



# Counseling in Inclusive Education: Challenges and the Role of School Counselors in Implementing Learning by Doing for Students with Special Needs in Junior High School

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate in depth the teaching strategies used by teachers to address the diversity of student characteristics in inclusive schools, particularly the implementation of teaching methods tailored to the individual needs of students with special needs (ABK). This study also seeks to identify the actual adjustments teachers make in the classroom, as well as the challenges and solutions that arise during the learning process. The study uses a qualitative case study design; data were collected through in-depth interviews with Special Assistance Teachers (GPK) and classroom observations. The results reveal five main findings: differences in student characteristics, learning design, teacher-parent collaboration, limited facilities, and the need to empower teaching staff. Solutions to these five challenges include awareness of the characteristics of inclusive students, preparation of SOPs for learning implementation, holding collaborative counseling meetings, using and innovating with learning tools, and training and empowering parents and teachers. This study provides practical contributions for teachers and guidance counselors and strengthens the theory of experiential learning in the context of inclusive education.

## KATA KUNCI

Konseling;  
Pendidikan inklusi;  
Guru pembimbing  
Sekolah;  
Learning by Doing;  
Siswa Berkebutuhan  
Khusus

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi secara mendalam strategi pengajaran yang digunakan guru dalam menghadapi keberagaman karakteristik siswa di sekolah inklusi, terutama terkait dengan penerapan metode pengajaran yang disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan individual siswa berkebutuhan khusus (ABK). Studi ini juga berusaha untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk penyesuaian nyata yang dilakukan guru di kelas, serta tantangan dan solusi yang muncul selama proses pembelajaran. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus; data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan Guru Pendamping Khusus (GPK) dan observasi kelas. Hasil menunjukkan lima temuan utama: perbedaan karakteristik siswa, perancangan pembelajaran, kolaborasi guru-orang tua, keterbatasan fasilitas, serta kebutuhan pemberdayaan tenaga pengajar. Solusi yang ditemukan dari kelima tantangan tersebut adalah Sadar akan ciri-ciri siswa inklusi, penyusunan SOP untuk pelaksanaan pembelajaran, mengadakan pertemuan konseling kolaboratif, penggunaan dan inovasi dalam sarana pembelajaran, Pelatihan dan penguatan bagi orang tua dan guru. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi praktis bagi guru dan BK serta penguatan teori pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman dalam konteks pendidikan inklusi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become an essential part of Indonesia's education system, aiming to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, can learn together in mainstream schools and have equal opportunities. The principle of inclusive education is not only about providing access but also about offering equitable educational services, where each student receives meaningful learning experiences and support tailored

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to their individual needs (Bah, 2025). However, in practice, implementing inclusive education still faces numerous complex challenges. Teachers in inclusive classrooms must manage differences in academic ability, student characteristics, communication styles, attention levels, intellectual barriers, and emotional and social issues (Dewi, 2025). All of these factors must be managed carefully to prevent some students from feeling left behind or neglected.

Teachers bear a significant responsibility to ensure that every child receives a learning experience aligned with their potential, despite this diversity (Buana et al., 2025). Nevertheless, field experience shows that some teachers may not have the appropriate approaches to address students with special needs. Many continue to rely on conventional teaching methods that focus heavily on academic achievement without considering students' real-life experiences. This often results in inclusive students being less actively engaged and struggling to understand the material. Therefore, to make learning more meaningful, a more flexible, innovative, and student-centered approach grounded in hands-on experience is necessary (Yunanti & Amaliyah, 2025).

Inclusive education is an educational system that requires students with special needs to learn in the nearest school alongside their peers, accommodating all students in the same classroom. It provides a variety of activities and experiences to ensure all students can participate (Pertwi et al., 2025). Thus, inclusive education offers significant benefits for all students, especially those with special needs (Yuona, 2019). In such contexts, a learning-by-doing approach may be particularly relevant and practical. This approach can provide concrete and meaningful learning experiences for students with diverse needs.

