

## The Collaborative Role of Special Assistance Teachers with Regular Teachers on the Learning Success of Students with Early Reading Difficulties in Inclusive Elementary School

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### Article History

accepted 1/11/2024

approved 1/12/2024

published 1/2/2025

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### Abstract

*The collaboration between special education teachers and regular teachers is viewed as a key factor in providing appropriate accommodations, ranging from curriculum design, special services, learning processes, to assessments that meet students' needs. This research aims to identify (1) the factors causing students with early reading difficulties to succeed in learning, (2) to explore the methods used by teachers in instruction, and (3) to describe the impact of collaboration between special education teachers and regular teachers in supporting the success of students' learning in inclusive elementary schools. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach involving regular teachers, special education teachers, and students with early reading difficulties as subjects. Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation. The data analysis technique used is the interactive data analysis model by Miles and Huberman which consists of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research findings indicate that special assistant teachers play a crucial role as important supporters for regular teachers in various aspects of learning, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and communication with parents. This role facilitates regular teachers in accommodating the special needs of students in inclusive classrooms. The conclusion of this study shows that the synergy between assistant teachers and regular teachers is vital in achieving optimal inclusive education, making it an important model to be implemented more broadly, especially to support the success of students in inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** *special assistant teacher, regular teacher, early reading difficulties, elementary school*

### Abstrak

Kolaborasi antara guru pendamping khusus dengan guru reguler dipandang sebagai faktor kunci dalam menyediakan akomodasi yang tepat, mulai dari perancangan kurikulum, layanan khusus, proses pembelajaran, hingga penilaian yang sesuai kebutuhan siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi (1) faktor-faktor penyebab siswa kesulitan membaca permulaan berhasil dalam pembelajaran, (2) mengeksplorasi cara-cara guru dalam pembelajaran, dan (3) mendeskripsikan dampak dari kolaborasi antara guru pendamping khusus dengan guru reguler dalam mendukung keberhasilan pembelajaran siswa di sekolah dasar inklusi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif yang melibatkan guru reguler, guru pendamping khusus, dan siswa dengan kesulitan membaca permulaan sebagai subjek. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan yaitu analisis data interaktif model Miles dan Huberman yang terdiri dari pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru pendamping khusus memainkan peran sebagai pendukung penting bagi guru reguler dalam berbagai aspek pembelajaran, termasuk perencanaan, pelaksanaan, evaluasi, dan komunikasi dengan orang tua. Peran ini memudahkan guru reguler dalam mengakomodasi kebutuhan khusus siswa di kelas inklusi. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sinergi antara guru pendamping dan guru reguler berperan krusial dalam mewujudkan pendidikan inklusi yang optimal, menjadikannya model yang penting untuk diimplementasikan lebih luas terutama untuk mendukung keberhasilan siswa di pendidikan inklusi.

**Kata kunci:** *guru pendamping khusus, guru reguler, pendidikan inklusi*

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## INTRODUCTION

Every child has the right to a proper education, including children with special needs. Currently many educational units implement inclusive education by placing students with special needs with regular students in one class. However, the implementation of inclusive education faces various challenges. Based on observations and interviews in several Surakarta primary schools, there are indications of bullying cases in the form of regular students belittling of treating students with special needs differently. In addition, students with special needs often have difficulty interacting with their peers because of actions that make their friends feel uncomfortable. Students with early reading difficulties in inclusive schools are no exception. These students are often constrained to write down ideas in writing, which hinders learning activities (Hidayah, 2011). In the learning process, students sometimes find it difficult to understand the material provided by the class teacher. Similar problems were also found by Hidayat et al. (2024), namely the presence of children with special needs often experience social gaps when interacting with peers. Teachers also experience obstacles in designing and implementing learning that is in accordance with the characteristics of students with special needs.

This is contrary to the main objective of establishing inclusive schools, namely to create a learning environment that supports the active participation of all parties and prevents discrimination. The Implementation Guide for Inclusive Education (Arriani et al., 2022) states that the success of inclusive education will be achieved if environmental factors that hinder students' learning can be adjusted to their needs. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive learning environment so that students who have difficulty reading at the beginning can successfully learn together. According to Supena & Munajah (2020), the indicators of learning success for students who have difficulty reading in inclusive elementary schools are 1) progress in basic reading skills, 2) understanding the contents of the text reading, and 3) increasing interest and motivation in reading. Thus, students not only recognize letters, but also understand the meaning of the contents of the text they read. Meanwhile, Widodo et al. (2020) stated that the indicators of success in initial reading for students include 1) being able to arrange letters in the form of correct words, 2) being able to arrange words in the form of correct sentences, and 3) being able to pronounce readings with good and correct intonation. Inclusive schools are expected to be able to accommodate students with low absorption so that they can learn together and grow in an equal educational environment, thus preventing discrimination between them (Berlinda & Naryoso, 2018). The existence of government policies regarding inclusive schools in elementary schools is expected to be able to form future generations who value diversity and are free from discriminatory behavior in social life (Ramadhanti & Herawati, 2024). In line with the opinion of Thufail & Bakhtiar (2023) who emphasized that the existence of inclusive schools aims to provide decent and equal educational services for students with special needs. The obstacles experienced by schools as organizers of inclusive education are that they are required to make adjustments because initially it was the management of regular or general schools, including aspects of facilities, human resources, and curriculum (Fitriana et al., 2022).

