

INCLUSION ISSUES IN ECCE: TEACHER LEADERSHIP FROM A CRITICAL EDUCATION POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education plays an important role in forming a solid foundation for child development. In this context, teacher leadership is a key factor in addressing inclusion issues in ECCE. This study aims to explore teacher leadership from the point of view of critical education in addressing the issue of inclusion in early childhood education units. The critical education approach emphasizes the development of critical and creative thinking skills in children, as well as their ability to ask questions and solve problems. Through literature review and conceptual analysis, this research reveals the close relationship between critical education and teacher leadership in early childhood education. The implications of critical education on teacher leadership can be seen in several aspects. First, critical education influences teachers' leadership mindsets and attitudes, encouraging them to become reflective, analytical, and innovative leaders and applying participatory leadership principles. Second, critical education influences the practice and learning strategies applied by teachers, by expanding discussion spaces, encouraging collaboration, and stimulating critical reflection in children. This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the importance of critical education and teacher leadership in early childhood education. The implications of this research are expected to provide insights for curriculum development and learning strategies, as well as training and professional development for early childhood education teachers. In the face of complex future challenges, critical education-oriented early childhood education and strong teacher leadership will provide a solid foundation for holistic and sustainable child development to address inclusion issues.

Keywords: Masalah Inklusi; Kepemimpinan Guru; Pendidikan Kritis

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a very important role in forming a solid foundation for child development. During this time, children experience rapid growth in various aspects such as physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Therefore, early childhood education has a strategic role in providing quality learning experiences and building a solid foundation for further development. In the context of early childhood education, teacher leadership plays a crucial role in creating effective learning environments and supporting children's holistic development.

Teacher leadership is not only limited to administration and management, but also includes aspects of professional development, classroom supervision, relationships with parents, and the ability to design and implement learning programs that suit children's needs. However, in an era that continues to evolve with the complexity of global challenges, early childhood education also needs to pay attention to critical aspects of education. Critical education is an approach to learning that encourages children to think analytically, reflectively, and creatively. Through critical education, children are invited to ask questions, explore various perspectives, and develop effective problem-solving skills.

Growth and development Early childhood often experiences various challenges in their growth and development. They can experience delays in motor, language, or cognitive development. Some children may also have difficulty controlling their emotions. Developmental disorders that are often experienced by some children today such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or sensory disorders. This developmental disorder can affect a child's ability to interact socially, learn, and follow instructions. In addition, children also have learning difficulties including difficulty in understanding basic concepts, remembering information, or following instructions. Factors such as cognitive immaturity or stunted language development can play a role in this learning difficulty. In addition, early childhood also often experiences social and emotional problems so that early childhood often has difficulty in interacting socially with peers or managing their emotions. They may have difficulty sharing, playing together, or resolving conflicts with friends. Some children may also show signs of emotional problems such as excessive anxiety, fear, or sadness. Although rare, early childhood can also experience mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. These symptoms may be difficult to detect in early childhood because they are not yet able to express their feelings clearly. Problems in eating and sleeping habits: Some children may have problems with healthy eating or sleeping habits. They may be picky eaters, have trouble sleeping, or experience sleep disorders such as insomnia. It is thus important to remember that every child is a unique individual, and the problems faced by each child can be different. Therefore, the implications of critical education on teacher leadership are needed so that this will be able to influence attitudes in providing services, as well as policies given by teachers during the learning process so that they can overcome even those faced by early childhood so as to get the right evaluation and advice so as to give birth to effective teacher leadership playing an important role in overcoming early childhood problems. Through good role modeling, creation of a positive learning environment, emotional support, structured organization of activities, communication (Kincheloe, 2008).

The essence of leadership in the classroom according to (Sidik et al., 2017) is the ability to influence and move students to achieve learning goals in class. The teacher can also be a leader during the implementation of learning, both in the classroom and outside the classroom. The goal is expected that teachers can lead students in accordance with leadership functions related to the learning objectives to be achieved. A teacher must also understand good leadership models, this is because a good learning process is determined by a leadership style that is identical to the teacher's leadership model in the learning process in the classroom. The learning process in the elementary school class is very different from the secondary level, especially in terms of delivering learning material to students. Automatically the teacher's leadership style must also be adjusted to the circumstances of students at the elementary school level. An effective teacher acts as a leader who directs and guides students throughout the learning

process. They should be able to provide clear instructions, facilitate discussion, provide feedback, and encourage students to achieve learning goals. But in reality, teachers can often only set an example, but it is very difficult to be an important positive role model for students. Teachers have not been able to demonstrate expected behavior, including integrity, dedication, hard work, cooperation, and responsibility. Teachers should be able to be good role models who can influence students' attitudes and behavior positively.

