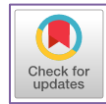


“Don’t judge, listen to their story”: A narrative study on an elementary school teacher’s experiences in supporting children with special attention needs



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Abstract: This study interpreted and navigated the experiences of a teacher providing an inclusive approach to children in elementary school who required special attention. The study was motivated by the increasing cases of mental health issues among elementary school-aged children, which adversely affect various aspects of their lives. The gap between teachers' knowledge related to children's psychological problems is an important substance that deserves to be explored, because research like this is still rarely carried out. This research did not judge the rightness or wrongness of a teacher's actions but prioritized the value of care in this exploration. Through a narrative inquiry, the study explored how a elementary school teacher's care and experience manifested in attending to children exhibiting psychological symptoms influencing their behavior at school. The findings focused on the interpretation of narratives constructed by the teacher. Behaviors perceived as 'naughty,' hyperactive, anxious, or attention-seeking were understood as accumulations of family background factors. Hence, what was needed was not judgment but the teacher's ability to dedicate time to listen to the child's story and provide an inclusive approach. Psychological competence was not the foremost concern; rather, it was the teacher's willingness and high level of care, demonstrated through actions aimed at helping students reach their optimal performance in life. Due to the research limitations, the findings recommend long-term studies involving multiple participants from diverse backgrounds for further exploration.

Keywords: Elementary School; Elementary School Teacher; Narrative Inquiry; Teacher Experience

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INTRODUCTION

A teacher's role extends beyond merely assisting students to achieve the highest levels of academic performance; they also bear a pedagogical responsibility to help students overcome various challenges. Joyce and Weil (2003) explain that education is not solely about achieving the overarching goals of the curriculum but also about how teachers navigate instructional models to support students in addressing their problems. According to the 2024 National Survey on Physical, Psychological, and Emotional Abuse in the Republic (SNPHAR), approximately 50.11% of boys and girls have experienced some form of violence during their lifetime. Notably, 21 out of 100 boys and 16 out of 100 girls have experienced physical violence, although emotional violence

remains the most prevalent form. Both physical and non-physical violence in children have been linked to adverse mental health outcomes, school dropout, psychological shock, impaired brain development, trauma, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ferrara et al., 2019; Hoeboer et al., 2021; Rameckers et al., 2021; Smiley et al., 2021; Tomoda et al., 2024). When children face challenges such as emotional or poor mental health, this often results in declining academic performance (Dias et al., 2022; Lettau, 2021; Mazrekaj & De Witte, 2024). Furthermore, socio-economic background and parenting styles influence the child's personality development (Däschle et al., 2023; Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Lari, 2023). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those from incomplete families, tend to exhibit poor personality development, which has been associated with parenting styles (Bessell, 2022; Mabbe et al., 2018). Therefore, it is challenging for children dealing with personal problems in the classroom to fully concentrate on their studies, placing a responsibility on teachers to assist, support, and even manage these issues (Granger et al., 2024; Keiler, 2018; Xu et al., 2023).

In the school context, teachers often assume the role of surrogate parents, albeit with differing responsibilities and perspectives (Burchell, 2018; Goodman, 2021). Within the classroom, teachers play a significant and multifaceted role, not only facilitating learning but also serving as therapists or psychologists for their students (Nurick, 1988; Totto, 2021; Vandenberghe, 1984). With the rise of inclusive education, teachers' considerations in helping students face their problems are increasingly emphasized as part of their professionalism (Jeremy et al., 2024; Raynham & Jinks, 2022). Specifically in Indonesia, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree Number 56 of 2022, elementary schools and Islamic elementary schools (MI) allocate approximately 23 hours per week for learning activities. Such an environment strongly supports the emotional well-being of children, enabling teachers to act promptly when issues arise (Granone & Pollarolo, 2024; O'Farrell et al., 2023; Raynham & Jinks, 2022; Zulauf-McCurdy et al., 2024). Moreover, changes in children's behavior or the emergence of problems can also affect teacher well-being (Oxley et al., 2024; Phillippo et al., 2024). Thus, when incidents occur within the classroom, particularly involving children, teachers are responsible for assisting students in resolving their problems.

