The Role and Challenges of Guidance Counselors in Inclusive Education

Fanesa Marizki[1], Rika Damayanti[2], Hardiyansyah Masya[3]
[123]Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia
Correspondent: hardiyansyah.masya@radenintan.ac.id[3]

ABSTRACT: Inclusive education has received much attention globally in relation to ensuring equal opportunities in learning for all students with diverse special needs. This systematic review explores the roles and challenges of counseling teachers in inclusive education through an analysis of 21 research articles. The results show that counseling teachers play an important role in emotional and academic support, development of individualized education plans, collaboration among stakeholders, and crisis management in an inclusive environment. Inadequate training, limited resources, heavy caseloads and systemic barriers hinder their implementation. Bk teachers identified targeted professional development, integration of assistive technology, and improved policies and resources as prerequisites to overcome these challenges. The current study demonstrates the importance of holistic and interdisciplinary methods to empower counseling teachers in building the supportive platforms needed to develop inclusive practices. Its findings add to actionable strategies and policy developments that can be established to improve inclusive education systems worldwide.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Counseling Teachers, Students with Special Needs, Educational Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central principle in modern education systems, reflecting a global commitment to providing equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs (DANĚK, 2024; Garg et al., 2024). The philosophy of inclusion asserts that every student has the right to receive education alongside their peers in an environment that is supportive and accommodating of their needs (Pal, 2023). This approach not only ensures academic integration but also promotes social integration and acceptance of diversity in schools and the wider community (Elfaizi & EL AOURI, 2024).

In this context, the role of guidance and counseling counselors becomes crucial as a bridge between students' needs and inclusive education policies (Hermanto & Pamungkas, 2023; Zhasulan et al., 2022). BK teachers are responsible for providing emotional, academic, and social support to students with special needs to help them overcome learning barriers (Ashokan, 2023; Kopchuk-Kashetska et al., 2023). Collaboration with classroom teachers, parents, and special

support teams makes BK counselors key actors in creating positive and equitable educational experiences (Al Hamad et al., 2024; Hermanto & Pamungkas, 2023; Kopchuk-Kashetska et al., 2023).

However, this role is not without challenges. Many BK teachers face limitations in training, lack of resources, and high workloads that often hinder the effectiveness of the support provided to students with special needs (Fajri & Jauhari, 2024; González-Gil et al., 2013). Furthermore, the increasing diversity of disabilities requires guidance counselors to have broad skills and be prepared to face complex emotional and pedagogical challenges (Donaire et al., 2024; Sani et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the success of inclusive education remains highly dependent on the performance of guidance counselors in creating an inclusive and responsive school culture (Akbar et al., 2023; Dewi, 2024).

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing attention to inclusive education in global and national education policies. Many schools in various countries, including Indonesia, have begun to implement inclusive approaches, but systemic support for the role of guidance counselors remains limited. However, guidance counselors are in a strategic position to provide in-depth and sustained interventions for students with special needs. Unfortunately, to date, there have been few systematic studies that specifically explore the role and challenges of guidance counselors in the context of inclusive education, which has resulted in limited policy development, professional training, and the provision of adequate resources.

Most previous research has focused on the perspectives of classroom teachers, school principals, or parents, with few exploring the multifunctional role of guidance counselors in depth (Azwar et al., 2021; Baranauskienė & Saveikienė, 2018; Belegu-Caka, 2022; Elumalai, 2023; Sakız et al., 2015). The absence of a systematic mapping of the roles and challenges of guidance and counseling teachers creates a gap in understanding the comprehensive implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap and provide a strong foundation for policy-making and practical interventions at the school level.

The problem addressed in this study is: what are the roles and challenges of guidance and counseling teachers in supporting the implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs? This question forms the basis for identifying the contributions of guidance and counseling teachers and the obstacles they face, as well as formulating strategies that can support the strengthening of their role more effectively.

The objective of this study is to systematically review various scientific literature on the role and challenges of guidance and counseling teachers in inclusive education, as well as to identify strategies that can be used to overcome existing obstacles and strengthen their capacity to support students with special needs.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review method to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scholarly findings regarding the roles and challenges of guidance and counseling teachers in inclusive education. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain a

comprehensive and objective overview of existing trends, research gaps, and contributions in the field (Benavides et al., 2021). By using this method, the findings become more structured and replicable for future studies.