(Mahmudah & Putra, 2021) in his research stated that one of the manifestations of teacher leadership is classroom management. For this reason, if teacher leadership is associated with teacher skills in conducting classroom management, there is a very close relationship. The more qualified the classroom management, the better the teacher's leadership. Thus, teacher leadership in the classroom should be able to build positive relationships with students. Teachers who pay attention to students' needs, listen with empathy, and give individual attention to each student tend to create an inclusive and supportive learning climate. As leaders in the classroom, teachers should be responsible for managing behavior and creating an orderly and productive learning environment. They implement clear rules and procedures, provide consistent consequences, and facilitate student collaboration and active participation. Effective teachers in their leadership should be able to motivate students to learn and participate actively. They use various strategies such as providing relevant challenges, rewarding and arousing students' interest to encourage their intrinsic motivation but the reality on the ground of low ECCE teacher competence has implications for the low quality of ECCE teachers' performance in carrying out their duties and obligations related to the learning process and their role as leaders in the classroom.

As learning leaders, teachers play a role in encouraging students' critical and analytical thinking. They encourage students to ask questions, question information, and critically analyze arguments. Teacher leadership in the classroom involves the ability to deal with challenges that arise during the learning process. Teachers must be able to overcome learning barriers, manage conflict, identify students' individual needs, and provide necessary support. However, this is very difficult to realize in Early Childhood Education because most ECCE teachers are qualified High School graduates, and general education graduates or not from the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Teacher Education (S1 PG PAUD). The low educational qualifications of teachers who teach in ECCE cause less than optimal teacher leadership in the classroom, thus affecting performance to create an inclusive environment and difficult to solve the problem of inclusion that occurs in ECCE (Zhang et al., 2021).

The various inclusion issues faced by ECCE teachers put pressure on teachers to have a strong understanding of inclusion, including an understanding of the needs and characteristics of students with special needs. Teachers must be able to design and deliver learning materials tailored to the needs of diverse students in the classroom. Teacher skills in classroom management are one of the effective elements to create an inclusive environment. Teachers who should race to improve competence and professionalism by continuing to learn and improve their skills in facing the challenges of inclusion. However, gur's lack of participation in attending relevant training and workshops, and reading the latest research and participating in professional networks makes it difficult to monitor developments in the area of inclusion. (Buisse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2013).

Based on the above phenomenon, this study aims to explore teacher leadership from the point of view of critical education in facing the problem of inclusion in early childhood education units. By understanding the relationship between critical education and teacher leadership, we can gain deeper insight into how critical education-oriented teacher leadership practices can improve the quality of learning so as to address the issue of inclusion in early childhood education. In this research, we will explore the concepts of critical education and teacher leadership in the context of participatory leadership to create an inclusive environment in early childhood education. We will explain the implications of critical education to teacher participatory leadership principles, including how critical education can influence teacher leadership mindsets and attitudes, as well as learning practices and strategies applied in early childhood education environments (Adams et al., 2005).

Through a deep understanding of the implications of critical education on teacher leadership in addressing issues of inclusion in early childhood education, this research is expected to make an important contribution to the development of early childhood education. The findings and recommendations of this study are expected to be a reference for the development of policies, curricula, and teacher leadership training that are more effective in creating a learning environment that is competitive, inclusive, and has a positive impact on child development in early childhood education units.

The implementation of critical education in teacher leadership can provide significant benefits to stakeholders in the world of education. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations can be given to policymakers to consider the integration of critical education into national education policies, particularly for early childhood education units. Such policies can include aspects such as improving teacher training and professional development in critical education, curriculum development that pays attention to social, cultural, and political issues, and policy support that promotes inclusivity and equity in early childhood education. In addition, the findings of this research can also be a guideline in the development of a curriculum based on critical education. A curriculum that reflects the principles of critical education can assist teachers in designing learning experiences that reinforce students' critical thinking, reflection, and deep understanding of social and cultural contexts. Such curricula can also promote student-centered learning, involve active student participation, and encourage problem-solving and critical skills (Sleeter, 2010).

