

# **Implementation of Inclusive Education in Indonesia**

## **A Persons with Disabilities' Perspective**

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By nature, man is a social being who always wants to be included in a group, and will join another group if he cannot be included in the first group. That is to say, a person with impairment by nature wants to be included in a “regular” community, and only when the community rejects him that he will segregate himself with other persons with impairment to form a “special” community. However, the tendency to be in a special community is never permanent as neither is the regular community to exclude them. This tendency to be inclusive is started when both parties realize that they have more similarity than difference.

The segregation of persons with impairments in Indonesia was started when the first schools for children with impairments were established during the colonial time at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After Indonesian independence in 1945, commanded by the stipulation of the 1945 Constitution that every citizen has the right to schooling, special schools for different categories of impairments developed rapidly. Today there are more than 1100 special schools all over Indonesia with about 50,000 students. This figure represents only about 7.5% of the school-aged population of children with special needs (Indonesia is a country with a population of over 200 million). It is believed that the schooling rate will increase when the idea of inclusive education is implemented.

The process towards inclusive education in Indonesia was initiated in early 1960's by a couple of blind students in Bandung with the support of the organization of persons with visual impairments as a pressure group. During that time special schools for the blind only provided educational service up to junior high school level, after which blind youths were given vocational training on handicrafts or massage. A number of blind youths insisted on pursuing higher level of education and tried to enter regular high school in spite of resistance from the part of the regular school. Perseverance of the blind youths managed to change the attitude and a couple of students were accepted, and their success had made more and more high schools and eventually also universities (though very slowly) open to blind students.

In the late 1970's the Government began to pay attention to the importance of the integrated education, and they invited Helen Keller International, Inc. to help with the development of integrated schools. The success of the project had led to the issuing of the Letter of Decision by the Minister of Education, 1986, stipulating that capable children with disabilities should be given the opportunity to attend regular schools together with their non-disabled peers.

Unfortunately, when the integrated education project was over, the implementation of integrated education was practiced less and less, especially in primary school level.

However, towards the end of 1990's new efforts were made to develop inclusive education through a cooperation project between the Ministry of National Education and the Norwegian government under the management of Braillo Norway and the Directorate of Special Education at national level. In order not to repeat the past experience with the integrated education programme that died out, attention has been paid to the sustainability of the programme of implementing inclusive education.

The strategy of the programme is as follows:

- Dissemination of the ideology of inclusive education through seminars and workshops;
- Changing the role of existing special schools to become resource centres to support inclusive schools (with teaching equipment, learning materials, methodology, etc.);
- Upgrading/training special school teachers as well as regular school teachers to enable them to better serve children with special needs in inclusive settings;
- Reorientation of teachers education at universities and involvement of universities in the programme;
- Decentralization of policy making to give more role to local governments in the implementation of inclusive education;
- Encouraging and facilitating the formation of working groups to promote the implementation of inclusive education;
- Involvement of NGOs and international organizations in the programme;
- Networking among various parties involved;
- Setting up pilot inclusive schools;
- Establishment of the master programme in inclusion and special needs education.

The most readily observable outcomes of the programme are as follows:

- 1) A number of workshops and seminars on inclusive education, both at national and local levels, have been organized, involving educators and education administrators.
- 2) Nine special schools in nine provinces (out of the 32 provinces) have been selected to be resource centres and their role as resource centres are slowly taking shape while maintaining their role as special schools. The National Resource Centre in Jakarta, Citeureup Regional Resource Centre in West Java and Payakumbuh Regional Resource Centre in West Sumatra are the three most functional among the nine resource centres. In addition, a number

of other special schools have been designed to function as supportive centres.

- 3) Some universities have started introducing inclusive education as a subject or as topics in other related subjects to their students.
- 4) Faculty members of a number of universities have been involved in workshops or seminars on inclusive education.
- 5) Provincial Offices of Education have been more proactive in promoting inclusive education. It deserves mentioning that The Office of Education of West Sumatra and West Java are the most prominent in this.
- 6) A working group on inclusive education has been formed in West Java, the members of which come from Citeureup Regional Resource Centre, the Provincial Office of Education and the Indonesia University of Education.
- 7) UNESCO has been actively involved in the promotion of inclusive education in West Java.
- 8) In 2002 the Project set up three pilot inclusive schools in each of the nine provinces with resource centres, and in 2003 the Ministry of Education ambitiously increased the number of inclusive schools to become three in each municipality. Since then over 1500 children with disabilities have been placed in regular schools.
- 9) A Master Programme in Inclusion and Special Needs Education has been established at the Indonesia University of Education (UPI), Bandung, West Java, with technical assistance from the University of Oslo. The programme started in 2003 with 15 students with scholarships from the Project. This year the programme is expected to enroll at least the same number of students with provincial governments contributing in providing scholarships.

The ultimate goal of all the efforts above is the well being of persons with disabilities as citizens with all their rights fulfilled. Whether or not the current placement of children with disabilities in regular schools will actually be good for their well being, it needs time to prove this; but we believe it will and we are hopeful as long as they are being given proper support as designed for them.