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Dialogic Learning as a Lever for Equity: Teacher Strategies in Indonesian Low-SES Classrooms

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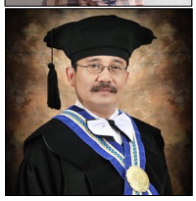

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Abstract

This study investigates how dialogic pedagogy could potentially serve as a lever for equity in elementary classrooms in Indonesia with low socioeconomic status. Addressing concerns that inclusive education is often reduced to participation or classroom management, the study examines how inclusion is enacted, negotiated, and contested through everyday classroom dialogue. Drawing on a six-month ethnographic qualitative design, data were generated through prolonged classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with six teachers and twenty-one students, and detailed field notes. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted to interpret interactional practices within their social and institutional contexts.

The findings identify five interrelated pedagogical strategies: dialogic learning, building personal closeness, providing personal guidance, confirming student understanding, and offering appreciation and rewards. Dialogic learning emerged as the central practice through which students' contributions reshaped the trajectory of classroom activity, enabling moments of co-authorship, epistemic uncertainty, and ethical recognition. In these dialogic encounters, students were positioned not merely as participants but as co-authors of meaning whose lived experiences and disagreements reoriented collective inquiry. At the same time, the study reveals tensions in which some inclusive practices, particularly reward-based participation, constrained dialogic openness by reasserting evaluative authority.

The study concludes that dialogic pedagogy functions not as a technical method but as an ethical and political practice through which equity is continually negotiated. It contributes to the scholarship on dialogic pedagogy by offering a context-sensitive analysis of how dialogic events emerge, fracture, and coexist with institutional demands in under-resourced classrooms.

Keywords: *Dialogic learning, Educational equity, Ethnographic study, Low socioeconomic status.*

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Introduction

Effective teaching relies heavily on fostering inclusive, encouraging classroom environments, especially for pupils from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. These students frequently experience systemic disadvantages that can have detrimental effects on their involvement, engagement, and academic outcomes (Abduh et al., 2023; Liu, 2019; Selvitopu & Kaya, 2021). These disadvantages might range from restricted access to educational resources to greater exposure to psychological stresses. Teachers' roles become even more important in this situation.

Research on inclusive education emphasizes how interactions and feedback between teachers and students can promote participation and a sense of belonging. Effective teacher feedback, for example, dramatically improves students' behavioral engagement and sense of belonging to the school, according to Monteiro et al. (2021). In a similar vein, Zitomer (2017) highlights that fostering positive teacher-student interactions and appreciating each student's individuality are essential to developing inclusive learning environments. Thus, classroom communities can be strengthened through inclusive techniques that foster empathy and support all kids (Irshad & Shaharyar Rafaqat, 2024; Nugraha et al., 2025; Nzuza & Sulaimon, 2025). Peer interactions are also influenced by classroom organization and teacher management techniques; according to Audley-Piotrowski et al. (2015), instructors are an "invisible hand" that can purposefully alter social dynamics through spatial arrangements and administration.

While inclusion is widely promoted as a policy and pedagogical goal, it is not a neutral concept. A critical question must be asked: inclusion into what, and on whose terms? Scholars caution that inclusive education can risk assimilating marginalized learners into dominant curricular, behavioral, or cultural norms without questioning those norms themselves (Allan, 2010; Slee, 2019). In such cases, inclusion is less about transformation and more about disciplining difference. In the Indonesian low-SES context, inclusion may mean access to mainstream academic knowledge, but it also entails recognizing local experiences and cultural voices as legitimate contributions to the classroom. Our study therefore examines not only how

teachers foster inclusion but also the terms of inclusion enacted in practice, and how dialogic pedagogy may enable shifts from assimilation toward recognition of students as epistemic agents.

Crucially, the majority of current research focuses on generalized classroom inclusion or special education requirements without explicitly looking at the relationship between inclusive teaching and socioeconomic position. It is rarely examined in long-term ethnographic detail how elementary school teachers work to encourage involvement and cooperation among students from low-SES backgrounds through routine activities such as relationship-building, reinforcing comprehension, and personal guidance. The purpose of this study is to address this important knowledge gap regarding how frontline educators actually implement inclusion in difficult situations.

Dialogic teaching is a pedagogical technique that encourages learning through dialogue, purposeful, protracted, and reciprocal classroom conversations that help students reason, question, and construct common meaning (Alexander, 2013; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). According to Wegerif (2007) and García-Carrión et al. (2020), learning is a collaborative process that values all voices, particularly those from underprivileged groups. Mercer et al. (2019) and García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego (2020b) found that dialogic teaching improves students' critical thinking, communication, and engagement, while also promoting student agency and equitable involvement. It produces teaching environments in which students are active participants, generating meaning via exploration, dispute, and reasoning (Alexander, 2020a; Howe & Abedin, 2013). Dialogic approaches have the ability to promote fairness and counteract silence or disengagement in under-resourced classrooms, where children may have fewer opportunities for expressive participation (Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Dewi & Palupi, 2023; Resnick et al., 2015).

In addition to being a pedagogical technique, dialogic pedagogy can also be understood as an ontological, ethical, and epistemological orientation. Building on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, every utterance entails addressivity, a call to the Other that carries with it responsibility, recognition, and the possibility of new meaning (Hamston, 2006). This view positions education not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a relational event in which learners' voices are recognized as constitutive of meaning. Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2018) argue that justice in education must go beyond equality and inequality, emphasizing the immeasurable uniqueness of each learner. In dialogic pedagogy, students are not recipients of pre-established content but subjects who bring irreplaceable perspectives that reshape the learning event. Similarly, Matusov (2021) distinguishes between learning and education, suggesting that dialogic education entails the transformation of subjectivity, engagement with meaning that cannot be predetermined or standardized.

Matusov (Matusov et al., 2016) further conceptualizes dialogic pedagogy as a practice of co-becoming, in which students and teachers transform one another through joint authorship of meaning. Sidorkin (2023) emphasizes that education is fundamentally relational, requiring recognition of students as dialogic partners, while Ruitenberg (2010) foregrounds the ethical dimensions of dialogue as an encounter with the other that resists closure. By drawing on these perspectives, we treat classroom episodes not only as exchanges of information but also as ethical events in which knowledge, identity, and responsibility are negotiated. This framing enables us to analyze when interactions function as genuine co-authorship and when they remain procedural or managerial.

From this orientation, dialogic pedagogy also entails ethical commitments. Teachers and students are encouraged to enter dialogue with an openness to alterity, recognizing that meaning emerges through mutual engagement and cannot be fully controlled (Ruitenberg, 2011). This requires acknowledging students not simply as learners who must meet curricular outcomes, but as beings whose voices, identities, and experiences matter. Such an approach is especially vital in low-SES Indonesian classrooms, where

dialogic interaction can serve as an equity lever by validating student voices often marginalized in monologic, top-down systems.

In this study, dialogic pedagogy is understood not only as a pedagogical method to increase classroom participation but as an orientation toward knowledge co-construction. Building on dialogic theory, classroom dialogue is not a neutral tool for engagement but a site where teachers and students jointly author meaning. As Alexander (2020b) and Mercer et al. (2019) emphasize, dialogue creates opportunities for learners to listen, question, and build on one another's contributions, thus positioning students as epistemic agents. From this perspective, students' voices are not supplementary but constitutive of classroom knowledge. Matusov (2021) further argues that dialogic education involves authorial agency, in which students' contributions reshape the learning process itself. This orientation challenges hierarchical teacher-student relations and reframes equity in low-SES classrooms as ensuring that all students are recognized as co-authors of meaning, not only as participants in teacher-led exchanges. In the Indonesian low-SES environment, we see dialogic teaching as a culturally relevant equity lever that promotes inclusive learning by engaging students as knowers rather than just learners.