In addition, teacher leadership training involving critical education can also make a significant contribution in improving teachers' ability to become participatory leaders in the world of effective education. This training can assist teachers in understanding the importance of recognizing and recognizing social and cultural diversity, as well as strengthening communication, collaboration, and advocacy skills to fight for the interests of early childhood. In conclusion, this study shows that critical education has important implications for the principle of participatory leadership of teachers in early childhood education units. By applying a critical education approach, teachers can become agents of change in creating learning environments that are inclusive, competitive, and have a positive impact on children's development. Through the findings and recommendations of this study, it is expected that there will be improvements in policies, curriculum, and teacher leadership training, thus creating an optimal educational environment for early childhood (Souto-Manning, 2013).

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a critical qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the implications of critical education on teacher leadership in early childhood education units. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the perceptions, understandings, and experiences of teachers in detail.

Participants

The participants of this study were teachers working in early childhood education units. As a sample selection, purposive sampling techniques are used to select teachers who have experience in applying critical education in their leadership practices. The optimal number of participants will be determined based on the level of data saturation achieved during the data collection process.

Data Collection:

- a. Interviews: Researchers will conduct semi-structured interviews with teachers to gain their understanding of critical education and its effect on their leadership. The interview will be recorded for further analysis.
- b. Observation: Researchers will observe teacher leadership practices in early childhood education environments. Observations will be made directly in the classroom to gain an understanding of how critical education is integrated in learning activities and interactions between teachers and children.
- c. Documents: Researchers will collect relevant documents, such as lesson plans, school policies, and training materials related to critical education and teacher leadership.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using a qualitative analysis approach. Data analysis will be conducted by transcribing interviews, identifying emerging themes, and relating them to concepts in critical education and teacher leadership. Researchers will use coding techniques and thematic analysis methods to organize and analyze data.

Validity

To ensure the validity of the study, data triangulation is used, namely by comparing and combining findings from various data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). In addition, verification of research participants was also carried out to ensure the suitability of data interpretation.

Research Ethics

This research will pay attention to the principles of research ethics, such as confidentiality of participant identity, informed consent, and use of data only for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inclusion Issues in Early Childhood Education

The problem of inclusion in early childhood education is the inability of education systems to provide equitable opportunities and access for all children, including children with special needs or children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the issues associated with inclusion in early childhood education are as follows:

1. **Unavailability of Special Services:** Many early childhood education institutions do not have the resources, curriculum, or staff trained to support the needs of children with special needs. This can hinder the access of children with special needs to an education equal to other children.
2. **Lack of Parental Involvement:** In early childhood education, parental involvement is essential to support child development. However, some parents may not have sufficient knowledge or resources to optimally support their children in the context of inclusive education.
3. **Discrimination and Stigma:** Some children may face discrimination or stigma due to their disability or socio-economic background. This can cause such children to feel unwelcome or neglected in educational settings, thus hindering effective inclusion.
4. **Curriculum Does Not Support Diversity Needs:** Curricula in early childhood education are often not designed with children's diversity in mind. This can lead to gaps in the fulfillment of the needs of children from diverse backgrounds and limit their ability to develop optimally.
5. **Limited Resources:** Limited resources such as funds, facilities, and staff may limit the ability of early childhood education institutions to provide an adequate inclusive environment for all children. This lack of resources can exacerbate disparities in educational access and opportunity.

ECCE Teachers' Competencies in Addressing Inclusion Issues

The competence of ECCE teachers in addressing inclusion issues is essential to ensure that all children, including children with special needs, can receive an equal and inclusive education. Here are some competencies that are important for ECCE teachers in addressing inclusion issues:

Knowledge of Special Needs: ECCE teachers should have a good understanding of the different types of special needs that children may have in their classrooms, such as autism, developmental disorders, hearing or vision impairments, etc. Teachers must be able to recognize the signs of special needs in children and understand how best to support their development.

Ability to Identify Potentials and Limitations: ECCE teachers need to have the ability to identify the potentials and limitations of children with special needs. They must be able to see each child's unique abilities and develop appropriate learning strategies to support their development. This involves careful observation, good communication with parents and relevant experts, and using comprehensive assessment.

Knowledge of Inclusive Learning Strategies: ECCE teachers should be equipped with knowledge of effective inclusive learning strategies. They need to understand how to adapt curriculum, teaching methods, and learning materials to meet the diverse needs of the children in their classrooms. Teachers should also develop skills in managing inclusive classrooms, facilitating collaboration and interaction between children, and providing additional support where needed.

Communication and Collaboration Skills: ECCE teachers must have good communication skills to collaborate with parents, school staff, and other experts involved in supporting children with special needs. Effective communication will ensure that relevant information about children can be shared regularly and enable proper planning and implementation of strategies.

