

**Teachers' Professional Knowledge of Social-Emotional Learning in a Special Needs
School: A Qualitative Descriptive Study**

Thesis



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**English Language Education Program
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
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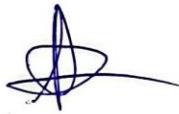


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ABSTRACT

This study investigates teachers' professional knowledge and experiences in implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in a special needs *school (Sekolah Luar Biasa)* in Indonesia. Grounded in a qualitative research design, the study examines how two special needs teachers understand, enact, and reflect on SEL in their daily teaching practices. One teacher works with students with mixed intellectual and behavioral challenges, while the other teaches deaf students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory serving as an analytical lens.

The findings indicate that teachers perceive SEL not as an additional program but as an essential foundation for learning and classroom management in special education contexts. Teachers described multiple challenges in implementing SEL, including limited institutional resources, lack of formal SEL training, inconsistent parental involvement, and sustained emotional demands. These challenges required teachers to engage in significant emotional labor as they continuously managed students' emotional needs, behavioral difficulties, and their own emotional regulation. To address these challenges, teachers employed adaptive strategies such as improvising instructional approaches, fostering collaboration with colleagues, and engaging in ongoing self-reflection.

The study further reveals that these reflective and adaptive practices align with key elements of transformative learning, particularly critical reflection, reassessment of professional assumptions, and gradual changes in professional identity. The study concludes that SEL implementation in special needs education facilitates a dual transformative process: supporting students' emotional development while reshaping teachers' professional understanding and emotional capacities. The findings highlight the importance of structured SEL training, institutional support, and policy integration to strengthen SEL practices within Indonesia's special education system.

Keywords: teachers' professional knowledge, social-emotional learning, emotional labor, special needs schools, thematic analysis, transformative learning

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