Mental health problems or psychological issues in children, if not properly addressed by teachers, can exacerbate the condition (Zhou & Ou, 2024). For example, a study conducted in the United Kingdom by Maclean and Law (2022) revealed that teachers believe they have a role in addressing children's psychological problems; however, barriers arise due to a lack of competence in this area. Maclean and Law (2022) further emphasize that despite their limited competence in supporting children's psychological issues, teachers continue to provide accompaniment and support. The role of teachers in accompanying or assisting students facing psychological difficulties has been shown to enhance the well-being of elementary school students (Ozturk et al., 2024; Rautanen et al., 2025; Tao et al., 2022; Ulmanen et al., 2023; Wang, 2023; Yli-Pietilä et al., 2024). Although limitations exist, such as inadequate equipment or infrastructure to support children's psychological health in elementary schools, teachers nevertheless maintain a willingness to help students manage their problems (Connolly et al., 2024; Giles-Kaye et al., 2023; Williamson et al., 2022). Some teachers have also acknowledged that during their studies, the training provided on this topic was superficial and significantly insufficient for handling real-life situations (Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Özdemir Cihan &

Dilekmen, 2024; Hollenstein & Brühwiler, 2024; Kyriazopoulou et al., 2025; O'Farrell et al., 2023; Pollmeier et al., 2024; Soares et al., 2014; Soneson et al., 2018).

Psychological Symptoms Commonly Exhibited by Elementary School Students

The psychological development of elementary school-aged children occupies a critical position, as it involves physical growth and psychological development. Piaget (1969) explains that children undergo affective and emotional development, during which they may exhibit signs of stress or other reactions when facing new experiences, socialization challenges, or various problems. According to Piaget (1969), certain events experienced by children, such as attention difficulties or specific incidents, can lead to psychological symptoms, including emotional distress, anxiety, and other manifestations. Erikson (1985) further describes symptoms experienced by children, such as feelings of incompetence, social anxiety, low self-esteem, and insecurity. Erikson (1985) often highlights childhood trauma related to past events, including family problems, violence, loss of significant figures, and so forth. Based on the explanations by Piaget and Erikson, children may experience psychological symptoms detrimental to their well-being due to specific causes, thus requiring adults to be responsive to these issues.

Meanwhile, the development of elementary school children is closely linked to their well-being, which fosters positive attitudes toward school and learning (Klemp et al., 2025). As children grow older, they may also exhibit emotional symptoms accompanied by behavioral problems such as rebelliousness, stress, and even perceptions of the classroom as unsafe, which hinder educational progress (Cortina et al., 2013; Horoz et al., 2022; Kevers et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Santamaría-Villar et al., 2021). Although psychological problems and symptoms may vary among children, this study aimed to describe common psychological problems generally exhibited by children. This approach helps link research findings with empirical reviews broadly. According to Sculte-Körne (2016), common psychological symptoms in children include hyperkinetic disorders, scholastic difficulties, and depression. The present study refers to the framework outlined by Manikam (2002), which explains mental health in terms of emotional-social well-being encompassing productivity and self-capacity at levels that may not necessarily meet the criteria for mental disorders or illness. Manikam (2002) also clarifies that mental illness refers to syndromes or behavioral patterns affecting clinical aspects and potentially causing disability. Thus, a distinction exists whereby mental health relates to emotional and social well-being, whereas mental illness more significantly impairs functional capacity.

