

## Philosophical cultural-based of Indonesian Inclusive Education: Meaning and Perception of Teachers' Candidates

Khofidotur Rofiah\*, Diah Ekasari, Riski Prasetya Arbi, Pamuji, Hirnanda Hirnanda Dimas Pradana

Corresponding Author: khofidoturrofiah@unesa.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the perception of teachers' candidates on inclusive education and the link to local philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers' candidates participating in an inclusive education course, thematic analysis was conducted to find the pattern of their perceptions related with inclusive education. Two main themes emerged as findings; (1) Inclusive education: what teacher candidates think with sub themes: (a) education without boundaries, (b) flexible curriculum, and (c) placing students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the same environment; and (2) Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD): The local philosophy with sub themes: (a) three principles of KHD, (b) *ngerti, ngroso, nglakoni*, (c) teachers as role model: the among system. These suggested the importance of preparing teachers' candidates to have comprehensive and deep knowledge of inclusive education and the connection with local philosophy for supporting inclusive education practices in Indonesian context

**Keywords:** perception of inclusive education; teachers' candidates; Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD)

### INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in Indonesia is often associated with a philosophy of education that cannot be separated from the involvement of cultural values. The relationship between the two is very close because they complement and support each other. However, culture is evolving globally, which certainly has an impact on education. The 1945 Constitution Article 28C paragraph (1) states that, "Every person has the right to develop themselves through the fulfilment of their basic needs, the right to education and to benefit from science and technology, art and culture, in order to improve the quality of their lives and for the welfare of mankind". In relation to inclusive education in Indonesia, all learners without exception have the right to access the best education to improve their quality of life in the future. Cultural values and education cannot be separated from each other, both affect each other, culture can change with education, and culture can also change with education. Mansur (2019) mentioned the implementation of cultural wisdom values is an important key in strengthening inclusive approaches and improving equality learning, because each individual brings a different cultural background.

Discussing philosophers in the world of national education cannot be separated from one of the Indonesian philosopher Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD), who fought for and raised the dignity of the nation through the field of education. Until his birth date, May 2, is celebrated as National Education Day every year. KHD emphasized the importance of

holistic and student-centered education, and facilitated the development of all students without discrimination (Hidayatullah, 2024). *Merdeka Belajar* [read: freedom in learning] is KHD's idea of education that provides freedom for every child to develop according to their abilities, which is very much in line with the principles of inclusive education. He believed that education should provide equal opportunities for every child, regardless of their social, economic or character background. For him, education is a tool to achieve independence so that every child can develop their potential to the fullest and become an independent, responsible and useful person for society.

KHD is known as the Father of Indonesian National Education. He introduced the motto "*Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani*" which has a deep meaning regarding the function and role of an educator in assisting the learning process of students (Sari et al., 2022). "*Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*" means 'In front, teachers should give an example'. When interpreted literally, an educator or teacher must provide a good example to students and be an exemplary figure in attitude, action, and behavior. This makes it clear how important the integrity and responsibility of an educator is in creating a supportive learning environment for loyal students. "*Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*" means "In the middle, the teacher should build the spirit." When interpreted, it means that in this position the educator acts as a companion or facilitator. An educator is present in the midst of students to maintain the spirit of learning and encourage students' motivation, initiative, creativity, and curiosity. "*Tut Wuri Handayani*" means 'Behind, giving encouragement'. A teacher also acts as an encourager from behind. A teacher must be able to give confidence to students to be brave and responsible for the decisions they choose. In addition, KHD argued that teachers' candidates should also understand and implement education based on the value of freedom and freedom of thought (Daga, 2022). Education can help form human individuals who are free, have integrity, and are able to develop their potential according to their respective potentials.

Indonesia, although ratified The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) since 2011, however, the society interpretations of inclusion are vary. It is similar with global trends, for instance in the 1990s, the words inclusion and full inclusion emerged. Inclusion often suggests that general education surroundings are the major but not exclusive placement factor, but complete inclusion presupposes general education placement for all students since "all means all, no exceptions" (Maag et al., 2019 p.1. Neither phrase has been defined in The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States, nor have they been embraced by the courts as terms of art, since there is no universally acknowledged understanding of what they imply in schools and districts. Although the word mainstreaming is used less commonly in schools today, courts continue to favour it when determining placement (Crockett, 2020). Notably, neither mainstreaming nor inclusion are legal phrases, but rather pedagogical practices used to operationalise the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) principle in public schools. Current arguments in the 21st century continue to be characterised by uncertainty over the varied definitions of these words as special education students spend more time in general education classrooms (Imray & Colley, 2017).