Knowledge of Resources and Support Services: ECCE teachers should be familiar with the resources and support services available to children with special needs in their communities. They should be able to direct parents and families to these resources, such as inclusive educational institutions, therapists, and support groups.

Empathy and Acceptance: ECCE teachers must have an attitude of empathy and acceptance of children's individual differences. They must create an environment that welcomes all children with their uniqueness and respects their right to learn and develop. Teachers should avoid stereotypes and discrimination, and strive to build strong bonds with each child in the classroom.

By having these competencies, ECCE teachers will be better prepared to address inclusion issues and ensure that all children have equal and quality educational opportunities.

Strategies and Steps in Overcoming Inclusion Issues in Early Childhood Education

To address the issue of inclusion in early childhood education, an inclusive strategy and approach are needed so as to provide equitable opportunities for all children to grow and develop optimally. The strategies that can be taken to address the problem of inclusion in Early Childhood Education are: 1. Increase accessibility and availability of inclusive education services for children with special needs. 2. Involve parents and communities in supporting children's inclusion and participation in education. 3. Provide training and support to teachers and education staff to improve their understanding and skills in supporting children with special needs. 4. Develop a curriculum that is inclusive and sensitive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds. 5. Prioritize the allocation of adequate resources for inclusive early childhood education. 6. Encourage awareness, understanding, and elimination of stigma related to disability and socio-economic background in educational contexts.

By adopting an inclusive approach and addressing these issues, early childhood education can become more inclusive, providing equal and equitable opportunities for all children to grow and develop optimally regardless of their background. The steps that need to be taken in overcoming the inclusion problem are as follows;

Policies and Guidelines: Create policies and guidelines that support inclusion in education. This policy should include principles of inclusion, clear goals, and concrete steps to implement an inclusive approach.

Training and Awareness Raising: Conduct training and awareness-raising to teachers, education staff, parents, and other stakeholders on inclusion. It involves an understanding of the needs of children with special needs, inclusive teaching techniques, and inclusive classroom management.

Inclusive Curriculum and Learning: Develop a curriculum that is inclusive and appropriate to student diversity. The curriculum should consider the needs, interests and abilities of all students, and promote diverse and inclusive teaching.

Special Support: Provides specialized support to children with special needs, whether in the form of special education or individualized support in the general classroom. This includes providing support services such as therapists, counsellors, or tutors who support the development and learning of children with special needs.

Inclusive Physical Environment: Creating an inclusive physical environment, such as adequate accessibility for children with physical needs, child-friendly facilities, and classroom settings that support the participation of all students.

Collaboration with Parents and Communities: Involving parents and communities in supporting inclusion in education. Involving parents in decision-making, communicating openly, and involving them in educational activities can strengthen inclusion.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitor and evaluate the implementation of inclusion in education periodically. This helps identify successes, barriers, and areas for improvement in inclusion efforts.

Resource Improvement: Improve the allocation of resources, both financially and infrastructureally, to support inclusive education. This includes the addition of teachers and educational staff, the provision of necessary facilities and equipment, and the provision of inclusive teaching materials.

Participatory Approach: Adopt a participatory approach in decision making and inclusion implementation planning. Involving students, teachers, parents, and communities in the decision-making process will create a greater sense of ownership and commitment to inclusion.

Leadership from a Critical Education Point of View

In the context of critical education, leadership plays an important role in promoting critical thinking, reflection, and transformation in the education system. Through leadership that supports critical education, it is hoped that the education system can become more responsive to social change, encourage critical thinking and reflection, and promote social justice in learning and the educational environment so as to be able to give birth to participatory leadership in creating an inclusive environment. Here are some aspects of leadership that are relevant from a critical education standpoint:

Vision and Values Oriented Leadership: Critical education leadership places the vision and values underlying critical education as the foundation. Leaders must have a strong understanding of social justice, empowerment, and equitable access in education. They must have a clear vision of education centered on critical thinking and fostering social transformation.

Critical Thinking Facilitators: Critical education leaders act as critical thinking facilitators in educational settings. They encourage students and educational staff to question, analyze, and critically evaluate information. Leaders must also create space for open and critical discussion, ask questions that provoke critical thinking, and encourage diverse views.

Collaborative Leaders: Critical educational leadership emphasizes collaboration and active participation of all stakeholders in educational decision-making and planning. Leaders should strive to build inclusive and mutually supportive relationships with staff, students, parents, and the community. They should encourage the participation of all parties in the learning and decision-making process.

Social Transformation: Critical educational leadership aims to bring about social change through education. Leaders must have a strong commitment to social justice and equality, and work to address inequities and inequalities in the education system. They must be drivers of change, fostering education that empowers students to contribute to building a more just and sustainable society.

