

Inclusive Preparing PGMI Students for Inclusive Classrooms in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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Abstract. Inclusive education has become a global priority, necessitating that teacher education institutions equip prospective educators with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to meet the diverse needs of learners. In Indonesia, the PGMI (Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) program plays a strategic role in shaping inclusive classroom practices in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. However, empirical studies exploring how PGMI students are prepared for inclusive classrooms are limited. This study aims to explore the experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical readiness of PGMI students in preparing inclusive learning environments.

Using a qualitative research design, this study utilized in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving PGMI students and lecturers at an Islamic higher education institution. Data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns related to inclusive pedagogy, teaching strategies, and professional attitudes toward learners with diverse abilities.

The findings indicate that PGMI students demonstrate greater awareness of inclusive education principles, particularly those related to differentiated and collaborative learning, as well as values-based teaching rooted in Islamic perspectives. However, challenges remain, including limited practical exposure to inclusive classrooms, inadequate integration of inclusive education content across courses, and a gap between theoretical understanding and teaching practice. Participants emphasized the need for experiential learning, reflective teaching practices, and stronger collaboration between universities and inclusive madrasahs.

This study contributes to the discourse on innovative teacher education by offering insights into the development of inclusive competencies in PGMI programs. The findings suggest that strengthening inclusive pedagogy in PGMI requires a redesign of the curriculum, practice-oriented learning, and an institutional commitment to inclusive values. These implications are relevant for policymakers, teacher educators, and researchers seeking to shape the future of inclusive learning in madrasah-based education systems.

Keywords: *inclusive education; teacher education; PGMI students; inclusive pedagogy; Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah); qualitative study.*

Abbreviations: PGMI = Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is seen as a fundamental approach to guaranteeing every child's right to receive fair and quality educational services.[1], [2], [3] This agenda has evolved in line with growing global awareness of the importance of equality and justice in education. Inclusive education rejects exclusionary and discriminatory practices in any form.[4], [5] Therefore, the education system is required to transform to serve all students equally.

The principle of inclusivity requires schools to respond proactively and sustainably to student diversity.[6], [7] This diversity includes differences in academic ability, social and cultural background, and special learning needs. Schools are no longer positioned as selective institutions, but rather as adaptive shared learning spaces.[8], [9] Therefore, learning approaches must be tailored to students' diverse characteristics.

Teachers play a central role in realizing inclusive education through daily learning practices. The successful implementation of inclusive education is greatly influenced by teachers' ability to manage student differences pedagogically.[10], [11] Teachers are required not only to master the material but also to be sensitive to students' learning needs. Without teacher preparedness, the principle of inclusivity is difficult to effectively implement. Teachers' pedagogical and professional competence is the main foundation for creating an inclusive classroom.[12], [13] In addition to technical competence, teachers' attitudes toward student diversity influence the classroom learning climate. An open and non-

discriminatory attitude contributes to the creation of a safe learning environment. Therefore, teacher education needs to pay serious attention to fostering inclusive attitudes.

In Indonesia, the commitment to inclusive education is reflected in various national regulations and policies. These policies encourage regular schools to accept and serve students with diverse needs. Inclusive education is seen as part of efforts to achieve national educational equality.[14] Implementing this policy requires institutional readiness and human resources at the school level. Madrasahs, as part of the national education system, play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education. Islamic educational institutions serve not only as centers for the transmission of knowledge but also as spaces for the development of human values.[15], [16] The principle of inclusivity aligns with Islamic teachings, which emphasize justice and respect for others. Therefore, madrasahs have a strong moral legitimacy to implement inclusive education.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, as Islamic basic education institutions, have a strategic responsibility in shaping students' character from an early age. At this level, values of acceptance of differences begin to be instilled through learning experiences. Madrasahs are expected to integrate Islamic values with equitable learning practices.[17], [18] The role of teachers is crucial in this process. The responsibility of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools) extends beyond academic achievement. These institutions also play a role in instilling the values of compassion, justice, and respect for human dignity.[19] These values are the fundamental principles of inclusive education. Therefore, inclusive education should be an integral part of madrasah educational practices. As student diversity increases, the preparedness of madrasah teachers to manage inclusive classrooms becomes a pressing issue.[20], [21] Teachers are required to adapt learning strategies to student needs. This preparedness encompasses knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. Without such preparedness, learning risks being ineffective for some students.

The Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) plays a strategic role in preparing prospective madrasah teachers. This program serves as an initial vehicle for developing teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. PGMI is expected to instill a deep understanding of student diversity. Therefore, an inclusive education orientation needs to be part of the study program's vision. PGMI focuses not only on mastering teaching materials but also on developing the professional attitudes and values of prospective teachers.[22] An inclusive attitude is a crucial element in the professionalism of madrasah teachers.[23] Teacher education needs to be directed at building awareness of moral responsibility towards all students. This requires a comprehensive approach to teacher education.

Prospective elementary school teachers are expected to be able to design learning that respects individual differences. Differentiated learning is one relevant approach to addressing this need. Through this approach, teachers can adapt learning materials, processes, and assessments. This ability needs to be developed during teacher training. In addition to designing learning, prospective teachers are also required to create a participatory classroom climate.[24] Inclusive classrooms position students as active participants in learning.[25] Collaborative interactions between students foster mutual understanding and appreciation. This learning environment supports students' academic and social development.

Various studies show that teacher education still faces challenges in preparing prospective teachers for inclusive classrooms. These challenges are found in various countries with different education systems. This demonstrates that the issue of inclusive education is complex and multidimensional. Teacher education needs to address these challenges systematically. One major challenge is limited practical experience in inclusive schools. Many prospective teachers lack adequate opportunities to interact directly with students with diverse needs. As a result, their preparedness is theoretical. Practical experience plays a crucial role in building prospective teachers' confidence. The dominance of theoretical learning in teacher education also hinders the development of inclusive competencies. Theory without adequate practical experience is difficult to implement effectively. This imbalance has the potential to weaken the professional readiness of prospective teachers. Therefore, teacher education needs to balance theory and practice.

The integration of inclusivity issues into teacher education curricula is often not systematically implemented. Inclusivity is not always positioned as a core competency. As a result, the strengthening of inclusive competencies occurs in a piecemeal manner. This situation requires continuous evaluation and curriculum development.

This situation has the potential to create a gap between conceptual understanding and learning practices. Students may understand the principles of inclusivity but struggle to apply them in the classroom. This gap impacts the quality of educational services. Therefore, teacher education needs to be designed to be more applicable.

In Islamic education, particularly in the PGMI program, empirical studies on student readiness to face inclusive classrooms are still limited. Existing research focuses more on policy or practicing teachers.

However, PGMI students are the prospective teachers who will face these challenges. This gap in research needs to be addressed immediately.

The learning experiences and pedagogical readiness of PGMI students require in-depth study. Understanding student experiences provides an important foundation for developing teacher education. Responsive teacher education requires strong empirical data. Therefore, this research is relevant and significant. This study aims to explore the experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical readiness of PGMI students in preparing for inclusive learning in Islamic elementary schools. This study also seeks to identify the challenges students face during the teacher education process. The research findings are expected to serve as a basis for strengthening madrasah teacher education. Thus, the PGMI program can contribute more effectively to realizing inclusive education.

METHODS

Study area

This research was conducted in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education (PGMI) Study Program at an Islamic religious university in Indonesia. This study program provides education for prospective elementary Madrasah teachers, aimed at strengthening pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies. The research location was selected based on the consideration that the PGMI program is developing an academic policy direction responsive to inclusive education issues and is committed to continuous curriculum evaluation and development.

The research subjects included PGMI students who had taken education and learning courses, as well as lecturers involved in teaching pedagogy and teaching practice courses. The students were selected because they are prospective elementary Madrasah teachers who will directly encounter diverse learners, while the lecturers were selected to gain insight into the policies, learning practices, and approaches implemented in the prospective teacher education process.

Procedures

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory design. Qualitative research aims to understand a phenomenon in depth through the perspectives, experiences, and meanings of participants in their natural contexts.[26], [27] This approach is not oriented toward hypothesis testing, but rather toward uncovering social reality holistically through the interpretation of data obtained from various sources.[28] Meanwhile, an exploratory design is used when a phenomenon still requires a more comprehensive understanding, particularly to identify issues, needs, and development opportunities that have not been widely studied.[29], [30] Therefore, exploratory research is highly relevant for generating initial information that can form the basis for developing policies, models, and curricula.