The primary data source was the Scopus database, selected for its broad academic coverage, multidisciplinary scope, and peer-reviewed content. Scopus is considered representative in providing high-quality articles from diverse regions and methodological approaches. The search was limited to articles published between 2000 and 2023 to ensure relevance and capture two decades of evolving policy and practice in inclusive education. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including: "Counseling teacher" AND "inclusive education," "Students with special needs" AND "counseling teacher role," "Challenges" AND "inclusive practices," and "Counseling" AND "support for students with special needs." Inclusion and exclusion criteria were explicitly formulated to ensure the relevance and quality of selected articles, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Criteria

Criteria	Description
Inclusion	- Studies focusing on the roles and responsibilities of counseling teachers in inclusive education. - Articles discussing the challenges faced by counseling teachers in supporting students with special needs. - Research conducted in primary, secondary, or special education settings. - Empirical studies, theoretical analyses, or literature reviews.
Exclusion	- Articles focusing solely on the perspectives of classroom teachers or school administrators. - Studies unrelated to inclusive education or counseling. - Articles, conference papers, or editorials that are not peer-reviewed.

Article Selection Process

The article selection procedure followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability in the review process. The selection involved four stages: initial identification yielded 75 articles; after removing duplicates, 62 unique articles remained; title and abstract screening reduced this to 35; and finally, full-text review resulted in 21 articles that met all inclusion criteria and were analyzed further.
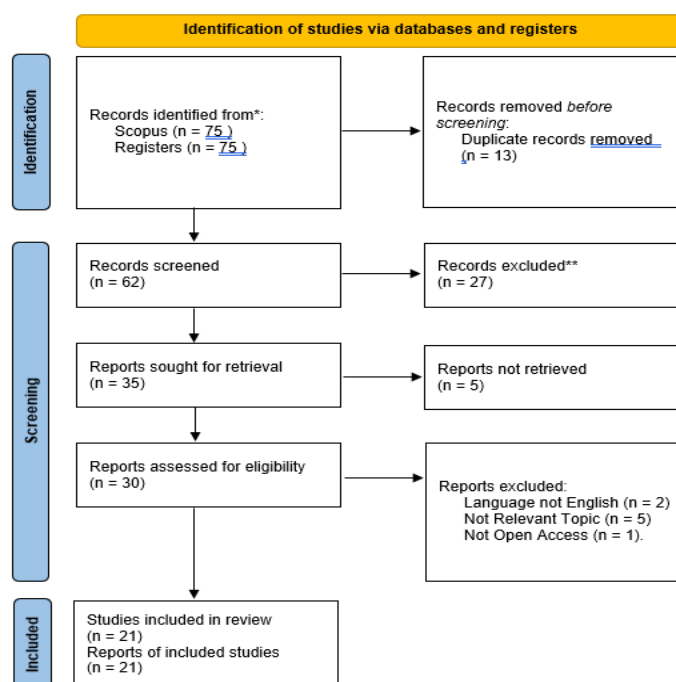
Figure 1. Article Selection Criteria

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Growth and Contribution
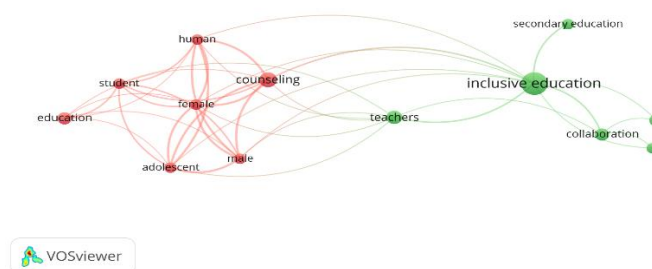
Figure 2. VOSviewer Result

A total of 21 papers were reviewed in this study, the results of VOSviewer in Figure 4 show the keyword linkage which is then identified in the table below.