The learning-by-doing approach emerges as a beneficial alternative in these situations (Pratama & Zubaedi, 2025). It encourages students to learn through action, experimentation, practice, and reflection on their actions (Murliati & Zubaidah, 2025). Students with special needs often require concrete contexts, repetition, and direct interaction to learn effectively and meaningfully. By actively participating in the learning process, students do not merely receive material passively but have greater opportunities to understand concepts more deeply, build self-confidence, and experience the immediate benefits of learning.

A substantial body of national research has been conducted as attention to inclusive education has increased. Research by Pratiwi & Sukartono (2025) notes that teachers face numerous complex challenges, including a lack of supportive facilities, limitations in addressing diverse student needs, and difficulties in implementing inclusive teaching practices that require intensive collaboration among teachers, schools, and parents. Research by Kusmaryono (2023) highlights that teachers face challenges in designing learning activities that genuinely engage all students. Teacher training to adapt curricula and teaching strategies remains a key issue. The success of an inclusive classroom depends heavily on variables such as teacher attitudes, knowledge of inclusion, teacher-student interactions, and the availability of infrastructure.

Moreover, a study by Suparno, Praptiningrum, and Purwandari (2019) on slow learners indicates that inclusive education improves students' academic abilities in reading and arithmetic but not entirely in writing. This shows that while inclusive teaching methods can enhance certain academic aspects, they may not yet fully reach the potential of slow learners. Panjaitan (2023) found that this approach makes classrooms more active and engaging; students seem more involved because they learn from direct, practical experiences. However, the study did not thoroughly examine how teachers address students' diverse needs in inclusive classrooms, such as those that require extra repetition or customized learning materials.

Research by Salma & Rafianti (2024) shows that teachers face many challenges in adjusting methods and materials, communicating with students and parents, and managing inadequate facilities. To support students with intellectual disabilities, teachers attempt various strategies, such as combining audio-visual media, providing additional communication, and modifying materials. However, many tactics are improvised and often depend on limited resources.

SMP Negeri 4 Waru is a school that implements inclusive education, enabling students with special needs to learn alongside their peers. The school provides special classrooms for inclusive students, supported directly by Special Support Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus, GPK). In these classrooms, students are taught basic skills and simple knowledge according to their abilities. In addition to attending special classes, inclusive students also participate in general classroom activities with their peers. However, during regular lessons, they are not required to complete the same assignments as other students, as teachers make adjustments based on each child's needs and abilities.

Interviews conducted by the researcher with inclusive teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Waru revealed similar findings. Teachers stated that the main challenge in teaching students with special needs lies not only in limited facilities but also in adapting teaching methods to each student's characteristics and learning style. Teachers

explained that every child has different needs, so teaching methods must be flexible and regularly adjusted. Teachers try to develop Individual Learning Programs (Program Pembelajaran Individual, PPI) and modify the curriculum based on diagnostic assessments to address these differences. They also emphasized that communication between teachers and parents is crucial to ensure that learning habits developed at school continue at home.

Despite this, inclusive teachers acknowledged that no single method is truly effective for all students, as each child responds differently and has unique abilities. Interestingly, one teacher noted that the learning-by-doing approach is often the most effective way for students to understand lessons, as it allows them to learn through hands-on experiences and concrete activities. These findings reveal a gap between theory and practice: teachers have tried various strategies but still need approaches that fully meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, further research on implementing learning-by-doing as a teaching approach is needed to help teachers manage student diversity and create more meaningful learning experiences for students with special needs.

Although some studies have addressed teaching strategies in inclusive education, their focus has not been specific. Research by Wilma Rahmah Hidayati and Jhoni Warmansyah (2021) found that teachers design activities suitable for children's ages and abilities. However, the methodological discussion remained limited to generalized inclusive services (Hidayati & Warmansyah, 2021). Research by Immara'atul Mauliddiyah and Santy Dinar Permata (2025) highlighted that approaches such as curriculum differentiation, creative media, and teacher-parent collaboration are success factors, but did not deeply examine the application and adjustment of hands-on teaching methods according to the individual profiles of students with special needs (ABK) (Permata, 2025). Research by Lastini et al. (2024) shows that even with adaptive teaching, challenges such as teacher competence, curriculum adaptation, and facility support remain obstacles.

