

IEP in Improving Learning Process for Students Special Needs

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Abstract

Learning is the process of human beings to get new things and develop what they have before. Moreover, they are created in individual differences which are in weaknesses and also excellences. Accordingly, some of the students' diversity can achieve their growth in the three domains (cognitive, psychomotorik and affective) of learning process. However, the other students need special guidance and fasilitator to acquire and develop their three domains. Indeed, the children who are in special needs are recommended in the inclusive environment.

⁴ Schools are accommodating diversity with a variety of teaching strategies and different degrees of mastery. Inclusive learning environments are reflections of the change in teaching and learning to help all students meet high expectations. The teacher needs the tools to create developmentally appropriate method that address students' learning differences and needs. As the teachers have to aware their students' diversity to decide the competible instructions. Inclusive education arranges the learning process by neglecting some obstructions in transforming the knowledge for each students. Then, the children with special needs feel same as other (the normal students) to optimize getting their abilities.

⁹ IEP (Individualized Education Program) is as the basic program to attend the students with special needs in developing their achievement and understanding. The program is set from the students' needs, characteristics, and potency. Thus, the students build the program and no vice versa. The descriptive method used in understanding more about the application of IEP program for the inclusive class.

Keywords: *IEP, Learning process, Students special needs*

Background

As an educator in formal or non-formal education it is more than being a teacher for the students. Consequently, the teachers faced in many kinds of different character, competence, skill, and psyche of their students. For these diversities how the teacher can guide them to the learning goal. Thus its needs the learning approach to accompany the students with disabilities and seat them into in inclusive classroom.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the special program -but not exclusive- for the individual with special needs. As Foreman (2005: 38) states that IEP must be provided for all students with special needs. Its program optimizes the students' ability and capability to reach their needs within learning process and education. IEP sets the students in personal or classical teaching-learning process as their competencies and capacities. They can perform what they have and they need. The individualization in this program gives more time and chance to the students with special needs to fill their duties.

² The IEP provides information on children's current levels of performance and directs the special services and supports that are provided to students who have IEPs. It includes provisions for defining annual goals, evaluating progress, and formalizing what is to be a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for the student with the disability.

IEPs have several required components. Among the information that is to be included in IEPs are the following: (1) present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, (2) measurable annual goals, (3) special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services, (4) amount of time students will not participate in general education classes, (5) participation in state or district-wide academic assessments (including accommodations to be provided and reasons for using an alternate assessment if the child will not participate in the regular assessment), (6) initiation date and projected duration of IEP, (7) transition services, and (8) how student progress toward annual goals will be measured and when periodic reports will be provided to parents. Access to and participation in

the general curriculum and use of research-based procedures are emphasized in the preparation of IEPs (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). States or districts may add to the basic components as they see appropriate, but failure to include all required components has been a source of litigation (Yell, 2006).

The individual differences of each student have been important things to concern in teaching process. Its need the appropriate program to facilitate what each student's needs. IEP helps the teacher to design the applicable instruction for the inclusive class. It supports the students with special needs following the learning process well. Accordingly, the instruction is arranged according to the result of students' assessment. Thus, from this sequence, the instruction will design as the students' condition or problem.

However, to succeed the goal of teaching-learning process, the teachers obligated to set the right instructional design which based on the individual diversity. The students with special needs require more attention and special learning environment. Which it makes them to be comfort and motivated in learning process. Bredekamp & Rosegrant (Foreman, 2005: 83) states

“the environment that this type of program provides has also proved to be an appropriate environment for children with a disability, but these children will require an individualized programming and instruction to achieve functional and developmental goals. The provision of activities and equipment is also guided by an awareness of cultural backgrounds, age appropriateness and individual differences in personality, growth, interests and experiences. The progress of the children is carefully monitored, generally through observation during play, with individual goals updated on a regular basis to ensure that development proceeds.”