In this study, an exploratory design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical readiness of students in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) in preparing inclusive learning in elementary madrasahs. This research is a preliminary study aimed at identifying the actual conditions for implementing inclusive education in the PGMI curriculum and learning process. The research findings are expected to provide an empirical basis for reviewing, refining, and developing the PGMI curriculum to be more responsive to the needs of inclusive education and aligned with the competency demands of 21st-century teachers.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, learning observations, and document analysis.[31] Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with students and lecturers to explore their understanding of inclusive education, their learning experiences, the learning strategies they implemented, and the challenges they faced in preparing lessons that accommodate student diversity. Observations were conducted during lectures and teaching practices to observe the implementation of pedagogical strategies that support differentiated learning, collaborative learning, and the internalization of inclusive values. Document analysis was conducted on the study program curriculum, Semester Learning Plans (RPS), course syllabi, and various other academic documents related to strengthening inclusive education.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the research employed source and technical triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions so that emerging patterns could be systematically interpreted.[32], [33] All research procedures were carried out in accordance with the principles of research ethics, including participant consent (informed consent), confidentiality of respondent identities, and responsible use of data for academic purposes.[34]

Data analysis

The data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis method that aims to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) emerging from the data. Thematic analysis allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives by organizing the data into themes relevant to the research focus. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the exploratory research objective, which is to comprehensively explore the pedagogical readiness of PGMI students in preparing for inclusive learning in Islamic elementary schools.

The analysis process was conducted simultaneously from the beginning of data collection until the study's completion. The initial stage began with transcribing all interview results verbatim and compiling field notes based on observations and document analysis.[35] The researchers then reread all data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and context of the information obtained.

Next, an open coding process was conducted, assigning codes to data units that were significant in line with the research focus. Coding aimed to identify various aspects related to students' pedagogical readiness, understanding of inclusive education, learning experiences during lectures, learning strategies, and professional attitudes toward student diversity. Related codes were then grouped into broader categories before being developed into main themes that represented important patterns in the data. The theme formation process was carried out iteratively through constant comparative analysis, ensuring that each resulting theme was fully supported by empirical evidence from various data sources.[36] Throughout the process, researchers continuously reflected and refined the categories and themes until a consistent thematic structure was achieved that adequately explained the phenomena under study.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research results, technical and source triangulation were applied by comparing findings obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Document analysis of the Study Program curriculum, Semester Learning Plans (RPS), syllabi, and other academic documents was used to confirm and strengthen the findings obtained from the field data. Furthermore, the researcher maintained consistent interpretation through discussions and review of the analysis results, ensuring that the findings had good credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

The final stage of the analysis involved interpreting the themes that emerged to explain the relationships between the findings and address the research focus. This interpretation focused on identifying strengths, challenges, and the need to strengthen the curriculum and learning practices within the PGMI Study Program to prepare prospective elementary school teachers with inclusive pedagogical competencies. The findings of this study are expected to provide an empirical basis for the evaluation and development of a curriculum that is more responsive to the principles of inclusive education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that PGMI students have a fairly good initial understanding of the concept of inclusive education, particularly regarding the principles of justice, respect for differences, and educational services for all students. This understanding is gained through educational lectures, class discussions, and exposure to Islamic values that emphasize mercy and mutual benefit. However, the depth of students' understanding and readiness to implement them still shows significant variation.

Interview Results and Document Analysis

To strengthen the findings, student and lecturer interviews were analyzed through source triangulation, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Triangulation results of research data from interviews and document studies.

Aspects Studied	PGMI Students	PGMI Lecturers	Academic Documents (Curriculum & Lesson Plan)
Understanding of inclusive education	Understood as equal service for all students, including students with special needs	Understood as equal service for all students, including students with special needs	The term "inclusive" appears only in a few courses.
Inclusive learning strategies	Mention differentiation and group work	Emphasize active and collaborative learning	Inclusive strategies are not explicitly structured
Practical experience	Minimal experience in inclusive schools	Field practice is not specifically directed at inclusive MI	PPL does not require inclusive locations

Note: Interview results and document studies.

