Research Paper

# Transforming Early Childhood Education in Karang Tinggi District: Strategies for Overcoming Bias and Promoting Inclusivity (How Can We Achieve This?)

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and strategies in transforming early childhood education (ECE) in Karang Tinggi District, with a focus on addressing bias and promoting inclusivity. The research employs qualitative methods, utilizing data collection techniques through observation and interviews. It identifies several key barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in ECE, including a narrow understanding of inclusivity, the lack of specialized training for educators, limited facilities, and insufficient supportive policies. The findings reveal that many educators hold a limited view of inclusivity, often focusing solely on children with severe disabilities, while broader needs for inclusivity—such as sociocultural diversity and different learning needs—are frequently overlooked. Additionally, the lack of specific training on inclusive strategies and inadequate facilities further impede the implementation of equitable education. This study implements treatments through several strategies to address the challenges faced by educators, one of which is strengthening educators' understanding through training aimed at developing inclusive conceptions in ECE institutions, and providing resources to support a range of play-based activities for children in ECE services. By applying these strategies, ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District are able to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, providing equal opportunities for every child to reach their full potential, free from bias or discrimination.

*Keywords:* Early childhood education, inclusivity, bias, educator training.

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a fundamental role in the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children, which can significantly influence their future educational success. In Karang Tinggi District, despite various efforts to improve the quality of ECE, significant challenges related to inclusivity and bias persist. This study aims to explore the challenges faced and strategies that can be applied to transform the ECE system towards a more inclusive environment.

The concept of inclusivity in education refers to the principle that all children, regardless of their social, cultural, or physical backgrounds, should have equal opportunities to participate and thrive in educational settings (Ainscow, 2005). Inclusivity not only involves adjustments for children with disabilities but also encompasses efforts to understand and accommodate social-cultural diversity and various learning styles (Acedo et al., 2009). A narrow understanding of inclusivity can result in the implementation of incomplete

strategies, ultimately limiting the benefits of inclusive education for all children anak (Bengtsson & Bonfils, 2013).

One of the main challenges in the implementation of inclusive education is the lack of sufficient training for educators. Adequate training on inclusive strategies is crucial for educators to effectively apply methods that accommodate the needs of all children (Florian, 2014). However, based on field observations, many educators in Karang Tinggi District have not received the necessary specialized training, leading to difficulties in implementing inclusive approaches effectively. This highlights that without comprehensive training, the implementation of inclusive education remains a significant challenge.

Adequate facilities are also a crucial element in supporting inclusivity in ECE. According to (Hornby, 2014; Hornby & Hornby, 2014), physical accessibility and appropriate resources play a key role in ensuring that all children can participate equally in learning activities. In Karang Tinggi District, many ECE institutions face challenges related to inadequate facilities, such as insufficient learning aids and accessibility, which hinder the creation of an inclusive educational environment.

To transform the ECE system in Karang Tinggi into a more inclusive environment, several strategies can be implemented. First, it is essential to enhance educator training on inclusive principles and their implementation strategies. This training should cover aspects such as addressing bias, designing inclusive curricula, and utilizing appropriate learning aids. Second, there is a need to evaluate and improve ECE facilities, ensuring that all institutions have adequate accessibility and the necessary resources to support diversity in the classroom.

Overall, the implementation of inclusive education in Karang Tinggi District faces key challenges, including limited educator training and inadequate facilities. To overcome these issues, an integrated approach is required, encompassing the enhancement of educator training, facility adjustments, and the adoption of a broader understanding of inclusivity. This study aims to explore these challenges in depth and formulate effective strategies to create a more inclusive ECE environment in Karang Tinggi. By identifying existing obstacles and understanding the environmental factors influencing the implementation of inclusion, this research seeks to provide comprehensive and practical solutions. The study also aims to offer useful guidance for policymakers, educators, and communities in developing strategies that promote inclusivity. It is hoped that the proposed transformation will improve the quality of education and the well-being of all children in Karang Tinggi District, creating a more inclusive ECE environment and supporting the optimal development of every child.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### 1. Anti-bias Education
Anti-bias education, developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, provides a critical framework for understanding and addressing bias within educational systems (Derman-Sparks, 2016; Derman-Sparks et al., 2015; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019). According to this theory, education is not merely about transmitting knowledge but also about fostering self-awareness and understanding diversity. Derman-Sparks and Edwards emphasize that from an early age, children should be introduced to concepts of diversity and equity and learn to recognize and challenge the prejudices present in society. In practice, this theory encourages educators to develop curricula that reflect various cultural and social perspectives, while also creating an inclusive and discrimination-free learning environment. This includes selecting educational materials that not only enrich children's knowledge of diversity but also promote positive attitudes toward differences. The approach aims to reduce inequities and ensure that all children feel valued and acknowledged in the learning process.

