

Conference Paper

Special Education Teachers' Self-efficacy in Inclusive Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of challenges in education settings especially for teachers arose due to the complexity of online learning. Notably, the issues surrounding online learning severely affected the special education teachers because of their reliance to assess and teach directly via a face-to-face method. In long term, the complexity of increased workloads and duties, preparing the lesson plan, and overseeing the lesson process might lead to teachers experiencing burnout and stress. One of the factors that might affect teachers' burnout and job stress is self-efficacy. This study aims to explore the pandemic effect on special education teachers and how learning method changes affected their self-efficacy. This study was conducted in Surabaya, Indonesia, and involves four special education teachers from local junior high schools which have an inclusive program. The study is conducted with a qualitative method of focus group discussion (FGD). The questions for the participant were derived from the teacher efficacy for inclusive practice (TEIP) scale. The result was produced by analysing the coding and transcripts of the video and audio feed. The result revealed that based on three dimensions of teacher efficacy; efficacy in inclusive instructions, efficacy in collaboration, and efficacy in managing behaviour, the special education teachers' self-efficacy worsened during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The implications and limitations of the research are discussed further in this manuscript.

Keywords: Special education teacher, inclusive education, teacher self-efficacy, covid-19 pandemic

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought up an unprecedented challenge in almost all aspects of life including education. During the pandemic, the majority of countries shifted their education from face-to-face meetings to online settings. This transformation brought up some complexities that teachers might never encounter before [1]. For example, in general, teachers were unprepared to teach their students remotely [2]. [3] revealed that teachers have a hard time relying on technology to deliver their lessons instead of doing it face-to-face in class. Educators also depended on their students' parents and guardians to help them interpret their instructions to the students [4].

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These issues were not exclusively experienced by teachers in Western countries. For instance, [5] explained that in Indonesia, teachers encountered several problems. These problems are lack of adequate and stable internet access and electronic gadgets, the parents did not have enough skills to help their children, the loss of students' motivation to learn, the limited skills that teachers have while operating online learning platforms, and students' truancy issues because the students and parents felt online school was ineffective. Research by [6] in the special education area also revealed similar issues. They found that teachers had a hard time fulfilling their educational target, calming students when they were throwing tantrums during online class, and encountering problems while giving instruction and communicating with their students and parents about their school tasks.

The COVID-19 Pandemic hit the special education students hard due to the absence of regular, structured learning environments that physical school provided, limited interactions between students and their teachers and peers, and the limited number of much-needed therapies and services [4,7]. These additional challenges forced the special education teachers to be more careful and creative in their approach while delivering their lessons. If the teachers could not manage these challenges successfully, it could add some pressure on their shoulders, which might lead to burnout and job-related stress. One of the factors that might affect teachers' ability in managing their classroom and its issues is self-efficacy.

According to [8], teacher self-efficacy presented a decisive factor, notably in handling their classroom's problems. Teachers' self-efficacy indicated their beliefs about their capability of "what they could do to achieve their goals" instead of "what they would do to achieve their goals" [9]. Teacher self-efficacy is important because it is related to the teachers' ability to employ better strategies in organizing and planning their tasks [10], influencing the achievement and motivation of their students [11], and their capability to overcome obstacles and difficulties that might occur during the learning process [12]. Teacher self-efficacy had been studied for decades now, however, the number of studies that focused on the COVID-19 impact on teacher self-efficacy was limited [13]. Moreover, there was a limited number of research focusing on special education teachers' self-efficacy and the majority of research on teachers' self-efficacy was conducted in offline settings which were unsuitable in current situations of online learning settings [12].

Special education teachers need to be prepared for teaching during the transition of online learning at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers were also required to understand new strategies and technology tools to create their lesson plans and IEP for special needs students. The more teachers are exposed to technology, the higher

their attitudes are toward using technology in the classroom [14]. Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's beliefs about their abilities to plan, organize, and carry out instructional activities [15], which was found to be negatively impacted by negative feelings towards technology [14]. [2] also stated that teachers were unprepared and required to take on a lot of new demands during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Special education teachers were under additional responsibility since they sometimes had students who cannot access technology on their own and they also had to be attentive to their students' IEPs and monitor their progress [2]. It is very important to understand what's best to prepare both future and current special education teachers for teaching remotely during the pandemic. Therefore, this study will explore how the pandemic affected the special education teacher's self-efficacy and whether the changes in education methods from face-to-face to online settings impacted their self-efficacy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Special Education Teacher in Inclusive School

There are two methods for students with special needs to receive education, which are an inclusive school and a special education school. Inclusive education is an education program in which the schools offer a chance for special education students to learn together with able-bodied students. The goal of the inclusive program is to reduce discrimination against students with disability. Furthermore, not all state schools are chosen to have an inclusive program, but only selected schools have been assigned by the local government.