Table 2. Literature Identification

No	Title	Author(s)	Publication
1	Perceived Social Support and Academic Resilience as Predictors of Psychological Distress and Well-being among Students with Disabilities at the University of Education, Winneba	(Klutsey et al., 2024)	Education Review

2	Provision of Higher Education for Students with Disabilities in Cyprus	(Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008)	Journal of Special Educational Technology
3	School Counselors' Views on the Practice of Individualized Education Programs	(Coşkun, 2010a)	Journal of Teacher Technology and Education
4	Systematic Literature Review on Guidance and Counseling Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Online Game Addiction	Lestari et al., 2024	Tadris: Journal of Teaching and Education
5	Reducing Barriers to Inclusion of Visually Impaired Students in University: Focus on Educational and Psychological Needs	Kija & Mgumba, 2024	International Journal of Inclusive Education
6	Classification of Risk and Protective Factors for Students' Mental Health Using Data Mining Techniques	Damayanti & Satria, 2025	Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal
7	Practices in Handling Children with Special Needs in Schools: A Norwegian Perspective	(Haug, 2014)	Computers in Human Behavior
8	Comprehensive Support for At-Risk Students in Inclusive Education: School Theory and Practice in the Czech Republic	(Slowík et al., 2023)	International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning
9	Inclusive Education for Gifted Students in Secondary Schools in the Czech Republic Compared with Students with Special Educational Needs	(Klimecká, 2023)	Reading Teacher
10	New Roles and Strategies for Educational Psychology Counseling to Promote Inclusive Education in the Valencian Community	(Moliner García & Fabregat Mas, 2021)	Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
11	A Survey on the Perceptions of Greek General and Special Education Teachers Regarding the Role of Special Needs Coordinators	(Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011a)	Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology
12	Digital Literacy and ICT in Learning and Inclusion – Ecuador	(Barros & Barros G., 2019)	International Journal of Disability, Development and Education
13	Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: A Cypriot Perspective	(Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008)	Computers and Open Education
14	Mothers' Reflections on the Role of Educational Psychologists in Supporting Children with Behavioral Problems	(Mohangi & Archer, 2015)	South African Journal of Education
15	Reducing Barriers to Inclusion of Students with Visual Impairments in General Classrooms: Focus on Educational and Cultural Aspects	(L. L. Kija & Mgumba, 2024)	British Journal of Visual Impairment
16	School Counselors' Views on the Practice	(Coşkun,	Procedia – Social and

	of Individualized Education Programs	2010b)	Behavioral Sciences
17	Practices in Handling Children with Special Needs in Schools: A Norwegian Perspective	(Haug, 2014)	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
18	Habilitation Services for Children Blind due to Retinopathy of Prematurity: Perspectives of Healthcare Professionals in Maharashtra	(Kulkarni et al., 2019)	Indian Journal of Ophthalmology
19	Relationship Between Perceptions of School Climate and Prevalence of Bullying Behaviors in Greek Schools: Implications for Inclusive Preventive Strategies	(Giovazolias et al., 2010)	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences
20	A Survey on the Perceptions of Greek General and Special Education Teachers Regarding the Role of Special Needs Coordinators: Implications for Inclusion Policies and Teacher Education	(Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011a)	Teaching and Teacher Education
21	Learning Styles: What We Know and What We Need	(Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2013)	Education Forum
22	Assessment of the Competencies of Pre-Service Teachers and Inclusive Practice Teachers	(Kudek Mirošević, 2016)	Croatian Journal of Education
23	Mainstreaming Oncogenomic Models: Enhancing Identification of Lynch Syndrome	(O'Shea et al., 2023)	Frontiers in Oncology

Table 2 above shows 21 relevant papers in this study that have been screened from a total of 75 through the Scopus database, the overall growth on this topic is shown in Figure 3 below:
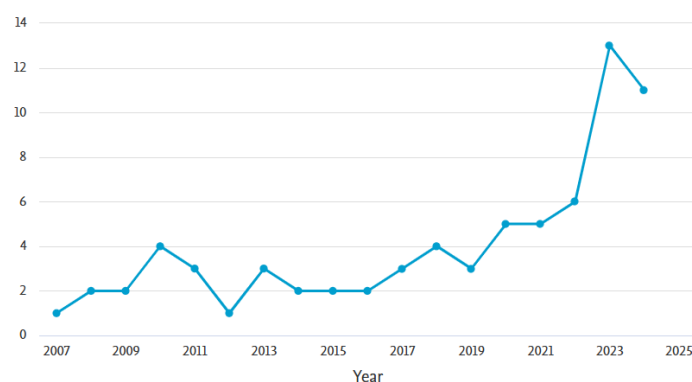

