and a cross-sectional design employing a pre-posttest design for quantitative data. The purpose of this study was to see if there was a difference in learning after and before the COVID-19 pandemic in inclusive elementary schools during a period of six months, from April to October 2021. This study was carried out in Metro City, Bandar Lampung City, and the Pringsewu Regency, with a population consisting of all-inclusive school teachers from settings. The samples of this research were special assistant teachers teach with a total of three teachers per inclusive school for quantitative data and a minimum of eight teachers per inclusive school until for qualitative data. This study used a quantitative research instrument in the form of a questionnaire created with Google Forms, as well as a qualitative instrument in the form of the authors themselves, starting with the preparation and proposal followed by obtaining research permits, coordinating with the Regional Education Office and Schools, locating the intended subjects/informants, interviewing them, data entry and analysis, interpretation of the results, and finally the preparation of the results and discussion. The flow of this research is shown in Figure 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before data collection, we tested the quantitative instrument to learn more about its quality, including whether it met the standards for displaying a data sample from a normally distributed population and testing the hypothesis. The normality test was used to determine whether or not a sample comes from a normally distributed population (Table 2). Based on Table 2 below, we concluded that all dependent variables were normally distributed, indicating that this study was feasible and capable of producing the best possible research results, which could then be used for evaluation to improve the transformation and adaptation of inclusive school management. To identify learning from design, learning process, and learning evaluation, the data analysis was undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of quantitative analysis, a t-test was run to determine the difference in learning before and after the COVID-19 and a descriptive analysis for qualitative data. A triangulation was also employed after the data were collected for validation.

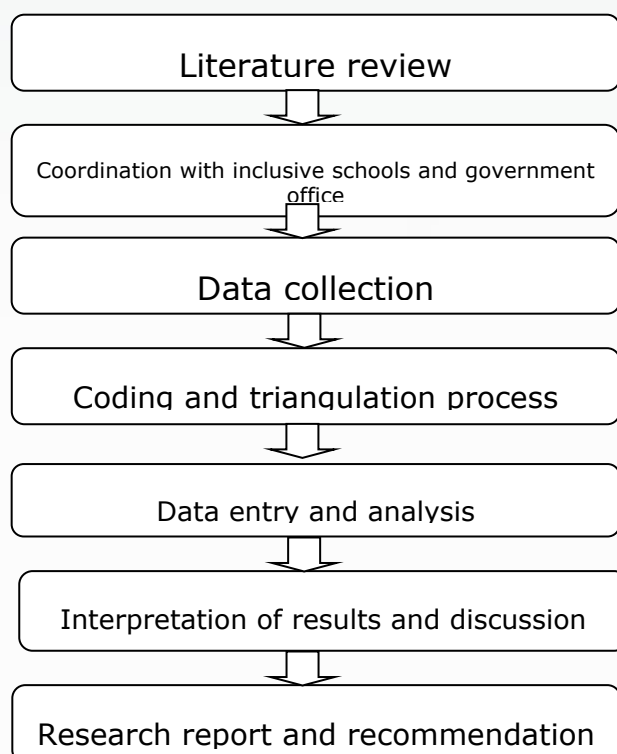


Figure 1. Research Flow

Table 2.
Results of Normality Test

Variable	Significance value		Information
	Experimental	Control	
Design	0.074	0.051	Normal
Learning process	0.088	0.062	Normal
Evaluation	0.067	0.077	Normal

Results

Online learning has been deployed in all-inclusive schools under investigation to support government decisions and break the COVID-19 transmission chain, using online media such as the Zoom, WhatsApp video calls, and offline media to implement the distance (online) learning program. The data were collected in the form of pretest, posttest, and N-gain results after the experimental class was treated. The formula below was used to calculate the N-gain.

$$G = \frac{\text{Posttest score} - \text{pretest score}}{\text{Maximum} - \text{pretest score}}$$

with the following categories:

High : 0.7 N-Gain 1
 Medium : 0.3 N-Gain 0.7
 Low : N-Gain < 0.3

Table 3.
Results of Pretest, Posttest, and N-gain

Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
0.7 ≤ N-Gain ≤ 1	High	14	51.85
0.3 ≤ N-Gain ≤ 0.7	Medium	13	48.15
N-Gain < 0.3	Low	0	0
Average	Medium	0.4	

