Mentoring Program for Teachers of Inclusive Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT
This mentoring program was conducted because we found several issues faced by teachers of inclusive schools. Some of which are the difficulty in detecting a child’s special needs and the psychological issues that affect students’ learning, as well as the lack of teacher’s ability in constructing learning programs that suits the child’s needs. This condition causes inadequacy in providing educational services, which are often unsuitable for students with special needs studying at inclusive schools. Therefore, the learning capabilities of students with special needs are not optimized. This program aims to increase the quality of education services for children with special needs who are studying at inclusive elementary schools. The mentoring involves two elementary schools located in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Research results: a) formulation of Identification Tool for Children With Special Needs, which include Observation Sheet for Children With Special Needs and Psychological Impediment Detection Sheet for Children With Special Needs as instruments for identifying students’ special needs and psychological impediments that can be used by teachers in inclusive schools; b) observation using impediment detection sheet for children with special needs conducted was helpful for teachers when understanding students’ psychological characteristics; c) teachers are able to better understand characteristics of children with special needs; d) trainings on Individual Learning Plan (ILP) benefited teachers, by helping teachers to formulate ILP based on specific psychological characteristics and needs of the students; e) the school acquires the profiles of children with special needs.

Keywords: teacher, inclusive education, detection tool, psychological impediments, ILP

Introduction
Thus far, students with physical, emotional, mental, or social learning impediments as well as students with special needs attend inclusive schools. Schools that conduct inclusive education do not possess a profiling system that can accurately describe students’ learning difficulties and potential as a basis for constructing a learning program that suits the students’ needs and capabilities. Based on the data from Sedayu Elementary School in 2008, there were 22 students (from 224 students) indicated to have special needs. Nevertheless, the school could not precisely identify students’ type of special needs due to unavailability of instruments that can be used by teachers to assess their students. This causes a disparity between the education service and the students with special needs in regular schools because the learning program is not yet tailored to the students’ needs and characteristics. This phenomenon seems to occur in other schools that implement inclusive education system.

As an effort to realize the responsibility of implementing education for all, the Education Department has created a policy on inclusive education to expand learning opportunity for children with special needs that aims to develop and empower their potentials in accordance with their characteristics. Nevertheless, this policy does not seem to be accompanied with teachers’ readiness as implementers in the field. Teachers’ skills and limited knowledge of children with special needs are inadequate to provide education service that suits the demands of children with special needs. Special education teachers assigned to assist students with special needs in inclusive schools, who are very limited in numbers, are also not yet capable of handling all students with special needs who have different characteristics.
Based on the reality in the field, there needs to be mentoring for schools that apply inclusive education to optimize existing resources as an effort to improve education service for all students, especially students with special needs. The mentoring will consist of providing knowledge of the characteristics of students with special needs and how to identify them, how to construct and implement a learning program tailored to students’ needs through Individual Learning Plan (ILP) in each school.

Through this mentoring program, teachers in inclusive schools are expected to acquire sufficient capabilities to assess students with special needs and provide educational services that suit their needs and characteristics to optimize the development of students’ potential.

The aims of this mentoring program are: 1) obtain an illustration of students’ condition and characteristics, which includes the level of learning difficulties and potential; 2) provide skills for teachers in recognizing students’ characteristics and constructing Individual Learning Plan that suits the needs of every student as a way of providing the best educational service for students with special needs.

The benefits that will be obtained by the school are: 1) acquiring the profiles of students with special needs; 2) teachers attaining knowledge and skills on identifying students with special needs; 3) teachers gaining knowledge and skills on constructing individual learning program for students with special needs.

The benefits that will be obtained by policymakers are: 1) access to valid identification tool that help teachers understand students’ special needs and psychological issues; 2) acquiring training models suitable for developing teachers’ skills in inclusive schools.

**Theoretical Background**

In the general/ regular educational institutions that engage students with physical, emotional, mental, or social impediments, known as students with special needs, are said to undergo inclusive education. Special education operated in the regular education system will of course be conducted in a different way from when it is operated separately. In inclusive education, educators hold a higher responsibility to plan, implement, and evaluate education for students with special needs (McDonnel et.al. in Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005). Educators/ teachers in inclusive schools, both special education teachers and regular teachers, need to share responsibilities on educating students with special needs. Special Ed teachers need to collaborate and cooperate effectively with regular teachers to support the participation of students with special needs in their class. On the other hand, regular teachers need to possess correct understanding of students with special needs.

Idol (2006) reported that inclusive education generates benefits for students, both students with special needs and regular students in general. Students with special needs who learn in inclusive schools experience an improvement in their learning performance. On the other hand, regular students state that they are not disturbed by the students with special needs and they also seem to gain improvement in their social behaviors. Aside from that, with the inclusive system, both students and teachers develop tolerant, respectful, and cooperative attitude in the learning process (Hardin & Hardin, 2002).