Therefore, in order to realize effective inclusive education, special assistant teachers are needed. Special Assistant Teachers (GPK) are tasked with accompanying students with special needs at school, both from the educational unit and from the nearest special school (Arriani et al., 2022). Special assistant teachers act as facilitators between class teachers and children with special needs, and help provide understanding related to the material presented by the class teacher (Hanifah, 2015). In addition, special assistant teachers work together with regular teachers in designing and implementing special programs, preparing individual learning plans, modifying teaching materials, and carrying out evaluations (Nurfadhillah et al., 2022). Based on the 2007 Special Guidelines for

Inclusion Organizers, the duties of a companion teacher include: (1) Preparing educational assessment instruments together with class teachers and subject teachers, (2) Building a coordination system between teachers, schools, and parents of students, (3) Carrying out assistance for children with special needs in learning activities together with class teachers/subject teachers/subject teachers, (4) Providing special service assistance for children with special needs who experience obstacles in participating in learning activities in general classes, in the form of remedial or enrichment, (5) Providing continuous guidance and making special notes to children with special needs during learning activities, which can be understood if there is a change of teachers, (6) Providing assistance (sharing experiences) to class teachers and/or subject teachers so that they can provide educational services to children with special needs (Berlinda & Naryoso, 2018). Therefore, the presence of a special companion teacher is not only for the success of individual student learning, but also educating regular teachers to provide optimal services to students.

The presence of special assistant teachers in inclusive elementary schools helps provide services to students in learning success. If only regular teachers handle it, it is possible that they will not be able to provide optimal service because they do not have the competence and understanding in this field (Haniifah & Efendi, 2022). Research on this collaboration has been conducted by Chomza (2017) who found that the collaboration between the two aims to handle problems and consult with each other about students with special needs. However, sometimes there are differences of opinion because the number of students with special needs is greater than the number of teachers handling them. In line with research conducted by that the absence of special assistant teachers causes a lack of knowledge in handling students with special needs in regular teachers in implementing inclusive education programs (Ni'mah et al., 2022). The involvement and cooperation of both are important in creating, classroom learning processes, and evaluations that are appropriate to the needs of students with special needs (Arriani et al., 2022). This collaboration is the key to the success of inclusive education, especially to support the social, emotional, and academic development of students with special needs (Liani et al., 2021). Previous studies have only focused on collaboration in general. Therefore, a deeper exploration of the dynamics of collaboration is needed, both in terms of interaction, academics, and classroom management.

Thus, the collaboration between teachers in inclusive schools makes researchers interested in further studying the collaboration between regular teachers and special assistant teachers for students with special needs in inclusive schools focusing on the city of Surakarta. Moreover, there is a need for improvement in the implementation of inclusive education, especially in handling cases of discrimination during the learning process, limited social interaction, and limited reading abilities of students who have difficulty reading during learning. Effective collaboration between regular teachers and special assistant teachers is very important to realize more optimal inclusive education, especially in the city of Surakarta after the implementation of a new policy in July 2024, namely all elementary school levels becoming inclusive schools. The purpose of this study was to identify (1) factors that cause difficulties for students with special needs to succeed in learning, (2) explore the methods of teachers in learning, and (3) describe the impact of collaboration between special assistant teachers and regular teachers in supporting the learning success of students who have difficulty reading in inclusive elementary schools.

## METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method approach. Qualitative research is a study used to examine the actual conditions of an object as a key instrument, with data

collection techniques in the form of triangulation and data analysis (Sugiyono, 2020). Thus, the results of this study describe the phenomenon in detail based on data obtained through various techniques, such as interviews, observations, or document analysis. The study will be conducted at an inclusive elementary school in Surakarta City for 3 months. Inclusive schools were chosen because they have special assistant teachers. In addition, in inclusive schools there is collaboration between class teachers and special assistant teachers to help students with early reading difficulties. The subjects in this study focused on students with early reading difficulties, regular teachers, and special assistant teachers at SDN Nayu Barat 1 in the 2024/2025 academic year.