This study aims to investigate in depth the teaching strategies used by teachers to address the diversity of student characteristics in inclusive schools, particularly regarding the implementation of instructional methods tailored to the individual needs of students with special needs (ABK). This study also seeks to identify the concrete classroom adjustments made by teachers, as well as the challenges and solutions that arise during the teaching and learning process. This study will likely provide a deeper and more practical understanding of effective teaching strategies in an inclusive context. The results are also expected to serve as a practical reference for teachers, schools, and other stakeholders in developing adaptive and responsive teaching approaches for students with special needs, thereby supporting the creation of a fair and inclusive learning environment.

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative case study design. The qualitative approach is used to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and solutions experienced by Special Support Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus, GPK) in implementing the Learning by Doing teaching method for students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher can collect rich, in-depth data on the various challenges and strategies GPKs employ during the Learning by Doing process.

A case study design is used because this research focuses on a single location, SMP Negeri 4 Waru, and examines a limited number of subjects in depth. Considering the social, cultural, and psychological context of ongoing inclusive education practices, the case study allows the researcher to explore phenomena in real-life settings. This type of study is expected to yield relevant and meaningful insights into teachers' roles and challenges, as well as the role of counseling services in supporting students with special needs.

### **2.2 Research Subjects**

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Waru. The subjects of this study were Special Support Teachers (GPK) at SMP Negeri 4 Waru who teach students with special needs.

### **2.3 Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the GPKs. These interviews aimed to explore the challenges they face and the solutions they employ when implementing the Learning by Doing method for students with special needs.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study refers to the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: 1) Data Reduction; After data collection, relevant and meaningful data are selected and focused on aspects related to problem-solving, discovery, and interpretation to answer the research questions. The findings and their meanings are then systematically organized and simplified, with key points emphasized; 2) Data Display; Data can be presented as text, images, graphs, or tables. The goal of data display is to compile information in a way that illustrates the emerging situation. The researcher organizes narratives, matrices, or charts to facilitate understanding of the overall findings or specific components of the study; 3) Conclusion Drawing; 4) Conclusions are drawn throughout the research process, similar to data reduction. After sufficient data have been collected, preliminary conclusions are formulated. Once all data are fully gathered, conclusions are established.

## 2.5 Research Procedures

The research was conducted in four main stages: 1) Preparation Stage: This stage includes problem identification, determining the research focus, selecting the location, identifying informants, and developing the interview guide; 2) Implementation Stage: Data collection is carried out through in-depth interviews with two Special Support Teachers (GPK) at SMP Negeri 4 Waru; 3) Data Analysis Stage: Analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing; 4) Conclusion and Reporting Stage: The researcher interprets interview results, compiles research findings, and prepares a systematic report.

Each stage is conducted sequentially and interrelated to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges and solutions faced by inclusive teachers in applying the Learning by Doing method for students with special needs.

# 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1 Results

Based on interviews and observations, five main challenges and solutions were identified in implementing the Learning by Doing teaching method at SMP Negeri 4 Waru.

The first challenge reported by both the Special Support Teacher (GPK) and the school counselor (BK) is the diversity of characteristics and needs among inclusive students. According to GPK Rizky Melania Agustin, “the students’ varied characteristics, abilities, and interests” are the main challenge when teaching inclusive students. Similarly, BK teacher Budiyanto stated, “The main challenge is that students are all different, which requires extra patience and diligence from the teacher.” Both statements refer to the primary difficulty teachers face in addressing the differences in students’ characteristics and needs.

To overcome this, teachers strive to understand each student’s unique traits through initial assessments and classroom observations of learning behaviors. Teachers then develop Individual Learning Programs (IEPs) tailored to each student’s abilities, learning styles, and needs. In addition, the Learning by Doing approach is applied to provide direct learning experiences that help students understand concepts concretely and build confidence in their learning. Generally, inclusive students develop differently from typical students—not necessarily because they have a disability, but due to the special characteristics they possess. In Indonesia, students with special needs are categorized as visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically disabled, intellectually disabled, or emotionally/behaviorally challenged. Teachers need to understand the characteristics, abilities, and needs of students with special needs (Nuwa et al., 2023).

