

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstrak: Program pengabdian masyarakat ini dilatarbelakangi oleh minimnya kemampuan guru khususnya di wilayah rural untuk melakukan identifikasi kondisi siswa dalam pelaksanaan pendidikan inklusif. Program ini dilakukan secara berkelanjutan dari program terdahulu dengan tujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan guru Lembaga PAUD di Kecamatan Cipanas, Kabupaten Cianjur, dalam melakukan proses assesment yang terdiri dari wawancara dan observasi, pengisian instrumen, dan evaluasi. Metode yang digunakan adalah *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*, yang meliputi tahap *Define Problem*, *Action* (pelatihan), *Observe* (pendampingan), dan *Reflect* (evaluasi). Pada tahap pelatihan dan pendampingan tim pelaksana melibatkan tenaga ahli dari bidang Psikologi sebagai mentor dan narasumber. Hasil dari program menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan dalam pemahaman dan keterampilan guru dalam melakukan *assessment*, dengan rata-rata peningkatan pemahaman sebesar 35%. Penggunaan pendekatan *Appreciative Inquiry* dan penerapan *Uncertainty Reduction Theory* pada proses identifikasi kondisi siswa dapat menunjang pelaksanaan program berupa pelatihan dan pendampingan, sehingga efektif dalam mengatasi permasalahan mengenai minimnya aksesibilitas informasi guru di wilayah rural untuk menunjang pelaksanaan pendidikan inklusif. Saran bagi program pengabdian masyarakat selanjutnya adalah perlu dilakukan penyuluhan lanjutan dengan meningkatkan kemampuan guru dalam melakukan terapi bagi siswa berkebutuhan khusus untuk menunjang proses pengajaran sehingga membutuhkan dukungan dari para pemangku kepentingan terutama tenaga ahli. Selain itu proses assesment siswa dapat dikembangkan melalui penggunaan platform digital pada penggunaan instrument pra skrining untuk menunjang aksesibilitas pemantauan kondisi siswa.

Kata Kunci: pendidikan inklusif, assesmen, anak berkebutuhan khusus

Abstract: This community service program was implemented in response to the limited ability of teachers to identify students' needs in implementing inclusive education, particularly within rural contexts. This program aims to build on the previous program, which has been carried out continuously, to enhance teachers' assessment skills in early childhood education institutions in the Cipanas District, Cianjur Regency. The program will involve conducting interviews and observations, completing questionnaires, and evaluations. This program employed a *Participatory Action Research (PAR)*, which includes the *Define Problem*, *Action*, *Observe*, and *Reflect* stages. At the training and mentoring stage, the implementation team involves experts from Psychology as mentors and speakers. The program's results show a significant improvement in teachers' understanding and skills in conducting assessments, with an average increase in understanding of 35%. The use of the *Appreciative Inquiry* approach and the application of *Uncertainty Reduction Theory* in the process of identifying students' conditions can support the implementation of programs in the form of training and mentoring, so that it is effective in overcoming the problem of lack of access to teacher information in rural areas to support the implementation of inclusive education. The suggestion for the next community service program is that it is necessary to conduct further counseling by enhancing the ability of teachers to provide therapy for students with special needs, thereby supporting the teaching process and requiring support from stakeholders, especially experts. In addition, the student assessment process can be enhanced through digital platforms and pre-screening instruments to support the accessibility of monitoring student progress.

Keywords: inclusive education, assesment, children with special needs

Introduction

This community service program is based on the importance of inclusive education, especially at the early childhood level. Inclusive education can provide equal opportunities for every student, regardless of their condition (Fatmawiyati & Permata, 2023). This inclusive education aligns with the primary goal of education, which is carried out without any element of discrimination, considering each student's various conditions and needs (Aulia et al., 2021). An inclusive education system can also help students to socialize and help children's social-emotional development (Hafiz, 2017).

In the context of early childhood education institutions, inclusive education aims to provide equal learning opportunities for children with a wide range of abilities and characteristics, including children with special needs. Inclusive education at an early age can help students appreciate differences and reduce the stigmatization of children with special needs. The function of educational institutions is one of the most important parts of people's lives, and through the educational process, one can find solutions to various social problems (Purnasari et al., 2023).