Figure 3. Trends in Research Growth

Figure 3 presents the trend of research publications on counseling teachers and inclusive education from 2007 to 2024. From 2007 to 2015, the number of publications was at a low and fluctuating level, reflecting the early stages of recognition of the role of counseling teachers, with certain spikes, such as in 2009 and 2011, influenced by international policies such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The period 2016-2021 shows

steady growth characterized by the adoption of inclusive education policies and implementation strategies such as teacher training and individual education plans, IEPs. A significant growth trend occurs in the period 2022-2024, with a spike in 2023 driven by increased attention to student needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and technological advances in inclusive education.

Table 4. Affiliate Contribution

No	Affiliation	Documents
1	University of Sydney	4.0
2	Garvan Institute of Medical Research	3.0
3	Faculty of Medicine and Health	3.0
4	Royal Prince Alfred Hospital	3.0
5	Autonomous University of Madrid	3.0
6	Concord Repatriation General Hospital	3.0
7	Medical Oncology	2.0
8	University of Crete	2.0
9	Jaume I University	2.0
10	University of West Bohemia	2.0

Table 3 shows the distribution of the number of documents produced by the top 15 institutions by affiliation. The University of Sydney, with a rating of more than 4 documents, is listed first due to its strong capacity to conduct research through access to resources, funding and collaboration. The Garvan Medical Research Institute and the Faculty of Medicine and Health each contributed around 3 documents, reflecting attention to health issues in special populations. Contributions from the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Concord Repatriation General Hospital show a focus on medical and psychological support in inclusive education. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, University of Crete and Universidad Jaume I ranked lower, contributing around 2 documents to expand the international scope of inclusive education studies. Despite being at the bottom of this chart, the role of the University of Western Bohemia has not gone unnoticed. The presence of various medical institutions, such as Medical Oncology, therefore reflects a multidisciplinary approach in integrating physical and psychological health aspects in supporting students with special needs.

Table 4. Contributing countries

No	Country/Region	Documents
1	Spain	10
2	India	9
3	Australia	7
4	United States	5
5	Czech Republic	4
6	Greece	4
7	Türkiye	4
8	United Kingdom	3
9	Germany	3
10	Russian Federation	3

Table 4. presents the distribution of the number of research documents by country or region, showing the global contribution of specific topics, which may be related to inclusive education

or other multidisciplinary fields. Spain and India are the largest contributors, with around 10 documents, and this may be because Spain has the most advanced policies in inclusive education and India has adaptation policies for a large and diverse population. Australia and the United States followed with 6-8 documents, where Australia highlighted technology in inclusive education and teacher training, while the US focused on federal policies and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Countries represented by around 3-4 documents are the Czech Republic, Greece, Turkey and the UK; these countries discuss innovative policies for inclusive education development, regional challenges and community-based inclusion. Germany and Russia are represented at the bottom with 2-3 documents, still contributing local perspectives using cultural and technology-based approaches.

Table 5. Key findings

No	Method	Authors	Key Findings
1	Quantitative	(Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011b; Giovazolias et al., 2010; Klimecká, 2023; Klutsey et al., 2024; Kudek Mirošević, 2016; Kulkarni et al., 2019)	(1) Social support and academic resilience reduce psychological distress among students with special needs. (2) Schools lack a conceptual approach to inclusion but implement informal practices for gifted and special needs students. (3) SENCOs are needed for student assessment, parent guidance, and teacher training in inclusive schools. (4) Knowledge of habilitation services for students with visual impairments due to ROP is inadequate. (5) Negative perceptions of school climate and involvement in risky behavior predict bullying in inclusive education. (6) Teachers and students in inclusive settings are more competent in supporting student rights, designing materials, and IEPs compared to those in non-inclusive education.
2	Qualitative	(Calero-Morales et al., 2023; Coşkun, 2010b; Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2013; Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008; Mohangi & Archer, 2015; Moliner García & Fabregat Mas, 2021; Slowík et al., 2023)	(1) Inclusive support in higher education includes infrastructure adjustments, teaching, and counseling; counseling teachers are undertrained in IEP and inclusive education, with limited staff. (2) Barriers to inclusion of students with visual impairments include physical environment, social environment, and limited access to information. (3) A gap exists between inclusive education policy and practice. (4) Inclusion coordinators and collaboration with families and social services are essential for effective inclusion. (5) Collaborative strategies, such as teacher mentoring and enhanced counseling, support inclusive practices. (6) ICT utilization is essential for accessibility for students with special needs. (7) Educational psychologists support families and children with behavioral issues for effective inclusion. (8) Understanding students' learning styles improves instructional planning and academic outcomes.
3	Mixed Methods	(O'Shea et al., 2023)	A genomics-based inclusion model enhances diagnostic accuracy and accelerates access to genetic

