



Multidisciplinary collaborative model for identification and assessment services for students with special needs in inclusive schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the multidisciplinary collaboration among professionals who voluntarily participate and share common goals in implementing assessment and identification services for children with special needs. This collaboration involves a multidisciplinary team working to develop an assessment service model and recommendations from the multidisciplinary for assessing children with special needs in inclusive schools. This research is qualitative approach with a case study method. Data sources included psychologists, orthopedagog, medis, principals, teachers, and parents at an inclusive school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data validation was performed using two triangulation techniques: source triangulation and method triangulation. The results show that assessment services for primary school children with special needs comprise three service models: educational assessment model, psychological assessment model, and medical assessment model. The preparation stage is divided into four activities: formulating goals, identifying targets, preparing instruments, and preparing for implementation. The implementation stage includes four aspects: approach, techniques, methods, and referral. The reporting stage is divided into two parts: result analysis and recommendations. The final stage, follow-up, is conducted through a case conference.

Keywords: multidisciplinary collaborative model, identification and assessment services, special needs, inclusive schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The challenges faced by teachers in identifying and assessing the learning needs of students with special needs include a variety of other needs, such as hearing impairment and deafness, visual impairment and blindness, dyslexia, mental retardation, and gifted learners. Various problems are experienced by students with special needs, both in psychological, educational, social, emotional, behavioral, health, language, and motoric aspects (Opi Andriani et al., 2023). Therefore, identification and assessment are important stages in special education. Collaboration among experts in identification and assessment services for children with special needs is very much needed. The team's involvement in sharing knowledge will provide each other with the necessary information (Mustaqim et al., 2024). Multidisciplinary collaboration is a collaboration that involves members with different professions working together in communication with each other (Travers, 2020; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Multiple studies have examined best practices that have resulted from multidisciplinary collaboration, namely the cooperation of professionals from various disciplines that impact long-term success (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020) (Abegglen & Hessels, 2018). Identification and assessment of students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, involve various professionals who work together across teams to develop programs from a holistic perspective.

Students with special needs who are in inclusive schools can learn together with their peers without learning barriers so that students with special needs can build friendships, interact socially, and learn the subject matter that is in line with the curriculum applied to regular children. Inclusive schools are not only about students being physically in general classes, but also about creating an environment that supports their holistic development through multidisciplinary collaboration, individual support, and evidence-based services (Hardman et al., 2017). Assessment of children with special needs is complex so the process requires the expertise of a professional team from several disciplines (Normawati & Cahyani, 2024). Multidisciplinary collaboration in identification and assessment services consists of at least one teacher or someone who has knowledge of children with special needs, regular teachers, psychologists, specialist therapists, counselors, and parents (Bagadood & Saigh, 2022). The multidisciplinary team participates in the design and development of ideas to explore and share knowledge, opinions, and experiences.

Multidisciplinary collaboration in the process of identifying and assessing students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to obtain information according to their respective expertise. Team members can provide the required information promptly (Dávideková & Hvorecký, 2017). Collaboration is a process that involves cooperation, effective communication, joint problem-solving, planning, and finding solutions for a common goal (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). Multidisciplinary collaboration in identifying and assessing students with special needs in inclusive schools is very important to obtain relevant and accurate information according to each team member's expertise.

The multidisciplinary model can work in their respective places but share basic knowledge about the areas of expertise of other colleagues (Beaudry-Bellefeuille et al., 2021). Team members have a mutual referral relationship if they find problems that are more appropriate for their area of expertise. Multidisciplinary collaboration in various fields, including education, health, and social development, to support the needs of children, especially those with developmental challenges or special needs (Salminen et al., 2024). This aims to design and implement holistic and targeted interventions (Cubells, 2016). Comprehensive and in-depth identification and assessment require authorized professionals such as pediatricians, psychologists, orthopedic specialists, psychiatrists, and others (Sukardari, 2019). The multidisciplinary team consists of professionals from various disciplines, namely parents, teachers, doctors, psychologists, and ortho-pedagogics who work independently of each other. Each team member conducts assessments, plans interventions, and provides services (Heward et al., 2017). Teachers and other professionals work together to take specific responsibilities for planning, teaching, and assessment. Therefore, in decision-making, teamwork is needed in the assessment so that the diagnosis can be made accurately.