The Indonesian education system often adopts the philosophical basis of KHD. An educational philosophy that emphasizes three aspects, (1) learning based on the desire to learn (*asah*), (2) compassion and concern for others (*asih*), and (3) mentoring according to developmental stages (*asuh*). KHD believes that every child has unique potential, and education should provide space for each child to grow according to their potential which

encourages a learning environment that respects differences. These philosophical concepts from KHD are important in representing the identity of how Indonesian society thinks of teachers and education. However, the research in this topic in connection with inclusive education and local philosophy, for instance KHD were not in the adequate focus for previous studies.

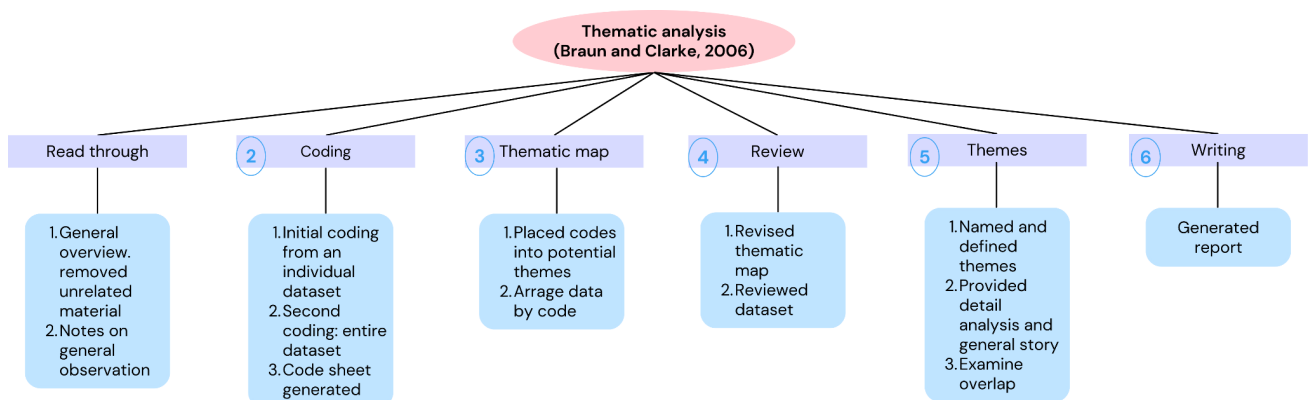
Research Questions:

1. How do teachers' candidates' perspective of inclusive education?
2. How do teachers' candidates' knowledge of the local philosophical basis of inclusive education?

## METHOD

This study was to investigate the teachers' candidates' perspective of inclusive education and their knowledge of the local philosophical basis of inclusive education. This research utilised a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten students participating in the Inclusive Education course. The interview guide included questions of the meaning of inclusive education, the local philosophy of inclusion, today's implication, and the questions of students' opinion of Indonesian inclusive education. The interviews were conducted face to face in the University and well recorded. Before the interview, the researchers gave comprehensive information about this research. Participation in this study was completely voluntary, with all responses kept confidential and no personal identities revealed. Interviewees had the freedom to end their participation at any point during the interview. At the start of the interview, respondents received a brief introduction that outlined the study's background and goals, providing them with detailed information about the objectives, interview process, and use of the transcripts. Participants who chose to join in the research signed a consent form prior to participation.

Following the audio recording file, we use verbatim technique for transcription. Thematic analysis by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with six stages was used to find the pattern and meaning from each participant's responses (see Figure 1). NVivo software was used to organize the dataset for analysis purposes.