testing for students with special needs.

Qualitative and quantitative research complement each other to capture a better understanding of inclusive education. Quantitative research reveals evidence in the form of statistical or measurable outcomes, such as how social support can improve the mental health of students with special needs (Klutsey et al., 2024), and how SENCOs play an important role in student evaluation and teacher training (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011a). Other research points to the need for professional training to address visual impairment (Kulkarni et al., 2019) and the need for a socially emotionally supportive school environment (Giovazolias et al., 2010). Qualitative approaches added, for example, the requirement of infrastructure adjustment and counseling in higher education settings, (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008), and the requirement of collaboration between family and social services, (Slowík et al., 2023) have been added. In addition, information technology has also been found to improve access (Calero-Morales et al., 2023), while educational psychologists ensure a holistic approach (Mohangi & Archer, 2015). In both approaches, there is an urgent need for multidimensional methodologies to further support inclusive education.

The role of counseling teachers in inclusive education

From the analyzed literature, guidance counseling teachers play a central role in inclusive education across three key areas: emotional support, individualized learning plans, and coordination among stakeholders. Klutsey et al. (2024) showed that counselor support significantly reduces psychological distress in students with special needs, improving their academic resilience. This aligns with findings in Indonesia, where counselors often mediate between students, teachers, and parents, although their involvement in developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) remains limited. Coşkun (2010) emphasized that trained counselors can address classroom teachers' lack of understanding of inclusive practices. Additional studies (Kija & Mgumba, 2024; Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011) highlight counselors' roles in supporting academic needs, conducting evaluations, and promoting family and community collaboration. These roles are critical in bridging policy-practice gaps and managing behavioral challenges, especially in students with ADHD, as noted by Haug (2014) and further supported by Moliner García & Fabregat Mas (2021) through collaborative mentoring strategies.

Challenges in implementing inclusive education

The main challenges identified include: **lack of professional training**, **lack of assistive technology**, **administrative workload**, and **limited policies supporting inclusion**. Studies by Calero-Morales et al. (2023) and Haug (2014) mention that lack of resources, including visual aids and psychopedagogical evaluation platforms, are major obstacles. These conditions are similar in Indonesia, where guidance counselors often take on multiple roles, ranging from counseling to administrative tasks, thereby limiting the time available for individualized approaches. Additionally, lack of harmony between parents, teachers, and support staff also hinders the integration of services.

Strategies to Improve Inclusive Education

Some strategies that have proven effective are **collaborative mentoring**, **use of adaptive technology**, and **involvement of parents and the community**. Moliner García & Fabregat Mas (2021) propose a mentoring model between guidance counselors and classroom teachers in the form of intensive case-based workshops. In Indonesia, this approach can be implemented through cross-functional *In House Training* (IHT) programs. In addition, the use of assistive technology such as AI-based adaptive software can help identify students' needs more efficiently (Luster et al., 2023). Community support also plays an important role; workshops involving parents, NGOs, and social service agencies can strengthen the synergy of inclusion-based services.

The important role of counseling teachers in inclusive education

The role of guidance counseling teachers is crucial in facilitating inclusive education through meeting the learning, emotional and social needs of students with special needs in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as classroom teachers, parents and education specialists. On the one hand, research conducted by Klutsey et al. (2024) showed that social support provided by counseling teachers significantly influenced students to reduce their psychological distress through increased resilience. In addition, counseling teachers participate in the development and implementation of IEPs, which is one of the important tools to meet students' unique needs. Nevertheless, research by (Coşkun, 2010) shows that deficiencies and lack of adequate training are usually the main obstacles that hinder the effective performance of counseling teachers' duties in building human character (Hidayat, 2019). Therefore, for inclusive education to be implemented well, better training and systemic support for counseling teachers is needed.