Anti-bias education highlights the importance of self-awareness development among educators. They are expected to recognize and confront their own biases, as well as commit to creating a fair and supportive environment (Kissinger, 2017). Educators who are aware of their biases are better equipped to identify and address potential prejudices in the curriculum and in their interactions with children, thus promoting a more inclusive learning atmosphere. This theory also underscores the need for parent and community involvement in anti-bias education efforts. Collaboration between schools, families, and communities is crucial in reinforcing messages about diversity and equality taught in schools. By creating synergy among these stakeholders, this theory ensures that anti-bias values are consistently applied across various aspects of children's lives (Putra, 2024). The application of anti-bias education theory in early childhood education aims to prepare children to live and interact in an increasingly diverse society. By equipping children with the understanding and skills to navigate differences, this theory contributes not only to the individual development of the child but also to the creation of a more inclusive and harmonious society.

## 2. Inclusive Education

In his theory of inclusion, Ainscow emphasizes that inclusion in education extends beyond mere physical access to educational facilities; it is more about creating an environment that supports the full participation of all children (Ainscow, 2005). To achieve genuine inclusion, it is crucial to adapt the curriculum and teaching methods to meet various children's needs, including those with different backgrounds or special needs (Ferguson et al., 2018). Inclusion theory demands that educators design and implement a flexible and responsive curriculum to accommodate diverse learning needs (Ang, 2010). This involves adjustments in teaching materials, methods, and assessments to cater to different learning styles and abilities. In this way, every child, regardless of background or special needs, has an equal opportunity to fully participate in the learning process.

A collaborative approach is essential for creating an inclusive environment. This means that schools must work together with families, communities, and various educational professionals to identify and address barriers that may impede children's full participation (Underwood, 2013). Such collaboration ensures that all parties are involved in supporting each child's educational success and promoting more effective inclusion (Blanch-Gelabert & París-Romía, 2024). Di In the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector in Karang Tinggi District, applying inclusion theory is particularly relevant given the cultural diversity and varying backgrounds of the children in the area. By adopting inclusion principles, schools can ensure that the curriculum and teaching methods accommodate the unique needs of each child and foster an environment that supports and values diversity. This approach is expected to reduce educational disparities and enhance the participation of all children in the learning process. Inclusion theory provides crucial guidance for creating an equitable educational system that supports all children. By implementing inclusion principles, schools in Karang Tinggi can more effectively meet diverse learning needs and ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed in education.

## 3. Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura, in his social learning theory, emphasizes that children learn not

only from their direct experiences but also through observing the behavior of others and the consequences that follow (McLeod, 2011). Bandura introduced the concept of "role models," suggesting that children are likely to imitate the behavior of adults or individuals they consider exemplary (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). In other words, learning occurs through observing and imitating what is seen around them (Bandura, 1991) . This theory indicates that the social learning process heavily relies on observation, imitation, and vicarious learning (through others' experiences).

In the context of early childhood education, applying this theory is crucial. Educators, as primary role models in the learning environment, bear significant responsibility in demonstrating behaviors that reflect inclusive and anti-bias values. For example, if an educator consistently demonstrates attitudes that value diversity, respect differences, and handle conflicts fairly, children are more likely to emulate these attitudes (Yildirim et al., 2020). Conversely, if educators exhibit biased or discriminatory behaviors, it can reinforce negative attitudes or prejudices in children.

Bandura also highlights that children learn not only from the actions they observe but also from the reactions and consequences that follow those actions (Crain, 2015). Therefore, it is important for educators to provide constructive and supportive feedback when children exhibit inclusive behaviors and address biases. By offering rewards or positive reinforcement for behaviors that support diversity, educators can reinforce these values and encourage children to adopt them in their daily interactions.