Although inclusive education has significant benefits, its implementation in early childhood education institutions often faces various challenges in both rural and urban areas. Based on the results of the community service carried out by the implementation team in 2022-2023, it is evident that several problems are experienced by partners in rural areas, specifically Early childhood education institutions in the Cipanas District, Cianjur Regency, West Java. First, regarding the ability of teachers to assess the development of students with special needs, there is currently no specialized instrument to measure students' abilities. Second, there is a lack of training in improving teacher competence to increase the understanding of inclusive concepts in the learning process. As well as the lack of information accessibility with experts to modify student development (Rahmi et al., 2024). In line with the results of the community service program in 2022-2023, the results of research on the model of implementing inclusive education in one of the cities in Kalimantan explained that the standards for the implementation of education have not been met, such as the recruitment system for students with special needs, curriculum modifications, accessibility, and learning evaluation (Utama, 2021).

Not only in rural areas, problems in implementing inclusive education are also found in Jakarta Province, which is considered an urban area. The results of Fuadi (2015) research indicate that the implementation of inclusive education does not align with the general model and provisions for implementation, and there are inadequate resources for accommodating students with special needs. This research finding aligns with the results of a study, which indicate that the implementation of inclusive education in schools across Jakarta Province has not been evenly distributed between public and private schools (Salsabila et al., 2025).

The explanation of the inclusive education problem reveals the same challenges in both rural and urban areas. Related to the main problems faced by teachers of early childhood institutions in rural areas, it should be addressed immediately by improving the basic skills that teachers must have in implementing inclusive education, in order to produce good inclusive

education quality. These abilities include, first, a general ability to respect the diversity of conditions and needs of students. Second, basic ability is identifying, designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning process of students with special needs. Third, specific ability is being able to modify behavior for students who experience learning obstacles and difficulties, both physical and emotional obstacles (Nuraeni & Gunawan, 2022). These three abilities are important to improve, especially in improving the ability of early childhood education teachers who are adaptive to various changes (Purworini et al., 2024).

The three teachers' abilities could be optimized using the assessment process of students with special needs. The student assessment process is crucial for identifying the presence of student growth and development disorders, such as speech delays, cognitive impairments, and coordination difficulties, which can be influenced by cognitive stimulation and social-emotional conditions within the child's environment (Yuliandari et al., 2024). The assessment can be carried out through student interviews and observations, data collection, and evaluation. Based on the results of the pre-survey on community service activities, teachers in rural early childhood education institutions have not yet used instruments to measure the development of students' abilities. This community service program provides training and assistance in using the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development (Haryani et al., 2022).

This community service activity involves training and assistance with the assessment process for students with special needs, in collaboration with a previous partner. The sustainability of partners could be a novelty in implementing this community service. Based on community service in 2022, the implementation team conducted education on family communication patterns following the Covid-19 pandemic, with the results showing an increase in the number of students with special needs in partner areas, specifically early childhood education institutions in Cipanas District, after the pandemic (Rahmi et al., 2023). Community service continued in 2023 with a seminar on optimizing the role of teachers in implementing inclusive education. This activity yielded recommendations, specifically the need for stakeholder support, particularly from experts in urban areas, in implementing inclusive education (Rahmi et al., 2024). However, the implementation of this community service program continues the previous two community services with a focus on improving teachers' ability, especially in carrying out the assessment process of students with special needs through the use of assessment instruments.

Based on the previous community service program, partners in the implementation of community service this time also involved teachers of early childhood education institutions in the Cipanas District, Cianjur Regency. The participants in the training activity consisted of 20 schools, one of which, Dian Insani Kindergarten, served as a pilot project in the mentoring process. The school selection was based on data on the diversity of student conditions. Considering the condition of partners and the development of previous community service programs, this activity aims to enhance the assessment skills of teachers in Early Childhood Education institutions in Cipanas District, Cianjur Regency, by implementing a comprehensive assessment process that includes interviews, observations, instrument completion, and evaluations.