Although this study draws on scholarship in inclusive education and sociocultural learning, its primary theoretical orientation is dialogic pedagogy understood as an ontological, ethical, and epistemic practice. Following Bakhtinian and dialogic-ontological perspectives (Matusov, 2021; Ruitenberg, 2011), the study conceptualizes classroom dialogue not merely as interaction or collaborative participation, but as a space in which students and teachers co-author meaning, negotiate epistemic authority, and encounter one another as subjects. From this perspective, inclusion is examined not only in terms of participation or access but also in relation to how students' voices are recognized, sustained, and made consequential within classroom dialogue.

By offering empirical insight into the inclusive behaviors of Indonesian teachers, this study closes the gap. We found that teachers actively cultivate intimate, personal relationships with underprivileged students and regularly check for understanding. These behaviors are rooted in culturally sensitive teacher-student rapport and are similar to the findings of Monteiro et al. (2021) on feedback-driven engagement. To build environments that benefit all students, not only those with recognized learning needs, teachers also promoted inclusive communities and dense friendship networks (Mamas et al., 2024).

This study is described as ethnographic because it involved prolonged engagement in the participating schools over six months, participant observation of daily classroom activities, and the use of multiple qualitative sources, including observations, interviews, and field notes. Consistent with ethnographic tradition, the analysis sought to provide a cultural interpretation of teachers' dialogic strategies, situating them within the broader social, economic, and educational context of low-SES Indonesian classrooms. Ethnography thus offered both a methodological approach and an interpretive stance for understanding how equity is negotiated in everyday classroom life. Overall, this study offers contextual insight by drawing on varied school settings, including those in economically disadvantaged areas, thereby contributing to a more global and context-sensitive understanding of inclusion. By grounding its analysis in the lived realities of teachers and students, the research provides a valuable contribution to educational practice and policy aimed at promoting equity and participation for all learners, regardless of socioeconomic status. Specifically, the study aims to

RQ1: identify core strategies used by teachers to create inclusive environments, and

RQ2: understand how these strategies reflect broader principles of equity, student engagement, and responsiveness in low-resource contexts.

Methods

Participants

The study was conducted at an elementary school in Indonesia, where the majority of students had low socioeconomic status (SES). Six classroom teachers and twenty-one elementary-grade pupils from low-SES backgrounds participated. The student participants ranged in age from roughly 7 to 12 years old, and all of the teacher participants taught in inclusive classrooms. Based on the research aim and the school's demographics, teachers and students were purposively selected. The sample size is in line with standard qualitative ethnographic methods for examining classroom interactions in-depth, where the goal is in-depth comprehension rather than statistical generalization.

Data Collection

Over the course of six months, from October 2023 to August 2024, data were gathered utilizing a variety of qualitative techniques and an ethnographic approach. In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant, the researcher spent significant time in the classrooms, engaging in participant observation and taking thorough field notes. In particular:

(1) Classroom observations: Throughout the six-month period, the researcher routinely (several times per week) visited every classroom to observe inclusive activities, peer collaboration, student participation, and teaching methods. The observation was on how educators encouraged participation and teamwork among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

(2) Field notes: To document the contextual features of the classroom setting, teacher-student interactions, group work dynamics, and non-verbal indicators, the researcher took thorough field notes right after each observation session. Insights, observations, and descriptions on the social and physical milieu were incorporated in these notes. In ethnographic research, field notes are a common method for recording detailed contextual information.

(3) Semi-structured interviews: Thirty-three interviews were done, including interviews with all six teachers and twenty-one students (some participants were interviewed more than once to explore developing themes). The duration of each interview was between 30 to 60 minutes. Questions were informed by (a) the study objectives and (b) emerging patterns from early classroom observations (e.g., group work, teacher feedback, use of rewards). Following qualitative interviewing best practice, items were intentionally open-ended to elicit participants' own framings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2019). The guide was piloted with two teachers (not in the main sample) and revised for clarity and cultural/age appropriateness. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the participants' everyday language, to ensure accessibility and cultural relevance. Interviews with students were carried out in small groups to create a supportive environment, while teacher interviews were conducted individually. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. For the purpose of analysis and publication, transcripts were translated into English. To ensure accuracy and preserve the meanings conveyed by participants, translations were cross-checked by bilingual research assistants, following best practices in qualitative translation (van Nes et al., 2010). Interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit teachers' reflections on classroom interaction, student participation, and instructional decision-making. Questions focused on (a) teachers' goals for classroom discussion, (b) their perceptions of student participation and engagement, and (c) their rationales for using specific strategies such as questioning, affirmation, or rewards. Follow-up prompts invited teachers

to reflect on specific observed lessons, thereby keeping interviews grounded in practice rather than abstract pedagogical ideals.

We conducted classroom observations and interviews and were regularly present in the participating classrooms throughout the study. During observations, the researcher adopted a non-participatory role, positioning themselves at the periphery of classroom activity and refraining from instructional interaction. While the researcher's presence may have influenced classroom dynamics, extended engagement over multiple visits aimed to reduce reactivity and support the observation of routine practices. The researcher's background in educational research and dialogic pedagogy informed the analytic attention to interactional processes, while reflexive memoing was used throughout the analysis to address potential interpretive bias.

Data Analysis

The primary dataset for analysis consisted of the verbatim transcriptions of all interview recordings and the field notes. An inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and identify trends related to inclusive and supportive teaching practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Among the steps in the analysis were:

(1) Familiarization: Researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading transcripts and notes repeatedly to understand the content.

(2) Coding: Transcripts and field notes were imported into NVivo 14 Pro software for systematic coding. NVivo was chosen for its efficiency in handling qualitative data from multiple sources. Using NVivo, the research team developed initial codes that captured meaningful units of text related to teacher strategies, student engagement, and collaboration.

(3) Generating themes: Following Braun and Clarke's framework, codes were examined and iteratively grouped into broader themes and subthemes. An inductive (data-driven) process was used, allowing themes to emerge from the data without imposing a strict a priori framework. Typical emergent themes included peer learning, use of local examples, and positive behavior reinforcement (illustrative examples of the identified themes).

(4) Review and refinement: Multiple researchers independently coded the data to enhance reliability. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved by consensus. Themes were reviewed against the data extracts to ensure they accurately reflected participants' perspectives. NVivo's query and visualization tools (e.g., coding matrices) helped compare themes across teachers and students. The final thematic structure distilled the key strategies teachers used to create an inclusive classroom and foster participation among low-SES students.

Throughout the analysis, the team maintained a reflective journal to note analytical decisions and to remain aware of potential biases. This collaborative, iterative coding process is consistent with qualitative best practices and helps establish the credibility of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Yogyakarta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained from each teacher participant and from the parents or legal guardians of all student participants; students themselves provided assent in an age-appropriate manner. These procedures align

with ethical standards for research with human subjects, which require parental consent for minors. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All data were treated confidentially: identifying details were removed or anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in notes and transcripts. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices. By adhering to these ethical protocols, the study ensured respect for participants' rights and the integrity of the research process.