The statement proposes that the students special needs also require the appropriate environment to support their learning process successfully. As functionally they also require an additional program to get their learning goal. Accordingly, the learning activity has been also provided from the students' cultural backgrounds, age appropriateness, and individual differences in personality, growth, interests and experiences. The development of the students' progress must be monitored and evaluated by using observation to update their individual goals. Furthermore,

applying this program, the students special needs will encounter their requirements and even-though they can still learn together inclusively. According to Friend and Bursuck (2002: 4), inclusion stands for the philosophy that “students with disabilities should be fully integrated into general education classrooms as long as they are making progress toward the achievement of IEP goals, even if they cannot meet classroom or content demands.”

Inclusive class is, regarding philosophy, accommodated in developing teachers' competencies to arrange the appropriate method and curricula for succeeding the learning process. Learning process is as the teachers' effort to create the educative environment and condition for their students. Whereas the teacher arranges the modification curricula by adapted its components; even-though in learning process the students study within collaboration. As suggested by Thompson, 1993 (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003: 57) “these materials often involve activities constructed to teach children about differences, including disabilities. Some curricula are focused on multicultural differences.”

The students special needs have more extensive meaning and spectrum than the exceptional children. The students special needs are able to follow and collaborate with others generally in teaching-learning process. The disturbances of the children can be permanent disability or temporary disorder. The children within temporary disorder do not need the education service intensively. Due to the obstructions come from the external factors; such as social maladjustments, concentration difficulties, or developmental reading disorders. Accordingly, they can go out from their obstructions when its causal backgrounds have been solved intensively. Consequently, for vice versa, it will become permanent disorder.

For the permanent disabilities need the special service and intensive guidance according to their requirements. The obstructions are more caused from the internal factors of the children i.e. a hearing impairment, a vision loss, or an intelligence disorder. Its conditions become permanent because their psyche and mental cannot solve well as other children. Nevertheless, related to their self-reliance are getting higher and more than others. And some of them do not require other help to step over their lives. They can study, communicate, adapt, be out going to their environments or societies.

Each student with special needs, for the permanent and temporary disorders, has some learning disabilities and differential requirements. Thus this study describes about the application of Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or – in Indonesia – Program Pendidikan Individual (PPI) in learning process for the children special needs in inclusive class.

Methodology

The descriptive study is conducted to demonstrate relationships between IEP in learning process of the students special needs. The study targeted two schools in Jombang – the Elementary school of Islamic students (SD Plus Darul 'Ulum Jombang) and the Inclusive School (SLB Tembelang – Jombang).

The sample included five teachers in Elementary School (SD Plus Darul 'Ulum) and 12 teachers in an inclusive schools (SLB) at Jombang. The schools allow me to carry out a survey of teachers who teach in inclusive settings. The researcher interacts with the participant, may involve surveys or interviews to collect the necessary information.

The survey began with five general questions to gather information about the participant schools (e.g., school's name; location; sector (public/private); level (elementary, preparatory, secondary); and category (male, female, co- educational). Section two of the survey asked six questions about IEP or PPI in learning process for the students with special needs. Each question had a stem that started with the statement *Place a tick next to...*, and each question was followed by a number of choices to select from. All the questions ended with this choice: *Other*, this option was included to allow the respondents to add any further items if they needed so. The following were the stems of the questions included in the survey: (a) Place a tick next to the kinds of disabilities that the students in your school have; (b) Place a tick next to the subject matters of difficulty that are given in your school; (c) Place a tick next to the application of IEPs components in learning process for the inclusive class; (d) Place a tick next to the special education professionals if employed in your school; (e) Place a tick next to the educational methods, media, and strategies in constructing the learning process effectively; (f) Place a tick next to the professional development courses or

training programs that you received to teach students with disabilities; and (g) Place a tick to the measurement instruction for the inclusive students in their learning development or progress.

After the approval from the headmasters of each institution, was obtained, to survey teachers in the participating schools, requesting them to allow the researcher to carry out the survey in their schools, the researcher would send an invitation, via phone, asking these teachers if they were interested in participating in this study. Once their acceptance to answer the survey was received, the researcher would visit their schools and meet the teachers -who teach in inclusive settings- in order to conduct the survey. All respondents could read and answer the questionnaire within 30 minutes.