Methods

This community service program was conducted from July to December 2024, involving partners from Early childhood education institutions in the Cipanas District Area, Cianjur Regency, and utilizing the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method. This method is used to produce solutions to research subject problems through the involvement and collaboration of various social elements. The methods used include Define Problem, Action, Observe, and Reflect (Pratiwi et al., 2022). In the first stage, namely Define Problem, the implementation team conducted a survey on the level of implementation of inclusive education, especially in the readiness of learning programs using indicators adapted from Maine's Quality Rating System (Lahti et al., 2015) and confirmed through interviews using the Appreciative Inquiry approach (Rahma & Zumaroh, 2023). Then, in the Action stage, is the program implementation, specifically in training in using assessment instruments for students with special needs. Finally, the Observe and Reflect stage is carried out by assisting in using assessment instruments to monitor students' academic and emotional development throughout the learning process and measure the results of activities. The flow diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the implementation of this community service activity.

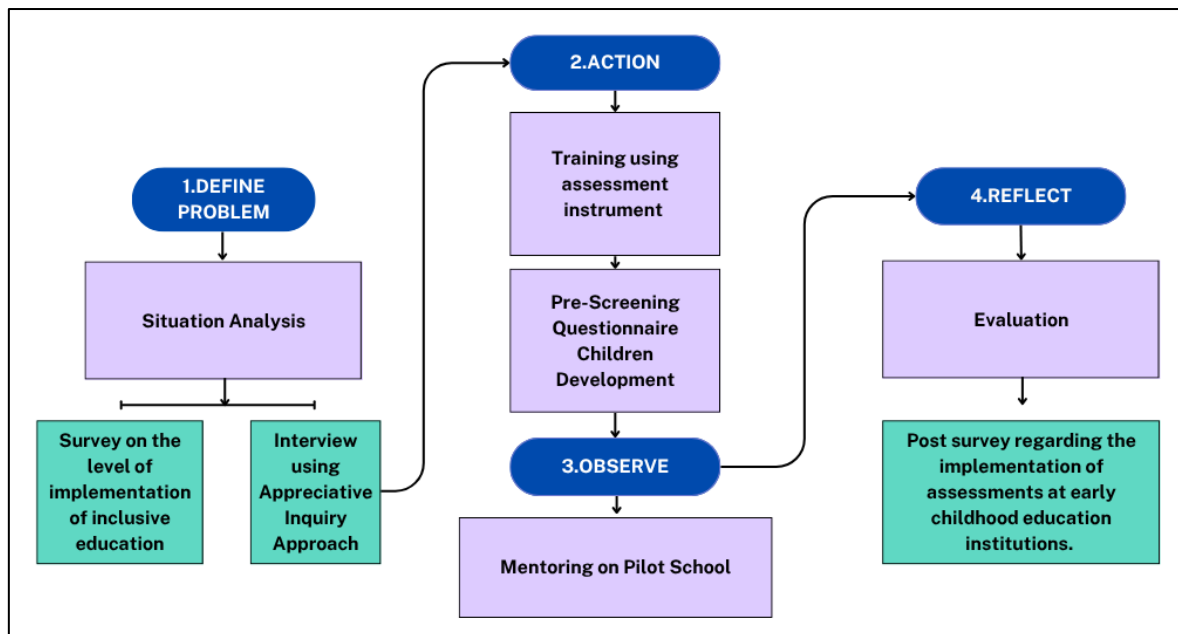


Figure 1. Flow of Community Service Program

Based on Figure 1, there are two main activities in this community service program: training and mentoring.

Training

The training activities aim to enhance knowledge and understanding of assessing students with special needs. Eighty principals and teachers of early childhood education institutions participated in this activity. Speakers, experts, and psychologists will provide material using various student assessment tools.

Mentoring

Mentoring activities are conducted to enhance the quality of the assessment process implementation for students with special needs. The participants in this activity include a pilot project school in the Cipanas District Area, Cianjur Regency, as well as experts, such as psychologists, and parents of students at the school. In the mentoring activity, the implementation team and experts accompany the student assessment process by teachers and educate students' parents about the functions and stages of each student's assessment.

Results and Discussion

Pre-Implementation Survey

In the first stage, the team surveyed 20 Early childhood education institutions spread across the Cipanas District area. The survey uses indicators adapted from Maine's Quality Rating System. Through this indicator, the readiness of the learning program can be measured with components such as the availability of planning programs, the implementation and evaluation of learning for students with special needs, and the existence of programs that involve parents in the student learning process. In addition to the readiness of the curriculum and the availability of school action plans for implementing inclusive education. All indicators are then given a level of availability, namely: 1) Complete, meaning that all components are adequate; 2) Some Are There, only some of the components of the readiness of the learning program are adequate; and 3) None. Figure 2 provides a graph of the program readiness survey in the partner region.