In practical classroom settings, educators can apply social learning theory in various ways. For instance, they can model respectful and empathetic communication, present stories and materials that reflect diverse cultures, and actively engage in activities that promote cooperation and mutual respect. Additionally, educators can use role-playing approaches to help children understand and experience different perspectives and social situations. Bandura's social learning theory provides a crucial foundation for anti-bias and inclusivity education by emphasizing the vital role of educators as role models. By demonstrating inclusive attitudes and behaviors, educators can positively influence children's attitudes and behaviors, create a supportive and respectful learning environment, and reduce potential prejudices among children.

### 4. *Ecological Development Theory*

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological Development Model, which provides an important framework for understanding how various layers of the environment impact child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This model consists of several interacting systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The microsystem encompasses the child's daily environment, such as family, school, and peer groups, which directly affect their experiences and development. The mesosystem involves interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationship between family and school (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The ecosystem includes environments that indirectly affect the child, such as educational policies and economic conditions, while the macrosystem

encompasses broader cultural, social values, and societal policies.

In the context of education in Karang Tinggi, the Ecological Development Model offers valuable insights into how local factors and social contexts influence the implementation of anti-bias and inclusive strategies (Bronfenbrenner, 2013) For example, educational policies supporting diversity and inclusion must be considered within the microsystem and mesosystem in Karang Tinggi. This means that such policies need to be translated into daily practices at schools, which then interact with support from families and communities. Good policies at the macrosystem level must be accompanied by effective implementation at the microsystem level to achieve desired outcomes.

The model also underscores the importance of adapting strategies to the local context. In Karang Tinggi, factors such as social conditions, cultural norms, and community structures can influence how anti-bias and inclusive strategies are received and implemented. For instance, cultural norms and local values may affect societal attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. By understanding the interactions between different environmental layers, educators and policymakers can design strategies that better align with local needs and conditions. The Ecological Development Model teaches that changes in one system can impact others. Therefore, efforts to enhance inclusion and address bias cannot be isolated from the broader context. Changes in educational policies, for example, must be accompanied by support from the community and families to ensure that such changes are effective and sustainable. In this regard, to design and implement effective educational strategies in Karang Tinggi, integrating an understanding of how various layers of the environment affect child development can help create a more inclusive learning environment and support optimal development for all children while considering the local context and interactions between different systems.

In efforts to transform early childhood education in Karang Tinggi to address bias and promote inclusivity, the interconnections among Anti-Bias Education Theory, Inclusion Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Ecological Development Model provide an integrated and comprehensive framework. Although each of these theories has distinct focuses and foundational principles, they complement and support the implementation of holistic and effective strategies. Anti-Bias Education Theory and Inclusion Theory primarily focus on creating equitable and inclusive educational environments. The Anti-Bias Theory, developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, underscores the importance of curricula and practices that challenge biases and promote understanding of diversity. Meanwhile, Ainscow's Inclusion Theory emphasizes the need for curriculum and teaching method adaptations to meet the needs of all children, including those with special needs or diverse backgrounds. The interrelation between these two theories lies in how they support achieving inclusion goals. Anti-Bias Education provides a foundation for creating a curriculum that reflects diversity and combats biases, while Inclusion Theory ensures that this curriculum is accessible and accepted by all children with necessary adjustments to meet varied needs. In Karang Tinggi, applying these theories can ensure that every child, regardless of background or special conditions, receives equal opportunities in the learning process.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory adds an important dimension to the

application of Anti-Bias Education Theory and Inclusion Theory by emphasizing the role of educators as role models. According to Bandura, children learn through observing and imitating the behaviors of adults around them. Therefore, educators who exhibit inclusive and anti-bias attitudes can directly influence children's attitudes and behaviors. This interconnection highlights the importance of developing anti-bias attitudes and behaviors among educators as part of inclusion strategies. When educators model respect for differences and practice inclusive principles, children are more likely to adopt these values. The implementation of an inclusive and bias-free curriculum, supported by anti-bias and inclusion theories, must be accompanied by real examples from educators to be effective.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Development Model provides important perspectives on how different environmental layers impact child development, which is highly relevant for implementing Anti-Bias Education Theory, Inclusion Theory, and Social Learning Theory. This model includes interactions between the microsystem (e.g., family and school), mesosystem (interactions between environments), ecosystem (policies and external conditions), and macrosystem (cultural and societal values). By understanding the interactions among these environmental layers, the Ecological Development Model helps explain how local factors in Karang Tinggi—such as social conditions, cultural norms, and educational policies—affect the application of anti-bias and inclusive strategies. It indicates that to achieve effective change, strategies must consider the local context and involve various stakeholders, including families and communities. For example, inclusion and anti-bias policies need to be integrated with daily school practices and supported by broader community backing.