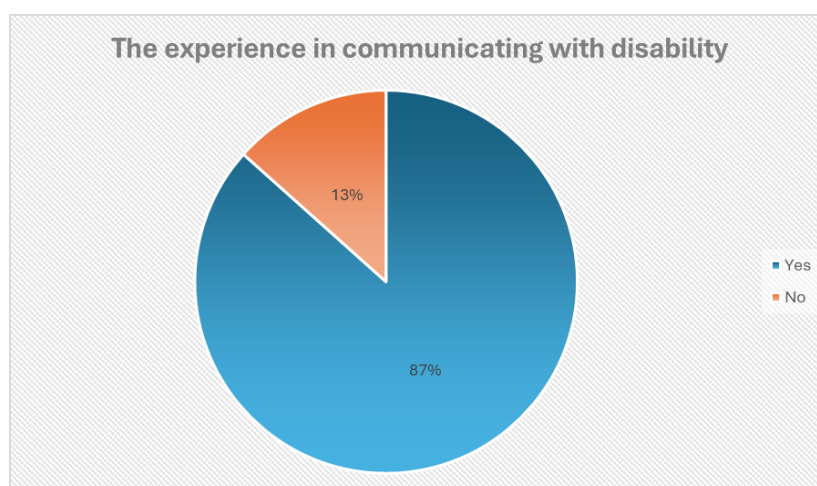
**Figure 1.** Six stages of Thematic analysis

The participants in the current research were first year students from all over East Java, Indonesia who are studying at the Department of Technology Education Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia. 15 teachers candidates agreed to participate voluntarily in this research (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The interview participants

| No | Participant | Gender | Age |
|----|-------------|--------|-----|
| 1  | S1          | Female | 19  |
| 2  | S2          | Female | 18  |
| 3  | S3          | Female | 19  |
| 4  | S4          | Female | 19  |
| 5  | S5          | Female | 19  |
| 6  | S6          | Female | 20  |
| 7  | S7          | Male   | 20  |
| 8  | S8          | Male   | 20  |
| 9  | S9          | Male   | 20  |
| 10 | S10         | Male   | 18  |
| 11 | S11         | Male   | 19  |
| 12 | S12         | Female | 18  |
| 13 | S13         | Female | 19  |
| 14 | S14         | Female | 20  |
| 15 | S15         | Male   | 19  |

In this study, around 87% participants expressed had experiences in communicating with people with disabilities while 13% had no contact experience with people with disabilities (see Figure 2). It is very important to know this information to investigate whether the previous experiences of the participants can influence their understanding of inclusion.