The data collection techniques used in this study were questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation studies. The questionnaire was conducted as an initial guideline for collaboration implementation data which can then be deepened through interviews with teachers. Interviews were conducted to find out and collect more detailed data related to collaborative interactions between class teachers and special assistant teachers. Observations were conducted to determine the implementation of collaborative interactions between class teachers and special assistant teachers. Meanwhile, documentation studies were conducted to collect several documents related to collaboration between class teachers and special assistant teachers, such as teaching modules, meeting notes, curriculum documents, assessment results, and activity photos. Details of aspects and indicators of collaboration between special assistant teachers and regular teachers can be seen in Table 1.

*Table 1. Aspects and indicators of collaboration between special assistant teachers and regular teachers modified from Ramadhanti & Herawati (2024), Thufail & Bakhtiar (2023), dan Rizqianti et al. (2022)*

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Planning	Curriculum modification
	Determination of learning objectives
	Preparation of facilities and infrastructure
	Formulation and arrangement of individualized learning schedule
	Determination of learning assessment criteria
Implementation	Implementation of the learning process
	The role of special assistant teachers as facilitators, motivators, and mentors during learning
Surveillance	Monitoring the learning process
	Documentation of student evaluation results
	Communication between class teachers, special assistant teachers and parents.

Based on the collected data, a validity analysis was conducted using data triangulation in the form of techniques. Technique triangulation is an approach that combines various data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, participatory

observation, and documentation studies, with the aim of obtaining a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2020). In this research, the combination of data collection techniques helps to validate the findings, thereby obtaining various perspectives and reducing potential bias.

The data analysis process in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model. This model includes continuous stages such as data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification (Budiyono, 2018). In the reduction stage, the researcher filters and summarizes the data to focus more on relevant information, eliminates less appropriate data, and identifies important patterns. The simplified data is then presented in a more structured form, facilitating further interpretation and analysis. If the conclusions drawn are deemed insufficient or there are discrepancies, the researcher may return to data collection or deepen the analysis until a more holistic understanding is achieved. This analytical approach not only strengthens the validity of the research results but also ensures that the findings truly reflect the conditions in the field.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Nayu Barat 1 Public Elementary School has implemented inclusive education. Therefore, teachers understand that children with special needs have the right to interact with their peers in order to face social environments in the future. Especially after it was established in July 2024 that elementary schools in Surakarta can provide inclusive education. The impact of this policy encourages the creation of collaboration within the school. This is due to the obstacles in implementing inclusive education, such as time constraints or the regular teachers' ability to handle students with reading difficulties. There are 2 special accompanying teachers (GPK) to maximize learning strategies. However, this number is still insufficient to optimally address students with beginning reading difficulties.

### a. Learning Planning Stage

At the beginning of the academic year, teachers hold meetings to assign roles and modify the curriculum, objectives, and implementation of the learning process for students with special needs. The curriculum is adjusted to the abilities of students with special needs while adhering to the minimum standard rules, which include modifications in simplifying materials, allocation of learning time, and the process of delivering content (Nurhadisah, 2019). In this modification planning, regular teachers consult with special education teachers who handled the relevant students in the previous academic year. This is done to facilitate role shifting among special education teachers so that students with special needs do not become dependent and can interact independently with their peers and teachers.

In the preparation of evaluations for students who have difficulties in early reading, regular teachers need to engage in intensive discussions with special education teachers because the cognitive levels of students with special needs differ from those of regular students. Therefore, the evaluations should be adjusted to their abilities while still adhering to the learning outcomes of the applicable curriculum. In line with the opinion of (Lailiyah & Jihan, 2020) that although schools use the same curriculum for students with special needs, they are certainly given lower standards compared to regular students. Furthermore, the Special Education Teacher (GPK) explains as follows,

*"For assessments or evaluation tests of students, we usually adjust to their abilities. Although the content often involves more activities following instructions, it is expected that they can follow these instructions in an orderly and precise manner. For example, the material on arithmetic operations in mathematics is modified with activities involving*

*stringing beads. Certainly, I discuss this assessment first with the regular teacher to ensure it aligns with the learning objectives."*

Then this school arranges a schedule for learning or individual services for students with special needs. Some inclusive schools provide taking in-taking out sessions. The taking in-taking out session is a service session for students with special needs, allowing them the opportunity to learn in regular classes, and at other times, they study in a separate room to deepen competencies that have not been mastered (Yuliawanti, 2021). Individual schedule services are usually conducted during school break in a separate inclusive room. The activities consist of reading sessions to enhance students' beginning reading skills. The accompanying teacher is also adjusted according to the abilities of the class teacher or special assistant teacher.