The interconnections among these four theories form a powerful synergy in designing and implementing educational strategies in Karang Tinggi. Anti-Bias Education Theory and Inclusion Theory provide a foundation for curricula and practices that support diversity and meet the needs of all children. Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of educators as role models in teaching these values. The Ecological Development Model provides a framework for understanding how various environmental factors affect implementation. By integrating these four theories, educational strategies in Karang Tinggi can be designed to systematically address bias and create an inclusive learning environment. This involves adjusting the curriculum, the role of educators, and support from various environmental layers to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to develop and succeed in education

## MATERIALS & METHODS

The research method employed in this study is qualitative, utilizing data collection techniques through observation and interviews. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the actual conditions on the ground and educators' perceptions of inclusivity (J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2016). By exploring educators' experiences and perspectives directly, this study aims to identify challenges faced and effective strategies for addressing these issues. The data collection techniques used in this study are as follows:

1. **Observation**
   Observation is used to gather direct data regarding educational practices in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers in Karang Tinggi District. This technique involves active observation of classroom interactions, management of the learning environment, and the implementation of inclusive strategies by educators. Observations will be conducted systematically to understand how inclusivity concepts are applied in daily practices and to identify potential

obstacles that may not be revealed through interviews. This observation follows principles that emphasize the importance of direct observation to gain a deep contextual understanding (J. Creswell, 2015).

2. **Interviews**
3. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with educators, school principals, and other educational stakeholders. These interviews are designed to explore views, experiences, and perceptions regarding the challenges and strategies in implementing inclusive education. Interview questions will cover topics such as understanding of inclusivity, training received, facility constraints, and experiences in applying inclusive strategies. These interviews will provide deep insights into factors affecting the implementation of inclusion and the effectiveness of various strategies that have been applied.

Data collected from observations and interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, incorporating data triangulation. Observational data will be organized and categorized based on key themes that emerge from the observations, while interview transcripts will be analyzed to identify patterns and themes related to challenges and strategies of inclusion. The results of the analysis will be compared with existing theories to determine the extent to which the application of inclusivity principles aligns with the referenced theories.

## RESULT

### 1. *Empirical Conditions*

This research originates from issues regarding the empirical conditions of education services based on inclusivity and gender justice as a form of anti-bias strengthening in Nonformal Education Units, specifically in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs in Karang Tinggi District, Central Bengkulu Regency.
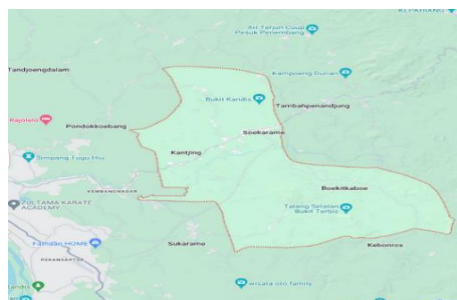


***Figure 1 Map of Karang Tinggi District***

The modeling of anti-bias education is crucial for nonformal education services in ECE programs in Central Bengkulu Regency because this region exhibits cultural, social, and economic diversity that has the potential to create inequality and discrimination, both directly and indirectly, within the educational process. Anti-bias education aims to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment where children, regardless of their background, can develop a positive self-identity and appreciate differences. Additionally, this modeling helps prevent the emergence of stereotypes and prejudices from an early age and supports the reinforcement of equality and human rights values in the community. This is highly relevant for rural areas like Central Bengkulu, which face socio-economic challenges and complex gender role dynamics, particularly in supporting equitable education for all children.

The fundamental goal of this research is to explore the empirical conditions of education services, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and gender justice as strategies to strengthen the anti-bias approach in education. The aspects examined in this study include the roles of educators and ECE managers in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, building awareness and better understanding of diversity, preparing children to live in a diverse society, and reducing disparities and conflicts arising from gender differences and social backgrounds. Indicators of success for this inclusive and gender-just education service include the creation of a conducive learning environment for all students, increased

awareness of the importance of inclusivity and gender justice, and reduced gender inequality within the educational context.