To ensure that the special needs student would receive all the support, the Indonesian Government declared that inclusive schools need to have their own special education teachers or called Guru Pembimbing Khusus (GPK). Special Education Teachers are a group of educators that have a degree in special education and or receive extra training in special education and they work in inclusive schools. Special Education Teachers are placed in inclusive schools to support regular teachers and assist the students by giving them extra services or therapy according to their needs.

The Ministry of Education [16] described the competency of special education teachers have three basic skills. First is the general ability to educate all students. Second, the basic ability to teach students with special needs, and lastly the specific ability to teach students included in the special disability category. Special education teachers

have their own specific tasks and are different from regular teachers. Special education teachers' tasks are (1) Building their own assessment instrument and collaborating with classroom teachers and subject-specific teachers. (2) Coordinating between teachers, schools and parents, (3) Supporting both special education students and classroom teachers during regular lessons in class. (4) Providing special services for special education students who have issues understanding the subjects by giving them remedial or enrichment classes, (5) Arranging continuous support for special education so they could follow the lessons even if the classroom teacher changes, and (6) Assisting classrooms teacher to construct their lesson so it would be suitable for special education students [16].

However, the implementation of special education teachers' roles and tasks is not optimal. Research by [17] revealed that special education teachers' workload has increased because not only do they have the responsibility to teach special education classes but also to teach a regular class. Besides the heavy workload, an unclear career path for special education educators is also one of the causes why some schools did not have special education teachers. Therefore, the learning process for special education students is not working maximally.

2.2. Teacher's Self-Efficacy

[15] defined teachers' self-efficacy as "*individual teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities that are required to attain given educational goals*". [18] described teachers' self-efficacy as teachers' capability to judge whether they could help their students' engagement and learning process reach their full potential and results. Teachers' self-efficacy is associated with educators' behaviour and performance in the class and their resilience and persistence regardless of challenges and setbacks [18]. Previous studies have shown that teachers' self-efficacy was correlated with job burnout, job satisfaction, job stress [15,9,19], students' achievement [20] and difficulties in classroom management [1,21].

There are several factors which could affect teachers' self-efficacy. Research by [18] revealed that teachers' willingness to work together with other educators affected their self-efficacy. Teachers with high self-efficacy were more amenable to asking their colleagues' help [22]. Collaborating with other teachers allowed an individual to observe and acquire useful techniques for managing different parts of teaching which enhance their self-efficacy [20]. Furthermore, a study by [23] explained that substantial workload,

inadequate organizational assistance and resources such as curriculum, supplies & technology worsened educators' self-efficacy.

In education settings, teachers had to collaborate not only with their colleagues but also with their student's parents and guardians. A study by [12] described one of the biggest obstacles for teachers to conduct effective online learning was uncooperative parents. If the parents are reluctant or refuse to be involved in their education, teachers would have trouble monitoring their students' learning process at home [3]. Experiencing difficulties while collaborating with parents might cause prominent strain between teachers and parents. It was affecting their confidence in planning, organizing and executing their lesson plans, increasing anxiety levels and job stress for educators thus lowering their self-efficacy and work morale [24].

This pandemic situation also impacted teachers' mental health. Research by [25] explained that stressors related to COVID-19 were correlated with teachers' mental health conditions. [26] examined the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' burnout and job stress. They found the main stressors for teachers were massive workload, unsuitable working environments and uncertainty related to the impact of the pandemic. Teachers' mental health was also a significant predictor of teachers' self-efficacy [25]. This result was caused by teachers not only dealing with the teaching methods' change without adequate training but also dealing with their family situations and their kids' education [27,28]. The more stressed the teachers were, the more likely they felt exhaustion and burnout [26]. A study by [20] revealed that teachers' burnout was strongly correlated with teachers' self-efficacy. They argued that the burnout feeling was caused by depersonalization and mental exhaustion which led to lower teacher self-efficacy.