The table shows a clear agreement between student and lecturer perceptions regarding the importance of inclusive education, but there is a gap between the ideal goals and the structural support within the

curriculum. Academic documents indicate that inclusive education has not yet become mainstream in learning planning in the PGMI program.

PGMI Students' Understanding of Inclusive Education

Most student informants defined inclusive education as an approach aimed at providing fair and equal learning opportunities for all students without exception. This understanding encompasses acceptance of diverse learning abilities, including the presence of students with special needs in regular classes. Students demonstrated an awareness that inclusive education requires tailoring learning services so that each student can participate optimally according to their individual potential.

In the students' view, the role of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers is no longer limited to delivering learning materials, but also includes the function of a facilitator of learning. Teachers are perceived as having the responsibility to design and manage learning that adapts to differences in abilities, learning characteristics, and individual needs of students. This understanding reflects a shift in students' perspectives on the professional role of teachers in diverse classrooms.

A lecturer in a pedagogy course corroborated these findings by stating that students' understanding of inclusive education had begun to develop through the lecture process. However, the lecturer also assessed that this understanding remained at a conceptual level and had not yet been fully reflected in students' practical skills. This indicates that the internalization of the values and practices of inclusive education still requires reinforcement through more applied and reflective learning experiences.

Inclusive Learning Strategies Understood by Students

Students in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program demonstrated a fairly good understanding of various learning strategies deemed relevant to supporting inclusive learning. They were familiar with differentiated learning approaches, heterogeneous student grouping, and the use of diverse learning media as an effort to address differences in student learning abilities. This knowledge was acquired through educational lectures and academic discussions, which emphasized the importance of respecting student diversity in the learning process.

However, students' understanding of inclusive learning strategies remained at the conceptual level. In practice, students encountered difficulties when asked to design structured learning consistent with the principles of inclusivity. This difficulty was evident in the learning planning process, particularly in determining appropriate adjustments to materials, methods, and assessments to accommodate the varying learning abilities of students in the classroom.

A more complex challenge arose when students were faced with learning situations in regular classrooms involving students with special needs. Students expressed limitations in identifying specific learning needs and determining appropriate strategies to support the active participation of all students. These findings indicate that although students had initial knowledge of inclusive learning strategies, they still needed more intensive mentoring and practical experience to develop their implementation skills in inclusive learning.

Challenges in Preparing Inclusive Classrooms

PGMI students stated that one of the main obstacles in preparing themselves as prospective inclusive teachers is the limited opportunities for direct involvement in learning practices in elementary Islamic schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) that implement inclusive education. Students' learning experiences are primarily gained through classroom lectures, so their understanding of inclusive education tends to be conceptual. This situation results in students not yet having a complete picture of the dynamics of classroom learning, which is characterized by diverse student abilities and learning needs.

Furthermore, students believe that theoretical learning still dominates over field-based learning. Although inclusive education material has been introduced in several courses, students feel they have not received adequate opportunities to apply this knowledge in real-life learning situations. This limitation has resulted in low student confidence in designing and implementing learning that accommodates the diverse characteristics of students in elementary Islamic schools.

These students' views are reinforced by lecturers' admissions that the integration of inclusive education into the PGMI curriculum has not been comprehensive. Some courses do not explicitly include inclusive competencies as core learning outcomes, resulting in student competency development occurring in a separate and unstructured manner. As a result, the formation of students' readiness as prospective inclusive Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers still requires strengthening through improvements in curriculum design and increasing practical learning experiences in the field.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that the PGMI Study Program has a foundation of values and initial knowledge regarding inclusive education. This foundation is primarily built through the integration of Islamic values that emphasize justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity.[37], [38] These values align with the basic principles of inclusive education, which view every student as an individual with equal rights to receive educational services.[39], [40] Islamic education, in this regard, provides a strong normative foundation for the development of diversity-friendly learning practices.

The integration of Islamic values in PGMI teacher education reinforces the view that inclusive education does not conflict with the identity of Islamic education, but rather reinforces it. The humanistic approach in Islamic education positions students as subjects whose existence must be respected, both in terms of their abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs.[41], [42] This demonstrates that philosophically, Islamic education has great potential to become a driving force for inclusive practices in Islamic elementary schools.

