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Differentiated instruction for special needs in inclusive schools: A preliminary study

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Abstract

This study aims to develop the instruments used in implementation of differentiated instruction among students in inclusive schools. The method used in this study was integrating between theoretical consideration based on the literatures and empirical evidences from the interview with the teachers of inclusive schools in Yogyakarta. The result of the study showed the need of assessment in several dimensions, both teachers and students. In the teacher's context, the evaluation on the relevant competencies need to ensure the successful process of teaching and learning on special needs students in inclusive schools. The competencies evaluated among teachers contains three dimensions: (1) Readiness to operate the differentiated instruction (2) Understanding on large difference of student's interest; and (3) Decision on the learning method based on student's learning profile. The assessment needed among students was developed by observation form that will be used by teachers to evaluate their students. This form contained the evaluation of student's readiness to receive differentiated instruction in learning process, the evaluations of student's interests, and the evaluation of student's learning style based on Gardner's multiple intelligences theory.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive development in Indonesia is following the developments in the world that begins from countries in Scandinavia which implement inclusive education, followed by the United States and then Britain. In line with the results of the world conference on education in 1991 in Bangkok which resulted in the declaration of education for all and the results of education convention in Salamanca Spain that produces the Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education in 2004, Indonesia held a national convention and produced Bandung Declaration in 2004 which established Indonesia Towards Inclusive Education. Implementation of inclusive education has several important implications in management. According to Sapon-Shevin (Ministry of National Education, 2010), there are five implications of teaching in schools. First is inclusion, inclusive education community to create and maintain warm grade, accept diversity, and respect for diversity. Second, teaching in heterogeneous classes require fundamental changes in curriculum implementation, means that the learning system in inclusive schools focuses on cooperative learning approach. Third, inclusive education means preparing and encouraging teachers to teach interactively. Fourth, inclusive education means providing support, encouragement for teachers and class continuously and elimination of barriers relating to professional isolation. Fifth, inclusive education means significantly involve parents in the planning process.

Based on the above-mentioned explanation, the implications can be drawn into a conclusion that, in order to be able to organize inclusive education, the school must prepare a variety of things which are creating warmth between learners and receive all the differences, the school must have the appropriate curriculum for diverse learners, teachers must have competencies that support for the creation of an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning as well as the involvement of parents while the education process takes place. Therefore, based on these conclusions, the most important part in the implementation of inclusive education is the curriculum that is appropriate to the staff and the competence of teachers needed to maintain the staff.

The curriculum applicable for special needs curriculum should be based on the needs of students special needs. Teachers and principals must be independent in making curriculum adjustments and changes in school management, and classroom are tailored to the needs of students (Mangunsong, 2009). In addition, teachers must also have the knowledge and skills necessary to select and adapt learning materials and teaching methods according to the specific needs of each student (Tarsidi, tt).

However, the facts on the ground show that the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia experienced a range of problems. Dika (<http://arifin-meaningoflife.blogspot.com/2012/>) revealed that various constraints are experienced in the implementation of inclusive education curricula which are applicable to the special needs. Special needs seemed stiff and less responsive to the needs of the crew. Evidence from the results of interviews (personal interview, 28 April 2014) conducted by researchers at some of the teachers at an inclusive school (SDN X) in Jogjakarta states that the lesson plan (RPP) have not been tailored to the needs and abilities of students in the class. Finally in teaching and learning activities teachers often use methods of learning with lectures, give assignments based solely on the worksheet and evaluation methods applied are limited to the written test.

When viewed from the teaching of the principles of differentiated instruction Tomlinson (2000), teachers should have a quality judgment against learning objectives defined in the curriculum (the principle of quality curriculum), have the ability to search and collect information about students and how to direct the teaching and learning objectives in accordance with the abilities and needs of students (the principle of ongoing assessment). Teachers also need to have a wide selection of activities, tasks and setting optimum learning for all students based on their level of readiness, interests and learning tendencies of different students (the principle of respectful tasks). In addition, teachers should also have a variety of settings to ensure that each student has the opportunity to learn and is able to work with all students in the class (the principle of flexible grouping). Teachers also have to be able to create a learning community that makes students feel happy, comfortable, accepted, and supported in learning (principles of community building). This suggests that, in teaching diverse students in inclusive schools, it is arguable to say that teachers have not yet applied all the principles of differentiated instruction, so that problems occurred in carrying out the task of teaching diverse students in inclusive schools.

The problem faced by teachers in SDN X in Yogyakarta, corroborated by the opinions Sobel et al (2003). It suggests that when there is a class of students with diversity, teachers have difficulty in facing and addressing the important needs of every student. Teachers are generally less able to develop skills in applying differentiated instruction approach to teaching, lacking the knowledge and development needs, and not trying hard enough to

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