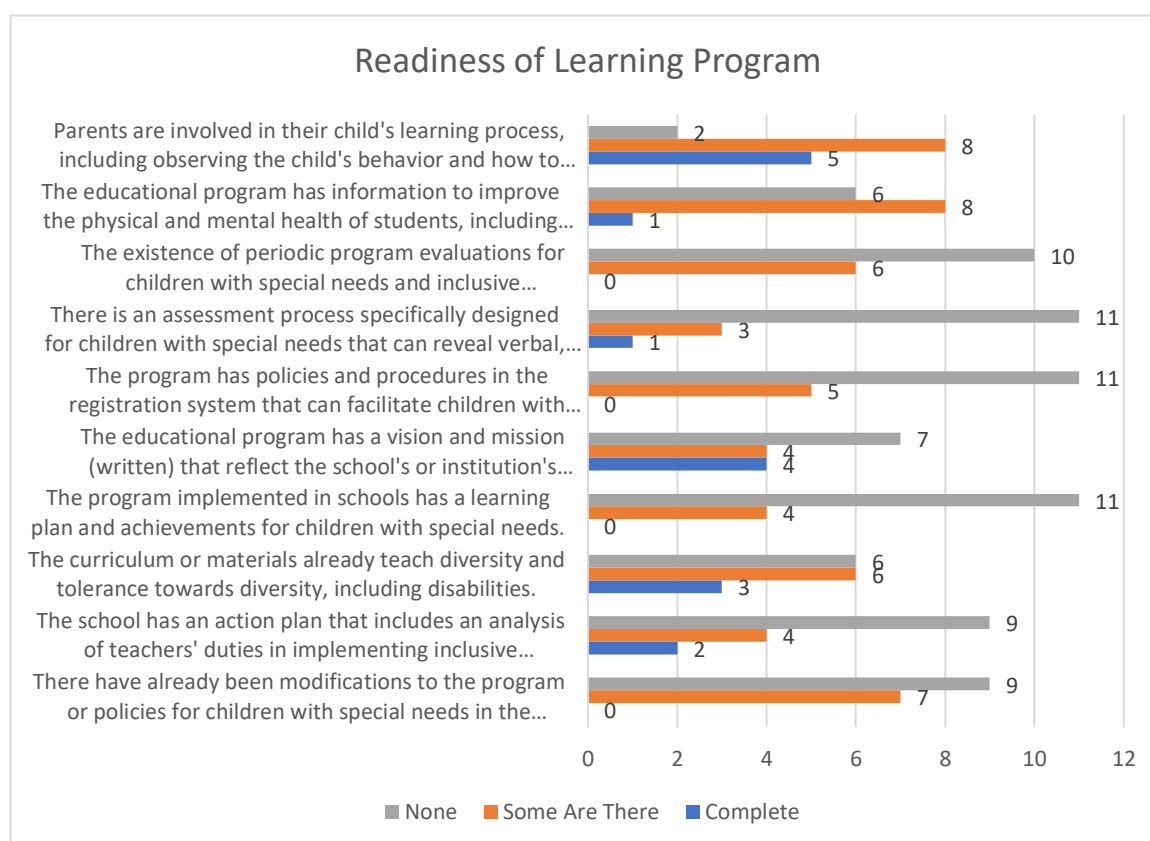


Figure 2. Pre-Implementation Survey Results

Based on the processing of survey data on the readiness of learning programs, it is known that the problems of teachers in conducting the examination or identification process of students with special needs are still minimal, namely, as many as 11 schools (73%) stated that they do not have a device to screen students' conditions when registering. Moreover, 10 schools (67%) stated they did not have regular program evaluations for students with special needs and an inclusive environment. The team conducted interviews using the Appreciative Inquiry approach to confirm the survey results. The interview involved the Early Childhood Education Institution, comprising principals, teachers, parents, experts, and psychologists. One of the concepts employed in this approach is Dream and Design, where group members are allowed to express their hopes and participate in the planning process for efforts to optimize the implementation of inclusive education. Table 1 shows the interview results applied to the Dream and Design concepts.