Results

Thematic analysis of classroom observations and interviews revealed five key strategies that teachers employed to foster inclusive and supportive learning environments for low-SES students in Indonesia. Using NVivo 14 Plus to assist the analysis, five key themes were identified: encouraging dialogic learning, building personal closeness, providing personal guidance, confirming student understanding, and giving appreciation and rewards (see Figure 1). As summarized in Table 1, these practices ranged from relational approaches (e.g., building personal closeness, providing individualized guidance) to pedagogical adaptations (e.g., dialogic learning and confirming students' understanding) to socioemotional supports (e.g., giving appreciation and rewards). Notably, dialogic learning and personal guidance emerged as central pillars, enabling other inclusive practices (see Figure 2). The following sections elaborate on these themes, with qualitative data illustrating how teachers operationalized equity in resource-constrained settings while navigating cultural nuances specific to the Indonesian context.

Table 1. Comprehensive summary of key themes

Key Theme	Example Quote	Source	Frequency	Contextual Insight
1. Dialogic Learning	*"Debates about Mount Merapi's eruption sparked critical questions."*	Teacher SR (Observation, Jan 2024)	Observed 12x	Local examples increased engagement.
2. Building Personal Closeness	*"I stroke students' heads or let them sit on my lap to build trust."*	Teacher AT (Interview, Oct 2023)	Observed 10x	Physical gestures fostered emotional safety.
3. Personal Guidance	*"After class, I give 15 minutes of extra help to struggling students."*	Teacher SR (Interview, Oct 2023)	Observed 40x	Targeted support during non-instructional time.
4. Confirming Understanding	*"I ask students to explain yesterday's lesson in their own words."*	Teacher DA (Interview, Oct 2023)	Observed 25x	Verbal checks ensured comprehension.
5. Appreciation/Rewards	*"A candy reward for correct answers made shy students participate."*	Teacher KU (Interview, Nov 2023)	25 praise instances	Small incentives boosted motivation.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the five interconnected themes form a cohesive framework for understanding inclusive practices in low-SES Indonesian classrooms. Table 1 expands on this visual by providing empirical grounding for each theme, including representative quotes, observed frequencies, and contextual insights. For instance, while Figure 1 positions 'Dialogic Learning' and 'Personal Guidance' as central nodes, Table 1 reveals how these strategies manifested in practice through teacher-facilitated debates (observed 12x) or after-school tutoring sessions (40 instances).

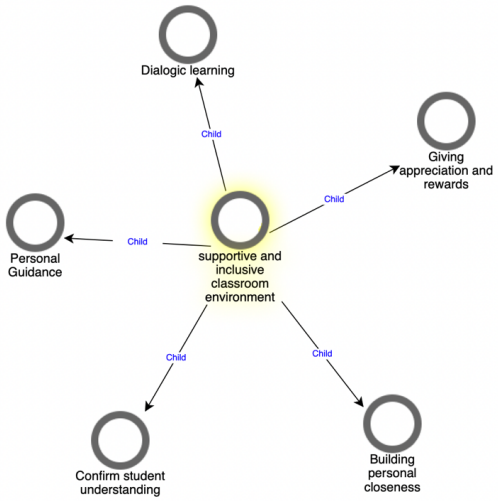

Figure 1. Five key themes of teachers' efforts to foster supportive and inclusive classroom environments

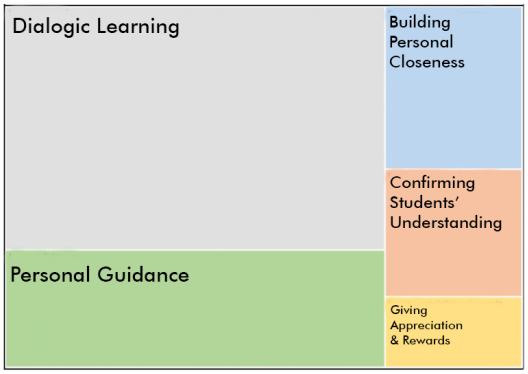

Figure 2. Hierarchy chart of codes of the five key themes

Figure 2 shows how teachers who work with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds create inclusive and encouraging learning environments in their elementary schools. The approach primarily emphasized is dialogic learning, which encourages candid dialogue and active student participation. Closely behind is personal guidance, which emphasizes the value of tailored assistance and fosters trust. To promote cooperation and shared accountability, teachers often actively involve their pupils in initiatives. Other initiatives that enhance students' sense of belonging include fostering personal intimacy, providing forums for viewpoints, and verifying student comprehension. By recognizing differences, expressing gratitude, offering rewards, and adapting instruction to suit a range of needs, teachers further promote inclusion. Taken as a whole, these strategies show a responsive and relational approach suited to the difficulties kids encounter in underfunded educational settings.

Theme 1: Dialogic Learning

When asked about dialogic practices, teachers frequently described dialogue in terms of student participation, responsiveness, and classroom atmosphere. Dialogue was commonly associated with encouraging students to speak, asking questions, and ensuring that all students felt confident to contribute. While these descriptions emphasize interactional inclusivity, they rarely foreground dialogue as a process of co-authoring meaning or sustaining epistemic uncertainty. This suggests that teachers' practical understandings of dialogue were primarily oriented toward engagement and support rather than toward dialogic openness in the stronger theoretical sense.

In several observed episodes, classroom dialogue functioned not merely as an interactive format but as a dialogic event in which the trajectory of learning was reshaped through students' authorial contributions. For instance, during a science lesson on volcanic eruptions (Observation, January 24, 2024), the teacher initiated a discussion with an open-ended question about the impacts of the eruption of Mount Merapi. While the lesson was initially oriented toward identifying textbook consequences (e.g., displacement, material loss), students' responses redirected the inquiry. One student introduced the impact of the eruption on animals, prompting peers to challenge and extend this claim by drawing on local residents' experiences of staying to protect livestock. At this point, the dialogue moved beyond a teacher–student exchange and became contingent on student contributions, as the teacher did not evaluate responses for correctness or close the discussion; instead, the teacher invited further elaboration ("Why do you think animals are affected?").

This interaction illustrates dialogic pedagogy in a strong sense: students were not simply participating in a teacher-led discussion but actively co-authoring the object of knowledge, integrating scientific concepts with lived community experience. The learning outcome was not predetermined; rather, meaning emerged through disagreement, narrative, and collective reasoning. Importantly, students' contributions altered the direction and duration of the activity, demonstrating authorial agency (Matusov, 2021). In that way, the students were positioning themselves as epistemic subjects rather than respondents to teacher prompts. Such moments were analytically distinguished from cooperative or interactive talk by the presence of epistemic uncertainty, student-initiated reframing of content, and the teacher's ethical stance of withholding closure, allowing multiple interpretations to coexist.