In implementing the inclusive system, there are several stages needed to be carried out by teachers as main agents in students’ learning process. The first step that needs to be done is conducting an assessment or identification of students with special needs to obtain information on students’ needs and characteristics, which will then become the basis of arranging the individual learning plan. The assessment can be done by giving students a series of academic tests to acquire information on students’ abilities and through a specific instrument to determine students’ psychological characteristics and special needs. To assist teachers in identifying the condition of students with special needs, the mentoring team compiles Identification Tool (IT) that consists of observation sheet for students with special needs, which finds out students’ type of special needs, and psychological impediment detection sheet for students with special needs, which gather information on students’ psychological issues that may affect students’ capabilities and learning process.

Through the use of these observation and detection sheet, teachers obtain information about students’ condition and characteristics as well as the issues being faced. Thus, teachers can further understand their students and are able to map out students’ potential and difficulties in their learning process more clearly and in detail. Henceforth, teachers will be able to devise the treatment plan.

The next step that needs to be carried out by teachers to handle students’ learning issues is constructing the individual learning plan for students with special needs by referring to existing learning curriculum and adjusting it with students’ needs based on the identification result that was previously conducted. This individual learning plan consists of students’ condition, weaknesses and strengths, action
plan, students’ learning targets, as well as learning strategies that will be performed. In the implementation stage, teachers need to provide precise instructions to the students concerned, after understanding the compiled learning plan, the targets, and strategies used. For this purpose, the mentoring team arranges modules and individual learning plan (ILP) sheet as an effort to assist teachers in learning how to construct the ILP and use it for the students with special needs who are under their care.

Observation sheet for students with special needs that are developed by the mentoring team serve to identify students with special needs, which include learning difficulties, mental retardation, autism, and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. This was based on data in the field, where the mentioned 4 types of special needs are the ones often found in inclusive schools. Observation sheet are compiled by referring to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) IV from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that has been adapted and Identification Tool for Students with Special Needs from the Education Department of Banten Province. This observation sheet can be used to enforce early diagnosis of students’ special needs by teachers before proceeding with a more specific examination by experts if necessary.

The next instrument constructed by the mentoring team is the psychological impediment detection sheet that aims to identify students’ psychological impediments on 4 psychological aspects namely the cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral aspects, which are the CBCL (Children Behavioral Checklist) from Achenbach (1991), Sample School Referral Questionnaire from Sattler (2002), and information processing theory (Dodge, 1986). This psychological impediment detection sheet can be used to determine in more details the impediments faced by students based on each aspect, thus allowing teachers to provide accurate treatment. This instrument not only can be used for students with special needs, it can also be used for other students who might have difficulties in their learning.

On the next stage, after teachers are able to identify students’ needs and issues, teachers need to prepare individual learning plan for the students concerned. To help teachers create individual learning plan, the mentoring team designs a training module on individual learning plan and train the teachers on this. The materials of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) given are based on A Guide to the Individualized Education Program that was developed by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Education Department (2000) and Individual Education Plan (IEP) designed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1998). ILP is a written and documented learning plan that describes the strengths and needs of students with special needs. It contains the education and service program that are developed according to the student’s needs and how this educational service is provided, including notes on students’ development and learning achievements. ILP is constructed based on the results of prior assessment conducted using the Identification Tool (IT) consisting of observation sheet of students with special needs and psychological impediment detection sheet that reveals the students’ condition, characteristics, and needs. In the ILP, specific goals and expectations of what the students need to achieve must be written, as well as how the provided program can help students achieve the goals and expectations written in the ILP.

Research Method

Based on the field survey, the types of special needs that often emerge and found in both schools – T Elementary School and S Elementary School – are mental retardation, autism, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and slow learning, thus the Observation Sheet for Students with Special Needs used in this mentoring program are limited to these four types of special needs.

The Psychological Impediment Detection Sheet for Students with Special Needs aims to reveal students’ psychological characteristics that include the cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral aspects. This instrument was created to assist teachers in their effort to discover and understand students’ characteristics through observation during the teaching and learning process in school, which will then serves as the basis for constructing a learning program that suits the students’ needs.

To obtain a valid instrument, several stages were taken in the construction process. At the initial stage, a selection process of the items that were constructed through discussions with professionals was conducted. On the Psychological Impediment Detection Sheet, there were 18 items on the cognitive aspect, 18 items on the emotional aspect, 26 items on the behavioral aspect, and 15 items on the social aspect, which will then be put through a trial process. Meanwhile, for the Observation Sheet for Students with Special Needs, the number of items is still the same as the original source, where the trials conducted aim to determine their importance as an enforcement tool to diagnose the type of special needs.
The mentoring activities are conducted not only to equip teachers with skills needed to identify students’ issues, but the mentoring team also develops the instruments in order to facilitate teachers in enforcing the diagnostic of students’ special needs and psychological issues. The follow-up action of the results of using the developed instruments is for the teachers to acquire the skills needed for identifying students with special needs, understanding students’ profiles, as well as improve teachers’ skills in preparing the individual learning plan for students with special needs.