Table 1. Interview Results for the Define Problem Stage

No	Program Expectations and Planning	Stakeholders needed
1	There is training from experts on using assessment instruments for students with special needs.	Principals and Teachers of Early childhood education institutions, and Experts.
2.	Optimizing the function of the parents' community in supporting inclusive education implementation.	Principals and Teachers of Early childhood education institutions, and parents of students.
3.	Planning a work reference plan for implementing inclusive education in early childhood education institutions.	Principals and Teachers of Early childhood education institutions, Experts, the Government, or the Teachers' Association of early childhood education institutions.

Source: Processed Data Researcher

Training on the Assessment Process for Students with Special Needs

The problem formulation in the initial stage and situation analysis implemented the community service programme as training on identifying students with special needs. The community service program collaborated with experts, including a psychologist and the proprietor of the therapy centre for children with special needs from an urban area. The training commenced with introductory remarks from the kindergarten teachers' association chairperson of Cipanas District, Cianjur Regency. The Chairperson conveyed the importance of efforts to enhance teachers' competencies in implementing inclusive education, particularly in light of the disparity between the rising number of students with special needs and the limited capacity of teachers. Subsequently, the activity proceeded with the delivery of remarks from the head of the team of Pembangunan Jaya University, followed by the presentation of material.

The speaker in the first training session explained the materials regarding the education system for children with special needs (see Figure 3). This material consists of a segregative system where educational services are carried out by separating students with special needs from those without special needs. The second integration system is an educational service that unites children with special needs and students who do not have special needs. Finally, the inclusion system of educational services is implemented sustainably, planned, and directed to

develop the potential of children with special needs, enabling them to adapt to their environment (Akbar et al., 2024). Inclusive education services employ several educational service models, including regular classroom models, cluster models, Pull-out models, cluster and Pull-out models, special classroom models, and full special classroom models (Akbar et al., 2024). This material is designed to help teachers understand the concept of inclusion that can be fully applied in the school learning process. After that, the training continued by explaining the concept of the learning process, specifically the strategy of inclusive education learning activities in early childhood, which begins by accommodating children's needs, identifying children's special needs, and mapping potential development and obstacles for children both currently and in the future (Haryani et al., 2022). Teachers can strengthen their understanding of inclusive education through training materials about the learning process and the learning system to accommodate the needs of students.



Figure 3. The speaker delivered the materials for the training activity

Furthermore, the speaker interacted with the participants to get an overview of special needs in their schools. Through the results of these interactions, it is known that the types of development disorders include autism disorders, speech and language disorders, and hyperactivity. Based on the identification results, the speaker then explained the assessment process for students with special needs, which consisted of three stages. First, teachers can conduct interviews and observations to identify students' needs and conditions. Then, it was collected by completing an assessment instrument.



Figure 4. Discussion Session of Speakers and Participants

During the training discussion session, it was known that the teachers had made efforts to conduct assessments (see [Figure 4](#)). So far, in the early stages of interaction with new students, teachers generally use verbal communication, greeting them and asking general questions, such as their name, age, and address. However, the approach is different when interacting with students who have special needs. In general, students with special needs who have verbal communication disorders, characterized by difficulties with speaking, limited vocabulary, and are still relatively few, often repeat the exact words and others. For this reason, teachers also try to combine it by using non-verbal communication to interact with students with special needs. Then, after interacting, the teacher directly observes the student interaction process with friends, teachers, or accompanying parents.

Teachers have conducted assessment processes at all stages of assessment, from interviews and observations to evaluations, but they have not been done in a structured system, and there is no written framework of reference. This condition needs to be improved so that the implementation of inclusive education can be developed every semester. For this reason, the following material in the training focused on using instruments to conduct assessments on students, especially those with special needs. One instrument that schools can use and adapt is the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development. During the training, teachers are allowed to complete the instruments directly under the guidance of the speakers.



Figure 5. Mentoring Pre-Screening questionnaire for child development

The Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development instrument aims to determine whether a child's development is typical or irregular (see [Figure 5](#)). This instrument can be used by both health workers and Early childhood education teachers (Wati, [2017](#)). In conducting student assessments, the necessary instruments include the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development, tailored to the student's age, and examination tools. To use the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development instrument, first determine the child's age, then select categories that fit the child's age, and provide answers that reflect the child's condition. Continue with analysis and observation (Haryani et al., [2022](#)). Various assessment instruments can be optimized by involving parents to suit the student's condition. Collaboration between

various early childhood education institutions and stakeholders is essential to support the student assessment process. The training concluded with a question-and-answer session and photos with the participants (see [Figure 6](#)).