Differences in the capacities of students with special needs in inclusive elementary schools such as intelligence, academic ability, language, motor skills, behavior, emotional social, and cultural aspects are viewed by some teachers as problems, obstacles, or difficulties, instead of recognizing the diversity of student abilities as an asset. The identification and assessment process are generally divided into two types, namely academic assessment which focuses on measuring learning outcomes, and developmental assessments which emphasize aspects related to prerequisite skills needed for success in academics (Kurniawan et al., 2018). The function and purpose of the assessment are to screen and identify, determine whether students have special needs and are eligible for special education services, provide information to develop individual learning programs and make appropriate decisions, plan and develop appropriate teaching approaches for students with special needs, and evaluate student progress (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2012).

Based on the results of observations of inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, it was found: first, various problems such as students who experience difficulties in academic learning (e.g., difficulty reading, writing, and arithmetic), behavioral problems (e.g., inappropriate classroom behavior, such as walking around during lessons, putting feet on the table, disturbing peers), and social emotional problems (e.g., difficulties integrating with peers, managing

frustration, using inappropriate language). Second, inclusive schools conduct the identification and assessment that include academic and non-academic aspects by involving orthopedagogues (special education teachers), psychologists, and medical doctors, with these evaluations carried out comprehensively. The implementation of identification and assessment in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia is interesting to study because it shows collaboration among a multidisciplinary team consisting of teachers, orthopedagogues, psychologists, and doctors, in assessing children with special needs. This collaboration results in an integrated model combining educational, psychological, and medical assessments. A thorough and in-depth diagnostic process requires authorized professionals (Sukardari, 2019; Frey, 2019). Teachers often face many challenges in accommodating the various needs of students with special needs. Teamwork with other professionals is needed to help teachers accommodate students with special needs in inclusive classes. Making diagnostic decisions requires cooperation from the assessment team so that the diagnosis can be accurate. Therefore, the researcher wants to know the collaborative model of identification and assessment services for students with special needs in inclusive elementary schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia with a focus on how the preparation, implementation, reporting, and follow-up processes are through the application of educational, psychological, and medical assessment models.

METHOD

This study aims to explore multidisciplinary collaboration in the process of identifying and assessing students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study uses a case study approach because the researcher tries to understand in depth the process of multidisciplinary collaboration to obtain a model of identification and assessment services in a multidisciplinary collaboration. Case study research is chosen because the researcher wants to understand the background of an issue, the interaction of individuals in a social unit, or a group of individuals in-depth, comprehensively, holistically, intensively, and naturally (Yusuf, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

The participants in this study were orthopedagogues, psychologists, doctors, teachers, principals, and parents. The total number of participants was 12, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant data

Participant	Gender	Role	Age
AT	P	Doctor	38
EM	P	Psychologist	28
RS	L	Orthopedagogue	30
RT	P	Principal	53
HL	L	Principal	41
WS	P	Principal	56
F	P	Teacher	38
JT	P	Teacher	29
WN	P	Teacher	34
KE	P	Parent	47
YT	P	Parent	39
SR	P	Parent	42

Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then organized and reduced into themes through coding. Qualitative procedures followed the approach proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The collected data, including interview transcripts, observation results, photos, student diaries, and assessment reports, were analyzed using thematic coding. In qualitative research, data is obtained from various sources using multiple data collection techniques (triangulation) and is carried out continuously until data saturation is achieved (Sugiyono, 2015).

Case study data analysis begins when the researchers is in the field, continues during data collection, and after all data has been collected. Data analysis begins with preparing and

organizing data, reducing the data to themes through coding and summarizing codes, and presenting the data in the form of charts, tables, or narrative discussions (John Creswell, 2015). Data analysis is the most crucial stage as it reveals key themes and relationships that informed the study's findings. The researchers' theoretical perspectives guided how they coded and interpreted the data. The data obtained from the research were reported as they were and then interpreted qualitatively to draw conclusions.

