

## **COLLEGIAL LEADERSHIP: AN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN MUHAMMADIYAH SCHOOLS**

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**Abstract.** This research aims to describe the form of collegial leadership as an effort to optimize education for students with special needs in Muhammadiyah schools. Furthermore, this study employs an ethnographic approach. The research locus is SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. Data were collected through observation and unstructured interviews with key informants. After data collection, it was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis model. The results of the research indicate that SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang implements several programs related to the education of Children with Special Needs (CSN) that align with the principles of collegial leadership. These include making regular students shadow teachers, involving all teachers and school staff, and engaging CSN parents in various activities. However, the education of disabled individuals in the school faces challenges in several aspects, such as continuous curriculum development, negative societal perceptions, and financing.

**Keywords:** *Collegial Leadership, Inclusive Education, Children with Special Needs (CSN), Disabilities, Muhammadiyah Schools*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Collegialism, Progressivism, and Autonomy as the Distinctive Features of the Muhammadiyah Educational Movement, which have subsequently become organizational culture in nearly all educational institutions under its umbrella (Puspitasari & Sulaiman, 2020). The concept of collegialism is indeed a manifestation of the teachings of the founder of this organization, KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who emphasized a collective missionary movement founded on progressive and modern thinking (Fuad, 2004). Collegialism also represents the pinnacle of organizational consciousness within every member of Muhammadiyah, as they firmly believe that this principle is closely connected to the noble message in Surah Ali 'Imran; 104. This verse conveys the message to always prioritize unity over individual interests, serving as the philosophical foundation for the movement, allowing it to overcome various dynamics for over a century (Qodir et al., 2020). In the effort to establish a sound educational institution, the rationale of collegialism also generally permeates every policy and action in Muhammadiyah schools. Collegialism is understood as a sense of binding, an equality of responsibility, and mutual ownership between leaders and members of the organization (Printy, 2009).

The provision of fair education for individuals with disabilities cannot be entrusted to just one or two teachers; it requires awareness and involvement from all parties, including special

education teachers, general subject teachers, staff, and parents, who must collaborate closely (Triyanto et al., 2022). All parties must kindle awareness regarding the education of special needs children. The principle of humanity serves as the most crucial foundation for this noble endeavor. This commitment is necessary to eliminate the feelings of isolation commonly experienced by most disabled students and their parents (Ainscow, 2020).

Regarding education for individuals with disabilities, it is fundamentally mandated by National Minister of Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on inclusive education for students with special needs who have the potential for intelligence and/or exceptional talents, as outlined in Article 1. Thus, it is imperative that schools in Indonesia, both public and private, present themselves as child-friendly institutions. Inclusive education policies require support from three crucial elements: structural (*stakeholders*), social (*society*), and emotional (*heartfelt involvement*) (Nikula et al., 2021); (Triyanto et al., 2022). The challenges in implementing child-friendly (inclusive) education are not unique to Indonesia; the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has also struggled with this issue (Khaleel et al., 2021). He argues that the role of an institution's leader is essential in achieving quality educational services for special needs children, given their complete authority over an institution's policy decisions (Khaleel et al., 2021).

Equity in access to education for children with special needs continues to face various challenges, including the availability of capable human resources, limited learning facilities, equal and fair learning service provision, training for schools offering inclusive education services, and the empathy of various parties, which remains relatively minor (Triyanto et al., 2022). Triyanto's scholarly exposition offers valuable insights into the challenges of inclusive education in Indonesia. Schools also require the involvement of various stakeholders in monitoring the development of students with special needs; in this regard, school principals need to engage existing structures such as special education teacher teams and other teachers (Lüddeckens et al., 2022).