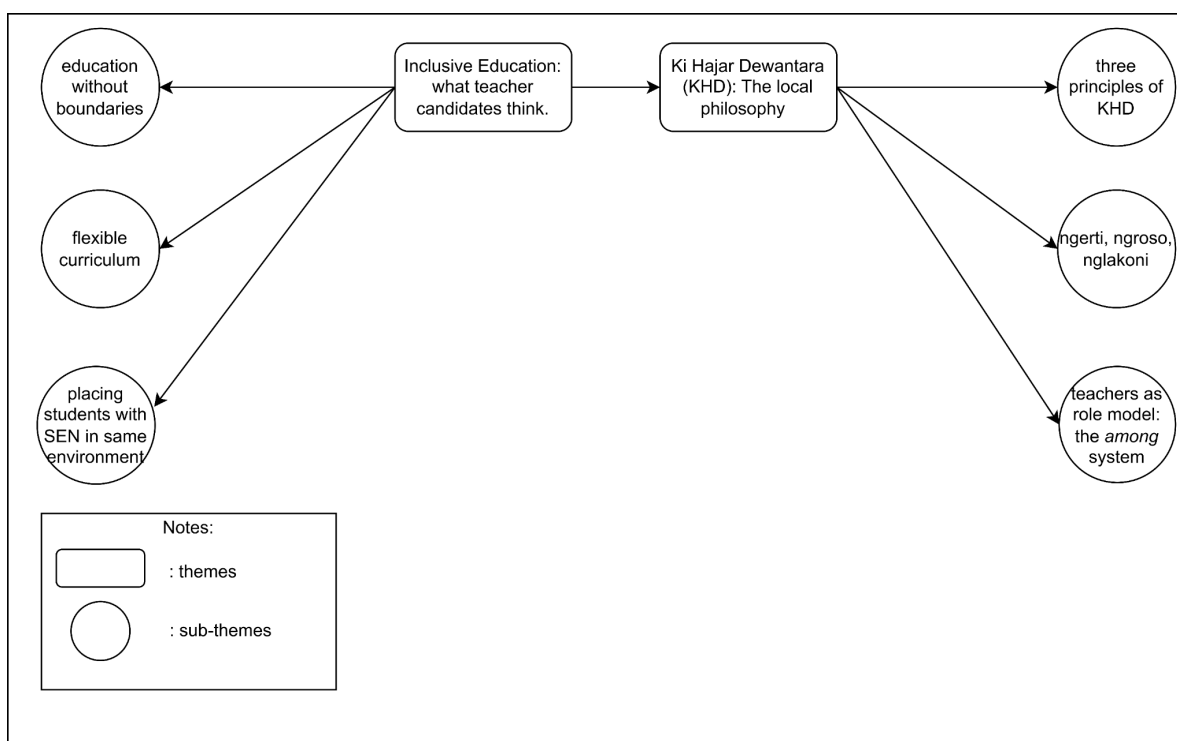


**Figure 2.** Prevalence of the participants' experiences in previous contact with person with disability

## RESULT

Based on thematic analysis from the semi-structured interview, the first main theme emerged was “Inclusive education: what teacher candidates think” with sub themes: (1) education without boundaries, (2) flexible curriculum, and (3) placing students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the same environment. Furthermore, the second main theme emerged was “Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD): The local philosophy” with sub themes: (1) three principles of KHD, (2) *ngerti, ngroso, nglakoni*, (3) teachers as role model: the *among* system.

The first theme answered the first research question about teachers' candidates' perspective of inclusive education whereas the second theme answered the second research question on teachers' candidates' knowledge of the local philosophical basis of inclusive education which participants referred to KHD philosophy (see thematic map in Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Themes and subthemes emerge in this study

### **Inclusive education: what teachers' candidates think**

#### *Education without boundaries*

Inclusive education represents an approach where all students, irrespective of their origin, background, abilities, or conditions, are provided with equal learning opportunities. This educational model seeks to integrate students with diverse needs and characteristics into the same learning environment, ensuring that everyone has access to quality education alongside their peers. In an inclusive system, the focus is on breaking down barriers, fostering understanding, and cultivating a culture of respect and belonging, where no

student is marginalized or excluded based on physical, cognitive, social, or cultural differences.

Rather than segregating students with varied needs, inclusive education adapts teaching methods, resources, and classroom settings to support and engage all learners. This approach empowers individuals to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally in an environment that respects and values their unique contributions. Through inclusive education, schools become places where diversity is celebrated, and each student can access the tools and support necessary to succeed.

“Inclusive education is an educational system that provides learning for all students or is open, without distinguishing between the origin, background, conditions, and abilities of a particular individual. Here, everyone can experience an education that is equal to others” [S8].

“Inclusive education is an educational process that involves all individuals regardless of physical background and in inclusive education all are equal and all get the same learning opportunities” [S4].

“Inclusive education is education that provides opportunities to everyone regardless of their conditions” [S1].

### *Flexible curriculum*

A flexible curriculum focusing on tailored teaching strategies that support diverse learning styles was mentioned by mostly participants in the semi-structured interview, for instance mentioned by S5 and S2. This means the importance in adapting content and instructional methods which can empower students with SEN to achieve academic and personal growth comparable to that of other students. This adaptability within inclusive education systems promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and meaningful participation, reinforcing that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive within the classroom.

“Education that can accept children with special needs and disabilities and the curriculum can be adjusted according to the needs of children with special needs and disabilities. Inclusive education also helps children with special needs and disabilities to learn like children in general [mainstreaming]” [S5].

“Inclusive education is an education that adapts to the needs of children with special needs, starting from the curriculum to the learning methods used will be adjusted so that all children can learn without any obstacles” [S2].

### *Placing students with SEN in the same environment.*

This sub theme emerged for the meaning and definition of inclusive education mentioned by participants in this study. Many teachers' candidates linked inclusive education as simply placing students with and without SEN into the same learning environment as their peers. This approach ensures that students with disabilities, as well as those with unique talents or intellectual potential, are given the opportunity to learn and grow within a shared educational setting. As highlighted by participants, inclusive education is designed to create a space where all students with and without SEN, can learn and study together, supported by tailored resources and teaching strategies that meet individual needs as mentioned by S3.

“[..inclusive education is] a learning system in which regular students [without SEN] and students with special needs are combined [in the same classroom], they learn in the same environment with support that suits their needs” [S3].

Specifically, S9 expressed through the inclusive approach, education becomes a transformative experience, opening doors for students of all backgrounds to reach their full potential.

“[..inclusive education is] education that provides opportunities for all students who have disabilities and have the potential for intelligence and/or special talents to participate in education or learning in an educational environment together with students in general” [S9].

