Collaboration of Parents and Teachers in Supporting the Success of Inclusive Education in Senior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education at the senior high school level presents complex challenges that require active collaboration between parents and teachers to ensure the academic success and social development of students with special educational needs (SEN). However, in the Indonesian context, such collaboration is often limited due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of parental understanding, and insufficient institutional support. This study aims to explore how parent-teacher collaboration is implemented, the obstacles encountered, and its impact on inclusive education practices in senior high schools. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted over three months in two inclusive senior high schools in Indonesia through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that while both parents and teachers recognize the importance of collaboration, its realization remains inconsistent, influenced by socio-economic disparities, lack of structured communication platforms, and varying levels of awareness about inclusive education. The study also highlights the role of school leadership and emotional connections in fostering effective partnerships. It concludes that improving collaboration requires institutional commitment, parental empowerment, and teacher capacity-building.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become an essential global movement aimed at ensuring that all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, have equal access to quality education. The concept of inclusive education is rooted in the principle that every child has the right to be part of the mainstream educational environment and to benefit from learning experiences that promote personal growth and academic success (Villafuerte & Mosquera, 2020). In recent

decades, the implementation of inclusive education has gained considerable momentum, especially in developing countries, including Indonesia. However, the success of inclusive education does not solely depend on school policies or teaching strategies, but also critically hinges on the collaboration between teachers and parents (Rostiani, 2023). This collaboration becomes even more pivotal at the senior high school level, where academic demands increase and students face greater social and emotional challenges.

The transition to inclusive education at the senior high school stage presents unique complexities. Adolescents are in a developmental phase characterized by identity formation, academic competition, and preparation for higher education or employment. For students with special educational needs (SEN), these challenges can be exacerbated without adequate support from both school and home (Asfahani, Abdurahman, Krisnawati, & Prusty, 2022). Teachers, as the primary facilitators of learning, play a crucial role in creating adaptive, differentiated, and supportive learning environments. Meanwhile, parents hold vital information about their children's specific needs, strengths, and emotional well-being (Zuhri, Agung, & Ramdhani, 2020). Therefore, establishing effective collaboration between parents and teachers is a key determinant in ensuring that inclusive education not only exists in policy but is realized in daily practice.

Despite the growing body of literature on inclusive education, many studies have predominantly focused on the implementation of inclusive practices in primary schools or early childhood education. Research addressing the dynamics of inclusive education at the senior high school level remains relatively limited (Rahmatika, Asfahani, Afriani, Saroâ, & Muhammadong, 2024). Moreover, while the importance of parental involvement and teacher engagement has been acknowledged, few studies have deeply explored the practical collaboration mechanisms between parents and teachers, especially in the context of inclusive senior high schools. This creates a significant research gap, considering that adolescence represents a critical educational phase where academic performance and social integration are strongly influenced by home-school partnerships (Aldawood, Alhejaili, Alabadi, Alharbi, & Skinner, 2019).

Another unique aspect that distinguishes this study is its focus on identifying the specific forms, challenges, and impacts of parent-teacher collaboration within inclusive senior high schools in Indonesia. Cultural, structural, and resource-related factors in Indonesia present distinctive conditions compared to inclusive education practices in more developed countries (Cerna et al., 2021). For instance, parental awareness, teacher preparedness, and societal perceptions of disability vary greatly across regions, which directly affect the implementation and success of inclusive education programs (Harmanto, Yulianto, Sholeh, Subekti, & Sueb, 2022). By analyzing these contextual factors, this study contributes to filling the knowledge gap and provides localized insights into improving inclusive practices through enhanced collaboration.

Furthermore, some previous studies have highlighted barriers to effective parent-teacher collaboration, such as lack of communication, differing expectations, limited parental understanding of inclusive education, and inadequate teacher training. However, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on how these challenges manifest specifically in senior high schools and what strategies can be implemented to overcome them (Haniah, Aman, & Setiawan, 2020). Most importantly, there is a scarcity of research that emphasizes a dual perspective simultaneously examining both teachers' and parents' experiences, perceptions, and expectations within the same study framework. This dual approach is critical for developing a holistic understanding of collaboration dynamics and for designing interventions that address the needs and constraints of both parties (Nurfadillah, Sahabuddin, & Sari, 2022).