In Malang, a city renowned for its educational institutions, the performance of inclusive education has not exhibited remarkable progress up to 2023. The number of schools consistently providing education for children with special needs in Malang does not match the number of students with special needs. This discrepancy arises because providing education for children with special needs demands substantial resources and efforts. Moreover, government funding falls short of the required amount. Furthermore, there is still no clarity regarding the career progression of Special Needs Teachers (GPK). They are unable to attain the certification allowances coveted by all teachers, resulting in relatively low salaries. The Malang City Education and Culture Office has indicated that, up to now, there is no specific policy for schools that offer education for children with special needs, such as GPK allowances, School Operational Assistance (BOS) Performance, and so forth. Career progression and financing remain unresolved issues. The number of GPKs in each school does not match the number of students with special needs, and a culture of inclusivity has not been holistically established in schools. Consequently, the acceptance of regular (normal) students and parents is not yet fully inclusive (Tholkhah, 2013). Negative societal perceptions also pose challenges in providing equitable education for disabled students (Sari & Saleh, 2020).

SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang has attempted to incorporate the tradition of collegialism in Muhammadiyah as a guiding principle for providing education to students with special needs. The principles of equal rights and responsibilities and a sense of ownership, which form the basic tenets of collegialism, are embodied in every policy related to education for disabled students at the school. The results have been quite positive, as evidenced by the selection of this school as a reference inclusive school in Malang, and most importantly, the consciousness of all school members in serving special needs children has been considerably nurtured.

In conclusion, this research seeks to answer two key questions: (1) how is the implementation of collegial leadership principles able to provide quality education for students with special needs? (2) What issues can be resolved through the implementation of collegial leadership principles? Therefore, the findings of the research conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge for other schools, even beyond Muhammadiyah-affiliated institutions.

## **B. METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method based on ethnography. The ethnographic approach was chosen because the researcher was extensively involved in the research locus, interacting with disabled students on a daily basis for more than three years. Data were gathered by examining various school policy documents related to education for disabled students and previous research results related to collegial leadership. These previous studies were accessed through Google Scholar and Mendeley. Subsequently, the researcher conducted observations while positioning themselves as a participant observer to authentically capture the on-site conditions (Mertens, 2009). Unstructured interviews were also conducted to enrich perspectives, with key informants including teachers, school committee members, and disabled students. The collected data and information were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis model, including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research steps undertaken were as follows:

1. The researcher collected various research articles related to the research title, collecting at least 20 scholarly articles discussing inclusive education and collegial leadership.
2. The researcher selected 10 articles published in reputable journals for in-depth examination.
3. The researcher documented findings obtained through observations and interviews.
4. The researcher conducted data reduction, where important data were elaborated, and information deemed irrelevant to the research was reduced.
5. After the data reduction process, the researcher performed data coding.
6. Subsequently, the researcher organized the data into a framework for writing.

Finally, the researcher compiled the complete research findings into the form of a scholarly article.

## **C. RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### **Collegial Leadership in SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang**

The collegial leadership model has seamlessly integrated into the operational framework of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang, facilitating the creation of an inclusive and accommodating educational environment for all students, including those with special needs or disabilities. Since 2012, this educational institution has been actively engaged in the implementation of inclusive education services, currently catering to the educational needs of 28 students with diverse disabilities. These disabilities encompass a wide range, from slow learners and cognitive impairments to autism, ADHD, dyslexia, physical disabilities, and emotional impairments. It is noteworthy that the school has demonstrated the capability to address nearly all forms of disabilities, with the exception of visual impairments, due to the lack of specialized facilities and educators for this particular group.

In the context of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang, a collegial leadership approach emerges as the linchpin in fostering an environment conducive to inclusive education. Parents find solace in enrolling their children in this institution due to the inclusive atmosphere nurtured by the collegial

approach. Special needs students, too, are able to learn and interact harmoniously with their peers and educators. Emanating from this approach are several key facets of collegial leadership:

1. Involvement of all subject teachers: The engagement of all subject teachers in the support and oversight of the routines of students with special needs underscores the collective commitment of the educators in executing inclusive education.
2. Positioning regular students as shadow teachers: The active involvement of regular students as "shadow teachers" or mentors for their peers with special needs is a pivotal strategy. It not only promotes positive interactions but also enhances understanding and collaborative learning.
3. Involvement of parents of students with special needs in every inclusive program: Actively engaging parents in the educational process is a crucial step. Parents play an active role in supporting their child's development and collaborate with the school to ensure the success of their children.