Figure 6. Participants and Speakers of The Training

Mentoring at the Pilot School

The mentoring session was provided at Dian Insani Kindergarten, located in the Cipanas District (see [Figure 7](#)). Dian Insani Kindergarten is an Early childhood education institution that experiences a significant increase in students with special needs every semester. For this reason, mentoring is conducted after training through assessment stages, which include interviews and observations, completing instruments, and evaluations. The mentoring was carried out for six months. However, until October 2024, it has only been carried out for two months. During the two months, the implementation team assisted at the student observation stage by helping teachers implement assessments, reducing communication uncertainty through passive, active, and interactive strategies (Richard & Turner, [2017](#)).

The passive strategy involves observing students with special needs in their daily behavior. While the active strategy involves searching for information related to handling students with special needs, in this case, the team serves as a liaison between teachers and experts, specifically psychologists, to consult on student development. Additionally, the team helps utilize digital media to support learning and overcome students' communication barriers. After obtaining an overview of students with special needs, the teachers implemented interactive strategies during the teaching and learning process.

After mentoring with the observation process, the team provided support in completing the assessment instruments. One of them is Individual Learning Planning, which contains student learning plans based on individual abilities and needs, allowing the type of support needed to be identified.



Figure 7. Mentoring Assesment Process

Evaluation

At this stage, the team evaluates training and mentoring activities through a post survey regarding the implementation of assessments at early childhood education institutions. The survey results are as follows.

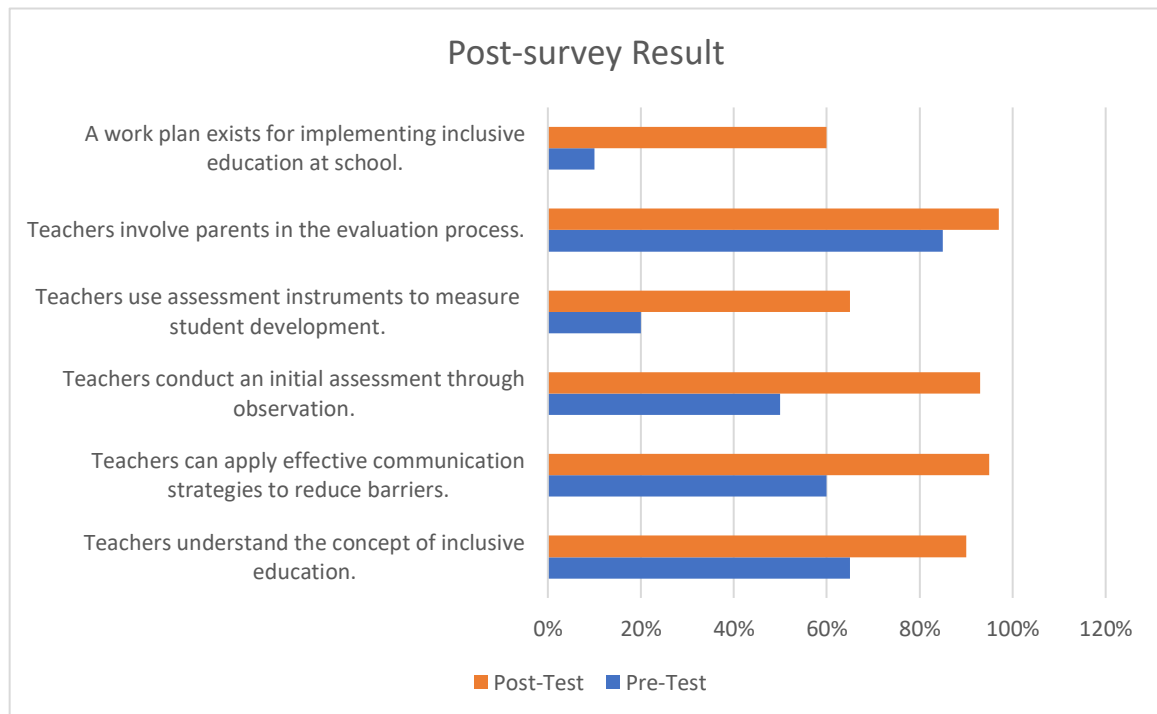


Figure 8. Post-survey Result

Figure 8 shows the post-survey's results, which increased the understanding and ability of partners to conduct the assessment process for students, with an average increase of 35 percent. It is known that the training can increase teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusive education by 90 percent and the application of communication strategies to reduce uncertainty with students by 93 percent. These two things are the basis for teachers'