The transcribed interview data were then analyzed using open coding (Junaid, 2016). For the coding process, the researcher utilized the "New Comment" feature in Microsoft Word, following the steps: View → Macros → View Macros → ExtractCommentsToNewDocument → Run. The output was in the form of a table with the following columns: Page', Code', 'Text', 'Interview', and 'Date'. These results were then copied into Microsoft Excel, where the columns were labeled 'Assessment Services', Page', Code', 'Text', and 'Subthemes'. The researchers formulated subthemes based on the codes and associated text. Using the 'Sort' feature in Microsoft Excel, the subthemes were organized into relevant categories to identify overarching themes, which were then transferred back into Microsoft Word for further in-depth analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study seeks to explore collaboration in the identification and assessment of students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. These include the preparation, implementation, reporting, and follow-up stages, involving paraprofessionals, teachers, and parents. The implementation of identification and assessment applies a referral process to other experts to find out more about student problems (Gyimah & Amoako, 2016). The study also examines the use of psychological assessment models, medical assessment models, and orthopedagogical assessment models. The assessment of students with special needs serves to guide the design of intervention strategies and learning programs (Ramadhani & Fitria, 2019; Hermanto, 2023). The results of this study are that the paraprofessional collaboration model in the implementation of identification and assessment in inclusive schools has the same goal of supporting students' academic and non-academic achievements. Therefore, teachers in inclusive schools can work together with other professionals to meet identification and assessment needs so that the problems experienced by children with disabilities can be addressed.

Findings

Preparation

The process of identifying and assessing students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, begins with a teacher's concern when students show signs of difficulties during classroom learning. The teacher identifies the areas of difficulty, provides assistance, and discusses the issue with the students' parents. Parents are the most important team in the identification and assessment process. Parents and teachers are the main stakeholders. The teacher then collaborates with other teachers to carry out support strategies through the school team and monitors the students who are suspected of experiencing obstacles. If the strategies that have been carried out are unsuccessful, a referral process is initiated to refer the students to experts according to the type of difficulty the students are experiencing. The teacher collects evidence from student diaries, learning outcomes, observation results, and interviews with the students. Based on the results of this identification, the teacher requests parental consent to proceed with identification and assessment carried out by a professional (psychologist, doctor, or orthopedagogue). Preparation for the assessment process is carried out by the teacher through a planning process related to the focus of the assessment, financial considerations, student conditioning, time, and the student documents as supporting data needed in the assessment process.

Implementation

The implementation of student identification and assessment is based on a schedule agreed upon by the school and the assessment institution. Before the assessment begins, the assessor approaches the student to reduce any sense of awkwardness, helping ensure that the process runs

naturally and without fear. One technique used by assessors is to invite students to have a casual chat beforehand, so that students feel more comfortable and relaxed during the identification and assessment. The implementation of the assessment by paraprofessionals uses tests (standardized and non-standardized tests) and non-tests (observations, interviews, and student documentation prepared by teachers or parents). The implementation of identification and assessment of students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia applies referrals to other experts according to the problems and needs of students, such as referrals to psychologists for psychological assessments, referrals to doctors for identification and medical assessments such as hearing tests, visual acuity tests, and referrals to ortho-pedagogues for learning needs.

The assessment instrument used by orthopedics is a non-standard instrument that is the result of development and is guided by the applicable curriculum adapted from other academic instruments. The use of media in the implementation of educational assessments is also needed to help clarify students' understanding of a concept being tested or media is used as a device in an instrument, such as animal or fruit miniatures, word cards, letter cards, picture cards, and balls. The implementation of the assessment, in addition to using tests, also uses observation, interview, and documentation methods interviews by teachers, principals, and parents. The process of analyzing the results of academic assessments is carried out by orthopedagogues with test analysis, notes from observations, documentation, and interviews with teachers or parents and then interpreted. The implementation of orthopedagogue assessments uses multi-methods, multimedia, multi-sources, and multi-settings. Analysis of assessment results is carried out by orthopedics by cross-checking various test methods or techniques.

The assessment instruments used by psychologists in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta are personality test instruments to see personality descriptions, emotional and behavioral instruments to see emotional and behavioral problems and social interactions, intelligence tests, and talent interests. The determination of the instrument is adjusted to the conditions of students with special needs based on the results of teacher screening. The strategy for implementing the assessment of students with special needs is carried out individually.

Students are referred to a doctor if they have specific problems such as hearing, vision, or other physical issues. The implementation of medical assessments uses standard instruments and instruments that refer to DSM guidelines, such as vision and hearing examinations, and establishing diagnoses such as autism.