### **Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD): The local philosophy**

#### *Three principles of KHD*

The participants emphasized three educational principles as the basic concept of inclusion and teacher roles in supporting learning and education for all. Inclusive education is grounded in the belief that all students, including those with disabilities, deserve equitable access to learning opportunities within a supportive environment. In exploring this approach, insights from recent interviews with educators reveal how they interpret and apply inclusive practices. Many participants emphasize the importance of adapting their attitudes, teaching methods, and resources to meet the diverse needs of their students.

An inspiring framework that surfaced in these interviews is based on the philosophy of KHD, an influential figure in Indonesian education. His three guiding principles: *Ing ngarso sung tuladha* (leading by example), *Ing madya mangun karsa* (motivating from within), and *Tut wuri handayani* (encouraging from behind) highlight the teacher's role as a mentor, motivator, and supporter. Participants noted that these principles align well with inclusive education goals, as they encourage an environment where all students feel accepted, motivated, and empowered to reach their full potential as mentioned by S12 and S14.

“When associated with inclusive education [with local philosophy], it is relevant because it emphasizes an approach that supports the development of students with disabilities or others. The meaning of *Ing ngarso sung tuladha* is that in front [teacher] gives an example, such as teachers who show an attitude of acceptance and fairness towards their students without discriminating against one another. The meaning of *In madya mangun karsa* is that in the middle [teacher] gives encouragement, this means that teachers build their enthusiasm and provide motivation in their learning process. *Tut wuri handayani* means that from behind [teacher] provides support in the form of independence so that students develop their potential” [S12].

S12 linked the three principles of KHD with how teachers should accept the students with disabilities without any discrimination and provide educational support for all students in the context of inclusive education. Furthermore, S14 emphasized that based on KHD three basic concepts of education, teachers should provide good examples to understand their students and not discriminate against them.

*“Ing ngarsa sung tuladha: teachers provide good examples and understanding to students, so as not to discriminate against each other. Ing madya mangun karsa: provide equal learning guidance without discrimination, especially for children with disabilities if they need special facilities, they must be given according to their rights. Tut wuri handayani: provide encouragement or enthusiasm for learning so that they can achieve their goals”* [S14].

### *Ngerti, ngroso, nglakoni*

Inclusive education extends beyond simply integrating students with diverse needs which requires a deep commitment to understanding, empathy, and action. In this context, the Javanese philosophy of *ngerti* (to understand), *ngroso* (to feel), and *nglakoni* (to act) offers valuable insight. As shared by S15 and S2 in this research, these concepts are seen as foundational to truly embodying inclusive education, moving it from a theoretical framework to a lived experience within the classroom.

“Overall, *ngerti, ngroso, nglakoni* inclusive education are the keys to not only understanding inclusion as a concept, but also applying it and feeling its benefits in mutually respectful and supportive learning” [S15].

*“ngerti* means understanding who fellow human beings are, *ngroso* means having sensitivity or empathy by training one's feelings, and *nglakoni* means



doing what has been learned regarding social sensitivity which is the basis of an inclusive education system” [S2].

*Teachers as role models: the among system.*

In an inclusive education system, teachers have powerful role models, demonstrating the values of acceptance, resilience, and commitment to lifelong learning. Participants, for example S1 and S4 emphasised that their role goes beyond teaching academic content. Teachers are responsible for modelling behaviours and attitudes that inspire confidence, motivation, and a love of learning in all students, including those with disabilities.

“As an educator, you must set an example for your students, both normal and disabled children, and must build ideas and concepts that build confidence and continue to motivate your students to remain active in seeking knowledge” [S1].

“The concept of KHD is that the motto is education that provides examples, enthusiasm and also encouragement to students in terms of goodness and this education is a broad education in the sense that it is open to anyone, even children with special needs of course” [S4].

Furthermore, S11 connected teacher characters with the *among* system based on KHD concepts consisted with three characteristics of a good teacher; (1) learning based on the desire to learn (*asah*), (2) compassion and concern for others (*asih*), and (3) nurturing according to developmental stages (*asuh*).

“Education must be on the side of children without discrimination. As a teacher, you must be able to adopt the *among* system from KHD, namely in educating children, there is no element of coercion allowed, but children must be guided and mentored so that they feel comfortable. The *among* system also applies the *asih*, *asah*, and *asuh* methods which are basic needs for the growth and development of a child, because basically the good growth and development of a child can be seen from how their environment is, including the school environment” [S11].