Hyperkinetic disorder (hyperkinetic behavior syndrome) is characterized by behavioral symptoms in children, primarily involving excessive, constant, and impulsive activity (Drechsler et al., 2020; Fuermaier et al., 2021; Laufer & Denhoff, 1957; Pérez-Dueñas et al., 2022; Thorley, 1984). Common signs include distractibility, restlessness, difficulty remaining seated, shouting, and other behaviors such as aggression (Danielson et al., 2024; Gomez, 2016; Heubeck et al., 2023; Schulte-Körne, 2016). Children exhibiting these symptoms differ from typically developing peers cognitively and socially and may suffer negative impacts across various life domains (Klapproth & Brink, 2024; McDougal et al., 2023; Salari et al., 2023). In addressing these issues, teachers often adopt an inclusive approach, providing special treatment to children with hyperkinetic symptoms (Aldabbagh et al., 2024; McDougal et al., 2023). Recommended interventions by educators or adults include behavior management strategies and creating more inclusive classroom environments (Alshehri et al., 2020; Ward et al.,

2022; Wolraich et al., 2019). Such support and management measures are essential for teachers to possess in order to support affected students within the classroom setting.

Another common psychological condition found in children is the specific developmental disorder of scholastic skills. This disorder affects children's abilities in academic domains such as reading, writing, and arithmetic (Arun et al., 2013; Jesina et al., 2022; Johnson, 2015; Simms, 2022). Symptoms manifest as difficulties in reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia), and calculating (dyscalculia), which cannot be primarily attributed to inadequate instruction or learning environments (Han, 2025; Rishitha & Subramanian, 2022; Scaria et al., 2023). Therefore, children exhibiting these symptoms require careful screening to determine appropriate follow-up interventions and support, avoiding any judgmental labeling such as being 'stupid.' Children who perceive themselves as lagging may develop negative self-conceptions, including shame or stigmatization from others (Devi & Kavya, 2023; Haft et al., 2023; Leung, 2023). Fundamentally, education equips children to live prosperous lives through knowledge acquisition, while teachers play a critical role in assisting students facing such challenges.

The next psychological disorder commonly observed is depression. Its primary symptoms include difficulty concentrating, low self-esteem, depressed mood, anxiety, sadness, loss of interest, social withdrawal, appetite changes, insomnia, or hypersomnia (Burns, 2021; Del Giudice, 2018; Xu et al., 2020). Depression is generally the result of multifactorial accumulation involving genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and the impact of traumatic events (Czéh & Nagy, 2018; Filatova et al., 2021; Wood & Kusumaningsih, 2024; Zhang, 2024). These symptoms are often associated with family background, parenting styles, parental divorce, and lack of attention at home (Dicu, 2024; Maajeeny, 2022; Rus et al., 2021; Stadelmann et al., 2020; Xie, 2024). Such symptoms can negatively affect children's development across emotional, academic, and general well-being domains during their growth period (Crnic & Lin, 2021; Dietz et al., 2019; Joshi et al., 2019). Although many studies recommend that teachers receive training to develop adequate literacy regarding these issues, at a minimum, they should be able to recognize the signs or indications that a child may be experiencing such conditions (Del Casale et al., 2021; Grande et al., 2023; Ní Chorcóra & Swords, 2022; Taghvaienia & Zonobitar, 2020; Zatto & Høglund, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). In such situations, teachers play a crucial role, acting both as facilitators and as observers of their students within the school environment. This framework sharpens the narrative on teacher awareness and cares for their students' conditions in the classroom. Hence, this theoretical framework is constructed based on real-life occurrences, aiming to focus and deepen the understanding of teachers' narratives.

The Role of Teachers in Supporting Students with Personal Challenges

Teachers hold a strategic position in curriculum implementation, yet they also bear the responsibility of helping students achieve their highest potential. When teachers encounter students experiencing personal difficulties, such as psychological problems, they can provide appropriate treatment and support and offer consultations with specialists or assist in resolving the issues (Butera et al., 2021; Zak-Doron & Hazan, 2024; Gulliver et al., 2018; Li & Stylianides, 2018; Sidenvall et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2020). The role of teachers, both within the school and classroom settings, is crucial in creating an environment that optimally supports children's growth and development (Hattersley, 2023; Frei-Landau, 2024). Children who come to school and enter the

classroom not only bring writing tools and books for learning but also carry the dynamics of their life narratives (Romano et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2024). The simple logic is this: How can students concentrate on the learning material when their mind is preoccupied with other concerns? How can they be highly motivated toward the subject matter when they feel hungry, anxious, in need of attention, or are facing other personal issues?