Given these gaps, the present study aims to explore the collaboration between parents and teachers in supporting the success of inclusive education in senior high schools in Indonesia. The research

specifically investigates how this collaboration is established, the obstacles faced by both stakeholders, and the perceived outcomes of effective cooperation. It also examines the extent to which parents and teachers share information, engage in joint decision-making, and coordinate support strategies for students with special educational needs. By focusing on the senior high school context, this study provides valuable insights into an often-overlooked educational stage and offers practical recommendations for enhancing inclusive education practices.

2.   METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and understand the collaboration between parents and teachers in supporting inclusive education at the senior high school level. The study was conducted over a period of three months, from March to May 2025, in two inclusive senior high schools located in Riau, Indonesia. These schools were purposively selected based on their implementation of inclusive education programs and their accessibility for research purposes. The qualitative method was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and interactions between parents and teachers, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative approaches.

Data collection in this study involved several techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The primary data sources consisted of teachers responsible for inclusive classrooms, parents of students with special educational needs, and school administrators. A total of 10 teachers, 12 parents, and 2 school principals participated in the research through purposive sampling to ensure that the participants had direct involvement and sufficient knowledge regarding the inclusive education practices in their schools. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring that relevant themes were covered. Observations were conducted during parent-teacher meetings, classroom activities, and school events to capture natural interactions and collaboration patterns. In addition, school documents such as inclusive education policies, Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans, and meeting records were reviewed to complement the interview and observation data.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles and Huberman. The researcher transcribed interview recordings verbatim, coded the data to identify emerging themes, and categorized information related to forms of collaboration, challenges encountered, and perceived impacts on inclusive education. Triangulation of data sources and methods was applied to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. By integrating multiple perspectives from teachers, parents, and school documents, this study aims to construct a comprehensive understanding of how parent-teacher collaboration operates in the context of inclusive senior high schools and to identify practical strategies to strengthen such collaboration in support of student success.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that collaboration between parents and teachers in supporting the success of inclusive education at the senior high school level manifests in various forms, yet remains inconsistent in terms of intensity and quality. Through interviews and observations, it was found that most teachers recognize the critical role of parental involvement in supporting students with special educational needs (SEN), particularly in adapting learning materials, managing student behavior, and providing emotional support (Rumere, Sugiyanto, & Sulistyaningrum, 2022). Teachers reported that

regular communication with parents contributes to early identification of students' difficulties and facilitates the development of individualized learning plans. However, the extent of such collaboration often depends on parental awareness, willingness to engage, and their understanding of inclusive education principles.

One of the dominant themes that emerged from the data was the variation in parental involvement based on socio-economic background and level of education. Parents with higher levels of education and awareness about disabilities tend to participate more actively in school meetings, discussions about Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and decision-making related to their children's learning needs (Uska et al., 2021). In contrast, parents with limited educational backgrounds or those who still hold stigmatizing views about disabilities often show low engagement, which hampers effective collaboration. Some parents still perceive inclusive education as the sole responsibility of the school, leading to minimal communication and lack of coordinated support for students outside the classroom (Erlisnawati & Budimansyah, 2020).

Furthermore, the study identified several structural and cultural barriers that hinder optimal collaboration. From the teachers' perspective, large class sizes, limited training on inclusive practices, and lack of institutional support reduce their capacity to engage parents effectively. Teachers expressed concerns about insufficient time to conduct home visits, follow-up consultations, or personalized meetings, especially when they are already overwhelmed with administrative duties. Meanwhile, parents reported that unclear communication from schools, use of technical jargon, and feelings of inferiority when interacting with teachers often discourage their participation (Bukit, Ariastika, Noviati, & Lubis, 2023). Both groups highlighted the absence of systematic platforms or structured programs that facilitate continuous dialogue between parents and teachers beyond formal meetings.