Research findings indicate that the majority of Nonformal Education Units providing ECE services in Karang Tinggi District, Central Bengkulu Regency, have not yet fully grasped the concept of anti-bias and the importance of inclusivity in learning. Observations and interviews with educators and ECE managers reveal that anti-bias principles have not been fully implemented in daily practices. Some educational institutions have not systematically addressed inclusivity, resulting in learning environments that are not fully safe and supportive for all students regardless of gender or social background. These findings suggest that most educators are still focused on conventional learning aspects without considering the importance of creating an inclusive and bias-free space. A lack of understanding about how to design learning environments that are friendly to all children, including those with special needs or from minority groups, is a major obstacle in achieving equitable and inclusive education.

These empirical conditions highlight the need for further training for educators on anti-bias and inclusivity concepts. A better understanding of how to identify and address biases, both directly and indirectly, will assist educators in ensuring that every student has equal opportunities for development, free from gender stereotypes or social discrimination. This approach is crucial for building an educational environment that is safe, supportive, and conducive to all children, in line with the principles of justice and inclusivity expected in contemporary education. The findings underscore the need for interventions such as training and capacity-building for educators and ECE managers to effectively understand and apply anti-bias and inclusivity concepts within the educational environment. Some results from the research conducted through interviews, observations, and field observations include:

### 1) Creating a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

Research indicates that many educators in Karang Tinggi District have a limited understanding of inclusivity, often associating it primarily with severe *special needs education*. This narrow perspective overlooks diverse learning needs and socio-cultural backgrounds. Many educators also report a lack of specialized training on how to support children with various needs and backgrounds.

Observations reveal that classroom arrangements in Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers are generally uniform, without adjustments for individual differences in ability or needs. The teaching methods used do not account for language barriers or learning difficulties, highlighting the need for adaptations in teaching practices to be more inclusive and responsive to children's specific needs.



**Figure 2. Children Gathering Without Differentiation**

Classroom activity showing a lack of differentiation based on individual needs.

A significant issue is the lack of specialized training on inclusivity, with many educators not having received adequate training. Existing curricula and policies do not include specific guidelines for inclusive education, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive policy development and training to support the implementation of inclusivity.

Although the physical facilities in the classroom are adequate, there is a shortage of resourcesand specialized aids needed to

support children with disabilities or learning difficulties. These limitations hinder the comprehensive implementation of inclusivity, indicating a need for better resource allocation. Overall, the study reveals that despite efforts to create a more inclusive learning environment, the understanding of inclusivity in ECE centers in Karang Tinggi District remains limited and is not supported by adequate policies and training. An update in local education policies to provide explicit guidelines is necessary to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all children.

### 2) Building Better Awareness and Understanding

In efforts to raise awareness about inclusivity and gender justice, interviews with five ECE educators in Karang Tinggi District indicate that although initial steps have been taken, the implementation remains limited. Some educators have attempted to introduce diversity through activities such as games and stories, but the application of inclusivity and gender justice principles is not well-structured. Educators frequently face challenges due to a lack of clear guidelines and training.

Field observations support these findings, indicating that teaching remains conventional and is not fully attuned to issues of inclusivity and gender justice. Many educators struggle to integrate these principles into their teaching methods, demonstrating a lack of consistency in application.

Documentary studies also reveal that ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District lack clear policy guidelines related to anti-bias and inclusivity principles. Educational documents focus more on general aspects and do not provide specific guidelines to support inclusivity and gender justice. Major challenges include difficulties in systematically implementing inclusivity principles and a lack of training and resources. Educators express a need for additional training to address issues such as gender treatment disparities and to

effectively apply gender inclusivity concepts.

Overall, the findings indicate that despite efforts to introduce and apply inclusivity and gender justice principles, there is an urgent need for more in-depth training and clearer policy development. Enhancing educators' competencies is expected to strengthen the application of these principles in ECE activities.

### 3) Preparing Children for a Diverse Society

Findings from interviews with educators in ECE centers in Karang Tinggi District show that the implementation of learning materials that promote understanding and appreciation of social diversity is minimal. Some educators acknowledge that current materials do not adequately challenge gender stereotypes and fail to reflect cultural and social diversity. For example, role assignments in class activities often follow gender stereotypes, with boys assigned physical roles and girls given domestic roles.

Field observations confirm a lack of implementation of learning materials that promote diversity. Classroom activities and storybooks often depict professions with gender stereotypes, such as associating certain professions with specific genders. The existing curriculum also does not systematically integrate cultural, social, and gender diversity.