fundamental abilities in implementing inclusive education. According to the post-survey results, it is also known that 97 percent of teachers have involved students' parents in implementing the inclusive education process. However, for other categories of questions, namely the existence of work plans and assessment instruments, not many schools have implemented them. An average of 63 percent of teachers who have applied instruments in monitoring student development have been recorded, and some teachers have received assistance and applied this instrument in the learning process.

Based on the results of the pre-implementation survey, training, mentoring, and evaluation of community service activities can solve partner problems. Based on the results of the pre-implementation survey, it is evident that the process of examining and assessing students is still minimal. So, the team conducts training and provides mentoring. The form of community service aligns with the research findings about the importance of assessment in the learning process, which can enhance teacher and student preparation (Hidayat, 2018). In previous community service activities, the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation processes can also improve students' ability to socialize with peers and optimize their potential (Ghuzali & Ritonga, 2022).

Then, in the pre-implementation process of the community service, the survey results were confirmed through interviews with partners using the Appreciative Inquiry approach. This approach is appropriate because it can optimize community involvement, as evidenced by equal opportunities for each group member to contribute to problem-solving through cooperative communication (Waters & White, 2015). The uses of Appreciative Inquiry are also supported by the results of research by Lase et al. (2023), which indicate that Appreciative Inquiry can help provide an overview of school strategies to develop the school's potential, realize the institution's vision and mission, and encourage individual contributions in the implementation of programs. The results of previous community service activities also suggest that an appreciative approach is essential for building a positive mindset in solving partner problems (Wibowo et al., 2020).

The assessment process and teaching and learning activities carried out during the training are explained by teachers and students. The communication techniques employed are gathering information, equalizing messages, and interacting. Teachers implementing assessments apply the Uncertainty Reduction communication theory, utilizing both passive and active approaches, to reduce communication uncertainty between teachers and students with special needs during interactions (Febriani & Iqbal, 2015). The communication process aligns with research findings on strategies to reduce uncertainty in the communication between teachers and students with special needs, specifically passive strategies involving observation, active strategies through information search, and interactive strategies (Wijayanti et al., 2024).

Last, the use of the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development, which is socialized during training and used in pilot schools, is appropriate for application to the student condition assessment process. The uses of the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development align with previous community service activities that utilized the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for child development detection, enabling all training participants to identify child development according to age (Haryani et al., 2022). The results of other studies suggest that

the Pre-Screening Questionnaire for Child Development can be optimized through digital platforms, facilitating each child's development screening process (Fauzi et al., 2023). An optimized digital platform can be a sophisticated plan to facilitate the screening process, with expert assistance.

Conclusion

Based on the results of implementing community service, it can be concluded that the entire community service activity has successfully improved teachers' understanding and skills in implementing inclusive education, particularly in conducting assessments of students with special needs, which include interviews and observations, completing instruments, and evaluations. This increase is evident in the high percentage of teachers who understand the concept of inclusion and the improvement in their ability to implement communication strategies that reduce uncertainty and involve parents in the assessment process. Additionally, the Appreciative Inquiry approach effectively encourages active participation and the exploration of potential stakeholders in implementing inclusive education. Applying Uncertainty Reduction communication theory provides a strong basis for equipping teachers to face uncertain interactions. Although implementing assessment instruments remains a challenge, the majority of teachers have begun using them. Therefore, this activity significantly strengthens partner schools' sustainable and inclusive education practices.

The community service should be continued with intensive mentoring and further training to enhance teachers' skills in using assessment instruments, particularly in schools in rural areas that require improved access to supporting resources. Further counseling for teachers to equip them with the ability to be a therapist for children with special needs also needs to be carried out as an effort to overcome limited access to training and information. The development of a digital platform for the Pre-Screening Questionnaire can be considered to facilitate the ongoing detection and monitoring of child development.

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