Systemic challenges in implementing inclusive education

According to (Slowík et al., 2023), the overall implementation of inclusive education often suffers from serious obstacles at the systemic level: "Policies are not very or fully supportive of inclusiveness, such as providing appropriate tools and materials". Counseling teachers are in a valuable position to act as advocates for policy change towards creating inclusive learning environments. However, resource limitations remain a major challenge, highlighting that the lack of infrastructure and assistive technology often hinders counseling teachers' ability to provide optimal services to students with special needs. In addition, (Slowík et al., 2023) pointed out that high workloads, along with limited time for individual attention, further increase the pressure on counseling teachers in supporting inclusive education.

Strategies to overcome challenges

Various studies have suggested a number of strategies to help BK teachers overcome the problems stemming from inclusive education. Developing training programs that will increase counseling teachers' capacity in dealing with students with special needs has been one of the

main strategies (Moliner García & Fabregat Mas, 2021) calling for a training approach based on collaboration between classroom teachers, parents and education specialists. In addition, technology integration will also be one of the solutions to be implemented for more effective inclusive education practices (Luster et al., 2023) claiming that the use of assistive technology, such as adaptive learning software and AI-based applications, allows teachers in BK to meet the needs of students with increased effectiveness and reduce teacher workload by offering more effective means to diagnose and design educational interventions.

Parental and community involvement is another important element that promotes inclusive education. Research by (Slowík et al., 2023) shows that workshops and discussion forums involving parents can help create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Such collaboration will strengthen mutual trust between schools and families, leading to synergy in supporting students' special needs. With a combination of training, technology and community involvement, inclusive education can be implemented more effectively to overcome the systemic challenges that have been faced.

Policy and practice implications

The findings from this study have major implications for policy and practice in the field of inclusive education. Education policy should turn its attention to developing frameworks that support inclusiveness, including the provision of adequate resources and ongoing professional training. In support, research by (Slowík et al., 2023) shows the importance of policy support in integrating new tools and strategies into the education system.

From a practice perspective, schools should ensure that counseling teachers, classroom teachers, and other specialists adopt an interdisciplinary approach in supporting students with special needs. A research study by (L. Kija & Mgumba, 2024) confirmed that various stakeholders need to collaborate in a holistic support system.

These findings provide a strong signal that improving the capacity of guidance counselors in the inclusive education system should be a policy priority. Currently, there are no national training standards that require guidance counselors to have inclusive education competencies. The implementation of policies such as Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education needs to be strengthened with training budgets, provision of assistive technology, and formal recognition of the role of guidance counselors in inclusive teams at schools. This study also calls for a review of the guidance counselor professional education curriculum to make it more adaptive to the demands of 21st-century inclusive education.

Future Research Directions

The results of this study create further avenues for research in the field of inclusive education, particularly in discovering the effectiveness of the strategies that have been proposed. For example, the specific impact of assistive technology on the success of inclusive education could provide further insights into research. In addition, further research on collaborative approaches

in BK teacher training needs to be conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the training programs designed.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the essential role of guidance counseling teachers in promoting inclusive education by addressing students' emotional, academic, and social needs, and by facilitating collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities. Through a systematic review of 21 relevant articles, the study identifies key challenges such as limited training, inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and weak policy frameworks that hinder the optimal function of counselors in inclusive settings. The findings contribute significantly to filling the research gap regarding the specific role of school counselors, especially in the context of inclusive practices.

To strengthen inclusive education, this study recommends actionable strategies, including targeted professional development programs, integration of assistive technologies, structured mentoring between counselors and teachers, and stronger parental and community engagement. For policymakers, this study underlines the urgent need to provide clear regulatory frameworks, funding allocations, and institutional recognition of counselors' roles within inclusive school teams. Addressing these barriers with a holistic and interdisciplinary approach will enable guidance counselors to build more equitable and supportive learning environments for students with special needs, particularly in developing contexts like Indonesia.

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