Reporting

Reporting the results of identification and assessment conducted by professionals (ortho-pedagogues, psychologists, or doctors) provides complementary data. For example, for a student with a hearing impairment attending an inclusive school, assessments may include a medical evaluation by a doctor to identify hearing ability, a psychological assessment by a psychologist to evaluate intellectual functioning, and an assessment by an orthopedagogue to determine learning ability and to design the appropriate learning strategies and programs according to the student's needs. The identification report is submitted to teachers and parents for follow-up and program implementation. The assessment results are presented in the form of a profile that includes student's identity, assessment objectives, identified problems, strengths and needs, areas assessed, treatments, conclusions, and recommendations. The areas assessed may include intelligence, motor skills, language, social skills, emotional development, behavior, academic performance, talents and interests (if relevant), and self-development. Recommendations from the assessment results are formulated in the form of programs directed toward both schools and parents.

Follow-up

The results of the identification and assessment report are submitted by the professional to the teacher or parents. As a follow-up, the teacher consults with the principal and the parents to formulate a learning program for use at school and at home. The involvement of all parties is essential to support the optimal development of the students.

Based on the findings above, the multidisciplinary collaboration model for identification and assessment services for students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is as in Figure 1.

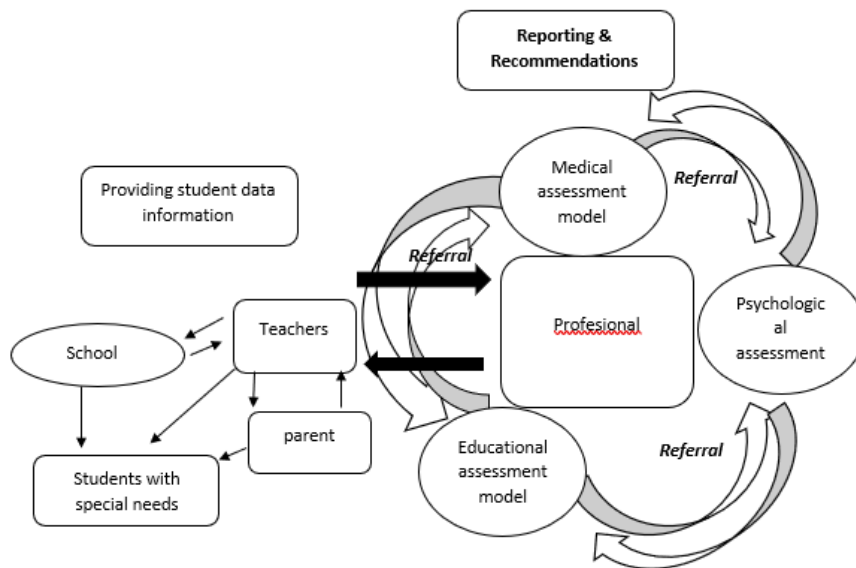


Figure 1. Multidisciplinary collaboration model for identification and assessment services

Discussion

Identification and assessment of students with special needs is a complex process that requires paraprofessional expertise from multidisciplines. Identification and assessment services for students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia are carried out in a multidisciplinary collaborative manner. Special education assessment services consist of a multidisciplinary team and are based on the needs of the learner. The multidisciplinary team collaborates with each other from the beginning by ensuring that the evaluation is completed before follow-up treatment is given (Shellenberger & Weber, 2018). Based on this, in carrying out assessment services, collaboration with other experts is very necessary. Parents and teachers have a very important role in multidisciplinary collaboration because parents and teachers are the people closest to the student and understand the student (Hardman et al., 2017). Parents provide information about their child's life outside of school, provide relevant information, and reinforce school learning at home. When parents are highly involved, teachers are also more engaged with the student, teachers can more easily identify student difficulties and provide interventions for academic, social, behavioral, or other problems (Da Silva Costa et al., 2023).

The multidisciplinary collaboration model in the identification and assessment services of students with special needs in inclusive schools emphasizes the importance of cross-professional collaboration in providing comprehensive services. The collaborative model for identification and assessment of students in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia by implementing a referral process. Referrals come from parents, doctors, institutions, childcare, or preschool teachers (Hardman et al., 2017; Varsamis et al., 2021). The referral process is based on concerns about the child's academic achievement and/or social and behavioral problems from teachers or parents. Before Identification can be carried out by people close to the child such as parents, teachers, caregivers, and so on (Rapisa, 2018). The referral process to determine special education services, first an identification process is carried out by teachers and/or parents to identify the behavioral and academic difficulties of students. Parents play an important role in understanding students' needs, providing support at home, and working with schools in implementing programs. The multidisciplinary team for implementing identification and assessment in inclusive schools can consist of several people and experts. Each team provides services and is based on the needs of

the students. The team is a special education teacher, general education teacher, doctor, orthopedagogue, psychologist, and parents (Yau Alhassan & Verma, 2024). The role of the team is very important because it helps to see the development history so that suspected disabilities are known, starting with tracing and collecting information from various sources such as learning outcomes, observations, and interviews with parents.