The second challenge is designing appropriate teaching methods for inclusive students. BK teacher Budiyanto explained that teachers address this by creating standard operating procedures (SOPs) for lessons, ensuring each step is carried out effectively. Lesson design is crucial for both regular and inclusive students. According to Yunita et al., planning is one of the most critical elements in the learning process, as it forms an integral part of education. Proper planning provides clear guidance for implementing instruction, ensuring that educational management operates more efficiently and effectively (Sari, 2023).

The third challenge is collaboration between parents and teachers, which often arises in inclusive education. Some parents may not fully understand the importance of their role in their child’s learning process. At SMP Negeri 4 Waru, this challenge has been addressed through collaboration among teachers, parents, and school counselors. The BK and GPK teachers explained, “There are counseling sessions involving students, parents, BK, and GPK.” The school regularly conducts collaborative counseling meetings to align teachers’ and parents’ perspectives on student progress. According to Sa’bna, parental involvement is a driving factor and determinant in the development of



inclusive students. Parents need to be directly involved in decision-making, from school selection to policies and actions affecting their children. Teachers and parents must collaborate, sharing information regarding student progress, skills, motivation, attention, social acceptance, and emotional adjustment. Teachers act as mentors at school, while parents act as mentors at home (Sa'bna, 2019).

The fourth challenge is the school's facilities for inclusive education. BK teacher Budiyanto stated, "Facilities still need improvement, although the curriculum is quite good." The school works to optimize existing resources by creating simple teaching aids and using digital media as alternatives. Teachers also take the initiative to innovate by designing Learning by Doing activities that rely less on physical resources yet still provide authentic learning experiences, such as educational games or skill-based projects. Cindy et al. note that inclusive education requires extensive facilities to ensure students feel comfortable in school. The necessary facilities must be tailored to each student's specific needs (Novriani et al., 2023).

The fifth challenge is to empower and equip teachers and parents for inclusive education. SMP Negeri 4 Waru addresses this by providing annual training, as GPK teacher Rizky Melania Agustin explained: "The school holds annual training on inclusive education." BK teacher Budiyanto added, "Teacher training is conducted regularly and even involves experts in the field." The school routinely organizes workshops for teachers and informational sessions for parents regarding inclusive education approaches. The goal is to strengthen students' understanding of their characteristics and of effective Learning by Doing techniques.

In inclusive education, the principal, as the highest decision-maker in the school, strongly influences the institution's direction and goals. Teachers and homeroom teachers play a crucial role in motivating students at the start of lessons, giving extra attention to inclusive students compared to regular students, and guiding them during learning activities. Parents support their children by providing attention and proper guidance while their children learn at school. Inclusive students' parents need to be directly involved in all decisions, from school placement to collaboration with the school. Effective alignment among teachers, parents, and school leadership is essential for successful inclusive education, and this alignment requires all parties to understand the inclusive learning system. Training and support extend not only to teachers but also to all stakeholders actively involved in facilitating the learning success of inclusive students (Liza et al., 2024).

Based on these five challenges, SMP Negeri 4 Waru has implemented various solutions tailored to the needs of inclusive students. The Learning by Doing method is considered one of the most effective approaches. By actively engaging students in the learning process and stimulating their curiosity about the subject matter, this method helps inclusive students understand lessons more concretely and meaningfully. Active participation and increased confidence in classroom learning activities have also been observed as a result of this approach.

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of counseling in inclusive education plays a strategic role in supporting the application of Learning by Doing for students with special needs at the junior high school level. Counselors and school guidance teachers serve as facilitators, helping subject teachers understand students' individual characteristics, including learning needs, psychological barriers, and preferred learning styles. Through comprehensive counseling assessments, teachers gain a more accurate understanding of students with special needs' emotional, social, and cognitive conditions, enabling experiential learning to be contextually adapted (Ardana et al., 2025). These findings emphasize that collaboration among counselors, teachers, and the school administration forms the foundation for the success of inclusive education focused on direct student experiences.