However, research findings also reveal that PGMI students' readiness to prepare inclusive classes still faces significant challenges. These challenges primarily relate to limited practical experience in directly dealing with student diversity. Teacher education theory emphasizes that field experience is a key element in developing the professional competence of prospective teachers.[43], [44] Without adequate practical experience, students' understanding of inclusive education tends to be conceptual.

The gap between theoretical mastery and implementation skills is a key issue identified in this study. PGMI students generally understand the principles of inclusive education, but struggle to apply them to practical learning strategies. This finding aligns with the view that transferring pedagogical knowledge into practice requires reflective practice and repeated experience.[45], [46] This lack of preparedness has the potential to hinder the effectiveness of learning in classrooms with diverse student populations.

The implementation of inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to be able to design differentiated learning, manage social interactions in the classroom, and adapt assessments to student needs. Inclusive pedagogy theory emphasizes the importance of teacher flexibility in responding to variations in student learning abilities.[47] However, this study indicates that PGMI students have not yet fully mastered these skills in practice.

The research findings also indicate that the PGMI curriculum structure does not fully support the systematic strengthening of inclusive competencies. Inclusive education still appears partially in several courses and has not been integrated as a core competency of the study program. In fact, curriculum development theory emphasizes that cross-disciplinary competencies, such as inclusivity, need to be integrated comprehensively into the curriculum.

As a preliminary study for the curriculum review, the results of this study emphasize the urgency of restructuring the PGMI curriculum. This restructuring is necessary so that inclusive education is not merely understood as a normative discourse, but becomes a professional skill internalized by prospective teachers.[48], [49] A competency-based curriculum approach requires alignment between objectives, materials, learning processes, and evaluation.

Strengthening inclusive education within the PGMI curriculum can be achieved through the development of specific courses that discuss inclusive education in depth. Furthermore, the theme of inclusivity needs to be integrated into all education and learning courses. Curriculum integration theory asserts that strengthening values and competencies will be more effective if implemented sustainably and across courses.[50]

Placing students in field practicums at Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) that implement inclusive learning is also an important strategy supported by the findings of this study. Direct experience allows students to develop pedagogical sensitivity and adaptive skills in dealing with student diversity.[48] The experiential learning approach emphasizes that the most effective learning occurs when students are directly involved in real-life situations.

Thus, the development of inclusive education within the PGMI program not only plays a role in improving students' professional readiness as prospective teachers, but also contributes to improving the quality of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah educational services, which uphold the values of justice and respect for student diversity. The findings of this study emphasize that strengthening inclusive education in teacher education is a strategic investment for the future of inclusive and equitable Islamic basic education.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that students in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education (PGMI) study program have a basic understanding of the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize respect for student diversity, fairness in educational services, and the application of Islamic values oriented toward compassion and mutual benefit. This understanding is formed through lectures and academic interactions that instill the importance of the teacher's role in creating a welcoming learning environment for all students.

However, PGMI students' pedagogical readiness to prepare inclusive classrooms is still at an early stage and tends to be conceptual. Students are familiar with learning strategies that support inclusivity, such as differentiated and collaborative learning, but their ability to apply these strategies in practice remains limited. This indicates a gap between theoretical mastery and practical skills in managing classrooms with diverse learning abilities.

The research also indicates that limited practical experience in elementary Madrasahs that provide inclusive education is a major factor contributing to students' low self-confidence in managing inclusive classrooms. Learning that is predominantly theoretical in nature does not fully provide students with the opportunity to develop reflective and adaptive competencies as prospective inclusive teachers.

As a preliminary study for the curriculum review, this research emphasizes the importance of strengthening inclusive education within the PGMI program through the development of a more integrated and practice-oriented curriculum. These efforts include strengthening inclusive content in education courses, providing field-based learning experiences, and strengthening collaboration between universities and Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) that implement inclusive learning. Therefore, improving the quality of inclusive Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teacher education requires a sustained institutional commitment to ensure that PGMI graduates possess adequate pedagogical, professional, and value readiness to realize equitable learning and respect student diversity.

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