The medical assessment model to identify the physical health conditions and medical needs of students is then submitted to teachers to support more comprehensive intervention planning. Medical assessments include conducting examinations for hearing disorders, vision, neurological function, orthopedics, and other health disorders so that abnormalities that may occur that cause problems for students with special needs in participating in learning in class can be detected. If in the medical assessment, the doctor suspects a clinical problem and requires treatment by a specialist for more in-depth action, then the doctor can refer to a specialist for further testing such as an eye specialist or hearing specialist.

The psychological assessment model analyzes aspects of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development of students. The results of the psychological assessment explain the results of the psychological assessment that has been carried out, intelligence, personality, interests, and motivation to determine intelligence abilities and other factors of student personality and determine student learning styles (Pratama et al., 2025). The instruments used in psychological assessments use standard tests.

The orthopedagog assessment model is related to school programs that include cognitive, emotional, social, motor, and daily skills. The instrument uses non-standard tests developed by orthopedagogues by linking the curriculum and non-tests using observation, interviews, and documentation. Educational assessments are carried out to help teachers, parents and schools so that they can provide educational service programs that can optimally develop the potential of students with special needs. The multidisciplinary inclusive education team works to provide services for students with special needs. This team is needed because it provides accommodation for students.

The preparation process carried out by the teacher includes planning the assessment focus, time management, financing, and student conditioning. The teacher's readiness to prepare supporting documents is also an important factor so that the assessment process runs effectively. The implementation of identification and assessment is carried out with a humanistic approach through ice breaking in the form of casual conversations between assessors and students so that students feel more relaxed. This is one of the effective strategies to reduce student anxiety so that the assessment results are more valid. In addition, the assessment carried out uses a multi-instrument method (standard tests, non-standard tests, observations, interviews, documentation) which enriches the assessment data and strengthens the validity of the results. The emphasis on the use of non-standard instruments by orthopedagogues that are adapted to the curriculum shows an effort to contextualize the assessment to be relevant to local conditions. The use of visual and concrete media (such as picture cards, animal miniatures, and balls) in the assessment also reflects an effort to facilitate optimal student understanding, especially for students with learning disabilities.

The assessment report produced includes a complete student profile, assessment objectives, assessed aspects, strengths, student needs, conclusions, and recommendations addressed to schools and parents. The assessment process collaboration between schools and parents to follow up on the assessment results in the form of individual learning programs or curriculum adaptations. Thus, the report is not only an administrative document but also a basis for preparing appropriate educational interventions for students. The follow-up process for assessment results is carried out by a multidisciplinary team to ensure that diagnoses are made with greater validity and reliability (Nurhidati, 2016). The results of the identification and assessment are used by teachers to improve their competence, enhance programs, methods, facilities, and infrastructure, hold meetings with parents to discuss and monitor students' developmental progress, and plan appropriate service programs (Mesiono, 2017; Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The research shows assessment in special education is useful for helping teachers and assessment service teams make decisions about providing appropriate and effective services to students. Identification and assessment services for students with special needs in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia implement a collaborative model through a multidisciplinary team approach involving various professionals from various disciplines. Professional collaboration is seen as a useful tool to assist teachers and other professionals in services for students with special needs and has been considered the best practice in inclusive schools. This is done to see, identify, diagnose, and conclude the needs of students related to the preparation of learning programs in the classroom.

The assessment service for students with special needs in inclusive schools is to provide expert assessment services consisting of orthoedagogues, psychologists, and doctors. Identification and assessment services in inclusive schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia are divided into four stages, namely preparation, implementation, reporting, and follow-up. The assessment results are discussed with the school and parents through a case conference. Assessment services in inclusive schools through a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach that is adjusted to the needs and objectives of the assessment through multisetting, multimedia, and multimethods. A collaborative approach requires clear role definitions and ongoing communication, allowing each member to contribute effectively to meeting individual student needs.

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