Capacity Building: Critical education leaders should invest in capacity building of educational staff to promote critical thinking. This includes training, mentoring, and professional development that encourages teachers and education staff to improve their understanding of critical education and apply it in everyday pr aktik.

Self-Reflection: Critical education leaders should be role models in self-reflection and constant learning. They must be prepared to review existing policies, practices, and beliefs, and

question any biases or inequalities that may exist in the education system. Leaders must also be willing to admit mistakes and commit to continuous growth and improvement.

Teacher Leadership Perspectives in Overcoming Inclusion Issues

The results showed that the majority of teachers had a sufficient understanding of the concept of critical education. They recognize the importance of developing critical, creative, and analytical thinking skills in early childhood. Teachers also recognize that critical education can help children develop problem-solving skills and independence.

The issue of inclusion in early childhood education is a complex issue and demands serious attention. The following are some of the problems that often arise regarding inclusion in the context of early childhood education: 1. Unavailability of facilities and infrastructure: Not all early childhood education units are equipped with adequate facilities and infrastructure to support inclusive education. Limited space, facilities, and other supporting resources can be barriers for children with special needs to participate fully in the educational environment. 2. Curriculum and learning approaches that are not yet inclusive: Curricula and learning approaches that still focus on conventional models can ignore the needs and uniqueness of children with special needs. The absence of adequate modifications or adaptations in curriculum and teaching strategies can leave these children feeling neglected or difficult to keep up with learning. 3. Lack of teacher knowledge and skills: Teachers in early childhood education may not yet have adequate knowledge and skills to support inclusion. They may not be equipped with teaching strategies that can meet the diverse needs of children, or may not have a sufficient understanding of the conditions and challenges faced by children with special needs. 4. Stigma and discrimination: Children with special needs often face stigma and discrimination in educational settings. They may experience unequal treatment, neglect, or even execution by peers, teachers, or even parents. This stigma can hinder their participation in learning activities and interfere with their social and emotional development. 5. Limited support and collaboration: Successful inclusion in early childhood education requires strong cooperation between teachers, parents, special education professionals, and other relevant parties. However, often this lack of support and collaboration among all parties can be an obstacle to the implementation of an effective inclusive approach (Kumashiro, 2000).

To address the issue of inclusion in early childhood education, steps need to be taken including: 1. Increase understanding and awareness: Educate all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the general public, about the importance of inclusion and the needs of children with special needs. 2. Training and professional development: Provide training and professional development to teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in support of inclusion in early childhood education. 3. Modification of curriculum and learning strategies: Adapting curriculum and learning strategies that enable active participation and development of children with special needs. 4. Strengthen cooperation and collaboration: Build close cooperation between teachers, parents, special education professionals, and other relevant parties to support inclusion and ensure adequate support for children with special needs. 5. Elimination of stigma and discrimination: Promote an inclusive educational environment, where all children are accepted and valued regardless of their differences. Through continuous efforts and commitment from all parties involved, inclusion in early childhood education can be realized, ensuring that all children have fair and equal opportunities to learn and develop.

b. The Influence of Critical Education on Teacher Mindset and Leadership Attitudes

The study found that critical education has a significant influence on teachers' mindsets and leadership attitudes. Teachers who apply critical education in their leadership practice tend to be reflective, analytical, and innovative leaders. They are more open to new ideas, encourage the child's active participation, and provide space for discussion and critical thinking.

Teacher leadership has a significant influence on early childhood problems. Here are some ways teacher leadership can influence early childhood issues: Good behavior modeling: Teachers as leaders in the classroom have an important role in modeling good behavior to children. When teachers show positive attitudes, cooperation, empathy, and self-control, children tend to imitate those behaviors. This can help address social and emotional issues that early childhood may have. Creation of safe and inclusive learning environments: Effective teachers create safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments for early childhood. In such environments, children feel accepted, valued, and encouraged to actively participate. This can help reduce problems in social interaction, such as bullying or isolation. Provision of emotional support: Early childhood often faces difficulties in managing their emotions. Teachers who have good leadership can provide emotional support to children, helping them identify and express their feelings in a healthy way. It helps to cope with emotional issues and encourages the development of positive social skills. Structured organization of activities and routines: Effective teachers have skills in planning and organizing activities that are varied and interesting for early childhood. Structured routines help children feel safe and can reduce anxiety. Proper activities can also stimulate a child's cognitive, motor, and language development. Effective communication with parents: Teachers who build good relationships with parents or guardians can facilitate collaboration in addressing early childhood issues. Through open and continuous communication, teachers can share information about child development, emerging problems, and strategies that can be applied to create an inclusive environment in Early Childhood Education.

c. Teacher Leadership Practices Oriented to Critical Education

The research also shows that teachers who implement critical education in their leadership adopt a variety of practices and learning strategies that fit that approach. They encourage collaboration among children, provide challenging challenges, and stimulate critical reflection in children. In addition, they also create an inclusive learning environment, where every child has the opportunity to participate and express his opinion.