Interestingly, despite these challenges, there were also positive examples of collaborative practices that emerged from schools with stronger leadership commitment to inclusive education. In these cases, principals played a proactive role in building partnerships by organizing parent workshops, inclusive education awareness campaigns, and regular forums where parents and teachers could share experiences and jointly develop strategies to address students' learning and social-emotional needs. Such initiatives were found to increase parental confidence, promote mutual trust, and create a more cohesive support system for students with SEN (Faisal & Kisman, 2020).

Another significant finding was the emotional aspect of collaboration. Several parents reported that when teachers demonstrated empathy, patience, and respect toward students with special needs, it encouraged parents to be more involved and motivated to support their children's education. Conversely, negative experiences such as feeling judged, ignored, or marginalized by school staff reduced parental willingness to collaborate (Warren & Aloia, 2019). Emotional safety and mutual respect were thus identified as key components for sustaining effective parent-teacher relationships.

Table 1. Forms of Collaboration, Barriers, and Impacts in Inclusive Education

No	Aspect	Description
1	Forms of Collaboration	- Regular parent-teacher meetings
		- Joint development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP)
		- Informal communication via phone or messaging
		- Parent involvement in school events or workshops
2	Identified Barriers	- Limited parental understanding of inclusive education
		-Socio-economic disparities among parents
		- Teachers' workload and limited training on inclusive practices

		-Lack of structured communication platforms
		- Stigma or negative perceptions regarding disabilities
3	Positive Impacts Observed	- Improved academic support tailored to student needs
		- Early identification of learning difficulties
		- Increased parental confidence and empowerment
		- Enhanced trust and communication between school and home
		- Better social integration for students with SEN
4	Challenges Remaining	- Inconsistent parental involvement across different socio-economic groups
		- Emotional barriers such as parental feelings of inferiority
		- Institutional limitations in facilitating sustainable collaboration

This table 1. above summarizes the core findings of the research, highlighting the types of collaboration that exist between parents and teachers in inclusive senior high schools, as well as the primary barriers that hinder such cooperation. Regular meetings and informal communication were identified as the most common forms of interaction, though their quality and frequency varied significantly. Socio-economic status, lack of awareness, and systemic school constraints emerged as dominant challenges. Nonetheless, positive impacts such as improved academic support and student integration were observed in cases where collaboration was effectively implemented. The table reflects that while progress has been made, sustainable and inclusive collaboration requires addressing both structural and relational obstacles within the school environment.

The findings of this study underscore the central role of collaboration between parents and teachers in supporting the success of inclusive education at the senior high school level. These results are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that inclusive education cannot be fully implemented without active participation from both schools and families (Sugiarti & Husain, 2021). The data from this research revealed that while both parents and teachers acknowledge the importance of collaboration, practical barriers such as limited parental understanding, socio-economic differences, and institutional constraints often hinder the realization of effective partnerships. This confirms Hornby's (2014) assertion that parental involvement in inclusive education is frequently shaped by external factors beyond individual willingness, such as socio-cultural background and systemic school conditions.

The variation in parental involvement based on socio-economic status and educational background found in this study aligns with the conclusions drawn by (Barger, Kim, Kuncel, & Pomerantz, 2019), who highlighted that parents with higher education levels and better access to information are more likely to engage actively with schools. This indicates that inclusive education initiatives must not only target students but also address inequalities among parents to create equitable collaboration opportunities. In this research, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds expressed feelings of inferiority or uncertainty when interacting with teachers, a phenomenon that resonates with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). According to this theory, a child's development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including the microsystem (family and school), and disruptions or weaknesses within these systems such as poor parent-teacher communication can negatively affect student outcomes (Chen, 2018).