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistical Test Results

Category	Pretest	Posttest
Sample size	123	123
Lowest value	30	57
Highest score	58	95
Mean	40.3	80.1
Median	40.00	79.50
Range	33	28
Standard deviation	11.354	9.143
Variance	128.911	83.952

Table 4 shows that the increase in the post-test and pre-test is not overly significant, but it is sufficient to conclude that the transformation of inclusive school management prior to and during the pandemic had a good influence. This change focuses everyone's attention on the necessity to be able to review how students might apply learning to their specific requirements. This is not simple, especially when inclusive students with disabilities are limited in their learning opportunities due to a lack of knowledge about how children with impairments can help. In addition, there is a highly substantial difference in the highest score in the post-test and pre-test comparison table, indicating that inclusive school management's flexibility to conditions during the pandemic has increased. This occurs because inclusive education management can improve the efficiency of the education system's implementation, which is supported by professional human resources for the continuity of inclusive learning, where the curriculum has been adjusted based on the student's character, abilities, and task commitment. According to interviews done in a variety of settings and with a variety of responses, teaching and learning activities sometimes necessitate the best and most complete participation from parents, students, and special accompanying teachers. This is one of the measures and techniques that must be implemented in light of the importance of inclusive students' learning spirits. It is assumed that if the parties cooperate well and maximally, the ensuing output will be maximal as well.

Discussion

A set of considerations for children with special needs has been released, including recommendations for ensuring a secure and accessible distance learning platform for disabled children. Teachers are trained to provide remote support to children with disabilities who are enrolled in any special education program, ensuring that their education is not disrupted (Ralli, Arcangeli, & Ercoli, 2021). In general, several points were obtained for the obstacles experienced during distance learning, including 1) parental limitations in understanding assignments, 2) limited facilities at home, 3) difficulties in accessing the Internet at home, 4) limited understanding of parents in the use of information technology, 5) the material provided in distance (online) learning

is quite extensive, and 6) children get bored easily. Various issues with online learning are felt strongly by all students in terms of their academics and psychological well-being. Due to online learning, many students from diverse places feel stress and worry. However, as a result of evaluations and subsequent conversations with numerous associated parties, these things gradually changed dramatically over time.(Cao et al., 2020). Another issue is that technology takes the position of the teacher in the learning process. Technology in education is solely used to help teachers transfer knowledge, not to help students develop character. In other words, the teacher's rules are unaffected by technology.(Cviko, McKenney, & Voogt, 2014; Oomen-Early & Early, 2015; Turnage & Goodboy, 2016) Moreover, many teachers are unprepared for the online learning process as a result of the transition to a technology-based learning system; many teachers are not yet proficient in ICT, making learning less effective (Efriana, 2021). Therefore, educators, particularly in inclusive education, must put in extra effort to fully prepare all teaching and learning activities.(Numonjonov, 2020; Scull, Phillips, Sharma, & Garnier, 2020) The teacher's abilities and competencies, as we have seen, are important aspects in effective inclusive school administration. A special assistant teacher must be prepared for remote learning scenarios that may require more energy than usual. In the inclusive education approach, there are three major phases, among others. 1) Using learning programs, plan the development of each child with special needs. 2) Implement inclusive education activities for students, and 3) measure and evaluate real-world conditions to promote students' individual development. Furthermore, this inclusive education paradigm is built on the entire educational system in general. An input (management aspect), a process (learning management), and an output are all included in this model (student quality development) (Robiyansah, 2020). This also necessitates support from the necessary facilities, infrastructure, and prices. The cost of internet data packages, equipment, and tools is required for the implementation of inclusive education. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, not only does the government lower its intended education budget, but household budgets may also reduce demand for education. Thus, increased funding is critical to prioritizing inclusive education and ensuring that it is effectively targeted (Bank, 2020). The government must deploy both human and financial resources in this circumstance, as well as conduct periodic and controlled supervision (Bier-Laning et al., 2021). Furthermore, when compared to the early stages of the pandemic, the administration of inclusive schools witnessed a progressive improvement in quality during the pandemic era. Online teaching and learning activities are based on several analyses of the educational environment conducted by connected parties in order to produce an educational environment that does not dampen each student's excitement for studying. Various analyses and conversations were conducted in order to present a complete picture of the characteristics of distant education for special needs children. Students with disabilities are included in all of these processes, including online instruction. In a world where information is fast expanding and technology and work processes are rapidly changing, researchers, educators, policymakers, and business leaders have highlighted the need to support "twenty-first century" skills for more than two decades (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020). Dealing with children with special needs who have sensory barriers is one of the most difficult challenges. During the pandemic, students with special needs and sensory obstacles face unique problems in terms of learning accessibility. One example is the use of sign language in online classrooms for students with hearing problems, which might be difficult to interpret because students' screens are small when communicating online. Students with visual impairments have additional challenges while studying online maps that cannot be touched. As a result, this is a tough situation for educators, students, and parents. Therefore, online learning strategies were shown to be useless. The cost of purchasing an internet data package, the lack of facilities in the form of learning aids, and students' inability to retain the content adequately are all complaints and impacts that many people are experiencing.(Ouma, 2021; Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson, & Hanson, 2020; Simamora, 2020). Many assignments are finished by their parents, who complete projects beyond the deadline, indicating a deterioration in learning results for children with special needs. Many children and teenagers do not understand why they must learn online from home, and it is not uncommon for online learning to negatively affect the mental health of children with disabilities during this time. Depending on their condition, children with disabilities may require additional assistance, such as simplified messages and sign language assistance to grasp health and safety precautions. In this case, not everyone, particularly parents, can meet their children's needs. As a result, children may require behavioral support and may be sensitive to changes in routine, especially in this COVID-19 era of learning, where they must inevitably follow changes in learning methods that are inconsistent. They must embrace, adapt, and adopt this technology-