Critical education-oriented teacher leadership practices encourage students to think critically, develop deep understanding, and engage actively in learning. Here are some critical education-oriented teacher leadership practices: Encourage questioning and critical thinking: Critical education-oriented teachers encourage students to ask challenging questions, analyze information, and formulate evidence-based arguments. They provide opportunities for students to think critically about the topics being studied and provide constructive feedback to broaden their understanding. Facilitate discussion and collaboration: Teachers oriented towards critical education create a classroom environment that encourages discussion and collaboration between students. They organize activities that allow students to share their views, exchange ideas, and work together in finding solutions to problems. Teachers act as facilitators in supporting and directing discussions that trigger critical thinking. Encourage research and

exploration: Teachers oriented to critical education encourage students to conduct independent research and exploration. They give assignments that require students to search for information, analyze resources, and construct their own understanding. Teachers provide relevant guidance and resources to assist students in this process. Integrating diverse perspectives: Teachers oriented towards critical education recognize the importance of integrating diverse perspectives in learning. They introduce materials that reflect a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and experiences of students. Teachers also facilitate discussions that allow students to listen and consider different points of view. Encourage social action and change: Teachers oriented to critical education invite students to think about relevant and relevant social issues

d. Teacher Leadership in Overcoming Inclusion Issues in Early Childhood Education

The results of this study confirm the close relationship between critical education and teacher leadership in addressing the issue of inclusion in the context of early childhood education. The critical education approach provides a solid foundation for effective teacher leadership practice. Through critical education, teachers can create learning environments that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills in children (Freire, 1970).

There is a close relationship between critical education and teacher leadership. Here are some of the relationships between the two: Learning facilitators: Effective teacher leadership involves the ability to be a facilitator of learning that encourages students to think critically. Teachers who practice a critical educational approach engage students in critical discussion, analysis, and evaluation, thus encouraging independent and reflective thinking. They create a learning environment that supports research, exploration, and collaboration, as well as encouraging students to ask questions and question information. Drivers of deep understanding: Critical education emphasizes a deep understanding of the concepts and issues studied. Teacher leadership that focuses on critical education encourages teachers to be steeped in the material they teach and facilitates students in achieving deep understanding. Teachers who understand concepts well can assist students in conducting critical analysis, relating information, and looking at problems or issues from various points of view. Student empowerment: Critical education and effective teacher leadership both aim to empower students. Teachers who practice critical education provide opportunities to students to take an active role in their learning, choose research topics, and take action in society. Teacher leadership that supports critical education facilitates students' active participation in the learning process and gives them autonomy to think critically and make decisions based on their own understanding. Building critical thinking skills: Teacher leadership focused on critical education plays an important role in helping students develop critical thinking skills. Teachers provide the direction, support, and feedback necessary to strengthen students' abilities in the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information. Teachers also engage students in activities that encourage reflection, logical reasoning, and problem solving, thus helping them become better critical thinkers. Social change: Critical education encourages students to question the status quo and encourages social change. Critical education-oriented teacher leadership engages teachers in designing learning experiences that enable students to understand complex social issues, identify injustices, and plan positive actions. Teachers as leaders play a role in guiding students in recognizing social problems, developing critical awareness, and taking constructive steps to bring about change. Critical education and teacher leadership are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Effective teacher

leadership facilitates critical educational practices, builds students' critical thinking skills, empowers them, and fosters positive social change (Giroux, 2010).