Curriculum documentation shows that current guidelines do not adequately cover aspects of diversity integration. Educators report an urgent need for concrete guidelines in designing activities that introduce children to various aspects of diversity. This underscores the importance of providing more inclusive materials to support children's understanding of diversity.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for a more inclusive and comprehensive ECE curriculum. Educators need additional support and training to develop effective materials that encourage children's understanding of diversity. With a more

integrated curriculum, children will be better prepared to adapt and actively participate in a pluralistic society and address gender stereotype challenges.

*4) Reducing Disparities and Conflicts*
In efforts to reduce disparities and manage conflicts in ECE environments in Karang Tinggi District, educators have shown some positive initiatives. They strive to foster cooperation among children, teach mutual respect, and apply fair approaches to conflict resolution. However, interviews reveal that many educators still face difficulties in handling more complex forms of disparity, particularly those related to gender and socio-economic differences. This highlights the need for additional training to enhance educators' abilities to manage more intricate social dynamics and improve conflict management effectiveness in the classroom.

Educators in ECE centers in Karang Tinggi District require training more focused on gender justice and inclusive conflict management. Improving educators' skills in managing complex social dynamics is expected to reduce classroom disparities and address conflicts more responsively and equitably concerning students' needs. These findings underscore that inclusive and gender-just education services in Karang Tinggi District still require significant reinforcement. Stronger policy support, inclusive curriculum development, and increased educator competency in understanding and applying anti-bias principles are essential for implementation.

The research indicates that educators' views in Karang Tinggi District are often limited to a narrow understanding of inclusivity, typically covering only children with severe disabilities. Therefore, it is crucial to expand the concept of inclusivity to include various aspects of socio-cultural diversity and learning styles. Proposed strategies include enhancing training for educators and developing inclusive concepts within ECE institutions. Continuous and evidence-based training is essential to improve educators'

skills in implementing inclusive methods. Additionally, the development of inclusive concepts within ECE institutions can create a more supportive environment for all children.

Providing adequate resources is also a crucial strategy in creating an inclusive learning environment. Appropriate learning aids and facilities can enhance accessibility and participation in learning activities. With adequate resources, ECE centers in Karang Tinggi District can more effectively meet the diverse needs of children, creating a fairer environment that supports optimal development. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that ECE centers in Karang Tinggi District can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment while promoting values of diversity and mutual respect. This research contributes significantly to efforts to improve and develop early childhood education systems and offers valuable insights for future educational policies and practices.

## DISCUSSION
### 1. Understanding Inclusivity in Early Childhood Education

This study highlights a significant gap in the understanding and implementation of inclusivity principles among educators in early childhood education (ECE) institutions in Karang Tinggi District. Many educators hold a narrow view of inclusivity, often focusing solely on children with severe disabilities. This finding aligns with Ainscow and Sandill's research, which indicates that inclusivity is frequently understood in a limited manner, excluding the full spectrum of diversity that children may encounter (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

This narrow perspective limits the effectiveness of inclusive education because it does not accommodate various forms of social, cultural, and learning diversity. Ainscow emphasizes that effective inclusivity involves recognizing and valuing the diverse needs of all children, not just

those with disabilities (Ainscow, 2005). Thus, an exclusive focus on disabilities may cause educators to overlook other diversity issues (Stubbs, 2008). The exclusive focus on disabilities can ignore critical aspects such as gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background, which also affect children's learning experiences. This underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of inclusivity that encompasses various forms of diversity (Blanch-Gelabert & París-Romia, 2024). Integrating this diversity into educational practices will help create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for all children.

Expanding the definition of inclusivity will enhance educators' ability to create an environment that truly supports each child. A more inclusive approach allows educators to address various challenges arising from social and cultural diversity, ensuring that all children feel accepted and supported in the learning process (Daniels & Garner, 2013)This approach will also enable educators to be more responsive to the diverse needs of children in the classroom. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of broadening the understanding of inclusivity to encompass various aspects of social, cultural, and learning diversity. By developing a broader definition of inclusivity and applying it in educational practice, ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District can create a fairer and more supportive learning environment, facilitating optimal development for all children.