Dialogic and collaborative learning emerged as a common instructional approach employed by teachers during the learning process. This was revealed in a follow-up interview with Teacher AT on July 29, 2024, who stated:

> *"Yes, dialogic learning is very important. Effective communication in the teaching and learning process enables students to speak with one another, ask questions to deepen their understanding, share opinions and feedback, reflect on each other's ideas, and express their thoughts through open and communicative dialogue. This can make the learning process more open and flexible." (Foll. Interview/AT/29-07-2024)*
>
> *"I usually use methods that develop students' critical thinking skills. For instance, group discussions are an effective way to foster such skills. Through discussion, students can exchange ideas, challenge others' views, and support their arguments with strong evidence. The teacher acts as a facilitator to guide students to think more deeply and critically about the topic discussed." (Foll. Interview/AT/29-07-2024)*

In addition to group discussions, Teacher DA applied dialogic learning through group work and by posing stimulating questions. This was described in a follow-up interview on August 7, 2024:

> *"Students are encouraged to engage in experiments, discussions, and to explore various learning resources and media. I provide feedback during group discussions, such as saying: 'I'm happy to see your enthusiasm in discussing. You've come up with very creative solutions. In the future, try to listen to different perspectives to enrich your discussion." (Foll. Interview/DA/07-08-2024)*
>
> *"I ask guiding questions to prompt open discussions where students can share ideas and questions about a topic, and then they are directed to use various learning resources to find the answers." (Foll. Interview/DA/07-08-2024)*

Teacher IR also adopted dialogic learning approaches by fostering students' awareness of group responsibility, applying varied learning models, and using interactive lectures. As stated in a follow-up interview on July 31, 2024:

> *"Effective collaboration occurs when all students are involved. I ensure that each student understands they have shared goals and responsibilities." (Foll. Interview/IR/31-07-2024)*
>
> *"I begin by building strong student interaction. Then, I form groups with heterogeneous abilities, ensuring students understand the need to work cooperatively. I often use learning models such as Jigsaw, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Teams Games Tournament (TGT), among others." (Foll. Interview/IR/31-07-2024)*
>
> *"My teaching always involves dialogue. Even during lectures, I do not dominate the session. I integrate questions into the lecture, often probing deeper into students' answers to encourage them to construct dialogues that lead to conclusions." (Foll. Interview/IR/31-07-2024)*

Teacher SR also emphasized dialogic and collaborative learning through group discussions and presentations. In a follow-up interview on August 6, 2024, she explained:

> *"Students discuss lessons in groups, then present their ideas, and afterward respond to each other's presentations." (Foll. Interview/SR/06-08-2024)*
>
> *"My strategy to promote collaborative learning is through pair work, where students work together to complete tasks or answer questions. Sometimes students understand better when a peer explains a concept rather than the teacher." (Foll. Interview/SR/06-08-2024)*

A similar emphasis on collaborative classroom environments was reiterated by Teacher AT:

> *"By creating a collaborative classroom environment, teachers can stimulate discussion, motivate students to ask questions, and encourage creative thinking." (Foll. Interview/AT/29-07-2024)*

The emphasis on dialogic and collaborative learning was also confirmed through student interviews. Some of the students' statements include:

> *"Yes, although it hasn't worked perfectly, we've discussed topics in study groups." (Interview/SP/21-06-2024)*
>
> *"Through group discussions, we are encouraged to think critically. We also receive challenging questions to promote deeper discussion." (Interview/SP/21-06-2024)*
>
> *"We work on assignments together and encourage friends to participate." (Interview/ADLP/12-06-2024)*

> *"When working on the electromagnet project, I coordinated with my peers to collaborate." (Interview/ARA/13-06-2024)*
>
> *"Yes, we worked on teacher-assigned tasks together in groups, divided the tasks among members, and encouraged everyone to engage in group learning." (Interview/ASP/03-06-2024)*
>
> *"We conducted an experiment on the properties of light, had group discussions, expressed our opinions, and solved problems together." (Interview/JEC/12-06-2024)*
>
> *"Yes, we completed tasks assigned by the teacher together with our group members." (Interview/SDA/10-06-2024)*
>
> *"In group work, we completed tasks together, shared opinions, and created a final product collaboratively." (Interview/NIR/20-06-2024)*
>
> *"Working with friends is helpful because we can discuss and ask each other about difficult questions." (Interview/NP/15-06-2024)*

These accounts suggest that students themselves experienced dialogic activities as inclusive and meaningful. They emphasized not only the academic aspects of discussion but also the sense of belonging and mutual support it fostered. For instance, one student explained, "Working with friends is helpful because we can discuss and ask each other about difficult questions" (Interview/NP/15-06-2024). Another reflected, "When working on the electromagnet project, I coordinated with my peers to collaborate" (Interview/ARA/13-06-2024). Such reflections highlight that inclusion was not an abstract policy goal but a lived experience of being heard, recognized, and supported within classroom dialogue. For these students, feeling included meant being able to contribute ideas, receive responses from peers, and know that their voices carried weight in shaping group outcomes.

In addition to interviews, observations of classroom activities further support the findings on the implementation of dialogic and collaborative learning. During an observation on January 24, 2024, in Teacher SR's classroom, students were engaged in a science lesson discussing natural disasters, specifically the eruption of Mount Merapi. The teacher initiated the lesson with an open-ended question:

> Teacher :*"What do you think are the impacts of a volcanic eruption on the lives of people around it?"*

Multiple students raised their hands. The teacher selected Ayu, who responded:

> Student 1: *"People have to leave their homes and lose their things."*
> Teacher : *"Good. Does anyone want to add or challenge Her answer?"*
> Student 2: *"I think not just things. Their schools and animals too."*

The teacher nodded and invited further elaboration:

> Teacher: *"That's important. Why do you think animals are affected?"*

This led to a small debate, with another student arguing that some people do not leave and take care of their animals. The discussion continued for 10 minutes, with students building on each other's ideas, occasionally disagreeing, and offering personal stories from a recent eruption they had seen in the news. At this moment, the object of learning shifted from identifying predefined impacts of volcanic eruptions to negotiating the social and ethical consequences of remaining in affected areas. Students did not merely respond to the teacher's prompts but redefined what counted as relevant knowledge by introducing lived community experiences. Meaning was jointly authored rather than merely transmitted, as students' contributions redirected the discussion's flow and focus.

This episode exemplifies various aspects of dialogic education, as defined in this study. The teacher used open-ended questions, invited many viewpoints, promoted debate, and positioned students as co-creators of knowledge. Her role shifted from lecturer to facilitator, allowing pupils to think aloud, justify their claims, and apply their existing knowledge. Importantly, the teacher did not dominate the dialog or pursue a single "correct" answer, allowing many interpretations to coexist. Such an approach is especially empowering in low-income communities, where students may rarely see their ideas respected in formal education. The debate also sparked local cultural knowledge, connecting the scientific notion to students' lived experiences, an important indicator of inclusive pedagogy.

These exchanges revealed that dialogic learning extended beyond classroom management or surface-level participation. For example, during debates on volcanic eruptions, students introduced personal and community experiences that redirected the discussion and generated new insights. In such cases, students were not merely responding to teacher prompts but actively reframing the trajectory of dialogue. Similarly, group projects often required peers to negotiate differing explanations until arriving at a shared conclusion, demonstrating that students were functioning as co-authors of classroom knowledge. These findings underscore that dialogic pedagogy in these classrooms was not limited to encouraging participation but opened epistemic space for students' ideas to shape collective meaning.

Theme 2: Building Personal Closeness

Teachers try to build personal closeness with students from low-SES backgrounds through several activities, both inside and outside the classroom. This is shown in several interviews with teachers. Based on the results of the initial interview with Teacher AT, on October 23, 2023, stated that efforts to build personal closeness are as follows.

> *"Giving touch, for example, stroking the head, some even ask for a lap to establish closeness with students. The point is not to make students afraid and distant from the teacher." (Int. Interview/AT/23-10-2023).*

In line with Teacher AT's opinion, in another initial interview, teacher SP stated the same thing.

