

Inclusive Education Management in Indonesia: A Literature Analysis of Policies and Implementation Practices

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education in Indonesia represents a strategic policy aimed at ensuring the rights of all children, including students with special needs, to receive equitable and dignified educational services. However, its implementation continues to face various challenges in terms of management at the institutional level. This study seeks to examine in depth the policies and practical implementation of inclusive education management in Indonesia through a literature analysis approach. The subjects of this study include more than ten scholarly articles, policy reports, and relevant academic publications published between 2015 and 2025, selected through purposive sampling to ensure empirical data and high contextual relevance. Data were collected through a systematic review of these publications, using a descriptive qualitative approach. The data collection instruments included document review sheets and a literature synthesis template, while content analysis methods were employed to identify key themes and to analyse theoretical correlations among factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation. The findings reveal that, despite the existence of supportive regulations, the implementation of inclusive education remains hindered by managerial factors such as limited teacher training, budgetary support, and school leadership. A positive correlation was found between participatory managerial planning and the successful integration of students with special needs into regular classrooms. In conclusion, inclusive education in Indonesia requires the strengthening of data-driven management and policies that are responsive to local contexts. These findings have significant implications for policymakers and education practitioners in building a more equitable, adaptive, and sustainable education system.

Keywords: *inclusive education; education management; education policy; literature analysis; policy implementation.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a central focus in the development of global education systems, in line with nations' growing commitment to the principles of justice, equality, and human rights. In Indonesia, this commitment has been reinforced through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD), enacted via Law No. 19 of 2011. This legislation affirms that every child, including those with special needs, is entitled to equal access to quality education. Inclusive education refers to an educational approach that accommodates the diverse needs of all learners within a single educational system, including those with physical, intellectual, social, or emotional challenges (UNESCO, 2017). In other words, inclusive education is not merely about admitting students with special needs into mainstream schools; it also entails ensuring that every component of the education system supports active participation and successful learning for all individuals.

The urgency of implementing inclusive education in Indonesia is increasingly evident alongside a growing awareness of the value of diversity in educational settings. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2022, a significant number of children with special needs still lack access to formal education. This challenge is further exacerbated by the inadequate readiness of mainstream schools to deliver inclusive education, particularly in terms of infrastructure, adaptive curricula, the availability of competent teachers, and other necessary support systems (Yuliati & Purnamasari, 2021). Therefore, effective management of inclusive education is crucial as a systematic effort to plan, organise, implement, and evaluate all aspects of education that accommodate learner diversity.

Conceptually, inclusive education management is a strategic approach aimed at achieving equitable and fair education for all students, especially those vulnerable to marginalisation. According to Booth and Ainscow (2016), such an approach should be grounded in the principles of participation, accessibility, and sustainability. In the Indonesian context, several policies have been introduced to promote inclusive practices, such as Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities and those with Outstanding Intelligence and/or Talents, alongside various teacher training programmes. However, the implementation of these policies continues to face substantial challenges in the field. Research by Kustawan (2018) revealed that many schools lack a comprehensive understanding of the inclusive education concept, resulting in symbolic rather than impactful implementation that fails to improve the quality of education services.

Several studies have highlighted that the success of inclusive education is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of school management. For instance, research by Widiastuti and Sunarto (2019) demonstrated that inclusive leadership by headteachers can foster a school culture that embraces diversity. Principals with an inclusive vision tend to promote programmes that support students with special needs, such as the provision of learning assistants, curriculum adjustments, and teacher training. Furthermore, the active involvement of the school community—including teachers, parents, and peers—is also a critical factor in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment (Marhum, 2020). This underscores that managerial approaches in inclusive education must involve integrated and sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Literature indicates that the primary challenges in inclusive education management in Indonesia stem from policy and implementation practices. A study by Wijaya and Sari (2020) revealed a persistent gap between national policies and their execution at the school level. Many schools still lack Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to serve students with special needs, and numerous institutions face limitations in accessible facilities and infrastructure. Moreover, there is a significant shortage of qualified special education teachers (GPK), particularly in remote areas. This finding is supported by Harahap and Lubis (2021), who observed an unequal distribution of GPKs, with most concentrated in urban centres.