This argument aligns with Maslow's (1954) assertion that basic human needs include physiological requirements such as food, drink, and shelter, as well as needs for love, esteem, and self-actualization. When these needs are unmet, the child's development will likely be hindered or disrupted. For example, malnutrition can stunt physical growth, while unmet needs for love and attention may lead to reduced well-being (Argaw et al., 2022; Poh et al., 2022; Verhagen et al., 2018). When children experience such unfulfilled basic needs, it can obstruct the realization of their full developmental potential, meaning they cannot achieve an optimal state. Consequently, as noted by Joyce and Weil (2003), the role of the teacher is not only to navigate students toward achieving curricular goals but also to provide special attention so that students can realize their best potential during their growth and developmental phases. This theoretical framework serves as a foundation for narrating teachers' experiences and provides analytical guidance for this study. The gap between teachers' knowledge regarding children's psychological problems constitutes an important and worthy subject for exploration. Despite these limitations, teachers continue to provide support to their students. Therefore, understanding how and what teachers do amid these constraints becomes a critical area for investigation. In this study, the researchers refrained from judging what was right or wrong; rather, the researchers strived to understand and explore a teacher's experiences. Through a narrative study, the researchers sought to interpret and navigate the experiences of a teacher implementing an inclusive approach for students in elementary schools who require special attention.

METHOD

This study employed narrative inquiry, as conceptualized by Clandinin et al. (2007), to narrate and help map a teacher's experiences related to mentoring students with psychological challenges. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain that experience is not merely an objective event but involves an interrelation of historical, social, and knowledge dimensions reflected through teachers' everyday stories. According to Clandinin (2016), narrative inquiry can be analyzed through three dimensions: temporality, place, and sociality. Temporality relates to time, suggesting that narratives of experience must consider the past, present, and future as accumulated into the experience and story. Place concerns the location where the experience occurs. Sociality refers to personal or social conditions connected to the experience. Therefore, narrative inquiry is an effective method for exploring and understanding what teachers possess, know, believe, and do within the temporal and contextual framework of their teaching (Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Correspondingly, the present study utilized the framework of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) to document real, specific, and concrete events that became the core or essence of a teacher's experiential narratives.

The participant in this study was a 49-year-old elementary school teacher named Irman Indrayana, born in March 1979 in Majalengka. He was selected based on predetermined criteria. *First*, his extensive experience brought a dynamic and long-standing background, and he was one of the most recommended teachers by parents

and fellow teachers. *Second*, before meeting the participant, recommendations were sought from several workshop instructors and seminar speakers; his name was mentioned due to his active participation in such events representing his school. *Third*, following Clandinin's (2016) recommendation, the participant was willing to share his life stories and experiences.

The researchers employed in-depth interviews as the primary data source to understand the complexity of the narratives constructed by the teacher in this study. Each interview session lasted more than one hour, and with the participant's permission, the interviews were audio-recorded. The extended duration allowed the teacher to share his stories in detail. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, guided by frameworks from Horton et al. (2004), Hoogesteyn et al. (2020), Isaksen et al. (2022), Kallio et al. (2016), and Wilson (2014) to ensure the participant felt comfortable and used everyday language, namely Indonesian and Sundanese, which allowed him to freely express his experiences, feelings, and heartfelt expressions. Additionally, to enhance the participant's comfort, informal meetings were held occasionally over coffee or meals at various pleasant venues. While interviews were the primary data source, observation was used to strengthen the narratives and data collected (Parks, 2023; Wei, 2023). This observation aimed to align the participant's recounted experiences with actual context and conditions. Besides interviews and observations, documentation played a crucial role in data collection. Documents were also utilized to ensure the credibility and authenticity of the interviews, involving fragments such as recorded conversations with the researcher, photographs, learning materials, and documentation shared by the participant.