> *"If it is with students, I try to establish a close relationship, like parents and children, so that students do not hesitate to tell and ask if there are difficulties related to academics and non-academics." (Int. Interview/SP/25-10-2023)*
>
> *"I definitely respond, students want to tell me anything, I always respond. For example, yesterday there was a student who vented after being scolded by his mother because his clothes were dirty, so I told the student that it was not anger, it was advising you to be more careful to take care of your own personal belongings so as not to get dirty or damaged." (Int. Interview/SP/25-10-2023).*

In addition to the interview results, several activities and activities of teachers and students were recorded during observation related to the teacher's efforts to build personal closeness with students, namely:

(1) Observations from February to May 2024 recorded that those teachers always called students by name, not by "mas" or "mbak".

(2) Observations on April 9, 2024, recorded that teacher DA always lowered their body to the level of students when providing guidance in class. This helps students feel close to the teacher.

(3) An observation on February 5, 2024, showed that Teacher IR made a few jokes while students were working on assignments, which aimed to keep students from feeling tense and to make them see the teacher not as a supervisor.

(4) Observations on March 13 and 18, 2024, showed that the SR teacher conducted personal guidance with students outside of class hours, namely during breaks.

(5) Observations on April 17, 23, and 24, 2024, showed that the DA teacher provided personal guidance to students in the classroom, while other students considered capable were working on assignments.

(6) Class observations on November 16 and 21, 2023, showed IR teachers chatting casually with some students during break time outside the classroom.

Theme 3: Personal Guidance

Teachers have made efforts to provide personal guidance to students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Based on interviews with teachers and students, as well as classroom observations, it was evident that teachers offered various forms of individualized support. One such effort involved utilizing time after school hours to provide additional guidance. This was expressed by Teacher SR during an initial interview on October 27, 2023:

> *"I provide extra time after class ends, for about 10–15 minutes. Of course, parents are informed that their child will return home later." (Int. Interview/SR/27-10-2023)*

Personal guidance outside instructional hours was also provided by Teacher DA, as noted in an interview on October 30, 2023:

> *"Individually, yes. While other students are working, I call the student who needs extra help to my desk and give personal guidance." (Int. Interview/DA/30-10-2023)*

In addition to providing support outside instructional hours, personal guidance was also delivered during lessons. Teacher AT, for instance, stated the following during an initial interview on October 23, 2023:

> *"I move around the classroom to make sure students are engaged and sit beside them to offer support."*
>
> *"I pay closer attention to certain students, sometimes sitting with them to ensure they understand the material." (Int. Interview/AT/23-10-2023)*

Similarly, Teacher KU implemented individualized instruction during class, as revealed in an interview on November 2, 2023:

> *"I provide differentiated support in the classroom. For example, I offer remediation. I group students by seating to make it easier to provide targeted support. For those struggling with calculations, I give simpler materials; for those who've mastered the basics, I offer more challenging tasks." (Int. Interview/KU/02-11-2023)*

Students also reported receiving personal guidance from their teachers. This was confirmed in interviews conducted on June 11, 2024, with students DPS, DS, and ENH:

"Yes, the teacher directly showed me how to solve the problem correctly." (Interview/DPS/11-06-2024)

"Yes, my teacher told me my answer was wrong and immediately helped me correct it." (Interview/DS/11-06-2024)

"Yes, I was taught how to solve it properly." (Interview/ENH/11-06-2024)

Other students shared similar experiences, as noted in interviews with JEC and WR on June 12, 2024:

"Yes, I asked the teacher for help, and I was shown the correct way." (Interview/JEC/12-06-2024)

"Yes, I was taught how to correctly solve a difficult problem." (Interview/WR/12-06-2024)

Observations supported the findings from the interviews. Teachers provided personal guidance both during and outside regular instructional time. The findings are as follows:

(1) Teacher SR provided personal support during breaks on March 21, 27, and 28, 2024.

(2) An observation on March 6, 2024, revealed that Teacher SR provided both individual and small-group guidance during a reading comprehension group activity.

(3) On March 14, 2024, Teacher SR was observed giving personal coaching on presentation skills to a student struggling with presentation tasks.

(4) On February 7, 2024, Teacher IR was observed providing additional support outside of class hours to students needing extra help.

(5) Similarly, Teacher AT was observed offering personal guidance during break time in the staff room on February 16, 2024.

(6) During a class observation on April 25, 2024, Teacher DA provided one-on-one support at the teacher's desk while other students were completing their assignments.

These various forms of individualized guidance highlight the teachers' commitment to supporting students with greater learning needs, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in both structured and informal settings.

Theme 4: Confirming Students' Understanding

One of the efforts made by teachers to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment is to confirm students' understanding of the learning material and activities. This includes checking in with students about their learning experiences, both in school and at home. For example, Teacher DA, in an initial interview on October 30, 2023, described her approach:

"At school, I ask students what they studied the previous night. What was the material about? I ask in detail. Those who studied can answer, while those who didn't, have difficulty responding." (Int. Interview/DA/30-10-2023)

A similar approach was taken by Teacher SR, who confirmed students' understanding of mathematics and science (IPAS) by connecting it to real-life experiences. In a follow-up interview on August 6, 2024, Teacher SR stated:

"I often relate mathematics and IPAS material to real life. As part of this effort, I ask students to share their experiences." (Foll. Interview/SR/06-08-2024)

The effort to confirm student understanding was also evident from a student's perspective. In an interview conducted on July 29, 2024, student AF shared:

"I understood, because my teacher tested me by asking me to come forward and solve a problem." (Interview/AF/29-07-2024)

In addition to interviews, teacher efforts to confirm students' understanding were also observed during classroom observations:

(1) An observation of Teacher IR on February 19, 2024, revealed that the teacher validated individual students' responses during group discussions. Furthermore, Teacher IR checked in with students identified as slow learners to confirm their progress in note-taking and summarizing.

(2) An observation of Teacher SR on March 18, 2024, showed that the teacher allowed students to verify their peers' work and confirmed understanding among students who believed their classmates' answers were incorrect.

(3) An observation of Teacher DA on April 23, 2024, indicated that the teacher circulated among groups to confirm their understanding of the game-based learning activity. In addition, Teacher DA reviewed and confirmed students' comprehension by revisiting tasks completed and presented the same day.

These practices demonstrate deliberate efforts by teachers to ensure that all students are engaged and comprehend the material, which contributes to building an inclusive and responsive classroom environment.

Theme 5: Giving Appreciation and Rewards

Teachers try to provide appreciation and rewards to students from low-SES backgrounds in the pedagogical process. The form of these efforts was explored through the results of interviews and observations as follows. Based on the results of the initial interview with Teacher AT on October 23, 2023, he stated that the form of appreciation and reward is praise.

"Giving praise, for example, the writing is good, the reading is a little more fluent". (Int. Interview/AT/23-10-2023).

Teacher SR also gives rewards in the form of praise. Based on the results of the initial interview on October 27, 2023, Teacher SR stated that:

"Giving rewards but not necessarily goods, for example, praise." (Int. Interview/SR/27-10-2023)

Another form of praise was also carried out by teacher SP. Based on the results of the initial interview with teacher SP on October 25, 2023, he gave examples of praise sentences for students, namely:

"I give rewards using sentences, how come you are smart, nha it can be, once it's right, it's smart". (Int. Interview/SP/25-10-2023).