## 2. Need for Comprehensive Training and Resources

The findings from this study reveal that educators in ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District lack comprehensive training and resources necessary for effectively implementing inclusive practices. Florian asserts that ongoing, evidence-based training is crucial for helping educators develop the skills required for inclusive teaching (Florian, 2014). Without adequate training, educators may struggle to apply inclusive principles consistently in practice, resulting in uneven implementation and limited impact on children's learning (Lindsay, 2003).

Hornby adds that having appropriate resources and facilities is also essential in supporting diverse learning (Hornby & Hornby, 2014). Suitable resources, such as appropriate teaching aids and supportive facilities, can enhance accessibility and participation in learning activities. Without adequate resources, educators will face additional challenges in designing and delivering an effective inclusive curriculum (Barton, 2003).

The lack of comprehensive training and resources can hinder educators' ability to design and implement an inclusive curriculum. This has the potential to reduce teaching effectiveness and its impact on all children, particularly those with different learning needs (Armstrong, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to provide targeted professional development and sufficient resources so that educators can design and deliver a more inclusive curriculum. Addressing these gaps requires a systematic approach to providing training and resources that support inclusive practices. This includes ongoing, evidence-based training for educators and the provision of appropriate teaching aids and facilities to support children's diversity (Corbett, 2002). With this approach, educators will be better equipped to implement inclusive principles in daily practice, which in turn will improve educational outcomes for all children.

Overall, this study highlights the need for more in-depth training and adequate resources to support the implementation of inclusive practices in ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District. Investing in professional development and providing appropriate resources will enable educational institutions to create a more inclusive and effective learning

environment, ultimately supporting the optimal development of all children.

## 3. Challenges in Addressing Gender Stereotypes and Social Inequalities

This study reveals persistent gender stereotypes and social inequalities in classroom activities and learning materials. Observations support these findings, showing that gender-specific roles and stereotypes in educational materials remain prevalent, as noted in previous research by Ainscow and Sandill. For instance, role division in classroom activities often reinforces traditional gender roles, such as associating physical tasks with boys and domestic tasks with girls (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). These stereotypes can limit children's understanding of gender equality and future career aspirations. When learning materials and classroom activities do not reflect role diversity and opportunities, children may face constraints in exploring various interests and talents (Hines, 2020). Creating an inclusive learning environment is crucial for recognizing and challenging existing gender stereotypes (Kissinger, 2017).

Integrating diverse perspectives into educational content is key to creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment (Gaias, 2015). By providing materials and activities that reflect diverse roles and social expectations, educators can help children develop a more balanced view of gender roles and social expectations. This can reduce the negative impact of gender stereotypes and allow children to pursue various opportunities without limitations imposed by traditional norms. Using diverse and inclusive materials in early education is essential for promoting gender equality and understanding social inequalities. In this context, educators need adequate training and support to develop a more representative and stereotype-free curriculum. Thus, they can design activities and learning materials that not only support

but also challenge traditional gender roles, promoting equality and diversity.

Overall, this study highlights the need for a more proactive approach to addressing gender stereotypes and social inequalities in early education. By enhancing awareness and inclusive educational practices, and providing diverse and fair materials, educators can play a crucial role in shaping children's views on gender and social inequalities more equitably and balanced.

## 4. Importance of Developing Inclusive Curricula

The need for more inclusive curricula is clearly indicated by this study's findings, which highlight the lack of comprehensive guidance on integrating cultural, social, and gender diversity into the curriculum. These findings align with Florian's recommendations for developing inclusive curricula that address diverse needs and promote understanding of various social contexts. An inclusive curriculum can ensure that all children, regardless of their background, receive education that is relevant and responsive to diversity.

A well-designed, inclusive curriculum can provide children with a broader understanding of various cultures, social norms, and gender roles, thus preparing them for success in a diverse society. Emphasizes the importance of a curriculum that accommodates all children's needs and reflects social diversity (Florian, 2014). By integrating inclusivity principles into the curriculum, educators can create learning experiences that reflect and value children's diverse backgrounds, thereby promoting social harmony and equality.

An inclusive curriculum not only helps children understand and appreciate cultural, social, and gender differences but also prepares them to interact effectively in a pluralistic society. Learning experiences that reflect diversity can enhance children's social skills and ability to adapt to various

social contexts. This aligns with the inclusion principles proposed by UNESCO (2009), which suggest that education should broaden children's perspectives and support their understanding and appreciation of diversity.