3. Method

This research was conducted with the qualitative method of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and designed with a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological design was chosen because this method offered a comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon that happened to several individuals [29]. The phenomenon was related to the changes in learning methods from face-to-face to online settings that forced teachers to adapt quickly. All teachers including special education teachers must redesign their lessons to suit the nature of online learning. Students with special needs encountered similar problems to regular students where they dealt with unstable internet access and restricted access to technology that hindered the process of online learning [30]. The demand for educators to adapt quickly to online learning might easily affect their

ability to plan, organize, and execute their lesson plans. Teachers' self-efficacy has a role to ensure the online learning process would go according to the plan. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is suitable for this study.

The Focus Group Discussion method was chosen because it could explore the participants' experiences and personal views deeper and whether all the participants have similar or different perspectives on one issue [31]. The focus group sessions were conducted online via ZOOM Meeting twice over a week with four participants and each meeting lasted between 80-100 minutes. Both sessions were audio and video-recorded, so the researchers could analyse the response and the subjects' non-verbal cues. According to [32] the collected audio and video data were analysed by making the transcripts based on the audio and video feeds. The transcripts were processed and divided based on their coding and categories. Subsequently, all the coding data were reviewed and evaluated further based on the indicators for each dimension.

The questions for FGD were derived from teacher efficacy for inclusive practice (TEIP) by [21]. The scale consisted of three dimensions; 1) Efficacy to use inclusive instructions, 2) Efficacy in Collaboration, and 3) Efficacy in managing behaviour. Each dimension has its set of questions and indicators. In Efficacy to use inclusive instructions, the questions focused on the teachers' ability to assess and build individual education programs (IEP). The question of efficacy in collaboration addressed the teachers' skills to work together with the parents and guardians. For efficacy in managing behaviour, the focus was on how teachers manage their issues and concerns during online learning.

The snowball sampling technique was utilised in this research because the participant must be an active special education teacher for an inclusive state junior high school in Surabaya. Surabaya is one of the cities in Indonesia with the highest percentage of special education teachers, with 37,7% of them working as special education teachers for public junior high schools with inclusive programs [33].

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Efficacy to Use Inclusive Instruction

According to [21], efficacy in providing inclusive instruction is about teachers' perception of how well they could give instructions to students. In this case, the four participants showed uncertainty which was marked by statements of difficulty in designing Individual

Education Programs (IEP). This difficulty occurred due to the inability to measure the student's ability correctly because of the online learning system. Teachers prefer to assess their students' skills directly via face-to-face methods instead of via online meetings. All participants also agreed that many learning targets were not achieved during the online learning process. The online learning settings create some difficulties for teachers because educators need to understand each student's needs and characteristics. After understanding their students' traits, teachers need to build an appropriate learning goal, select an instructional method, and apply this instruction to fulfil the students' individual needs [34,35,36]. The whole process of assessing students' needs until implementing the teaching method is important for teachers' efficacy in inclusive settings.

The implementation of the IEP also cannot run optimally due to teachers' scarcity. The teachers' scarcity issues have plagued Surabaya since before the pandemic began, and it has not been solved yet. One of the participants explained that in the current condition, one special education teacher would manage up to fifteen students at the same time, which was not ideal. Moreover, because of the shortage, teachers suddenly received more responsibility than they ought to. Besides teaching and managing the special education students, they also have to teach another subject outside their speciality for regular classes. Consequently, despite the teachers' best efforts, the inclusive students were slightly neglected and had not received the attention they were supposed to have. This condition could affect the teachers' self-efficacy as [23] explained that lack of support and resources from the organization and heavy workload decreased self-efficacy.

4.1.2. Efficacy in Collaboration

All the participants indicated that during the pandemic, there were some efforts to work together with parents and guardians. However, 75% of participants stated that they could not trust the information provided by the parents about their students. Furthermore, one participant also stated, *"the most difficult thing is not educating children, but educating their parents"*, and other participants agreed with this statement wholeheartedly. Teachers felt unsure and suspicious about whether the task they handed to the students was done by themselves, or their parents did it for them. This notion sowed some distrust between teachers and parents and might be harmful to the students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an excellent partnership and trust between parents and educators were needed to ensure that the learning process would go effortlessly [37]. Teachers found that there was some discrepancy in students'

performance when they were studying at school compared to when they were studying via online classes. Similar results had been discovered by [5]. They explained that despite all the efforts that teachers had been done by providing extra syllabus and teaching material for the students, there were some inconsistent learning outcomes between students who learnt at school and students who did online schooling.