based learning method during this pandemic (Bank, 2020). As a result, assistance from various parties is required to carry out the online learning activities. Online learning activities should be arranged for children with special needs, beginning with learning planning; implementation; self-development that teaches how to keep the body healthy; and ending with learning evaluation that is tailored to children with special needs. This requires a lot of help from students' parents, but it is still a problem that has not been solved optimally or completely. This is due to the fact that not all parents are able to accompany their special-needs children to online classes. It is one of the major challenges in inclusive school management during this pandemic in which learning must be done online (Jiu, Zulfia, Rahayu, & Putra, 2020). Furthermore, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of leadership in inclusive school management is critical in planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling efforts to improve learning efficiency (DeMatthews, Serafini, & Watson, 2021; Óskarsdóttir, Donnelly, Turner-Cmucha, & Florian, 2020). Several strategies can be implemented by inclusive school management in the future based on the findings of the current study. These are as follows: 1) changing the program strategy, 2) changing the curriculum, 3) changing the teaching methods, 4) communication, and 5) flexibility. As the manager of education, the principal is responsible for the successful implementation of educational activities. In this case, inclusive school administration should delegate complete authority to school principals (Sulasmi & Akrim, 2020).

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that the administration of inclusive schools has begun to adapt to the current pandemic conditions, which necessitate the completion of all teaching and learning activities online. This may create many obstacles and problems, putting a lot of pressure not only on students but also on educators who are struggling to adapt to current conditions. The current situation has begun to gradually improve where there is an increase, although it has not yet been signed, it has had the expected impact where at this time various parties involved in teaching and learning activities and inclusive school management have been able to adapt and adjust to current conditions that were initially quite beneficial. Therefore, this study has an implication. The government should be able to better develop home learning programs and provide knowledge about how to learn at home, as well as proper instruction for parents to teach their children at home, including special needs children. It is also feasible to offer online seminars for parents on distance learning, as well as train teachers to be more competent in distant learning implementation. However, this current study is also with its limitations. Despite the fact that this study is able to provide a brief summary of online learning in inclusive schools, the number of subjects engaged in the study is still limited. As a result, future study should include a wide range of participants, including parents and the government. Similar research in geographical areas relating to this topic must also be done to see whether similar findings can be found.

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