Effective communication forms the bedrock of supporting these collegial leadership practices. Effective communication between educators, parents, and students with special needs fosters positive emotional relationships. The inclusive education services at this school are also recognized as an instrumental facet of collegial leadership, as they maintain customer satisfaction (*students and parents*) while exemplifying the dedicated commitment of the educators.

These findings illustrate that the implementation of the collegial leadership approach in this school has resulted in the establishment of an inclusive environment, supportive of the development of students with special needs. It further enables positive interactions between all stakeholders in the educational process. These developments align with the principles of Muhammadiyah, which emphasize the establishment of fair and inclusive education for all students, regardless of the nature or degree of their special needs.

### **Student as Shadow Teacher**

In pursuit of optimizing services, SMP Muhammadiyah 2 has five Special Needs Teachers (GPK) dedicated to supporting the learning process of exceptional children. However, one of the distinctive features of this institution is the active involvement of all teachers beyond the GPK team. It can be said that the culture of inclusivity in the school has been well-established. From the school principal to the security guard and the gardening staff, everyone participates in assisting these exceptional children. In an effort to foster self-reliance among students with disabilities, parents are not allowed to bring shadow teachers or special educators for their children. Instead, regular students are actively engaged as peer mentors for exceptional students. When a student with special needs encounters difficulties, other students willingly come to their aid. This culture is intentionally nurtured to raise awareness among all members of the school community to protect and support these exceptional children. Moreover, students with disabilities gain exposure to real-life diversity and various personalities, enriching their knowledge. Furthermore, it instills a sense of self-sufficiency as they become accustomed to resolving challenges independently. There is concern that if exceptional students are continually accompanied by shadow teachers, they may not develop the ability to be self-reliant.

### **Involvement of All Teachers and School Staffs**

With more than a decade of inclusive education at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang, the school's organizational culture has matured, fostering mutual understanding among teachers regarding the conditions of exceptional children. In the early years of the program's launch, issues occasionally arose between subject teachers and special education teachers due to the lack of information. However, with the passage of time and the intensive training organized by the school's leadership at the time, the collective understanding and awareness of all teachers and staff

significantly improved. The school recognized that positive interaction between students with special needs and teachers was a critical prerequisite for establishing an inclusive culture in the school (Frumos, 2020).

Various activities have been employed to promote communication between subject teachers, Special Needs Teachers (GPK), and exceptional students. Home visit services, for example, aim to resolve issues that students face at home. This service also serves as a means to strengthen the emotional connection between exceptional students and their teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. In some cases, these students develop a closer emotional bond with the GPKs than with their own parents. Hence, when students face challenges such as tantrums, declining motivation to learn, or behavioral changes, the GPKs promptly arrange home visits. The role of GPKs in such situations becomes critically important. Occasionally, students also contact teachers through WhatsApp or phone calls to share stories or express their concerns. On some occasions, teachers or staff members even accompany students home after school if parents are unable to pick them up, including assisting them with specific administrative requirements such as the legalization of certificates, report cards, and other administrative documents required by students.

### **Involvement of Parents**

The school organizes annual parenting and camping activities specifically for parents of exceptional children. These events aim to monitor the development of their children and provide a forum for dialogue between parents and relevant experts on child development. Additionally, these activities are oriented toward building awareness among all parents regarding their children's education and serve as a platform for mutual motivation among parents. It is noteworthy that parents' perceptions of exceptional children vary, with some demonstrating a positive understanding (positive perception), while others may still perceive these children as burdens (negative perception). All parents of exceptional children are actively involved in activities organized by the school. In fact, some parents have even become sponsors of these events. In 2022, one parent of an exceptional child offered their villa as a venue for an inclusive camp at no cost, while other parents sponsored meals and accommodations for the participants. The active involvement of parents of exceptional children at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang is a crucial pillar in the educational process for these special children.