In addition to praise, rewards can take the form of giving objects/items, as Teacher AT did, or of stars in students' assignment books, as he said in the initial interview on October 23, 2023.

"Being rewarded with a star in the student's assignment book is very happy". (Int. Interview/AT/23-10-2023).

In addition to awarding stars, Teacher AT also gives students candy. Based on the results of further interviews with Teacher AT on July 29, 2024, she stated that:

"I also do questions and answers who can answer I give a prize even though only with 1 candy the students are happy". (Foll. Interview/AT/29-07-2024).

Other teachers also give rewards in the form of objects, as does the Teacher DA. Based on the results of an initial interview with Teacher DA on October 30, 2023, he stated that:

"I once gave a reward using money to provoke students' intrinsic motivation. Just as a lure, in the future, the teacher will give more money prizes, so that students have a willingness to learn." (Int. Interview/DA/30-10-2023).

Rewards in the form of money for students from low-SES backgrounds are also given by Teacher IR. Based on the results of the initial interview with Teacher IR on October 31, 2023, he said that:

"I often give money rewards, rewards for going home first; I also give snacks to students who can do/understand." (Int. Interview/IR/30-10-2023).

In addition to money, rewards in the form of books and food were also given by another teacher, namely Teacher KU. Based on the results of an initial interview with Teacher KU on November 2, 2023, he said that:

"If per semester I usually give book prizes for students who are ranked, if every day I reward candy, I always bring candy for prizes for students who can answer questions or do problems correctly". (Int. Interview/KU/02-11-2023).

Giving rewards in the form of praise and objects seems to be common among teachers. However, Teacher IR provides rewards in another form: opportunities to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) media. As revealed by Teacher IR in the initial interview on October 31, 2023, namely:

"For example, from these 10 questions, all students in this class have an average of more than 5 correct answers; the next day, you will use the tablet to study". (Int. Interview/IR/31-10-2023).

The observation results show several teacher efforts in providing appreciation and rewards for students with low SES backgrounds, namely:

(1) An observation on March 4, 2024, showed that Teacher SR played a guessing game using multiplication content before students entered the class. Students who can answer correctly are allowed to enter the class first.

(2) An observation in March 2024 showed that Teacher SR consistently conveys positive expectations to students at the end of the lesson.

(3) Observations on April 17, 23, and 24, 2024, showed that Teacher DA consistently offers appreciation and praise to students who are correct in answering and to those who are not.

(4) An observation on February 15, 2024, showed that Teacher IR invited students to give a high-five to those who answered correctly as a form of appreciation.

These findings suggest that inclusion in practice was not limited to ensuring that students complied with teacher directions or joined classroom routines. Rather, several episodes revealed that inclusion also occurred on students' own terms. For example, when learners reframed science content with references to local volcanic eruptions or drew on community experiences to challenge peers, they were not only participating but also reshaping the meaning of the lesson. In these moments, inclusion meant more than being present in the teacher's script; it meant that students' cultural knowledge and perspectives became part of the classroom discourse. Such episodes highlight that inclusion was both contested and negotiated, sometimes reinforcing dominant expectations, but at other times opening space for students to act as co-authors of knowledge. While this recognition increased participation, it also oriented students toward producing responses aligned with teacher expectations, limiting opportunities for epistemic risk-taking.

Discussion

Establishing inclusive and encouraging learning environments is crucial, especially in low-socioeconomic settings where kids may have more emotional and intellectual difficulties. Five essential components that define how primary school teachers create such environments are identified in this study. These components show a comprehensive, student-centered strategy that fosters social-emotional growth in addition to meeting academic demands. Teachers show their dedication to equity, engagement, and responsiveness, essential values required to provide meaningful learning experiences in underserved educational environments, by incorporating these techniques.

Dialogic Learning

Across the analyzed episodes, dialogic encounters were marked by shifts in the focus of learning, as students' lived experiences and questions reoriented classroom inquiry. Rather than functioning as recipients of knowledge, students exercised authorial agency by redefining what counted as relevant evidence and explanation. Such moments illustrate the emergence of authorial agency (Matusov, 2021), in which students position themselves as legitimate contributors to collective inquiry. Equally significant, dialogic encounters nurtured an ethical dimension: students practiced listening, considering alternative perspectives, and disagreeing respectfully with peers. These transformations suggest that inclusion in dialogic classrooms is not limited to access or participation but entails cultivating students as ethical and epistemic agents whose voices reshape the learning process.

In the observed classroom, teachers also fostered dialogue and discussion as part of instruction. By structuring lessons around open-ended questions, group talk, and teacher-student exchanges, they enabled a more interactive classroom climate. The literature shows that dialogic teaching and learning have powerful social and cognitive benefits. Research reviews find that dialogic methods significantly develop students' language and communication skills, promote critical thinking and reasoning, and even boost social inclusion and democratic values in schools (García-Carrión et al., 2020a). In fact, dialogic interaction has been explicitly linked to inclusive education goals: one review notes that productive classroom dialogue can "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (García-Carrión et al., 2020a). Recent research on dialogic methods (interactive groups, literature circles, etc.) shows powerful gains for learners with special needs. Navarro-Mateu et al. (2021) review studies of dialogic environments and find that discussing texts or solving problems together significantly boosts the instrumental learning of students with disabilities, as well as their social skills.

These classroom episodes reveal that dialogic teaching means asking open-ended questions, encouraging students to elaborate on each other's answers, and creating space for multiple voices. For low-SES contexts, dialogic approaches can build confidence: when teachers treat students' ideas as important contributions, students become active co-constructors of knowledge. Messiou et al. (2025)

similarly emphasize that valuing student input through dialogue, essentially a form of shared agency, promotes inclusion. In short, when students talk, listen, and build on each other's thoughts, classrooms become more inclusive, and learning deepens. These findings suggest that education ministries should encourage dialogic pedagogies, for example, by training teachers in Socratic questioning and peer-learning techniques, and that teacher preparation programs include theory and practice of interactive, student-centered discourse to promote equity in low-SES schools.

We classified the research data related to dialogic learning into five observable indicators, namely: Student-Student Talk (Mercer, Hennessy, et al., 2019; Wegerif, 2007); Open-Ended Teacher Questions (Alexander, 2020b; Howe & Abedin, 2013); Student-Initiated Responses (Boyd & Markarian, 2011); Extended Utterances (Boyd & Markarian, 2011); and Evidence of Collaborative Meaning-Making (García-Carrión et al., 2020b; Mercer, Hennessy, et al., 2019), as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Grouping of Dialogic Learning Practices into Five Observable Indicators