To enhance reliability and internal validity, appropriate sampling techniques were used and build a trail of evidence (hard copies of the answered surveys with raw data, schedules of schools' visits, electronic messages with respondents, data reduction and data construction products, soft copies of tables created for data analysis). In order to have error-free results, the data analysis procedure was repeated two times by the researcher.

Results

This descriptive study was conducted to rise on the brave of the teachers' contribution in applying the IEPs for improving the learning process of students with special need. The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a bilingual English-Indonesia survey to target teachers in inclusive settings. After the data collection had been completed, the data were analyzed qualitatively in two steps: (a) counting and analyzing the responses using designed tables; and (b) synthesis, interpretation, and discussion of results. Each question in the survey was followed by a number of choices to select from. Simply, the researcher would count the number of responses made by the participant teachers next to each choice. To analyze the responses drawn from the questionnaire, a table was made for each question to count the number of responses placed next to each item. For example, one of the questions asked if the school was the elementary school of SDPlus Darul 'Ulum or the Inclusive school of SLB Tembelang Jombang. For this

question, the table had two columns: column one had the title *the elementary school of SD Plus Darul 'Ulum* and column two had the title *the Inclusive school of SLB Tembelang Jombang*. Next, the researcher would refer to the process of placing classified data into tables facilitated the process of data interpretation. For data interpretation, a separate analysis of teachers' answer of each institution was made.

Based on the responses made on each question in the survey the following three questions emerged to describe the application of IEP in learning process for the students special needs: (a) the kinds of disabilities they have; (b) the subject matters of difficulty; (c) the training experiences; (d) and the application of IEPs components.

Students with Disabilities

Referring to the questionnaire, all participant teachers emphasized that their schools included students with different disabilities. Table 1 below classifies such types of disabilities:

Table 1. Types of Disabilities

No	Types of difficulties	SD Plus Darul 'Ulum	SLB Tembelang Jombang
1	Learning disability (<i>kesulitan belajar</i>)	Yes	Yes
2	Speech or language impairments (<i>Gangguan Bahasa dan ucapan</i>)	Yes	Yes
3	Emotional impairments (<i>gangguan penguasaan emosi</i>)	Yes	Yes
4	Hearing impairments (<i>gangguan pendengaran</i>)	No	Yes

5	Visual impairments (<i>gangguan penglihatan</i>)	No	yes
6	Orthopedic impairments (<i>gangguan pada tulang</i>)	no	Yes
7	Attention deficit-hyperactive disorder (<i>gangguan konsentrasi atau perhatian dan hiperaktif</i>)	yes	yes

The data indicated that each school has different condition and some in similar. ⁶ None of the respondents reported the existence of the following severe disabilities in their schools: traumatic brain injury (TBI); multiple disabilities; developmental disabilities; deaf-blindness; autism; and mental retardation.

The subject matters of difficulty

The subject matter which are given to the students with special needs generally concluded into four sections; for instance, Language (Bahasa), Science (IPA), Social (IPS), and religion (agama). The data collected in 17 teachers as the participants from two institutions –they are five teachers (SD Plus Darul ‘Ulum) and 12 teachers (SLB Tembelang Jombang).

Table 2. The subject matters of difficulty

No	The subject matters of difficulty	Sum of participants
1	Language (<i>bahasa</i>)	15
2	Science (<i>IPA</i>)	17
3	Social (<i>IPS</i>)	5
4	Religion (<i>Agama</i>)	8

The result can be read that most of the students restricted in understanding about language and science.

¹ *Training Experiences*

In regard to training, data drawn from the questionnaire indicated that almost five of the participants received some training. On the other hand, the in-service teachers indicated that they had not taken the necessary training to facilitate their roles as teachers in inclusive schools. They expressed their urgent need for more specialized intensive courses and training programs on the proper care for students with disabilities.