#### **b. Implementation Stage of Learning**

During the learning process, the special education teacher (GPK) is not always present. This is because the regular teacher is deemed capable of handling students with special needs, although the GPK continues to supervise and assist when necessary. The regular teacher collaborates with the special assistant teacher to create a supportive classroom atmosphere that accommodates the learning needs of each student (Mauliddina & Irianto, 2023). The regular teacher also plays a role in providing learning support to students with special needs during the lessons. For instance, by giving students the opportunity to answer questions on the board with adjusted problems, appreciating cooperative behavior during learning, and integrating students with special needs into study discussion groups with their peers. During this activity, the special accompanying teacher plays a more significant role as a motivator to enhance the confidence of the students in their abilities. This is done to encourage the involvement and participation of students with special needs (Mukhlis et al., 2023). Additionally, the special accompanying teacher also assists students with special needs in maintaining focus on understanding instructions and participating in learning activities. This collaboration also aims to create an enjoyable inclusive learning environment for students with special needs (Kovač et al., 2017).

In addition to academics, special assistant teachers alongside regular teachers also play a role in facilitating communication between students with special needs and their peers. This is because sometimes the behavior of students with special needs makes their peers feel uncomfortable, leading teachers to frequently receive reports from those peers. The actions taken by the teachers include explaining the intent of such behavior to regular students and providing warnings to students with special needs to help them understand that such behavior can make their friends feel uncomfortable. Special assistant teachers also play a role in communicating the progress of students with special needs to regular teachers and their parents.

#### **c. Learning Supervision Stage**

The special assistant teacher and the regular teacher conduct joint observations of the development of students who have difficulties in beginning reading. This activity is routinely carried out during the learning process. The special assistant teacher focuses more on observing the responses, behaviors, and engagement of the students with the material being taught, while the regular teacher observes the extent to which the students are able to participate in class activities with their peers. Thus, the observation results are reported in a format that includes the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of the students.

Furthermore, the results of the observation can assist teachers in monitoring the abilities and challenges of students on a regular basis. In addition, these observation results also help teachers in understanding the learning needs of students in depth,

enabling them to design improvements in teaching approaches that are more appropriate and aligned with the students' characteristics. The collaborative results in diagnosing needs early on also play a crucial role in inclusive education, particularly in supporting the development of follow-up actions for students with special needs. (Lewkowicz & Jaszczyszyn, 2015)

Therefore, there are two reports on the evaluation results of students who have difficulties in early reading, namely the academic report prepared by the regular teacher and the development report prepared by the special education teacher. These two evaluation reports enable parents to gain more specific insights into their child's development, both in cognitive and socio-emotional aspects. Although special education teachers do communicate more intensively with the parents of students with special needs to provide optimal services while at school, they still communicate crucial matters to the regular teachers, such as conditions that may affect learning in the classroom. The essence of this good communication ensures that students with special needs receive consistent support, both at school and at home, for their learning success (Ariani et al., 2019).

The results of this study align with Bouillet (2013) that the presence of special assistant teachers in schools helps all parties, including regular teachers, parents, and students, in providing consultation, support, and communication during the learning process. This collaboration is particularly important for regular teachers who contribute to the success of students with special needs. Regular teachers may lack the necessary competencies to handle students with special needs, which hinders their ability to serve them (Shutaleva et al., 2023) Furthermore, this collaboration contributes to creating a classroom environment that fosters tolerance and positive interactions between students with special needs and their peers. Additionally, the synergy among these teachers also aims to provide support to parents with the hope that students with special needs can minimize barriers to accessing their right to education (Kovač et al., 2017).

## CONSLUSION

This research highlights the importance of collaboration between special education teachers and regular teachers in supporting the learning success of students with reading difficulties in inclusive elementary schools. The findings indicate that special education teachers play a significant role in assisting regular teachers, from planning and implementation to evaluation of learning tailored to the needs of students with special needs. This collaboration not only supports the academic success of students but also strengthens their social and emotional aspects through a more adaptive learning approach. This collaboration enables regular teachers to better understand the needs of students with special needs and provide appropriate interventions, both inside and outside the classroom.

This conclusion emphasizes that the collaboration between special education teachers and regular teachers plays a crucial role in realizing effective inclusive education. Therefore, efforts to strengthen this collaboration need to be enhanced through policy support and specialized training, so that the inclusive education model can be implemented more optimally in various elementary schools.

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