In data analysis, process coding was employed to identify and categorize stories, including actions and feelings experienced by the participant (Naeem et al., 2023; Theobald et al., 2024). This framework facilitated the analysis based on the participant's stories. Following this, a semiotic discourse framework was applied to seek meaning in actions, specifically human agency and material conditions (Beetz, 2016). This approach assisted in aligning elements of human agency with actions, behaviors, interactions, teaching practices, and examining the subject's position as these intersect. All these methods could be regarded as performative in formulating the participant's position and shaping his identity within this discursive practice. Consequently, when these procedures were complete, the thematic categories were grouped as follows: (1) Being a teacher is a calling; (2) The teacher and his extensive experience; (3) The teacher and his dedication

The researchers argue that the meaning within a story cannot speak for itself; rather, it requires projection through interpretative dimensionality techniques (El Outa et al., 2022; Stahnke et al., 2016). Likewise, this technique aimed to simplify complex data with many variables while preserving the essential information. Thus, the numerous narratives were organized into predefined themes to avoid excessiveness while maintaining the inherent meaning of each narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Being a Teacher is a Calling

Contrary to what might be imagined, Mr. Indrayana initially had no intention of becoming a teacher, let alone teaching children. His initial involvement began when he was offered the opportunity to train and prepare children for a dance performance at

the school. The dance performance he coached turned out to be a success and received appreciation from many teachers at the school. Because of this, Mr. Indrayana was subsequently offered a position to teach a foreign language in one of the classes, as the school was experiencing a shortage of teachers. Although he was proficient in the foreign language, Mr. Indrayana was hesitant due to his lack of formal teaching knowledge. However, his helpful nature ultimately motivated him to accept the teaching role. At first, he was very anxious about whether he could teach correctly. Indeed, on his first day entering the classroom, he felt nervous seeing many children running around and the lively, chaotic atmosphere. Despite these feelings, Mr. Indrayana reassured himself that this situation would soon pass. After completing the class, Mr. Indrayana met with one of the teachers and was asked to teach another foreign language class. He found himself unable to refuse and agreed to teach the following day.

The turning point came on the second day when Mr. Indrayana had just arrived to prepare for the next class he had promised to teach. Before he could even catch his breath, many children ran toward him, giving him hugs from all sides and eagerly pulling his hand to shake, saying, "Come on, Sir, let's study again. Please come into our classroom." This experience made Mr. Indrayana realize that *"I am truly accepted by these children."* The innocent expressions shown by the children deeply moved him, giving him the courage to request more teaching hours. Given the school's urgent need for teachers, Mr. Indrayana was asked to continue teaching, albeit initially as an honorary teacher. Feeling valued by the children, he then tried registering as a permanent teacher. In 2005, he was accepted as a Candidate Civil Servant (*Calon Pegawai Negeri Sipil - CPNS*) with certain conditions, including completing a bachelor's degree in education (*Strata 1/S1*). Eventually, in 2007, he became a permanent civil servant teacher (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil - PNS*). Although Mr. Indrayana's economic condition was unstable and teacher salaries were very low, his strong desire to become an educator beloved by children compelled him to persevere. To save on living expenses, Mr. Indrayana and several new teachers lived at the school under modest conditions.