Moreover, the structural challenges identified in this study, including large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and limited time for personalized engagement with parents, reflect findings from previous research conducted by (Dover & Rodriguez-Valls, 2018), who emphasized that teachers often feel ill-equipped to handle the demands of inclusive classrooms while simultaneously fostering meaningful parental collaboration. These structural barriers, if left unaddressed, can reinforce the gap

between policy and practice in inclusive education, particularly at the senior high school level, where academic demands and class complexity increase.

An interesting dimension that emerged in this study is the emotional and relational aspect of parent-teacher collaboration, particularly the role of trust, empathy, and respect in shaping parental willingness to engage. This finding is supported by the work of (Tao & Xu, 2022)v, who argued that authentic parental engagement is not merely about attending meetings but is built upon emotional connections and mutual respect between families and educators. The research findings demonstrated that when teachers exhibit patience, openness, and a non-judgmental attitude, parents especially those from marginalized groups feel more empowered to participate actively in their child's education (Damayanti, Djollong, Asfahani, & Yadav, 2024). Conversely, when interactions are marked by misunderstanding or condescension, parental involvement diminishes, thereby weakening the support system for students with special educational needs (SEN).

The proactive role of school leadership, as observed in some of the more successful examples of parent-teacher collaboration, further reinforces Fullan's (2001) theory of educational change, which emphasizes that sustainable reforms, including inclusive education, require strong leadership, clear vision, and the development of collaborative cultures within schools. The principals in this study who facilitated parent workshops, created regular forums for dialogue, and promoted inclusive values demonstrated that institutional support is a critical factor in transforming inclusive policies into everyday practices. This aligns with studies by (Evans, 2018), which highlight the significance of school-wide commitment and systemic support in fostering effective inclusive environments.

In relation to the broader literature, this study contributes new insights by focusing on the relatively underexplored context of senior high schools in Indonesia. Much of the existing research on inclusive education, such as that by (Stephenson, 2023), has centered on primary education or specific disability categories, often overlooking the unique challenges faced by adolescents with SEN in more advanced educational settings. This study shows that the complexity of adolescence characterized by heightened academic expectations, peer influences, and identity development makes parent-teacher collaboration even more essential yet more complicated (Ma et al., 2020). Parents and teachers must navigate not only educational needs but also socio-emotional challenges unique to this developmental stage.

In conclusion, the analysis of these findings suggests that successful inclusive education in senior high schools depends on multidimensional collaboration that is sensitive to socio-economic disparities, rooted in mutual respect, and supported by institutional structures and leadership. The research highlights both areas of progress and ongoing challenges, confirming prior theoretical frameworks while also pointing to the need for more context-specific interventions. Addressing these issues holistically can enhance the educational experiences of students with special needs and contribute to a more inclusive, equitable school environment.

4.　CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that while both parents and teachers acknowledge the importance of collaboration in supporting inclusive education at the senior high school level, its actual implementation remains inconsistent and fragmented. This condition reflects the researcher's concern that inclusive education in Indonesia, particularly at the senior high school stage, is still often interpreted as a formal policy requirement rather than a living practice grounded in mutual partnership. The research highlights that collaboration is not merely about occasional meetings but requires ongoing

communication, shared responsibility, and mutual understanding between schools and families to ensure that students with special educational needs (SEN) can thrive academically and socially.

Despite the valuable insights obtained, this research is not without limitations. First, the study was conducted in a limited number of senior high schools within a specific region, which may not fully represent the diversity of inclusive education practices across Indonesia. The reliance on qualitative methods also means the findings provide rich, in-depth descriptions but cannot be generalized statistically. Moreover, while the study explored both teachers' and parents' perspectives, it did not extensively capture the voices of students with SEN themselves, whose experiences are equally crucial in evaluating the success of inclusive practices.

Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope of study to include diverse regions and educational contexts, especially considering Indonesia's cultural and structural diversity. Further studies should also adopt mixed-method approaches to combine qualitative depth with quantitative measurement for broader generalization. Most importantly, researchers are encouraged to incorporate the perspectives of students with special needs to gain a more holistic understanding of how collaboration among stakeholders directly affects their learning experiences, well-being, and personal development within inclusive senior high schools.

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