Results of the Research

The usage of the Identification Tool was actuated on 3 September – 11 September 2008. Each student was observed by 2 teachers. Each school was given 10 days to fill in the IT. The booklet filled in by teachers in Elementary School T consists of 43 IT by 9 teachers, whereas in Elementary School S, there were 46 IT by 15 teachers.

Throughout the implementation process of IT usage by teachers, the team conducted an observation. This observation was meant to ensure teachers use the Identification Tool and assist teachers when they face difficulties when filling out the IT, as well as check that IT was filled in comprehensively.

The results of using the identification tool are as follows:

S Elementary School: 1) Several teachers have not yet filled in the Identification Tool because they were busy teaching; 2) there were several teachers who have used this instrument and found disparities between students’ characteristic features and the type of special needs they are having.

T Elementary School: 1) Teachers were able to fill in the tool and conduct the scoring correctly; 2) Several teachers have not yet filled in the IT due to inadequate time with the particular student, thus needing more time to conduct an observation.

Generally speaking, the issue faced by both schools is the limited time given to fill in the IT, so teachers were not yet able to conduct thorough observation on the students. Several statement items did not appear in one of the schools because the school culture does not allow for that behavior to appear.

The utilization of the IT was followed up by the construction of Individual Learning Plan module by considering each school’s needs and characteristics, taking into account the conditions and characteristics of both schools are quite different. The module consists of an explanation on the definition of ILP and its benefits, ILP components, ILP writer, constructing stages and its elaboration. This activity consists of training and monitoring the implementation of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

The training was conducted in both schools, which are Sedayu Elementary School and Tumbuh Elementary School. Whereas the results of ILP training are as follows:

S Elementary School: 1) teachers undergo training quite enthusiastically; 2) the materials given were quite plenty, but the time allocated was limited, thus several teachers did not seem to really understand the materials given, especially when filling in the ILP sheet. Teachers needed to be assisted individually to fill in the ILP.

T Elementary School: 1) teachers in school have applied various ways to handle the students, but it has not yet been documented; 2) teachers were able to complete the identities easily due to established communication with parents to fill in the student related data; 3) on several students that need treatment in almost all aspects, teachers find difficulties in prioritizing who needed to be dealt with.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Identification Tool for Students with Special Needs have been constructed, which includes Observation Sheet for Students with Special Needs and Psychological Impediment Detection Sheet for Students with Special Needs as an instrument to identify students’ special needs and psychological issues that can be used for teachers in inclusive schools.

Observation using impediment detection sheet for students with special needs was very beneficial for teachers in understanding students’ psychological characteristics.

Teachers are able to better understand the characteristics of students with special needs.

Trainings on Individual Learning Plan (ILP) are useful for teachers, which helps teachers construct ILP based on the students’ psychological characteristics and special needs.
The school has the profiles of students with special needs.

**Recommendation**

**Teachers.** Continue using observation sheet and psychological impediment detection sheet for students with special needs to detect and identify their students and understand their psychological condition as a base for constructing a learning program that suits the students’ needs. The instrument can be used not only for students with special needs, but also for students in general who has learning issues.

Applying Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to construct learning program for students with special needs according to students’ needs and condition, implementing it, conducting evaluation, and developing it. The construction format of ILP can be developed by each teacher, but still taking into account the aspects needed to be included in the ILP.

**Schools.** Facilitate teachers in gaining information related to students with special needs and the type of service needed to optimize students’ potential. For instance, through trainings, books, as well as internet. Support and facilitate teachers when using the observation sheet and psychological impediment detection sheet for students with special needs. Accommodate communication between teachers and parents when writing the ILP for students that needs specific treatment. Monitor implementation, evaluation and development of ILP, as well as documenting that ILP as students’ profile.

**Policy Makers.** Need to provide training for teachers in inclusive schools before the inclusive program is conducted so teachers have sufficient skills dealing with students with special needs in a regular class. This training includes an understanding of students with special needs and how to identify them, the philosophy of inclusive school and its implications, inclusive class management, and so forth.

Need to place special assistant teachers in inclusive schools, who are suited to the needs of each concerned school, meaning teachers who owns the knowledge and capacity related to inclusion, caring for students with special needs, and ability to transfer their knowledge and skills, and able to cooperate with regular teachers to develop education for students in inclusive class.

Conduct advanced program to evaluate ILP as well as programs relating to improvement of teachers’ skills on inclusion. For instance: inclusive class management.

**Bibliography**