The application of IEPs components

The questionnaire discussed the components in IEP which are also supported in Siegel's (2007). Its components are as shown below:

Table 3. The application of IEPs components

No	<i>The application of IEPs components</i>	SD Plus	SLB
1	the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (<i>pelaporan hasil penilaian akademis dan tingkah laku</i>)	yes	yes
2	measurable annual goals (<i>pengukuran prota</i>)	yes	yes
3	special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services (<i>pendidikan khusus, pelayanan, dan penambahan alat bantu</i>)	yes	yes
4	The participation of students in general education class (<i>partisipasi siswa di kelas umum</i>)	yes	no
5	The participation in state or district-wide academic assessments (<i>pengikutsertaan penilaian dalam system UNAS</i>)	yes	yes
6	initiation date and projected duration of IEP (<i>tanggal awal dan jenjang waktu pelaksanaan PPI</i>)	yes	yes
7	Placement periodically (<i>test ujian tingkat secara</i>)	yes	yes

	<i>periodik)</i>		
8	The student progress report toward annual goal provided to parents (<i>penyampaian laporan perkembangan siswa tiap tahunnya kepada orang tua</i>)	yes	yes

1 Discussion

Data drawn from the questionnaire that was directed to 17 teachers which are five teachers in SD Plus Darul 'Ulum Jombang and 12 teachers in SLB Tembelang Jombang. The data shown that the inclusive schools –SLB- indicated the diversity of students' condition getting more than the general school –SD Plus. Moreover, the teachers believed in the importance of maintaining separate settings based on the students' academic performance and based on the severity of students' disabilities. Indeed, similar concerns were raised by the teachers in the present study. Thus, they should arrange the instructions based on the students' backgrounds, competencies, and characters to succeed in IEP application.

Data also showed that the types of disabilities that the students had were mainly moderate and minor. None of the participant schools in the present study included students with severe disabilities. Both of those schools are more inclined to include students with minor and mild disabilities than students with more severe intellectual and emotional and behavioral disabilities. This specific attitude might be based on a common belief that students with mild disabilities require less modification of curriculum and instruction (Mastropieri &, Scruggs, 2000). So, the IEP does not getting more serious problem in arranging the assessment or instruction which is available for the children with special needs.

The result in the subject matters of difficulty explains that most of the students restricted in understanding about language and science. It indicates the students need an appropriate strategy or method to help them in developing their comprehending of the instructions. So, the teachers have to provide the right assessment or eligibility process (Siegel, 2007: 58) to reliable result to rearrange their learning instruction, method and strategy.

5
In regard to training and professional development opportunities, all the teachers who participated in this study were concerned about the available trainings. To get the evidence that positive attitudes about inclusion correlate with feelings of being well prepared, 1 all teachers in this study reported a lack of confidence and unpreparedness to teach in inclusive classrooms. All what they received were sketchy training sessions which did not necessarily prepare them to teach in inclusive settings. This is hardly surprising given that the structure of their general education program did not include a single course about exceptional learners in general or inclusive education in particular. Previous literature has documented the positive effect of special education coursework and professional training in relation to teachers' perspectives toward inclusion and increased awareness of techniques for successful inclusive practices. 1 It will give a positive correlation between teacher's attitudes and the number of courses taken in teaching students with disabilities.

Moreover, IEP components required to set the appropriate instruction in reaching the learning goal. Regarding the data shown that most of the components have been filled by both the schools; except in the participation of students in general education class for the Inclusive school is not available, because the inclusive environment set in this school within students' diversity of difficulties.

Conclusion

Implementing IEP or *PPI* is required more intention and monitoring from the educational affairs in general schools and Inclusive schools. Due to the requirement of the students special needs, IEP is one of the eligibility program to guide the teacher in achieving the learning goal and solving the students difficulties in comprehending some of the subject matters especially in language subject and Science. The whole of IEP's components work well within the collaboration of some aspects – parents, school professionals, educators, and community stakeholders professional teachers, services, tools, developmental aids, and the headmasters – in the learning process.

Suggestion

As an educator, its responsibility ¹ emphasize that there is a great need for extra efforts to create a culture of team work in implementing IEP, *one hand can't clap*. Accordingly, the inclusive schools and classroom should encourage the effective involvement of special need students, parents, school professionals, educators, and community stakeholders in the inclusion process. It's only by team work spirit that we will be able to achieve the ultimate goal of the Ministry of Education, to craft a *School for All* and to ensure that no student with disability is left behind.

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