Another frequent issue concerns the limited understanding among teachers of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an instructional design framework that responds to the diverse learning needs of students (Mulyono & Arifin, 2022). Many teachers are unable to modify instruction to suit the characteristics of inclusive learners, resulting in less effective and unresponsive teaching. Mastery of differentiated instruction strategies and alternative assessment methods is key to the success of inclusive education (Rahmawati & Fitriyani, 2019). This highlights the need to strengthen teacher capacity through ongoing training and mentoring, as well as the development of flexible curricula that are responsive to the needs of all students.

In recent years, community-based approaches have gained traction as a strategy for managing inclusive education. Research by Setiawan and Nuraeni (2021) emphasised the importance of engaging parents, disability organisations, and community leaders in supporting inclusive education in schools. This approach encourages schools to operate not in isolation but as part of a broader network of social support that strengthens the implementation of inclusive programmes. This finding aligns with that of Lestari and Prasetyo (2022), who found that schools which successfully integrate community roles into inclusive education practices tend to achieve higher levels of success in managing students with special needs.

Advancements in educational technology also offer new opportunities for inclusive education. Assistive technologies such as screen readers, interactive learning applications, and adaptable visual media for deaf or blind students have been adopted in some schools as part of inclusive learning strategies (Nurhadi & Suryani, 2023). However, access to such technologies remains limited, particularly in underdeveloped areas. This issue becomes more complex when linked to schools' capacity for budget planning and the sustainable procurement of assistive tools.

Beyond technical and structural challenges, cultural barriers also significantly impede the development of inclusive education. Negative perceptions of people with disabilities are still prevalent in many schools and communities. Research by Ismail and Hidayat (2020) highlighted that discrimination, stigma, and stereotyping of students with special needs remain major obstacles to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments. In this context, transforming school culture towards inclusivity demands a shift in the mindset of all school members to view diversity as a strength rather than a hindrance. Transformational leadership within schools is seen as a vital catalyst for such cultural change (Susilawati & Nugroho, 2017).

Globally, the goals of inclusive education are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which targets inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all by 2030. This has driven countries, including Indonesia, to incorporate inclusive education principles into national policy frameworks. However, serious challenges remain in collecting accurate data on students with special needs. Without valid data, policy planning and decision-making cannot be effectively targeted (Handayani & Pramudita, 2023). Therefore, inclusive education data systems must be strengthened through integration with the national education information system.

This literature analysis aims to examine in depth the policies and practical implementation of inclusive education management in Indonesia. The study synthesises recent research findings to provide a comprehensive overview of field conditions, policy effectiveness, and managerial strategies applied in various school contexts. It also seeks to identify gaps in current policies and practices that require improvement to reinforce the national inclusive education system. The findings are intended to serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, education practitioners, and researchers in formulating more effective and inclusive management strategies for the future. While inclusive education in Indonesia has made policy-level progress, it still faces significant implementation challenges. The effectiveness of inclusive education management depends largely on the readiness of human resources, school leadership, community involvement, and sustained policy support from central to local governments. A systemic, data-driven approach is therefore essential to ensuring the implementation of inclusive education that guarantees access, participation, and learning success for all students—without exception.

METHOD

The literature analysis of policies and implementation practices in inclusive education management is a systematic study of various academic and policy-based sources that examine how inclusive education policies are formulated, implemented, and managed in real-world school settings. This analysis covers government regulations, school management strategies, stakeholder engagement, and the challenges and opportunities encountered in providing education for students with special needs.

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, employing literature review as its main research strategy. The literature review method enables the researcher to evaluate, compare, and synthesise findings from previous studies and official policy documents, with the aim of uncovering patterns, trends, and gaps between national policy and school-level implementation. Data were collected through a systematic search of relevant literature. The results were then filtered using inclusion criteria: peer-reviewed academic publications and official documents published between 2015 and 2025 that focus on inclusive education in Indonesia and contain information on policy, management, or practical implementation.

Data sources fall into two primary categories: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include academic journal articles from both national and international publications that have undergone peer review, as well as institutional research reports that directly investigate inclusive education practices in Indonesian schools. Secondary sources comprise policy documents such as laws, ministerial regulations, technical guidelines from the Ministry of Education, and reports from international organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and Save the Children that explore issues surrounding inclusive education.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which identifies and organises key themes from the reviewed literature. Each theme was analysed in depth to explore how interactions between these elements affect the effectiveness of inclusive education in practice. Thematic correlation analysis was also conducted to examine the conceptual and narrative relationships between managerial and policy elements. Rather than using quantitative statistics, this correlation took the form of qualitative exploration and was visualised in the form of thematic matrices or concept maps to aid systematic and interpretive presentation of the findings.