One of the participants found another way to monitor students' learning progress by opening up a group chat with their parents. The aim of this group chat was a platform for parents to complain or ask some questions related to online learning to the teachers. Furthermore, the group chat also worked as an alternative for the parents to share their hardships while they oversaw their children's educational progress with other parents or guardians. Unexpectedly, this forum offered some comfort not only for the parents but also for the teachers related to the uncertainty about the pandemic and online learning.

Another issue that the special education teachers encountered while conducting online learning was the parents' socio-economic situation. One of the subjects explained that the majority of their students originated from low-income families which made it hard for their parents to purchase the necessity for online learning such as laptops and internet access. Additionally, the parents were also busy with their jobs and chores, so they were unable to monitor their children's learning process at home. The connectivity issues appeared to be common in Indonesia as both studies by [5,6] encountered the same problems.

4.1.3. Efficacy in Managing Behavior

All participants gave statements that they were not confident in their ability to manage their students' behaviour in the online learning process during the pandemic. Participant 4 revealed that during online learning, students often had not done their assignments and preferred to play games instead of studying. Teachers cannot make any meaningful effort to monitor and control these behaviours due to the nature of online learning. So, when face-to-face learning has been implemented, the special education teachers had to re-educate their students in terms of school rules, manners, and learning process to eliminate the unsavoury routine of online schooling.

One of the biggest obstacles in managing behaviour during online schooling was the reliance on students' parents or guardians to manage their children's behaviour. Two participants stated that there were several disruptive behaviours such as shouting, crying loudly and throwing tantrums. During offline classes, if the students exhibit troublesome behaviour, teachers could easily pull them out from the regular class and

move them to another class (which is called the source room) and did some interventions there. However, during online classes, the teachers must depend on the parents to intervene when their children misbehave. Teachers could only offer some suggestions and recommendations for parents to aid them in managing their children's attitudes. Nonetheless, whether the parents adhered to the suggestions and recommendations, depends on the parents themselves. This result reiterates the point which has been made by [4] that lack of adequate personal support and therapies was one of the crucial issues for special education students during the pandemic.

4.2. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on special education teachers' self-efficacy and how the changes in learning methods from face-to-face to online settings impacted their self-efficacy. The teacher efficacy dimensions from [21] were utilised to analyse the responses. Based on three dimensions of efficacy in inclusive instructions, efficacy in collaboration and efficacy in managing behaviour, we concluded that the special education teachers' self-efficacy during the pandemic worsened.

Moreover, the result showed that each aspect was interrelated and affected all participants. The interrelations between each variable were determined based on the subjects' experience and statements about the difficulties they encountered during online learning. If the teachers have problems managing the students' behaviour because of the inability to collaborate with their parents, the implementation of IEP would be affected and the learning objectives might not be achieved.

The result discovered that there is one external condition that affects the participants' self-efficacy, which is the teacher shortage in Surabaya. This shortage led to the increasing number of responsibilities, duties and workloads the teachers' have. Lack of human resources also impacted the learning process because the implementation of IEP relies on the teachers' lesson plans and their special education teachers' attention should be fully given to the students with special needs. Furthermore, the risk of teachers experiencing burnout and low job satisfaction also increased because of the pressure from the workplace. As [18] described that teachers' self-efficacy is depended on how teachers judge their capacity to maintain the quality of students' engagement and learning process so they could help their students fully reach their potential and better result. If these issues with self-efficacy are not solved promptly, it might affect the performance and quality of lessons that the teachers give to their students further.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants in this study was small and limited to one city, thus it is hard to generalise the result. Second, the data related to socioeconomic and demographics of the inclusive school could be added to the study. Third, the experience of the teachers should be considered because several studies found that working experience acted as a significant factor for teachers' self-efficacy [12,9]. Finally, for future research, a mixed-method research design should be utilised to study self-efficacy further. The quantitative methods could offer more diverse data related to self-efficacy and factors that might affect it such as burnout, job satisfaction and job stress. Whereas, the qualitative method could be employed to dig further into the teachers' experiences and issues about self-efficacy.

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