What Mr. Indrayana experienced aligns with several theories and observations that teaching or being a teacher is not merely a profession but a deep inner response to the dynamics of an individual's life (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Jain & Kaur, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of education, being a teacher can be understood as a form of service rather than simply a job (Schön, 1982). Feeling accepted by the children, feeling wanted by many students, and discovering many things about them motivated Mr. Indrayana to believe he needed to continue learning, which became a source of strength for him to become a teacher. On the other hand, although he genuinely liked children, his love also made him realize that children are unique and face their own challenges:

"I think I also need to learn how to understand children. I feel sorry for them because they are in class, but their minds wander everywhere, sometimes disturbing their friends. So, they're all over the place." (Interview 1, March 5, 2025)

This thought continued to occupy Mr. Indrayana's mind during the early stages of his teaching career. Understanding children also means accurately responding to their emotions, and teachers who can build emotional connections with their students are more successful in supporting their development (Goleman, 2006).

“When we enter the classroom wearing neat clothes and a face full of smiles, children are ready to learn with us. But when we start class with a sour face, and so forth, it becomes difficult to engage the children. This is what I experienced, improved, and consistently maintain whenever I prepare to teach.” (Interview 2, March 12, 2025)

Mr. Indrayana's statement is consistent with findings by Assali (2024), Longobardi et al. (2023), Pennington, 2021, Whitehill et al. (2014), who found that a teacher's appearance and facial expressions helped build positive interactions with students and influenced their perceptions of the teacher's credibility and professionalism. Until now, Mr. Indrayana has held firm to this belief, understanding that teaching always requires preparation. He sincerely stated:

“As a teacher, we must be prepared. But, well, sometimes at home, things are hectic, worrying about electricity bills, installments, taking care of children, and so on. But at least when we are in the classroom, we should not bring those burdens along because these children deserve our full attention, and that is our responsibility.” (Interview 2, March 12, 2025)

Based on Mr. Indrayana's narrative, it can be concluded that being a teacher is not merely working for a salary. Instead, the position carries moral responsibilities and burdens toward the students at school.

The Teacher and his Extensive Experience

As times continue to evolve, the paradigm of what it means to be a teacher also evolves. Teachers were considered the sole source of knowledge in the past, but today, their role extends beyond merely navigating the curriculum. Teachers now hold responsibilities as lifelong learners themselves. On the other hand, several researchers note that extensive teaching experience supports professionalism, benefiting students and fellow teachers (Alsahli, 2023, Graham et al., 2020; Shin, 2023). Reflecting on Mr. Indrayana's experience, his perspective has changed over time. Previously, he regarded noisy students in the classroom as misbehaving, but he eventually understood that it was not entirely accurate. According to Mr. Indrayana, although some students were indeed “noisy in class,” teachers should not hastily judge them as unruly. Those noisy students had different characters; some were engaged in discussions, others were excited because they were working on assignments, and some were noisy because the teacher had made the class boring.

“If the teaching model is well-designed and the media are effective, it comes down to how the material is delivered to the children. Children will become very bored when a teacher lectures continuously without providing opportunities for them to express what's on their minds. If children are only told to listen, I am sure they will get bored and cause disturbances. When children show signs of boredom, that is the moment we must improvise; invite them to do ice-breaking activities, clapping chants, and so forth to restore their mood and focus.” (Interview 2, March 12, 2025)

It is common for novice teachers, especially at the beginning of their careers, to encounter challenges and even feel inadequate in their pedagogical competencies (Näykki et al., 2021; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020). The process that Mr. Indrayana went through was not unique to him but rather a typical experience shared by many beginner teachers. Many new teachers feel lacking and insecure, as well as struggle to adjust. However, how teachers adapt, continue to learn, and improve themselves is

worthy of recognition. This is particularly relevant in Mr. Indrayana's case, where he started teaching without a formal education degree but later pursued higher education, which equipped him with the knowledge to adapt and build sound pedagogical skills.

"When I went back to college, I studied psychology. I learned that children go through developmental phases, and at certain ages, they tend to behave in specific ways. Even children's learning styles differ. Although my knowledge on how to act when facing problems is still limited." (Interview 3, March 19, 2025)

Mr. Indrayana's conviction about what he narrated was reflected in his daily behavior. Observations of Mr. Indrayana's teaching showed that he allowed children to pursue their interests without harsh judgments. When a child struggled academically, Mr. Indrayana did not label them as 'stupid.' His years of experience convinced him that a child who might appear weak academically could be a star on the sports field.