## **Challenges and Solutions**

### **Financing**

The financing of education for exceptional children differs significantly from that of regular students. Implementing the basic principles of collegialism requires a substantial budget. Activities carried out together with students, parents, and teachers undoubtedly involve expenses beyond the students' monthly school fees (SPP). Moreover, these activities cannot be fully facilitated with government funding, whether through BOSNAS or BOSDA. Therefore, at SMP Muhammadiyah 2, parents are obliged to pay more than regular students. However, not all parents are capable of meeting the specified amount due to various reasons, including family economic conditions and job layoffs. In such circumstances, the school principal is compelled to find alternative solutions because these students must receive educational services like any other students. The school's principal actively seeks sponsorships to support various activities for exceptional children. Therefore, the ability to communicate and collaborate becomes a crucial instrument in delivering inclusive education (Ricci et al., 2022).

### **Effectiveness and Efficiency of Time**

Raising awareness among the entire school community is a time-consuming endeavor. SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Malang, for instance, required nearly five years to establish this collective

awareness. While the principles of equal roles and responsibilities, as well as emotional attachment, can be easily articulated, their implementation proves to be challenging. Often, subject teachers relinquish their responsibilities to special education teachers when issues related to inclusive students arise. A sense of apathy also presents a challenge that needs to be addressed to foster collegialism among school community members, especially teachers.

Building an inclusive culture is not an instant undertaking. Several European countries, such as Austria and Finland, have needed a long time, more than a decade, to build a culture that is open and tolerant, including toward people with disabilities (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Various training programs for school principals, general teachers, and special education teachers are frequently conducted during the initial phases of establishing inclusive education programs as part of efforts to deliver equitable education for all. The principles of justice and tolerance are prerequisites that must be met for an inclusive culture to materialize (Bemiller, 2019).

The efficiency and effectiveness of time are directly proportional to the required financing. In other words, the faster this process is realized, the less funding is needed. Therefore, other schools must devise more effective strategies to achieve efficiency and time effectiveness.

### **Parent and Community Acceptance**

Resistance from some members of the community toward their children's unique intellectual condition is frequently encountered. Sometimes, parents and the originating schools are unaware that their children fall into the category of students with special needs (ABK), and thus, they do not receive the appropriate educational services. Often, parents refuse to acknowledge that their child has special needs, as they view ABK as a burden. However, if we refer to Qs. At-Tin: 4,

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ ٤

*The meaning: "Indeed, we have created man in the best of stature."*

This verse forms the basis for the perception of the condition of children with special needs and strengthens the hearts of humans, indicating that Allah has created a servant without neglecting its meaning. Furthermore, Allah also states in Qs. Al-Baqarah; 286,

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ... ٢٨٦

*The meaning: "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can capacity..."*

Awareness of the condition of exceptional children is crucial because this condition is a manifestation of the perfection of creation. The perfection of iron and stone lies in their hardness, the perfection of fire lies in its heat, and water is considered perfect when it has the quality of coldness or liquidity. Similarly, humans have their own unique forms of perfection. If the condition of children is seen as a test, then it has been measured by the Almighty Creator, Allah. However, not all parents have an understanding of the holy advice in Allah's words.

Therefore, the school regularly organizes meetings with parents using a parenting design in the hope of fostering a collective awareness of the growth and development of all children, including those with special needs. A deeper look reveals that the emotional bond between the child (student) and the teacher as well as the parents is a crucial indicator of creating child-friendly and equitable education (Huda, 2018); (Pastore & Luder, 2021). Pastore (2021) also claims that the

quality of the emotional closeness between students and teachers is the most important foundation in creating inclusive education.

Society or the community also bears a similar responsibility to ensure that these exceptional children feel accepted in their environment. However, the reality is not all members of society are prepared to interact with children with disabilities. Integration between the school, the community, and the family is a strategic step in providing child-friendly education for children with special needs (Kozibroda et al., 2020). An awareness of their responsibility is one of the fundamental values of collegial leadership, and it is through this value that inclusive culture can be established.

#### D. CONCLUSION

Collegial leadership can serve as an alternative leadership model for inclusive schools because this model prioritizes the aspect of equal roles in serving students with special needs. Home visits are a form of service needed by students with special needs and their parents. Additionally, to foster independence in exceptional children, the presence of shadow teachers at the junior high school level may need to be eliminated. Effective communication between the school and families is crucial in the success of inclusive education. Challenges related to continuing education, financing, sustaining the curriculum, and the responses of parents and the community must be addressed by all parties involved. This is essential to ensure that equitable education becomes a reality.

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