To ensure objectivity and validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing academic articles with policy documents and institutional reports. By combining systematic data collection, in-depth thematic analysis, and thematic correlation of managerial and policy variables, this research method enables the development of a comprehensive literature synthesis. The resulting analysis does not merely summarise previous findings but also reveals causal relationships, implementation trends, and policy-practice gaps that have not been extensively discussed in prior studies. This analysis provides a solid foundation for formulating policy recommendations and more effective management strategies to achieve inclusive education that is equitable and widely accessible across Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of this study reveal a strong tendency indicating that the implementation of inclusive education policies in Indonesia has not yet been fully effective or equitably realised. This is evident from various studies highlighting a significant gap between the government's normative policies and the realities of implementation in mainstream schools. In this context, national policies such as the Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009 and its derivative regulations have indeed established a framework for implementing inclusive education. However, implementation on the ground is heavily influenced by the managerial readiness of schools, limitations in human resources, inadequate teacher training, and infrastructure that does not yet accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.

To provide a more systematic overview, Table 1 presents a summary of the key findings from 20 literature sources reviewed in this study. The table outlines aspects of policy, implementation barriers, and forms of managerial practices in schools that either support or hinder the success of inclusive education.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Findings on Inclusive Education Policy and Management Practices in Indonesia (2015–2025)

No	Source/Researcher	Aspect Examined	Key Findings	Description of Implementation Practice
1	Widiastuti & Sunarto (2019)	School Leadership	Inclusive school principals enhance implementation success	Occurs in major cities, not widespread
2	Kustawan (2018)	Teacher Understanding	Teachers lack comprehensive understanding of inclusive education	Limited to formal training only
3	Harahap & Lubis (2021)	Availability of Special Needs Teachers (GPK)	GPK distribution is uneven	Concentrated in provincial cities
4	Marhum (2020)	Community Support	Parental involvement significantly influences success	High in active community areas
5	Setiawan & Nuraeni (2021)	Community-Based Strategy	Involving disability organisations enhances management effectiveness	Occurs in government-supported inclusive schools
6	Rahmawati & Fitriyani (2019)	Curriculum Modification	Curriculum is not flexible for inclusive students	Regular teachers struggle with adaptation
7	Nurhadi & Suryani (2023)	Assistive Technology	Effective but uneven use of AT	Limited access and training
8	Lestari & Prasetyo (2022)	Parental Role	Parents as partners in inclusive education	Strengthened via communication forums
9	Ismail & Hidayat (2020)	Social Stigma	Stereotypes towards children with disabilities remain high	Hinders inclusive student acceptance
10	Mulyono & Arifin (2022)	Universal Design for Learning	UDL understanding among teachers is minimal	Not included in regular training
11–20	Other Studies	Various Aspects	Consistently highlight	Especially in non-piloting mainstream schools

(Source: Compiled from various journals and inclusive education documents, 2015–2025)

The table illustrates that issues in inclusive education management in Indonesia stem from systemic unpreparedness involving multiple actors and school elements. One of the most dominant findings is that many mainstream schools admit students with special needs merely as a form of administrative compliance with national policy, without making adequate structural, pedagogical, or cultural adjustments. Regular teachers who have not received specialised training struggle to manage diverse classrooms, particularly in the absence of support staff or special education teachers (GPKs). This directly impacts the quality of learning services received by inclusive students and affects the overall school climate.

Inclusive managerial practices are found to be heavily influenced by school leadership styles. Research by Widiastuti and Sunarto (2019) indicates that schools led by principals practising transformational and collaborative leadership tend to have better support systems for students with special needs. Inclusive leadership fosters the involvement of all teachers in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of inclusive learning processes. Moreover, principals who actively establish partnerships with external institutions—including education authorities, NGOs, and disability organisations—are better positioned to enhance their schools' institutional capacity to meet students' needs effectively.

Policy effectiveness also largely depends on the regions' ability to decentralise implementation. Regions with strong local government commitment and sufficient budgetary support demonstrate better outcomes in building inclusive education systems. Findings by Setiawan and Nuraeni (2021) show that community-based initiatives play a crucial role in strengthening inclusive programmes, especially when bottom-up approaches are combined with top-down policy support. In government-assisted inclusive schools, participation from parents, community leaders, and civil society organisations has been shown to improve the effectiveness of lesson planning, curriculum modification, and student monitoring.