"There was once a child whom other teachers considered not smart, and even the parents frequently came to the school requesting special guidance for their child. However, that child turned out to be a star on the field. This means he had a strong interest in a particular activity, and I was deeply moved when, under the guidance of many teachers, he succeeded in becoming a champion in a sports competition." (Interview 3, March 19, 2025)

Based on these experiences, Mr. Indrayana developed a strong conviction that there is no such thing as a "stupid" child; rather, each child simply has different interests. In this position, the teacher holds the responsibility to help students discover and achieve the highest performance in their respective talents and interests (Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021; Swanson et al., 2022). The mindset that teachers should avoid making hasty judgments about students is an essential quality every teacher must possess. Caution is thus a primary behavioral principle in this context. Mr. Indrayana's overall narrative reflects a coherent interrelation, indicating that a teacher's quality and pedagogical competence are not developed overnight but through a long process filled with continuous real-life reflection. Pedagogical competence encompasses several aspects that have direct implications for students (Ranta et al., 2023; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020). Regarding this, a teacher's experience becomes more valuable not only in terms of duration but also in how that experience is manifested through action (Abakah, 2023; Ambon et al., 2020; Vanassche, 2022).

The embodiment of this experience lies in concrete actions, and the researchers highlight how Mr. Indrayana continuously sharpened his abilities with clear implications for his students. His extensive experience enabled him to act with careful consideration rather than impulsiveness.

"Children are basically honest; they react to what they feel. When children do not receive attention at home, they seek it at school, and that is common. As much as possible, when I encounter such children, I approach them first and try to understand what they need. Approaching and engaging in dialogue greatly helps when dealing with children like that." (Interview 4, April 17, 2025)

"After lessons, usually during breaks, I make time to approach them. I typically call the child over and ask simple questions like whether they had breakfast, what they ate, or what they did at home. It's simple, actually; they just need to be listened to

so that during learning, they won't disturb other students." (Interview 4, April 17, 2025)

Several interventions can be applied when children exhibit symptoms such as hyperactivity; play therapy or simply listening to the child's story can be alternative approaches (Amel et al., 2018; Porto Brondani & Pedro, 2019; Lenhart et al., 2020). However, Mr. Indrayana acknowledged that these approaches could not be universally applied to all children. Therefore, an inclusive approach tailored to individual needs is the initial step a teacher can take (Jeremy et al., 2024; Raynham & Jinks, 2022). Overall, Mr. Indrayana acted based on what he observed, using these observations as preliminary assumptions for his actions.

"Not just one or two children, but I often see many children who try to seek attention at school. Sometimes, they engage in mischief just to be noticed. Usually, children from incomplete or broken families often seek attention, frequently feel anxious, and seem to have difficulty concentrating because they are preoccupied with gaining attention." (Interview 4, April 17, 2025)

This finding is relevant to the conceptual framework of this study, where childhood depression, manifested by symptoms such as difficulty focusing, mood disturbances, anxiety, and attention-seeking, is the result of multifactorial accumulation, including family background and parenting patterns (Dicu, 2024; Maajeeny, 2022; Rus et al., 2021; Stadelmann et al., 2020; Xie, 2024). Mr. Indrayana's narrative about how his extensive experience enables him to act appropriately is no simple matter. This argument suggests that what children need is not judgment but to be attentively cared for and understood based on their lived experiences.

The Teacher and his Dedication

The care manifested through concrete actions demonstrates a teacher's dedication that goes beyond merely working; it reflects the true meaning of service. The efforts to explore Mr. Indrayana's sense of care revealed that it could not be captured in a single interview. As the participant and researchers grew closer, Mr. Indrayana shared a story that deeply moved us:

"When I had just become a homeroom teacher for grade 4, there was a child who frequently arrived late. On one occasion, this child suddenly grabbed a pencil and started screaming, then shortly after fainted. Naturally, I panicked and immediately carried the child to the school health unit for first aid. After repeated observation, it turned out that the child's fainting episodes were feigned to get food." (Interview 4, April 17, 2025).