Observable Indicator	Sources	Summary of Evidence
1. Student–student talk	Interviews: Teachers (SR, AT, DA, IR), Students (SP, ADLP, ARA, ASP, JEC, SDA, NIR, NP). Observations: Teacher DA group discussion, Teacher DA games	Students work in pairs or groups, discuss, and respond to peers' presentations. Group activities like discussions, experiments, and projects encourage peer-to-peer interaction. Peers help each other understand tasks more easily. Students share tasks, coordinate, and create joint outputs. Teachers use cooperative models like Jigsaw, TGT, PBL to facilitate interaction.
2. Open-ended teacher questions	Interviews: Teachers (AT, DA, IR). Observations: Teacher DA	Teachers use guiding/prompting questions to spark open discussion and critical thinking. Teachers probe deeper into student responses during lectures. Open-ended questions lead students to use various sources to find answers. Observed use of prompting questions to initiate discussion.
3. Student-initiated responses	Interviews: Teachers (AT, IR, SR), Students (SP, JEC). Observations: Teacher SR (Q&A about volcano)	Students ask questions, respond actively to peers, and reflect on discussion content. Students are given space to express thoughts and respond with their own ideas during Q&A and presentation sessions.
4. Extended utterances	Interviews: Teachers (AT, IR, DA, SR), Students (JEC, NIR). Observations: Teachers (SR, DA)	Students and teachers elaborate on ideas, share arguments with evidence, and construct deeper responses. Teachers provide feedback that encourages students to consider different perspectives and extend their ideas.
5. Evidence of collaborative meaning-making	Interviews: Teachers (AT, DA, IR, SR), Students (ARA, ASP, JEC, NIR). Observations: Teachers (SR, DA)	Students engage in group discussions, experiments, and shared projects that lead to joint understanding. Teachers design tasks requiring students to negotiate meaning, build consensus, and solve problems together. Teacher feedback encourages building ideas through collective reflection and shared dialogue.

Our findings indicate that dialogic pedagogy in the observed classrooms transcended classroom management techniques or strategies for boosting participation. Teachers regularly created conditions where students' responses could redirect the flow of dialogue, transforming lessons into collaborative inquiries. For instance, disagreements among peers in science lessons generated extended debates that the teacher facilitated but did not control, allowing students' interpretations to frame the discussion. In these moments, students were positioned as co-authors of meaning, their utterances treated as valid

contributions that reshaped collective understanding. This interpretation aligns with Matusov's (2021) view of dialogic pedagogy as fostering authorial agency, where learners exercise the capacity to influence the course of education itself. Such co-authorship is particularly important in low-SES classrooms, as it affirms the epistemic authority of marginalized students and demonstrates how dialogic pedagogy functions as a lever for equity.

However, interpreting inclusion solely as a positive outcome risks overlooking the ethical and political tensions embedded in dialogic practice. While the findings show that dialogic techniques increased opportunities for engagement among children from low-income families, inclusion in these classrooms cannot be viewed purely as a pedagogical success. Rather, inclusion arose as a dialogic conflict, negotiated moment by moment within institutional and curricular boundaries. For example, when the teacher urged quieter students to contribute through individualized questioning, proximity support, and supportive comments, engagement rose; nevertheless, these invitations were usually geared toward planned learning objectives and normative forms of academic expression. As a result, pupils were primarily included if their contributions met the teacher's standards. In several observed lessons (e.g., January 24 and February 3, 2024), the teacher reconstructed or diverted students' first comments, gently indicating which forms of participation were valid and which were peripheral. Such instances imply that inclusion served not only as a form of empowerment but also as a form of epistemic regulation, influencing students' authorial possibilities in the debate. Furthermore, quick, reluctant, or minimal responses suggest that involvement was sometimes interpreted as compliance rather than ownership of meaning. From a dialogic standpoint, these patterns demonstrate that inclusion is more than just obtaining access to classroom discussion; it is also about negotiating the parameters under which one's voice is recognized, sustained, and enabled to influence communal understanding. Recognizing these tensions provides a foundation for critically examining the strategies teachers employed to manage participation and learning.

Teachers' Strategies: A Critical Reflection

While dialogic moments were characterized by a temporary suspension of evaluative authority, reward-based practices marked a return to hierarchical regulation of participation. This tension is particularly visible in the observed episode in which the teacher introduced verbal praise and points to encourage students' responses during a whole-class discussion (Observation, February 3, 2024). Following the announcement of rewards, students' contributions became increasingly concise and confirmatory, with responses oriented toward reproducing the teacher's framing rather than extending or challenging peers' ideas. Although rewards expanded opportunities for participation, they also functioned as mechanisms of pedagogical regulation by signaling which forms of contribution were institutionally valued. Students increasingly oriented their responses toward teacher recognition, narrowing the dialogic openness initially encouraged through exploratory discussion.

Although participation visibly increased, the dialogic space narrowed as uncertainty and disagreement gave way to answer-seeking behavior. From a dialogic perspective, this shift suggests that rewards redirected students' authorial agency by signaling which forms of contribution were recognizable and institutionally valued (Matusov, 2021). Rather than co-authoring meaning through exploratory dialogue, students were positioned as respondents competing for recognition, reinforcing existing power asymmetries in which the teacher retained control over epistemic legitimacy. In this sense, rewards functioned ambivalently: they supported engagement while simultaneously constraining the emergence of dialogic eventfulness by privileging compliance over authorial risk-taking (Alexander, 2020a).

Prior to the introduction of rewards, students frequently extended peers' ideas, challenged assumptions, and introduced personal experiences into the discussion. Following the announcement of points and praise, however, interaction became increasingly evaluative. Contributions shortened,

disagreement diminished, and students oriented more directly toward producing recognizable "correct" answers. This shift suggests that the reward structure altered not only participation rates but also the epistemic character of dialogue itself.

Our observations and interviews showed frequent use of rewards: stars in assignment books, praise, candies, occasional small monetary rewards, and opportunities such as tablet use or books. Teachers' rationales (e.g., "I give candy for correct answers", Teacher AT; "I sometimes give money or snacks", Teacher IR; "I reward ranking students with books", Teacher KU) suggest pragmatic aims to increase participation and motivate students. However, these practices raise ethical and epistemic questions. From a behaviorist perspective, extrinsic rewards can successfully shape observable behavior but may also prioritize compliance over internalized understanding or critical engagement. Psychological research indicates that contingent extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation under some conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000), while the form and framing of praise influence whether it supports or constrains student agency (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002).

Our findings demonstrate that rewards simultaneously supported participation and constrained authorship by orienting students toward teacher-recognized forms of contribution. This dynamic is evident in observed episodes where praise and points were introduced to encourage student responses, resulting in increased verbal participation but a noticeable narrowing of dialogic possibilities. Research on classroom discourse has shown that reward structures often increase compliance and frequency of participation while simultaneously redirecting students' attention toward producing evaluatively "correct" or recognizable answers rather than exploratory or dialogically risky contributions (Alexander, 2020a; Nystrand et al., 1997). Following the announcement of rewards, students' contributions became shorter and more confirmatory, aligning closely with the teacher's framing rather than extending, questioning, or contesting peers' ideas. While such recognition appeared to boost confidence and engagement, particularly for students who were previously hesitant to speak, extrinsic incentives are also known to constrain epistemic agency by positioning learners as respondents seeking approval rather than as authors of meaning (Matusov, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2000). From a dialogic perspective, these moments illustrate how reward practices subtly reassert epistemic authority, shaping what can be said, valued, and sustained within classroom dialogue, even in pedagogical contexts committed to openness and inclusion (Bakhtin, 1981; Mercer, Wegerif, et al., 2019).

Reward practices therefore operated ambivalently. On one hand, they enabled participation among students who might otherwise remain silent, particularly in low-SES contexts where academic confidence may be fragile. On the other hand, these same practices narrowed dialogic openness by privileging approval-oriented participation over epistemic risk-taking and exploratory disagreement.