Another key finding is the increasingly critical role of assistive technology (AT) in supporting the learning of students with visual, auditory, or mobility impairments. Some schools have begun adopting tools such as screen readers, visual learning software, and alternative communication apps. However, limited funding and lack of training mean such technology has not been widely used—particularly in mainstream non-piloting schools. Nurhadi and Suryani (2023) demonstrate that schools receiving technological interventions from donor organisations show significantly better outcomes in supporting students with disabilities than those relying solely on internal resources.

The review also shows that the national curriculum remains limited in terms of flexibility for inclusive adaptation. Rahmawati and Fitriyani (2019) note that the absence of practical guidelines for learning adjustments often results in teachers neglecting the needs of students with disabilities. Without the ability or resources to modify content and methodology, these students tend to be pedagogically marginalised. This is one of the major challenges for an inclusive education system, which aims not only for physical integration in the classroom but also for active student participation in learning.

Thematic correlation analysis of the literature shows a strong relationship between school leadership, teacher training, and the success of inclusive education implementation. This is evident in the consistent findings that schools with proactive principals and well-trained teachers tend to be more successful in managing inclusive classrooms. A positive correlation also emerges between community involvement and the functionality of student support services—particularly in under-resourced schools. Conversely, a negative correlation was found between high administrative workload on teachers and the effectiveness of differentiated and adaptive instruction. This

highlights that overburdened teachers tend to be less able to develop inclusive strategies effectively.

The study further discusses that transformation towards an inclusive education system cannot rely on policy reform alone—it also requires a cultural shift in school organisation. Ismail and Hidayat (2020) note that stigma against students with special needs remains a major barrier to their social and psychological integration in schools. Negative perceptions from teachers, peers, and even parents of non-disabled students often result in covert discrimination, affecting the confidence and learning engagement of inclusive students. Therefore, a paradigm shift through values-based training and increased awareness must be a long-term strategy.

This study confirms the central hypothesis that there is a significant gap between the inclusive education policies formulated by the government and actual practice at the school level. Despite the presence of regulatory frameworks, without strong school management, adequate teacher capacity, community involvement, and a sustainable support system, such policies are unlikely to be effectively realised. Thus, it is essential for the government and stakeholders to focus not only on formal regulation but also on building school ecosystems through collaborative approaches that are oriented towards the individual needs of students.

It can be affirmed that the success of inclusive education management relies heavily on the synergy between national policy, school practice, and community support. The findings of this review provide robust evidence that investment in teacher training, strengthened school leadership, improved access to assistive technology, and school culture transformation are strategic priorities that must be emphasised in building a more equitable and just education system in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the literature analysis on inclusive education policy and management practices in Indonesia between 2015 and 2025, it can be concluded that inclusive education continues to face serious challenges in translating policy into practice. Although government regulations—such as Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 and Government Regulation No. 13 of 2020—have reaffirmed the commitment to equitable education for all children, including those with special needs, implementation at the school level remains inconsistent. Differences in school managerial capacity, resource constraints, limited teacher training, and societal perceptions of disability are still major barriers. Literature findings show that schools with transformative and collaborative leadership, ongoing teacher training, and partnerships with parents and communities tend to be more successful in inclusive practice.

Effective inclusive education management is characterised by clear school organisational structures, inclusive budget allocation, and internal policies that encourage participation from all stakeholders. A strong correlation is also observed between the quality of school leadership and the successful integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Schools that adopt evidence-based policies

and apply the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach are demonstrably better equipped to face the challenges of learner diversity. However, many good practices remain sporadic and are not yet institutionalised systematically. Therefore, policy strengthening is needed—not just normatively, but also through effective implementation supported by strict monitoring, evaluation systems, and sustainability incentives.

In conclusion, the success of inclusive education in Indonesia depends not only on the availability of regulatory frameworks but also, more importantly, on how professionally these policies are managed by individual schools. The empirical conclusion of this study indicates that transforming education management towards inclusivity must involve interventions at three levels: macro policy by the government, institutional policy by schools, and socio-cultural interaction within the learning community. This study also recommends further field-based (mixed-methods) research to deepen understanding of local dynamics in inclusive education implementation and to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies.

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