Learning by Doing, a theory developed by Dewey, is a teaching model in which students actively participate in the learning process (Surahman & Fauziati, 2021). This model stimulates students' curiosity about unfamiliar topics, thereby encouraging active engagement, particularly among inclusive students. It is highly effective for developing learning skills and exploring students' potential. Furthermore, the benefits of this teaching model extend beyond students, as teachers also gain knowledge, skills, and practical experience (Yusuf, 2022).

Interviews revealed that this teaching method is particularly effective for inclusive students. GPK teacher Rizky Melania Agustin stated, "The Learning by Doing method is very effective because it provides students with direct experience. For example, applying skills in activities such as cooking classes or ironing, and applying knowledge, such as teaching counting using fingers during life skills activities. Inclusive students respond enthusiastically and eagerly because the method is straightforward and hands-on."

Inclusive students require special attention from multiple stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents, and the broader environment (Affandi & Husaini, 2025). In inclusive education, the active involvement of each of these components significantly contributes to students' learning success. According to Firman et al. in their journal

article Measuring the Success of Inclusive Education: Developing Performance Indicators and Evaluation, the success of inclusive learning is influenced by several key indicators, each of which must be carefully evaluated to achieve optimal learning outcomes (Firdausyi et al., 2021). The Learning by Doing method allows inclusive students to receive comprehensive guidance from teachers, as it requires active, focused participation in the learning process.

However, the study also identified several significant challenges in implementing Learning by Doing for students with special needs. These challenges include limited teacher understanding of the characteristics of students with special needs, insufficient specialized training in inclusive teaching strategies, and inadequate supporting facilities and infrastructure. Additionally, teachers' administrative burdens and high student-to-teacher ratios hinder the optimization of individualized guidance. Within the context of counseling, another challenge is the suboptimal integration of counseling services into lesson planning (Augustine et al., 2024), which means the Learning by Doing approach does not always fully account for each student's psychological readiness and developmental needs.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening the counselor's role in supporting teachers through consultation, advocacy, and ongoing guidance. Counselors are expected to assist teachers in designing Learning by Doing strategies that are adaptive, flexible, and student-centered, taking into account the individual conditions of students with special needs. Furthermore, continuous teacher training in inclusive education, the development of individual learning programs, and fostering an inclusive school culture are strategic steps that need to be undertaken. With practical, collaborative counseling support, the implementation of Learning by Doing not only enhances active participation among students with special needs but also promotes independence, confidence, and social skills in an inclusive educational environment.

#### 4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have significant implications for guidance and counseling within the context of inclusive education. In general, the results reinforce the Learning by Doing theory, which emphasizes the importance of hands-on experience in learning, enabling students with special needs to understand the material better and build confidence through practical activities. In practice, this study serves as a reference for special education teachers and school counselors (BK teachers) to implement participatory, creative, and student-centered teaching methods, making the learning process more meaningful.

From a managerial perspective, the study highlights the importance of school principals providing support through training programs, adequate facilities, and strengthened collaboration among teachers, parents, and counselors to create an inclusive learning environment. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that a qualitative case study approach is practical for understanding the challenges and solutions teachers face when teaching inclusive students. This approach can also serve as a foundation for future research aimed at developing experiential learning strategies in inclusive schools.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that implementing the Learning by Doing method in inclusive education at SMP Negeri 4 Waru has a positive impact on students with special needs (ABK) engagement and understanding during the learning process. Through this method, students learn through direct experience, which contributes to a concrete understanding of concepts and enhances motivation to learn. However, in practice, teachers face various challenges, including differences in students' characteristics and needs, limited facilities, and the necessity for ongoing collaboration among teachers, parents, and the school.

Special education teachers and school counselors play a key role in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The success of experiential learning in inclusive classrooms depends on school support, including teacher training, adequate facilities, and cross-stakeholder collaboration. This study confirms that Learning by Doing can be an effective strategy in inclusive education when supported by a deep understanding of student characteristics and sufficient managerial support. It also contributes to the field of guidance and counseling by providing insights for developing services that help teachers manage the dynamics of inclusive classroom learning. Inclusive education is expected to provide equitable and meaningful learning opportunities for all students through adaptive, collaborative, and experience-oriented approaches.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author takes full responsibility for all stages of the research, from conceptualizing the study to collecting and analyzing data, and writing and preparing this research article..

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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