Seen through a dialogic/ontological lens (Matusov, 2021), rewards that function primarily as inducements risk treating students instrumentally, as means to correct responses, rather than as epistemic agents whose contributions are valued for their meaning. Conversely, when praise or recognition is specific, dialogically embedded, and acknowledges students' reasoning or unique perspectives, it can affirm voice and belonging rather than coerce compliance. In our data, some reward instances appeared to sit uneasily alongside dialogic practices: teachers invited debate and student contributions in one episode, then used candy or public ranking next session to elicit "correct" answers. These tensions suggest that inclusion in practice may oscillate between recognition (in which students' voices co-construct knowledge) and assimilation (in which students are included by meeting externally imposed criteria). In this sense, inclusion through rewards risked becoming assimilative rather than transformative, as students were included insofar as they aligned themselves with institutionally sanctioned forms of participation and expression.

Although students were invited to participate in dialogues, the parameters of contestation, including what could be questioned, challenged, or redefined, remained largely teacher-governed. Research on classroom discourse has long shown that even participatory formats often preserve asymmetrical control over epistemic authority, particularly regarding what counts as legitimate knowledge and acceptable challenge (Nystrand et al., 1997; Alexander, 2020). This governance became especially visible when rewards and recognition were introduced to manage participation. While praise and points encouraged students to speak, they also oriented contributions toward teacher-sanctioned answers, subtly narrowing the range of ideas that could be explored or contested. Studies grounded in self-determination theory and dialogic education suggest that such extrinsic incentives tend to shift students' orientation from meaning-making toward approval-seeking, thereby constraining epistemic risk-taking and disagreement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Matusov, 2021). In these moments, dialogic openness gave way to instrumental participation, as students prioritized producing recognizable responses over engaging in exploratory or dissenting talk. From a dialogic perspective, this illustrates how evaluative mechanisms function as instruments of authority, shaping not only who speaks but also what can be meaningfully said within classroom (Bakhtin, 1981; Wegerif, 2019). These dynamics highlight that dialogic pedagogy, even when explicitly committed to inclusion, remains embedded within asymmetrical power relations that delimit the scope of contestation rather than eliminating it.

One of our themes was 'peer interaction' as a strategy. Seen through the ontological lens, peer interaction becomes more than collaborative learning: it becomes a site where students recognize each other as persons with different perspectives, a dialogic ethical encounter. As Matusov (Matusov, 2024) argues, dialogic education includes ontological engagement, that is, that learners should not only learn content but also engage as beings whose questions, concerns, and uncertainties shape the educational event. In our classrooms, moments when students push back, question, or reframe tasks are particularly rich: they suggest that the classroom is not merely a site of instruction but of becoming

Similarly, practices of confirming understanding reveal more than formative assessment. When teachers paused to ask students to rephrase content or validate peer explanations, they enacted what Irshad and Rafaqat (2024) call "listening to all children" as a foundation of inclusivity. Through this lens, confirming understanding becomes an ethical act of acknowledgment; it signals that every child's meaning matters. Reward and appreciation practices, though sometimes modest (e.g., praise, small tokens), can also be interpreted dialogically. Recognition affirms students' existence and contribution, echoing Bakhtin's view that every utterance demands a response and carries ethical responsibility. In this sense, even small affirmations enact dialogic ethics, fostering trust and belonging for disadvantaged learners (Hamston, 2006).

Taken together, these strategies illustrate how dialogic pedagogy in Indonesian low-SES classrooms functions simultaneously on three levels:

1. Ontological: recognizing students as subjects and co-authors of meaning.
2. Ethical: affirming responsibility, respect, and openness to difference.
3. Epistemological: co-constructing knowledge through open-ended, reciprocal dialogue.

The findings also invite us to interrogate what students are being included in. At times, inclusion meant participation in mainstream academic discourse structured by curricular objectives and teacher authority. For instance, practices such as confirming understanding or rewarding correct answers positioned students within established norms of knowledge. Here, inclusion risked reproducing existing hierarchies by assimilating students into dominant expectations. Yet other moments, particularly dialogic exchanges, allowed inclusion on students' terms. When learners questioned peers, introduced community knowledge, or redirected the flow of discussion, they acted as epistemic agents, shaping the dialogue rather

than merely following it. These moments align with García-Carrión et al.'s (2020a) argument that dialogic pedagogy can be socially transformative, as it redistributes epistemic authority toward marginalized voices. Thus, inclusion in these classrooms functioned simultaneously as a disciplinary practice and a site of transformation, underscoring that equity requires attention not only to who is included, but also to how and on whose terms inclusion is realized.

At the same time, inclusion was marked by tensions and ruptures. Dialogic exchanges often surfaced disagreements among students, as when peers contested one another's views on the impacts of volcanic eruptions or alternative solutions in science projects. While at times these debates risked conflict, they also created opportunities for productive struggle in which meaning was negotiated rather than imposed. Such ruptures underscore that inclusion is not always a smooth consensus but involves conflict, contestation, and the renegotiation of authority. These findings resonate with Boyd and Markarian's (2011) argument that dialogic pedagogy requires a stance open to uncertainty and divergence. In the observed classrooms, teachers' willingness to sustain disagreements without silencing students affirmed that equitable inclusion entails recognizing not only shared participation but also the legitimacy of diverse and dissenting voices.

This study contributes to the scholarship on dialogic pedagogy by demonstrating that dialogic inclusion in low-SES classrooms is a negotiated, tension-filled process rather than a straightforward pedagogical achievement. While dialogic practices enabled moments of co-authorship and epistemic agency, they also remained entangled with evaluative authority, reward structures, and institutional expectations that shaped the conditions under which students' voices became recognizable and consequential. In this sense, the study extends research on dialogic pedagogy by foregrounding the ethical and political ambivalence of inclusion in resource-constrained educational contexts.

By situating classroom practices within these broader orientations, the study contributes to international debates on dialogic pedagogy. It suggests that even in resource-constrained environments, teachers' dialogic commitments create inclusive spaces where marginalized students' voices and experiences are validated, positioning dialogic learning not simply as a method but as a lever for equity grounded in being, ethics, and knowledge-making.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how dialogic pedagogy can serve as a lever for equity in low-SES elementary classrooms. Through close analysis of classroom interactions, the findings demonstrate that dialogic teaching, when enacted as open-ended, contingent, and ethically responsive practice, can enable students to participate as authorial contributors in the co-construction of meaning. In such moments, learning trajectories are reshaped through students' lived experiences, questions, and disagreements, positioning them as epistemic subjects rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

At the same time, the study reveals that inclusion within dialogic classrooms is neither automatic nor unproblematic. Rather than functioning solely as a positive outcome of dialogic methods, inclusion emerged as a negotiated and sometimes ambivalent process, shaped by institutional expectations, curricular demands, and prevailing norms of legitimate participation. While many students gained increased access to classroom dialogue, this access was often conditioned by teacher-defined objectives and communicative practices, raising ethical questions about whose voices are sustained, how authority is distributed, and under what terms participation becomes meaningful.

These findings suggest that dialogic pedagogy should be understood not as a technical strategy for increasing engagement, but as an ongoing ethical and political practice that requires teachers to balance

openness, accountability, and care. For educators working in marginalized contexts, fostering dialogic spaces involves continuous reflection on how inclusion is enacted and experienced, as well as attentiveness to moments of resistance, silence, and uncertainty. Future research may further explore how students interpret and navigate these dialogic tensions over time and across institutional settings. By foregrounding the relational and contested nature of dialogue and inclusion, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of equity-oriented pedagogy as a dynamic, fragile, and ethically charged endeavor.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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