Critical education and teacher leadership are closely intertwined in addressing the issue of inclusion in education. Here are some of the linkages between the two: 1. Social and political awareness: Critical education encourages teachers to develop a strong social and political awareness. Teachers who have a deep understanding of social and justice issues will be more sensitive to inclusion issues and understand the importance of providing equal opportunities for all children. They will lead with sensitivity to the needs of children with special needs and strive to create an inclusive environment that promotes justice. 2. Critical thinking in overcoming obstacles: Critical education involves the development of critical thinking, where teachers are encouraged to analyze problems in depth and question the status quo. In the context of inclusion, teachers who have critical thinking will be better able to identify barriers and challenges faced by children with special needs in educational settings. They will strive to find innovative solutions and design inclusive learning strategies. 3. Participatory leadership: Critical education encourages participatory leadership, where teachers involve all stakeholders, including parents, special education professionals, and children themselves, in the decision-making process. In the context of inclusion, participatory leadership ensures that decisions relating to children with special needs involve their perspectives and respect their individual needs. Teachers who exercise participatory leadership will create an inclusive environment, where all parties feel heard and actively engaged. 4. Changing paradigms and practices: Critical education encourages paradigm shifts and non-inclusive practices. Teachers who implement critical education will review existing educational practices and look for ways to make the educational environment more inclusive. They will identify and change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that may limit the participation of children with special needs. By adopting an inclusive approach based on critical thinking, teachers play an important role in addressing the issue of inclusion in education (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009).

In order to address the issue of inclusion, it is important for teachers to understand the concepts and principles of critical education, as well as apply inclusive and participatory leadership approaches. By combining critical education and inclusive teacher leadership, positive change can be realized in the educational environment that promotes participation, equality, and justice for all children (Ekaningtyas & Yasa, 2022).

Through the application of critical education, individuals become more aware of social issues and inequalities, develop critical thinking, and adopt values of inclusion and justice. This then establishes participatory leadership that creates an inclusive, democratic, and empowering environment. Participatory leaders use critical thinking and inclusion values to engage all stakeholders in decision-making and create positive change in education (Rawal et al., 2017).

In the face of the weaknesses of participatory leaders in dealing with the problem of inclusion, it is important for leaders to evaluate situations and conditions wisely, and have the ability to adjust their participatory approach according to specific needs. Flexibility, effective communication, and a deep understanding of different cultural contexts can help leaders overcome challenges and maximize the potential of participatory leadership in diverse situations (Adams et al., 2005).

Teacher leadership engaged in critical education creates an environment that encourages active student participation. Teachers provide opportunities for students to talk, share opinions,

and discuss with other students. Teachers also invite students to take an active role in the learning process, such as through collaborative projects, independent research, or problem solving. Thus, teachers who implement critical education create an environment that encourages active student participation and student-centered learning. Students are encouraged to think critically, ask questions, and analyze in depth social, cultural, and political issues. Through this approach, students not only acquire knowledge, but also develop critical thinking skills that will benefit them in facing challenges and taking roles in complex societies (Ekaningtyas et al., 2023).

Thus, strengthening community participation is one of the positive impacts of critical education on teacher leadership in early childhood education units. Through a deeper understanding of the social and cultural context, teachers can work with parents, families, and local communities to create learning environments that are inclusive, sustainable, and have a positive impact on children's development.

The implementation of critical education can also have an impact on the professional development of teachers in early childhood education units. Teachers can continue to learn and collaborate with their peers to increase their understanding of critical education and apply it in everyday practice. Thus, teacher leadership will develop into insightful educational leaders, able to overcome complex social and cultural challenges. It is important to remember that the implications of critical education for teacher leadership in early childhood units can vary depending on the context and needs of each school. Factors such as school culture, local communities, and education policies can also influence how critical education approaches are implemented and implemented. It is also important to continue to involve all stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents, and communities, in the decision-making process and strategic planning to achieve optimal results in improving the quality of early childhood education (Yasa et al., 2023).

To be able to create an inclusive environment, early childhood education needs to implement participatory leadership, because participatory leadership of teachers has significant implications for early childhood education. Here are some implications of the importance of teacher participatory leadership in the context of early childhood education:

Child empowerment: Participatory leadership of teachers provides opportunities for children to be actively involved in the learning process. Teachers recognize and value children's voices, ideas, and thoughts, so they feel they have an important role to play in learning. It encourages children to develop self-confidence, communication skills, and positive decision-making abilities.

Child-centered learning: Teacher participatory leadership promotes a child-centered learning approach. Teachers involve children in the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning activities. Thus, learning becomes more relevant, meaningful, and interesting for children. Teachers can also identify children's needs and interests individually, so that the learning experience can be tailored to their characteristics and development.

Collaboration with parents: Participatory leadership of teachers involves parents in the decision-making process and implementation of educational activities. Teachers and parents work together in creating an environment that supports children's holistic development. Teachers communicate openly with parents, appreciate their contributions, and involve them in the planning and evaluation of educational programs. Strong collaboration between teachers and parents creates better support for children's development.