Based on the results, it is in line with previous research by Oktavia, et al (2024) found that schools can help students learn about each other and develop mutual respect by appreciating and celebrating differences. In addition, (Septyah, 2024) emphasized that inclusion is a philosophy of respecting the diversity of individual uniqueness and openness to differences. This concept is not only intended for SEN students, but for every student, including those who have low socio-economic backgrounds, minority groups, those in remote areas, violence victims, as well as those living in conflict areas. The implementation

of the curriculum in inclusive schools must be tailored to the needs of students which was mentioned in the Minister of Research and Technology Decree No. 56/M/2022 “education units need to develop a curriculum with the principle of diversification according to the conditions of the education unit, regional potential, and students.

KHD emphasized the concepts of education and the important role of teachers which are still relevant in Indonesian today's situation in the technology era. Previous research by Rofiah et al. (2024) investigated Indonesian teachers' candidates attitudes towards inclusive education and the relationship with digital competence which is crucial for future teachers working with SEN students in supporting inclusive education nowadays.

## CONCLUSION

This research aims to investigate teachers' candidates' perception of inclusive education and their knowledge of local philosophy of inclusive education. The qualitative method by utilizing semi-structured interviews was used to find a deep understanding of teachers' candidates' perception on inclusive education. Two main themes emerged as findings; (1) Inclusive education: what teacher candidates think with sub themes: (a) education without boundaries, (b) flexible curriculum, and (c) placing students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the same environment; and (2) Ki Hajar Dewantara (KHD): The local philosophy with sub themes: (a) three principles of KHD, (b) *ngerti, ngroso, nglakoni*, (c) teachers as role model: the among system. For the future research directions, current research suggests broader investigation on the other local philosophers and their contributions related with inclusive education, for instance Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923), Hasyim Asy'ari (1871-1947), and R.A. Kartini (1879-1904). This is important to prepare teachers' candidates with Indonesian philosophy context in understanding their identity for stronger positive belief in implementing better inclusive education.

## REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA>
- Crockett, J. B. (2020). Inclusion as idea and its justification in law. In J. M. Kauffman (Ed.), *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives* (pp. 25–45). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429344039-2>
- Daga, A. T. (2022). Penguatan Peran Guru dalam Implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Dasar. *ELSE (Elementary School Education Journal): Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Sekolah Dasar*, 6(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.30651/ELSE.V6I1.9120>
- Hidayatullah, E. (2024). Rekonstruksi Konseptual Pendidikan Holistik: Pendekatan Fenomenologis terhadap Inklusivitas dan Kesadaran Sosial. *Jurnal Studi Edukasi Integratif*, 1(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.53696/jsei>
- Imray, P., & Colley, A. (2017). Inclusion is Dead: Long Live Inclusion. *Inclusion Is Dead: Long Live Inclusion*, 1–125. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315280059>
- Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 262/M/2022 tentang Perubahan atas Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 56/M/2022 tentang Pedoman Penerapan Kurikulum dalam Rangka Pemulihan Pembelajaran.

- Maag, J. W., Kauffman, J. M., & Simpson, R. L. (2019). The Amalgamation of Special Education? On Practices and Policies that may Render it Unrecognizable. *Exceptionality*, 27(3), 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2018.1425624>
- Oktavia, N., Puspita, N. A., & Mardicko, A. (2024). Menciptakan Lingkungan Pembelajaran Inklusif di Sekolah Dasar Sebagai Bagian dari Keberagaman dan Persatuan Melalui Kerangka Bhineka Tunggal IKA. *Cendikia: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran*, 2(7), 84–92. <https://doi.org/10.572349/CENDIKIA.V2I7.1879>
- Rofiah, K., Ngenge, R. T., Kholidya, C. F., & Ainin, I. K. (2024). Digital Literacy and Perception of Inclusive Education of Preservice Teachers at Indonesian Universities. *Communications in Computer and Information Science*, 2130 CCIS, 24–43. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-63235-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-63235-8_2)
- Sari, Z. P., Sarofah, R., & Fadli, Y. (2022). The Implementation of Inclusive Education in Indonesia: Challenges and Achievements. *Jurnal Public Policy*, 8(4), 264–269. <https://doi.org/10.35308/JPP.V8I4.5420>
- Septyah, R. (2024). Filosofi Pendidikan Inklusi dalam Praktik Pendidikan Abad Ke-21 di Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.20944/PREPRINTS202406.1663.V1>
- Undang-Undang Dasar Republik Indonesia 1945 Pasal 28C ayat (2). Sekretariat Negara. Jakarta.