In practice, developing an inclusive curriculum requires strong policy support and adequate resources. Educators need clear guidance and training on how to integrate diversity into learning materials and classroom activities. This includes providing representative resources and ongoing training to ensure effective implementation of the inclusive curriculum.

Overall, this study's findings suggest that designing and implementing a curriculum that reflects cultural, social, and gender diversity is essential for achieving fair and inclusive educational outcomes. With a more inclusive approach, education can significantly contribute to creating a more harmonious and equitable society.

## 5. Policy and Practice Recommendations

This study emphasizes the need for stronger policies and clearer guidelines to support inclusivity and gender equality in early childhood education. Previous research indicates that existing policies often lack specificity regarding inclusivity and anti-bias principles (Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992). Developing more detailed and implementable policies can provide the necessary direction and support for educators to effectively apply inclusive practices.

Effective policies and clear guidelines are crucial for ensuring that inclusivity principles are consistently applied across educational settings (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2021). Clear policies can guide educators in designing and implementing practices that address diverse needs and reduce bias, thus creating a more equitable learning environment. Policies that support inclusivity and gender equality are essential

for creating education that responds to various children's needs (Corson, 1998). With strong policies and detailed guidelines, educators will have a clear framework for integrating inclusivity principles into daily practice. This includes curriculum planning, material development, and implementing teaching strategies that are sensitive to diversity. Good policies should also include training for educators to understand and effectively apply these principles in the classroom.

Furthermore, adequate policy support can help minimize existing inequalities and enhance the quality of education for all children. With clear guidelines, educators can more easily identify and address challenges related to inclusivity and gender equality, creating a more equitable and inclusive learning experience. This will also contribute to developing a more inclusive and fair learning environment, in line with inclusion principles (Derman-Sparks, 2016). Overall, this study highlights the importance of policy and guidelines in supporting inclusivity and gender equality in early childhood education. Clear and supportive policies can strengthen the implementation of inclusivity principles, improve educational quality, and ensure that all children have equal opportunities to thrive in a fair and supportive environment.

Implementing anti-bias education is a crucial step in addressing inequalities and discrimination that may arise in the educational process (Kuh et al., 2016; Nguyen, 2022; Vandenbroeck, 2007). This model aims to prevent stereotypes and prejudices while supporting the development of positive self-identity for all children (Derman-Sparks, 2016). By consistently applying this model, ECE institutions in Karang Tinggi District can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment and support children in appreciating differences.

Educators and ECE administrators need regular training on anti-bias and inclusivity

concepts to strengthen their understanding and skills in creating an environment that supports all children regardless of background (Corson, 1998). Governments and ECE institutions need to develop policies that explicitly support inclusivity and anti-bias in curriculum and daily educational practices. Efforts should be made to ensure the availability of adequate resources and facilities to support inclusive education, including appropriate teaching aids and intervention programs for children with special needs. By addressing these challenges, educational services in Karang Tinggi District can transform into more inclusive and gender-fair institutions, supporting every child in reaching their full potential without barriers caused by bias or discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals various challenges and needs in implementing inclusivity and gender equality principles in early childhood education (ECE) in Karang Tinggi District. Key findings indicate a limited understanding of inclusivity among educators, who often focus exclusively on children with severe disabilities. Inclusivity is frequently understood narrowly, without considering broader social, cultural, and learning diversity. Additionally, the research highlights a lack of comprehensive training and resources for educators. Underscores the importance of ongoing, evidence-based training, while emphasize the need for adequate resources to support inclusive learning. Without appropriate training and resources, educators may struggle to effectively implement inclusivity principles, leading to inconsistent application and limited impact. The study also highlights challenges related to gender stereotypes and social inequalities in classroom activities and learning materials. Common gender stereotypes in role division and professional representation within educational materials hinder children's understanding of gender equality and career aspirations. Integrating diverse perspectives and inclusive materials, crucial for addressing these issues and promoting a more balanced view of gender roles and social expectations.

Furthermore, the study identifies an urgent need for the development of more inclusive curricula that encompass cultural, social, and gender diversity. By designing an inclusive curriculum, educators can provide learning experiences that reflect the diverse backgrounds of children, promoting social harmony and equality. Clear policies and guidelines will offer direction and support for educators to more effectively implement inclusivity principles. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of improvements in policy, training, and curriculum development to support inclusivity and gender equality in ECE. With proper implementation and adequate support, early childhood education can become more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all children, preparing them to actively participate in a diverse and equal society.

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