Inclusive environment: Participatory leadership of teachers promotes an inclusive educational environment. Teachers play a role in creating a safe, friendly, and accepting atmosphere for all children, including children with special needs. They involve all children in learning activities and ensure that every individual is valued and given equal opportunities. In an inclusive environment, children learn to appreciate differences, build friendships, and develop positive attitudes toward diversity.

Teacher professional development: Participatory leadership of teachers also impacts the professional development of teachers themselves. Teachers are empowered to be involved in decision-making and curriculum planning, so they have a sense of ownership of their work. Teachers can share knowledge and experience, support each other in improving the quality of learning, and continue to learn and develop as a professional.

Participatory leadership of teachers has significant implications in confronting the issue of inclusion in early childhood education (ECCE). Here are some important implications of teacher participatory leadership in the context of inclusion in ECCE: First, **Collaboration and Partnership:** Teacher participatory leadership encourages strong collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and other school staff. Teachers can invite contributions and views from all stakeholders to plan and implement an effective inclusive approach. This collaboration helps create an environment of mutual support and encourages the active participation of all parties involved.

Second, **Shared Decision Making:** In participatory leadership, teachers involve students, parents, and other school staff in decision-making related to inclusion in ECCE. This process allows multiple perspectives and needs to be considered holistically, resulting in more responsive and accurate decisions. It creates a sense of shared ownership of the goal of inclusion and encourages more inclusive and equitable policies.

Third, **Student Empowerment:** Participatory leadership of teachers provides space for students to become active in the learning and decision-making process. Teachers value students' voices and provide opportunities for them to contribute to planning lessons, setting goals, and evaluating their progress. It encourages student empowerment, builds confidence, and increases active participation in an inclusive environment.

Understanding and Appreciation of Diversity: Participatory leadership of teachers encourages understanding and appreciation of student diversity in ECCE. Teachers recognize that each child has his or her own uniqueness, needs, and talents. In the context of inclusion, teachers create an environment that engages and blends student differences in a positive way. This includes enriching the curriculum, accommodating different learning styles, and valuing each individual's contribution in the learning community.

Fifth, **Support and Professional Development:** Participatory leadership of teachers involves ongoing efforts for professional support and development. Teachers work together to identify training needs and resources needed to increase understanding of inclusion and improve their practice. This collaboration creates a sustainable learning community, where teachers support each other and share their knowledge and experience in creating an inclusive environment.

Thus, it can be understood that teacher participatory leadership plays an important role in creating an ECCE environment that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all students. Through collaboration, empowerment, and shared decision-making, teachers form a

strong foundation to address inclusion issues and create positive learning experiences for all children in Early Childhood Education.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the implications of critical education on teacher leadership in early childhood education units so as to give birth to a participatory leadership principle to address the problem of inclusion in early childhood education. Based on the results of the study, several conclusions were obtained as follows:

The issue of inclusion in early childhood education is that there are still challenges that need to be overcome to achieve equitably inclusive education for all children. Some of the problems that arise include the unavailability of special services, lack of parental involvement, discrimination and stigma, curricula that do not support diversity needs, and limited resources.

Addressing the issue of inclusion in Early Childhood Education requires policies and guidelines that support inclusion in education, training and awareness-raising for all stakeholders, inclusive curriculum development, special support for children with special needs, creation of an inclusive physical environment, collaboration with parents and communities, monitoring and evaluation of inclusion implementation, and improved resource allocation. By adopting an inclusive approach and addressing these issues, it is hoped to create an inclusive educational environment for all children, where every child has equal opportunities to grow and develop according to their potential.

Teachers' perceptions and understanding of critical education have a significant impact in addressing inclusion issues. Critical education-oriented teacher leadership practices having a good understanding of injustice, applying critical reflection, having critical analysis skills, empowering students, and committing to social change can create a better inclusive environment inside and outside the classroom. Critical education and teacher leadership are intertwined in addressing inclusion issues. Critical education provides an important foundation and perspective for teacher leadership, while inclusive and critical teacher leadership helps implement a more equitable and sustainable approach to inclusion.

Teacher leadership from a critical education standpoint plays a key role in addressing the issue of inclusion in ECCE. Teachers who practice this approach understand injustice, encourage collaboration and participation, strive for social and structural change, and continually reflect and learn on an ongoing basis. In doing so, they create an inclusive environment that empowers all children to grow and develop optimally.

Through participatory leadership, teachers develop an inclusive environment that engages all stakeholders. This strengthens student participation, engagement and empowerment, and strengthens teacher capacity and support needed to address inclusion issues in ECCE more effectively.

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