Mr. Indrayana further explained how he tried to understand the child's situation. Contrary to what might be expected, the child came from a complete and well-off family. However, due to the parents' strict upbringing, the child was not given an allowance to bring to school. The child's frequent fainting was caused by hunger, which led him to pretend to be fainting in order to be given food. Additionally, the child was often late because he walked a considerable distance to school. On one occasion, Mr. Indrayana attempted to discuss the child's condition with the parents, but they insisted that their disciplinary approach was intentional and best for their child. With limited options, Mr. Indrayana and other teachers, out of compassion, often shared snacks with the child after meetings or contributed from their own funds.

During the interview, Mr. Indrayana's eyes frequently welled up with tears as he recounted his experiences with his students. The researchers concluded unequivocally that this teacher possessed profound care for his students. Mr. Indrayana emphasized that labeling a child as "problematic" is a harsh judgment; often, children only require a little extra attention. However, teachers face limitations when a child truly needs professional help. The difficulty arises when teachers try to inform and advise parents that their child should receive expert intervention.

"That child was extremely naughty; once, he suddenly grabbed a pencil and stabbed it into a friend's leg. He even spat in front of people. We tried several interventions, but there was no significant change. I consulted a psychologist, and cautiously, we communicated with the parents to seek professional help. Although the child was 'naughty' in a way, he was smart, especially in English, so we cared about him, even if he often caused trouble." (Interview 5, April 23, 2025)

One of the primary objectives of elementary education is to foster a cooperative climate and reduce disruptive and aggressive behaviors among students (Santamaría-Villar et al., 2021). Mr. Indrayana's narrative underscores the conviction that teachers must consistently provide appropriate treatment and interventions. He believes that when a child makes a mistake and others ignore it, the child assumes the behavior is acceptable. When a child justifies their behavior, it can accumulate into actions that may harm those around them. Correction is not about blaming, and discipline should not be equated with punishment. Rather, teachers must explain logically so that students can understand and accept it (David et al., 2020; Hancock et al., 2020). Such treatment requires time, and elementary teachers must genuinely be willing to dedicate time to their students. Mr. Indrayana firmly believes that behaviors exhibited by children in school do not purely originate from within themselves but result from accumulated experiences perceived as problematic by others. What children need is not judgment but a teacher's responsibility and care to help them achieve their highest potential.

CONCLUSION

This narrative study demonstrates that Mr. Indrayana's experience was embodied in his wholehearted willingness and care as expressions of his responsibility as a teacher. The exploration revealed and provided narratives that hold significant value regarding a teacher's experience and high dedication. The findings of this study were conveyed through narratives describing how willingness and care were enacted for the benefit of elementary school students. An inclusive approach that refrained from judging children's behavior became a key focus of this study. Mr. Indrayana's extensive teaching experience offered narratives about navigating actions when encountering children who required additional attention. Rather than judgment, the teacher's role involved allocating time to approach and listen to the stories experienced by the child. Ultimately, this narrative interprets the teacher's experience in accompanying children needing extra care. This study narrates that being a teacher is not limited to academic aspects but also involves a high level of care and dedication to supporting a child, which constitutes a fundamental responsibility of a teacher.

Research Limitations

This narrative study has limitations, as most data were derived from interviews. While the exploration allowed for understanding the value of the teacher's experience, retrospective interviews might be fragmented and emotionally charged (Bifulco, 2021). Additionally, time is required to build trust so that participants share openly, as well as improvisation in questioning to address the dynamic conditions of participants (Lima, 2023).

Recommendations

The authors recommend longer-term studies to explore changes in actions based on experience by involving multiple teachers from diverse environments.

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